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DIGITALIZATION AND NEW MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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Abstract

The article presents the phenomena of new communication technologies. It exposes the role of social media (Web 2.0) and sketches some global trends within the field of new media. It further outlines basic characteristics of traditional mass communication and consumption of media products, and as a counter-part presents interactive nature of a new media and the phenomena of user-generated media contents. The main focus of the article is the process of digitalization and its influence on important social system: media industry and production.

Digitalization and growth of social media have challenged the news industry, so the latter has to adjust its media production to the rising power of independent publishers on social media platforms, as well as to users, which became publishers themselves, the so-called prosumers. The process of multimedia production is described through various types of inclusion promised in the technological formats. This article also highlights the transformed “intimacy” of new media cultures, which presents further evidence of new, unstable, and to some respect blurring divisions between the public and private spheres of communication.

Several positive and negative consequences of digitalization on media landscape are enumerated. There are problems concerning transparency, accountability and professionalism of media production. Digital media has speed up the process of media production, journalists are faced with lack of time. Journalists as multitasking professionals are becoming the norm.

The article exposes social activities manifested on social media (networks). Social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, are becoming news platforms for spreading information and news among users. Moreover, social media has become a powerful tool for publishers and journalists, as it enables them to augment or to keep their audience. Since social networks are usually used to accomplish interpersonal rather than professional goals, there is a risk of misperception of communication acts performed by journalists via social networks.

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Interaction via social networks is usually more personal, interactive, collaborative, but these characteristics are quite different from normative ideals, attributed to quality journalism. The article concludes with the question about possible solutions concerning further development of normative conceptions of journalism.

Keywords: digitalization, social media, Facebook, Twitter, journalism

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Introduction: From mass consumption towards mass production

Social media enhanced by digitalization manages new forms of interactions. Its sociality enables constant growth in popularity. Web platforms enable sharing of content between users; therefore their main purpose is enhancing social interaction, building relationships, self-representation and collaboration among users. Traditional consumers became prosumers/producers. Web 2.0 platforms such as LinkedIn, Flickr, Facebook, YouTube or Twitter have become dominant communication channels for distribution, consumption and appropriation of diverse information or media news.

Before entering deeply into problem, we have to clarify important distinction. There is a distinction between digitization and digitalization, we quote an example: »The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) traces the first uses of the terms ‘digitization’ and ‘digitalization’ in conjunction with computers to the mid-1950s. In the OED, digitization refers to “the action or process of digitizing; the conversion of analogue data (esp. in later use images, video, and text) into digital form.” Digitalization, by contrast, refers to “the adoption or increase in use of digital or computer technology by an organization, industry, country, etc.” *Digitization* is therefore the material process of converting individual analogue streams of information into digital bits, while *digitalization* is a process in which many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures. (Brennen, S; Kreiss, D., 2014:1).

As already mentioned, one of the crucial and defining elements and activities of new media cultures, established via Web 2.0, is collaboration. This influences the transformation of key activities and statuses, especially in the light of individuals: we are acquainted with the traditional media category, such as the category »audience«, and subsequently new media category named »user« (also producer and prosumer). New media technology with its possibilities shapes and fosters new cultural connections and relations, previously more or less

overlooked. The process of multimedia production has been introduced via different types of inclusions promised in the technological forms. We are also faced with the transformed »intimacy« of new media cultures, which presents further evidence for a new and unstable, to a some extent blurring divisions between public and private sphere of communication. World Wide Web as a multimedia form has absorbed many other media (Praprotnik, 2014: 138-139). The so-called participative culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civil engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices (Jenkins et al, 2009: XI).

