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POLITICAL JOURNALISM AS A DIRECTION OF INFORMATION ACTIVITY¹

The features of political journalism due to its subject field are analyzed. The authors focus on three issues: defining the essence of political journalism, revealing the specific features of journalism in politics, highlighting the relationship between political science and political journalism. The main conclusions of the study are as follows: political journalism includes only those publications in the media, the subject of which is directly the political sphere of public relations. Political journalism is determined by the following factors: political regime, the priority of the function of social control and the cyclical nature of activity. Political journalism, although related to political science, is at the same time significantly different from it.

Keywords: *journalism, information, mass media, politics, political journalism.*

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ПОЛІТИЧНА ЖУРНАЛІСТИКА ЯК НАПРЯМ ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОЇ ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ

Актуальність дослідження зумовлена зростаючим впливом журналістики на політичні відносини. У сучасних умовах політична журналістика стала важливим засобом регулювання соціальної поведінки. Хоча існує немало наукових публікацій, що присвячені питанням політичної журналістики, багато важливих аспектів її проблемної галузі потребують розгляду.

Метою статті — розглянути три питання, які ще не були чітко висвітлені в літературі: як політична журналістика виокремлюється із загального контексту журналістики; які особливості політичної журналістики; чим політичні медіаспостерігачі відрізняються від політологів.

Методологія дослідження базується на системних, структурних, функціональних та порівняльних методах аналізу політичної журналістики.

Результати дослідження — удосконалена концепція політичної журналістики; виявлення найважливіших факторів, що визначають особливості

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журналістської діяльності у сфері політики; знаходження найзначущіших відмінностей між політичною журналістикою та політологією.

Новизна цієї роботи полягає в тому, що особливості політичної журналістики аналізуються, по-перше, у контексті її предметного поля (політичної сфери суспільних відносин); по-друге, у межах порівняння її з політологією, яка має ту саму предметну сферу.

Висновки дослідження можна узагальнити наступним чином. Розвиток політичної журналістики зумовлений двома основними факторами: політичним та професійним. Політичний фактор пов'язаний з утвердженням демократії, що забезпечує надійну гарантію свободи вираження поглядів та інформації, незалежності політичних спостерігачів від тиску власників ЗМІ та влади. Професійний фактор зумовлений удосконаленням журналістської підготовки в галузі політології.

Ключові слова: *журналістика, інформація, засоби масової інформації, політика, політична журналістика.*

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ПОЛИТИЧЕСКАЯ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА КАК НАПРАВЛЕНИЕ ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ

Задачей статьи является анализ особенностей политической журналистики как специфического направления информационной деятельности. Авторы сосредоточивают внимание на трех проблемах: определении сущности политической журналистики, раскрытии специфических особенностей журналистской деятельности в сфере политики, освещении отношений между политической наукой и политической журналистикой. Основные выводы исследования заключаются в следующем. К политической журналистики относятся только те публикации средств массовой информации, предметом которых непосредственно является политическая сфера общественных отношений. Политическую журналистику детерминируют такие факторы: характер политического режима, приоритет функции социального контроля и цикличность активности. Политическая журналистика, хотя и связана с политической наукой предметным полем, но в то же время существенно отличается от нее.

Ключевые слова: *журналистика, информация, средства массовой информации, политика, политическая журналистика.*

Problem statement. Nowadays, the role of journalism in public life is growing significantly. The information becomes not only a major result of social production, but also a leading regulator of social relations in the context of the transition to post-industrial society. This fact leads to increased attention of scientists to journalism — a social institution that deals with the collection and interpretation of information, as well as the further dissemination of interpreted information to a mass audience. The political

journalism – a field of information activity that specializes in coverage of political events, production and dissemination of political information – has been established and greatly developed. Jesper Strömbäck and Adam Shehata (2018: 1) from the Department of Journalism, Media, and Communication of the University of Gothenburg notice: “Political journalism constitutes one of the most prominent domains of journalism, and is essential for the functioning of democracy”.

