Incubator of Young Journalists as an Opportunity to Improve Communal Media

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Abstract - This study is based on a new theory of the metamorphosis of the mass public and media and a new typology of media that reflects the development of media communication in the digital age. Focus in particular is placed on the category of communal relationship-based media and their public role in strengthening democracy in society. Analysis of these media in the Slovak media environment highlights the problems associated with the creation of media content, in particular the low level of journalistic processing, manipulative content, the closed-nature of media and discrepancies between the expectations of the public and the content structure of media. One cause is the low level of professionalism among those who generate media content. These deficiencies represent an opportunity to implement the concept of an incubator of young journalists to integrate university-level education with practical experience. Communal relationship-based (RB) media provides ample room for this creative-form of education involving student participation in the media creation process in a real media environment. A specific level of professional competencies among students is the required prerequisite and verification of these competencies is the objective. A new form of dual academic education is presented and opportunities to make a significant contribution to the continued improvement of the quality of public service media are highlighted.

Index Terms - metamorphosis of the public, relationship based media, Incubator of young journalists, public role of media.

1. Introduction

Extensive changes in the social and cultural climate that have occurred with the development of virtual reality, the growing informatization of society and the digitalisation of communication and these changes have had fatal consequences for media communication. The collective mentality has changed significantly and has also become the foundation of a new social organisation. Time and space have lost their original dimensions. A new socio-cultural space has been created on the Internet. Lives have been impacted by this tremendous change as free time has increased and more specific needs have appeared as a result of education and learning.

This new type of society was characterised by Lohisse [1] as a cellular society and Gálik [2] explains that its essence is embodied by "a physically isolated person who communicates, works, shops and is entertained in a cyber-environment. These communication cells, as we currently observe them, for instance on Facebook, may combine into larger units that combine specific values and ideas." The era massification took place at this exact moment and the epoch of the information society began.

Bauman [3] states that the " »rigid« phase of modernity has transitioned into a »fluid« phase and, as a result, social forms (examples of acceptable behaviour, structures restricting individual choice and institutions responsible for the deepening of routines) cannot (and they cannot be expected to) continue to maintain the same form over an extended period of time as they collapse and dissolve at a much faster rate than they can be defined, much less, establish themselves (...) Given this short lifespan, even more long-term life goals and plans cannot be used as a reference framework for human behaviour."

The objective of the study is to identify changes in social forms and their consequences for (mass) media communication and the media public. Focus was placed on the collapse of the mass public and the creation of new social structures and connective communication among individuals and between social groups. As noted, specific groups have different communication goals and needs and the current situation requires specific competencies that minimise the risk of discrepancies between the expectations of the public and the symbolic content that is communicated. This situation is an opportunity for creative and dual academic education with a multiplicative effect [4]. This potential also involves a hidden opportunities to significantly improve the quality of media communication, to create the conditions and prerequisites for inclusive education of future journalists in a real media environment and to continuously improve the quality of target media.

2. Conceptual and Terminological Definition of the Issue

Terminological definitions primarily involve the terms communal media, incubator of young journalists and inclusive education. Questions related to the metamorphosis of the public are the focus in other parts of the study.

Communal media are media structured as a public institution. They provide a public service with the goal of fostering public relations in the interest of involving citizens in public matters. Publishing and media organisations are established directly by local governments in towns and cities and may involve other types of organisations created by local governments and owned by them. Financing is from public funds or is a combination of public funds, commercial revenues (sales), private funds and philanthropy. Communal media may have specific differences in terms of a national dimension, due in large part to the size of the area they serve, which has an impact on their economy, on the material and

technical conditions for editorial work and in terms of periodicity. With respect to the media intentionality, content structure and principle of public service media, these represent typological definitions compatible with every democratic media system.

Incubator of young journalists – this is an educational construct, the objective of which is to ensure that the first year of master-level studies include relevant practice in a real media space. The practitioner, in this case a graduate of bachelor-level studies, will be involved in the editorial staff of a communal media with a precisely defined mission.

Inclusive education – this is a concept defined by UNESCO as a flexible process with the objective of creating an environment in which the diverse educational needs of every individual are met without exception. In this case, inclusive education is taken to be a process of integrating students of media studies into an environment in which they will create and distribute practical media production.

