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Explanatory Journalism – A New Way How To Communicate In Digital Era

ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the issue of explanatory journalism, which is becoming an increasingly popular and important form of communication in times flooded by verified information as well as misinformation and hoaxes. The study is of a theoretical character and critically evaluates knowledge from this area, placing emphasis on digitalization of journalism that has brought new communication instruments and platforms, thus increasing demands on information literacy and media education of a recipient. This phenomenon resulted in the establishment of several media projects aimed mainly at explaining complex terms or phenomena in a simple and comprehensive way or at interconnecting high-ranking state officials with influential businessmen. In the text, the authors address the role and status of explanatory journalism, its potential in relation to investigative journalism and data journalism - areas and topics that are urgent and beneficial for our society but are often difficult to comprehend for a reader due to their technicality and complexity.

KEY WORDS

Explanatory journalism. Investigative Journalism. Data Journalism. Digitization. Media Education. Information Literacy.

1. Introduction

Communication is a broad concept with a wide range of uses. It occurs across various scientific disciplines, but is most often associated with the use of a specific language.¹ The need for people to communicate, i.e. to transfer information, from one place to another, in the shortest possible time and of the best possible quality, has grown in society. Therefore, in the history of communication, the search for an adequate method to multiply the already existing set of information, ie to provide a larger number of copies, represents an important area.² Over the years, communication has been constantly evolving, transforming and adapting in relation to the author (journalist / presenter) and recipient (reader / listener) with the advent of modern technologies, the Internet and online platforms. Therefore, their needs have also changed.

What the percipient in the media space understood twelve years ago has changed, which may result in a difference in the level of media literacy. Media literacy³ represents some of the key characteristics of an individual, which include preparation for effective self-realization in today's dynamic society from the point of view of information mediation.⁴ We can understand it as knowledge, understanding and experience with various forms of media, but also as a competence in the use of various media, or the ability to think critically about them. Last but not least, it represents a certain level of skill and competence in the use of media devices.⁵

There are dozens of different definitions in relation to media literacy, which define in particular the perception of media literacy as the ability to receive, analyze, evaluate, but also critically use and create a variety of media content. However, these competencies should be complemented by a certain level of ability to shape media products and to understand the processes of their creation, to understand the nature, functioning and influence of mass media.⁶ As stated by several authors, the pedagogical non-specificity of the term requires its understanding in the context of media education, in the so-called media pedagogy, which includes media didactics, media education,⁷ media teaching and media research.⁸

The concept of media literacy is related to education itself, i.e. media education, which also appears in literature as mass media education.⁹ S. Brečka understands it as a wide range of educational, developmental, promotional and practical activities in order to connect various groups of the public with the functioning of the media, the meaning of media content and the possible consequences of their impact on the life of the individual or society.¹⁰ J. Průcha, E. Walterová and J. Mareš characterize media education in the Pedagogical Dictionary as education towards orientation in the mass media, their use and their critical evaluation.¹¹

¹ ŠKVARENINOVÁ, O.: *Rečová komunikácia*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2014, p. 15-18.

² JIRÁK, J., KOPPLOVÁ, B.: *Média a spoločnosť*. Praha : Portál, 2003, p. 13.

³ See, for example: BIELIK, P., OPRALA, B.: The Most Important Thing Is to Find a Way How to Teach Media Education in an Appropriate Way. Interview with Jan Jiráček. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 87-97.

⁴ RADOŠINSKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: To Thrive Means to Entertain: The Nature of Today's Media Industries. In *Communication Today*, 2018, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 39.

⁵ *Definition of medial literacy*. [online]. [2021-01-20]. Available at: <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100146592>>.

⁶ MORAVČÍKOVÁ, M.: Magazín o životnom štýle. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds.): *Slovník vybraných pojmov z mediálnych štúdií*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2016, p. 123.

⁷ See, for example: VRABEC, N., BŤOŠOVÁ, L.: The Concept of Learning-by-Doing in the Context of Media Education and School Quality Assessment. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 140-149.

⁸ MORAVČÍKOVÁ, M.: Magazín o životnom štýle. In PRAVDOVÁ, H., RADOŠINSKÁ, J., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J. (eds.): *Slovník vybraných pojmov z mediálnych štúdií*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2016, p. 123.

⁹ OLEKŠÁK, P.: O potrebe mediálnej výchovy. In *Otázky žurnalistiky*, 2007, Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 24.

