VERODOSTOJNOST MEDIJEV KOT PRVINA DRUŽBENE ODGOVORNOSTI

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Povzetek: V številnih državah tradicionalna televizija razume svojo navzočnost na internetu kot "alternativo" ali eksperiment, kot "tretjo roko" javne radiotelevizije, in ne kot enega izmed temeljnih medijev za izražanje mnenj državljanov. Kakšen je odnos televizije do koncepta participacije? Kaj pomeni in kaj lahko prinese občinstvom sprememba iz koncepta "televizije, ki jo morate gledati" v koncept "televizije, ki jo morate klikniti"? Kako bi javna televizija morala reagirati na to spremembo? Živa komunikacija med uporabniki interneta je nasprotje enosmernega razširjanja vsebine, zato postaja vse pomembnejši koncept dialoga. Številne televizije nočejo prepoznati, kako pomembno je, da so njihovi novinarji izobraženi o rabi novih medijev, in istočasno, kako pomembno je, da so prav tako izobražena tudi njihova občinstva oziroma uporabniki multimedijskih platform. Javna televizija še vedno verjame v moč profesionalcev in manj spoštuje moč informacij, ki jih prispevajo njeni uporabniki. Poleg tega "tehnološki determinizem" zanika negativne vplive internetne komunikacije, predvsem "skupinske polarizacije", ki povzroča radikalizacijo javnega diskurza. Medijska pismenost je zato bistven koncept politične kulture za državljane in celo eden od pogojev za preživetje javne televizije in njene resnične družbene odgovornosti v demokratični družbi.

Ključne besede: medijska pismenost, medijska konvergenca, javna televizija, participacija, skupinska polarizacija.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE PUBLIC MEDIA AS A PRIMARY OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Abstract: In many countries traditional television still understands its presence on the internet as an »alternative« or an experiment, like a »third hand« of public service broadcasting, and not as basic media for citizens to express their opinions. What is the relationship of television to the concept of participation? What does it mean and what does the change from the concept of »Must-See TV« to the concept of »Must-Click TV« bring to the audiences? How should the public television react to that change? Live communication between internet users opposes the one-way broadcasting of content; the concept of dialog therefore becomes more important. Many public televisions do not want to recognize how important is it for journalists to be literate in new media, and at the same time how important is that audiences or users of the multimedia platforms are literate themselves. The public TV still believes in the power of its professionals and respect less the power of information contributed by its users. Besides that, »technological optimism« denies negative impacts of the internet communication, at first »group polarization« which causes more radical public discourse. Media literacy is therefore the key concept of a political culture for the citizens and even one of the preconditions for survival of the public television and its real social responsibility in any democratic society.

Key words: media literacy, media convergence, public television, participation, group polarization.

Indicative for television was allegation that it »offers viewers a variety of subject matter, requires minimal skills to comprehend it« and »what I am claiming here is not that television is entertaining but that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience« and entertainment »is the supra-ideology of all discourse of television.« (Postman, 2006: 86-87) Contemporary corporative media updated with new digital technologies used first the technological improvements for »the dumbing down of journalism« and the rise of reality television, and not to establish »the digitized public sphere«, to implement new »democratic values« or to contribute to »digital democracy«. Therefore we have to agree with a question »whether or not this new technology is leading to greater levels of public participation, social inclusion and empathy?« (Marden, 2011: 6) Simplification that television is a medium of »passive consumption« and internet turns users to »active producers and sharers of content« leads to wrong conclusions; we agree more with Steiner »that there is a new literacy forming around us at great speed« and finally with Marden's thought: »The importance lies in people becoming active in the creation of content rather than simply being receivers, and this can potentially produce a critically informed public.« (2011: 10)