3. Analysis and Results

A. Metamorphosis of the Public

The information society is characterised by a restructuring of the mass public [5]. A change in collective mentality has been expressed by changes in social structure, in which mass media communication has been impacted by the fluidity of the mass public. This has led to its disintegration and dissolution, which represents the interface between the diffused mass and the phenomenon of the fragmentation of the public, which gives the mass a new dimension. It is almost as if it has made the mass more individualised and structured. It is almost as if the mass has assumed on clear contours. On the one hand, it has extended beyond the ordinary interfaces we observe and taken on a position into which it has penetrated into the international, indeed global, environment. On the other hand the mass public has broken down into new social structures that create a kind of cellular public. The new public is integrated in global processes but is essentially autonomous. This development can be described as a trichotomous model of the public with three interrelated components – (a) the public above the mass interface (global) or the hyper-mass public, (b) the mass public and (c) the public below the mass interface (sub-mass), i.e. the cellular public. As such it represents a complete system. It means that the global public is mass and cellular and vice versa. Globally it is a system in which the mass and cellular are global subsystems.

The cellular public differs from the mass public in that it is not homogeneous or universal and diffuse but rather it is diverse, specific and spatially defined by social bonds. This space is not defined by geographical borders; rather it is defined by the relationship between the individual and a reference group. This is space created by a "community spirit" requiring no geographical references; however it does require participation in the standardised values and ideas of the reference group or the public created on its basis. This is a continuous process, determined by the individualism of the percipient and the excitation or inhibition of their needs implemented within social intercourse. The higher the congruency between individuals and the community, the more consistent the cellular public and conversely, the higher the discrepancy, the created the risk of the sublimation of the public within the mass.

B. Media Typology in the Information Society

The trichotomic stratification of the public was taken as the basis for a new typology of media [6]. A distinction is made between: (1) global media are active in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual environment, owned by multinational media organisations and established on a commercial basis. (2) Mass media are universal media, active in a relatively homogeneous cultural and linguistic environment; usually at the state or national level. They are owned by national media organisations and financing is dual, either operating on a commercial basis or using public funding as public institutions. (3) Relationship-based media (RB media) are more specific and operate within the dimensions of a reference social group constituted on the basis of social and cultural relations as opposed to a population of geographic references. They are owned by multinational, national, regional, local, public and philanthropic media organisations and even individuals. Financing is commercial, public or philanthropic.

RB media differ in terms of several key characteristics, which are why another sub-system is created of these other typological groups: (1) community RB media, (2) communal RB media, and (3) domestic RB media. The subgroups of domesticated RB media are (a) supplements, (b) syndicated media and (c) unitary media.

C. Public Role and Social Climate in Fulfilling the Public Role of Communal Media

1) Public Role of Communal Media

The public interest, on the one hand, is an institute that combines communal media with public administration and, on the other hand, differentiates such media communication from other forms of media. The relationship between local government and communal media is determined by the function of communal media and the expectations of the public. Expectations and the level of their saturation are the factors that determine the impact such media can achieve [7].

The terms public administration and public institution are considered a unified system in which public administration is the basal element and the public institution is one of its structural components. The interaction between both institutions and between the public is completed on the basis of public relations.

Many papers on sociology have defined public administration as a decision making activity conducted by the authorities delegated powers under the law, in the extent and scope of the orders such authorities make and their powers, focused on governance and public service.

Similarly, public institutions as a modern form of management and ownership are focused, in this case, on supporting the fulfilment of tasks by local government and the public interest. They operate exclusively on the principle of an

independent entity with the objective of mitigating the negative consequences of the marketplace and a lack of democracy in public administration.

Regional public relations are formed at the interface with the activities of local government authorities and within public administration and represent a system of laws and legal standards that define the interaction of public power with the public at large, organisations and companies active in a precisely defined territorial unit creating the basis of the environment.

Environment in this context must be viewed more comprehensively. The foundation was adopted at the UNESCO Helsinki Conference (1967): "The environment is the portion of the earth with which man interacts directly, i.e. which man uses influences and adapts." The environment is comprised of a set of different factors with an impact on the lives and development of a specific community and that are the result or the consequence of the social conditions created by human society. These primarily are social and cultural conditions, education and training conditions, interpersonal relationships and conditions for the individual self-realisation of every member of the society that is a part of the given environment.

