

6.3. COMMUNICATING DIVERSITY: PARADOXES, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

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THE CHALLENGES FACING JOURNALISM IN THE ERA OF POST-TRUTH

Abstract

At present, in social and humanitarian sciences, there is a problem that is connected with the fragmentation of scientific developments in the field of understanding the impact of the consequences of post-truth that leads to the destruction of the public sphere and transformation of the social and political media reality. It results from the intensive development of social media and the dissemination of information flow. Consequently, these factors influence the direction of activity of Russian mass media. Although the very existence of post-truth as a phenomenon leading to the exploitation of cognitive distortions is almost universally recognized, it is crucial to analyze the current developments in academic discourse to indicate the most significant scientific directions in reflection of the declaimed topic.

Keywords: post-truth, journalism, social media, fake news.

There is currently a problem in humanities and social sciences related to the fragmentation of scientific developments in the field of understanding the effects of post-factual consequences that lead to the destruction of the public sphere and the transformation of the social and the political reality of mass media sphere. It results from the intensive development of social networks and the spread of information flows. The mere existence of post-truth as a phenomenon leading to the exploitation of cognitive distortions and the use of eristic tools is almost universally acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is crucial to analyze the current development of academic discourse to highlight the main scientific directions and tendencies in reflecting the declaimed theme.

In academic discourse, post-truth is understood as a communicative process that leads to the formation of a new media reality in which truth, individual facts, and analytical conclusions are less convincing than ready-made interpretations. Post-truth is conditioned by the development of postmodern processes (e.g., mediatization), technological transformations (the widespread use of digital media), changes in social communication (competition of influential actors in the information space), and a general loss of trust in social institutions. Post-truth is considered a communicative strategy that marks the selective handling of facts and blurs the boundaries between truth, opinion, and fiction. At present, the appeal to personal emotions and beliefs plays a more critical role than the appeal to facts. Positions in the information space conflict with each other and exist without generally recognized criteria of truth. One of the post-factual phenomena is fake news, which destroys public discourse in the media environment and exacerbates political and social differences.

It is necessary to understand the current activities of the mass media in order to form a holistic view of existing media practices. They include the techniques and methods of professional journalists working with information in conditions of uncertainty and cognitive biases, methods of examining data, tactics, and strategies to counter fake news, including the fundamental principles (objectivity, transparency, etc.) that guide journalists in their work. These directions can be combined in a truth-building strategy, which implies a set of complex works related to the search, processing, interpretation, and dissemination of information. The study's main aim is to identify the decisive changes in the current media reality and consider the main problems of journalism.

The transformation of the field of mass communication is reflected in the development of political and social life, leading to the introduction of neologisms and original theoretical concepts into academic discourse, "through which the research and professional community seeks to reflect ongoing changes and the reasons to discover for them" [2, p. 12]. One of these new terms with an emotional and expressive tone was the word "post-truth," which was first used by the American

publicist S. Tesich in his essay “A Government of Lies” in 1992 [2]. With this concept, the author tried to draw attention to the “flight from the truth” inherent in society, in which citizens did not want to receive negative news, even if the content was primarily true [2]. In 2011, the term “post-truth” reappeared in political discourse after American economist P. Krugman used it to describe the characteristics of the US presidential election campaign. Republican nominee M. Romney deliberately disseminated false information to discredit incumbent President B. Obama during the election. M. Romney used this technology to gain greater public support for his candidacy [11]. During D. Trump’s 2016 campaign, the concept of “post-truth” was named “Word of the Year” by Oxford University Press. However, the concept “post-truth” has acquired a somewhat different interpretation and has been associated with various situations in which objective facts are less significant in forming public opinion than appeals to emotions and beliefs [1]. Moreover, when the actual state of affairs is revealed over time, the truth no longer arouses discernible public interest [2]. Subsequently, the post-truth phenomenon continues to “occur within the framework of the electoral process in foreign countries (USA, Great Britain, France) and is expressed in an unexpected and unpredictable election result. The studies conducted, including sociological ones, show that we are dealing with a new mechanism of public opinion formation” [1, p. 187].

In modern academic discourse, particularly in American and European science, the concept of “post-truth” has received widespread attention in academic discussions. Based on research, post-truth studies can be divided into several groups:

1. The study of the essential features of this phenomenon and the main interpretations that characterize this concept [3].
2. The analysis of the socio-cultural consequences of the development of the post-truth phenomenon for society [8].
3. Determining perspectives of the impact of this phenomenon on social transformations, including tactics and strategies to overcome the negative consequences of post-truth [14].

