

Chapter 23

To Think Future of Journalism With Virtual Reality

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ABSTRACT

The neutrality that is accepted among the journalism principles is very unlikely when it comes to the practice. Journalism, which started with writing, has become one of the fields that benefit from the technological possibilities to fulfill the objectivity and truth transfer criteria. The picture has been featured in the news transmission so that the photographer can see the actual use of the video later on and can testify to the story. Today, the latest development in the field of journalism of developing technology is the application of virtual reality. Virtual reality, a new application area in reporting yet, will bring many arguments. Ethical issues, reality formation, impartiality, a new visual experience are some of these discussion areas. In this study, it is aimed to investigate new discussion topics which will be brought to the field of journalism while discussing how and with what kind of news the virtual reality application which opens a new field in the journalism.

INTRODUCTION

News is a text that both transmits information and conveys a story. With mediation, which is the process of transforming an event into a form conformable for media, the event is converted into a story. Due to the structure of the media, it is not possible, within this process, to convey the full account of the event that has happened in actuality. Although the news organizations argue that they have conveyed the reality, what they conveyed is not the reality itself but a remanufactured reality. The news organizations pass the information they collected to generate content from certain filters. Gatekeepers are the decision-makers who decide which information will pass through the filter and which will not. The news values, broadcasting principles of the institution, codes of ethics, economic and political connections of the institution are among the elements that shape the new reality. The actual event passes through filters and a new reality emerges that is re-structured and fictionalized by the news organization.

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Although the process described above seems to evoke only print journalism, it is also valid for visual journalism. Just as the items to be and not to be printed are sorted, the items to be shown and not to be shown as also separated from each other. Thanks to the use visual materials entering the world of journalism first with drawings and then with photographs, it is enabled for the audience to witness the event and also to reinforce the credibility of the news organization. People think that what they see is the reality and therefore find it more credible. However, a photograph is a visual element that is shot with the help of an objective-lens and that is actually not so objective. The news photographs taken are moments dissected from the reality as a whole. It is unknown to the viewer as to which section of the reality this immortalized moment belongs to. Although photograph, as a frozen frame of a moment, is “real”, it does not convey the whole reality.

Another visual element that is introduced to journalism is motion image, i.e., video. Motion image does not freeze and dissect the moment like a photograph; it presents a time slot in motion and dissects a wider time slot. However, the images passed through the process called editing before broadcasting phase are cut, shortened and reunited. This practice being a feature of media processing, prevents the broadcasted item from being “real”. Even without editing, motion images also share same fate with the photograph owing to the angle selected by the camera lens.

Today, the most recent visual experience in the field of journalism is the virtual reality (VR) technology. Holding the promise to become a witness to an event outside of time and space, VR has been started to be implemented by news organizations. The content of VR invites the audience to become a participant instead of just a viewer. Being a very new application field in journalism, VR aims to provide an actual experience to the audience. It is considered that the audience will be able to empathize with the event via this application. Furthermore, it is claimed that the VR technology, which also includes 360-degree videos, will overcome the criticism brought for other visual content such as photographs and video. As indicated above, the image in a photograph and a video is the one where the lens is directed to. However, 360-degree videos ensure that the whole angle is visible. This, in turn, brings about a subjective visualization experience for the individuals.

Having started to be used in the field of journalism since 2015, VR also brings about many questions and problems. Ethical problems, manufacture of reality, impartiality and a new visual experience are some of the issues of debate. This study will concentrate on the identified issues of debate, try to make determinations and bring suggestions. The subject of remanufacture of reality via the media will be especially emphasized and the role played by the methods used in journalism, including VR, in remanufacturing reality will be discussed. In this study focused on visual journalism, it will be tried to explain the impacts of methods used in the media on the visual experience.

In the scope of this study, the above-mentioned topics will be addressed with argumentative method and the VR applications that the news organizations have started to use will be addressed with a descriptive approach. This study aims to discuss how and what type of news are made with the VR application that has opened new horizons in visual journalism and also to review new issues of debate to be put forth by this application in the field of journalism.

NEWS AS A SLICE OF REALITY

It cannot be denied that there is an organic bond between news and reality. News is a slice of reality, a slice dissected from the reality in the whole world, and then from the reality that is considered news-

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