Communal media are an integral part of the environment [8] and their primary function as public institutions is reflexive and to control public administration, co-create public relations and in particular to motivate the public to participate in public matters. This is the manner in which communal media contribute to strengthening democracy in a society.

The functions of communal media have been constituted on the basis of the principle of public with the mission of strengthening democracy in society. This is the public role of these media.

2) Climate in the Fulfilment of the Public Role of Communal Media

The study relied on a number of research studies into Slovak communal media completed with a sampling set of 1,400 respondents aged 18+; 193 individual communal media were analysed. Nearly 100 students of the bachelor-level study program at the Faculty of Mass Media Communications at University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius took part in the research.

Research confirmed that communal media are the Achilles heel of democracy. Deviating from the legal framework provided by European Union legislation, the area of communal media is often used to hide the abuse of public funds and to suppress human rights, as proper information is a fundamental civil right. Information has a decisive impact in the development of individuals and society has a whole. In this context communal media have more a retardant effect on society and the strengthening of democracy. If democracy is to fully develop, then it must ensure that citizens participate in public affairs.

3) Primary Problems of Communal Media

Communal media [9] are owned (and published) in a majority of cases by a local government or an organisation in which the local government or municipality holds a majority interest. Media to an extensive level are funded using public funds and up to 81.34% of all such media are provided free of charge. This indicates a high level of dependence between media and local government.

The institution of the editorial staff plays an important role in media production, for instance editorial staff reviews up to 53.37% of print media before a newspaper goes to print while another 25.9% review in periodicals after they go to print. 59.1% of editorial staffs are responsible for agenda setting and up to 86.1% of editorial staffs secure direct editorial activities.

The results of the research confirmed the strong tendency of the local governments to define and censure media content. With respect to the level of professionalism of such editors, only 4% could be considered professionals in the field of journalism or the more broadly conceived field of media communications. On the other hand, 58% of editors did have university-level education but their editorial work is largely a part of other professional activities.

Up to 90% of editorial staffs did not have their own premises and the material and technical aspects of the work in a decisive majority of editorial staffs was conducted at a volunteer level. The result of such situation is low periodicity and a low level of influence in media. In general, local government print media have a negligible impact on the development of public relations and the fulfilment of the public's other expectations.

4) Inclusive Education as a Form of Continually Improving Communal Media

A graduate of bachelor-level studies acquires specific media and critical competencies [10] during the educational process comprising a basic tool kit for their future activities. A weakness of such education is a lack of personal experience based on the confrontation of this knowledge and these skills with the reality of media and in particular in interaction with the public. It is these very weaknesses that inclusive education at the master-level of study intends to remedy within the incubator of young journalists. These bachelor-level students will be able to confront the knowledge they have gained in practice and in a real media environment during a semester of professional work experience in a selected communal media. Work in the first phase will be conducted under the supervision of a trainer and will involve a media audit and proposing ways to improve its quality and efficacy. The second phase will afford them the opportunity to put their project into practice. They will then complete a final report containing data demonstrating changes in the quality and efficiency of the given media. The final assessment will be conducted by a professional committee where the student will then defend their work. The entire process will climax with a qualified assessment of the work and an authoritative

certificate demonstrating completion of such practical experience.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Strengthening democracy inside society is based on reinforcing the principle of public at the lowest levels of local government and administrative units. The principle of public means that public administration has sufficient respect for the rights of citizens to furnish accurate information and so public administration creates mechanisms that facilitate independent public control and a potent counterpoint for power structures in the sense of closing the democratic gap in the exercise of public administration. Such ambitions necessitate the separation of public communal media from the direct influence of local governments and the creation of financing mechanisms that provide adequate material, technical and human resources needed to consistently increase the quality of media communication. In the democracy in an entire country is the same as the level of democracy at the lowest level of such society. As such, independent communal media should serve as a benchmark for democracy on the one hand and a resource for building public relations and motivating civic participation in the administration of public affairs on the other. Inclusive education of young journalists is one of the possible ways to efficiently ensure sustained improvement in the quality of media and also preparing human resources to ensure the sustainability of the quality of communal media. Communal media provides ample room for an incubator of young journalists, both as an opportunity for students to gain valuable experience, and as a jumping off point for their careers in media.

Acknowledgement

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