¹⁰ BREČKA, S.: Východiská, koncepcie a ciele mediálnej výchovy. In MAGÁL, S., PLENCNER, A. (eds.): *Kolokvium 1 – 2 Katedry masmediálnej komunikácie : Zborník príspevkov z jarného a jesenného kolokvia Katedry masmediálnej komunikácie FMK UCM*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2004, p. 84.

¹¹ PRŮCHA, J., WALTEROVÁ, E., MAREŠ, J.: *Pedagogický slovník*. Praha : Portál, 2008, p. 119.

If we transfer the individual definitions to the current media environment, where the problem of the web dominates, we can, according to P. Garaj, talk about useful websites, where meaningful functioning in online spaces requires skilled users – those who have mastered the relevant principles and thinking. Future users must be careful about how the media directs their attention. Therefore, media literacy will be mainly about the ability to understand the media environment in which we create our image of the world.¹²

The media, as a means of mass communication, transmit information in various forms and for various purposes related to the fulfillment of the basic functions of the media in society, as defined by several experts in the field of mass media studies, and which are also the starting points for pedagogy in this area. In addition to the basic functions, such as entertainment, information or culture, the mission of the media is also to educate in what we call an educational function.¹³ From the pedagogical point of view, the media can therefore be perceived as an important means of education, acculturation and socialization of the individual.¹⁴ Within the fulfillment of information, according to V. Kačínová, the media function thus becomes a means of providing various information.¹⁵

2. Digitalization of Journalism: A Revolution in Public Communication

We live today in a media space where everyone can publish, and the means to present their own content are available on the web, either through social networks or in blogs. According to P. Garaj, the result of such an opportunity to publish and engage in the media space is, above all, a huge amount of content, which, however, lacks quality and value. In addition, journalists must learn to deal with those who are not real journalists. According to him, the originally celebrated and positively perceived democratization of content publishing required a social order in the form of online media education for schools. Pupils and students would thus be able to more effectively identify misinformation and false information in the process of digitizing media content using explanatory tools and teaching methods. The problem is that we first have to wait for the changes that the Internet brings, and then we learn how to respond to the changes.¹⁶

The most dominant characteristic of digitization is the transition from a physical form of media product to an electronic one.¹⁷ According to M. Švecová, digitization in the technological concept of media is the process of changing the production of media content, its storage, distribution and dissemination to audiences from analogue to digital.¹⁸ While in 1964 up to 80% of Americans read newspapers regularly, in 1994 it was 20% less and during 2006 the numbers fell to below 50%.¹⁹

The ontology of journalism has also changed. New formats and methods have changed the daily work practices of journalists, which must be handled by both novice professional and more experienced reporters. These innovations are accompanied by various challenges, including a wealth of quick and concise information provided online and more easily reaching audiences

¹² GARAJ, P.: Spamujte menej, dozviete sa viac. In *Ako fungujú médiá*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://a-static.projektn.sk/2018/04/n-magazin-media.pdf>>.

¹³ KAČINOVÁ, V.: *Teória a prax mediálnej výchovy*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2015, p. 11.

¹⁴ PRŮCHA, J., WALTEROVÁ, E., MAREŠ, J.: *Pedagogický slovník*. Praha : Portál, 2008, p. 119.

¹⁵ KAČINOVÁ, V.: *Teória a prax mediálnej výchovy*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2015, p. 12.

¹⁶ GARAJ, P.: Spamujte menej, dozviete sa viac. In *Ako fungujú médiá*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://a-static.projektn.sk/2018/04/n-magazin-media.pdf>>.

¹⁷ See, for example: MINÁRIKOVÁ, J., BLAHÚT, D., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: Hi-Tech and Eye-Catching Alike: Information in the Multiplatform Era. In *European Journal of Media, Art and Photography*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 118-126.

¹⁸ ŠVECOVÁ, M.: *Webová žurnalistika*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2017, p. 10.

¹⁹ ČERMÁK, M.: Nová média. Úvod a stručná historie. In OSVALDOVÁ, B., TEJKALOVÁ, A. (eds.): *Žurnalistika v informační společnosti: digitalizace a internetizace žurnalistiky*. Praha : Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2009, p. 8.

on social networks, but they are insufficiently communicated,²⁰ which constantly exacerbates the problem of media and information literacy and thus puts us in a difficult situation, when we need to not only convey information to the audience, but also to explain its meaning.

