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Media Education, Media Industry, Mass Media Theory: Interrelations and Conflict of Interests

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Abstract

The article deals with some informational aspects of human sciences cooperation and conflicting interests in media education amplification. The purpose of authors is to show application of journalism and communication studies interdisciplinary conjunction for media competence fostering during academic curricula courses in journalism departments, which face numerous restrictions and limitations. Extension of notion “media” under conditions of new media and digitalization is pinpointed. The scheme of media text characteristics, based on the journalistic vision of media education mission, is reevaluated and propounded; texts analysis methodology adapted for pedagogical tasks of mass media actors is highlighted. The conclusions are drawn about ambivalent gist of “mediality problem” (media module in cultural context) and the idea that different professional shops in media education can cooperate only by taking into account the strictness of cross-disciplinary demarcation lines. However, media education encourages practical use of critical approach and concrete findings of media text analysis while mass media theory tends for a deeper and more contextually oriented view on media information with the focus on textual-contextual presuppositions. We claim that the encounter of goals, objects and means of media education, media industry and mass media theory roots in commercialized nature of media industry and widespread audience’s mistrust in media content verity.

Keywords: media education, journalism, communication studies, media consumption, mass culture, mass media.

1. Introduction

The relevance of media education (*ME*) study as interdisciplinary field of humanities is evident, since intersections of different sciences usually give the birthplace to new interesting ideas and concepts. The choice of methodological orientations is considered crucial for such investigations when cognitive crisis creates “bifurcation fork” of evolution. The term *ME* is closely linked with such notions as *mass media*, *mass culture*, *media text (MT)*, *media literacy (ML)*, *information society (IS)*, etc., these words being correlated with rapidly spreading Internet communicative revolution. *ME* is also connected with journalism and communication studies, with other branches of media texts analysis (*MTA*), and with media industry.

What are the methods used by *ME* specialists of different methodological orientations that bring together all these strategies of media comprehension and training? How can terminological systems of pedagogical realm coexist and cooperate with contiguous and non-allied thesauri?

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Where are the demarcation lines delineating domains and borders of allied epistemological territories? Such questions set *the aim of our research*: to expose contradictions of media text analysis in ME, laying emphasis on delineation of teleological goals in *ME, journalism and mass media theory*, the objective contradictions of which are grounded in the methodological aspects, purposes and methodical means in different *ME* branches.

These contradictions are:

- a) between dynamic theoretical progress in *ME* and lack of great achievements in mass practical educational work;
- b) between explosive growth of Internet communications and commodification of mass media products preventing people from unrestricted use of intellectual and spiritual wealth of *MT*;
- c) between economic profits of mass culture industry and the facts of declining audiences integrated in infotainment practices.

According to our hypothesis, growing commercialization of world cultural industries and weaknesses of mass educational establishments in many countries explain contradictory trends in *ME* and communication studies. This factor relates with political will and social conditions. Methodological pluralism in *ME* and scientific recommendations should be backed by governmental programs.

2. Materials and methods

The empirical basis comprises scientific articles and reports made by Russian and foreign specialists during conferences and discussions in Belgorod, Moscow, Taganrog, Voronezh and other cities in 2015-2019 with authors' personal participation. Another source of data grounds in students' semi-structured interviews on media consumption problem and having evident impact on media education strategies. The ideas of Western authors are compared with Russian ones (Bazalgette, 2002; Buckingham, 2003; Dezuanni, 2018; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2016; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2019; Pastukhov, 2016; Tully, Vraga, 2018; Vartanova, 2017; Walker, 2010; Zemlyanova, 2010, etc.), media text analysis being the topic and core of educational competence discussion.

Authors' participant observation experience and some experiments outside auditorium upheld and substantiated the methodology of contextual, cultural and critical realistic approach. The starting point of methodological scrutiny given below is the conviction that *ME* is the global strategy upheld by UN defending human rights – to have education, to have free access to any informational sources, to get maximally free access to mass media and chances for self-education in all-life learning process, etc. These rights should infiltrate *ME* strategic and tactical work.

