

New normality of agriculture against the background of infodemia (Georgian example)

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Abstract

Growing technological development in the last decades and a traditional media environment modified due to the stated reason has placed Journalism before absolutely new challenges, mainly before necessity of struggling with false information and propagandistic narrative. On the first hand, it should solely select information source, moreover, personally create and share a definite information, and, on the another hand it created a real opportunity of spreading of media materials burdened with propaganda and hate speech.

The key functions for which, many centuries ago, journalism was created, its social objective is primarily based on informing of audience. Information has a vital significance for each separate individuum, as well as for the whole community. Well-known word-painting definition determines its significance and essence as of the “democracy currency”. However, operative information is valuable only when it preserves all obligatory features (factuality, actuality, specificity and others), and, simultaneously, obtains new features, that is conditioned by specifics of descriptive means of its channels of transmission (printed, broadcasting, digital media).

Accurate, fact-based information supports absolute participation of an individuum in a contemporary life that is expressed by correct objectives in social relations and creation of one’s own construction of the world perception. In contradiction with the stated, disinformation and spreading of false news really work; they are targeted at misleading of the auditory, manipulating with a social opinion and having an impact on the informed choice of a user.

Target of the present thesis is to make analysis of the agricultural sector, the so called “new normality”, against the background of the current infodemia, which will be discussed by us as replacing of the behavioral norms generated by separate individuum and organizations during thousands of years with new forms of relations.

The definition “infodemia” is set as flooding of online and offline information and by an attempt of intended spreading of false news its aim is to support alternative agendas of separate groups and individuum.

A task of the research is to make an analyze of communication channels forms for an access to the market and links with the users in new normality conditions on the example of activity of small and average farmers of Georgia.

A target of the research is to analyze the so called “new normality” of the agricultural sector against the background of infodemia. The “new normality” in this research is considered as replacing of behavioral norms generated within thousands of years by human beings and organization with new forms of relations.

A task of the research is, on the example of activity of small and average farms of Georgia, in terms of new normality, to analyze communication channels and forms of communication with users and access to the market.

Methodology of the Research

Qualitative analysis, on top of the indepth interviews with small and average farmers and focus groups, is based on the so called “table analysis”, in frames of which we have studied the media and obtained qualitative and quantitative data.

A significant part of the research is a content analysis. The table research revealed that necessity of digital skills among average and small farmers particularly became distinctive against the background of problems caused by Covid 19 pandemics. Accordingly, we, for the purpose of content analysis, obtained materials about farmers’ problems while pandemics using the searching terms and time filters. We used the following key words: Covid 19 pandemics, farmer, problem and time filter in the period since the 1st of March, 2020 – till the 1st of October, 2021. As a result of the stated, we selected 75 media publications dedicated to farmers’ problems.

Results of the content analysis, on their hand, revealed a methodology selected for the research – a specter of conducting of deepen interviews. The analyze demonstrated that a significant part of the specter of employers of digital skills is self-employed; also, the small and average farmers include business operators in the agricultural field who have routine communication with journalists as they report their activity. Accordingly, in frames of the research, in addition to the profound interviews with employers and self-employees in the agricultural sector, we formed a focus group including experts and journalists working in the agricultural sector. A target of the focus group was to identify necessities of the actors employed in the agricultural sector from the viewpoint of digital skills in terms of the “new normality”.

Review of sources

International Commission of Toxicomany of Viruses (ICTV) and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2021), cooperatively, examined an impact of the COVID-19 on the agriculture and in 2021 they published the following data: currently approximately 820 ml people suffer from chronical starvation. Vulnerable

groups are small farmers, illegal (self-employed) workers involved in different agricultural activities who lost the work, however the food markets still can preserve stability. Probably, in the nearest future production of expensive products (fruit, vegetables) will be decreased, supply of new products due to obstacles in transportation that will necessarily cause increasing of food residues and losses (particularly fish, marine products).

Agricultural sector always played a focal role in the Georgian economics, which is directly connected with more than 3500 villages on its territory, being historically formed territorial units (Kuprashvili, Chalaganidze, 2020). They are populated with more than half of the country's whole population; their small agricultural premises have a significant impact on preservation of minimal standards of life of the majority of population.

In the beginning of the Covid 19 pandemics, Georgia was one of the first country, together with other countries, where the so called "Lockdown" was established, intercity movement was suspended and farmers were placed before serious problems on the first stage of the pandemics.

The Cambridge Dictionary determines a term of "infodemia" as a situation where false information is spread by harmful ways.

One of the first authorities who connected ingress of infection with the crisis caused by spreading of Covid 19 virus, was personally the World Health Organization (WHO -Managing the COVID-19 infodemic: Promoting healthy behaviours and mitigating the harm from misinformation and disinformation Joint statement by WHO, UN, UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNAIDS, ITU, UN Global Pulse, and IFRC, 2020), who, in its articles published on the web-site, underscored necessity of handling with wide-spread flow of disinformation in pandemics.

At the World Health Assembly, in May, 2020, members of the WHO adopted WHA73.1 Resolution – Covid 19 Respond. The resolution recognizes, that management of infodemia is a significant part of the control over COVID-19 pandemics; the resolution urges the member-states to submit a COVID-19 "reliable content", calling different countries to mke all efforts against disinformation.

The WHO states that the Covid 19 pandemics is the first thing that is closely connected with infodemia (Walter, 2020) and is expressed in active application of channels of social media as well as media generally, for avoiding of virus spreading, and vice versa, misleading of citizens with false information. A problem of tracing of a path in the information labyrinth is especially aggravated during the pandemics when disinformation may have a negative impact on human health, and, individuums and organizations may make incorrect decision which, on top of the health, worsens their social-economic background.

