

A “communicative turn” in the theoretical and methodological substantiation of the media system and journalism

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the “communicative turn” in media systems theory which, based on the continuity of the theoretical and methodological foundations formed by the “linguistic turn” and “discursive model”, presents new opportunities for research of the media communication industry and for its practical activity. The article reveals that the “linguistic turn”, prioritizing language as a key means of communication, had a significant impact on the development of theoretical and methodological justifications of communicative action. The author examines the features of journalist’s activity in the context of multimedia and formation of new media communication models in interaction with digital transformations of the industry.

Keywords

“Communicative turn”, “linguistic turn”, “discursive model”, new models of media communication, digital transformations.

Introduction and problem statement

Digitalization has become intertwined in everyday life, and it is rapidly improving its tools through computer technologies and artificial intelligence. This has ushered in the emergence of a digital civilization era, which, based on big data on human behavior, deals with the issues of controlling society and even, due to the achievements in the fields of biochemistry and genetics, determining prospective life forms that may inhabit the planet in the future. In the digital age,

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media and communication processes, metaphorically representing a nervous system of social and governmental structures, are of considerable importance (Vartanova, & Tkacheva, 2004; Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2022, 2023; Volkova et al, 2021). In this vein, it is important to analyze the patterns of media processes amidst the rapid development of network society which serves as a foundation of the digital civilization.

The logic of formation and development of new ideas in the scientific environment goes through several stages. It begins with the expressions of dissatisfaction and misunderstanding, which are conveyed through controversy and responses, and culminates in substantive discussion. Theoretical understanding of communication action in the media industry develops in accordance with the stages of the flow of new ideas (Habermas, 2022).

In regard to the development of media communication theory, particularly in relation to the new nomenclature of the scientific specialty “media communication and journalism” proposed by the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK), we are currently at the initial stage of deliberation. Preceding the discussion on the subject of media communication theory, we clarify a definition of the theory of communicative action, which “is not a metatheory but the beginning of a social theory concerned to validate its own critical standards” (Habermas, 2022: 19).

The idea to view the theory of communicative action as the beginning of a certain theory of society can be considered as a methodological justification for a theory of a new digital society, which nowadays is transforming into the society of mass and at the same time personalized communication. For instance, the emergence of information and communication user groups represents a novel form of organizing virtual reality and actual reality through computer-mediated social networks (Baychik, 2023).

During the pre-digital era, theoretical understandings of the information and communication sphere were considered as a derivative of socio-economic relations. In the fourth period of the computer revolution and on the initial stage of its fifth mode, information and communication technologies, transforming into the independent productive force, affect social relations and largely determine a new system of social, industrial, and economic relations (Vartanova, & Tkacheva, 2004). Considering as one of the components of the digital economy, information and communication digital technologies these days are evolving into its fundamental basis (Gladkova, & Cherevko, 2020; Vartanova, & Gladkova, 2023). This statement is confirmed at least by the fact that revenues from implementing management decisions based on digital methods exceed those of the entire sectors of the real, production economy. Presumably, this may

be explained by the involvement of a spiritual and informational component in the construction of a new media system for managing society.

According to the methodological foundation which states that application of the theory is not only an intra-scientific process but a social one as well (Habermas, 2022), the theory of communicative action “is intended to make possible a conceptualization of the social-life context” (Habermas, 2022: 20). Due to the digital transformations related to the emergence of computerized civilization, communicative communities, formed on the basis of similar tastes, needs, and interests among social network users, represent a “combined model of social cooperation”.

The “linguistic turn” in justification of the social communication theory

The development of communication theory was significantly influenced by the “linguistic turn”, which fostered research for theoretical and methodological justifications of the communicative action, in essence, the theory of social development, a new round of civilization, and prioritized language as a key means of communication.

The impact on the development of the “linguistic turn” in the social cognition was exerted by “discursive turn”, which enriched and expanded the possibilities for theoretical justification of the civilizational development of the society. Perhaps, modern processes of improving speed and increasing intensity of communication may occur due to the fact that the “inner world” of individual’s self-consciousness is formed through communication, including interpersonal and technological, computer-mediated forms of communication, with other individuals. The information and spiritual world is not an immanently inherent property of individual, the “inner self” arises through social interaction in a specific society. A prerequisite for the development of “self-communication” is a society, which stimulates and cultivates the individual’s need for strengthening spirituality and harmonizing the inner world development.

