

Problematics and Functional Diversity of Video Game Journalism in the Modern Russian Media “Igromania”

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Abstract: *The article reveals and studies the problematics and functional diversity of video game journalism in the journalistic texts of “Igromania” – one of the most popular monthly publications in modern Russia. Each issue of the journal published several articles on socially significant topics. Having studied the archives of “Igromania” (36 in total) for the period 2015-2017, we have identified 106 articles covering social issues. Using methods of continuous monitoring of “Igromania”, quantitative and substantive analysis of its articles, we found out that social problems are present in the author’s columns and special sections. A large part of the media texts analysed dealt with problems related to social inequality, unemployment and discrimination. The authors of the article found that modern Russian gaming publications are different focus on social issues, which helps to expand the horizons of readers. Having studied the texts of gaming journalists of “Igromania”, we found out that there is a decrease in the critical author’s assessment. Using the functional analysis, we have considered the main functions of video game journalism and concluded that it is characterized by significant irregularity in the implementation of the main functions of journalism. In addition, we found that the most common genre in the video game edition of “Igromania” is a review, you can also find notes, reports, sketches, essays and essays. These characteristics allowed to determine the effectiveness of the texts of gaming journalists “Igromania”, their problems and thematic focus. The results of our study complement and extend the findings of examples from modern practice of the Russian video game journalism research results, contained in articles and the scientific literature D. Amrich (2012), S. Anderson (2007), D. Auerbach (2014), K. Gillen (2005), J. Hall (2006), B. J. Harris (2014), M. Musgrove (2007), D. Tennant (2009).*

Keywords: *video game journalism, Internet, social networks, video game, player, gamification of media, reveal, preview, review, ethics, online publications, blogs, gaming community, conflicts of interest, “Igromania”.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the article is to reveal and study the problems and functional diversity of video game journalism in the modern Russian media space on the example of publications in “Igromania”. Video game journalism is a type of journalism aimed at the description and discussion of video games. Its basis, as a rule, is the cycle of materials “announcement, preview, review, passage” [1]. Video game

journalism has its own specific audience called gamers. Created to provide information support to gamers and video game developers, today it is of great importance for the entire industry and raises significant social problems of modern society.

Video game journalism actively manifests itself in the modern Russian media space. This is manifested both in the audience's enthusiasm for the video games themselves and the need for appropriate, video-game-oriented media. The emergence of video game journalism is caused by the intellectual needs of the players themselves: the need to obtain relevant information, in interaction with each other and with representatives of the video gaming industry, in relating themselves to any subculture and the creation of an appropriate image, characterized by a peculiar form of communication and behavior.

Nowadays video gaming press published in Russia remain popular two magazines: “Navigator igrovogo mira” and “Igromania” appeared in the mid-1990s and managed to maintain its own audience. Popular among Russian gamers magazine “Strana Igr”, which began to be published at the same time, ceased to exist in 2013 [2]. It should be noted that the printed video game magazines since its appearance were distinguished by a clear division into publications on console or computer games, but due to the expansion of the video gaming audience there was a tendency of mixing these areas. The wide spread of the world wide web has allowed video game publications not only to go beyond the editorial censorship, but also to expand the readership, resulting in video game journalism has become one of the leading areas of development of electronic media.

The transition of video game journalism to the Internet space around the world is considered one of the stages of its natural development. To date, each print edition has its own website, which organized forums with discussions, have the opportunity to comment on the publication and communicate directly with the editors and journalists. Globalization has contributed to the establishment of links between gamers not only with the editors of specialized publications, but also directly with the video game developers, which helps receive feedback from readers.

By the way, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Internet in the development of video game journalism. This is a relatively new phenomenon in the media, which existed before in the format of magazine columns about video games, thematic notes and advertising publications, nowadays has taken a completely different shape.

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Direct contact with the audience, the ability to share impressions of video games, find accomplices, play with the journalist of the game edition in real time – all this became available even to the ordinary user. The wide spread of the world wide web has allowed game publications not only to go beyond the editorial censorship, but also to expand the readership, resulting in game journalism has become one of the leading areas of development of electronic media.

