

AXIOLOGY OF POLITICAL JOURNALISM: DEVELOPING AN ALGORITHM FOR THE STUDY OF MASS COMMUNICATION

AXIOLOGIA DO JORNALISMO POLÍTICO: DESENVOLVIMENTO DE UM ALGORITMO PARA O ESTUDO DA COMUNICAÇÃO DE MASSA*

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Abstract: The article describes and analyzes the research methods of political journalism in the axiological context. For a researcher, appealing to values means diving into the space of meanings and interpretations, which are difficult to grasp within the framework of the positivist epistemological paradigm that dominates the Western research tradition. There is a need to combine the interpretivist and positivist paradigms in the study of political journalism through the prism of values. Another problem consists in the analysis of empirical data. The use of quantitative methods entails a risk of underestimating the subjective interpretations of political events in journalism, while qualitative methods are not always representative in a broad context. The authors propose an algorithm of research in the sphere of political journalism axiology that accounts for a variety of methods used in the study of mass communications.

Keywords: Political journalism. Value analysis. Positivism. Interpretivism. Axiology of journalism.

Resumo: O artigo descreve e analisa os métodos de pesquisa do jornalismo político no contexto axiológico. Para um pesquisador, apelar para valores significa mergulhar no espaço de significados e interpretações, que são difíceis de entender dentro da estrutura do paradigma epistemológico positivista que domina a tradição da pesquisa ocidental. Há uma necessidade de combinar os paradigmas interpretivista e positivista no estudo do jornalismo político através do prisma dos valores. Outro problema consiste na análise de dados empíricos. O uso de métodos quantitativos implica um risco de subestimar as interpretações subjetivas dos eventos políticos no jornalismo, enquanto que os métodos qualitativos nem sempre são representativos em um contexto amplo. Os autores propõem um algoritmo de pesquisa na esfera da axiologia do jornalismo político que dá conta de uma variedade de métodos utilizados no estudo da comunicação de massa.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo político. Análise de valores. Positivismo. Interpretivismo. Axiologia do jornalismo.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are good reasons for analysts to reject the temptations of the evaluative approach. The latter is difficult to separate from the subjective attitude to the subject of study, due to which M. Weber's commandment to leave one's beliefs outside the laboratory door in social-humanitarian research is sometimes no more than a good wish. Yet the need for reliable knowledge obtained in compliance with the scientific principles of its discovery, nevertheless, dominates. There is no need to state this each time, although sometimes it needs to be done. For example, this applies to studies in the area of political journalism axiology, where the central category of scientific knowledge is *value*, which needs to be handled with exceptional caution due to its proneness to a subjective point of view.

The definition of value and the degree of its objective or subjective presence in the characteristics of animate and inanimate nature, the social world included, remains a topic of debate (Shokhin 2000). Although the presence of values in human life is universally recognized, their list changes throughout history and is being constantly revised. For this reason, the identification of values in socio-political processes is marked by incompleteness and spawns acute controversy/conflict. As a result of this, there is a temptation to replace the identification of the value in the object under study with the procedure of evaluation, which corresponds to the ambivalence of both the evaluator and the result of the evaluation. Naturally, evaluation itself is inevitable in the study of the life of society, the only question is how it is produced. The ambivalence of evaluation can be eliminated if the procedure of scientific analysis is made more rigorous and if flatly understood evaluation is abandoned. In other words, it is necessary to develop criteria for the appraisal apparatus, as well as an algorithm for the research procedure/model of analysis, which is essential for the axiological study of political journalism, in which the ideological positions of its authors are most tangible. Developing a research model "helps to formalize the events taking place in society. The fact is that political life is fairly recurrent. Most of what happens is not entirely unexpected, in fact, the element of surprise indicates that we have an a priori idea of how things might unfold and we are able to recognize the fact of the unexpected turn of events" (Isakov 2012, 134).

