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ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL FIELD OF JOURNALISM: METHODOLOGICAL GROUNDS

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Abstract

The urgency of the study is predetermined by qualitative shifts in the information environment of the modern society, when the most important processes of the social and political life become mediated and are actively moving into the media environment. The interrelations of politics and journalism caused their integration in the political field of journalism. The new phenomenon has not been properly studied. There are no research instruments that are in line with its nature. In the article the fundamentals to develop a methodology for analyzing the political field of journalism have been considered.

Keywords

Journalism – Politics – Methodology – Research models – Mass communication

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Introduction

According to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu, “the concept of the field is a study instrument whose main function is to provide the scientific construction of social objects”¹. According to Bourdieu, the field is a place of struggle of various agents that have “instruments of symbolic production required to reflect their personal point of view on the social one”. The scientist defined the field through the concept of the abstract social space, “constituted by an ensemble of subspaces or fields (economic field, intellectual field, etc.)”². A little later, he presented to the scientific community the object that is “a little strange, but very important in terms of science and politics, namely, the relationship between the field of politics, the field of social sciences, and the field of journalism. These are three social universes that are autonomous, relatively independent, and at the same time influencing each other”³.

Nowadays, understanding of the relationship between the fields goes beyond the existing notions: the well-known/established is not always adequate to the new realities. J. Kin expressed his doubts about the “persuasiveness of modern theories of means of communication” because “all spheres of life from the most intimate environments of the everyday life to global organizations operate under the extremely mediated conditions where the meaning of messages is constantly changing and is often at variance with the intentions of their creators”. The political scientist suggested not to yield to “temptation to interpret the new dynamics of the communication abundance by using the terms inherited from our ancestors ... We need new approaches, fresh views, which allow us to look at things differently and interpret them, offering us more accurate methods for recognizing the innovations of our time”⁴. Along with this, the change in the usual point of view makes its impact on understanding the phenomenon, in particular, the political field when viewed through the prism of journalism.

The social space and its fields are not static. The time changes their structure and characteristics. While in 1995 Bourdieu had discovered the field of journalism, in 15 years researchers expanded his idea to the level of media. While in 1995 the field looked like “very weakly autonomous”⁵, today this field that arose at the intersection of social needs and new technological opportunities is firmly rooted in public relations, primarily due to the absorption of a number of functions of other social fields. Many symbolic acts that were previously inherent exclusively in the field of politics, now, as a rule, are carried out through the field of journalism, and sometimes it is not possible to differentiate the original and its copy. Such dramatic changes gave rise to a new quality of social space that caused the political field of journalism.

The interpenetration of politics and journalism started from the emergence of the periodical press. However, for a long time only its most noticeable result was noted – the expanding impact of politics on the media and journalism functioning. Nowadays, there is an oncoming movement, and scientists have started talking about the “mediation of politics”, referring to “the subordination of politics to the internal laws of the media”. Thus,

¹ P. Bourdieu, O televidenii i zhurnalistike (Moscow: Foundation for Scientific Research “Pragmatics of Culture”, Institute of Experimental Sociology, 2002): 108-109.

² P. Bourdieu, Sotsiologiya politiki (Moscow: Socio-Logos, 1993), 80.

³ P. Bourdieu, O televidenii i zhurnalistike... 108.

⁴ J. Kin, Demokratiya i dekadans media (Moscow: Publishing House of the High School of Economics, 2015), 312.

⁵ P. Bourdieu, O televidenii i zhurnalistike... 114.

“the political process is becoming more and more communicative, and journalists participate in it on equal terms with politicians, although the public perceives them as antagonists”⁶. It is no coincidence that the role of media agents is growing in the political field because “endless political and cultural debates about the “spirit of the times” provide them not only with the status of a special participant..., but also empower them to indicate those whose opinions should be taken into account in terms of the upmost and key issues of “the modernity”, those you can be sure in, and those who will answer the questions “everyone” poses to them”⁷. However, it is necessary to remember that “the world of journalists is the world of differences where there are conflicts, competition, and hostility”⁸. Due to this, the notion the political field of journalism is not so much a special case where politics is viewed through the prism of journalism, but a generalization of the manifestations of the sociocultural situation at the beginning of the 21st century.

