BOOK REVIEW

**World of Media: Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies**, edited by E. Vartanova, Moscow, National Association of Mass Media Researchers, 2017, 323 pp., free of charge (print), ISSN 2307-1605

It is never an easy task to review an edited volume due to the sheer diversity of the content that is presented to the reader. This book is no exception to this rule. There is a great deal of diverse content concerning different key challenges that are facing contemporary journalism by an equally diverse background of authors. Even though this presented a significant challenge to analyze in a systematic and meaningful manner, it was also a positive experience in becoming familiar with a number of non-mainstream Western media environments that are currently undergoing massive change. Articles contained within the book were selected after a process of blind review. But before moving to the review, it is necessary to offer a brief description of the World of Media series and its goals.

In 2009, the World of Media was initiated by the Faculty of Journalism at Moscow State University in conjunction with the National Association of Media Researchers (NAMMI) and the editor-in-chief of this annual publication is the Dean of the Journalism Faculty, Professor Elena Vartanova. Information on this venture can be found in English language at the following web address: http://worldofmedia.ru. At its inception, the World of Media began as a publication that focused mostly on Russian media, but in its current form it is an international platform that engages in the latest research findings within journalism and media studies from scholars around the world.

The World of Media issue from 2017 consists of one lead article, 10 research articles, one contemporary debate article, one review article and one conference report. A geographically diverse set of authors in this issue are from Russia, Canada, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Nigeria and Namibia. They tackle issues and subjects that range from the digital divide to ‘networkization’ to gender issues to political instrumentalization of media outlets and many more.

The first work in the World of Media after the Editor’s note was the lead article by Tatiana Frolova from Moscow State University on ‘Subject competence in journalism: issues of responsibility and ways to tackle them’. Frolova tackles the issue of the significant role that subject-matter expertise plays in the role of increasing the quality of content appearing in media. The problem analyzed here is: how do academic programs prepare future journalists in this regard? Although this article concerns a study carried out at the Faculty of Journalism at Moscow State University and concerns the content strategies of modern Russian media, the lessons are presented in such a manner that can potentially make them more widely relevant at a time of crisis in modern journalism. As Frolova notes, ‘it is crucial to establish a connection between the quality of media content and a journalist’s understanding of social responsibility, since this juncture reveals the necessity of improving and reinforcing the subject-matter expertise of content creators’ (p. 26). Thus the article is revealing a complex series of interconnections and interdependencies that need to be considered when attempting to resolve this question.

Next in the World of Media is the first research article on the ‘Conceptual evolution of the digital divide: a systematic review of the literature over a period of five years (2010–2015)’ by Bhanu Bhakta Acharya from the University of Ottawa. The author looks at the definition and perception of the digital divide and how the concept has evolved with the passing of time. This is a literature review that takes into account the nuances and evolutions that have taken place over the last 20 years, the primary focus being the five year period in the work’s
title. One of the central messages of the piece is that it is necessary to address the long-existing issues of socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities before the problem of the digital divide can be more effectively approached.

Following this research article, Jan Krecek from Charles University in Prague, presents an analysis of the changes in media ownership in media outlets in the Czech Republic. ‘Buying a gun not to use it? A study of the change in Czech media ownership and its political instrumentalization’ engaged in the sensitive topic of investigating the assumption that ownership of a media outlet equates to owning and exploiting its power of persuasion through influencing the editorial line. Although this hypothesis is actually dispelled in this particular instance, caution and vigilance is called for by the author.

From St. Kliment Ohridsky Sofia University in Bulgaria, Lilia Raycheva’s contribution ‘Transformations in the Bulgarian media system: Tendencies and challenges’ covers the experience of the Bulgarian transition towards civil society and a market economy, and how these have posed challenges to the development of mass media and journalism in the country. The author provides insight into the numerous challenges that Bulgarian media are currently facing, even after the country’s accession into the European Union. Raycheva concludes that the current situation is a dangerous one for the further development and consolidation of democracy in the country, given the various institutional and organizational challenges and hurdles being faced by the country’s mass media.

‘Christian media in Russia in the age of “networkization”’ by Victor Khroul from Moscow State University is the next contribution of the volume. Khroul sets out to analyze religious media in Russia within the context of ‘networkization’ in the national media system. He notes that there are three problems faced by these media: 1) journalism subordinated to PR and proselytization; 2) poor understanding of their target audience; and 3) the use of a language that is very specific and therefore difficult for many laymen to understand. Media outlets operated by Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant believers all enter into this analysis.

