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Media Literacy Function in Critical Blogs

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Abstract

The Internet is widely recognized as playing an important role in facilitating education on a range of issues, including media literacy. Analyzing the media critical activity of contemporary Russian bloggers, the authors of the article reveal the following reasons for popularity or, on the contrary, unpopularity of blogger's media criticism: targeted orientation, emotional charge, entertainment nature, duration, interactiveness, multimedia mode, simplicity/complexity of the language of a media text, the level of conformity.

Keywords: media criticism; media education; media literacy; media competence; analytical thinking; ethics; media blogger.

Introduction

It is difficult to challenge the viewpoint that the new "hyper technological environment, this deepening of communicative globalization, has not only altered the way we perceive and use time and space, it has also changed the chemistry of our everyday life and our culture. This new life and cultural chemistry fostered by the acceleration of the rapid configuration of huge, changing publics is in fact generating chain reactions of an unheard of scope and complexity that we are still far from being able to grasp. It is affecting our environment, our culture and also our way of being individuals, our way of framing ourselves as human beings. Perhaps we are not prepared to wholly explain the change, but we must examine it because it affects all the dimensions of our existence. Perhaps this is an unprecedented mutation that will not only affect our environment but also decisively influence our psyche and our character" [Perez Tornero, Varis, 2010, p. 13-14].

In fact, interactive media, engaging their user into the creating process, thus turning him/her from a receiver/translator into a creator of media texts, have made a real breakthrough to a personal freedom in mass information sphere. The degree of dependence of a person from the dictate of a media message's producer has significantly decreased and the borders of choice have been broadened; the personality's status and self esteem have been raised [Korkonosenko, 2013, p. 38].

Materials and methods

S.V. Ushakova (2006) classified the forms of media contribution to the development of citizens' media competence. According to her, there are two groups - of direct and of indirect participation.

The forms of indirect participation include:

- self education of the audience during media exposure; additionally, broadening of one's communicative experience;
- enhancement of the audience's media competence due to its cooperation with media agencies as freelance correspondents, sources of journalistic information, and/or participants of television/radio programs;
- release of periodicals and TV/radio programs by a media center in an educational institution/club/community center;
- blogging - publishing discussion or informational posts on the World Wide Web;
- "self-press" - participation in publication of alternative (informal) periodicals;
- public, out-of-editorial body communication of journalists and other media sphere specialists with representatives of the audience (in the form of special events, journalists' meetings with public, television audiences, etc.).

In contrast, the forms of direct participation include:

- media education publications and programs in mass media;
- media journalists/ media critics articles, containing analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the contents of mass media and the issues of their functioning in society;
- publishing periodical TV guides and film guides, targeted at the mass audience and aimed at the development of basic abilities to perceive and evaluate audiovisual media texts (facilitated by reading publications, related to the analysis of TV programs and films);
- publishing syllabi, lesson plans and other materials produced by public media monitoring organizations and media activists - representatives of civic society;
- sections and columns in mass media aimed at maintaining the feedback with the audience, and explaining the "inside" journalism policy of collecting, evaluating, and verifying the information;
- ombudsmen's columns, inquiring into disputable cases of journalism [Ushakova, 2006].

Whereby, speaking about professional media criticism, the peculiarity of the current situation is connected to the fact that some media critics, actively involved in press, also successfully collaborate with electronic media as well, thus television criticism begins to acquire some synthetic forms, uniting political analysis and dismantling internal corporate problems, political bias and the independent view, theoretical analysis of the form and method, and superficial, tabloid-tinted simplistic view [Gureev, 2004].

One would think that such active media critics as Dmitry Bykov, working nearly 24/7 in press, on TV and on the Internet, would fully get hold of the audiences' attention. However it is not happening - there are quite a few media bloggers on the Internet who sometimes attract even more readers.

Conclusions

Why is bloggers' media criticism popular?

We suggest the following reasons for popularity or, vice versa, unpopularity of bloggers' media criticism:

1) *Targeted orientation*: media texts of popular bloggers may be aimed at a broad audience (thus potentially popular) or at a narrow circle, joined by thematic or other interests. Professional media critics' texts, apart from being targeted at a wide audience, may be corporative, that is "can influence comparatively small, but strategically important groups of audiences (journalists and top media managers, teachers and students of journalism schools, working journalists, researchers in various fields of social studies and humanities, and social activists), empowering them with new ideas and approaches, new vision of common problems of media functioning" [Korochensky, 2003, p.33].

2) *Duration*: popular media bloggers' texts are usually short, and professional media critics' texts, on the contrary, often require prolonged reading/listening, that, evidently, discourages the concentration of an impatient part of the audience with a short attention span (especially, the young);

3) *Interactiveness, multi-media mode*: popular media bloggers' texts are often interactive. Short texts are accompanied by photographs, video clips, links to other sites, etc. On the other hand, professional media critics' texts, even on the web, resemble the format of print press;

4) *Language*. Popular media bloggers' texts are written in plain, understandable for a wide audience, language; often without a deep analysis and logical structure. Meanwhile professional media critics' texts are well structured, logical, and often aimed at media competent readers who are aware of the social and cultural context of the issue, understand media language, and specialized media terms, know the functions of media agencies, manipulative effects, the creative work of media professionals, and so on.

5) *Emotional charge*. The texts written by media bloggers, in general, are clearly emotionally charged. They sometimes contain sharp, straightforward judgments and comments, while professional media critics' texts are characterized by the understatement, sometimes ambivalent, (implicitly) ironic, reasonable, argumentative evaluation of the ethical, aesthetic and other categories. Moreover, the media critics of older generation often act in the spirit of "enlightenment" and development of good taste in their audience.

6) *Entertainment*. Popular media bloggers' texts frequently exploit the entertainment function, while professional media critics' texts are occasionally too serious, or even pompous.

7) *Conformity*. On the one hand, non-conformist texts of media bloggers commonly oppose any authority, criticize media personalities of any scale and position. On the other hand, professional media critics avoid any personal attacks, they tend to use apophrisis, they do not break social taboos. That said, we encounter that both bloggers and professional journalists frequently break social norms [Muratov, 2001], and are not shy to use abusive language, including obscene lexis, in their political propaganda statements.

What does the above-said mean for the media education practice? In this sense, it implies that besides the mass communications theory, the syllabi for media teachers' pre-service or in-service education should include theoretical units on non-mass mediated communication - ranging from auto-media communication and interpersonal communication to in-group and intergroup media communication. This theoretical background should become a starting point for the development of the new framework of media education both in schools and universities [Sharikov, 2012]. Bloggers' media texts may become a useful teaching and learning tool for a modern teacher, the same as traditional media texts, created by professionals working in press, on television, and on radio.

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УДК 37

Медиаобразовательная функция блоггерской медиакритики

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Аннотация. Анализируя медиакритическую деятельность современных российских блоггеров, авторы статьи выявили следующие причины популярности или, наоборот, непопулярности блоггерской медиакритики: целевые ориентации, эмоциональность, развлекательный характер, продолжительность, интерактивность, мультимедиахарактер, простота/сложность языка медиатекста.

Ключевые слова: медиа; медиакритика; медиаобразование; медиаграмотность; медиакомпетентность; аналитическое мышление; этика; средства массовой информации; блоггер.