The new study field can be interpreted as “political content”. This is the environment “where the political culture is not only reflected, but also formed, and the system of social and political interests is coordinated”⁹. Consequently, the formative factors of the political field of journalism and its content are inextricable: here a purely nominative (actual) presentation of political documents, and the academic presentation of scientific concepts are rare; here the political and moral assessment of the field subjects’ actions is dominating, and the importance of political events and facts, and their compliance with social ideals and values are analyzed.

It is possible to find and study the political field of journalism in various fields of knowledge – philosophy, political science, sociology, and journalism theory. Let us single out the latter: the analysis with its starting point being journalism as a political practice allows becoming their integrating source because journalism is a formative factor of the phenomenon under study.

Methods

Traditionally, the methodology is interpreted as the system of principles of the scientific study – “a self-correcting, constantly evolving method of cognition... Theories are created when trying to gain understanding. They help to guide our work and determine whether our understanding of the problem is correct”¹⁰. However, let us pay attention to the remark of V.A. Yadov that “the concept of methodology is also used in the meaning of the system of study methods, for example, measuring social characteristics”¹¹. This allows to present the system of techniques for analyzing the phenomenon under study in the form of one more meaning of the model of the political field of journalism because “the model contains the potential knowledge which a person, when researching it, can acquire, make

⁶ A. V. Dmitriev y V. V. Latynov, *Massovaya kommunikatsiya: predely politicheskogo vliyaniya* (Moscow: MNUTs, 1999), 19.

⁷ L. Pento, *Filosofskaya zhurnalistika. The Socio-Logos of Postmodernism*, 1997. Available: <http://sociologos.net/textes/pinto/pinto1.htm>

⁸ P. Bourdieu, *O televidenii i zhurnalistike...* 36-37.

⁹ I. G. Yakovlev, *Semantika politicheskogo konteksta (sotsiologicheskiy aspekt)* (Moscow: AMI, 2005), 43.

¹⁰ J. Mannheim y R. Rich, *Politologiya. Metody issledovaniya*. (Moscow: Publishing House “The Whole World”, 1997): 22-23.

¹¹ V. A. Yadov, *Strategiya sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniya. Opisaniye, obyasneniye, ponimaniye sotsialnoy realnosti* (Moscow: Dobrosvet, 2000), 53.

it visual, and use it in their practical life needs”¹². Thus, the choice of the political field of journalism as a subject of study causes the development of a two-stage theoretical structure: the model of the study subject and the model of its analysis. Modeling of social objects is based on the theory of “ideal types” by M. Weber, who, nevertheless, was careful in his recommendations because “the ideal type is not a hypothesis, it only indicates the direction to form hypotheses”. Moreover, far from all social objects are equally modifiable for the analysis and the subsequent “combination of a multitude of diffuse and discrete existing identity phenomena”. Weber considered the state to be such complex object: no matter how the scientific concept of the state was formulated, it “is always a synthesis we create for certain purposes of cognition”¹³. Modeling of such an ambiguous object in its social importance as the political field of journalism is also complicated by many variables defining it. On this way, the most difficult task is to search for constant quantities and factors.

Finding constants, as a rule, is associated with the ideological and political position of the researcher, but it may be in conflict with the growing dynamics of the public life. Therefore, at the present time “more and more analytical problems are being solved in the “direct modeling” mode, when researchers refuse the stage of analyzing the information base on the problem under study because in most materials published on paper the information about events and processes in politics becomes outdated even before it gets to the publishing house”¹⁴. Moreover, it is not always clear what point of view the information was considered from, and how the value-interpreted factors of the political field of journalism (that are also in the state of turbulence) are treated.

The political field of journalism is not free from the administration or ideological impact of political actors; only to a small extent it looks like a public space for an unhindered exchange of views. On the contrary, the political field of journalism has been structured for a long time – according to personas, themes, meanings, and ideological preferences because it is determined by the most important areas of its functioning: in one area, politics predetermines the content and dynamics of media processes, its informational diversity, and the values transmitted in it, and in the other one it adopts formats journalism. Thus, there is a clear institutional convergence of politics and the media with a distinct separation of the journalistic basis in it. “The media actively “dissect” the political reality, highlighting some of its sides at its discretion and leaving others in the shadow... as a result, the audience is imposed alien and rash opinions and ideas... people’s opinions are determined by what they have learnt from the media reports”¹⁵. At the same time, the functioning of the political field of journalism, in fact, its journalistic basis must have an undeniable effect whose essence is found in the creative nature of journalism because the creative process is essentially the least regulated. Consequently, in all developments of the methodology for studying the political field of journalism, the creative component of journalistic work should be taken into account along with the analysis of the interaction of constants and variables in politics and the media.

