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Decoding Cultural Frames: How Ukrainian Mass Media Report about Cultural Public Events

ABSTRACT

Purpose. This research covers the issues of reformatting frames of cultural public events in mass media. The author identifies the problem of breaking the link between real cultural activity and the virtual reality of the media, emphasizing the negative impact on audiences. Public receives from media distorted picture of the world, in the way as it is exposed by the producers of information imagination. Media agenda forms the view of historical traditions, economic and political influences, since the media in Ukraine are dependent on their owners and politicians. Journalists, media publishers, media editors claim to have knowledge of society and impose agenda, which is theirs a subjective representation but not the reflection about the world in its diversity. Therefore, the key issue of this research is as follows: How could journalists create reports about culture events without distorting the picture of reality?

Methods. The study has aimed to identify the potential of cultural themes for journalism through the prism of mass communication theory, taking into account the basic criteria of international journalism standard. Methods which have been used are: case study to outline the problem and discourse analysis to define trends of public messages creation and to understand their perception in a socio-cultural context.

Results. Analyzing messages about specific cases of public events author has presents model for decoding of public event message on two levels – creation by initiators and perception by audiences in the context of political and cultural changes.

Keywords: *mass media; mass communication; media agenda; reformatting frames; public events.*

Introduction

In the context of political changes and social transformations number of culture events in all regions of Ukraine is increasing, but regional mass media do not proactive in reporting about culture of their region as it is, they are waiting for invitations, special effects, scandals, celebrities, and leave cultural events in addition to, so to speak, the main news.

In current decade (2010-2018), in Ukraine, the most mass media coverage of culture events of national importance was the 2012 European Football Championship and Eurovision 2017, which analysts point out as a soft political power for social and economic change (Concept, 2015). But after it's over, in local media cultural silence comes: of course, journalists wrote about pop culture or entertainment events, but do not write about culture life for a wide audience.

Specific feature of Ukrainian press is that formats of national and local traditional mass media are determined by the commercial benefit and influence by owners. Media agenda forms in view of historical traditions, economic and political influences, since the media in Ukraine are dependent on owners and politicians. As a result, public receive from media distorted picture of the world, such as it is producers of information imagined. Journalists, media publishers, media editors claim to have knowledge of society and impose agenda, which is theirs a subjective representation but not the reflection about the world in its diversity. (IDPO, December 2017). Journalist Marina Dorosh writes about the complexity of “embedding” culture into journalistic formats in the materials of the portal “Cultural Journalism: How To Embed The Format” (Dorosh, 2013). Journalists in public appearances also raise issues related to culture as an entertainment industry, for instance, Nadezhda Schwadczak emphasizes that “majority of socio-political text-based Internet-media reduce the role of culture to entertainment. This is, what is called, lifestyle” (Schwadchack, 2015; Botanova, 2015). In 2018, with states reforms Ukrainian medialandscape starts to change gradually, so the study of the Ukrainian cultural context as an object of the mass media is important.

The data of the analytical report on the monitoring of regional media conducted by specialists of the P. Orlik Democracy Institute in the spring

of 2017 showed that the number of publications on cultural events in the press, references to radio and TV programs is not enough to meet the lack of cultural information (IDPO, May 2017). A recent analytical report on the monitoring of local media conducted by the Institute in the fall of 2017 showed that “issues of corruption, news of culture, education and science are of last resort to regional journalists” (IDPO, December 2017). Observation of cultural activity processes in Kharkiv and the Kharkiv region in the period from 2016 to 2018 shows that people get information about cultural events mostly from social media.

What becomes an obstacle to disseminating information about culture and shaping public opinion about cultural values in mass media? Why does culture have left behind and have to adapt to tabloid formats of the press, television, etc.? However, cultural managers are confident that people have to learn about the events themselves, because they say – everything is on the web-site.

So, there is a gap between real cultural activities and the virtual reality of the media. On the one hand, traditional mass media ignore social reality, and it leads to decrease the confidence of the audience, and, on the other hand, distorted representation of culture has a negative impact on consumers, who perceive the lack of cultural information in the mass media as a due, shaping the relation to culture as something not very important.