Nowadays we are witnesses of many attempts of media to attract their audiences to participate more in a creation of media content, television programs, radio talk shows and many other forms of programming media output. Employing qualitative methods to analyze these attempts and to synthesize the theoretical framework regarding interactivity of and participation in media, we argue that social networking, emailing, free, even registered access to comments on the media web sites opened for their users, capacity of the internet at all, have some potential to contribute more to the culture of dialog, to new opportunities to civil society and citizens as individuals to participate in public affairs. Comparing these practices with interpersonal communication, live language, our thoughts and judgments exchanged in the dialogs among human beings, inside the available researches we've been noticed on the group polarization as a dangerous gap which can cause reduction of »a critical capacity for building a democratic culture based on a humane understanding of difference and a broad recognition of the pluralism of values.« (Marden, 2011: 16)

From the broadcast audience to a "media-empowered citizen"

Nyre (2011) defined three main problems of the broadcast public: »(1) an elitist rationale for the construction of one-way technological infrastructure, (2) a lack of social equality between professionals and amateurs, and (3) a commercial rhetoric of the media empowered citizen.« These problems emerge from the particular interpretation of Dewey's participatory communication ethics: »If the main purpose of communication is to allow people to participate in a common world, it follows that delegation of communication to an expert regime will only weaken the level of participation, and it is therefore not an option.« (Nyre, 2011: 7) He insists that the denial of the citizens' »right to express themselves in the broadcast public« is technologically driven; on the other hand the internet and mobile devices »all have advanced tracking and registration features, and this is a high price to pay for a more symmetrical platform for public life.« (ibid) There is no problem that, for example, television viewers are »relatively passive recipients of messages«, but they will not get an opportunity to »express themselves«, to response or co-create television programs on the same conditions as professionals. It is not necessary that viewers wish to be in the same role as the media professionals; what this author calls »a lack of editorial and social equality in the broadcast paradigm« does not exist only on the technological level, »but also in the social organization of production and reception.« (Nyre, 2011: 12) Present forms of the user's participation in media are limited, users are not visible, and they are mostly still anonymous. Rhetoric encouraged by commercial interest defines »media-empowered citizen« as a consumer, who likes to purchase new electronic or media devices, who is »a self-made, individualistic communicator... celebrated in advertisements for electronic appliances« (Nyre, 2011: 14). He or she is an antithesis of »home-bound, willing-to-learn citizen«, who was one of the public broadcasting media ideals in the past; we also can add one of the failed ideals from the media history, but we still cannot find a proper replacement for an anticipated ideal of an individual from the public, which is not driven by political or different group interests. It is more »an ideological construct«, and we agree with Nyre: »A democratic public cannot rely on images of omni-competent citizens, it must rely on effective intelligence among its members.« (ibid)

Considering position of many authors that the media should »disseminate information and facilitate dialogue«, public service broadcasting »has been criticized for not providing space for participation, neglecting the role related to dialogue.« (Moe, 2008: 319) In the discussions about the democratic potential of online media more arguments had been dedicated to prove an emancipatory potential of internet or social networks, even those funded on the commercial basis, than to prove or simply show, how to transfer public service broadcasting remits to the internet. Moe declines simplification that radio and television just disseminate information and internet provides dialogue, his thesis is »first, that aspects of dissemination are crucial for any understanding of public online communication and, second, that dissemination has a normative potential in the public sphere which should be included in a legitimate concept of public service media online.« (2008: 320) Latter already exists, but they are not »acknowledged as an autonomous part of the public service broadcasting remit«. (ibid) »Technologically driven normative optimism« is how Splichal (2006)

describes very common faith to the power of the internet and online communication. New technology provides not only new forms of interactive or non-interactive communication, but »calls for a new concept of publicness in which the nature of openness and visibility is radically transformed. The internet brought about a new form of publicness – mediated and dialogical at the same time – supplementary to the mediated publicness constructed by traditional mass media.« (Splichal, 2006: 702) An important extension to former and present understanding of visibility and participation in the context of our understanding of media literacy is that traditional media »favor and facilitate primarily reception and consumption through *imitation*«, on the other hand the internet has »ambivalent capabilities«. It makes individuals and/or social groups more visible, but »as a kind of disciplinary technology« it opens possibilities for dissemination of hate speech and other forms of the violence of the citizen's rights. (ibid) Splichal particularly warns on three important inabilities of the internet: »it can also hardly perform the role of a watchdog or create moral obligations in a way similar to traditional media«; »it can hardly assure any response« inside dialogical communication; and it is »much less capable of digesting ideas and presenting them in a form that would influence the authorities to heed them.« (2006: 703)

