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THE NEW PARADIGM OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION AS A RESULT OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract

This paper researches the participatory culture in new media and information consumption regarding the phenomenon of social media, content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites and blogs (e.g., Facebook), collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), and virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft). All these applications have widened the concept of sharing, what has resulted with change of traditional media gatekeeper. The research approach is qualitative and exploratory in nature, as the aim is to develop a theoretical argument based model of information consumption in environment in which the information quality is challenged by many individuals who create and dissiminate informations in digital environment. Primary findings are encompassed in the theoretical framework. Media fragmentation has led to fragmented dissemination of information and breakdown of traditional control structures, leading to amateur information dissemination.

Key words

media communication, media audience, media content producers, gatekeepers

Introduction

Communication is one of the many everyday activities that is interwined with all of human life so completely that we sometimes forget its role, importance and complexity. New information technologies have enabled greater interactivity and a greater degree of democracy and level of participation in the creation of media content. Modern means of communication have become so powerful communication tools not only for managing content, but also they have become a new battlefield for individual, group, technological and social conflicts and compromises. The world wide web today is a participatory community where both users and information sources co-create, share and modify content. Digital media production allows efficient and rapid organization of media mediation of visual messages which in this process become a permanent value that does not disappear – in

this way we get a digital asset as a value without an expiration date /**1**/. Information user today partly assumes the role of creator of visual aspects of information, so there is a repositioning in relation graphic designer - recipient.

Communication process is defined by its origin, historical, tehnological, cultural and social frames. When we talk about the cultural and social frames in which modern communication processes are happening, we have to define the historical and philosophical concept of modernism/postmodernism. The concept of modernism has its roots in the attempt to explain the meaning and significance of the social changes occurring in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century (the effects of industrialization, urbanization, political democracy on essentially rural and autocratic societies, changes in property relations). In modern society the world is experienced as a

human construction, so is the communication system and its essential parts. Modernism believed that the lives of people would improve thanks to science (humanely and altruistic use of science) and a world based on logic. Postmodernism means "after modern" which is formed with the combination of the word "post", which means "after" in English and French, and "modern".

Postmodernism is the term used to describe contemporary culture, or the very recent surroundings which we live amongst. It is an internal criticism and an effort to provide an alternative to modernism /**2**/. Baudrillard /**3**/ argues that postmodernism is comfortable with the commodification of culture (and its information/mass media products) and recognizes its power in the modern, industrialized world. He believes a new era of simulation has dawned where society is organized around simulation codes and models that replace production as the organizing principle of society. Baudrillard /**4**/coined the term "semiurgic" society in which signs take on a life of their own and that constitutes a new social order structured by models, codes and signs. Postmodern thought emphasises that people with different ethnic, cultural, social, class and economic frames of reference have very different realities. Postmodernism focuses on diverse, subjective, and local multiple truths by identifying and deconstructing underlying processes of power and discourse that shape social reality by asking how and why knowledge comes to be /**5**/. Hyper-realities are based on the idea that reality is constructed, and therefore it is possible to construct things that are more real than real /**6**/. Postmodernism implies that objective truths do not exists and in the postmodern age subjective observations and opinions will have to be enough. The goal according to Lyotard (1984) is not an anarchy of ideas as postmodernism is sometimes characterized, but a critique of the modern, an acknowledgment of the current world, and state of technology and the difficulty of legitimation of knowledge in this context. Lyotard /**7**/ was concerned about the meta-narratives that had become a substitution for knowledge and felt this led to a compartmentalization of knowledge and a lack of coherence in knowledge domains. Postmodernism focuses

on issues such as the link between knowledge and power, dissensus rather than consensus. Other postmodern trends are the link between power and ideology, the concept of hyper-reality, the challenge to rationality, the rejection of the distinction between truth and falsity, the rejection of metanarratives, and the lack of representation of minorities and marginalized groups /**8**/. All of this trends have found a perfect platform in todays information technology and opportunities provided by Web 2.0 technologies.