We have to stress also the newer contextual circumstances regarding subjectivity and receptions of individual's identity, for example in Facebook profiles. Anonymity is nowadays no longer the main attraction of new media. We are faced with a kind of reframing of certain activities on-line. In the late 20th century the main goal was to hide, to mask, to disguise ourselves. Disembodiment (especially anonymity) was the main attraction. »Disembodiment signifies that a person's online identity is apparently separate from their physical presence, a condition associated with two features: textuality and anonymity« (Slater, 2003: 536). Nowadays we are faced with the so-called collaborative culture based on Web 2.0. Accordingly to this new climate we are faced with different kind of activities performed by on-line individuals: to share, to collaborate, to link, to like (as it is in the case of Facebook) (Praprotnik, 2014: 138-139).

Collaboration as a new climate has to a great extent influenced also the media industry. Namely, channels for distribution and consumption of information have radically changed. As Paul Bradshaw points out: »For news industry used to controlling its own distribution, the rise of social media has brought significant change. Where media owners previously looked to the power of dominant portals such as Yahoo! and MSN as channels for attracting users, they now have increasingly to adjust to the rising power of users themselves as distributors not only of traditional content through social media, but also of independent publishers and individuals on social media platforms« (Bradshaw, 2012: 6).

Transformations of relationships within media system

Traditional media system and the whole media landscape (media corporations, distributors and consumers of media information) is radically changing. The statuses and activities of all elements are

changing; therefore the very relationships between these elements of media system are changing too. Traditional relationship between producers and consumers do not exist anymore. With the growth of social media platforms new category has been made: prosumer or produser. These processes have already influenced on (self) perceptions of the status and role of media workers (especially on some journalists) as authors of media contents. Social media platforms enable new type of pluralism and diversity. They redefine the agenda setting. In traditional media production journalists have their own sources of information, their own preferred agenda setting repertoire. Social media constitute completely new field of potential interlocutors, new sources of information. Social media enable new field of potential critics and opinion makers. Contemporary audience, with the constant ability of commenting, suggesting, reframing of media content, is additional reservoir of new suggestions on how to deal with media stories, how to transform media story into another one, even more intriguing story. Journalists and users became tightly interconnected in the very process of producing media content. »Journalists who blog talk of having access to a wider range of voices and opinions which provide not only leads for new stories, but also suggestions on ways to approach work in progress.« (Bradshaw, 2012: 12). Bradshaw made an online survey among blogging journalists (200 journalists, 30 countries, representing newspapers and magazines, television and radio, online-only and freelancers from all continents) and he was »surprised at just how much these journalists felt their work had been changed by the simple act of blogging. I had expected some effect on their relationship with the 'former audience', but what surprised me most was when more than half of the blogging journalists said this relationship had been 'enormously' or 'completely' transformed« (Bradshaw, 2008: 2). These evidences of cooperation and blurring divisions among journalists and audiences expose different problems concerning the very identity, role and classic virtues of journalism, such as accuracy, transparency, accountability and impartiality. Igor Vobič and Peter Dahlgren highlighted in their article various pivotal questions: »How has the relationship between journalists and audiences changed with the rise of interactive forms of public communication? How have these dynamics reshaped the prevailing societal roles of journalists and the established social meanings of news?« (Vobič and Dahlgren, 2013: 10). There are at least two kinds of transformations: firstly, due to growth of social media, new kind of journalism – participatory journalism - has markedly grown. These transformations are in some way also institutional; namely news industry has to appropriate its production to the technological changes and to new interactive users. Secondly; the very perception of news as a source of (relevant) information has been changed. News information

does not have privileged status any more. Users became more »promiscuous« concerning the use of different media contents and various media platforms. They observe information in a more personal way, they became more pragmatic when evaluating news information. Additionally, besides traditional journalists with their own media production, there are lots of users engaging with the so-called user-generated content (abbr. UGC), which are also the source of (relevant) information. Traditional image of journalism with its own virtues is not so strong any more. The so-called participatory journalism referring to all forms of non-professional activities in journalism, captures the ideas of collaborative and collective action. Some intriguing transformation will be outlined in the article too.