The authors' statements are confirmed by the following numbers. According to statistics from the ABC SR portal, which archives the results of both printed and sold copies, the number of daily copies of *Nový čas* sold (for the period November 2015 to January 2020) decreased from 99,819 pieces to 65,507 copies, which is a decrease in sales of almost 34% during four years.²¹ For comparison – the number of daily copies of the *SME* daily sold (for the period from April 2015 to January 2020) fell from 33,563 copies to 21,230 copies, which is a decrease in sales of more than 36% over four years.²²

The sale of printed matter has been regularly declining and for the Slovak media environment brings risks not only in terms of financial risks, but also challenges inclined towards positive changes. One of them is the widespread digitization of the media and the rise of the Internet, which represent fundamental changes in content management systems, higher demands on journalist's multimedia skills or overall access to and knowledge of information and data that transform online journalism. Digitization has brought about changes in the evaluation and overall definition of what is considered a success. While in the traditional print media there were already several indicators with which we were able to recognize whether the work of a particular medium is profitable, in the online space, success is measured primarily by web traffic.²³

Although most media outlets feared the advent of the Internet, as there was not yet a functioning payment / funding mechanism for such platforms, by the end of 1995 there were already more than a thousand such titles on the web.²⁴ The rapid growth of the Internet in human society, and the associated downloading of media on the Web, took everyone by surprise. Among those surprised by the rapid change were not only older journalists, but also academics, educators, media theorists and scientists.²⁵

The evolution of the internet subsequently created an ideal environment for the application of online journalism in the internet environment.²⁶ L. Manovich even calls the transformation of traditional media into Internet form a revolution.²⁷ However, in order for journalistic work to provide a living for journalists today, it must generate profit, but we are still far from fully understanding the political, economic and institutional boundaries of media production in all their complexity.²⁸

Therefore, today's media are in the situation where they have to constantly make their content and web design more attractive and search for more and more entertaining forms of storytelling and information provision, which will be at the same time undemanding on the time and attention of the recipient. There are several commercial models that use the media. These include the sale of advertising space and advertising interaction, sales, publishing PR content and charging content to recipients, i.e. the monetization of content.²⁹ In terms of success

²⁰ HAHN, O., STALPH, F.: *Digital investigative journalism: Data, Visual Analytics and Innovative Methodologies in International Reporting*. Passau : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 2.

²¹ ABC SR – results. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<http://www.abcsr.sk/aktualne-vysledky/archiv-vysledkov/>>.

²² Ibid.

²³ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 27.

²⁴ ČERMÁK, M.: *Nová média. Úvod a stručná historie*. In OSVALDOVÁ, B., TEJKALOVÁ, A. (eds.): *Žurnalistika v informační společnosti: digitalizace a internetizace žurnalistiky*. Praha : Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2009, p. 22.

²⁵ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 9.

²⁶ VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Aktuálne otázky teórie a praxe žurnalistiky v ére internetu*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2015, p. 47.

²⁷ MANOVICH, L.: *The Language of New Media*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<http://www.manovich.net/LNM/Manovich.pdf>>.

²⁸ RADOŠINSKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *To Thrive Means to Entertain: The Nature of Today's Media Industries*. In *Communication Today*, 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 15.

²⁹ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 61.

in terms of quality of content, one of the traditional aspects is citation. The mentioned criterion has been given a completely new form of referencing in the environment of the web, the basic tool of which is hypertext. The journalistic speech, to which other authors and other media refer, is becoming successful. It should be added that this new form of citation is an important criterion for success in the media space,³⁰ as the recipient using a portable mobile device finds themselves in a place full of diverse information for which they need an explanation, which hypertext has partially solved.