If we look at the areas of application of interactive television, we can find there many old and well known outputs: general free or pay-per-view TV channels, different outputs of commercials, data-broadcasting including teletext, video games, video-on-demand, some newer offers combined with the internet experiences: interactive shopping, telebanking, video telephony and video conferences, fax and e-mail services. (ibid) In those cases we can talk more about the enhanced television and less about the interactive television. Gillan (2011) described these changes as the transformation of television from Must-See TV to Must-Click TV. The first concept was known in 90's and recognized »by programming power blocks« of the most popular public or commercial TV-networks, »which relied on strong lead-ins to carry weaker shows and encouraged viewers to stay with the network for the evening's programming flow.« The second concept has been implemented in the first decade of the 21st century »by an attempt to create power blocks through Must-Click TV, the term I use to describe new media-influenced network programming, marketing, broadcasting, and distribution strategies and audience reception practices.« (Gillan, 2011: 1) In other words: it was the attempt to use online communication possibilities and particularly mobile devices for »fun tracking, targeting and interaction« with audiences of popular TV contents, particularly serials. Conceptual view on these practices »referenced the centrality of both technological and cultural convergence, that is, the capacity of devices to work in sync and the synching of the social practices and behavior enabled by these technologies.« (Gillan, 2011: 26) As a counter-balance to the neo-liberal treatment of users as consumers we also have to re-consider the social, cultural and political role of public television, which is nowadays able to design new communities and go »beyond the traditional one-way Trickle-Down model of a national service.« (Himmelstein, Aslama, 2003: 257) These communities could be real, constituted in the realistic geographic boundaries, or virtual, and »in fostering community communications the public service broadcaster would create a public forum in which local challenges to entrenched collective attitudes and beliefs could be aggregated regionally and nationally. It would thereby help to create a discursive space for collective political action engendered by the process of 'working through' confrontation and controversy, beginning at the local level.« (Himmelstein, Aslama, 2003: 266)

Normative models of interactivity and participation in media

Similar dilemmas can be recognized also on the normative level, inside the online policies of public service media. The normative contribution to the theories on the democratic role of media and their ability to reinforce democracy and participation has been made as an upgrade of two most known models: the liberal model, which exposes the role of media as a watchdog of any government or any authority, and the model of social responsibility, which is based on the importance of correct representation of social groups in media. As Carpentier noticed, McQuail has upgraded these two models with another pair: the development model and the participatory-democratic model of the mass media. (Carpentier, 2007: 158) Focus on the participation of the citizens in any creation of the media content led Carpentier to structure the typology of democracy and participation-enhancing journalistic practices, which »encompasses a wide variety of possibilities« and offers »plenty of space for additional steps remains available.« The main importance of his typology could be synthesized in a message that an ideal practice does not exist, »but needs to be negotiated and constructed over and over again.« (2007: 169) Carpentier exposed four clusters: information and control, representation of the social communities and constituting social subgroups, representation of political and participatory role of the media. Every dimension is dichotomy and represents positive or negative impact of media activities to information, audience or social subgroups, societal decision-making, orientation towards dialogue or debate, balance of arguments or absence of a balance, neutrality and participation. Regarding media literacy as a personal value of any citizen, this typology can help them to understand better functioning of a particular media, to define what they want to contribute through a participation in any public debate, to choose proper media suitable to their own styles and skills, but it is in the same time limited with their knowledge, awareness, or access to the technological gadgets most appropriate to their own purposes.