The inevitability of the difference of ideological positions of the authors of journalistic texts means that events can be evaluated by them from opposed points of view. Yet we should also note the paradox of the situation – the different assessments can imply

the same value of, for example, freedom, democracy, and the inalienable rights of the individual. Both authors of journalistic texts and political media analysts are aware of this fact. While evaluativeness acts as a weakness of the research procedure, the value analysis of the meanings generated in journalistic texts acts as a condition for the objectivity of cognition (Gureeva 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The need to deepen the theory of value analysis of the media and expand the subject of research is raised by the growing demand of society for the understanding and evaluation of the processes occurring in the modern media environment, which are no longer confined to the traditional media or the Internet. Much of what was once objectively “inaccessible and distant” has suddenly become “near-reachable” in our imagination because, as philosophers argue, “we have been thrown into a world of decisions made by others, but the foundations of those decisions elude us” (Savchuk & Ocheretianyi 2021, 10). Moreover, the variety of content in the media environment has expanded, and the number of media platforms – messengers, telegram channels, video hosting platforms – has increased. As a result, the value analysis of facts, phenomena, and processes of digital media communications is one of the most important methods of satisfying society’s demand for new knowledge.

Journalism no longer dominates the information life of society; it has entered a highly competitive media communication environment where the technological revolution reserves everyone an unhindered entrance to the network space and where a stratified media society has formed – according to the levels of access and orientation in the Internet, culture, and education. The stratification of the media society is different from that of real society, and thus reproduces a different value-political system. The stratified media society “replaces real reality, taking on the function of the only source of knowledge and perceptions of the world around us” (Volodenkov 2016, 127) and even of a new space of cultural and political conflict (Koukoutsaki-Monnier & Seoane 2021). There has formed a “hybrid reality” (Ocheretianyi 2019, 110), which largely corresponds to the practices of hybrid conflicts of our time, there is a certain distortion of the semantic space of the public sphere – under the influence of media discourses, the formerly objectively stable values are replaced in the public consciousness by the results of subjective evaluation. Furthermore, all this is complemented by the binary nature of the meanings broadcast by journalism,

which is natural for journalism.

The essence of the meanings emerging in journalism is ambivalent: 1) the author-journalist's understanding and evaluation of the world, 2) a retranslation of the perception of reality already established in society. Meanings are generated by a person's rational and emotional response to the environment and reflect socially significant ideals and values. Researchers' focus on the value structure of journalistic works has led to their increased attention to the philosophical theory of values. This increased interest is, of course, spontaneous, yet nevertheless objective, followed by attention to the value components of the journalistic profession – the political, cultural, and moral. Mass media theorists admit: “Modern perceptions of the means of mass communication make it possible to consider the informational message as a transmission of a value” (Khochunskaja 2012, 214). At the same time, the flip side of the issue – the actualization of the opposition to the value polarization of society – is no less important.

Today, the value dimension of the world is split into two: the applied aspects of axiological knowledge have taken a step forward: axiologies of medicine, education, science, politics, religion, and journalism have emerged. However, the expected “value turn” in the science of media/political journalism has not yet occurred. A similar situation is observed in other fields of research, wherever the applied aspects of axiology have found their application, primarily as a tool for studying something. Thus, the value theory of journalism is still far from being complete. That is, the value theory, the primary element of which is consideration of values as the main basis for the dynamics of the mass media and their development in the 21st century is primary. This is why we will focus our attention on the instrumental capabilities of value theory.

The axiology of political journalism, in addition to its philosophical foundation, is based on ideas about political journalism as a media reality, which are organically combined with an understanding of politics in general. “As a field of professional subject specialization, political journalism varies in content; it is structured differently depending on the channels of information and involves certain authorial forces in its orbit. Political journalism relies on a broad normative (legal and ethical) base, which is somewhat different from the one regulating mass media activity in general. Political journalism exists in the form of works that use sources of information, genres, literary and stylistic techniques, etc., that are specific to political journalism” (Korkonosenko 2015, 18). In light of the above, we will view the axiology of political journalism as, on the one hand, a stage of the formation of the applied aspects of the philosophical theory of values in respect to journalism, and on

the other – as a value-orienting approach to the study of media practices in the sphere of politics.