Study aims to identify the potential of cultural themes for journalism through the prism of mass communication theory, taking into account the basic criteria of international journalism standards. Therefore, the key issue of this research is as follows: How could journalists create reports about culture without distorting the picture of reality? The objects of the study is cultural public events, peaceful gathering that relates to the specific culture activities and attract large number of people in a public space (may be related to music, art, sport, food or other similar things). Subject of research: media texts about cultural public events.

To analyze Ukrainian media discourse we use the approach and methodology of the Ukrainian media researcher and political scientist Volodymyr Kulik. The scholar refers to the concept of the discourse by Foucault, Gramsci and Ferclaugh, and suggests to analyze textual and contextual level of message,

distinguishes between two levels of existence of a media discourse – the subject (the level of message creation by the initiators of discourse based on its assumptions) and an object (perception of the message to the audience based on its reaction). (Kulyk, 2011, pp. 41-80).

Theoretical overview: reasoning interdisciplinary approach

Historically, in Ukraine with its Soviet legacy, the operators of cultural and educational activities organization were traditionally supported by authority agents: state institutions and politicians, since only these agents of social activity has sufficient resources for organizing and promo of public event. The change of the political paradigm with the collapse of the USSR turned economic to market relations, and invention of new power agents – commercial businesses. In 2000th, Information Revolution contributed to the dynamic development of personal media technologies and democratisation of the entertainment industry. With access to the Internet and social networks, the organization and promotion of a public event in the media becomes more accessible to ordinary citizens. After 2013 we see activation of NGO's and certain public leaders as new power agents of public events organization. All these transformations are the reason to expand the boundaries of mass communication research in Ukrainian realities, both in terms of the functioning of technologies, and in terms of specificity of media objects.

Ukrainian culture researchers, while pointing out the need to turn to a dialogue with the public, focus on the explored forms and types of cultural practices as content creation technologies for public performances. Researches mostly focus on historiography or methodology of constructing a culture object, that is, studies of genres, forms and corresponding technologies of embodiment of images (Kravchenko, 2013). Accordingly, the main criterion for evaluating a cultural product, given the aesthetic criteria, is the correspondence of the object to creator's idea. Sociological studies make focus on the impacts of a public event as an instrument of communication with the audience. Cultural public events are considered by them as entertaining, integration studied as community movements (Berher, 1995). The effectiveness of public interaction,

in this area, is evaluated from the point of view of initiators or organizers mostly in quantitative indicators. Economists are paying attention not only to the quantitative effect, but also to the wow-effect that possesses entertaining events (Smith, Hanover, 2018, pp. 144-147). In particular, economists emphasize the fact that a cultural public event has a powerful emotional impact on consumer. So, we see that culture studies represent culture objects as a production, sociology provides evidence of the influences of culture products on the audience, and the economy provides tools for measuring the effects of cultural interaction in financial indicators.

Alan Badiou, analyzing the 1968 protests in Czechoslovakia, wrote about public event as phenomenon: “Observing the public’s reactions to the situation of a public action, analyzing the conditions of people’s presence in the West, it is necessary to find out how the organizers of the event want to show public consent – whether this is really a “cause of the people”, a public opinion, or it is a scenery constructed in the interests of a certain power (political, economic, social)” (Badiou, 2003). Analyzing the events of the Maidan in Ukraine in 2004, Ukrainian media researcher Borys Potiatynyk noted that when the media do not address the challenges of reality, people go out and create public media. (Potiatynyk, 2004, pp. 100-101). Next Maidan in Ukraine, Revolution of Dignity in 2013-2014 has become a platform for the emergence of new forms of mass media for the Ukrainian media – community engagement and public broadcasting. As we could see this public events shaped public interest in a context of public message and made influence on public opinion through the emotional interaction between people. Therefore, understanding of a public event is impossible without the baggage of collective memory, because it should be compared with previous public experience. The role of journalists who have to interpret this fact of reality in mass media is very important and complex: to understand the meaning of events, to present the material impartially it is necessary to maintain an independent position and keep the balance of opinions. So, we see that in the field of mass media, public events could be considered in the context of interdisciplinary research, since they act for it as representative environment of communicative action (Habermas, 2000, pp. 151-155). The fact is that peaceful assemblies, which have contributed to political change

in society, attract more attention of journalists and researchers. Meanwhile, cultural public events show themselves as primary, pre-institutional structures of mass communication, which meet the needs of communities in expressing their thoughts in a form of irrational knowledge.