Digitalization and new »values« of media production: democratization, promptness and speed

Digitalization has to a large extent transformed the very processes within media production. Namely, news organizations cannot ignore social media any more nor they can ignore users and their empowered ability to seek information in alternative ways. People are no longer merely consumers, people are no longer »people formerly known as the audience«, as written by Jay Rosen, professor of journalism, when describing new interactive audience (Rosen, 2006). For sure, all empowered citizen are a welcomed novelty, but this also brings questions concerning quality, transparency, accountability of user-generated content. Namely, do we all have anything meaningful to say, do we all have to produce our own contents? It is a fact that we all can be creators of media contents; every voice counts. But we have to put another question too: Are all voices, all comments and contents recognized and heard? Additionally; is every voice meaningful?

Andrew Keen, author of the book *The Cult of the Amateur* (Keen, 2007) problematizes the idea of democratization of the internet via user-generated content. Keen exposes potential danger of the so-called digital utopia, which is strengthened by the rise of individual-amateur. His distinction between experts and amateurs is to some extent not pertinent, because the new information society is too complex, so we cannot insist on traditional distinction. The main problem with his distinction expert-amateur is that, in many cases, people who actually experience specific phenomena can provide information in which expert observers cannot (Derek, 2009: 1). Nevertheless some Keen's statements are meaningful anyway. A quick glance at You Tube proves that many amateurs are simply copying a well established media formats

or ideas and that technically empowered citizen is not a guarantee for better media production.

Additionally, digitalization highlights basic postulates of traditional journalism and drives various changes in journalism, including news values, professional ethics, working conditions. Digital media represents opportunities and alternative ways for gathering information and dissemination of news, more sophisticated channels for communicating with potential audiences (users). It brings risks and challenges too. Indeed; digitalization facilitates news gathering and dissemination, but this is a »mechanical« part of media production. Digitalization does not necessary foster better journalism. Good journalism is in the hand of individuals. We can enumerate some problematic practices, which are to some extent interconnected with the growth of digitalization: plagiarism, lack of verification, lack of complexity of media contents (Chan, 2014: 107). For sure, digitalization has widened strategies for media production, for alternative approaches towards construction of news stories, but these wide opened possibilities are only potential possibilities. They have not been properly exploited yet. We can make a comparison to the »magic word« of modern society: interactivity. Interactivity is a characteristic of interactive individual, but this characteristic cannot be fostered by the very (interactive) technology; it is the individual who can interactively communicate with technology and to other individuals.

We wish to expose that technology itself cannot enhance or foster qualitative changes in society. Technology can speed processes, enhance different ways to disseminate information, but the content of the information is somewhat in our hands. Digitalization itself is not some kind of magic stick to transform our ways of thinking, our images of democracy. Our attitudes towards socio-cultural phenomena are in our hands. Technology is a black box. Our ideas on how to use technology are limited by our imagination which is our biggest limitation.

We can enumerate many examples on how we deal with technology. Let us quote Ying Chan: »Almost all candidates in general elections use social media platforms to communicate with voters, but the emergence of new political actors because of digitalization is something that has occurred in only few countries« (Chan, 2014: 108).

Digitalization as two sided coin; risks and opportunities

If we return to the main topic – journalism in the era of digitalization – we have to enumerate some other risks and opportunities for good-quality journalism. Digitalization has posed risks to journalism standards as the