Previous research. Various aspects of political journalism are analyzed in the writings of foreign researchers (Albæk and al., 2014; Mishanin & Frolova, 2013; Nyhan & Sides, 2011; Pechota, 2011; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2018; and etc.) and domestic ones (Войтович 2007; Воронова, 2013 a,b; Громадська Н. А. & Висоцька К. О., 2016; Дуцик 2005; Коваленко, 2012, 2013, Kovalenko 2019; Романюк & Коваленко 2016; Romanyuk & Kovalenko, 2017a,b, 2019; and etc.). Although political journalism is explored from both the science of social communication and political science, social communication publications are prevalent. This leads to a focus on the technological aspects of the creation and dissemination of political information, while the essential aspects are largely ignored.

The aim of this paper is to answer three questions that have not yet been clearly lighting in the literature.

First, how is political journalism stand out from the general context of journalism?

Second, what are the features of political journalism?

Third, how are political media-observers different from political scientists?

What is political journalism? Political journalism must be defined as a field of information activity of mass media, which is aimed at covering political problems of social development. In works on social communications, political journalism is often defined as a *genre* of journalistic activity. However, this definition is quite narrow. Certainly, political journalism has its own genre characteristics, because it is carried out by the same means (print media, television and radio broadcasts or online reports) as other directions of journalistic activity. However, its specificity determines not so much the genre features, but the subject of information activities. Its specificity lies in the fact that the subject of information activities is political relations, political events, and political processes. The task of political journalism is to cover issues of public governance, relations between the state and civil society, ensuring political rights and civil liberties, and political activity of citizens.

There is an opinion that the subject environment of political journalism can become “any sphere of social life: science, sport, international life”(Мишанин & Фролова 2013). However, such an opinion does not

seem right, since the subject of political journalism is politics, and other spheres of public life fall into its “subject environment” insofar as they are *directly* involved in the field of political relations. Unless in the journalistic paper the link between politics and a particular non-political sphere is not straightforward, it cannot be defined as political journalism. For example, if a journalist casually notes in an article that focuses on national culture that the government pays insufficient attention to cultural development, such can hardly be considered as political journalism.

Specific features of political journalism. The specificity of politics as a sphere of public relations determines the most important features of political journalism. These include:

Firstly, the conditionality of the political journalism quality in a particular country by its political regime. In conditions of totalitarian regimes, where a freedom of speech and a media independence are abolished and the journalists become fighters of the ideological front, to talk about journalism in general is a very problematic thing. Although under totalitarianism, the information field is completely politicized, however, journalists are deprived of their freedom of creativity and become broadcasters or, as a last resort, interpreters of official opinion. Journalism in authoritarian regimes is different from totalitarian ones. Although free media may exist under authoritarian regimes, the distribution of political information is tightly controlled by the government. There is political censorship, the purpose of which is to prevent the spread of anti-government information. The best conditions for the functioning and development of political journalism are created by a democratic regime that guarantees freedom of speech, pluralism of thought, independence of creative activity and no political censorship. However, the degree of realization of these foundation stones of political democracy is conditioned by the level of its maturity (Ronanyuk & Kovalenko 2017a).

Secondly, the functional features. A political journalism performs the same social functions as journalism in general – informational, communicative, socializing, cultural, educational, critical, etc. However, a leading function of political journalism is a control over public governance. All other functions are subordinated to it in one way or another (КОВАЛЕНКО 2013: 242–244; Romanyuk & Kovalenko 2017b). In a democracy, independent media, along with elections, parties, and pressure groups, is an effective means of preventing the government from transgressing the powers that civil society agrees to. The control function of journalistic activity on the functioning of the government is so large that the mass-media has been dubbed the “fourth power”.

Thirdly, the cyclicity of information activity. The cyclical nature of political journalism is determined by the fact that the content of politics (its subject) is the struggle for the seizure and retention of governmental

power. This struggle tends to exacerbate and soften. The exacerbation of political struggle occurs in the face of social crises and political elections. Accordingly, media attention to political developments is increasing and the political direction of journalistic activity is intensifying. In a democracy, the elections are a *leading form of political action*, since the universal criterion for political democracy is the formation of governmental authority on the basis of free, competitive and general elections (Diamond 1996: 21). As the mass-media always pay a lot of attention to election campaigns, political journalism has become a sub-type of electoral journalism. Today, election journalism has become the main stream of political journalism characterized by problematic diversity. As noted by Grazyna Piechota (2011) from Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University, the plebiscitization of power through elections is nowadays based on activity of a great deal of mass media.