Collective memory and public event message constitution

Creation of a cultural public event is associated with rational aspects of actual knowledge about the target groups and their problem and with irrational knowledge, which is determined by collective memory. Moris Halbvaks notes: “the presentation of a rational problem as a new information through the frame of irrational knowledge, which is history, memories, tradition, ritual, has the potential to influence the audience. Although according to Kant’s ideology, irrational may not be able to carry new information, but it will guide us” (Halbwachs, 2003). Substantiating the notion of collective memory Moris Halbvaks emphasized that “collective (social) memory has blurred the frame, and has finalized the denotation”, but the main argument, which leads philosopher, substantiating this notion is that “some memories come to a person not individually, but in communicating with other people, that is, these memories occur as a result of social communication” (Halbwachs, 2007, pp. 120-123).

The specifics of the Ukrainian context are precisely in the culture diversity of social communication, which is conditioned by historical, political, economic and social (ethnic as well) conditions of development. Collective memory appears through cultural practices and it is object to reformatting in a dynamic environment of social transformations. Acceptance or rejection of new formats by the audience is a marker of community interaction with public event message proposal.

Since 1991, when Ukraine gained independence, the process of forming a festive agenda in the media develops by removing from the Soviet past. Ukrainian media were updated or a completely reinvented after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But due to the rapid development of market economy, media represent cultural agenda through entertaining calendar cycle with traditions, festivals to involve mass audience to communication

processes. First 15 years of independence, the Soviet festive program in media remained virtually unchanged: the New Year, February 23th (men's day, officially celebrated until 2013), March 8th (women's holiday), May 1th, May 9th (until 2014), May 25th the end of a school year at school), September 1th (first call or beginning of school year), June 1th (Child's Rights Day). Although forbidden in Soviet times traditional folk festivals, such as Christmas, Masliana, Easter, Kupala and Pokrova, were restored as events that served as functions of integration of societies, and satisfied the need for legitimizing the collective memory of folk traditions. Interest in folk traditions returned in relation towards consumption culture.

An interesting overview of the topics presented through the festive agenda frame provides Kyiv International Institute of Sociology with monitoring, as reported by the media on Easter as the most popular holiday among Ukrainians (KIIS, 2018). The authors of the material point high-ranking officials and politicians were the most "prized" on this topic. Often, we see that journalists falling into the trap of festive and entertainment frames and promote ideas, products, services, media and, worse, build platforms for populists.

Journalists use festive frames to provide for public entertaining information, even in cases when it is not celebration but just a special remembering date. Let's look at the International Women's Day in Ukraine. March 8th is celebrated in the world to engage the public to respect women's rights, human dignity and promote anti-discrimination. In the USSR, and later in post-Soviet countries, the tradition of recalling this date turned into a ritual that intends to support the ruling elite and impose stereotypes and manipulate the masses with the use of mass media.

Mass-media messages that was appeared in the information space on the eve of March 8th, 2018 can be divided into 3 types: 1) festive-greetings, 2) educational materials, and 3) reportages. One of the first news was from leading news agencies in Ukraine "Ukrinform". They told about "4 official holidays on March 8th" (Ukrinform, 2018). National TV channel STB has written on its web-site an illustrative notion about "women's day": "This day is celebrated in a family circle, with friends or relatives. It will not be a holiday without traditional flowers for representatives of the fair sex. Men try to pay attention

to each important women in her life: mother, sister, grandmother, beloved. On this day compliments and toasts are heard everywhere” (STB, 2018).