3. Discussion

Understanding media in media education, media industry and mass media theory

Many of the current obstacles and communication barriers for constructing the multidisciplinary basis for *ME* have their roots mostly in *two* epistemologically equivocal cross-disciplinary dilemmas.

Firstly, there is an obvious terminological gap between media education, media industry and media theory. The basic terms and notions, which are used in these fields, do not often correlate with each other. The very notion *media* is the point of many debates, as its semantic and pragmatic potential widely varies from the discipline to discipline. Thus, while the media educators keep on using the notion in the more traditional meaning (as it represents “old media”: newspapers, TV, radio and cinema), the media specialists tend to indicate new informational and communicational resources by the term *media*: social media, YouTube channels, messengers, etc. As for the scholars, they make the notion *media* as wide as possible to conform it to any subject matter as it fits the *pluralistic* methodologies and approaches, or deserves elaborating the new ones (Wodak, Busch, 2004). Discussing the variety of terminological items in *ME* and media theory C. Bazalgette claimed the importance of six basic notions for media education: media agency, media category, media technology, media language, media audience, media representation (Bazalgette, 2002: 14-19). D. Buckingham reduced the list to four core terms: production, language, representation and audience (Buckingham, 2003: 53). Naturally, those are models apt for media text and journalistic discourse analysis. There were also many other models and useful attempts to determine the fundamental set of notions for media education, but we consider it more useful to share the view of those who aim at avoiding the polysemic terminology because the meaning of basic (performative)

lexemes is often vague or too metaphorized. Thus, the first aspect of overlapping the methodological barriers is the terminological dis-metaphorization.

Media industry versus media education

Secondly, the contemporary society (IS) witnesses intensive changes of mass media industry bringing forth new demands for media literacy. As R. Schroeder claims, digital media influence social order, and their contribution to social changes make researchers revise the fundamental principles of the theory of media functioning in the society (Schroeder, 2018). Schroeder discusses the set of things in four countries: the U.S., Sweden, India and China, comparing social and political prerequisites for digitalization: “In all four countries, despite their differences, digital media, in contrast to traditional broadcast and interpersonal media, have led to a more differentiated media landscape. Greater complexity in political communication nevertheless runs up against the continuing dominance of elite agenda-setting” (Schroeder, 2018: 323). He criticizes three theories that currently dominate in our cognition of digital media and of media at large: network theory, mediatization theory and actor-network theory. We agree with the author’s opinion, stressing the revolutionary gist of World Wide Web, but it hardly can “preserve the social order” (Schroeder, 2018: 324), since it often breaks the social boundaries and transforms many social modes.

Meanwhile, the cultural factor of media texts functioning remains one of the most influential in terms of media pragmatics and effects. As A. Pastukhov states, “in the ‘cultural’ texts, however, it is very important to complement these approaches by meaningful analysis of numerous stereotypes for their implicit cultural content, as well as to clarify the question of whether “cultural” category or the rules of public opinion affect” (Pastukhov, 2016: 69). This is also the point of interdisciplinary cooperation, where “an empirical analysis of the cultural phenomenon of communication and media captures the widest scope of literary questions, sociology, psychology, semiotics, etc.” (Pastukhov, 2016: 69).

The cognition of fundamental media categories fall in the range not only of the interdisciplinary discourses but also of the cultural representations of media and journalism, which are produced by various social and cultural actors, including mass culture industry. As P. Ferrucci states in his article “Mo “Meta” Blues: How Popular Culture Can Act as Metajournalistic Discourse”, metajournalism “comes from both journalists and non-journalists, included in that category of “non-journalists” should be popular culture creators working in fictional media” (Ferrucci, 2018: 4833). Gamification, to his mind, can be a driver of ME, popular culture giving useful entertaining patterns of MTA (Ferrucci, 2018; Gutiérrez-Martín, Torrego-González, 2018). To our mind, hedonistic strategy is necessary in school; however, for seniors, it depends on a concrete situation and tutor’s aims.