Twenty years ago, J. O. Green argued that by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, people would carry a small, inconspicuous object with them and join in everything and with everyone. An intelligent „agent“ will gather information from around the world, as well as materials that interest people.³¹ The advent of smartphones and tablets has significantly affected the work of online journalists, as well as the structure of media outputs themselves, if we consider the current definition of a smartphone to be one that describes having an operating system capable of installing new applications.³² V. Bednář says that Internet publication is the youngest branch of journalistic work, yet one of the most influential, and has gained this attribute over its gradual historical development – first media, through initial online services, the Internet and the Web to smart devices.³³

According to J. Višňovský, the beginnings of online journalism can be dated back to the first half of the 1990s, when the Internet was available mainly for commercial use.³⁴ However, the beginnings of the Internet date back to the late 1960s, and the global network we know today can be traced back to the 1980s, while the birth of serious web journalism dates back to 2000.³⁵ After the transition of journalism from print to electronic media, methods of journalism were adapted to the given medium, and so it was with the advent of the Internet. The media world has changed with digitization and this conditioned the emergence of new types of journalism.³⁶ The change after the transition to online media of Aktuality.sk was noticed, for example, by the investigative journalist M. Vagovič, who sees the changes mainly in the form of feedback, the reach of the journalistic speech and in the comments coming from readers.³⁷ Similar words can be heard from the former presenter of the Czech internet television channel DTV, F. Horký, who said that he only has seven seconds on the web to attract viewers, otherwise they will leave. In order to not anger or drive them away, he believes he needs adopt a tabloid appearance.³⁸ Journalists in the new media environment are currently facing challenges from the Internet and social media. They need to work on different platforms that previously didn't exist, and also work with the audience more than ever before.³⁹

³⁰ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 29

³¹ GREEN, J. O.: *Nowa era komunikacji*. Warszawa : Prószyński i S-ka, 1999. In JAKUBOWICZ, K.: *Nová ekologie médií*. Zlín : Verbum, 2013, p. 18-19.

³² *The Difference Between a Smartphone and Tablet*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://www.fony.sk/clanky/7709-aky-je-rozdiel-medzi-smartfonom-a-beznym-telefonom>>.

³³ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 9.

³⁴ VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: *Aktuálne otázky teórie a praxe žurnalistiky v ére internetu*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2015, p. 53.

³⁵ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 13.

³⁶ PRONER, J.: Vývoj a predpoklady pre vznik dátovej žurnalistiky. In: GÁLIKOVÁ TOLNAIOVÁ, S., GREGUŠ, L., PRONER, J. (eds.): *Quo vadis massmedia & marketing*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2019, p. 101.

³⁷ JANOČKO, J.: *Marek Vagovič: Naši čitatelia oceňujú, že vieme vysvetliť zložité kauzy jednoduchým spôsobom*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://gaudeo.sk/marek-vagovic/>>.

³⁸ GEHREROVÁ, R.: *Ako môže vyzeráť televízia budúcnosti*. In *Ako fungujú médiá*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://a-static.projektn.sk/2018/04/n-magazin-media.pdf>>.

³⁹ PICARD, R. G.: *Journalists' Perceptions of the Future of Journalistic Work*. Oxford : Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2015. [online]. [2021-10-16]. Available at: <<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-11/Journalists%27%20Perceptions%20of%20the%20Future%20of%20Journalistic%20Work.pdf>>.

We believe that a journalist who works on investigative speeches or works in the field must master several online platforms and tools that appeal to today's audience – newsrooms even record a number of regular podcasts, to which advertisers respond positively. The mentioned phenomena confirm the impact of digitization in all areas of the media environment; they influence journalistic expression, the relationship between the authors of media expression, but also the media literacy of the percipient who must constantly develop their understanding of the media environment.⁴⁰ They must adapt to the conditions of the new media in order to ultimately bring benefit to the media. Another factor is the continuing fragmentation of media content, where on the one hand media companies distort their content in the context of stakeholders, while on the other hand they fragment the type of content they offer to consumers – online or printed forms of newspapers, videos, podcasts, infographics, even posts on social networks coming from official media accounts on social media platforms. This expansion of content production is a consequence of digitization, which, according to K. Jakubowicz, is a major factor in media convergence. All of this is causing the media to dematerialize as the media slowly departs from its original platforms.⁴¹

New trends in the media are constantly bringing phenomena that need to be addressed, and in some cases it is possible to reap the maximum benefits from them. News comes in an increasingly diverse form and stories are created in innovative ways to adapt to the habits and attract the attention of recipients in the digital world.⁴²

The whole process associated with the progress of computers has other consequences. With the advent of the Internet, new distribution channels have opened up, faster and more accessible than anything we have known before. Digital visual technologies have significantly expanded the scope of human vision. The whole era of digitization is thus considered another stage of evolution in the system of depiction and understanding of the world, which in the context of postmodern society has contributed to the disintegration of the real, optically perceptible world.⁴³ In addition, the new media is associated with the feeling that Western society is on the threshold of a world that has no borders, where everyone can communicate with everyone, anytime, anywhere, and above all about anything. We already perceive the Internet as an open medium, an environment where the boundary between the recipient and the content is blurred.⁴⁴

