

MEDIA ECOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND HYBRIDIZATION

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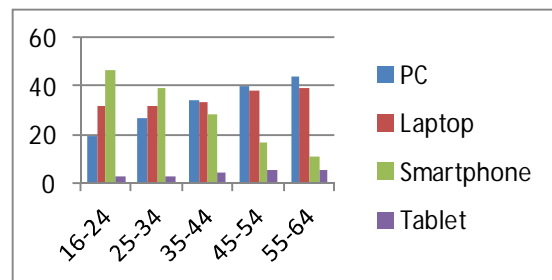
Abstract- The technical possibility of combining different media languages in modern mobile communication devices is facilitating the emergence of new hybrid forms. The similar features of the new mobile devices, such as laptops, smartphones, tablets, etc. and their interchangeability contributed to their widespread deployment and usage in recent years. By acquiring meta-media character through their ability to combine all existing forms of communication – written, aural, visual, audiovisual, etc. and based on Internet technology, modern communication products are combining different expressive means of communication. The article reveals the basic dimensions of media convergence, which facilitate the interchange between different media. It also focuses on one of its essential consequences – the status-quo of the new media hybrid products. Its emphasis is on those of their dimensions that contribute to the erosion of the media ecosystem, such as these media explications which contain combination of untruths and half-truths, intolerant language, etc. in traditional and new media formats, thus contaminating media atmosphere.

Key words- media ecology; media convergence; media hybridity

I. INTRODUCTION

Firstly the cell phone and consequently - the smartphone in combination with Internet are firmly established as meta-media for realizing of communication of all of kinds - audio, visual, audiovisual, written, etc. The mobile phones with built-in Internet nowadays are owned by people of all ages in nearly all parts of the world. Today, more than 80 percent of the Internet users possess smartphones in addition to PCs. Data, provided by the World Agency Global Web Index reveal that the percentage of the smart phone users follows closely the users of the personal computers/laptops - respectively 91 and 80 percent. At the third place the Agency indicates tablets with 47 percent. They are followed by game consoles and smart TVs. The last two places are allocated to smartwatches and smartwristbands. Only 2 percent of the respondents do not own any of them In this study, the Agency states further on, that 75 percent of the smartphone users use mobile internet as well. Averagely the daily usage of smartphone has raised in 2016 with 40 minutes, compared to 2012 - from 1.45 hrs. to 1.85 hrs. in 2016. The PCs have been increasingly replaced by mobile laptops and mobile phones. The study of the Global Web Index also notes the tendency to decline of tablet usage, inclusively among the 16-24 year olds[1].

The data provides a ground for the supposition that the internet-based meta-media nature of the new mobile communication devices and their convergence and interchangeability in different contexts lay in the basis of their mass dissemination, unrelatively towards time, place, age, gender, etc.



Source: Global Web Index Get the data

II. CHANGING OF NEW MOBILE DEVICES ATTITUDES

The attitude towards these new meta-media has evolved in different ways for different countries over time, but this evolution has very similar characteristics in all cases

Today they have been associated with their utilitarian application, as well as with other traditional and new media.

Two studies conducted in 2016 in Bulgaria found that mobile media:

- have and preserve their similar meta-media characteristics;
- are interchangeable in various contexts;
- are forming a new mobile determined culture of behavior*.

The similar characteristics of the mobile meta media are based on their multi-functionality, on their meta-

* The two representative sociological surveys on the use of internet and mobile phones in the first half of 2008 and at the end of 2016 have been conducted in New Bulgarian University and at the University of National and World Economy by the authors of this article.

media features, and are related above all to their providing the possibility for:

- speed in making contact;
- using them practically everywhere;
- personal freedom of communication;
- selection (of telephone calls and electronic letters);
- hybridity-combining written and oral communication (sending and receiving SMS texts and e-mail messages and sending attached packages).

Their interchangeability in various contexts is due to their similarity of characteristics and is giving rise to new processes of restructuring of communications.

The entire history of culture is, in fact, a history of the restructuring of communications. These restructurings are indicators of the introduction of concrete media, and have even served as labels of whole epochs: the age of traditional written culture, the age of electronic culture, etc.

The modern restructurings of communications are far more dynamic. Their inherent feature is mobility. In other words, the constant characteristic of modern restructurings of communication areas is their mobility and interchangeability.

Modern restructurings of the communication area have become more intense and dynamic due to:

- cost of the services;
- area (the presence of Internet or of mobile phones);
- the temporal segments – time zones – e-mails or text messages;
- the degree of involvement of a person and the in access to information.

Dependence on cost. Cost proves to be decisive for the structuring of communication areas in all studies.

Very important was the response given in this respect for the mobile phones - 34,6 percent of the respondents, mainly young people; important for 36,5 percent; more or less important for 18,9 percent not very important for 6,3 percent; not important for only 0,3 percent. The restructuring of the communication area brought about by the new media is related to cost of their usage and is economically determined. Other research on the topic supports this approach.