Media literacy is important for those strong-willed to surpass mediated access to the participation in public debates through the media and to overcome traditional political broadcasting. Many general or local elections in the European countries, referendums, several consecutive circles of the elections to the European parliament including the last elections in 2014, identified »a 'crisis' of democratic participation, measured in falling rates of party membership, reduced involvement in political campaigning and, most urgently, a sharp decline in voting at local and general elections.« (McNair, Hibberd, 2003: 269) This crisis is »generally seen as a phenomenon relating to party politics«, but there is also a possible question, how the media »as the main disseminators and translators of political discourse to the citizenry« contributed to the same phenomenon. In late 90's the most of the researchers of media used to believe that »the broader process of technological convergence now impacting on the broadcast media, access programing on TV and radio is now being complemented by e-mail and internet channels«, and in some countries (UK) »broadcasters have been among the leading promoters of on-line political debate and discussion«; they also believed in »talk show democracy«, »the positive role of public access broadcasting in the 'mobilization' of the citizenry«, even in »their contribution to the construction of an informed, participatory public sphere«. (McNair, Hibberd, 2003: 270) Opposite to those »pessimistic about the capacity of public participation channels« they also believed that mediated political debate »has the potential to reach millions of people in their own homes«, who like »to be informed, motivated or mobilized into action by public participation media.« (ibid) Nowadays we have a lot of arguments to disagree with that optimism; we even have many empiric evidences for honest, frank and systematic efforts of mass media to involve the audience in their programing or participation in live mediated public debates.

The main reason why we have to be careful about the mediated access to participation is hidden, first, in the principles of building communities on the web or inside the social networks or connected with media. Two main theoretical approaches are referring to the concepts of »virtual democracy« and »urban entrepreneurialism«. The first »contains reference to many of the key concepts taken from classical democratic theory: universal access to information, participation in public debate and political decision making, empowerment and equality of citizenry.« The second is based on the capability of the local electronic networks »to be in a prime position to mediate communication, promote particular internal and external relations, and transmit images into local and global cyberspace that are appropriate to given cultural and economic requirements.« (Malina, Jankowski, 2002: 271-276) The case study of the Craigmillar Community Information Service (CCIS) Network in Edinburgh, started in 1994 in the area that »suffers from a number of social and economic disadvantages«, discovered that the local authorities had had many positive interests and goals connected with »business sector interest«, »about getting the concept right to look at social injustice and quality of opportunity«, citizen participation, »locate activity in the community«, but they had been only partly successful, also in the »educational context«. (Malina, Jankowski, 2002: 282) It was one of the early attempts to combine both concepts, of virtual democracy and urban entrepreneurialism, and apply them in the project started in the real community. The most important conclusion was that »whereas the technology is described as able to create participatory communication and more democratic dialogue at the 'community' level, in reality this discourse applies only to some representative groups«, but »very few ordinary local residents have access to a local network, and are not included in the local electronic public sphere.« (Malina, Jankowski, 2002: 290)

Online public sphere – where are the limits?

The result of the efforts to find how the public sphere had been changed from the period, when the reading rooms, salons or cafes dominated as the places for any kind of public discourse, to the age of internet, which »has revolutionized the structures of the public sphere« (Brundidge, 2010: 64), is the concept of the online public sphere. Inside the context of the traditional media operations on the internet some researchers tried to answer the question, how the frequent use of online news impacts an engagement in online political discussion, and how are the both related to »standard predictors of political engagement (e.g., education, income, and political knowledge).« (Brundidge, 2010: 69) There were also the questions about relations between the newspapers news, television news and online news, and about an impact of each of those three groups of news to political engagement of citizens, all observed inside two key concepts of accessibility and traversability.[1] The concept of accessibility relates to an impression that »the contemporary public sphere would seem more accessible than ever before«, whereas the concept of traversability explains »the ability to move easily or seamlessly from news to political discussion.« (Brundidge, 2010: 67-71) Answers to the two research questions revealed that online news use is predicted positively by education, male sex, political knowledge, political self-efficiency, and less by income. Newspapers news use is predicted positively by education, political knowledge, age and social trust, whereas television news use is predicted positively by education, political knowledge, and less by ideological polarity. Reciprocal to these results, frequency of online discussion is positively predicted by income, political knowledge and online news use; the latter is more important than two other predictors. Online news use is important predictor for frequency of discussion on work; beside it male sex is also more important than newspapers news use and television news use. Private spaces show a significant difference: frequency of discussion with family is positively predicted by education, newspapers news use and television news use, whereas frequency of discussion at church is predicted positively by ideology, ideological polarity, newspapers news use, and

