

# REFLECTION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PUBLICISTIC JOURNALISM GENRES IN THE SLOVAK MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

The submitted study addresses the topic of the current state of the opinion journalism and its genres in the Slovak periodical press. The author draws attention to the question of classification of the opinion journalism of a rational and emotional type from the genre categorization point of view and, simultaneously, reflects on its application in the present journalistic practice. This brings a certain rate of confrontation between the defined theoretical premises and their subsequent practical (non-)implementation. The main objective of the study is to clarify the presence of genres of analytical and literary opinion journalism stated by media theory in the environment of the Slovak periodicals. Presentation of the basic terminological axis and the related explication of journalism genres included in the opinion journalism constitute the secondary objectives of the paper. For the purposes of achieving the set objectives, the author uses methods of logical analysis of text in combination with discourse analysis. Similarly, she predicts the evident presence of the phenomenon of hybridization in the Slovak journalistic practice.

***Keywords:** hybridization, journalism genres, opinion journalism, periodical press*

## INTRODUCTION

Periodical press as such could have been perceived for centuries and, thanks to its dynamic development, it has become an integral part of everyday lives of the whole society. Journalism, and mainly the complex system of journalism genres, has been changing mostly on the basis of the needs of the audience, but also the needs of the authors themselves. However, due to modern technological innovations or intensive changes in the lifestyles of individuals, new writing and reading habits started to emerge. The most significant change in the area of journalism is the phenomenon of the internet, through which a completely new dimension of informational needs can be observed. Despite the aforementioned, i.e. the wide spectrum of possibilities to perceive media contents, we are currently able to note a stable interest of people in journalistic expressions within the classic periodical press. Not only the news reporting, but also the publicistic journalism genres, can still be described as considerably attractive and sought out by the recipients. Journalists utilize them to a large extent and they can frequently be

found in current periodicals. Information in these genres is presented in a more reader-friendly way, while their truthfulness and reliability cannot be denied. Besides stating the facts, they are also able to make a judgment or provide a certain opinion on specific occurrences or affect emotions of the recipients of these media contents. As a consequence of the topical phenomenon of the so-called hybridization, it is presently rather difficult to identify the individual journalistic expressions in the periodical press, as they are characterized by the elements of heterogeneous genre groups, while many of them atrophy as a result of socio-cultural and technical-technological development of the society. It has thus become our objective to provide a complex overview of current shape of publicistic journalism genres in the Slovak periodicals on the basis of theoretical approaches of the experts.

We base our processing of the issue of the existence of publicistic genre types on the theoretical concepts of A. Tušer, H. Pravdová, M. Marko, and others. Beside the acquired key knowledge, we also do not forget the critical aspects of theoreticians related to the opinion journalism genres or their classification as such.

## **TERMINOLOGICAL DEFINITION OF OPINION JOURNALISM AND PRESENTATION OF BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ITS CREATION**

The term “publicistic” (opinion) journalism has its origins in the Latin language and the word “publicus” means related to the people, municipality, the state and also municipal, public.[1] Opinion journalism can be described as a productive mental activity that reflects primary and topical social phenomena in the centre of public attention.[2] Contrary to the news reporting, the opinion journalism sees the current affairs as not only the subject of presenting, but also a premise for a certain generalization; its dominant feature being the judgment-making.[3] Therefore, one of the differences between the news reporting and the opinion journalism is the fact that, besides the informational element, the opinion journalism also provides an evaluation approach. Opinion journalism works with information that is later transformed and adjusted to a given audience on the basis of the author’s knowledge and abilities. It does not prefer the accepting point of view, but rather the evaluating one – it makes judgments about the facts, analyses, generalizes, looks for context, and expresses opinions.[2] In the opinion journalism articles the author decides the method of depicting the reality and the selection of language used in their expressions. Contrary to the news reporting, they are able to use authenticity in their creative activities. However, they should still depict events that are topical and publicly discussed. Texts of this type can be found predominantly in press of a not especially frequent periodicity (e.g. weekly or monthly periodicals, etc.).[3] Besides topicality and evaluating opinions, opinion journalism is also distinctive by the public, factuality, pragmatism, suggestiveness, accessibility, and resourcefulness.[2] Š. Veľas also regards massness as one of the basic characteristics of opinion journalism.[4] On the other

hand, H. Pravdová and A. Koltaiová extend the aforementioned specificities by the author's authenticity, opinion-forming ability, and subjectivity.[5]