Based on this philosophy, we can ask ourselves are then contemporary very popular concepts of alternative truths and post-truth era just another logical consequence of ideas conceived in the core of postmodern thought? Different realities must lead to alternative truths. Fast development of new technologies has only accelerated the multiplication of alternative truths as products of alternative realities.

This paper will examine a contemporary information consumption in the context of postmodernism. The purpose is also to demonstrate how the fragmentation of traditional information production structures have been replaced by new amateur, self-produced information production further contributing to the acceleration of social changes. The goal is to define research questions for communication researchers that will include the challenges of postmodernity.

Methods

A literature review was carried out on the subject after determining the problem statements of the research. The literature is limited to the resources used in the study. These papers were examined with the document analysis method of the qualitative research pattern.

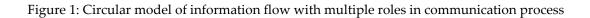The following question will tried to be answered with this research:

If we assume that information quality today is challenged by the lack of traditional gatekeepers and many individuals who create and dissiminate informations in digital environment, what are the effects on social reality?

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Document analysis includes the analysis of the written materials that contain information on the phenomenon aimed to investigate. The researches carried out on the social reflections of postmodern understanding were generally assessed with the document analysis method.

Theoretical framework and discussion

Information is consumed through a communicative process which begins by accessing the information from a source. In information science, search engines are considered information retrieving systems - IR systems and the process of retrieving information is considered an information search process (ISP). The most important IR system and the most dominant sources of information today is the commercial search engine. A great number of the population use these search engines to gather all forms of information. The search engine represents a gateway, a form of control owned and operated by private, for profit businesses. While they do not own the content, they have complete control over the view of that content. These information sources exist in a larger socio-economic framework which impacts the construction and distribution of information /**9**/. New graphic media discourse involves multiple media channels synergies, sharing of information content in multiple graphic presentations, allowing the user to select the information he wants to use, for how long and in what way /**10**/. According to Taylor /**11**/, today web provides information from a multitude of sources which include a variety of self-published sources such as blogs, wikis, discussion boards, news aggregators, news readers. For many of these information sources, the gatekeepers of the past are gone. Modern information technology provides access to vast information sources. The result is a huge offer of easily accessible information of increasingly questionable quality. The traditional gatekeepers who provided some level of quality control, validity and objectivity, have been set aside. Although, the actual roles and effectiveness of traditional gatekeepers has been often criticized, they did represent an intermediary role in the production and access of information resources. This phenomenon associated with modern technological develo-

pment was predicted by Toffler /**12**/ who referred to it as "prosumption", a term deriving from a combination of the terms producer and consumer, and has been a focus of study in recent years.

Communication history is showing the permament need for superiority and control over the all levels of communication (local, national, regional and global). Governments, organizations, institutions and interest groups – they always have had and always will try to have some control over the channel for communicating with the public. Media studies documents decreased production staff, consolidation and reduction of news offices domestically and internationally, reduction of news reporting and editorial staff, and reduction in television franchises (which report local news) – all efforts designed to improve profit margins (seek surplus value) with resulting reduction and quality in production of local and international stories /**13**/. This reduction in reporting represents a weakening of the information quality dimension of completeness since there are news stories (information) that are not being provided to the information seeker. Users can immerse themselves in social environments with an ever-expanding compendium of symbolic tools at their disposal to present their identities to others. In the internet environment, physical beings are transformed into digital self-entities charged with symbolic meaning and evolving dynamically /**14**/. Today's digital technology provides a rich range of multimedia cues in the form of photographs, videos, graphics, symbols and hyperlinks enabling users to create multidimensional identities /**15**/. As opposed to media like TV or print, where the amateurish is marginalized , Douglas /**16**/ emphasises that the internet is built to give outsized attention to the amateurish, the accidental - creators with no traditional skill or talent often become online celebrities for their work, and creators with skill or talent often suppress their abilities or manufacture amateurish conditions to better achieve so called the Internet Ugly aesthetic (it normalizes imperfection, objecting to the effect of magazines, TV shows, and corporate websites that use technical tools to build an artificial simulacrum of the world). Audiences have become more and more information satu-

rated or bombarded by the media on a daily basis. They are familiar with many texts, both current and from the past, making intertextual references entertaining.