At this point, we will define the object of interest on the part of political journalism axiology – the political field of journalism. Political scientists point out an opposition of antagonistic principles: “a value is realized when it is opposed with an anti-value, understanding the good means contrasting it with evil” (Bagdasarian & Sulakshin 2012, 179). This is the view of practice in which the abstraction of evil is objectified by the subjects of the political field of journalism and the good and the evil interact creating a social dynamic. Values in statistics are meaningless. Their understanding comes from the recognition of the conflict that accompanies life (or is life itself) in the social, cultural, and political spheres. A closer look at media practice reveals that any conflicts in the information space in one way or another acquire a political connotation and are implanted in the political field of journalism. The constant functioning of socially apparent conflicts is considered one of the most important properties of the political field of journalism and is a form of running information processes in it, the essence of which is reduced to the clash of opposing value principles in the form of semantic wars of varying intensity. The outcome of the political clash of values in the mass media should be seen as a representative object of axiological analysis, in which the most important aspects of the functioning of values in society converge.

However, even in this case, an uncontroversial answer is unlikely to be found, because the axiological approach to the evaluation of reality is itself contradictory, all the more so in an era of political turbulence. “The problem of values was inescapably arising at the times when cultural tradition was devalued and society’s ideological foundations were discredited” (Avdeeva 2012, 265). If provocations of crises and the criminalization of society are spreading, it becomes clear that “certain actors in society have special goals and values (as anti-values in relation to the integral sociosystem)” (Panarin et al 2020, 57). The collapse of society’s value system is the main internal threat to any state, as stated by the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu at a meeting with young people: “All this is due to the fact that society is gradually decaying” (RBK, Politics 2021). The individual of the “digital reality” is not isolated: no matter what efforts the authorities make, their ability to protect the citizens of the country from destructive ideas is too small. This is why the individualization of thinking is so important for maintaining the integrity of society; under these conditions, “of critical importance is the independent identification of values,” since “attempts to improve the system by borrowing values from other systems ... may in fact

lead to degradation” (Alekseev & Alekseeva 2016, 11). Thus, we consider the threats to the value system of society coming from the digital space, destruction in relation to the spiritual life of society as the actual problem field of creating the axiology of political journalism.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE DEVELOPED ALGORITHM

The methodology of the study of political journalism relies both on general scientific principles and the approaches developed in the theory of journalism and mass communications, and with respect to value analysis – in the area of research of journalism axiology. The structure of scientific knowledge on the object of our study is a collection of logically interrelated parameters of general scientific, humanitarian (political science), branch (theoretical-journalistic), conceptual (axiological), and paradigmatic components. To create the methodology of political journalism axiology, fundamental are the provisions on the paradigm as a model of problem statement adopted as an example of research problem resolution (Kuhn 2009, 264-272), on the scientific research program as a set and sequence of theories tied together by a constantly changing foundation, the unity of their fundamental ideas and principles (Lakatos 2008, 359), on the rational nature of scientific knowledge determined by the opportunity of critical analysis of theories and paradigms (Popper 2005, 29), and on the universality of scientific methodology based on activity theory and the systemic thought-action approach (Shchedrovitskii 1995, 281-298). Thus, methodology presents a systemic unity of the principles and methods of organizing scientific research that has a paradigmatic basis.

What is to be attributed to the general scientific components of methodology is the principles of research (objectivity, rationality, reliability, verifiability, consistency, coherence, heuristic nature, reproducibility); the logical sequence of the research process (the choice of a theory, the organization of a study, data collection, data processing, participation in the implementation of the results of research); methods of scientific program structuring (justification of the problem under study, goal setting, definition of the object and subject of study with justification of the operational concepts, proposition of hypotheses, formulation of objectives, reliance on the theoretical basis, formation of the empirical corpus, identification of research methods with the presentation of appropriate techniques).

One of the major methodological problems lies in finding a balance between the two extreme research positions – positivism and negativism. The problem of this opposition has been repeatedly referred to in the history of the philosophy of science (Lukianov 2015; Ricoeur 2008; Sartre 2008; Solovev 1988), yet the practice of scientific research proves that the research process is always carried out in proportionally varying but synthetic forms combining both positivist and interpretivist perspectives. In the study of the values of political journalism, the positivist component consists in the researcher's distancing, abandonment of speculation, recognition of the significance of each empirical fact, a focus on systematization, quantitative data processing, and creating explanatory models. The predominance of positivist approaches in the space of contemporary journalism (Kurushkin 2019, 11-18) vividly illustrates the disregard of the methodological risks of simplifying political communication, the inability to take into account the everyday information context, and the difficulties of identifying and assessing the phenomenon of value and the accompanying social factors.