In comparison to the news reporting genres, the publicistic ones are longer and characterized by certain compositional and lexical particularities. The publicistic language style is thus an inseparable part of opinion journalism. It is a method of purposeful selection and thematic arrangement of the standard language that is used to inform the public in a prompt, accurate, and convincing way.[6] Publicistic texts are thus very "rich" in information and contain large amounts of facts. As the publicistic style is being used in a significant number of journalistic texts, an obvious variability is characteristic for it. In other words, the publicistic style should be comprehensible and clear, not too simplistic, but rather unique. The author should beware of their statement appearing primitive. At the same time, they should use such words and expressions that allow the content to be understandable even to a person of elementary education. The clearness should also be involved in the process of creating the framework of the expression. Article should not contain logical errors, confusion of terms or diversions causing dissonant rhythm of the expression.[7] Another important part of the stylistics of the opinion journalism is the accuracy that needs to be achieved through using both the language and non-language tools. For the word selection it applies that with the increasing extent of the text its content decreases.[8] Therefore, words in publicistic articles can, for a better effect, be exchanged for image material or charts that have an ability to fulfil a function of a sensible persuasive invective. This can be achieved through several methods. For example, the literary expression uses a more compact syntax, the analytical type an abundance of a certain element.[7] Variability or efficiency of an expression also have their irreplaceable role among the characteristic features of the publicistic style. However, the variability must be applied with caution and consideration, as the intensity of such tools should only be of an extent that does not obscure the meaning and idea of the article. However, the opposite of the aforementioned variability is often an undesirable stereotypicality of expression and its excessive use can fall short of the mark and can thus eliminate interest of a potential recipient. Within the context of the analyzed topic of opinion journalism in the current Slovak media environment, we can speak of two basic approaches of a journalist to a particular socially significant phenomenon – a rational and an emotional approach.

## **ANALYTICAL AND LITERARY OPINION JOURNALISM**

Opinion journalism of the rational type, also called analytical, evaluative, inspecting or commenting opinion journalism[2], constitutes a significant element of newspapers since the time it has successfully separated itself from news reporting, which resulted in a gradual definition and consolidation of its genres. This type of opinion journalism is unique, specific, and distinctive and, therefore, it differs from both the news reporting and the literary opinion journalism. The expressions of the opinion journalism of the rational, or factual, type aim to

clarify, persuade, and support statements with facts. The opinion journalism of this type includes expressions that analyse, clarify, generalize, and evaluate the facts with intent to express an attitude towards a certain topical phenomenon in the society or to persuade and win over the audience. In the creation of the aforementioned journalistic type, an expedient should not only briefly report the news and facts, but should contribute to the information with evaluation or criticism, while expressing himself on the basis of the abovementioned cognitive process. The most frequently used style in the analytical opinion journalism is the descriptive and expository writing style. The representing genres are the commentary, note, analysis, review, editorial, editorial brief, and publicistic interview.[9] J. Mistrík, on the other hand, includes commentary, glossary, evaluation, editorial, discussion, review, polemic, debate, caricature, pamphlet, and entrefilet into this group of journalistic expressions.[10] According to P. Verner, the genre definition of opinion journalism of the rational type, differently from the previous categorizations, contains author's article, column, commentary, interview, reportage, essay, glossary, cameo, obituary, portrait, feuilleton, court report, sketch, and PR article.[11] Because of the difference in the assertions or typologies of individual genres from the previous authors, H. Pravdová and A. Koltaiová, their ideas cited in the publication by Z. Bučková and L. Rusňáková, are of an opinion that the genres belonging to the group of opinion journalism of the rational type should be included there in accordance to their frequency and representation in the periodicals. Specifically, they classify commentary, editorial, essay, analysis, review, polemic, note, publicistic interview, editorial brief, and epistolary opinion journalism as the opinion journalism genres [2], thus presenting one of the most topical classifications of the analytical opinion journalism genres.

Based on the mentioned facts, it could be generalized that the opinion journalism of an analytical type simply points out the fact that a journalist factually argues, explains, or evaluates an event or information and in doing so uses reason, i.e. the rational approach.[3] This point of view is represented mainly by an application of thought processes that lead to an emergence of logical-terminological framework of the analysed issue. In creating the texts of opinion journalism of the rational type, the author uses methods of logical analysis, which include analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, abstraction and concretization, comparison, argumentation, and evidence presentation.[12] Through the aforementioned methods, the author is able to create an expression belonging to the opinion journalism of rational type. The result of such approach is a content that covers topical events and phenomena with a certain rate of authenticity, similarly to the opinion journalism of the emotional type. However, due to its compositional methods, ways of expressing or portraying the reality, it could be regarded as the opposite of the factual type of opinion journalism.