The geographical focus then shifts from Russia to Nigeria, where Joseph Wilson and Nuhu Gapsiso, both from the University of Maiduguri, contribute ‘Communicating in the absence of mobile telephone network during the state of emergency in Borno state, Nigeria’. What happens when a taken-for-granted form of communication is temporarily taken away by the authorities during a counter-terrorism/insurgency campaign? The authors demonstrate that the answer is: instead of reverting to prior forms of technology (landline phone, face-to-face, etc.) other forms of new communication technologies are adopted instead (such as social media).

Eno Akpabio from the University of Namibia then discusses the issue of ‘Women in Tanzanian media: a critical analysis’. This contribution delves in to the hardships and obstacles faced by women working in the media industry in Tanzania. These obstacles and barriers are in addition to those faced by their male colleagues who face threats and intimidation. Akpabio concludes that women are deeply marginalized by their male colleagues, which is illustrated by the ratio of male to female in mid and senior level management positions. Women also tend to be relegated to issues concerning ‘soft’ news, culture and entertainment.

‘Ethical education at Western schools of journalism’ by Irma Kumylganova from Moscow State University follows, where the author studies the current trends and approaches to the teaching of ethics at schools of journalism. Russian and other experience in the pedagogical traditions and approach to the instruction in media ethics is very diverse. The study notes that there is a clear need for a ‘clearly formulated, objective and socially sanctioned system of ethical requirements to guide the work of mass media professionals’ (p. 184). In addition to the study of secondary material, interviews with US and European teaching staff, classroom observation was used by the author to reach her conclusions.
The following study also deals with the issue of ethics ‘Violations of journalistic ethics: professional negligence or a pattern?’ by Iosif Dzyaloshinsky from the National Research University: Higher School of Economics in Moscow analyzes the violations of ethics by journalists in the Russian media. A study of the perception of the violation of media ethics among students was undertaken. This study had been performed earlier and the results compared. The comparison shows some changes in what students consider to be the primary types of violations that are occurring currently compared to the original 2011 survey. The author notes a certain disconnect from the general public concern for media freedom, driven in part by the behavior of media and journalists in Russia, which has a tendency to mitigate the journalists’ ‘ethical amnesia’.

Elena Kalugina from Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University writes about ‘The influence of citizen journalism on the Internet media sector: demarcation between online media and other network resources’. This contribution concerns the need to rethink traditional understandings of media and journalism, and how they operate. ‘Network resources’ are being increasingly used by media and journalists to obtain information, which has witnessed an increase in the competition between professional and citizen journalism. This raises questions concerning definition and categorization, which in turn has implications for the formulation of laws and regulations that are intended to govern the activity.

The final research article to appear in the volume is ‘Freedom of expression and safety of journalists in the digital age’ by Abigail Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Hassan Hussein Shabu from the University of Lagos (Nigeria). This paper covers the role of journalists and mass media from the perspective of their potential role as a fourth estate, which is undermined when they are attacked, intimidated by legal constraints, issuing of licences and so forth. The focus is on the work of journalists during the digital age, and how they can possibly overcome or circumvent the challenges faced by journalists in order to go about their work in holding officials accountable to the public. Although the setting is primarily in Nigeria, there are also some possible implications and lessons for the wider world.

The final part of the World of Media to be reviewed is the contemporary debate article ‘Media criticism as a form of literary journalism: updating theoretical approaches to a meta-genre’ by Alla Teplyashina and Natalia Pavlushkina from St. Petersburg State University. They analyze the contemporary practices of literary journalism with a focus on media criticism as being a central part of its content. A more in-depth look at the works and style of one literary journalist, Tatyana Moskvina, is undertaken. The authors conclude that ‘media criticism constitutes the core of literary journalism as it gives important social and artistic meaning to the meta-genre of the column’ (p. 306).

As seen from the above-mentioned abbreviated descriptions of the constituent parts of the World of Media (2017), it is extremely diverse in terms of the topics and content. This does not make the task of reviewing an easy one as it is normally necessary to get a good ‘feel’ for the quality and consistency of a work. Certainly in terms of living up to the stated aims and goals of the World of Media series in general, it does so by engaging in the research and understanding of key processes, trends and challenges faced by contemporary journalism and mass media.

Instead of viewing the diversity of the content as being problematic and a challenge for the reviewer, I would frame this a little differently. It should be viewed, in my opinion, as its strength and an opportunity for the reader to engage in reading relevant and topical research from different non-mainstream country studies (Nigeria, Tanzania and Russia), thereby offering the reader new information and perspectives on topics, issues and challenges that are faced by Western countries (such as the Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic), and also simultaneously faced by other countries with different cultural/historical/political experiences and approaches, not to mention the nature of resources. Thus World of Media is offering a rich amount of
information and material from a comparative perspective, and making information and knowledge from other languages available (Bulgarian, Czech and Russian). A very minor drawback is the very occasional typo, but these are few in number in a very informative volume of the current challenges faced by contemporary journalists and media outlets.

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