The second type of messages is educational notes, analytical articles, interviews with experts specialized on feminists and gender inequality issues on public media web-resources. Authors gave explanations about the content and history of this date. Many of them appeal to an article by the president of the Ukrainian Association for the Study of Women’s History Oksana Kis, where she points out that March 8 is “a stolen holiday that, in Soviet times, turned against women: the hypocritical exaltation and giving women one day per year for celebration under conditions of their ubiquitous exploitation, discrimination, ignoring the numerous needs and problems of women in the country councils, where the “women’s issue” had long been considered as made solution. ” (Kys, 2018).

The third type of messages is the reportages from the scene of events. In 2018, Ukraine third time joined Women’s march. The report by the BBC Ukraine provided a photo overview of what happened on the ground. In spite of snazzy lead, they marked that participants demands was ratification of the Istanbul Convention on the Prevention of Violence against Women in Ukraine (BBC Ukraine, 2018). TSN evening news on March 8th release of the national broadcaster “1+1” gave more distinctive report for Ukrainian context. Reporters interviewed different participants in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv and Uzhgorod. We can hear and see different participants that telling some words: “a woman should not be restricted to choosing a profession through stereotypes” – from a technical university student, “a woman should dispose of her body” – from a woman with a poster with nude breasts, “we do not want in the Middle Ages” – from a woman, dressed in stylized suit. News commentator intonation, the construction of the reporting structure, the choice of heroes represent him as a distant observer. But this was not a carelessness of a professional journalist, he reacted as a casual witness. Further in reportage, when the commentator announces the intention of the “young men” to attack peaceful protesters, confidence in his voice is emerging, as the situation becomes clearer because of conflict situation (TSN, 2018). Thus, we see that traditional media do not ready to work for society, if they used to interpret the facts of social reality in the context of outdated stereotypical frames.

Meanwhile, we can find examples of public events that open the discussion of the issues relevant to society problems. For example, the “InclusziON, City Access Festival” (2016-2018) that aims to overcome the barriers of communication in the perception of people with disabilities as participants in the public life of the city through the arrangement of public cultural events. The monitoring of local and national news reports about the festival (263 publication analyzed), conducted in the framework of this study, shows the trend of increasing the original interpretations of festival’s events, authors provide interviews with participants of the discourse – museums managers, public activists, business and people with disabilities. In the first year of the news makers reacted to the conflict situation with the ineffectiveness of the city authorities regarding the inclusion. As organizers noted, the conflict situation was developing, but not in the media. Next year they made partnership with another local authority department, and than, in the third year of the festival the main news of the festival was about positive results. Journalists reported about audio guides in the Kharkiv Museum of Arts, that was installed with the help of community and business (Ukrinform, 2018). Such public events provided opportunities for voices that have not been heard before, and shows how journalists can talk about human rights through culture frame.

Results

Decoding how Ukrainian mass media report about culture, we see two levels on which journalists operate with facts of of culture reality:

- ▶ the level of creation and representation, based on their own knowledge, media agenda or existing cultural frames,
- ▶ the level of event perception, based on observation of public reaction in a context of situation here and now.

Taking in account only one level of understanding cultural public event, journalist make unbalanced, uncompleted reports, shaping distorted picture of reality. In order to create an adequate message about the fact of a cultural public event in the context of international standards of journalism, media agents should take into account both levels of understanding: at first, possessing

the knowledge of event creation, culture aesthetics, culture meanings and possible effects on public; and, the second, actual knowledge about society, accessibility (physical and information access) and public perception of the proposed cultural public event. When we see that journalist can appeal to both level in his/her news, reportage or analytical article, we can say that this issue has reasoned verdict in terms of the context and ethics of international journalists standards.

So, this study defined issues of reformatting frames of culture public events by the mass media. It helps to provide an opportunity for professional media actors to reasonably appeal to the public, establishing a dialogue between cultural activists and mass media to popularize cultural values among a wide audience.

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