news cycle shrinks. Major »values« nowadays are speed and promptness. Digitalization has managed to reframe the main focus within media production: in many media organizations it is not so relevant to produce complex news stories and to verify the facts and sources for their stories, but to disseminate new media material before others will do the same. Time pressure and fast-paced journalism have made journalists more prone to mistakes. Additionally, the race to deliver news as fast as possible can lead to deficient revision practices and inconsistent fast checking, along with the tendency to reproduce content as it is received (Chan, 2014: 109). Changes also occur in terms of working conditions, which have generally worsened. Media production is faster than in the era of traditional mass media, and information volume being generated is higher. Journalists are expected to work longer and to have diverse digital skills. That means that journalists have to multitask, to switch between different kinds of jobs. They not only write articles but also shoot and edit images and videos, and manage social media. All these tasks to a greater extent increase their workload (Chan, 2014: 110). Chan states, that »perhaps the biggest role that digitalization plays in journalism lies in news gathering and dissemination rather than in news quality«. Chan continues with the example from France: »The expansion of online news has not substantially enlarged the volume of valuable information, as most content is still based on the same sources as before digitalization: press agencies, press conferences, or internal sources of information. It is rather a system of dissemination of the news (the hypermedia system) that has changed, as similar content is now delivered on the main websites, commented on by blogs, and promoted on Twitter and Facebook« (Chan, 2014: 110). Once again, as we have already stated, technology does not have transformative potential to alternate or to improve news, technology simply enables alternative channels for distribution and enables faster dissemination of quite the same information. Indeed, the quantity of information has grown, whereas the quality of information is another question. For sure, the multiplicity of voices and possibilities of participative and collaborative culture gives potential opportunities for better and alternative production of news, but evidences from around the world does not prove it is the actual case.

Digitalization and the transformation of news consumption; users seek personalized information

As we have already mentioned, digitalization has not significantly affected the diversity of the total news offer. The move to digitalization has not led automatically to a more diverse media landscape while content providers offer old information on new platforms. The main

benefit is that online platforms allow constant updating of content and access to this content at any time. The very possibility of constant updating of media information is new context »forcing« media producers to speed up media production process. The constant updating becomes »value« or »virtue« by itself.

Additionally the audience generally still relies on trusted channels, mostly public media. At this point we have to mention some serious digital divide which will have overall influence toward forthcoming media production. We are talking about divide between generations. While younger generations tend to rely more on new digital platforms when searching for news, older generations still stick to traditional media, particular terrestrial television and radio. Digitalization has also created divide between urban and rural areas. Rural areas have access to much poorer sources of information (Surčulija Milojević, 2014: 129-130). However, distinction between urban and rural is just approximate. Digital divide in terms of technology access is more or less overcome; even rural areas have in the 21. century quite good access to technology. Real divides occur within the field of cultural capital (education, diversity of cultural goods consumed by individuals etc) and divides among more or less culturally rich individuals influence on their news consumption; what to consume, how to consume, how to find suitable news for fulfilling individual motivations etc.

Surčulija Milojević states that »the main change triggered by digitalization is in citizens' attitude to the news offer. Citizens nowadays use several platforms to acquire news and do not wait for it to arrive on television or radio as before. They are more active in obtaining news through various channels of communication, such as PCs, cell phones, car radios, and portable computers« (Surčulija Milojević, 2014: 131). Modern well equipped citizens are – as we have already said – more promiscuous, more open for different media partners in order to get information they need. Especially younger generations are using digital media for getting suitable news. Therefore the number of countries that have experienced growth in news consumption via social networks is rising daily and it especially applies to the younger generation who are even more domesticated to digital media. Younger generations enjoy clicking to the hyperlinks that either media post on social networks (via Facebook and Twitter as the most popular) or follow the news recommended by their friends on these networks (Surčulija Milojević, 2014: 133-134). Generally spoken, younger generations are not very faithful media partners; they are able to simply switch news provider with another one. Even more, younger generations seek for more personalized information, i.e. information they need. They are not so

much concerned with news, labeled by media producers as important news. The importance and usefulness of information has become more personalized. Additionally, we have to take into account the socio-psychological characteristics of younger generations, which build their identity in line with important Others, their colleagues in schools. In light of this their use of media information are even more strategic and pragmatic. The value of (media) information does not lie in the very information; the value of information is considered through potential benefits/costs, for example: Is this information useful for my presentation in front of my colleagues. Will I enhance my self-presentation while mentioning this information?