Speaking of the problematics of video game journalism in the contemporary Russian media space on the example of publications in the “Igormania”, it is necessary to consider that in the Russian video game journalism has a great influence of the Western media. In the West, where video game journalism is better organized and where a huge number of professionals’ work, the reviews look completely different. Mostly in Western materials there are no reportage aspects. The authors say that the developers succeeded and that is not. And the main emphasis is on technical quality. And since there are Russian versions of both printed and online foreign publications, where journalists simply translate materials from English into Russian, these changes find a place in Russian articles, which are still inherent in the reporting character.

The results of our study complement the conclusions of A.S. Bobrysheva (2009) [3], C. Anderson (2007) [4], D. Amrich (2012) [5], K.Gillen (2005) [6], D.Auerbach (2014) [7], J. Hall, (2006) [8], D. Tennant (2009) [9], B. J. Harris (2014) [10] in the field of trends in video game journalism on the example of the modern Russian video game publication “Igormania”. Furthermore, the data obtained can be included in training and professional development programs for journalists and critics at universities, special courses or professional educational seminars as additional examples of the successful development of modern thematic media raising their level both among those engaged in media production and the ordinary population of Russia.

II. METHODS

The empirical base of the study became seven Russian the publication of video game journalists in the monthly entertainment edition “Igormania”. This is one of the few Federal publications, the editors of which since 1997 regularly writes about all the changes taking place in the gaming industry. Only for this period has been studied in 36 rooms of the said periodical, which published 106 articles with social issues. In the course of research of problematics and functional diversity of the video game journalism, we studied only publications covering socially important topics.

Digests on video games and texts of informational nature, as a rule, announcing the release of video games or introducing the audience to the news from the world of the video gaming industry, were not considered: they practically lacked socially significant issues. The purpose of these publications was to attract the attention of the audience to a particular project to improve its rating. It was not relate to the topic we are studying.

The chronological period of the study is 2015-2017.

In the course of the study, we used the following methods:

1. Continuous monitoring of the sections “Author column” and “Special section” in “Igormania” to identify articles containing social issues.

2. Quantitative analysis of the identified articles, which allowed to establish, firstly, how many articles containing social issues was published in “Igormania” for each year of the study; secondly, to identify the prevailing themes for each year of the study, and in the total array of identified articles. We considered the facts of manifestation of a social problem on articles, but not on each case.

3. A content analysis of media texts, which allowed to identify the problems of game journalism.

4. Functional analysis allowed to consider the main functions of game journalism on the example of “Igormania” texts.

III. RESULTS

For the period of the study of social problems, published in “Igormania” evenly. In 2015, 37 articles were published, in 2016 – 34, in 2017 – 37. The prevailing theme was the problem of social inequality – 14 (15% of the total), gender discrimination – 19 (20%) and unemployment – 17 (18%). However, the analysis of the content of the texts showed that in game journalism there is a decline in interest in the analysis of such problems and a decrease in the critical author's assessment.

A distinctive feature of “Igormania” as a video game edition is that the magazine pays great attention to the coverage of internal topics related to video games and the video gaming industry as a whole. To understand such publications requires knowledge of certain terminology, knowledge of the features of the video game community and trends in modern technology. However, along with special texts, video game journalists often touch upon topics relating to socially significant aspects of society. Thus, on the pages of “Igormania” often raises the theme of the impact of video games on society and society in the video gaming industry – 15 articles, the theme of gamer’s interests – 14, violence in video games – 18, as well as various social problems of concern to young people – 16. In General, the results of our research allow us to conclude that the topic of video game journalism problems for the Russian audience remains poorly understood and is often covered only on the pages of the profile press.

As for the general features, the following peculiar properties are obvious. First, video game reviews are usually created by professional gaming journalists. Any review should meet the requirements of PR-technologies, as the gaming industry is a business focused on getting the maximum benefit: the more attractive the review of video games, the more demand the video game will have. By the multimedia features video games are expanding the form and content of communication of people, and the reviews of the video game written by professional gamers-journalists, and encourage the activity of the participants, engaging them in the development of the new reality [11].

The video game edition of “Igormania” is aimed at the description and discussion of video games, so the texts of this magazine use all the main genres of journalism, but not all in the same volume. The most common of them is a review. Writing such material requires the author to have some basic knowledge of the industry, as the specificity of video games and extends to reviews that are written on them.

