

**Media Criticism in a Modern Russian Press:  
Formation and State****Roman P. Bakanov**

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**Abstract**

*The article reveals and studies problems of formation of the Russian journalism, its state and its new trend as media criticism. Like literary, cinema or musical criticism it has to become a way of knowledge and public reflection of the modern information production different parties. Having studied filings of 13 Russian and 9 regional newspapers and magazines for 2005-2015, we revealed 5783 articles containing both positive and negative estimates for telecasts, work of the leading telecasts and tendencies of modern federal television broadcasting. By means of the Russian newspapers continuous monitoring methods, the substantial analysis and comparison of articles media critics published in different newspapers we found out that largely the analyzed articles talked about telecasts and their famous participants. Broadcasts quality was extremely seldom mentioned, articles of printing media were not discussed. In this article the problems connected with modern media criticism quality in the Russian press are exposed. We consider that the most important of them are problems of absence of the analysis uniform criteria for media texts and observance of critics activity ethical standards. From articles containing the analysis of telecasts we established that many Russian expert journalists have not recognized media criticism yet. Main conclusion: currently media criticism in Russian press is presented incidentally, it is on the periphery of public attention, critics make the analysis of media texts, being guided by their own representations about bad and good. Results of our research supplement conclusions of A. Fedorov, A. Levitskaya (2015); they are expand by examples from the Russian media criticism practice, the results of researches which are contained in articles and scientific literature by A.A. Berger (2013), A. Kaun (2014), P.B. Orlik (2014), S. Craft, T.P. Vos, J.D. Wolfgang (2015).*

**Keywords:** Russian journalism, media criticism, television criticism, television, media text, assessment, opinion, ethics of criticism, audience.

## Introduction

The purpose of the article is to reveal and study the most significant problems of formation and condition of the Russian media criticism as part of the modern Russian journalism.

The Russian sociologists conducted research and came to a conclusion that television has been the most popular type of media among Russian residents for several decades now [1]. The majority of them obtains information and has a good time by means of television. While the number of television programs and channels increases, the telecasts quality remains very non-uniform in contents. Thereafter, the country's population attitude to this type of media remains ambiguous.

In this article we define "media criticism" as it is given by A.P Korochensky (2002): "the special field of journalism urged to help society with knowledge of new realities and tendencies of mass media activity, which is carrying out critical knowledge and assessment of socially important, actual cultural and creative, professional and ethical, legal, economic and technological aspects of information produced by mass media with emphasis on the creative media contents part. It is at the same time both a peculiar way of reflection, self-knowledge of the modern print and electronic media and a public mirror, which is urged to reflect "gloss and poverty" of the mass media turned out in the market environment" [2].

The media criticism in the Russian printing media appeared on the verge of the 1980-1990ties along with development of multi-program television and private press. In 1993 the weekly headings containing the analysis of telecasts were in each newspaper popular with residents of Russia.

Research results which we had supplement conclusions of A. Fedorov, A. Levitskaya (2015) [3] and allow us to say that despite the creative background which is available for the Russian media criticism, quality of its operational telecasts analysis is not constant and depends on the level of professional skill, the purpose of critics speeches and the edition format. Critics are guided by their own ideas of what is good and bad. The results of the research can have practical application when training media critics at universities, as well as for newspaper and magazine editors in respect of implementing quality examination for reviews published by media critics and for assessing media review contents quality. In the international context the received results can help with comparison of the analysis and quality level of conclusions for discussions of practical modern media impact on audience in different countries including Russia.

But beyond the scope of the executed research there was a following problem, which arose during its carrying out. In modern Russia about 90 thousand different media are registered. We consider that their daily content should not just be consumed by audience, but analyzed from the point of view of usefulness and personal importance. A time has come when each person has not only to consume information but filter and eliminate unnecessary, and even harmful for oneself and one's family came. It is especially important for the teenagers and students who are often unable to distinguish in cheerful (as they consider) video the hidden impact on mentality from certain forces or structures, the forbidden terrorist groups. We consider that activities of the Russian media critics following the example of foreign countries can become one of journalistic community self-regulation forms, as well as an example of the independent critical analysis media contents implementation for each person. Besides, by means of media criticism each citizen has an opportunity to express the position in relation to practice of modern media functioning.

One of the media criticism problems is the information production comprehensive knowledge. This field of journalism can help to reveal manipulative "arsenal" of modern media practice and to explain the purpose and extent journalists use it for to the citizens of Russia. This problem research results will be presented in our following articles.