Arguments related to the spatial aspect are also adduced with regard to the restructuring of the communication area.

Dependence on space. The restructuring of the communication area can also be based on where the possessor of the mobile media is located. Thus the space can prove to be restrictive or advantageous for the use of one of the two media.

Dependence on time zone. Time zones often determine the use of certain media in communication usage. Electronic mail is a substitute for the telephone call when there is a night/day difference between time zones. In fact text messaging plays a similar role. There may be variations. The similar characteristics make it possible to use the separate media almost interchangeably in time.

Dependence on a person's engagement in work (accessibility) This dependence refers to people who

are extremely busy or are engaged in activities that exclude interruption and in which the use of mobile phones is undesirable; it also refers to those for whom it is known beforehand that they will not or will probably not respond to a call.

The iinterchanging of different new media have positioned the media convergence as a sustainable and irreversible process with mobile dimensions [2,3].

III. NEW CONVERGENTLY DETERMINED COMMUNICATION-CULTURAL (HYBRID) PRACTICES

With the introduction of the Internet and the new communication-cultural (hybrid) devices, a new dimension of culture connected with mobility has been generated:

-the new media culture has sustained predominant youthful appearance. Youths have the highest percentage with regard to: number of possessed mobile phones and phone calls made; frequency of logging into the Internet; creation of new practices of agenda setting.

- the new cultural forms of communicating with friends and relatives. Interpersonal communications between friends and relatives are increasing and the electronic mode of conducting them is growing in share. Mobile-determined communication is starting to predominate over direct face-to-face contacts.

- a new structuring of written communication culture. The survey data indicate that there is a new situation of structuring of written communication, with a growing share of electronic letters and a decrease to a minimum of traditional letter-writing and stationary telephone calls. There is an increased restructuring and concentration of writing in the mobile media in terms of: firstly, number of acts of communication per unit of time; secondly, change of technique of mediation; and thirdly, of materialization in different products. The new capacity for written communication through mobile media is, ultimately, a new revival of the letter, though greatly modified. The modifications and varieties of written communication through text messaging, e-mails, chat, etc., have given rise to a new written culture with a youthful character; the new linguistic equivalent of this culture is a hybrid mix of national and international languages, a concentration of verbal and non-verbal (emoticons) explications as a sum of digital and lexical signs and symbols. This new written culture, respectively reading culture – a predominantly youthful one – has revived written communication and accelerated the processes of reading [4,5,6].

- instantenous feedback. Text messaging (SMS) has taken over the stage and left a modest place for telegrams, while chat, e-mail, conference connections, etc., have turned traditional feedback into a nearly instantaneous connection. In fact, this

instantaneous mode of feedback is the most revolutionary development of mediated written communications, which speed has evolved for centuries. This almost paradigmatic cultural change is tantamount to a revolution in written culture.

-transforming individual participation from passive to active act. The individual is turning from recipient into communicator, from viewer into author, from consumer into producer, from contemplator into disseminator. He/she may often play the role of photo reporter, journalist, photographer, movie director, etc., contributing to the creation of the hybrid audiovisual culture. The uploading of video clips to specialized sites like YouTube is often used by world media organizations when setting up their programs. Such video clips are used as a visual or audiovisual argument in respective verbal explications in TV programs, and also as separately included audiovisual materials [7,8].

- conversion of an individual in a single media unit. As creator and disseminator of his/her own "production", the individual assumes the features of an independent media unit. A separate person assumes the role of a sort of independent media also by creating personal blogs, vlogs, podcasts, etc., in the net; this is a strong argument in support of the idea of mediatized society, presented some years ago [9].

The dynamic restructuring of the communication space and the transforming the audiences from passive to active proved ambiguous challenges to media convergence [10]. Meta-media formats started to obtain non-ecologically hybrid character.

IV. MEDIA HYBRIDITY

Common to all changed cultural patterns is the ability to combine them into hybrid formats. The similar characteristics of mobile media and their interchangeability in different contexts cause many convergent processes of hybrid character, unprecedented in the history of communication and cultural content.

On the other hand, their ever-expanding orientation towards the main sources of information and entertainment, as well as the overwhelming use of mobile media by young people positions the issues of media hybridity and ecology with particular urgency. "Conventional boundaries between news and entertainment, between public affairs and popular

culture, between actual and fictitious models are becoming more porous" [10]. The mass media have lost their monopoly on news journalists who started to integrate information shared daily in social media. Many journalists do not want to be dependent on their editors and news managers and start their own news initiatives [11].

CONCLUSION

Media convergence that facilitates hybrid media products and make hybridity the rule rather than the exception in the journalism practices started processes of media erosion. Representative sociological studies that took place in Bulgaria in 2009 and 2016, and a content analysis of 2016 revealed that media convergence and changed model media practices result in a trend of increased violations of media "ecosystem" and abuse of media hybridization. The parameters and the sustainability of such a trend can be verifiable in future content-analysis and expert researches.

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