¹² N. N. Moiseev, *Matematika v sotsialnyh naukah* (Moscow: Mathematical methods in sociological research, 1981), 166.

¹³ M. Weber, “Obyektivnost” sotsialno-nauchnogo i sotsialno-politicheskogo poznaniya. M. Weber. Selected: Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism (Moscow: “Russian Political Encyclopedia” (ROSSPEN), 2006).

¹⁴ O. V. Popova, *Politicheskii analiz i prognozirovaniye* (Moscow: Aspect Press, 2011), 446.

¹⁵ A. V. Dmitriev y V.V. Latynov, *Massovaya kommunikatsiya: predely politicheskogo vliyaniya* (Moscow: MNUTs, 1999), 15.

The new methodology should take into account the communicative nature of today's political processes. The structure and essence of the political field of journalism allow the researcher to decide on the method of modeling the study object. In this regard, the development of the methodology logically continues something that has already been well-known in the theory of journalism, sociology, and political science.

Results

As a result of analyzing the terms and conditions for developing the methodology to study the political field of journalism, above all, it is necessary to pay attention to the phenomenon of “digital journalism”. Along with the “new media”, it was considered for some time as an appendage to the “traditional media” – newspapers, radio, television and news agencies¹⁶. The content produced for traditional media was often used by online editors with minimal changes, or even unchanged. The minds of editors and scientists changed approximately simultaneously with the collapse of the “dot-com bubble” at the beginning of the century: large financing of new Internet companies, including online media, and the use of inefficient business models caused the wave of bankruptcies of many IT corporations and the collapse of the NASDAQ index; content strategies of some editorial offices were not viable. Therefore, copying the same content on different platforms gave way to the creation of unique content for distribution on the Internet. Due to this, journalism researchers had to deal not with the appendage of the traditional media, but with a new force that required other approaches to its study. Thus, the first half of the 2000s is characterized by the following trends in the study of journalism and mass communication:

- Attempts to classify “new media” and define their importance in the system of traditional media,
- The need to modernize instruments to study constantly increasing volumes of content, and
- The emergence of new economic models instead of “dot-com bubbles”.

Under these conditions, the role of the audience has changed. Due to simplified interfaces and instruments that did not require any special knowledge, users were able to generate content themselves and used this opportunity unexpectedly often¹⁷. The abundance of user-generated content enabled a number of researchers to talk about the division of journalism into professional and citizen. Besides, there were issues related to the scale of digitalization: there were those who predicted the complete absorption of traditional media by the Internet – these forecasts have not yet come true¹⁸.

The change of the audience's role, the development of citizen journalism that rapidly expanded the space of the user-generated content, the transfer to Web 2.0 – this is how it is possible to describe the second half of the 2000s. Social networks were created,

¹⁶ R. Salaverría, “Digital journalism: 25 years of research. Review article”, *El profesional de la información*, Vol: 28 num 1 (2019). Available: <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.ene.01>

¹⁷ J. Van-Dijck, “Users like you? Theorizing agency in user-generated content”, *Media, culture & society*, Vol: 31 num 1 (2009): 41-58.

¹⁸ J. Nielsen, *The end of legacy media (newspapers, magazines, books, TV networks)*. Nielsen Norman Group. 1998. Available: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/the-end-of-legacy-media-newspapers-magazines-books-tv-networks>

there were even more data, but most importantly – during this period in the scientific discourse the concepts of convergence, hypertextuality, and multimedia were firmly fixed, and the changing role of the audience activated sociological methods to study media. At the same time, there were attempts to critically interpret the citizen journalism as a kind of antithesis of the professional journalism.