## Methods

1. The continuous content analysis of federal and regional (Republic of Tatarstan) printing editions during 2005-2015 regarding identification showed:

a) frequencies of data publication in assessment of media contents (television, radio broadcast transfers, journalese texts), and without such assessment;

b) methods of the mass media maintenance analysis which are applied by media critics.

For our study we have chosen: a) thirteen most mass-popular all-Russian social and political editions: *Argumenty i Facty* (Reasons and Facts), *Vremia Novostey* (News Time), *Gazeta* (The Newspaper), *Izvestiya* (The News), *Kommersant* (The Commersant), *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (The Komsomol Truth), *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (The Literature Newspaper), *Moscowskiye Novosti* (The Moscow News) (since January 1, 2008 stopped its existence, currently exists only in electronic form), *Moskovsky Komsomolets* (The Moscow Comsomolets), *Novaya Gazeta* (The New Newspaper), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (The Independent Newspaper), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (The Russian Newspaper) and *Trud* (The Labour).

b) The print media which are published in Russian and extending to territories of the Republic of Tatarstan – only nine names. Here also regional inserts to federal newspapers are included. Let's note that the *Respublica Tatarstan*, *News of Tatarstan*, *Time and Money*, *Youth of Tatarstan* (closed in December, 2013), *The Kazan Bulletin* are the state mass media. Founders of *Evening Kazan*, *Reasons and Facts Tatarstan*, *Stars of the Volga Region* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda – Tatarstan* became labor collectives of editions and individuals.

In the third group of sources are publications of television critics and scientists in professional trade magazines: *Journalist*, *Journalism and the Media Market* (earlier *Journalist*, *the Profession*), *Journalism and Culture of the Russian Speech*, *Art of Film*, *SREDA*, *Television and Broadcasting* (since 1993 – *Teleradioefir*) and *Teleforum*.

2. The substantial analysis of articles containing media criticism. This method allowed us to study deeper, what makes the author's assessment of various media work; to what extent the critic is being objective / subjective towards the work of a certain media; lexical-and-stylistic originality of speeches of each analyst.

3. The comparative analysis methods assessment ways of mass media activity practice of from the critics cooperating with different editions. By means of this method we tried to compare author's methods and criteria for evaluation of media maintenance, as well as to define the problems common to modern media criticism in the Russian mass media.

During 2005-2015 we revealed and investigated 5783 articles containing both negative and positive telecast assessment, leaders work in television cadre and the tendencies of modern telecasting in the specified Russian printing media.

## Results

1. Despite the fact that 10-12 materials with the telecast analysis are published weekly in the Russian newspapers, the television criticism does not have thematic variety. This is due to all critics being guided by information occasions: telecast entering the air, presentation of the new teleproject, discharge cases from air of the famous persons and so on. The air one is one for all, therefore observers try to discuss any significant premieres or interesting facts of television "behind the scenes", which may be of interest to the public. But there are questions which were and continue to be out of media criticism "agenda". For example, nothing is written about economic turnover of TV companies in connection with reticence of such information from the public. Observers also do not make a faintest attempt to open the veil of secrecy on this problem for the readers. Very little is said on specifics of TV shows for youth and children, the methods of impact on human consciousness used by modern television specially are not covered. We understand that the telecriticism, as well as

television and radio process, is a conveyor which needs to be filled constantly. However, in our opinion, critics should take the initiative in their own hands and at least incidentally act in accordance with the actual problems of mass media activity (not necessarily television). We see the publication of the readers' opinions concerning their impressions on specific shows and articles as one of these activities forms, alongside the organization of public discussion for important mass media activity issues.

2. Activity of media (television) critics in Russia is segmental. In 2014 the so-called "telepress club" starring the observers who were constantly published in federal editions ceased to exist. Now almost all critics work according to their own representations of being bad and good, due and optional. Each author works according to information policy of the specific edition. Sometimes, the critic should satisfy conditions of partner contracts for information telecast support, being torn between mass media's editorial office, the heading, and specific TV channel. Can objectivity stand a trial in this case? The main thing is to try and draw as much audience attention as possible to the telecast.

4. The Russian media (television) criticism has not established uniform and accurate criteria of the telecast analysis yet. Whether the long-lived authors (Y. Bogomolov, A. Melman, I. Petrovskya, S. Taroshchina and some others) strive to keep to ethical criteria when forming an assessment of a teleproject, authors, having begun to try the forces in the field recently, are guided by the principle of "pleasant / unpleasant". At the same time the reasoning in favor of this or that statement may be completely lacking. Here starts the pluralism of opinions (not always confirmed with reasons) in publications. We consider that in the 1990ties discussing TV became the fashionable phenomenon: in each popular social and political federal newspaper there were many critical reviews of shows, television leaders, TV companies CEOs.

