



REVIEW

from Prof. PhD Iliana Pavlova, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.5. Social Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Mass Culture).

with a dissertation on the topic: "The prospects for the magazine as a media platform in a time of transformations of the paper press. Strategies of quality Bulgarian-language magazines at the beginning of the 21st century" ,

presented by Panayot Krassimirov Stefanov, doctoral student in the Department „Press journalism and book publishing“ of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication with supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Georgi Lozanov

I. Presentation of the doctoral (PhD) student

Panayot Stefanov is a graduate of Sofia University. He graduated from the master's program "E-Europe", a doctoral student in the doctoral program "Media and Communications - Mass Culture" of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. He has practical experience in journalism, photography, public relations. He is the recipient of a number of honors and awards, including "First prize in the category of cultural journalism" of the "Vasa Gancheva" Foundation (2016), "Student of the year in the field of humanities" of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2017), Award for student achievements in the field of journalism of the "Radostina Konstantinova" Foundation (2017), etc. Panayot Stefanov is publisher and editor-in-chief of "Nula32" magazine.

II. Assessment of the qualities of the text of the dissertation

The topic of the magazine as a media platform in a time of accelerated transformations in the media and communication sphere, of heated discussions about the fate of paper media and the transition to a digital environment, of changed reader attitudes and preferences, is undeniably relevant. The low interest and the lack of comprehensive and in-depth studies of the transformation processes of the magazine in



Bulgaria make the research efforts of Panayot Stefanov important for the understanding of a number of phenomena of recent years in the country.

The subject and the object of the research are clearly stated at the beginning of the dissertation and are directly related to the study of the transformative mechanisms in the media sphere as a result of digitalization and their impact on the typological group of magazines. The main goals are also clearly and precisely marked - highlighting the problem areas and outlining the prospects for development for the Bulgarian consumer magazines.

The chosen and used research methods in the dissertation work are in accordance with the set goals and are applied according to the requirements and specific tasks in the chapters - theoretical overview, direct observation, description, analysis, comparison. The empirical part of the dissertation presents the results of a conducted qualitative research that combines the possibilities of a semi-standardized interview with open questions and a case study. For the purposes of the dissertation, 11 interviews were conducted with publishers, editors-in-chief and journalists with many years of media experience, who held managerial positions in the segment of the quality Bulgarian press in the period 2000-2023. The interviews were conducted in the period February-December 2023 and were observed the requirements for a similar type of study.

The main text has a volume of 226 pages and is structurally compliant with the compositional requirements for a dissertation work, consisting of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion (p. 6 - 232). The bibliographic awareness of the author covers the main sources on the subject. A total of 204 sources are indicated in the bibliography of the dissertation, of which 106 are in Cyrillic and 98 are in Latin (Bibliography, pp. 233 – 250). In addition to the dissertation work, an appendix of 60 pages (pp. 253 – 313) has been prepared.

The dissertation skillfully combines the general theoretical observations and trends in the modern type of media-communication interactions with observations on the practice in Bulgaria, in a comparative plan, significant practices and opportunities for development stand out. It is this duality of the considered processes that I single out as a feature of the study, which is also decisive for its scientific contribution. A good theoretical awareness is demonstrated and the scientific experience to date is explored, with theoretical and historical overview (in chapters one and two) being analyzed and combined with observations from practice and concrete empirical data (in chapters three, four and five).

The dissertation examines three operational classifications related to the paper edition of the magazine - general specialized classification, classification by areas of editorial interest, informational-functional classification, and the dissertation chooses to adhere to the third one due to its closer proximity to practice. The contributions of the



paper edition of the magazine to the development of modern societies are presented in an argumentative manner, emphasizing with reason the "highly subjectivized media narratives of the world intended for precisely defined readerships" and the interaction with these audiences. The conclusion made stands out that "without their highly interpretive editorial manifestations, magazines risk existing in vain and approach derivative media" (p. 225).

Building on existing scientific developments and models for the evaluation of quality journalism, the dissertation enriches the scientific experience by proposing eight basic indicators as a basis for future methodology for the recognition and evaluation of journalistic quality in consumer magazines: ratio of author's to reprinted texts and visuals; amount of non-advertising content; ratio of non-advertising to advertising content; ratio of interpretive to content with informational functions, use of narrative techniques, editorial vigor; civil commitment (p. 97).

The dissertation fully covers the two research directions laid down in the topic and fulfills the set tasks - highlighting the prospects for the magazine in a time of transformations of the paper press and determining strategic directions for the development of quality Bulgarian-language magazines at the beginning of the 21st century.

The dissertation observes correctness in the collection, processing and analysis of empirical data. The evidentiary material on which the contributions of the study are based is characterized by credibility and correctness in presentation.

I positively value the systematized observations on the theoretical material, the results of the conducted research, the conclusions and summaries of the dissertation work, which could also be used in future studies on the topic.

The abstract correctly reflects the text of the dissertation.

III. Contributions to the dissertation research

The contribution of Panayot Stefanov's dissertation work is the thematic examination of the paper edition of the magazine in the age of digitalization - with a detailed systematization of theoretical sources, a critical analysis of existing knowledge and an overview of the Bulgarian practice of recent years.