The process of constructing “inner world” of the individual and developing certain type of self-consciousness proceeds within the framework of a “discursive model”. Its algorithm of formation was taken as a basis of the “discursive turn” concept proposed by Romano Horace Harré, the British philosopher and psychologist known widely as Rom Harré. Conditioned by the cultural and social context, as Rom Harré claimed, a self-model has a discursive character, and it is a product of a certain kind of communication (Stepin et al., 2010). In comparison to the definition of the concept “communication”, the “discourse”

definition is broader and more polysemantic as it includes, along with linguistic characteristics, a social component. Additionally, the discursive model operates in the context of transformation of social relations. By means of information and communication, digital technologies, personally-motivated communication assumes socially significant, public character (Kolomiets, 2014). In other words, the “discursive model” provides facilities to promote communication to a significant socio-political level. Personalized communicative action transforms the subject’s personally motivated participation into media public spheres, which hierarchize the horizon of possible communications and at the same time erase its boundary (Habermas, 2022).

The “communicative turn” as a basis for middle-range theory

A new stage in the justification of the theory of digital civilization society can be designated as the “communicative turn”. It complements and develops the “linguistic turn” and the “discursive model” to the status of the middle-range theory, which is a kind of mediator between theoretical and methodological foundations, working hypotheses, and a set of empirical data. The middle-range theories should not only combine broad theoretical foundations with working hypotheses that are formulated in the course of empirical research, but also offer an algorithm, humanitarian technologies and implementation of ideas embedded in the theoretical and methodological concept, in particular, serve as a basis for the development of communicative strategies of certain channels of the media system (Dugin, 2017b).

Based on the proposed understanding of the middle-range theory, the “communicative turn” contributes to the formation of a communicative media model and serves as a methodological construct for capturing and displaying the trends of mediatization of society. Through the expansion of the scale and scope of artificial intelligence technologies (Frolova, Ilchenko, & Striga, 2023), the communicative turn creates a “combined model of social cooperation” and identifies interrelations in the “man-machine” system considered as one of the most significant characteristics of digital civilization.

One of the primary research directions for a comprehensive study of the media communication industry could encompass various aspects of study of visual and expressive means in cinema and television, use of time-tested theoretical foundations of the screen art theory, and examination of film language and a figurative structure of screen works. It is challenging, if not impossible, to create content which would evoke reciprocal feelings, deeply affect personal experience, and stimulate imagination without using a wide range of visual

and expressive means of screen art. With the introduction of artistic criteria for evaluating screen works within journalistic practice, television correspondents are forced to obtain high-level skills, increase responsibility to the viewer, and consider the communicative aspect of their professional activity. Visual images and other expressive means of screen art play a pivotal role in conveying meanings. The core of these resources is the audiovisual language, which is a means of communication between a viewer and a screen as screen art is based on communication mechanisms. This theoretical foundation allows researchers in the field of information and communication media system and journalism to focus on text analysis. This approach does not raise any doubts; however, it complicates a search for the subtlest principles of communicative interaction with the audience. The audience is influenced not so much by written text or by word spoken by presenter or correspondent, as by the totality of all the visual and expressive means of the screen, its figurative structure, in professional slang – by the “picture”. Researches indicate that a screen image has greater impact on a viewer than a text of a television work (Dugin, 2017a).

Unfortunately, a vast number of theoretical and methodological foundations, which have been developed over a century in the field of film art, a forerunner of television, are still underutilized in media communication and journalism studies. Primitive techniques, often borrowed from foreign quizzes and reality shows, are more commonly used on the TV screen than a diverse range of visual and expressive means. With the formation and development of Russian media system, digitalization and acquisition of multimedia qualities, the need to use a variety of means is increasing considerably and is becoming feasible through the combination of the capabilities of the screen, printed text, and sound characteristics of a screen work. Media communication brings together a totality of ideas, meanings, and screen images. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of media communication nature, its functions, and structural elements can have a decisive impact on the methodological (communicative) turn, both in the theory of screen art and in the theory of journalism, information and communication media system of a country.