Opinion journalism of the emotional type (or literary opinion journalism) is characterized by the dominance of artistic means, figurativeness, emotionality, generalization or imagination and figurative-emotional depiction. Through these

instruments, an author is able to influence emotions of the recipients, while this approach of theirs could be described as emotional. This approach is specific also for the genres of opinion journalism of the emotional type or, in other words, the publicistic literary genres. The authors of literary text generalize their knowledge of life and people in a certain pattern, depict them using artistic images, and it is this principle of capturing a phenomenon, a fact or an event that makes it clearer and more easily acceptable for the audience than the elements of logical-terminological methods. Author attempts to influence the emotions of the recipient and thus convey an aesthetic experience or an impulse for an emotional reaction. It is, therefore, close to an artistic style and largely applies literary methods derived from prose writing, such as e.g. allegory, expressivity, metaphor or metonymy.[2] Furthermore, it can be stated that this type of opinion journalism also contains a classificatory opinion that has a basis in the figurative style of depiction and in the arguments.[13]

Within the literary opinion journalism, we may speak of several genre types, which include the reportage, feuilleton, causerie, glossary, sketch, essay, column, and entrefilet.[5] Within the stated context, it is, however, necessary to mention also the fact that the emotional effect, as well as the quality of a journalistic product, is also determined by its consumers. Proportionately to the growing cultural level of the society, the excellence of journalism must also grow. To achieve an efficient expression, the mental influence through journalistic data does not suffice, but it is the emotional intensity that is the essential part.[7] In order to increase the quality of journalism, the overlap between the rational and emotional basis of journalistic expressions occurs naturally and the term “hybridization” has been establishing itself more and more in the genreology. It also implies certain problems related to identification of the specific publicistic genres on the one hand and their clear classification into either the analytical or literary opinion journalism on the other hand.

## **CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES RELATED TO THE PUBLICISTIC JOURNALISM GENRES**

In connection to the current production of journalism genres, a phenomenon of the so-called hybridization is being pointed out. The term indicates the increasing trend of overlapping of individual genre types, when, for instance, methods and vocabulary typical for publicistic genres become a part of reporting and vice-versa. Journalism genre thus transforms its form, but also its intent. Genre types can simply overlap and their relationship and interaction depends on the rate and functions they are supposed to fulfil. Boundaries between them are often unclear and blurred.[14]

A. Tušer defines an attempt to divide genres into specific groups as a way of supporting a journalist to be able to choose a method and form of processing a certain topic. The group of genres of the analytical opinion journalism comprises genre groups characteristic for periodicals with a longer periodicity. Based on this

thesis, these would be the commentary, editorial, analysis, review, note, publicistic interview, and rarely also the editorial brief.[3] Typology of genres of the opinion journalism of rational type according to Š. Vel'as is almost identical to the categorization by A. Tušer. However, we see a certain difference in Vel'as's classification of genres, such as the no longer used scope of press and a complex journalistic analysis. Although the scope of press has similar characteristic features as the review, the author categorizes it as a separate genre with a specific aim to assess journalistic texts. In past, it used to contain exclusively criticisms of magazines and individual articles within them. The complex journalistic analysis or the thematic centrefold, not stated by Tušer, is a genre in which the author comprehensively depicts a certain phenomenon or an event. Artistic elements are absent in this genre, although some non-journalistic passages can be observed in it. Thanks to them, the journalist is able to characterize the analysed issue in a more factual way and provide a certain aesthetic experience. The complex journalistic analysis is thus more related to genres of other media, as on the radio it is called a radio documentary.[4] A specific stance on the classification of genres of opinion journalism of the rational type has been taken by the earlier mentioned P. Verner. The discussed theoretician includes the author's article, column, commentary, interview, reportage, essay, glossary, cameo, obituary, portrait, feuilleton, court report, sketch, and PR article in these genres[11], thus pointing out the apparent overlap between the analytical and literary opinion journalism. Other classification is provided by D. Slančová, who categorizes only the commentary, essay, review, and glossary as the genres of opinion journalism. The aforementioned categorization is theoretically based on the relation between these genres and the fact that they all have common features with the commentary.[15] Definition of the glossary as a genre of opinion journalism of rational type is contrary to the categorization by H. Pravdová and A. Koltaiová. These authors classify this genre as the genre type of the opinion journalism of the emotional type. The difference of categorization of P. Verner in comparison to H. Pravdová and A. Koltaiová is even greater, as the two theoreticians, similarly to the glossary, also classify the column, reportage, feuilleton, essay, and sketch as the genres of literary opinion journalism due to their figurative-emotional depiction.[5]