Additionally, individuals experience social pressure to participate in the Social Web applications when their social environment is using it, so that they do not feel socially excluded. That kind of social pressure is frequently documented among young generations, which use specific media contents to fulfill communication patterns and to involve themselves into their own social environment. David Z. Mindich made a series of interviews with young people in order to understand better the problem of media use by young generations. He especially investigated their disengagement with the news. Instead of news they intensively follow various reality shows, such as American Idol. His book *Tuned Out; Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News* tries to explain what are young people consuming instead of news and what drives their decisions about what to consume. Mindich explained why so many more people tune into entertainment than news and one of the main reasons is a social (conversational) one. One youngster put the problem in a following way: »when your age peers do not follow the news, there is less incentive for you to do so, too« (Mindich, 2005: 64-65). News is not a topic to talk about and is not a topic by which to enter and be in line with social group (Praprotnik, 2015: 134-135).

Personalization takes place everywhere: If the news is that important, it will find me

Personalization of products, lifestyles and communication are processes that have taken place for quite some time. Products have to be personalized in order to be sold to customers. The same is true for media discourse, which became more audience oriented. The shift on the level of media discourse is quite obvious. Norman Fairclough has identified two tensions affecting contemporary media language: the tension between information and entertainment and the tension between public and private. Additionally, he points out two tendencies:

-the tendency of public affairs media to become increasingly conversationalized;

-its tendency to move increasingly in the direction of entertainment – to become more »marketized«. Fairclough adds another thing too: »Because of increasing commercial pressures and competition, media are being more fully drawn into operating on a market basis within the 'leisure' industry, and one part of this is greater pressure to entertain even within public affairs output« (Fairclough, 1995:10-11).

Another process is reframing news production too; news are not any more coherent information of actual events; they are becoming stories which never ends. Digitalization has pushed the process of personalization and storytelling even further. Media expert and professor of journalism Jeff Jarvis states that contemporary media ecosystem is completely different than traditional media system, where press had a major attention and where traditional media were almost »owners« of the news. In traditional media system the existence of the news depended to a large extent on media house. Jeff Jarvis states that the whole system of participants within media landscape has been changed: »The press becomes a press-sphere« (Jarvis, 2008a). In that renewed sphere all sources of information can contribute to the construction of a story. Jarvis ends his blog with the following thought: »Stories and topics become molecules that attract atoms: reporters, editors, witnesses, archives, commenters, and so on, all adding different elements to a greater understanding. Who brings that together? It's not always the reporter or editor anymore. It can just as easily be the reader(s) now«(Jarvis, 2008a). Even the status of the news is not any more self-evident. The selection of news is not in the hand of media house; the news is constructed as news among others channels too, especially within social media. Potential events (information) are reframed into news in different ways; it is not only a decision of media producers. News is distributed by our colleagues, friends, readers of our blogs or tweets and so on. These individuals can alert us that some information is newsworthy. News is not objective fact, the news become more personalized, suitable for me. We have to cite one student: »If the news is that important, it will find me« (Jarvis, 2008b).

Conclusion: Journalists as Bloggers and Twitters; how are their social media activities perceived by audience and why?

Social media as platforms and as channels for dissemination of information are powerful tools. Their potential was also recognized by journalists and news organizations. They realized that social media use has a potential to build and maintain audiences. One of the most notable trends is the usage of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as news platforms. Additionally, people consume media – as has already