The phenomenon of loss of audience credibility of documents and facts

To gain a comprehensive understanding of media and communication systems, we analyze significance of the loss of audience credibility of reality, specifically of the document and fact (Gorshkov, & Petukhov, 2018). The overabundance of messages transmitted by various communication channels,

including user-generated content on the Internet, creates conditions for arbitrary treatment of facts and documents. The unprofessional interpretation of a documentary, which is traditionally considered as a representation of reality (according to Sergei Drobashenko, “the phenomenon of authenticity”), turns virtual reality into a kind of aesthetic system (Drobashenko, 1972). Therefore, there is a stable trend in modern journalism as *mockumentary*, a combination of the words “mock” and “mentary” (a part of the word “documentary”). In accordance with this trend, we can identify the emergence of the term *infotainment*, which combines the words “information” and “entertainment”, as well as other combinations with the word “entertainment”, such as *edutainment*, which is a blend of “education” and “entertainment”.

Modern discourse related to communication and journalism activity persistently directs media towards entertainment, in particular, to perform manipulative functions (Oleshko, Mukhina, & Malik, 2023), to produce pseudo-events and pseudo-documentaries. The entertainment component, which is actively being incorporated into the domestic media practice (Gorshkov et al, 2011), is intended, on the one hand, to facilitate the perception of gloomy news events and, on the other hand, to shift the public attention from socially responsible behavior to mindless pastime, distracting the audience from thinking about socio-political and socio-economic problems, and creating conditions for manipulating them. Sociological studies indicate that all age groups of the Russian population (except old age group and young people under 20 years old) prefer to escape from problems, relax and continue their habitual “doing nothing” over all other types of activities in their leisure time (Gorshkov, Krumm, & Tikhonova, 2013).

There is no doubt that the mindless “pastime” in everyday culture must have been influenced by television: since the 1990s, “merry nineties”, entertainment programs have dominated the structure of Russian TV programs. Such trend in the development of domestic television as the increase in the volume of light genres in the broadcasting structure was detected by the television production analysts from the “Video International” company (Kolomiets, & Poluechtova, 2010).

There is another perspective that justifies incorporation of the entertainment element in TV and radio programs geared to inform, enlighten and educate the audience. Thus, a “participatory” model of communication is attained, which allows people to participate in production of information and its dissemination in mass media. The “participatory” model does not exclude professional journalists from the communication process; it transforms their traditional functions and skills, in particular, professional journalists are required to master additional

skills as discussion moderators, navigators in the information space, organizers of events, information campaigns, and etc.

The role of journalists in the new communication model

In the context of digitalization and Internetization of the media space when the “participatory” model of communication fully manifests itself, some theorists propose the ideas of “disintermediation”, questioning the need for professional journalists to serve as “mediators” or intermediaries between the audience (communication communities) and information channels. According to this point of view, the refusal of journalistic mediation contributes to the formation of a communication model in social media, which is based on the reduction of the narrator role, or even on the disappearance of the narrator who stimulates an intellectual process of a deep, rather than superficial, understanding of events, phenomena, and facts of reality.

In practice, the proposed understanding of the new communication model and the role of the journalist does not stand up to criticism. The problem of the contemporary world resides in information abundance, oversaturation of the global network with contradictory, often false information. In this context, interpretation of unverified, contradictory information, opinions and facts acquire particular value. In fact, the ability to interpret the increasing flow of information has given rise to a new field of business journalism, which is known as “data journalism” or “data-driven journalism”.

In contrast to the endless stream of video games and reality shows, which have flooded television screens with a superficial treatment of facts and opinions, data journalism equips the audience with new tools for visualizing statistical data and presents information with visual objectivity (Vartanova, 2019). This provides an opportunity to illustrate fascinatingly Johann Goethe’s famous idea stating that figures do not rule the world, but they show us whether the world is being ruled well or badly (Eckermann, 1850). The main principle and perhaps the most prominent feature of data journalism is that information and analytical materials are based on statistical data, summaries, reports, and on a variety of background information presented in an appealing and memorable way. Having specialized knowledge in data journalism, journalists, experts, or scientists get the opportunity to give an appealing form to figures and to assist the audience in identifying and extracting socially significant phenomena amidst the “information noise”, the abundance of information.