Applied skills versus critical literacy

The mediatizing society of nowadays as well as the expansion of data production activities may result in the “hypercommunication” and excessive abundance of mass media products. K. Thorson and C. Wells regard it as one of the biggest problems of IS, arguing that the society faces the necessity to find the ways to curate the data flows and participate in intense “informational interactions” (Thorson, Wells, 2016: 8). As we claim, educational actors, both educators and students, are actively engaged in the processes of data production and distribution; hence, their communicational roles being often interchanged and mixed. Operating as a media educator today means following the media changes and experiencing the new media practices in personal life. The authors show the relevance of embedding, intersecting and overlapping communication flows for understanding “which sorts of flow are most influential, for which people, under which conditions, to what effect” (Thorson, Wells, 2016: 310). Although the need for it in any case is obvious, we think there is a tendency in Western ME scholarship to reduce the individual competences in media practices to applied skills, sometimes to computer literacy and not ML as Russian theoreticians insist, stressing controversies of global ME progress. This fact can be illustrated by the opinion of A. Fedorov and A. Levitskaya, as they say: “Analysis of the development of mass media education in the CIS countries... shows that it is advancing unevenly” (Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018: 38). Practical work in journalism and media education in higher school both reaffirm the thesis.

However, ML and MTA development is based on the optimistic view of social and historical aspects of media and ME changes. In addition, new media passed the long history of technological, functional and semiotic changes for last decades; it means that media educators and students

should have the deep knowledge of New Media and social networks to make the proper analysis and relevant evaluation of reality represented in MT. Thus, N. Brügger refers to the example of Facebook history to show that “it is important to be aware of the changes that Facebook has undergone in the media and text environment in which each of its functions and interaction forms must be understood” (Brügger, 2015: URL). The researcher aimed not only at Facebook history, we claim that this statement refers to the most types of new media. On the other hand, we should not overestimate the role of technologies in ME, as oral human intercourse remains supreme so far.

Therefore, since there have been crucial transformations in media industry, and since media change their nature and functionality so drastically, there is the need to re-evaluate both the educational potential of media and their didactic use for educational processes. Accordingly, T.L. Walker explores “the use of media texts in contemporary high school social studies classrooms” (Walker, 2010: 1). The idea of adding more *class* time “specifically to media literacies skill development” (Walker, 2010: 1) is rather common in Russia but still it makes sense.

The scholars have always viewed media literacy as the complex object, which includes critical literacy as the basic competence. However, critical literacy is being regularly revised, since objects of critical evaluation are changing (Álvarez-Arregui et al., 2017; Burnett, Merchant, 2011; Gutiérrez, Tyner, 2012; Petranová, Hossová, Velický, 2017) and methodological ideals differ. There is still a risk to reduce media literacy to technical skills. We share the view of A. Gutiérrez and K. Tyner, as they claim that “it is becoming increasingly apparent that although information processing and digital competencies are inextricably linked to media literacy, they are, at best, a threshold with limited uses for broader fluency in diverse social contexts” (Gutiérrez, Tyner, 2012: 38). This approach corresponds to Russian cultural tradition.

The broader approach to the media critical literacy should embrace not only digital and technical skills development but also improvement of abilities to deal with meaning structures and contexts, which is more important in general cultural and humanistic terms. Many scholars share this approach (e.g. Dezuanni, 2018; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2016; Ferres, Piscitelli, 2012), but its elaboration needs new methodology which would overpass relatively narrow tools of technical-digital or applied approach. For instance, J. Ferres and A. Piscitelli claim that the new media literacy should comprise six dimensions: languages; technology; interaction processes; production and dissemination processes; ideology and values, and the aesthetic dimension (Ferres, Piscitelli, 2012). M. Dezuanni distinguishes four key categories: digital materials, conceptual understandings, media production and media analysis (Dezuanni, 2018). We consider these methodological schemes and templates reasonable and constructive. However, the scholars need to see more clearly the way to adapt their theoretical models to real educational practices. For this purpose, one needs a methodological tool that would connect a model to critical literacy development practices. We claim that quality media texts do fit the role of such educational and didactic tool.