The significance of the interpretivist component is found in the methods of interpretation of, first of all, one's intellectual research process of cognition, as well as the substantiation of how journalists, characters of works, and the target audience of the media understand the meaning of the message and based on which values they express their understanding. The limitation of interpretivism (quite surmountable given the advantages of positivist approaches) lies in the subjectivity and speculativeness caused by the identification of the researcher with the object of study. However, in the political information space, such identification promotes effective communication, the compatibility of contractual positions, and the achievement of a consensus of values (Blokhin 2018, 101-104).

The differentiation of the positivist and interpretivist approaches is also used for typological differentiation of quantitative and qualitative methods. A positivist attitude is based on recognition of the objectivity of social reality, which is ontologically independent of the nature of values defined as systemic formations with characteristic vertical (hierarchical) and horizontal (network) structures. In gnoseological terms, positivism focuses on the justification and description of systems, on deduction as a way to test and validate theories, and on the selective methods of organizing the research process. At the stages of data collection and processing, positivist attitudes manifest in the technologies utilizing quantitative, statistically substantiated indicators: mass surveys, formalized methods of analysis of texts (content analysis, analysis of technical characteristics, media

statistics, structural and thematic analysis, profile and citation analysis, etc.), scaling and ranking, correlation and cluster analysis.

Interpretivist research orientations rely on the constructivist nature of social reality, which is changed by people in processes of value-reduction circulations and communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding. Interpretivist gnoseology captures and describes axiological processes inductively, based on the uniqueness of the observed phenomena and the contextual concreteness of political reality and journalistic works. At the stage of research organization, interpretivist attitudes manifest themselves in the reliance on a holistic description of an individual case (case-study) included in a broader value context, in variations of the monographic study of objects characteristic of the entire class of phenomena, in the biographical method (“life history”), and in the event analysis of messages about a continuing event. The specific features of data collection and processing by a researcher-interpretivist consist in the use of methods capturing the singular and the unique: personal interviews, expert assessments, focus groups, non-formalized text analysis (context finding, stylistic analysis, intent analysis), media portrayal, observation and experiments, modeling and factor analysis.

Despite the ontological and gnoseological differences of the positions of positivism and interpretivism, the principles of general scientific methodology characteristic of the axiology of political journalism are unifying for the researcher. In the static sense, the integrating principle lies in the plane of systemic analysis, which can be carried out both through the recognition of the objective nature of the existing systems of values and their constructivist modeling. The dynamic significance of methodological integration lies in the universality of the dialectic method, which explains the patterns of the evolution of values. Also universal is the comparative method of research organization, which includes comparative, comparative-historical, and typological components. Furthermore, it is at the level of the integration of approaches that the main problem of the value sphere of modern Russian journalism is defined. Whereas in the systemic static sense, there is a patriotic consensus (the corresponding amendments are made to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the labeling of foreign agents is in progress, etc.), in the dialectic dynamic (defined not tactically situationally and strategically indicatively, but deontologically), there is an ideological conflict at the party-organizational level and the balancing of power over the alignment of elite interests at the state-institutional level. Unmet remains the public need for an image of the future, for a clearly articulated, ideologically framed system of political values.

The methodological apparatus in the sphere of the axiology of political journalism has a major effect on the range of research and the subject matter specifics of scientific schools engaged in this topic. What should be identified as parameters of the study of the phenomenon of a scientific school is its organizational affiliation, the identity of its founders and leaders, scientific network structures (periodicals, conferences, specialized networks) and, which is especially important in view of the studied perspective, its methodological specialization (Korkonosenko 2021, 48-50). In the theory of communication, there are mainly three theoretical and methodological paradigms that exist and interact within it. The first one is based on linguistic, primarily structural-semiotic theories and conceptions. The second paradigm is developed as part of social (normative, functional, role) theories founded by researchers who stated the problem of the social functions and roles of journalism understood as a public institution, a subject of mass communications. The third paradigm relies on socio-political theories and the methodological approaches to analysis in the categories of processual dynamics with an emphasis on the effectiveness and instrumental nature of communications.