It is explanatory journalism that represents a new form of creating journalistic expression, which is a manifestation of the popularity of Internet journalism. The Web has become a medium that, shortly after its advent, and in a combination of circumstances, has dramatically changed the way Western society understands the work and nature of journalism.⁴⁵ Another phenomenon is, for example, the hybridization of genres – they are created by combining two or more genres, and thus a text is created that contains various genre elements. B. Osvaldová sees the reason for the hybridization of genres as a complicated classification and sees a problem with the definition of genres according to their attributes; therefore hybridization is associated with new media.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ See, for example: VRABEC, N.: *Výskum úrovne mediálnej gramotnosti: prehľad výskumných stratégií*. Trnava : FMK UCM v Trnave, 2015.

⁴¹ JAKUBOWICZ, K.: *Nová ekologie médií: Konvergence a mediamorfóza*. Zlín : Verbum, 2013, p. 16-17.

⁴² See, for example: HOSSOVÁ, M.: Fake News and Disinformation: Phenomenons of Post-Factual Society. In *Media Literacy and Academic Research*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 27-35.

⁴³ LÁB, F., LÁBOVÁ, A.: *Obraz v digitálním věku*. In OSVALDOVÁ, B., TEJKALOVÁ, A. (eds.): *Žurnalistika v informační společnosti: digitalizace a internetizace žurnalistiky*. Praha : Karolinum, 2009, p. 121-122.

⁴⁴ RADOŠINKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., RUSNÁKOVÁ, L.: *Globalizovaný filmový priemysel*. Praha : Wolters Kluwer, 2020, p. 34-36.

⁴⁵ BEDNÁŘ, V.: *Internetová publicistika*. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2011, p. 13.

⁴⁶ OSVALDOVÁ, B.: Změnil internet žurnalistické standardy a žánry? In OSVALDOVÁ, B., TEJKALOVÁ, A. (eds.): *Žurnalistika v informační společnosti: digitalizace a internetizace žurnalistiky*. Praha : Karolinum, 2009, p. 110.

3. The Importance of Explanatory journalism in the Media Space

According to F. Struhárik, the form of the Internet and online journalism has for more than ten years been largely determined by social media. From sites that initially only connected friends and acquaintances, today there are large companies that set the trends in the media environment.⁴⁷ The audience is the primary reason for the existence of the medium and maintaining the audience's attention is its basic premise.⁴⁸ Journalism must therefore devote its primary resources to explanatory journalism, which deals in depth with political issues, trials, institutions in a democratic society and, through thorough explanation, also questions myths and concerns about surrounding issues such as immigration, terrorism and other issues that perpetuate the audience's attention.⁴⁹ According to the Pulitzer Prize website, this is journalism, in which we clarify significant and complex phenomena through clear text and presentation of content, using the available journalistic tools.⁵⁰

Today, data journalism can be considered embedded and respected in prestigious media editorial structures such as The Guardian or The New York Times. However, even at the local and regional level, we see more and more small teams dealing with data journalism. This phenomenon can be observed due to the very existence of explanatory and analytical data journalism sites, which are based mainly on working with data. These include Vox, FiveThirtyEight or Quartz. In addition, thanks to the inclusion of data journalism in journalism education and the growing interest of the scientific community, data journalism is no longer on the fringes of interest. This is a recognized journalistic phenomenon.⁵¹

Quartz was launched in 2012.⁵² For example, the New York Times did not begin to take a more thorough approach to explanatory journalism until April 2014, when it founded The Upshot. In the field of data explanation and interpretation, The Upshot can be considered more comprehensive, but it focuses less on prediction than the similar project FiveThirtyEight (also known as 538).⁵³ FiveThirtyEight was founded by journalist N. Silver in March 2008, has been owned by ESPN since July 2013 and was relaunched in March 2014. N. Silver became famous for his approach to explanatory journalism through the policy-oriented 538 blog, which soon became operational as a proprietary and respected online medium. Assuming that FiveThirtyEight is based largely on data from which it makes full-fledged predictions, Vox is a contrasting type of media in this regard. It was established in April 2014 as part of the larger Vox Media organization, which was itself a start-up company in the media environment. This is a popular website for journalist E. Klein, who, along with several other colleagues, left the Wonkblog project founded by the American daily The Washington Post. It was Wonkblog that E. Klein established as a political and economic platform within The Washington Post based on the same principles.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ STRUHÁRIK, F.: Sociálne médiá. In *Ako fungujú médiá*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://a-static.projektn.sk/2018/04/n-magazin-media.pdf>>.