In 2015, the work of Steen Steensen and Laura Ahwa “Theories of Journalism in a Digital Age: Research and Introduction”, which is important in the context of this article, was published. Its authors studied more than 9,000 keywords and 195 abstracts to articles from two authoritative publications devoted to media research – Journalism – Theory, Practice and Criticism and Journalism Studies in order to understand how the theoretical approaches to studying journalism had changed since 2000 to 2013. As a result, the following has been determined:

- Firstly, the dominant disciplinary approaches in journalistic research still include the political science one (it denotes the place and role of journalism in the political system, as well as the interaction of government and journalism) and the sociological one (the study of various interactions between actors involved in the content production). Moreover, in recent years there has been a tendency to increase the “sociological” research of journalism. As the authors note, a paradigm shift from political science to sociology has occurred,
- Secondly, a variety of approaches to studying journalism in general and by using new technologies and economic models is growing,
- Thirdly, in the studies of journalism, the philosophical approach is increasingly dominating (issues of ethics and objectivity in journalism are posed), and
- Fourthly, there has been a movement from pure empirical to theoretical study. However, the empiricism still prevails¹⁹.

The third position will be specially emphasized. Today the issues of ethics and objectivity in journalism are often used in the context of studying such “fashionable” phenomena as post-truth and fake news. The authors do not aim at showing their attitude to these terms that have entered the scientific vocabulary in the second half of the 2010s. Therefore, they will only state the fact: the numerous studies on post-truth and fake news suggest that the issue of destructive media practices is especially acute today. This is largely due to the political context and the transformation of social practices into the “digital age”. At the same time, the issues of media destruction are considered through the prism of ethics and objectivity in journalism, and not only in the political science perspective.

Discussion

The relations of politics and journalism in the field integrated by them expose a lot of discretely existing ordinary phenomena, which fact does not allow completely ignoring their opposite characteristics when modeling the objects under study. Firstly, it is impossible to bring the individuality of the subjects at the political field of journalism – politicians, representatives of social sciences, and journalists – to a common standard.

¹⁹ S. Steensen y L. Ahva, “Theories of journalism in a digital age: An exploration and introduction”, Digital journalism Vol: 3 num 1 (2015): 1-18.

Secondly, there are various types of states in the international arena, and they ambiguously interpret democracy, human rights, etc. Therefore, the ideal type of state as a scientific and publicist abstraction does not arise in the general field and various ideal types of the state are mentioned in journalistic works of polemicizing parties.

For this reason, political media texts have some statements in common, e.g., something like what was said, for example, by A. Brod, a member of the Russian Presidential Council for Human Rights: “Our country is involved in a large-scale confrontation with the Western world,” because Russia and the West have diametrically opposite moral legal interpretations of individual rights to security and protection. The statement of Ank Bejleveld, the Dutch Minister of Defense, that her country is in the state of cyber war with Russia²⁰ should be interpreted in the same way. In both cases, the authors of the statements rely on conflicting ideas about democracy (where and for whom it is authenticity, and where it is facade) and the state. Due to this, the ideal types of these institutions that do not coincide are formed, and confrontational political positions are promoted.

Undoubtedly, the availability of empirically fixed divergence of ideology bearers clashing in the political field of journalism causes difficulties in modeling the field as a study object. At the same time, these clashes are the essence of the political content. That is why understanding the meaning of the polarization of the agents acting in it should form the basis for modeling the methodology for studying the field. Thus, it is necessary to look for such ideal foundations of the methodology that could become constants for analyzing the behavior of the subjects of struggle in the space under study. Finding common grounds is associated with two major aspects of functioning of the political field of journalism – mythological and verbal.

From the standpoint of the structural analysis, the aggregate content of the political field of journalism is formed with independent plots that are developed, specified, and acquire the genre, compositional, stylistic, and evaluative certainty. The impulse for acquiring its plot by the political information is the laconic operational messages of news feeds, radio and TV programs, and replicas in the Telegram messenger. Far from all information becomes the basis for the plot development; some fall on the periphery of the field or remain non-demanded, while others, depending on their inherent values in a particular socio-political situation (historical era, society, social stratum) are in the focus of the journalists’ attention and act as the basis for variable interpretations, supplemented by facts, speeches of officials, and “opinions” from the blogosphere. Thus, the dynamics of the modern field of political journalism preserve the traditional character for mass communication: information – redundancy.