Categorization of journalism genres is an essential and frequently discussed topic; however, the current theory of journalism genres does not provide a comprehensible and complex overview even in the theoretical issues that stem from the relation between journalism and fiction. As stated by M. Marko, there are opinions that strictly separate journalism and fiction, consequently dividing the journalists and writers. He also speaks of journalism as an earlier stage of fiction. Journalistic literature, however, works autonomously, with its own characteristic features and principles. Therefore, we cannot compare two independent spheres of writing – journalism and fiction; as such comparison is unscientific, unprofessional, and unreliable. Although a journalistic expression can contain literary features, it should not be described as fiction.[7] Similar problem with genre classification is also being discussed in connection to the

feuilleton. It is thus not certain that every feuilleton belongs to opinion journalism. If, for instance, its content is not purposefully documentary and contains artistic principles such as generalization, typification, or artistic figurativeness, it does not fulfil the premises of a journalistic expression. Therefore, it can be stated that it is a journalism genre, but has lost the specific elements of this genre type. On the other hand, it has adopted the ways of capturing events that are immanent in fiction – the artistic area. In regards to the content, it is more a part of this discipline than the opinion journalism. Thus, its definition is not unequivocal and, besides the aforementioned facts, it is true that it has gained different characteristic features in different countries resulting from the impact of the environment and specific contexts in the society.[2] The status of reportage, or its inconsistent classification as an opinion journalism or a news reporting genre, is also debatable in the Slovak media environment. For instance, T. Repková and J. Mistrík regard it as a news reporting type of journalism, stating that the presence of a journalist in an article is less pronounced than in other literary units and it provides mostly facts, knowledge, and impressions, not ideas, which means that its suggestiveness is indirect.[10] However, M. Wojtková is of a contrasting opinion and states that reportage is not only a journalistic but also an artistic genre categorized as non-fiction literature. According to the primary classification, stated by e.g. T. Rončáková, Z. Bučková, and L. Rusňáková, reportage is, besides other types, classified also as reportage-portrait, reportage-event, or reportage-interview, etc.[2] M. Marko, on the other hand, does not sympathize with creating and applying genre and terminological combinations that have no meaning. According to the author, reportage is meaningful only stand-alone, with its own inherent laws, similarly to the sketch or feuilleton, regardless of the fact that some characteristics and features of these genres overlap.[7]

Protrusion and overlapping of the elements of the journalistic units stimulates the existence of genres defined as borderline. According to A. Tušer, the borderline genres are the newly-emerging forms of reality depiction that evolve during the artistic activity of authors. A genre is thus a variable, constantly developing phenomenon. Within the journalistic expression, various features of genres can be combined and, in certain situations, if it is important for the thematic focus of the article, the author can combine both the literary and the rational approach.[3] Therefore, when considering the essence of individual publicistic genre types, it is necessary to take into account mainly the fact that socio-cultural changes and technical-technological progress have determined the fact of instability of their individual definitions and classifications that must be continually re-evaluated.

## CONCLUSION

Journalism genres had been developing and forming for a long time until reaching the shape in which we know them today. Their unstoppable progress has been influenced also by the technological development, which allowed the journalistic texts to be presented to their readers in various forms. It is the basic

(formal and contentual) essence of the journalism genres that is presently causing a dispute among theoreticians, as their categorization into the news reporting or the opinion journalism of the rational or emotional type is not uniform. Coherence of the relevant experts in the area of categorization and description of individual genres is, however, important, mainly for the reason of successful identification and clear classification of the given journalistic types into the wider genre groups. The ambiguity of the definitions and categorization of journalism genres belonging to the analytical and literary opinion journalism has led us to closer exploration of this topic.

The primary objective of the study was to clarify the presence of journalism genres of the analytical and literary opinion journalism in current media environment by providing a closer presentation of critical outlook of the theoreticians on the discussed problem. Based on the presented knowledge, we have come to find an evident variability in the characteristics and mainly the typology of the publicistic genres that, in our opinion, reflects the current social situation in combination with the technological development of new media and genre types typical for these genres that retrospectively influence also the journalism genres in press. Experts' opinion differences could lead to undesirable questions, answering which requires a further, more thorough study of certain phenomena. Syncretism of genres and sub-genres, emergence of new categories, or their extinction, thus becomes a subject of further, more in-depth discourse.

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