Media text in media education: a controversial object

Media texts are considered to be one of the most efficient tools for performing ME tasks. Media texts evaluation aims at both development the professional skills and interpretational and critical capacities of journalism and communication students. M. Kaidonis refers to the notion “reflexive device” to indicate the educational role of media texts (Kaidonis, 2004). The scholar regards the transformational potential of media texts as they correspond to the reality.

We claim that the reflexive potential of MT would embrace not only the transformational or representational features but also, which is wider, critical thinking in political, cultural and historical contexts. As M. Tully and E. Vraga claim, “if news producers and the public are to work together to develop a nuanced understanding of important social and political issues, these groups must be speaking the same language and have some common democratic goals” (Tully, Vraga, 2018: 782). Agreeing with this view, we would add that media education processes are to comprise development of both news production skills and news interpretation abilities.

Multimodality in current media texts imposes new practices of evaluating the realistic and factual potential of journalistic messages, since it is now not only the verbal and visual means (Hall, 2003; Silverblatt et al., 2016) but also digital and interactive semiotic elements that communicate the fact. The students’ awareness of how these elements transform the model of reality representations are expectable in the ME processes. Although the humanistic and anthropocentric approach to ME would correlate with technological orientation, which is the goal of the highest importance.

Our point is that the ME theory should be based on the term *mediality*, which characterizes the “media module” functioning in culture. Media texts represent the system of mass communications phenomena in regard with integrating function of mass media in human life. The interdisciplinary term *mediality* (“medynost” in Russian) receives much from terminological sphere of media theory, but still it can’t be reduced to the original semantical constructions of it. It comes partly from the general methodology systematic study of different social phenomena as the controversial entity of different ideas and conceptions.

The core (but not the only “quantum”) in mass communications and in “mediality” category is the term *MT*, or *message* in numerous Western works, that communicates the author’s ideas. Media and mass media in particular, are commonly treated both in Russia and in the West in the strict dictionary sense (Fedorov, 2014: 3-4; McLuhan, 2017; Zemlyanova, 2004), but with the extension to new formats of mass communications. Media are not only communicational channels or content transmission means, since they comprise the broader sphere of human interactions (Zemlyanova, 2010).

Commonly, both journalism and mass media theory use the term *media* to indicate means of communication “from the most ancient (gesture languages, smokes, drums, cave drawings, etc.) to ultra-contemporary ones that build informational superlines” (Zemlyanova, 2004: 200). However, for ME it is important to treat media texts in cognitive and aesthetic terms. This is why ME traditionally includes the practices of artistic texts analysis (cinema, painting, music and literature), since art texts are directly linked with media module and individual’s aesthetic development. We hold the line that the orientation on intellectual and spiritual development is central for ME as the universal up-growth strategy.

There is also the difference in interpretation of media texts functions. Media texts are both the elementary meaning unit in cognition discourses and parts of unlimited informational waves shaping the life worlds of media recipients. As well as in physics, the wave-particle approach in communication studies reflects the dialectics of discrete and indiscrete informational interactions, including the dialectics of communications. Thus, media texts concentrate the contradictions of mass culture, whilst remaining the highly important social discourse and a way for world picture for hundreds of million individuals. Media discourse is a result of collective activities; however, the authorship remains the noticeable qualitative indicator of media texts. The scholars have been arguing for decades about the basic features of media texts, referring normally to a hierarchy of commonly known elements, though, in what follows, we are proposing below a new logics of basic *MT* characteristics which differ from those that are widely spread in the Russian humanities (Kazak, 2010; Strashnov, 2009; Zemlyanova, 2010).