less by television news use. (Quoted by Brundidge, 2010: 75-76) This research exposed two possible conclusions: online news is less accessible than offline news, and online news use requires a higher level of education, it is »may be a more cognitively engaged activity than simply attending to such information as it appears in the newspapers or especially on television«, and higher level education »develops in citizens the cognitive skills required for political engagement and political knowledge creation.« (Brundidge, 2010: 77) Traversability in relation between online news and online discussion has been explained as »blurred and porous boundaries«, which create »more intimate relationship between the two than seen in traditional media domains.« (ibid)

Relocation of users of the traditional media in real broadcasting production or co-production of online news combining technologies necessary for professional production of television news and those necessary for web production could reveal how are the boundaries between online participative communication and mediated offline communication really »blurred and porous«. Ekström, Eriksson and Lundell[2] followed the project of the Swedish public broadcaster SVT called SVT News Live to find »where broadcasters are in the process of mastering a sense of sociability and 'communicative ease' in relation to audiences.« (Ekström et al., 2013: 620-621) The main goal of SVT was »to integrate the web and interactive affordances into broadcast news, and to develop new forms for audience participation.« (ibid) The real ambition of SVT was »not just to produce unpolished material for the benefit of web users but to make news *before* 'the real' news«. (Ekström et al., 2013: 626) This was harder and more complicated for the anchors and journalists involved in interaction as »a complex multimodal achievement« (ibid), and it moved again the position of the audience to passive role of a »source of information« more than an active participant in a public debate moderated over the media. Abandoning of this approach demonstrated by the public broadcaster also revealed crucial difference between the representational dimension and the presentational dimension of public communication, and that the most of the traditional media are not able to disentangle themselves from the dominant practices by preferring the presentational dimension. Supported by the internet, many »of heterogeneous topics, styles and groups which has never been present in conventional mass media... have entered the public sphere, enabling a dramatic expansion and differentiation of public communication«; but in the same time »vocal elite of intellectuals draws on representational interaction, transforming and narrowing it into statements which set the public agenda and act as a simulation of a public opinion vis-a-vis formal political decision-making.« (Rasmussen, 2013: 101)

Logical, although paradoxical consequence of all these changes is permanent constriction of the public space for democratic participation of citizens in public affairs, for citizenship journalism or for real interactive participation in online communication. It is also continuation of the crisis of the media caused by their closer relationship with governments and politics in 80's and 90's of twentieth century, which has been recognized in something Ackerman (2011) called discharging »constitutional function« of press, particularly by »big city newspapers and weekly newsmagazines«. He argued that the slippage of watching network news, reduced coverage of public issues in the newspapers and on television, and figures about 60% to 75% of all front-age stories focused on government and politics, all found in US media in the mentioned period, lead to »the disintegration of the public forum«, and further it »will accelerate now that the Internet is destroying the economic foundations of professional journalism.« (Ackerman, 2011: 301) For our topic is important that the media literacy does not exist without clear understanding of the economic background of traditional media and new technologies. That background is crucial for the relationship between mediated/professional journalism and democratic participation of the citizens in any form of civil activities/journalism. The most of citizens react on the information provided by professional journalists in the accountable media, web forums, blogs, academic's web sites are sources of very dynamic debates about any public issue, but there is also, although not only one, a possibility, »if the economic foundation for serious journalism collapses, blogging will degenerate into a postmodern nightmare – with millions spouting off without any concern for the facts.« (ibid) In the last two decades it was proved several times, when the Federal Communications Commission abandoned the fairness doctrine in USA, when the European Commission supported deregulation in media policies, how it »led broadcasters, much of the time, to avoid controversial issues entirely, and to present views in a way that suggested a bland uniformity.« In the circumstances produced by deregulation not only the internet, but also radio and television became generators of fragmentation and polarization of the audience: »On the good side, the existence of diverse pockets of opinion would seem to enrich society's total argument pool, potentially to the benefit of all of us. At the same time, the growth of a wide variety of issues-oriented programming – expressing strong, often extreme views, and appealing to dramatically different groups of listeners and viewers – is likely to create group polarization.«[3] (Sunstein, 2007: 72-73)

