

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CULTURE OF JOURNALISM RESEARCH IN RUSSIA

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Abstract: The authors present the theoretical and methodological culture of journalism research as a holistic phenomenon and its correlation with the practice of scientific work. The generalization of data and scientific ideas is performed in relation to the analysis of journalism. A comprehensive description of this culture is formed. The authors consider the development of world and domestic theoretical thought in the field of study, focusing on Russian traditions, experience and needs. At the empirical level, the method of content analysis of scientific papers prepared by young Russian researchers is used. The authors conclude that there is a noticeable gap between the academic ideas about the theoretical and methodological culture of journalism research and the quality of published scientific products.

Keywords: research culture, journalism, methodology, Russian experience, history.

1 Introduction

The question of theoretical and methodological culture in the research of journalism allows us to consider the relationship of tendencies and problems characteristic of the discipline, the qualification requirements for authors of scientific works and the level of manifestation of qualification in published works. It is clear that the results of activities depend on the work culture, both in the practice of individual scientists and in the scientific industry as a whole. Meanwhile, attention to this characteristic of a researcher cannot be considered to be sufficient. Russian literature has made occasional attempts to present it in a comprehensive manner (Prokhorov, 2006), although relevant training courses are included in university programmes for journalists. According to our hypothesis, the consequence of this state of affairs is a decrease in the quality of publications and the reliability of the results. The objective of this paper is to present the culture of journalism research as a multidimensional and holistic phenomenon and to correlate this view with the quality of scientific publications. In the empirical section of the paper, we are interested in the works of young authors, as they clearly express the results of the academic training received, and the future of the national research tradition is seen in their totality.

2 Literature Review

In international practice, comprehensive works, in which the experience of different regions of the world is evaluated, are devoted to the methodology and theoretical foundations of the journalism research (Loffelholz & Weaver, 2008; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009). But in these works, theoretical and methodological culture does not become a special subject of analysis. For our topic, attempts to evaluate a set of approaches to journalism, including the historical retrospect (Erjavec & Zajc, 2011) are valuable, especially taking into account the Russian context (Bykov, 2015).

However, in recent years, the interest is paid not so much to the methodology as a comprehensive set of components, but to its changes under the influence of the expansion of digital technologies. According to some analysts, "The emergence of the Web has to a degree de-institutionalised journalism ... A journalist ... can in theory be anyone" (Russian et al., 2015, p. 301). Digital innovations "have created a need to rethink what journalism is and consequently to reassess theories of journalism" (Steenen & Ahva, 2015, p. 4). Fundamental monographs are devoted to the dynamics of theories in the digital age (Karlsson & Sjovaag, 2017). Some Russian authors support a radical update of scientific approaches, believing that "a number of processes taking place in the media industry make

media scholars formulate a new theory and new conceptions" (Dunas, 2013, p. 90).

The question of the theoretical-conceptual basis is central in the consideration of the research culture, because its solution determines the point of view on the material, the choice of tools and the data interpretation. But this area is far from consensus. The view is expressed that representatives of individual Western countries are responding to their situation by spreading "calls for 'rebuilding', 'reconsidering', 'remaking', 'reconstructing', 'rethinking' and 'reinventing' journalism ... and even for 'rethinking again'", and that "studying journalism from a non-Western perspective should be more than just a sideline journalism research" (Hanitzsch, 2019, p. 216). Thus, the thesis of national-cultural conditionality of research culture is supported. Other authors insist on distinguishing between journalism studies, in which the representatives of all disciplines are engaged, and journalism theories as an independent branch of science. The latter has the task of developing its methodologies, "that are consistent with the perception of journalism as a profession, as a scientific object, or as a specialized field of education" (Machado, 2005, p. 14).

The stated points of view are consistent with the tendency towards De-Westernization of the theory, the transition from unipolar to polycentric relationships (Goodman & Steyn, 2017; Oller Alonso & Barredo, 2013; Thussu, 2009), the use of theoretical and methodological tools adequate to national models of journalism. This is particularly important when unique practices (other than "normative" Anglo-Saxon ones) are being studied.

3 Research Methods

The authors of the paper set the following objectives:

- to justify the specificity of Russian journalism as an object of research;
- to characterize the research culture as a set of interrelated components;
- to consider the manifestation of research culture on the material of scientific publications.

As a method, the generalization of the data and the scientific notions about structure and properties of theoretical-methodological culture of journalism researchers is used. The authors turn to the world and domestic research experience, focusing on Russian traditions and needs. The conceptual conclusions are related to the publication practice. Empirical testing of the hypothesis is performed by the method of content analysis of scientific works.

4 Results and Discussion

Russian journalism is a specific object of analysis. The formation of the model of journalism in Russia and its historical conditionality are studied in detail (Esin, 2000). In recent years, the development of journalism in the countries of the former socialist camp (Hannah, 2013, 2019; Jirak & Kopplova, 2012; Toepfl, 2013), the influence of the Soviet model on journalism in China (Zhang Quixi, 2005), leadership of the Russian scientific-pedagogical schools (Korkonosenko, 2018; Korkonosenko et al., 2018; Khubetsova, 2018) have been actively explored.