In papers, post-truth is viewed as a communicative process that generates a narrative with specific characteristics: “Individual facts and analytical conclusions are less persuasive than ready-made interpretations. These interpretations resonate with citizens’ personal beliefs and are particularly nurtured in politicized internet communities” [1, p. 186]. This phenomenon is seen as a key feature of the modern media environment when the value of information, facts, and truth is being revised. New information technologies have given audiences access to the ability to create and disseminate information [13], so a larger number of actors are involved in the content creation process. Generating a massive flow of information means that objective facts have less of an impact on public opinion formation than appeals to emotions and personal beliefs [15]. There is an apparent loss of the media information monopoly, which gave the audience the right to create and disseminate information [10]. Given the diversity of opinions and beliefs, it is increasingly difficult for citizens to separate fact from fiction.

Fake news can be considered a separate branch of this topic [5]. Scholars devote special attention to the historical, social, and political prerequisites for the appearance of fake news, the methods and procedures for creating fake news, and the threats that this news poses to the sphere of mass communication. As the researchers note, the Internet and, in particular, social media have created a unique environment for disseminating this type of information. Civic activism poses a danger, as netizens create and spread fake news. Therefore, there is a need to determine what current tactics and strategies Russian media journalists use to prevent the possibility of publishing fake news. This question is crucial because many scientific publications emphasize the importance of turning to the truth. “The main problem in news coverage is finding and presenting a new form of truth” [5, p. 47]. This statement was made by K. Kelly, a journalist for Wired in March 2017, who accurately summed up the problem faced by journalists and news consumers. “Truth” is becoming increasingly difficult to define because “for every fact, there is one counterfactual” [5, p. 48].

Under these conditions, the question arises as to the changes in the professional culture of journalists under the influence of factors such as the spread of digital technologies [9], the spread of the phenomenon of blogs and user-generated content [7], high competition in the field of information gathering and presentation, especially in social networks [6], the threat of manipulation of public opinion [5] and intense competition between the communication media for the right to publish news rapidly [5, p. 10]. As a result, many scholars point to a paradigm shift that realizes the formation of new professional standards and principles [4].

So far, there are no studies in the national scientific literature to understand the specific features of the construction of truth in mass media. For this reason, the author resorted to the analysis of American and European papers where the topic was dealt with in detail. The author refers to the concept of “truth-telling strategies”. The authors offer different approaches to understanding this phenomenon. For instance, M. Carlsson adheres to two main approaches to determining the content of the truth formation strategy. The first traditional strategy is for the media to provide accurate and reliable information to the audience. The second, much more significant strategy is the adherence of journalists to the principle of “transparency”, which means that the truth can only be revealed in the process of “direct discussion and description of the course of events” [9, p. 284]. At the same time, within the framework of the second strand, truth is viewed as a constructed phenomenon, the content of which may change over time [9, p. 284]. To date, the author has managed to collect and analyze the most frequently published approaches to the consideration of strategies for constructing truth and the elements that form them: transparency [10], objectivity [7], and accuracy [5].

As for empirical tendencies in this subject matter, there is not a sizable variety of research in overseas instructional discourse wherein this subject matter may be disclosed [12] – the authors’ cognizance of such normative additives of the reality creation approach as objectivity and transparency. At the same time, different factors stay outdoor the studies cognizance (interactivity; openness; accountability, etc.), together with strategies and technology for verifying facts, attempting to find the number one source. Therefore, there is a want to investigate the components of the empirical stages which might be issued with patterns, norms, and talents of expert reporters withinside the technology of post-reality.

The theoretical and practical aspect of the original problem lies in the fundamental uncertainty that has developed in society around the management in the field of building a media communication strategy and adequate approaches to presenting broadcast news. This problem is aggravated by the destructive consequences of the post-truth era, which leads to cardinal transformations in mass media reality, affecting professional journalists’ activities and creating a situation of uncertainty. In the context of these circumstances, the issue of critical reflection on the existing tactics and strategies for constructing truth by mass media, including an assessment of approaches to working with primary sources of information, interpreting facts, and a comprehensive fight against fake news, is being updated. The study of current media practices will make it possible to revise journalists’ accumulated experience and modern patterns to reflect the key transformations in journalists’ professional culture.

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ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА В ЭПОХУ ПОСТ-ПРАВДЫ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И УГРОЗЫ

Аннотация

В настоящее время в социо-гуманитарной науке отмечается проблема, связанная с разрозненностью научных разработок в области понимания воздействия последствий постправды на область массовой коммуникации, что приводит к нарушению баланса в публичной сфере и трансформации основ представления социальных и политических реалий в современных СМИ. Это является результатом интенсивного развития социальных медиа и распространения информации пользователями Сети. Как следствие, эти факторы влияют на направление деятельности российских СМИ. Хотя само существование постправды как явления, ведущего к эксплуатации когнитивных искажений, практически общепризнано, важно проанализировать современные тенденции в академическом дискурсе, чтобы указать на наиболее значимые научные направления, развиваемые в рамках заявленной темы.

Ключевые слова: пост-правда, журналистика, социальные медиа, фейковые новости.