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Participative culture in community media

Abstract

This theoretical study deals with the conjencture of community media and participative culture in the context of media production. It also showcases the importance of culture per se and its place within community media.

Key words:

Community Media. Cultural theory. Participative culture.

Introduction

Community media, which are still undefined within the confines of slovak legislature, is a media type which coexists in one media environment together with public and private media. And although there is a large amount of countries, which have ratified community media, there are still countries, much like Slovakia, which have not done so yet. One of the pillars of community media is participation of the community within the production process. Same as other media types, community media also contribute to creating a so-called media culture. Within public and private media, the culture is defined „from the top" –

derived from the existence of a hierarchy and internal structure created by the managing body of the media themselves. On the other hand, community media lends the reins to the „normal" people within minority groups, i.e. communities. This leads to the argument, that we can see the participation within the creation process as a form of participative culture.

Participation and media

„Participative culture as a term is often used to describe the partaking of users / audience or consumers and fans with the creation of culture and content." We can interpret this as any participation at all from the individual when creating and distributing media content. In the context of community media however, this production is advanced to a next level to a certain level of autonomy, as community media content is by far and large created by media "unprofessionals", i.e. people who might or might not have a media education or prior practice within the sector. This makes it possible, that any community member has the right to partake in the creation of the content of his community medium. The most usual motivation to do so

is their love of creating content or the need to have a voice which can be heard.

It becomes obvious, that we can suggest a certain form of participative culture within the context of social networks, which are used by individuals as a medium of distributing one's own thoughts, opinions and artistic expressions in the form of text, photography, graphics and other art forms. These distributions usually stay within the confines of individual expressions. In the context of community media however, we consider this a form of an organised group with its own internal hierarchy, which communicates the content in an organised fashion with the goal of distributing it to a specific audience, which in this case are the other community members or community affiliates.

Due to the fact, that most of the people within these communities know each other personally, there is a certain openness within the content of the work presented in community media. Jenkins puts this into correlation with the subsequent content adoption with the audience:" A participatory culture

is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created)."

Participative culture does not have to be made up completely by a culture per se, i.e. something which is just an artistic expression of the author or of multiple authors. Delwiche and Henderson even understand that if for example somebody suggests something to somebody else on the internet, writes a review, etc., one can argue that this is also a part of it. In this case, participative knowledge is a part of participative culture. It is hard to pinpoint the exact boundaries which define what does and what does not fall under this culture, as the opinions of various authors are quite polarising on this topic. For example, the limits differ depending on the perspective of culturology or mediology.

Carpentier is one of the leading scientific mind on participativity within community media. He understands that there is an issue in the theoretical, conceptual and even in the analytical understanding of this particular topic. The reason for this is the wide range of the community media themselves, not to mention the amount of participation within them, which offers plethora of different options concerning artistic expressions.

From the perspective of community media typology, the frontline of participative culture creation is filled by cultural community media, whose goal is usually the actual development of culture and art, providing space to alternative and / or less popular artists and their works and even the spreading of culture which is in direct opposition to the mainstream culture. In the specific case of community radios, one can define this as alternative or indie music, different subgenres of metal music, etc. On the other end of the spectrum, we have zines which focus on both prose and poetry, polemic or philosophical texts, or even reports from various cultural events, photography reports and many more. There is even a category of the so-called "youth community media",

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which tries to agitate cultural and artistic feelings and practice within the community of the younger generation of today through the option of letting them participate on the content of the media by themselves.

In general, it is plausible to argue that being a member in a community does not mean that one has to obligatory participate on creating the content of the community's medium. On the other hand, it is of utmost importance, that the community should give their members the option to do so, whenever they feel like it is necessary and the community should reward this behavior. Rewards within communities are mostly non-financial; they usually consist of positive vocal feedback to the author.

Conclusion

The production of both public and private media does not have any participation of their audience in mind when managing content creation. These media often lean on their own resources, which can narrow the culture created by these media to just a handful of authors. On the other hand, community me-

dia by their definition offer space for participation to all members of minority communities. They help these people to realise their goals of sharing their own worldview with other members of the community and contribute to creating an alternative culture, one that is an alternative to the mainstream culture. Contrary to typical belief, this culture is not created randomly, but it has its own audience, which can be the same people as the creators of it. This form of participative culture, which is in turn the same as any media culture, is created within the confines of the respective communities, whose goal is neither profit nor fame. Their goal is to contribute to the cultural dialogue, to the development of culture through participation and to creating a platform, which could offer anyone to express themselves.

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