Linguistic scientific schools primarily identify in the structure of a value the components of its identification and the factors of its contextual determination. Journalism in this approach is objectified as a set of texts of media products in the space of actualized texts (discourses), media spheres as the fields of the meaning of mass communications. The methodology is based on the procedures of linguistic, semiotic, and discursive types of analysis, and the central object of the studied structures is the text in its substantive and formal (genre) manifestations. Studies of the values of political journalism emphasize the tasks of determining the agenda, the significance of metaphors in ensuring effective perception, the specifics of language as a means of creating and confirming the identities of the participants in communication, etc. The use of socio-linguistic analysis reveals the cause-effect links between the linguistic means of different types of media for different groups of audiences. Psycholinguistic analysis is used to analyze the speech behavior of actors in strategic and leadership positions, often in ambiguous and unstable situations leading to improvisations. The difference in value interpretations is determined using the semantic differential method.

The schools of functional analysis define values as the attributes of subjects residing at different levels of the social system: politics as its subsystem, the institutions of government and journalism, mass media as organizations, journalists acting in a normatively defined status-role space, etc. The issue of defining journalism as a political

institution is resolved by differentiating regulatory functions into managerial (journalism acts in an instrumental, non-subjective capacity), self-governing (journalism can acquire the properties of a subject depending on the degree of civil society development), and controlling (journalism fully acquires the institutional qualities of a subject, being a component of social control of the political system).

The schools adhering to the communicative approach are characterized by a focus on the processes of value articulation in the space of relationships between the current political and media actors. In the analysis of communication processes, the emphasis is shifted to the mutual associations and actions (acts) that shape the force fields and flows in the media space. Special attention is paid in this approach to the influence of reference groups of opinion leaders and the effectiveness of communication. The methodology is built based on communicative actions to achieve mutual understanding and the correlation of role expectations and is based on the paradigmatic principles of hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and the methodology of practices.

In a methodological sense, paradigmatic differentiation shows itself the most clearly in such a multifaceted method of research organization as discourse analysis. Within the linguistic direction, it presents a method of studying discourse as an integral structure divided into the semiotic, activity, material, political, socio-cultural, and applied levels. In the context of functional paradigms, discourse analysis presents itself as a specific fragment of reality that has a certain time and logic of its progression. A discourse fragment of reality can be embodied in the aspects of the discourse frame or discourse production. The discourse frame acts as a generating system in relation to discourse, and ideologies, channels of communication, types of media and their target audiences, etc., can manifest themselves in this capacity. At the personal level, the discourse frame exists as a mental matrix or a core conviction (“red lines”) that makes communication difficult. The defining characteristic of a discourse production is the plot – a conflict, a life story, a coup, a visit, etc. The task of discourse analysis in relation to a production is to identify its internal logic and determine how the plot is constructed and unfolds in reality. Within the processual paradigm, discourse is analyzed as a type and mode of communication – written and spoken, verbal and nonverbal, as a monologue, dialogue, and polylogue. In the political science context, critical discourse analysis is used as a line of research into how domination is exercised through texts.

Drawing up preliminary conclusions, we should outline two main methodological problems that are discovered through the analysis of political journalism from the point of

values functioning in it.

The first problem is the need to combine positivism and interpretivism within a single study. If we turn exclusively to positivism, we risk falling out of the space of meanings and interpretations which are not always quantifiable. If an exclusively interpretivist view is adopted, the study risks losing objectivity; there is a possibility that instead of a voluminous and objective image of reality, we will be presented with the point of view of the author of the study.

The second problem is the diversity of approaches to the study of journalism, which results in methodological differentiation. At each stage of conducting a study, there is a need to choose the method that best suits the goals and objectives set by the author. The wrong choice of method will produce a distortion of the interpretation of the already elusive values abundantly present in the texts of political journalism.