Group polarization is a maybe surprising discovery, how online communication, particularly social network services could deform any public discourse which involves participants in a virtual environment. This is why the participants' preferences are so important in any form of communication. The formation and deformation of preferences is many times viewed through dichotomy citizen vs. consumer. But, this is not the issue. If we agree that an unrestricted choice is the most important for the freedom of expression, than we also could agree »when people's past choices lead to the development of preferences that limit their own horizons and their capacity for citizenship«, they are »a product, at least in part, of social circumstances, including existing institutions, available options, social influences, and past choices.«

(Sunstein, 2007: 120-121, 136)

Conclusion

Regarding the social responsibility as the concept, and as the personal value/achievement of every citizen, theoretical concepts and case studies presented in this article can help us to understand better the operations of the traditional and online media, particularly their relationships to the audiences. Citizens are maybe free to decide what they want to contribute through an active participation in any online public debate, the most skilled ones are free to choose the most appropriate media suitable to their own styles of expression and skills. On the other hand the real scale of their participation in co-creation of media content or in online communication is and will be limited by the knowledge, awareness, and at least with the incomes of the majority of citizens, and it will always depend of their access to the technological gadgets available on the market for those purposes.

Declining the citizens' participation in media, limited interactivity and other reversible processes in the traditional media are not only the consequence of some subjective weakness of media stuff, professional journalists and editors, for an example. Knowing the available technologies, standardization of media formats and financially accessible tools, there is no reason anymore to talk about a gap between »amateurs« and »pros« in media world, or between the newspapers and traditional electronic media or the web media. Of course, the media convergence is not an ideologically neutral concept, as we must not speculate about the social responsibility out of the context of media economics, political and social pressures to media. For an example: to drop off their role of »the fourth estate«. The case studies of the public service media (PSM) presented in this article prove that we can threat the social responsibility also as one of the preconditions for survival of the PSM. It could be possible, if the concept of the "media-empowered citizen" becomes dominant and strong enough to replace misconstruction of the media output user as a consumer. That concept must not be an ideological construction as Nyre noticed; it needs clear political will to support an effective public policy to realize all achievements and cover all contexts of social responsibility.

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[1] Jennifer Brundidge used these questions in her empirical research, where she designed three main hypothesis:
(H1) Online political discussion and online news are positively related to standard predictors of political engagement;
(H2) The relationship between online news use and online discussion is stronger than the relationships between offline news use and offline forums of discussion;
(H3) Online news use is positively related to frequency of political discussion at work but the relationship will be somewhat weaker than the relationship between online news use and online political discussion. (2010: 69-73)
She also argued »that the structural boundaries of the Internet – the increasingly blurred and porous form they seem to be taking – are not increasing the accessibility of the public sphere, but are increasing its traversability.« (2010: 65).
[2] They studied 46 SVT News Live productions aired between November 2011 and May 2012. Each program was 15-minute production, put in the daily schedule at 3.00 to 3.15 p.m., produced by small editorial team of four people from SVT News Lab. After seven months the SVT project was abandoned by its own management. (Ekström et al., 2013: 622).
[3] The main impact of group polarization, as the consequence of an online communication, is to change previous participant's opinion to more radical than it was before that person started simultaneous debate about an issue with other members in some social network group. The famous Colorado experiment from 2005 proved that the most of participants did not change their previous opinions, but they ended discussion "with more extreme positions after they spoke with one another." (Sunstein, 2007: 61-64).

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