The history of the Russian model of journalism formation "passed under the sign of responsible intellectual analyticity" (Artemov, 2016, p. 57). Its viability and effectiveness are the result of the systematic and purposeful way in which the issues of organization, education and study were developed. Before the USSR, the development of journalism was not regarded as a task of national importance anywhere in the world; scientists were not instructed to develop a theory of journalism anywhere, as it was done in the 1970s. On the basis of such significant

experience, domestic scientists draw their conclusions about the culture of journalism research in Russia, which are proposed below.

Theoretical and methodological culture of journalism research includes both universal and specific approaches, principles, methods and techniques. The fundamental qualification requirement for the researcher is the assimilation and practical testing of the logic of scientific work. This algorithm consists in the sequential implementation of the following actions: choice of theory, research organization, information collection, data and information processing and, possibly, participation in the implementation of the results. The following principles of research, or scientific criteria, are universal: objectivity, rationality, reliability, verifiability, logical consistency, reproducibility, consistency with the results of other studies, growth of new knowledge. The ways of structuring software are also universal. They include justification of the research problem, setting an objective, defining of the object and subject of study, generating hypotheses, formulating objectives, relying on a theoretical basis, creating an empirical corpus and developing the methodology.

The choice of theory is often ignored as the initial stage of research because of the author's weak connection with a certain scientific school, which should be understood as a methodological limitation that draws the attention of specialists (Manheim & Rich, 1995). Domestic and foreign practice allows us to identify three main *approaches* that set the basic paradigms, a specific set of categories, methodological and methodical techniques. The first approach was formed as a functional one within the framework of the methodology of system analysis. Journalism is understood as a social institution with a developed organizational structure, a set of functions and relationships, a stable form of social practice, which is supported by social norms. As an institution, journalism is part of the social system, performing its functions at the levels of society as a whole, its subsystems, social groups and audience communities, a separate individual. Institute of journalism realizes itself through a system of organizations: media, trade unions and associations, educational institutions.

The origins of the second – structural-semiotic – approach are in the philological sciences which denote journalism in the space of texts of works, discourses, and media spheres as semantic fields of mass communications. Journalism takes the properties of the product of interactions of communication structures and participates in the creation and development of media spheres. The basic paradigm of the research is based on the methodological principles of linguistic, semiotic and discursive types of analysis. The central object of the studied structures is the text in its content and formal (genre) manifestations. Journalistic text (wider – media text), in turn, organizes the space of communication of the author, recipients and social reality.

The third approach is based on a set of communication theories – interpersonal, intercultural, political, business, etc. Journalism acts as a space of relationships between actors. The unit of analysis is a communicative action aimed at achieving mutual understanding and correlation of role expectations. The basic paradigm for the communicative approach is based on the principles of hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, methodology of practices. In the analysis of communication processes, the emphasis is placed on mutual relations and actions that form force fields and flows in the media space.

The principles and methods of organization of research are acting as *standards* in the complex of culture. The principles are expressed in the division of methods into quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods are based on positivist attitudes of perception of social reality as objective and external to the researcher. Qualitative methods are conditioned by interpretative notions of reality formed by human actions. Methods of research organization depend on the specifics of the objects of study,

concretized in the empirical base. In the study of journalism, monographic methods (case-study) are used in the forms of analysis of individual media, biographical study of the journalist-author, event analysis of media events in its time span etc. In studies of homogeneous groups of objects (media systems, media holdings, editorial offices, professional cultures, etc.), comparative methods of organization in the forms of comparative, comparative-historical and typological methods are used. When processing large amounts of information either selective methods or software are used for analyzing large data.

Skills as a part of professional qualification are formed at the stages of information collection and processing and are expressed in the methods of performing research procedures. Methods of information collection are differentiated depending on the type of its sources. The main source is represented by media materials belonging to the group of documentary information carriers. In their study, the methods of content analysis, informal analysis of texts, structural and stylistic analysis, media portrait, intent analysis etc. are used. When working with people, survey methods of interviewing and questioning, methods of expert evaluation, focus groups, hall-tests and experiments are used. The analysis of situations encourages turning to methods of observation. The skills of processing research information suggest the possession of modeling techniques, ranking, scaling, correlation, factor and cluster data analysis.

The result of education of comprehensive theoretical-methodological culture is expressed in the ability of self-organization of scientific thinking and action in order to optimize professional activity. To identify the degree of development of the elements of research culture and the peculiarities of their interpretation by young scientists, we conducted a content analysis of 116 works by novice authors, the sample is continuous. Scientific texts by undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students who were the best speakers of the international conferences "Media in the Modern World. Young Researchers" held in Saint Petersburg from 2014 to 2018 were selected as an empirical material. The papers are published in four collections issued by the Institute "School of Journalism and Mass Communications" of Saint Petersburg State University: 1. Modern Media Environment: Creativity and Technology. View of Young Researchers. No. 14, 2014; 2. Modern Media Environment: Traditions, Relevant Practices and Tendencies. View of Young Researchers. No. 16, 2016; 3. Modern Media Environment: Traditions, Relevant Practices and Tendencies. View of Young Researchers: Inter-university Collection. No. 17, 2017; 4. Modern Media Environment: Traditions, Relevant Practices and Tendencies. View of Young Researchers. No. 18, 2018.