4. THE PROPOSED ALGORITHM

Modeling the process of an axiologically oriented study in the field of political journalism presents a difficult task. Nevertheless, we will propose an algorithm for such an analysis as a starting point for researchers working with the transmission of values in the works of political journalism. The proposed algorithm may be modified and adjusted depending on the direction chosen by the author, but the fundamentally important elements remain unchanged.

1. The choice of the research approach. The algorithm for an axiologically oriented study of political journalism will rely on a symbiosis of positivism and interpretivism within a single study. Above we outline the risks of resorting to a single approach as part of a comprehensive analysis of meanings and values. Accordingly, a balance between quantitative and qualitative methods is desirable when conducting research.

2. The choice of the theoretical and methodological direction. Regrettably, the authors of media studies do not always pay close attention to this stage. Meanwhile, the choice of the theoretical and methodological direction not only indicates the author's adherence to a certain scientific approach but defines the further progression of analysis. The directions of analysis indicated previously (linguistic, functional, communicative) do not always fit together in a single paper. Even if the researcher manages to combine them, one direction will remain predominant. The absence of a theoretical and methodological

idea strictly followed by the author of the study impoverishes the work, taking the conclusions beyond the limits of scientific discourse.

3. Research organization stage. It should be understood that this process will depend, firstly, on the choice of research approach and the theoretical and methodological direction, and, secondly, on the goals and objectives set by the author. What appears promising is the choice of the methods of research organization that do not leave out but, on the contrary, emphasize for this case the regularity of the integration of positivism and interpretivism. In particular, the use of the case-study method will not only focus attention on a specific event but also incorporate it in the social context, as well as provide some grounds for the formation of the sample of empirical material. It is certainly worth paying attention to discourse analysis as a multidimensional way of organizing research in the field of political journalism, which can be adapted to all the theoretical and methodological directions discussed in the previous paragraph.

4. Data processing stage. Same as at the previous stage, this process is contingent on the first to stages of the algorithm. The need to find a balance between positivism and interpretivism implies the need for balancing different sources selected for analysis. Research in political journalism has long been drifting away from informalized analysis of texts, yet this method should not be completely disregarded. Its employment in combination with positivist methods (various types of surveys, content analysis) can strengthen the axiological component of political journalism research.

5. Information processing stage. It is easy to notice that media studies (as well as political journalism research) have recently started to incorporate “technologically advanced” statistic methods requiring specialized software. The use of confirmatory factor analysis can assist in testing hypotheses on the presence of a set of interrelated factors affecting the dissemination of political values by mass media and their acceptance/unacceptance by the audience. Correlation analysis allows detecting the presence or absence of dependencies between the variables. However, the use of statistical information processing methods should not become an end in itself, it depends on the goals and objectives of the researcher and, of course, should be subject to the logic of research and the observance of the balance between positivism and interpretivism.

The proposed algorithm is quite broad and leaves the researcher room for maneuver. It allows for variations in combining different methods. However, the main positions that need to be considered when developing and carrying out an axiologically oriented study in the field of political journalism remain unchanged. Whereas stages 3, 4,

and 5 of our algorithm allow a wide range of variations, stages 1 and 2, which determine the further course of the study, appear to us the most important and obligatory.

5. CONCLUSION

Thus, we have developed a five-stage algorithm for the study of mass communications. Stages 1 and 2 (Choosing the research approach and Choosing the theoretical and methodological direction) are fundamental for the following reasons.

First, the study of political journalism from the value standpoint needs to observe the balance between positivism and interpretivism. The very essence of the chosen problem field obliges us to observe this rule: on the one hand, there is a need to identify the objective patterns by selecting data sets (or, for example, forming a sample of respondents) and counting the units of analysis; on the other, we are dealing with the study of values, which reside in the space of meanings and their interpretations. Second, the choice of the theoretical and methodological approach is needed to determine the course of the study overall, since it is this choice that indicates in what way the author interprets the complex and multifaceted concept of “journalism”. The combination of the first two stages of our algorithm distinguishes research on the axiology of political journalism in the broad field of media studies.

A prospect for further study is the development of new methods for the analysis of empirical data in political journalism. The availability of data processing methods allows identifying relationships between the transmission of certain values in texts, the ideological attitudes of the journalist, the perception of these values by the audience of the media, political context, and so on.

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