Redundancy is interpreted as the organization of text where the emotionally-shaped outline of the narrative is accelerated due to the activation of poetics and evaluative vocabulary. Redundancy in the digital age, under the continuity of the gigantic media stream, involves a special inventory of means, including speech. “Information is not so much what is said as how much can be said. Information is a measure of the possibility to choose”²¹. The choice of a journalist, publication – agents of the political journalism field

²⁰ Ministr oborony Niderlandov zayavila o kibervoyne s Rossiyey. Fontanka.ru, 2018. Available: <https://www.fontanka.ru/2018/10/14/036/>

²¹ U. Eco, *Otsutstvuyushchaya struktura. Vvedeniye v semiologiy* (Saint-Petersburg: LLP TC “Petropolis”, 1998), 423.

– is embodied in the media plot based on the relevant information and the nature of its presentation in the media (type of media, genre, and the relevant speech outline of the statement). For example, in the political journalism the message about the beginning of the impeachment procedure for the US President Donald Trump that appeared in the RIA Novosti newsreel and was copied by other channels after the publication of the transcript of his telephone conversation with the President of Ukraine (Sep. 25, 2019) becomes the center of a continuing plot and is getting new facts, scans of the dialogue that had taken place, and quotes from Twitter accounts. The number of actors who are representatives of the political elite is also gradually expanding. Apparently, in the era of the information expansion, the journalist's skill is determined not so much by their speech competence as by their ability to quickly respond to the changing picture of the world and to quickly find the episodes that support the plot intrigue. It is just to refer the publication accompanied by the video series about the reason why V. Zelensky was called "the new Monica Lewinsky" on the American television²², and the appeal of the Ukrainians to their president asking him to publish a transcript of his conversation with the Russian president about the terms and conditions of exchanging the captured people²³ to such episodes. Although the episodes that make up the ongoing plot fancifully branch out the original political information, its integrity is maintained by thematically homogeneous lexical units and even verbatim repetition of the original nominations from the news feed in the headlines.

The extreme manifestation of redundancy is the simulated reproduction of the reality that is characteristic of the post-modern paradigm of artistic merit, when real heroes turn into characters of the political theater: a telephone conversation between two presidents – "this is a conversation between a boss and a subordinate or a rich uncle with a poor nephew who is fawning in front of him, is standing still and only repeats: "Yes, yes, yes, you are absolutely right!". The rich uncle is laughing about this, admiring the wit of his nephew"²⁴. In online publications the redundancy is also formed by using links to the source's website and to reference materials about the nature of a political term or about a certain person. Following these links, the user finds himself in a differently organized text and in a different style register.

Thus, the redundancy as a category of meaning formation in the political field of journalism arises primarily due to the accumulation of information that supports the ongoing plot. During this accumulation, the original news as a significant form no longer remains unchanged and makes it possible to include it in various contexts that provide the perception planned by the agent of the media field.

Myths found in the political field of journalism can be identified as a component involved in its structuring, and as a force that has impact on the intensity of the processes taking place in it. The mythologization algorithm includes, firstly, the establishment of links between myths, secondly, the information support of the myths involved in the structuring of culture, and thirdly, the reflection of aggression destructing the integrity of the field elements. Like the aggregate political field of journalism, the myth is a sphere substance with a relatively dense core and surrounding space. In the space of myth, it is possible to

²² Na amerikanskom televidenii Zelenskogo okrestili novoy Monikoy Levinski. Lenta.ru, 2019. Available: <https://lenta.ru/news/2019/09/26/zelensky/>

²³ I. Apuleev, Razgovory Zelenskogo s Putinyem: na Ukraine trebuyut stenogrammy. (Gazeta.ru, 2019). Available: https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2019/09/29_a_12694813.shtml

²⁴ L. Radzikhovskiy, Osoboye mneniy. Echo of Moscow, 2019. Available: <https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/2508713-echo/>

distinguish layers with different density that increases to the extent of its proximity to nuclear structures, e.g., the model of semiotic space (“semiosphere”) by Yu. M. Lotman. In his model the core is as a myth-forming mechanism representing the world being in the order and having a sense²⁵.