With a completely contributory nature, I examine the fourth chapter of the dissertation work "Strategies of quality Bulgarian-language magazines in the 21st century". When presenting the "general picture" in Bulgaria, the dissertation provides a clear overview for the period 2000-2022 in terms of various criteria - number of editions, circulations, media ownership, media concentration, etc. The second part of the fourth chapter presents the results of the interviews conducted in the period February-



December 2023 with 11 publishers, editors-in-chief and journalists with many years of media experience who held various management positions in Bulgarian consumer magazines in the period 2000-2023 regarding of researched problems - the understanding of quality journalism, the specifics of the magazine, the financing mechanisms. As reasoned, I accept the inclusion of the two weekly newspapers - "Capital" and "Kultura" (p. 138) in the research and for the purpose of "a broader view of the trends in the quality press".

The fifth chapter highlights the problem areas facing Bulgarian magazines (unfavorable and hostile environment, lack of tradition of quality consumer magazines, crisis of author content, shortage of professionally trained staff, limited distribution and etc.), but the prospects for development are also marked - journalistic entrepreneurship, budget diversification, etc. It is rightly noted in the dissertation that "The future of the quality magazine, through its civic commitment, is unequivocally a question of the order of social entrepreneurship. Fostering this conversation not only expands the field for innovation but works to fully understand budget diversification as the next key prospect for media" (p. 210).

As an author's contribution in the dissertation work, I examine the derived concept of "paper premium" and the associated understanding of the role of the magazine in the digital age as an image resource that "materializes" opportunities and imparts communication values, and at the same time is an alternative to the speed of distribution and information overload in the digital age. The magazine, as a thing, for the creation of which a resource of time and creative energy is required, also stands out as a specific business model, an alternative to fast consumerism. In this sense, I support the observations in the dissertation about the need to reconceptualize the quality criteria of journalism in the magazine and the perception of the "paper premium" as an opportunity to restore the prestige of the printed word as "extraordinary content" (p. 229).

As a contribution, I evaluate the proposed conceptual framework of eight basic indicators as a basis for a future methodology for the recognition and evaluation of journalistic quality in consumer magazines.

IV. Notes and recommendations

In the first chapter, presenting the "three theoretical approaches" to journalistic content, the inclusion and examination of "slow journalism" in this sequence needs some clarification. "Slow journalism" is not in the same category as the others mentioned - journalism and literary journalism. Its statement and its theoretical interpretation, but, above all, its consideration as a practice is connected rather with criteria related to the journalistic activity (study of the sources, data collection, etc.), and not so much to the



journalistic content and its genre characteristics (way of telling, techniques used to create media reality, narrative techniques, etc.).

I also believe that the use in the dissertation of the three concepts - "slow journalism", "publicism" and "literary journalism" and considering them "as interchangeable, in their shared sense of manifestations of interpretative discourse in the media" needs some clarification, as well as the finding that "the three perspectives testify to the abundance of names with which we can talk about the content characteristic of magazines" (p. 42).

Without belittling the unquestionably good theoretical preparation of the PhD student and the understandable desire to demonstrate knowledge, but in my opinion, the dissertation needs for a more careful and precise use of some terms, as well as a clear and thorough, theoretically grounded framing of the concepts used (including regarding the concept of "media platform" referred to the paper edition of the magazine). In this aspect, I also pay attention to the examination of "brand journalism" and the need to get to the essence of the phenomenon, not just a slide on findings about "a hybrid between journalism, marketing and PR", mixing it with advertising and reducing it to "the open and ethical type of positioning" of brands (p. 215).

The language of the dissertation would benefit if it escaped unnecessary mannerism and if the text of the dissertation underwent a more careful editing in order to achieve a clear and precise statement. For example: "The socio-political conditioning of the construction (interpretive journalism - b.m.) is explored as the prerequisite for the development of media narratives in the middle temporal media space for the contemplation of magazines, through which collective identities have the opportunity to express themselves and enter into relations and configurations with other structures in society'; "magazines as a business are problematized through the intertwining of journalistic and economic rationality, developing dissociativeness in the unambiguous definition of the goals and results of their activity" (p. 14 - 15, Author's abstract). Also, with phrases and expressions like: "the abundance of adjectives to denote journalism" etc. similar.

V. Publications and participation in scientific forums

A total of 5 publications in peer-reviewed edited collective volumes are presented:

- Two articles published in: "The European Parliament Elections in 2019. Coverage in the Bulgarian online media", comp. M. Yurukova, UI "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia, 2022, ISBN: 978-954-07-5646-2 ("The site dariknews.bg: Almost



"Darik" - pp. 197–203, and "The site segabg.com: No surprises, except for the bad organization on site" - pp. 324–330).

- Two articles in: "Media and Communications, Scientific collection of doctoral students from the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication", ("Zines - between media and art" - pp. 239-253 Volume 2, UI "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2022; "Possible criteria for evaluating the quality journal" - pp. 259-274, Vol. 3, "St. Kliment Ohridski", 2024).

- One report from the International Scientific Conference of the FJMK, 27 - 28.10.2022 - publ. in: Communication and Media in the XXI CENTURY: Educational and Professional Challenges. UI "St. Kliment Ohridski". ISBN 978-619-7567-15-1, 2023, ("Sociocultural Effects of Declining Print Circulations", pp. 235-244).

The minimum national requirements have been completed - a total of 50 points.

The requirements of the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" for approving and disclosing the results of the research according to Art. 5, item 5.

VI. Conclusion

Bearing in mind the noted contribution in the presented dissertation work "Perspectives for the magazine as a media platform in a time of transformations of the paper press. Strategies of quality Bulgarian-language magazines at the beginning of the 21st century", I express my completely positive attitude to **Panayot Krasimirov Stefanov to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional direction 3.5. Public Communications and Information Sciences (Media and Communications - Mass Culture).**

30.08.2024