⁴⁸ See, for example: PRAVDOVÁ, H., HUDÍKOVÁ, Z., PANASENKO, N.: Homo corporalis as the communicated muse and centrepiece of commercialized culture. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2020, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 68-81.

⁴⁹ WARD, S. J. A.: *Ethical Journalism In a Populist Age*. London : Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, p. 99.

⁵⁰ *The Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory reporting*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-category/207>>.

⁵¹ HAHN, O., STALPH, F.: *Digital investigative journalism: Data, Visual Analytics and Innovative Methodologies in International Reporting*. Passau : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 15.

⁵² *An inside look: How cloud computing transformed the Quartz business model*. [online]. [2021-01-16]. Available at: <<https://qz.com/1897845/an-inside-look-how-cloud-computing-transformed-the-quartz-business-model/>>.

⁵³ HAHN, O., STALPH, F.: *Digital investigative journalism: Data, Visual Analytics and Innovative Methodologies in International Reporting*. Passau : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 55.

Bloomberg launched a similar project called QuickTake in October 2013. According to its editor J. Landman, QuickTake has published more than 70 press releases in just a few months. BuzzFeed also publishes a large amount of explanatory material on a daily basis, while Slate uses a distinctive name for its project The Explainer.⁵⁵ All the aforementioned platforms based on the pillars of explanatory journalism bear similar features. Moreover, looking at their year of foundation, we can see an increase in the popularity of explanatory journalism in the second decade of the 21st century, modern and progressive ways of mediating content that are constantly evolving and looking for increasingly attractive and accessible forms of attention – after all, they help to develop the media literacy of the population in an accessible form. For example, if we feel that the US electoral system is too complicated, we only need to use keywords to find explanatory content on a specific page, or on a Youtube channel where Vox is active. Their 8-minute explanatory video on the US election reached more than six million views.⁵⁶ FiveThirtyEight's Youtube account provided a similar, this time longer than 30-minute video – a larger interview that reached about 40,000 views.⁵⁷

Keywords like „explain“ are becoming more and more popular and sought after. This is confirmed, for example, by Quartz's slogan, which says: „*Global news and insights for a new generation of business leaders.*“⁵⁸ Vox again came up with the slogan „understand the news,“⁵⁹ and chose a similar strategy with the title of the podcast – Today, Explained, which has been competing with the New York Times podcast, The New York Times, in US and global media markets. Today, Explained is a daily explanatory podcast accompanied by a presenter, S. Rameswaram, which covers the most important topics of the day. Until January 27, 2021, we counted 741 episodes with a length of approximately 25-30 minutes for the Today, Explained podcast,⁶⁰ and the slightly older and more popular podcast The Daily, accompanied by presenter M. Barbara, was founded in 2017 and had, by January 27, 2021, produced 1126 episodes.⁶¹ The primary difference in relation to reaching the audience is the time of publishing of new episodes. While the The Daily podcast produces a new episode every morning, the Vox podcast releases its episodes later in the day.⁶² FiveThirtyEight runs several podcasts, one of which is the Politics Podcast, which analyzes political events and is released on Tuesdays and Thursdays.⁶³

Another important milestone in explanatory journalism is the television series Explained. The explanatory American documentary television series premiered on the Netflix streaming service on May 23, 2018.⁶⁴ The show, produced by Vox Media, released new episodes every week. The Explained series is based on the previous popular video series from Vox, which is in a similar format and comes with new regular YouTube explanatory videos.⁶⁵ The Institute for Nonprofit News, which represents non-profit organizations working on investigative topics, is

⁵⁵ MCDERMOTT, J.: *Explaining what's behind the sudden allure of explanatory journalism.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://digiday.com/media/explainer-rise-explanatory-journalism/>>.

⁵⁶ *The Electoral College, explained.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajavsMbCapY>>.

⁵⁷ *Model Talk: How The 2020 Presidential Forecast Works | FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4FJErcJJXNQ>>.