Features	Substance
Conditionality of the political regime	Free in democracies, not free in autocracies
Functional features	Priority for the function of public control over the over public governance
Information activity	Significant increase in activity during election campaigns, as well as political and economic crises

Figure 1. Specific features of political journalism

Political journalism and political science. Because political journalism and political science share a common problematic field, it is important for our study to find out how political media-observers differ from political scientists. In our view, the differences between them are as follows.

Firstly, political scientists have a substantial theoretical knowledge and systemic understanding of politics, but many journalists have no such knowledge or understanding. Brendan Nyhan and John Sides (2011: 1) from the University of Michigan assert: “Journalists who report on politics are frequently unfamiliar with political science research or question its relevance to their work”. However, we agree with Matthew Iglesias (2009), who emphasizes that “it’s just incredibly foolish to go about doing the work of journalism about politics devoid of any broader theoretical or empirical foundations provided by political science”.

Secondly, political scientists are pointed on the objective coverage of political events. Although there is no some absolute objectivity (Kovalenko 2019: 104), scientists are trying to use the real facts in their research. Another matter is the interpretation of these facts, which is not freely influenced by their belonging to particular nations, ethnic, denominational and other social

groups, their social background, their political views and social values, and so on. In return, the journalists treat facts fairly freely. This is not least about politics. Journalists are keen to create of sensations. To create sensational news, the journalists often use unverified information of questionable origin. Many journalists are inherent in the creation of conspiracy theories that explain complex social phenomena (economic and politic crises, protest actions, revolutions, etc.), caused by a number of objective causes of social development, only by collusion of internal or external enemies. It is not uncommon when journalists to come up with sensational news themselves. Such false fictitious information was called “media duck”.

Thirdly, political scientists tend to be much more free-spirited in their creative activities than political media observers, because scientists are less dependent on their employers. Political scientists work predominantly at universities, which are considered the centers of free thought. Instead, journalists work predominantly in mass-media owned by private owners, who in many cases are connected through business or other relationships with certain political forces. The political positions of mass-media owners and their guidelines, as evidenced by practice, can significantly influence the information production of journalists (Romanyuk & Kovalenko 2019: 188). However, this distinction between political scientists and journalists does not apply to totalitarian and rigid authoritarian regimes. Under totalitarianism, it is not necessary to talk about political scientists at all, because they, like journalists of the not free media, turn into fighters of the “ideological front”. Under rigid authoritarian regimes, both political scientists and journalists who criticize government are subject to political repression.

	Political scientists	Political media-observers
Political knowledge	Substantial, systemic	Mostly weak and extra-systemic
Professional aspirations	Objective coverage of political events and processes	Create informational sensations
Freedom of creativity	Unlimited	Limited by media owners

Figure 2. Comparative characteristics of the typical qualities of political scientists and political media observers in democracies

It should be noted that there is no “Great Wall of China” between political scientists and political journalism. Many reputable political scientists collaborate with the mass-media, constantly covering current issues of national and international politics in them. Journalism becomes their second profession in fact. A striking example of the combination of science and

journalism was demonstrated by French political scientist Raymond Aron. He left the teaching position at the University of Toulouse at the beginning of World War II and edited the newspaper of the French resistance movement "France Libre" in emigration. Returning from emigration after the war, Aron became an influential columnist for the "Le Figaro" newspaper, and then, having already become a professor in the Sorbonne, he kept a political column in the "L'Express" magazine for the rest of his life. On the other hand, there are examples where conscientious journalists who specialize in politics become true political scientists as a result of mastering political knowledge and methodology of scientific analysis. They publish articles and books on political topics that are recognized by political scientists. There are cases when individuals who started their political activities as journalists and then they were received academic degrees in political science. But there are very few.

Conclusion: The development of political journalism is driven by two major factors: political and professional. The political factor is related to the strengthening of democracy, which provides for a reliable guarantee of freedom of expression and information, independence of political-observers from the pressure of media owners and government. The professional factor is due to the improvement of professional training of journalists. Unfortunately, the level of political knowledge of journalists is still quite low. As political journalism today emerges as a leading field of journalistic activity, political science must become a normative discipline in the journalism faculties of universities and colleges.

In this paper we have only tried to outline the main aspects of political journalism that are related to its problematic field. The lines of research that we have identified need further development and deepening.

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