4. Results

The discussion shows that great variety of views relating ME is evident and natural; controversy becomes more austere under conditions of IS digital progress. Nobody argues with ME general mission, but ambivalence of global situation with media literacy at stake, doesn’t allow media critics to be sure about fruitful prospects for cooperation of ME and journalist education, of ME and media industry purposes. Media comprehension in developing countries leaves much to be desired. Methodological preferences of every professional shop make it difficult to find common grounds for modeling media text analysis (MTA) and constructing universal analysis patterns for ME application in educational establishments and among youngsters at home. There are some of results of our semi-structured interviews with active media users (journalism students of Voronezh and Belgorod Universities). The holistic emotional perception of MT is prevalent even among advanced users of Internet. 70-75% of respondents could not differentiate genre and style peculiarities of “news” and “views” messages. 43-45% of questionnaires contained blunder mistakes in author’s main ideas exposure, nearly half of answers in the first year students’ reports showed striking ignorance in Liberal arts and History (Khorolsky, 2011; 2016). At the second stage, the journalist students were given *mediality pattern of MT* analysis (MTA) consisting of five basic points centered on following question-scheme:

- 1) *who and what?* (creator and thematic content of MT);
- 2) *how and why?* (argumentation means and narration style with its teleological undercurrents);
- 3) *for whom?* (audience segmentation and commodification strategies propounded by media industry owners);

4) *who, what, how, why, for whom and what about me?* (personal opinion and self-apprehension of MT recipient);

5) *how to improve the MT and the message of MT recipient?* (creative reconstruction tasks).

The students did some text work at home, and both students and teachers introduced some new *mediality patterns of MT analysis*.

At the third stage of experiment, with control tests, we fixed no great progress after patterns of MTA learning curve. Nevertheless, journalists demonstrated greater skills of MTA compared with non-humanitarian students, although liberal arts students usually lose in intellectual competitions.

For journalism students, the set of major specific characteristics of MT is of special importance, so we decided to create the list of MT characteristics based on *mediality notion* with its overlap of ME and mass media theory. The term *mediality* is treated hereinafter as complex of MT characteristics, a compendium of signs centered around such key words as relevance, objectivity, topicality, “operativeness”, event, documentary foundation, truthful representation, condensation of narration, lapidary style, audience differentiation in market strategy etc. (Khorolsky, 2011).

The term MT in journalist and media business in general, being the core of *mediality notion*, correlates firstly with category *event* because acts of monitoring and evaluating the social changes reflect the professional mission of mass media actors. Then, MT and media industry give analytical messages and present common sense opinions reflecting and molding global opinion reverberations and fluctuations in mass consciousness. Naturally, the choice of events and the process of agenda setting is partly subjective and depends greatly on political and business interests, the competition and rivalry being the reason of conflicts and variation of media representations (see, e.g. Dubrovskaya, Kozhemyakin, 2017).

ME evolution depends in particular upon public interest in hedonistic MT production. Vital interests of media industry owners, who often do not care about public ME strategies, back this psychological trend. Statistical data can prove the thesis of conflicting interests both in production-consumption dichotomy and in ME-journalism interrelationship. Thus, in 2018 Mediascope (former TNS-Russia) company fixed the number of Internet users in Russia: 73 % of population (almost 90 millions) used Internet data at least once a month. A quarter of respondents stated that they used Internet data with educational purposes, but main tendency remained hedonistic (Internet consumption, 2018). In Russia, the growth of number of Internet users is substantial, since it is 4 % per year. However, how to compare the quality of media consumption in different countries? In Africa, for example, the figure of users’ growth is 20%, but educational problems are severe. In Russia, the number of Internet users steadily grows, but greater part of newcomers are too young to be responsible users, a lot of people enjoy smart pictures without reading words. They need advice, curation and guidance as in any country (Ferrucci, 2018; Thorson, Wells, 2016). Still, in Russia, ME exists successfully in theory and is outlined in official declarations. Nevertheless, the work of enthusiasts in school and other educational establishments is not so effective so far, the mechanisms of realizing sound recommendations, ideas about ME promotion are also mostly ineffective. There are some figures illustrating the situation available in Internet.