⁵⁸ *Quartz/about.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://qz.com/about/>>.

⁵⁹ MCDERMOTT, J.: *Explaining what's behind the sudden allure of explanatory journalism.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://digiday.com/media/explainer-rise-explanatory-journalism/>>.

⁶⁰ *Today, explained.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/today-explained>>.

⁶¹ *The Daily.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-daily/id1200361736>>.

⁶² *“Today, Explained”: An Edgy New Vox Podcast to Compete with “The Daily.”* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/podcast-dept/today-explained-an-edgy-new-vox-podcast-to-compete-with-the-daily>>.

⁶³ *Politics Podcast.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/politics-podcast-the-lawmakers-who-will-determine-what-gets-through-congress/>>.

⁶⁴ *Explained on Netflix.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.netflix.com/sk/title/80216752>>.

⁶⁵ *Vox on YouTube.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/Vox/videos>>.

also important in the environment of expanding journalism. The organization was formed under the name Investigative News Network by journalists from twenty-seven non-profit investigative news centers in 2009, at a time of media crisis. In 2015, the organization changed its name to the Institute for Nonprofit News and expanded its membership to include organizations dedicated to journalism in the public interest. Today, 40% of its members focus on investigative journalism, with the rest preparing explanatory or analytical reports.⁶⁶

TheUpshot



 FiveThirtyEight

Vox



QuickTake
by Bloomberg

PICTURE 1: Websites based on explanatory journalism

Source: own processing, 2021

When deciding which approaches to journalism deserve our attention, we should rethink what the democratic public needs and expects from its journalists at all. The public needs more types of information and more ways of communication than just direct factual messages.⁶⁷ So let's take a look at some examples of the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, which has held this category since 1985. The story of the Panama Papers case is interesting, as journalists have won many prestigious awards around the world, including the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting in the United States. The Pulitzer Prize Committee praised the Panama Papers team for the unprecedented collaboration of hundreds of journalists on six continents, and for uncovering the hidden infrastructure and global scale of tax havens.⁶⁸ Panama Papers from 2016 is the result of quality data journalism and the largest international cooperation project of its kind in history (400 journalists from 80 countries), thanks to 11.5 million secret documents from the Panamanian company Mossack Fonseca. It specialized in corporate clients. The documents also contained detailed information on more than 214,000 offshore companies and their ownership structure, approximately 2.6 terabytes. It was not even a fraction of the data generated in one day. More than one hundred participating media organizations published approximately 4,700 press releases in a few months.⁶⁹

In 2016, the Marshall Project and ProPublica won the Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting for an extensive (12,000 words) story about the rape of a woman whom the police did not believe.⁷⁰ An important milestone in explanatory journalism was certainly the Safeway project, which in 1991 won the Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting. To this day, it is considered in the media environment to be one of the greatest stories about the economic environment

⁶⁶ BIRNBAUER, B.: *The Rise of Nonprofit Investigative Journalism in the United States*. New York : Routledge, 2019, p. 73.

⁶⁷ WARD, S. J. A.: *Ethical Journalism In a Populist Age*. London : Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, p. 121.

⁶⁸ *Pulitzer Prize winner in Explanatory Reporting*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/>>.

⁶⁹ HAHN, O., STALPH. F.: *Digital investigative journalism: Data, Visual Analytics and Innovative Methodologies in International Reporting*. Passau : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 56.

⁷⁰ BIRNBAUER, B.: *The Rise of Nonprofit Investigative Journalism in the United States*. New York : Routledge, 2019, p. 168.

of American journalism. The project examined important phenomena that changed the American economic environment.⁷¹

In 2018, the USA Today Network and The Arizona Republic received the Pulitzer Prize for current news, which masterfully combined text, video, podcasts, and virtual reality to explore the difficulties and consequences of then-President D. Trump's decision to build a wall along the US border with Mexico.⁷²

In 2019, The New York Times received the award, presented for its explanatory coverage of D. Trumba's finances and tax evasion,⁷³ and in 2020 The Washington Post claimed the prize for material dealing with the environmental consequences of extreme temperatures.⁷⁴