The communicator must take into consideration the main disadvantages of multimedia, including the average quality of content and a flow of featureless and inexpressive images and texts. As the information flow and the number of

information sources increase, more experts discuss a crisis in journalism, citing as arguments the decrease in the number of traditional print media subscribers, an upward trend of increasing the number of “niche”, targeted information channels, and thereby transition of advertising financing on the Internet, on the electronic platforms, and in the media communication channels. The trends in media consumption force publishers and media managers to change traditional business models and look for new ways to reach a differentiated audience. Meanwhile, editorial staffs neglect implementation of a scientific and analytical component of information and communication processes in their daily activities (Kolomiets, 2020), and, as a rule, do not pay enough attention to their own development in a dynamically changing communication context. As a result, they are sometimes unprepared to create new business models and concepts for television and radio programs and editions which would meet the expectations, value orientations, and demands of the target audience.

In terms of content, there is a crisis in journalism characterized by a departure from clear author’s position and balanced assessments of events. The concept of objectivity, proposed by the Western theorists, is captured and mastered by domestic mass media. However, while the cornerstone of Western theories is a postulate that objectivity manifests itself through impartiality, the audience’s nerve is not touched until there is a powerful word, and the audience cannot be convinced by the indifferent report. In all seriousness, the crisis of journalism stems first and foremost from the decrease in opportunities for media to generate advertising revenue from their communication activities.

The modern communication model with its systemic network environment should not solely perform the functions of collecting and distributing information. First of all, its distinctive feature is a narrative style of reporting about socially significant stories, comments, and interpretations of events in such types, genres, and forms that allow readers, viewers, and listeners to absorb information, share it, and include it in communication activities, in other words, to take full advantage of the journalist’s work. The variety of forms, their visualization and virtualization serve to help create and strengthen communicative communities based on shared thoughts, interests, and hobbies, rather than on common location.

In networked journalism, society itself performs the functions of creating and distributing information. Therefore, presentation of material, its figurative and expressive means must have such properties and characteristics that would encourage a representative of the communicative community to share it with colleagues, like-minded people. In contrast to the traditional journalist, who

worked alone at all stages of collecting, processing and interpreting information, the modern journalist acts as a “commutation node”, in which many specialists and representatives of the active audience are engaged. These trends have led to the emergence of a new type of professional identity known as a “networked journalist”, who is considered as a subject of networked journalism.

Professional skills are still constitutive not only for the process of collecting information at the scene, but also for the subsequent text analysis, for the semantic substance of the collected information, its thematic and genre specificity, and its target orientation.

The authorship of a message, its analysis and commentaries are determined by networked practice, which depends on the sources of information used by journalists, the expert opinion, and the audience feedback. Many of these dependencies are conditioned by work in the “global network” and mediated by computer and digital technologies. The final product of modern journalistic activity is the result of interaction between professionals and various audience groups, who cooperate and adjust the meanings in stories and messages disseminated through information and digital technologies. In these complex interrelations and interdependencies of the information and communication process, there inevitably comes a stage when it is necessary to bring together all the collected material, facts, and opinions. For this purpose, a singular “analytical voice” is required, a voice of the author of the message, the narrator of the story (not necessarily an individual author; it could be a creative team). As a result of networked journalism activity in the conditions of multimedia, a cumulative media product appears that accumulates original authors’ stories enriched by interaction with various audience groups.

Having considered the characteristics of the modern journalist practice in the context of Internetization, multimedia, and rapid formation of communicative communities, we suggest that the future lies in communication models based on cooperation with various members of the audience, active participants of meaning making process. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that achieving a high level of professionalism in creating works, which could capture public interest, become a subject of public discussion, and a condition for shaping public opinion, is possible only through specialization and improvement of professional skills.

The patterns of multimedia information channels formation

Knowledge of text construction patterns in multimedia channels and features of audience perception is one of the conditions for the effective

use of various media communication channels and information and media platforms. According to the research, a multimedia or monomedia verbal-visual information news report which needs for 30 to 50 seconds of silent reading time consists of approximately 930 characters, but does not exceed 2500 characters. It has been empirically proven that a 40-seconds message of silent reading time consists of 12 sentences and 153 words; the average sentence length is 12.75 words (Sokolov, 2021).

There are other observations related to the standardized format that are also significant for the practice of media communication. This format contains a certain set of typological characteristics, such as genre, headline format, reading time, frequency of keywords in the text, degree of text originality, and etc. Remarkably, the identified patterns in the formation of the standardized format closely align with the requirements of search algorithms and audience needs (Sokolov, 2021).