Figure 1. shows the contemporary communication model with communication flux between creators of the message and users of the message. Every person with the access to the communication technology and minimal technical knowledge about it, can be a a source, gatekepeer and the consumer of the mediated message at the same time. This person with the multiple roles in an communication process is the basis of the new paradigm of participative culture created in the new media.

Figure 1: Circular model of information flow with multiple roles in communication process

Prosumers
You, we, they

gatekeepers, flag bearers, spokespersons, motivators, mobilizers and the source of inspiration and appeal

Prosumers
You, we, they

Source: Authors

New technology may offer new opportunities for social connectivity and the development of cultural identity, but also raises questions about equality of access to and ethical standards within these virtual communities /17/. Social movement studies have emphasized the role of social media in creating opportunity structures, organizational infrastructures, and spaces for the formation of counter-publics /18/, /19/. Social capital refers to the resources inherent in social relationships; it is considered the foundation of economic, political, and social development /20/. Theirs research (2016) indicates that Internet use and informational media use increase social capital and that societies seem to benefit from open, free, and pluralistic media systems as they support the production of social capital. Social networks are also changing the dynamics of communication and the dynamics of social changes: they are fast, they affect the communication strategies, the distribution of power and attention; using them is a cheap way of communication; they change media agenda, providing new space for discussion and they can increase transparency (if wanted). Kennedy /21/ argues that a framework for a theory of sharing is needed and she identifies three distinct perspectives in the literature: sharing as an economy driven by social capital; sharing as a mode of scaled distribution; and sharing as a site of social intensification. The Facebook statistics indicates that, as of August 2016, the average number of items shared by Facebook users daily is 4.75 billion.

Social networks open up new possibilities: mobilization, social awareness, control, representation, imagination, creation of alternative truths and alternative realities and new possibilities for data metrics. This affordable mass communication has become a mobilization tool, but it has also brought the risk of disinformation, populism and social irresponsibility.

According to Taylor /22/, when an information search is conducted on the internet, the hypertext interface of the web browser is most likely the medium used to consume the information and since the information is often read on a computer screen, in-depth coverage of a topic which would require a large number of pages is instead condensed into a smaller number of pages. Those who view this information may not recognize a fragment as such

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and may be confused about the nature and validity of the information being consumed through this interface.

If we assume that the information quality today is challenged by the lack of traditional gatekeepers and many individuals who create and dissiminate informations in digital environment, we can derive question for future researches:

Q1: If we cannot manage and control communication process in the ways originally thought, what would be alternative practices for best communication outcome?

Q2: Who are these possible participants/creators and what is their role and impact?

Q3: What are the implications for public communication when every man can be an active participant and have an impact on public communication without any real responsibility?

Q4: How do new postmodern forms such as social networks influence public communication?

Q5: What would be appropriate gatekeeping solutions for public communication to ensure comprehensive and meaningful participation for different publics and audiences?

Q6: How should practitioners and scholars research new communication modes based on fiction or "alternative truths"?

Q7: How should media and communication practitioners perform their media role in hyper-reality?

Postmodern media presumes that the audience is media literate and familiar with a wide range of media references and needs a high level of stimulation. But, media literacy is a wide term, and in shouldn´t be considered superficially. According to Garcia Ruiz et all. /**23**/ media literate person, a modern »prosumer« knows how to arrange the necessary resources for generating creative and innovative content; he/she is *a reviewer*, of the content he or she receives, as well as that which s/he creates, with a critical, thoughtful and pluralistic eye; he or she has to be *an observer* of the message's production and emission processes, as well as its impact, taking into account the possible audiences; he/she should be *a selector* of the content and a unifier of the criteria for quality, equality, inclusion, and the maximal diffusion of the message, *a manipulator* of the technological tools that are adapted to the new communications media, as well as *an identifier* of stereotypes, bad practices, abuse and lack of veracity of some messages that are distributed through communication media and social networks, *a booster* of the communication and interaction between emitters and receptors, *the organizer* of the resources that are required for the production of creative, critical and responsible content...This great number of roles for one person, indicates the necessety of media litearcy in the modern communication world.