4. Conclusion

Given the progress of the Internet in the 21st century, the media has been constantly evolving. However, not only the media but also the ways of their perception have changed. Vox Media is one of the online media that has helped identify emerging trends. They do not focus on the classical form of journalism, but on explanatory journalism. Through graphs, animation or infographics, it presents the audience with challenging topics in an accessible, clear and simple way. Vox does not focus on reporting events, but on explaining them in politics, technology and sports. The explanatory journalism presented by Vox and other similar platforms is a form of news or journalism that attempts to approach complex events in a more accessible way. Many important news events – for example, E. Snowden and his declassification of US governments, or the long-running armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Journalism about the latest gradual developments in such a situation can therefore be crucial for readers who have not been following the issue from the beginning. This means that the goal of explanatory journalism is to make complex topics accessible by providing important information in a clear context.⁷⁵

Explanatory journalism is popular, but we are certainly not talking about a phenomenon that is completely new. Magazines and newspapers have long used photographs, sidebars, charts, infographics, and other tools to help you understand otherwise complex topics. The category for explanatory journalism was part of the Pulitzer Prize from 1985 to 1997. Since 1998, the Pulitzer Prize has been awarded annually for outstanding results in the field of explanatory reporting. Therefore, the media now use these techniques and tools to communicate topics on the web, which can be considered one of the latest trends in the maturation of digital media.⁷⁶

Similar to data journalism, the concept of explanatory journalism has existed for decades. Its principles were briefly described by R. P. Clark in a 1984 essay: it is important to write for a wide audience and to use graphics and analogies. This new phenomenon remained mostly untapped for years, until the sudden arrival of the modern information age forced media content authors to re-examine it and find effective communication tools. It was an excellent opportunity for data journalism, which therefore pioneered new styles in the media space.⁷⁷

⁷¹ STARKMAN, D.: *The Watchdog That Didn't Bark*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 150.

⁷² RYMAN, A.: *The Arizona Republic and USA TODAY NETWORK win Pulitzer Prize for border wall project*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://eu.azcentral.com/story/news/arizona-republic/2018/04/16/arizona-republic-and-usa-today-network-win-pulitzer-prize-border-wall-project/521740002/>>.

⁷³ *The New York Times Wins Two 2019 Pulitzer Prizes, for Explanatory Reporting and Editorial Writing, Bringing Total to 127*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/pr/2020/05/04/read-the-washington-post-stories-that-won-2020-pulitzer-prize/?arc404=true>>.

⁷⁴ *Read The Washington Post stories that won the 2020 Pulitzer Prize*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.nytc.com/press/the-new-york-times-wins-two-pulitzers-bringing-its-total-wins-to-127/>>.

⁷⁵ MCDERMOTT, J.: *Explaining what's behind the sudden allure of explanatory journalism*. [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://digiday.com/media/explainer-rise-explanatory-journalism/>>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ HAHN, O., STALPH, F.: *Digital investigative journalism: Data, Visual Analytics and Innovative Methodologies in International Reporting*. Passau : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 51.

The media, which provides explanatory journalism, is aware of how the media has been transformed and the way in which it is consumed. Extensive texts lacking visual or audiovisual material are not attractive for millennials. Millennials spend an average of three hours a day on their mobile devices,⁷⁸ communicating primarily through social media and spending as much time using their mobile devices as older generations spent watching television.⁷⁹

The advent of modern data and explanatory journalism was thus a combination of new requirements for simple and accurate coverage of complicated and information-intensive content. This trend has also been reinforced by the use of new effective interactive tools.⁸⁰ The aim of explanatory journalism is to reach less frequent consumers of news. The topics are intended for people who have heard of Bitcoin, for example, but to whom the name S. Nakamoto might seem foreign. This type of journalism can therefore appeal to experts, but also to the general public, who can show interest in complex topics.⁸¹ And while many of us have heard of the growing popularity of explanatory journalism in the digital space, it is also important to consider whether journalism itself is not explanatory in nature.

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⁷⁸ *Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, and Gen Z Explained.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.kasasa.com/articles/generations/gen-x-gen-y-gen-z>>.

⁷⁹ *Generation Z News Latest Characteristics, Research, and Facts.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://www.businessinsider.com/generation-z>>.

⁸⁰ HAHN, O., STALPH, F.: *Digital investigative journalism: Data, Visual Analytics and Innovative Methodologies in International Reporting*. Passau : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 52.

⁸¹ MCDERMOTT, J.: *Explaining what's behind the sudden allure of explanatory journalism.* [online]. [2021-01-21]. Available at: <<https://digiday.com/media/explainer-rise-explanatory-journalism/>>.

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