In 2016, Russian officials from Federal Agency for printed media and mass communications made a report on press developments in recent years. They made a conclusion that press and TV are the most important sources of information for absolute majority of grown-up media users. 21 % of population in Russia are not Internet users, while more than a thousand of small towns have no cellular communication, and the postal service is often bad (Federal Agency, 2016). The conclusions of Public Opinion Fund organization (POF) are even more pessimistic, since more than a half of Russian citizens are not Internet users (Internet 2017–2018), the digital revolution bringing great revenues but modest ME results. E. Paneyah, Vedomosty newspaper columnist, commented those POF facts stressing the trend of TV audience ageing and youngsters’ refusal to watch TV. POF gives the following figures: in 2016, according robust statistics 87 % of all media consumers watched TV; in 2018, their number decreased by 16 % and at the beginning of 2019 it was 71 % (Paneyah, 2019: 4).

Students generally prefer WWW, while TV becomes outmoded for them. It is not a source of safe information any more, the number of those who trust in TV is nowadays one third less than 10 years ago (Paneyah, 2019: 4). The main danger in ME – journalism interrelationship is caused by loss of trust to journalists’ MT and lack of confidence in mass media in general. Many truthful facts do not prevent journalists from disinformation and distortion of Verity, generating cognitive dissonance in consumers’ minds. All propaganda is overwhelmed by falsehood. ME trainings give

some ways of curbing falsehood zones and educating critically minded consumers, but results come after many years of labor. In October 2018 “RIA-Novosty” agency published results of sociological interrogation made by “Circone group” company supported by Civil Initiatives Committee (CIC) and “Media Standard Fund” called “The image of journalist in Russian mass consciousness”. The key question was “who trusts in mass media?” 51 % of respondents approved the thesis “I don’t believe to most messages in mass media” (Soloviev et al., 2018). Numerous disinformation discourses in MT are, to our mind, a principle barrier in ME-journalism cooperation.

On the other hand, critical reactions of consumers have a positive trait as well: critically minded persons are more active in political life. As for media industry, economic progress here is sustainable despite journalism crisis. The analyst E. Paneyah gives the sum of revenues and total industrial input of information sales, including soft and hardware, in Gross Domestic (National) Product (GDP): it is more than 2,5 trillion of roubles (Paneyah, 2019: 4; Stulov, 2017: 3). Material interests often contradict civil journalism progress. The success of commerce trading TV sets and internet technologies does not always correspond to ME progress. Media competence grows quicker when TV scientifically oriented programs like Nat Geo Wild channel formats popularize nature and environment protection or scientific achievements in biology, when big audiences regularly read quality press, and when Russian “Culture” channel is financed properly.

5. Conclusion

Many years of newsroom and classroom observations have contributed to argue some super-optimistic declarations about digitalization and Internet will bringing quick victories to ME. The concluding ideas of presented survey are as follows:

1. Our interviews and statistics show that ambivalent situations in ME and MT production make the question of sciences cooperation and interrelation not only urgent and stimulating new fruitful ideas, but also more sophisticated and fermenting new cognitive conflicts. Our approach to media text analysis based on sociocultural interpretation of MT and *mediality module* of journalistic text production, showed only partial progress of students in ME programs, although communicative motivation in computer games is ever-growing.

2. Internet communications, gamification and infotainment in MTA are of great importance for ME but balanced curated flows of hedonistic information are needed to promote knowledge-based MT surveys in classrooms. MTA schemes may be different but we insist on necessary *minimum set of key questions*: the author and his position; genre and format; media language; dominant tones and intonations; thematic and problematic peculiarities; address and auditorium specific features; economic parameters; media effects; didactic lessons etc. It helps to find measure in MT exploration and explanatory depth.

3. The conflict of interests between ME and communication studies or communicology (which we regard as a complex of disciplines scrutinizing human communication practices) is preconditioned by contemporary commercialization of mass media industry and prevalent audience’s disbelief in journalists’ truthfulness. ME fosters critical and concrete judgements in MTA while theory of mass communication insists more often on compromise looking for deeper penetration into contextual presuppositions.

4. Western ME experience is undoubtedly useful for Russian educational traditions and further contacts are unavoidable, the main lines of discussion possibly touching political MT surveys, semiotic MTA, critical discourse analysis, confrontational MT evolution, cognitive linguistics methods in ME, and other neighboring research fields.

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