The basis of the video gaming press is usually a series of several publications about a particular project, consisting of an announcement, a pre-release review (preview), a review and walkthrough. In addition, information genres such as note, report often offered to the audience in the form of a digest, as well as artistic and journalistic genres occur in the form of sketch and essay. To understand such publications requires knowledge of certain terminology, knowledge of the features of the video gaming community and trends in modern technology.

On the example of the analysis of publications of "Igromania" it can be concluded that video game journalism is characterized by significant irregularity in the implementation of the main functions of the media. The information, cultural and educational functions remain unchanged, but the recreational, communicative, entertainment, advertising and commercial ones come to the fore. "Igromania", first of all, should be considered as an entertaining publication, highlighting recreational and communicative functions, which implies a description of youth leisure and communication among readers on topics interesting to them. Advertising and reference function reveals consumer demand, creates conditions for communication with producers of goods and has a significant value for the magazine in economic terms.

The cognitive process carried out by game journalism as a creative activity is an important part of the entire cognitive process of the audience of players. The need for communication motivates readers to the communication activities, which in essence is a movement of senses in social space. Such communication through game journalism is able to meet the communication needs of the audience only if it is recognized by the players as a lack of knowledge and skills [12-14-17].

Video game journalism is primarily considered as recreational, which implies a wide participation of video game journalism in the creation of services for recreation. It should not be forgotten that the information function of video game journalism is also of particular importance, as it covers the primary social needs of the audience to receive timely information about what is happening in the video gaming industry. It should be noted that the developers and publishers of video games are interested in their projects for a long time remained a topic for discussion in the video gaming press.

Educational function performs an important task for the video gaming press – to introduce readers to knowledge, social values, which forms a person educated and spiritually-held. Thus, unlike the 1980-2000s, the modern video game edition of "Igromania" focuses on analytical materials. The most common and favorite genre of gaming journalists is considered a review of video games. The review usually writes about the main elements of the game, such as: the plot, information about the developers, the background of the series/game universe, gameplay. Traditionally, the review brings an objective assessment of the game with a mention of its advantages and disadvantages. However, for the modern video gaming industry, there are cases when the opinion of the journalist and the final score are bought by the publishers of the game in order to mislead players. Such overrated games are often undeserved popularity, which fades after the formation of the reader's audience's own opinion about such a project, so that the authority of the publication in the eyes of

readers falls and lost confidence in the opinion of the reviewer [13-15-16].

By the advertising and reference functions video game journalism identifies consumers' demand, communicates with manufacturers of goods. This feature is of great importance to the gaming press in economic terms. Overseas registration of video game media gives journalists the right to obtain a copy of the game before its release for writing exclusive material on it. In recent years, this practice is actively introduced in the Russian segment of video game journalism.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study confirmed and extended the conclusions made by A.S. Bobrysheva (2009), K.Gillen (2005), D.Auerbach (2014), D. Tennant (2009). The results of our study contain the examples from the findings that the development of video game journalism is closely related to the changes taking place in the video gaming industry. At least this can be argued on the example of the creative activities of gaming journalists "Igromania" in Russia, paying great attention to internal problems. Also, our findings complement the research of K.P. Govorun and A.S. Borisova conclusions about the functional diversity of the gaming press and konkretisiert study V.I. Tarmaeva which examined the relationship between computer games and video game journalism.

Also, following Amrich D. (2012), Anderson C. (2007) and B.J. Harris (2014) we believe that video gaming publications should expand the list of covered topics, not to move away from the coverage of social problems and to fully cover the interests of the audience.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the functions realization in the texts of "Igromania" allows to reveal the mechanism of constructing the image of video games in the mass consciousness by the mass media. The publication occupies a special niche in the Russian video game journalism, forming functional, structural and communicative models different from other publications. "Igromania" puts forward a new concept, enabling a mass audience to form their informational potential on the issues of video games and entertainment. The magazine provides the audience with informative information, facilitates its search, as well as expands the horizons of gamers.

Nowadays, Russian gaming press is a set of print and online publications, as well as unique online blogs, while remaining a dynamically developing area of mass communication. The quality of analysis of the work of video game journalists in other media will reveal further research.

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