Content analysis showed that young researchers avoid choosing a certain research methodology. In particular, they do not indicate the branches of knowledge, scientific directions, schools or concepts in line with which their research is carried out. If the names of Russian or foreign authors are mentioned in the texts, they are mentioned either in the historiographical aspect, or to justify the choice of a special term. Young scientists are most successful in using those elements of the research culture that can be conditionally designated as "sampling" and "terminology" (these elements are found, respectively, in 74% and 57% of all the studied works), and the least used one is "aim" (present in 41% of cases).

The comparison of the frequency of the presence of individual elements (Table 1) suggests a positive dynamics of the development of using the element "methods" by young scientists (growth from 2014 to 2018 from 48% to 59%).

Table 1 Frequency of research culture elements in the papers of young researchers (% of the number of publications in the collection)

Elements	Publication date			
	2014	2016	2017	2018
Relevance	52	58	55	56
Aim	32	46	39	48
Methods	48	50	53	59
Sample	64	77	74	81
Terminology	52	62	58	56

Source: authors

A more detailed consideration allows us to note the qualitative features of the interpretation of the elements of the research culture. It was found out that aim-setting (implicitly or explicitly presented in the text), being the least developed element, is often replaced by the indication of the process ("analysis of the practice of using special techniques..."). In some texts, research task is articulated instead of the aim: "The task of our research is to identify the methods of forming an opinion...". A common drawback in the formulation of aim-setting is also the fact that the aim is described not specifically, but blurry and vaguely.

The analysis of articulation of another important element of research culture, which is the relevance of the work (present in 55% of texts), suggests that the authors do not fully understand its essence: when linking the topic of work with contemporary realities, they do not single out the problem dictated by these realities. It happens that the problem is formulated implicitly, and the author leaves the reader the opportunity to figure it out himself: "The relevance of the study of the means and ways of expression of individual speech image is determined by the fact that each author has his own individual view..."

Indicative is the situation with the research methods (present in 53% of the texts). In very rare cases, the authors describe the methodology of the research, limited by listing the methods; for example, in 2016, only two works justified the choice of method and described the methodology, and in 2018 it was described in four works. Sometimes novice researchers confuse the methods of collecting empirical material with methods of its analysis: "In the course of the research, the following methods were used: content analysis, monitoring, comparison, analogy, deduction, induction, semantic-stylistic and statistical methods".

The high frequency of mentioning the sample is probably due to the simplicity of its designation and justification; the sample is justified and described more often than the method: in 2016 it was present in nine works, and in 2018 it was found in ten works. However, sometimes problems arise with the justification itself: "In the research, the text of the fairy tale, opening each number... is primarily under analysis...". The following questions arise: what does "primarily" mean, why are the texts in the fairy tale genre chosen, how many texts are selected?

Sampling is an empirically-oriented element of the research culture. Perhaps, there is a need to solve the problem of correlation of theoretical and empirical components in the works of students-journalists. The texts we have considered can often be called empirical-oriented due to the practical orientation of journalistic education. This orientation is useful for future journalists, but only if it does not harm the theoretical component of the research culture. The data we have obtained suggest otherwise. The empirical nature of the research by young authors is manifested in the choice of research methods: the most common one is content analysis.

Working with terminology is the most heterogeneous characteristic of publications. Often, the authors offer definitions of borrowed neologisms – hashtag, crowdsourcing and some controversial, unsettled terms (media fake as "an unreliable, distorting the real meaning of the fact... a message in the media, fabricated with certain intent or published accidentally").

Thus, the following problems associated with the research culture of young authors are highlighted:

1. works badly fit the scientific field, they are detached from the existing scientific concepts;
2. aim-setting is poorly developed, often there is no clarity about the reasons of conducting the research;
3. the authors indistinctly articulate the relevance of their work or inadequately perceive this criterion;
4. little attention is paid to the methods of work, not always the stated methods are used in the work;
5. the authors tend to use empirical analysis, and therefore the theoretical component of the research culture is weakened.

5 Conclusion

The analysis allows us to conclude that, firstly, the theoretical and methodological culture of a researcher of journalism is a relevant and not fully known object of scientific reflection. The complex of components includes theoretical approaches, standards of research organization and skills of performing operations with the leading role of theoretical attitudes. Secondly, in Russia it has strong national and cultural features and this should be considered in light of the tendency towards De-Westernization of the journalism science. Thirdly, in support of the generated hypothesis, there is a noticeable gap between academic ideas about research culture and the quality of scientific products, which leads to a decrease in their quality. The publications of young scientists clearly demonstrate this discrepancy, especially in the conceptual part; hence there is the need to intensify their preparation for independent research at the appropriate qualification level.

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