The core of the myth is determined by the actual content, based on the memory of the phenomena and events that occurred in reality. This does not mean that a myth cannot be initially false; by its very nature, it absorbs the reality through interpretation mechanisms. In the political field of journalism, the myth is based on facts, evidences, and documents that have been verified for authenticity. The density of the mythical core is decisively influenced by the time of its formation. The myth supported by true and sharp evidences, on the one hand, is constantly tested for strength, and, on the other hand, it forms an internally consistent actual structure. In the modern Russian political field of journalism, such myths include the myth of Victory, the myth of repressions, the “Afghan” myth, the myth about Chernobyl, the myth of the “wild 1990s”, etc.: “The myth is not substantial, but energetic self-affirmation of a personality. This is not a statement of personality in its deepest and last root, but a statement in its revealing and expressive functions”²⁶. In the near-nuclear sphere of the political field of journalism, any personal story or biography becomes a myth. For the stability of structures and self-preservation, the myth requires repetition, repetition in media works and public consciousness. The myth as a repetition is embodied in rituals, verbal formulas, and cosmogony as a whole, “rather than in the constant repetition of the same, and rather than in complete cultural immobility”²⁷. The dynamics of updating a myth or even replacing it with another one are found in the media field of the values circulation. The endpoints of its fixing in the eternity are orderliness and meaningfulness.

The impact of the political field of journalism on myths can be traced by the types of thematic media sectors and actors of impact. Myths of the political and social life are correlated by the socio-political sector and corrected by politicians and journalists. The political myth is the basis for the formation of ideologies based on the values of the state, nation, race, class, or an individual. The vertical connections of the political myth are expressed in the concept of hierarchy as a way of legitimizing the power (the myth about the state and the elite). The horizontal myth about the network self-organization is specifically expressed in myths about the people, civil society, a hero, and a crowd. The external media sphere of the political myth gives rise to nuclear structures of myths about conspiracies, internal and external enemies. At the core of the myth reinforced by beliefs and emotions there is interpretation not due to the facts that have actually happened, but in accordance with the cultural and psychological matrix of perception. Such method is the basis for the explanatory model of the so-called “post-truth”: for example, in the case of poisoning the Skripals in Salisbury, the factual side is ignored, but there are appeals to stereotypes and beliefs of the British society (the imperial Russia is a “bear” striving to dominate) and emotions (the revenge of the GRU (the Russian Military Intelligence) and Putin personally on the traitor-deserter).

²⁵ Yu.M. Lotman, *Vnutri myslyashchikh mirov. Semiosphere* (Saint Petersburg: Art-SPB, 2010).

²⁶ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika mifa* (Moscow: Mysl, 2001), 555.

²⁷ M. Eliade, *Aspekty mifa* (Moscow: Academic Project, 2010), 251.

Conclusion

The methodological foundations of studying the political field of journalism directly come from its nature, the integrating fields of politics, social sciences, and journalism. At the same time, the latter acts as a formative element that in a certain way arranges the content side of a new phenomenon – political content. Understanding and analyzing the political field of journalism can be based on modeling both the object under study and the system of study methods. The field modeling involves the identification of “ideal types” of its components that due to the nature of the political field of journalism should be divided into two blocks – constants and variables. Along with this, it is impossible to ignore the creative nature of journalism – the factor that is the most incompliant with formalization.

The variables of the political field of journalism include, first of all, the worldview and political positions of the agents who enter its space for the struggle, actors of politics, social sciences, those who claim the right to form the political content. The autonomy of journalism is also a variable component of the political field of journalism: its degree depends on the socio-political situation of the time and the political structure of the society. The variable factors complicate, but do not cancel the possibility of studying the phenomenon, especially in case of reliance on the constant components of the political field of journalism.

Among the constants, the authors single out the cultural foundations of the functioning of the political field of journalism on which the system of methods of analysis – the research model – is largely based on. Thus, the model includes the historical and cultural memory and the speech practice of the field subjects.

The new phenomenon has been studied as the continuation of the theoretical study of media that has recently been intensified by technological changes in the global information space. As a result, the terms and conditions of the activities of political, scientific, journalistic agents in it, as well as the role of the media audience have changed. In the modern studies of mass communication, there is an increase in the number of theoretical works where the paradigm shift in favor of sociological approaches to studying journalism, as well as its philosophical analysis has been noted.

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