Media analyses

Competences that you gained through completing the other lessons that are included in this online course and through additional resources will help you to effectively analyse media pieces and their context. However, there are still several topics that cannot be missed out to give you a broader understanding of the current media world.

A) Modern types of journalism: engaged, solution, citizen

In general, new methods and tools are being developed to enable producers to create high-quality and engaging content (e.g. interactive videos) and audience to see between and behind the lines. There are now more opportunities for connections with an audience: e-participation tools, discussion forums. However, already before the digital era there were practices of audience engagement, e.g. interactive shows, during which people were able to influence the direction of the story.

In the digital era, media and journalists are becoming more open and are looking for effective ways of engaging and interacting with an audience. **Engaged journalism/media** is an approach that strengthens their relationship and increases trust in the media. Audience has more opportunities to express their opinion or share information, and is able to define the importance of topics and be involved in agenda or decision making (similar to e-participation in the field of active citizenship). Journalists/media makers and their audience can even co-create the content. More people can also contribute to the content of media by producing it.

Citizen journalism/media refers to the practice of the audience creating content which is then published and distributed by the media. Both parties are not collaborating on the production of content, but this method is beneficial for both of them - media get more content, people and stories they cover gain more visibility. Ultimately it also helps to bring people closer to the media, bridge the gap between them, and raise trust.

Solution journalism is a method of coverage of topics that responses to societal problems. It continues with telling the story where other methods usually end, because it focuses on analysis of potential solutions. It doesn't look for or come up with perfect solutions, but offers options and alternatives.

B) Prosumption and produsage

Line between producers and consumers is now more blurred. Concepts of prosumption or produsage emerged thanks to digitalisation of media.

A prosumer is a person both consuming and producing information or media content. There are six basic types of prosumers: DIY prosumers, self-service prosumers, customizing prosumers, collaborative prosumers, monetised prosumers, and economic prosumers[1]. The terms prosumer and prosumption were coined in 1980 by Alvin Toffler[2].

Produsage is user-led content creation. This term was coined by Australian media scholar Axel Bruns. Examples are citizen journalism or social media. It's similar to commons-based peer production, where large numbers of people cooperate on creation of the content[3].

C) Wisdom of the crowd

Aristotle is credited as the first person writing about the "wisdom of the crowd" in his work titled Politics. It refers to the collective opinion of a group of individuals.

This concept gains importance in the digital era and is explaining assumptions on which platforms such as Quora, Stack Exchange, or Wikipedia are based.

On one hand people are less dependent on opinion or symbolic leaders, on the other hand they can be influenced by the group (crowd or social bubble). On the basis of *criteria separating wise crowds from irrational ones* formulated by James Surowiecki, wise crowds are characterised by diversity of opinions, independence of their members, decentralization (people can specialize and be focused on a local level), aggregation of information or opinions that can support decisions of the whole group, and trust of members towards the group. The opposite are irrational crowds.

In relation to engaged media/journalism it's important to mention three main types of disorganized decisions described by James Surowiecki that can support this approach:
- Cognition – mutual cognition of needs, audience can recognise important local topics better and faster than media leaders.
- Coordination (of actions) – allowing the audience to enter discussion about topics/agenda can ensure the media will address local needs.
- Cooperation – people can form networks with media producing content at a local level without interferences of headquarters[4].

D) Sources and communication

Original source (also a primary source) is a person or organisation making the information known first (e.g. author, witness, conversation partner, but also media). Recipient is then a person or

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[1] Lang, B., Dolan, R., Kemper, J., Northey, G. (August 6, 2020), Prosumers in times of crisis: definition, archetypes and implications, Journal of Service Management, Emerald Publishing Limited, Retrieved from: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JOSM-05-2020-0155/full/html

[2] Wikipedia (April 21, 2021), Prosumer, Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosumer#:~:text=A prosumer is an individual,the words provider and consumer

[3] Wikipedia (January 2, 2021), Produsage, Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Produsage#:~:text=Produsage is the type of,passive consumption and active production

[4] Based on the book Surowiecki, J. (2005). The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter Than the Few. Anchor Books. ISBN 978-0-385-72170-7, available online: https://books.google.cz/books/about/The_Wisdom_of_Crowds.html?id=bA0c4aYTD6gC&redir_esc=

organisation receiving the information (audience, listener etc.). Usually the information doesn't get directly from the original source to the final recipient, as there are several intermediaries involved. Sources then become secondary, tertiary, etc. The information can be distorted in the process and its variations can come from several sources. Therefore it's important to understand types and flows and communication and some concepts that explain why people miss information even if there is no distortion (e.g. cognitive dissonance theory).

Relevant types of communication:
Their combination is very common nowadays, e.g. in engaged journalism or on social media. Type also depends on the perspective: one to many type of communication from the perspective of, for example TV, would be regarded as many to one from the viewpoint of the viewer who receives other information from other sources.

- *One to one:* conversation between two people, personal interaction between medium and audience member.

- *One to many:* the most common type - traditional media, digital media, and people publishing there; influencers; other very active users of social media; politicians.

- *Many to one:* social media in general – passive users are only receiving information (and do not interact). Also when followers interact with influencers or the audience interacts with media.

- *Many to many:* growing type - social media, discussion groups, live-chats, various online communication platforms, citizen journalism.

- *One-way communication:* audience is passive (mainly in case of one to many or many to one type of communication)

- *Two-way communication:* audience is active or even engaged in co-creation of content.