We believe that such an attitude of critics towards object of the analysis could exert impact on the attitude of journalistic community towards media critics. Now this attitude became ambiguous. To judge the publications in the magazines which target audience of journalists and media managers, the remarks and opinions of some of those journalists whose work underwent public critical analysis, as a rule, is rejecting criticism in their address, often painfully reacted, publicly "hitting back" as they put it, the "losers in the profession".

Thus, one may say, that employees of the main TV companies of Russia hardly need criticism of the content they produce, one of its (criticism) tasks being to explain the audiences tendencies, common to modern television broadcasting practice, strategy and tactics of public opinion formation, mechanisms and ways of turning spectator attention to shows and, respectively, increase in their rating.

5. The media criticism in regional Russian media is practically absent. We know that in newspapers of Belgorod, Arkhangelsk, Penza areas, St. Petersburg and the Republic of Tatarstan in the 2000s there were incidental examples of articles containing shows assessment both federal and local television, however, this practice did not receive continuation after 2010. Regional mass media and the journalists working there are out of the objective professional critical analysis of the creative activity now.

6. Faculties and departments of journalism in Russian universities have no special educational programs allowing to them train professional media critics. It is necessary to introduce in humanitarian disciplines students training curricula, as well as in the senior school classes the subjects aimed to develop the media texts analysis skills and critical judgment of the world picture offered by journalists as free-choice disciplines for youth.

7. In modern Russian mass media the serious analysis is replaced with a superficial glance on telecasts and a fragmentariness of a research object. That is, modern media (television) critics work only in information occasions, without having big newspaper space for profound studying of the

program or a certain public phenomenon (sense) which it bears in itself. In articles of media critics the problem-and-production type of criticism prevails. Critics formulate problems, select the examples from modern practice of TV broadcasting illustrating it, and generalize the told. We believe it partly occurs because many editors do not want to load audience with serious information. For mass media critics, as for editions members, it is necessary to carry out the administration decisions.

8. For further development of mass and civil types of media criticism in Russia it is necessary to introduce communicative platforms for the publication of opinions, remarks, mini-reviews from ordinary citizens, media audience, about various TV, broadcasts, publications of print media as much as possible. Theme groups on social networks can bear media educational effect for media audience as well. Enthusiasts (for example, media teachers or journalism professors at universities of Russia) who would undertake a role of creators and moderators of these projects are badly needed.

9. In modern Russia there is a lack of electronic educational resources for media education and media criticism. The thematic websites training audience to skills of the independent critical analysis of media texts are necessary. Currently, they are lacking. Does the society have a demand for those? In our opinion, the demand is great from the point of view of media education for school students and students of all training directions, and not just humanitarian specialties. We consider that the level of critical thinking of the Russian audience needs enhancing.

10. Currently the Russian media criticism has not yet become, as their colleagues in European countries did, the authoritative figures in journalism. In order for the public to know about media critics' mission, serious work from scientists, journalists, teachers is necessary. Conversation on problems of journalistic criticism has to change from emotional and accusatory tone ("you can do nothing but criticize!") to the course of constructive reasoned dialog on pages of specialized editions, as well as qualitative, and mass political newspapers and magazines. We consider that it is possible to draw attention of the population to media criticism only in the presence of detailed conversation on its problems on mass periodicals pages. Now it is not observed.

## Discussion

Results of our research confirm the conclusion of I. Petrovskya (2003): "the institute of media criticism in Russia does not exist ... It does not hold serious discussion of the data provided by the sociologists engaged in television and advertising" [4]. 13 years later after the publication of his article, the level of the Russian media criticism has not changed. The results we received also supplement the researches of P.B. Orlik (2014, 2009) [5], [6] with the conclusions about current state of media criticism in Russian press. Following S. Craft, T.P. Vos и J.D. Wolfgang (2015) [7], A. Kaun (2014) [8], L.R.V. Berg., L.A. Wenner and B.E. Gronbeck (2004) [9] and A.A. Berger (2013) [10] we consider that the media criticism should be considered as an important component of audience media formation process. Currently the Russian mass media audience and journalists have no culture of public constructive criticism perception. In order to create such culture, regular assessment of media criticism quality is necessary.

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