Conclusion

Google now processes over 40,000 search queries every second on average which translates to over 3.5 billion searches per day and 1.2 trillion searches per year worldwide (Internet live stats). According to a 2013 comScore public release /**24**/ as of December 2012, Google enjoyed a 65.2% share of web search volume worldwide, with 114.7 billion searches that month. Baidu had a 8.2% share, Yahoo 4.9% , Yandex 2.8% and Microsoft sites (mostly Bing) 2.5% . We can say they are the new gatekeepers, who have a different way of information filtering then the traditional gatekeepers. They have transferred the responsibility for the accuracy, quality and relevance of information to an audience who is not always able to effectively evaluate information. There are many reasons - information overload, media illiteracy, lack of accountability for power of (in)accurate information released to the media. The almost near-zero production and distribution cost of the internet removes the barriers for active participation, therefore, skills for critically using the search engines are indispensable. When users will be capable of both consuming and producing media messages in a free, responsible, critical and creative way, we will have a meaningful platform for all- to all communication. Information theory generally does not require information to be true, thus information that is false is still information /**25**/. Because of that, users need to develop such skills for evaluating messages and facts offered by the new gatekeepers – search engines. They also need to learn about the mechanisms behind how they work and

how they can influence the public. The key role and the appropriate gatekeeping solution is in the media literacy, which will result with the higher media responsibility. Access to technology and the Internet is having a positive impact on all levels, individual, family, professional and social. This changes can be seen as a cultural, social and communicational process of technologies adapting to the process of creating new models of living and understanding of all citizens on important issues for the development of man and society as a whole /**26**/. However, it seems that the influence of the media has not been accompanied by the promotion of media literacy. Bazalgette /**27**/ emphasizes the importance of media literacy in the defense of the individual against the negative influence of the media - media literacy by him includes skills that will enable individual to critically deconstruct the media and prevent manipulative effect. In the situation in which we cannot longer control communication process because of the complexity of the stakeholders roles in the communication process, we find ourselves in the constant situation of crisis communication with unknown communication outcome.

Online users bypass professional gatekeepers such as editors in traditional media so the gatekeeping function shifts from content producers to search engines and content consumers. This for sure is a a communication turn that will be accompanied with the revision and the supplementation of existing communication models and theories.

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Unique Searchers Dips Slightly. Search Engine Land

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NOVA PARADIGMA PARTICIPATIVNE KOMUNIKACIJE KAO POSLJEDICA PARTICIPATIVNE KULTURE DIGITALNIH MEDIJA

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Sažetak

Ovaj rad istražuje participativnu kulturu u novim medijima i načine korištenja i kreiranja medijskog sadržaja uzimajući u obzir fenomen društvenih medija, aplikacija za dijeljenje sadržaja (npr. YouTube), društvenih mreža i blogova (npr. Facebook), projekata temeljenih na suradnji (npr. Wikipedia) i virtualni svijet igara (npr. World of Warcraft). Sve ove aplikacije su proširile koncept dijeljenja što je rezultiralo promjenama kod uloga tradicionalnih vratara u medijima. Istraživački pristup je kvalitativan, jer je cilj razviti teorijski argumentirani model o korištenju informacija u okruženju u kojem je kvaliteta informacija ugrožena sudjelovanjem mnogih pojedinca koji stvaraju i šire informacije u digitalnom okruženju. Primarna razmišljanja su iznesena u teorijskom okviru fragmentacije medija koja je dovela do fragmentiranog širenja informacija i sloma tradicionalnih upravljačkih struktura, što dovodi do amaterskog stvaranja i širenja informacija.

Ključne riječi

medijska komunikacija, mediji, publika, proizvođači medijskog sadržaja, vratari