Flow of communication:
- **One-step flow of communication:** Information from the original source reaches the recipient directly. It is gaining importance again and is supported by diversification of media and customisation of content.
  Sources of information are transmitting it directly to the audience without interference. Gate-keeping effect of big media is decreasing. Content, especially advertisement, is reaching the audience on the basis of a person's preferences or behaviour in the online space.
  On the other hand, people are influenced by previously gained knowledge and experiences, which serve as a filter of information.
  Mis- and disinformation creators are counting on this model.

- **Hypodermic needle model (magic bullet theory):** It's not always related to one-step flow of communication.
  Information provided by the media reaches its recipient directly and has an immediate effect. This model may work today in the case of powerful messages, when someone

strongly believes the media/source of information, or when a person doesn't think about presented information and accepts it as fact). The audience is passive.

- **Two step flow of communication and multi step flow of communication:** Indirect, original message is processed and presented by one or several intermediaries (e.g. influencers, media, friends, or colleagues) before it reaches the final recipient.

  Opportunities for an audience to be active (become an intermediary) or even co-create the content.

  Communication in the media space is now two-way thanks to discussion forums, emails, social media, competitions, and feedback forms that enable continuous engagement of customers.

  Customisation is also based on two-way communication, but in this case the customer (audience) is represented by digital data. Therefore the entrepreneurs, marketers, or advertisers need to supplement their knowledge of traditional media communication with that of technical matters, e.g. how algorithms on social media work. That is also relevant for increasing monetization of published content.

Important concepts from the behavioural psychology:
- Opinion leaders: information provided by these people changes the opinions of others.

- Symbolic leaders: people, organisations, or institutions having an indirect influence through symbols: celebrities, politicians, but media as well).

- Cognitive dissonance theory: people follow only media that confirm their opinions.

- Spiral of silence: people/media with minority opinion stay rather silent.

Customisation:

This concept refers to advertisement and other media content that is tailored to the audience and potential customers, specifically to their (assumed) needs and preferences. It is also based on two-way communication, but in this case the customer (audience) is represented by digital data. Therefore the media makers, entrepreneurs, marketers, or advertisers need to supplement their knowledge of traditional media communication with that of technical matters, e.g. how algorithms on social media work.

Customisation can have four kinds of effects:
- neutral: people just receive content based on their previous preferences or behaviour online.

- negative are twofold: a) people remain in social bubbles in which misinformation and hate-speech is being spread; b) even if only facts and unbiased content are spread in the social bubble, it's never good to stay only within its boundaries.

- risk of automatic evaluation, which means that some online tools may wrongly evaluate a person's preferences, because they don't consider individual needs (e.g. questionnaires before elections) or use just the internet browser history (e.g. advertisement customised on the basis of previously visited websites).

- positive (people receive information they might miss otherwise, e.g. on the basis of their behaviour online or who are their friends on social media).

E) Social responsibility of media

Social responsibility of media means to think about and consider various effects that the published media content may have on the public. It is a feeling of responsibility towards the audience and ultimately the whole society.

Nowadays, it can also refer to ensuring digital safety of the audience (secure websites and tools), empowering people to be resistant to disinformation and harmful content (through media products and learning opportunities). It applies not only to the public service media and it should not be confused with a corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Being socially responsible doesn't mean that media and information producers are self-censoring themselves. On the contrary, it supports independence of media and broad public discussion about their role and content.

Social responsibility of media helps to avoid:
- Commercialisation (excessive use of advertisement in public service media, or dependency on the corporate sector) and negative effects of customisation.
- Intentional distortion (manipulation, e.g. disinformation, fake-news) or unintentional distortion of information or media content – including unprofessionalism (e.g. misinformation, bad quality of content, unverified information, funny headlines, various mistakes, bad grammar and strange sentences).
- Spread of harmful content: hate and divisive speech, defamation.

F) Media regulations

Social responsibility as such is not regulated, therefore it can be defined as a set of internal or personal rules. However, media are regulated by codes of ethics, professional codes of conduct, media councils, or media law. In pluralistic society, such laws or councils do not interfere in freedom of media as long as they follow the ethical principles and respect the other laws.

Media must not publish content that supports disinformation, harmful content, or illegal behaviour. They should also take all steps necessary to avoid that the published content causes any harm.

In the case of defamation they can, however, prove that it was needed to publish certain information through defences of *honest opinion* (statement of opinion and not a statement of fact), of *truth* (the statement is true), and of *public interest* (defendant reasonably believes that publishing the statement was in the public interest)[5].

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[5] Carruthers Law (2021), Defamation Defences, Retrieved from:
https://www.carruthers-law.co.uk/our-services/defamation/defamation-defences/

Serious harm and defences mentioned above are defined in Defamation Act 2013 of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. In this context, the media should do ***serious harm test***[6] – ask questions to check whether the work can cause a serious harm to someone's reputation (defamation, libel, etc.)[7].

Likewise, they should think about possible negative effects on the audience, even if there is no legal regulation (***potential harm test***). When it comes to legal proceedings, the defences mentioned above may apply as well, in justified cases.

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[6] Little, A. (October 2, 2019), Defamation – test of serious harm, Hill Dickinson LLP, Retrieved from:
https://www.hilldickinson.com/insights/articles/defamation-test-serious-harm
[7] Legislation.gov.uk (2013), Defamation Act 2013, Retrieved from:
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