The identification of the patterns in media communication is carried out by specialists in the field of media economics in accordance with a certain logic. As far as the modern media industry manifests itself as a rapidly growing commercial enterprise, media communication system develops according to financial and economic laws. In this context, a primary objective of media communication channels is to generate profit (Kolomiets, 2020), what we can observe in the operations of modern domestic print media, on television and radio (Dugin, 2021). A departure from studying the media enterprise activity as a commercial structure in favor of examining the process of creating journalistic texts is appropriate to Andrei Vyrkovsky's scientific position. According to the concept outlined in his doctoral thesis, "it is the editorial process that is the core that determines both the very existence of the media and the effectiveness of its activities" (Vyrkovsky, 2017).

In the practical activities of domestic media, the pursuit of profit has prevailed over their social functions for several decades. As a result, profits turn into irreparable loss of the worldview and behaviour patterns of several generations of Russians. The psychological law of "induced demand" suggests that population has been habituated to mindless pastime and primitive "entertainment", which serves as a distraction from acute life problems, and shapes worldviews and behavioural patterns.

In practice, journalists rarely consider a structure and a content of a communicative media model, an optimal length of a headline, a number of words in their emails, or readable text volume of the article, reportage, or news item. Meanwhile, science has developed optimal characteristics of texts, which

can be effective for media channels, information and communication platforms and meet the features of perception of different audience groups (Sokolov, 2021).

It is appropriate to use the results of socio-psycholinguistic research, according to which an optimal “tweet” size should be 100 characters, a standard post (the most “likeable”) should have no more than 80 characters, and a title length should not exceed six words for better memorization (Sokolov, 2021).

During the experiment, the subjects were able to remember only the first three and the last three words of any headline. Psychologists have also proven that the length of effective blog text should not exceed 1600 words. This number of words can be read in about seven minutes, which is determined by the length of time required for effective concentration of the reader’s attention. For example, a seven-minute media material with photographs contains around one thousand words, since the number of images reduces the amount of text (Sokolov, 2021).

According to the laws of perception, a speech on television should not exceed 18 minutes, what is the time required for one-step perception of information without shifting attention to extraneous activities. The laws of information perception should be taken into account when preparing newspaper articles, TV and radio programs. The material structure, the reporter’s lexical richness, and the author’s analytical commentary should be clear and comprehensible to the audience, and the content elements of the modern communicative model, temporal and rhythmic characteristics of news information, and presentation of analytical material should correspond to the audience’s socio-psychological perception.

The “Human Touch” technique is commonly used to reduce the distance between news events and the audience, focusing on the human aspect of any story, regardless of its topic or issue. RT (“Russia Today”) frequently utilizes the technique in its news programs, which consistently captures attention of the mass audience.

The visualized component of the modern media communication model

One of the main development trends in production and consumption of media communication product is related to the fact that audience is being more focused on the visualized data (Kolomiets, 2014, 2020). Television and computer images typically contain much more information than printed text. By imbuing a message with imagery, which affects the audience feelings and

therefore generates an emotional perception of events, the visual and expressive characteristics of video communication are more firmly imprinted in mass and specialized audience consciousness. In addition, a figurative structure of the video image, which looks more convincing than a traditional newspaper and magazine text, is considered to be more credible. It should be taken into account that in recent years generations have grown up for whom visualized messages are much more familiar than printed text. The young generation of media product users prefers mainly “live” pictures taken at the scene. Thus, it turns out that visualized information is one of the most important components of the “communicative turn” of the modern media communication and journalism model.

Conclusion

The analysis of media communication and journalism development reveals that modern theory of media communication and journalism is emerging under the influence of computing and digital, and information and communication technologies. Due to the digital transformations of the media system, society turns into a distinctive combined model of social cooperation. It is characterised by new forms of organization of virtual and actual reality, created by computer-mediated social networks of the Internet, digital platforms, websites, and other constituent elements of information and digital society.

The formation of social cooperation models, taking place under the influence of digital transformations in the media sphere, will require scientific conceptualization and practical application of humanitarian technologies in the near future. This will foster further development of the media communication industry and journalism as fundamental components of digital civilization. In the conditions identified in this article, the conceptual justification of media models appears to be a productive approach to developing a new theory of communicative action based on the continuity of theoretical and methodological foundations formed by the “linguistic turn”, “discursive model”, and “communicative turn”.

Thus, the “communicative turn” in the study of media industry gives grounds to believe that the current stage of formation and development of theory and practice of media and journalism communicative action can be considered as a methodological justification for the innovative theory of information and digital society.

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