been stated – by liking or following journalists or news organizations on Facebook or Twitter (Lee, 2015: 312). For journalists, social media has become powerful tool in a technical sense – to capture information flow, to gauge public opinion, to disseminate news. There are also other motivations: to strengthen bonds with audience, to promote personal brand or institutional brand. Some news organizations even encourage their staff journalists to engage in social media to expand readership or to raise brand awareness and increase their web traffic (Lee, 2015: 313). Nevertheless we have to expose the somewhat mixed nature of social media. As Jayeon Lee states »today's social media users experience news as not just mass communication but 'masspersonal' communication through which they can build interpersonal relationships with news sources« (Lee, 2015: 313). Namely social media are platforms for enhancing social interaction among users, for enhancing collaboration, cooperation and so on. Their social nature is quite obvious. Through social media users develop interpersonal relationships, maintain relationships, and engage in various cooperative actions. Social media is all about interaction and relationships. Now the question arises what happened when journalists engage with their readers and followers in social media? What are implications of journalists' social media activities for audience perceptions of journalists. Lee poses a question: »how journalists who used to be exclusive senders in mass communication processes are perceived by social media users when they behave like ordinary communicative partners«? To present the problem in a different way: Given the communication practices, prevalent in social media (self-disclosure, social interaction, collaboration, sharing, linking and liking) we can observe journalists' media activities (via Facebook and Twitter) »as a mix of interpersonal communication and mass communication through which audiences form impressions of journalists and their news products« (Lee, 2015: 313). The problem concerning journalists' social media activities can be seen as a clash of social media norms and the traditional journalism norms. »As social media users, journalists are subject to the influence of social media norms such as personality disclosure and interaction« (Lee, 2015: 315). Lee is referring to the study of Lasorsa, Lewis and Holton (2012) analyzing the tweets (Twitter posts) of the 500 most followed professional journalists. They analyzed 500 journalists who posted in a period of 14 days (from Oct. 05 to Oct. 18 2009) 22 248 tweets which were then coded (Lasorsa et al, 2012: 8). A study found that their tweets commonly included links (42%), personal life stories (20,2%), opinions (15,7%), information with at least an element of opinion (27%), and discussions (14,9%) (Lasorsa et al, 2012 in Lee, 2015: 315-316).

The study shows that journalists' social media activities follow interaction strategies characterized for social media; journalists gave opinion and personal life stories etc. However, self-disclosure and interaction are typically known to help achieve interpersonal goals rather than professional goals. The problem then arises on how to deal with these discrepancies. Lee presented the problem in a following way: »Those social media behaviors may present a journalist as a nice and friendly person, but at the same time, those can be seen as a violation of professionalism that traditionally requires journalists to be neutral and detached« (Molyneux and Holton, 2015 in Lee, 2015: 316). Molyneux and Holton state that »through interviews with such journalists, this study explores the perceptions, practices, and drivers of personal branding among journalists. Findings indicate journalists are squarely focused on branding at the individual level (rather than branding the organizations they work for). Journalists cite technological and cultural changes in the profession as giving rise to personal branding. They also describe the tension they feel between their obligation to uphold the traditional tenets of journalism and their perceived need to incorporate more branding into their practice, especially on social media platforms« (Molyneux and Holton, 2015:1).

We can expect the interdependence between journalists' image in front of their audience and perception of journalists' news product by the same audience. It is expected that audiences view a news product positively when it is produced by a person they view positively. To put this observation in a direct way as was formulated in Lee's hypothesis H2: »Audience perceptions of a journalist positively predict audience perceptions of the journalist's news product in the personal dimension« (Lee, 2015: 317). The hypothesis was supported and this leads us to the problem which was already exposed: the pressure to gain audience, the pressure to maintain audience. These social media activities (to interact in a friendly, open manner, to self-disclose, to share ideas with audience and followers) may be seen as a violation of traditional norms of journalism. The question remains, how to deal with traditional norms of journalism (impartiality, accuracy, objectivity). Are these norms in any sense useful; are these norms more or less only recommendations since objectivity is an ever-evolving concept, even differently interpreted or valued among cultures.

Social media activities push our traditional common sense observations and attitudes in a brand new perspective. Do we have to reframe the meaning of our activities, do we have to reform basic cultural norms and postulates. Those questions are hard to answer. For sure, journalism as

a profession is in a constant transformation. We, as an audience, have at least privileged position to observe these spectacular changes.

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