Our research is based on the theory of "new normality. This term is interpreted by the Collins Dictionary, as a "state before unusual which unexpectedly becomes standard or typical". The term was applied prior to the Covid 19 pandemics (Begg, 2021), however the pandemics "new formality" made it globally actual. In this context, the terms are used to show if how the pandemics had modified existence of a human beings in different fields, such as professional identity, economic livelihood, work and family, education management and others which require stimulation of scientific debates.

Our research is focused on the agricultural sector against the background of the “new normality”. A group of American scientists in their scientific Article “Agricultural communications: prospects from experts” (Kurtzo, Hansen, Rucher, 2016) considers that agro communication as a field was transformed into a wide specter of communication and it requires a relevant studying. Authors of the article name as skills necessary for agricultural communicators, not only technical knowledge of the art of communications but they think that they need a general knowledge about the agriculture as of the sector.

One of the last work in this direction was dated by 2020. The Article “Impact of agricultural communication intervention on improvement of agricultural productivity in Malawi” (Masambuka, Rodgrigues, Buck, Niewoehner, 2020) reports about failure of farmers in handling with their problems only using their local resources and existing knowledge. Thus, scientists recommend to review technologies enabling farmers to apply efficient communication channels for sharing of their ideas and innovations.

Existing scientific works and articles say that problems of agricultural communications exist even in such developed countries, as the USA. Scientists see a precondition of development of the field in development of the communication field and consider that the most efficient and useful communication channel among contemporary entrepreneurs are social networks.

Results of the research

As a result of the content analysis we formulated a list of the problems which are actual for average farmers as a result of impact of the pandemics. These problems are divided into two general groups:

1. A problem of conducting of agricultural works, which include availability of relevant inventory as well as a problem of means and movement.
2. A problem of an access to consumers; a general market of general harvest for small farmers had been represented by local agricultural markets which had been closed.

To study the problem in Georgia, we selected two farmers whose cases were reviewed in details by means of a indepth interviews.

Case study 1

Merab Tsulukidze, a cultivator of floristic greenhouse (Astromeria greenhouse) in Batumi (Western Georgia) was placed before a risk of serious financial loss in March of the last year. The small entrepreneur says that a comparatively large harvest of flowers being the only one source of incomes for his multi-child family faced against a risk of destruction – selling of flowers was not the only one confirmed method.

Prior to the pandemics, the entrepreneur was selling his flowers only in floristic shops, but in February these shops were closed due to the lock-down. Losing of one-year harvest for the family was a tragedy and the entrepreneur was forced to search for alternative ways of marketing of the products, and it was online trading.

For this purpose, the entrepreneur created a simple Facebook page, a profile (it was not a like page), with a simple heading “Flowers on site”. The entrepreneur says that this method had a very good result. Moreover, the small entrepreneur discovered that online marketing of flowers is much more profitable than their delivery to shops. By this way the family gained an income which was 3 times more than the previous one as flowers via internet were sold at more expensive prices (3 times) in comparison with the cost paid by the shop owner.

The entrepreneur has a one-year experience of online marketing; however, he thinks that he is a pioneer in this field and has much to study. He says that forms of delivery of products to clients have been improved, and he vividly sees a fashion, taste of consumers and their requirements. All this requires studying.

Case study 2

The pandemics created a problem of marketing of strawberries to young entrepreneurs. A couple of young people had a greenhouse of strawberry “American Albion” in their garden in Kutaisi (Western Georgia) and for the last 3 years they have been cultivating hybrid species of strawberry. Prior to the pandemics, they mainly sold their products in baker’s shops, as a result of the pandemics, holidays events were decreased and the baker’s shops were closed.

To avoid financial problems, Inga decided to use her Facebook page with many subscribers for business purposes and started online marketing of strawberry. She says that she almost had no any loss, moreover, marketing was simplified and today, when baker’s shops continued operation her general source of incomes is the online marketed strawberry.

The family thinks that enriching of knowledge is necessary and a field of their knowledge and interest is prolongation of the harvest and improvement of the product’s quality. They consider that a source of knowledge and a method of marketing are social network and online trainings and according to the young farmers, the knowledge gained by this way is more efficient and, that is the most important, it will save their time and money.

Profound interviews and results of focus group

According to the experts, Covid 19 created new challenges for small and average farmers involved in the agricultural business and a scale of digitalization requires additional digital skills for access to the resources necessary for production as well as of the communication from the field – to the table. Digital skills are particularly undeveloped in regions. Many researches demonstrated a digital distance between the center and regions.

In-depth interviews with experts and focus groups with participation of journalists enabled us to form a list of the skills, in frames of the research, which are deficient and require educational intervention. Against the background of the new normality and infodemia, a list of needs in the agricultural sector is as follows:

- Skills of searching of the information necessary for farmers in the digital world;

- Skills of checking of the searched information;
- Skills of digital communication;
- Skills of digital packaging of agricultural products (labelling, production of QR codes and others);
- Skills of an access of potential clients to the social networks;
- Skills for creating and operating of own web space for small and average farmers;
- Based skills of the so called “desk research” of the potential market;
- Based skills of digital marketing;
- Based skills of photo and video recording;
- Skills of self-PR and self-promoting.

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სოფლის მეურნეობის დარგის ახალი ნორმალობა ინფოდემიის ფონზე (საქართველოს მაგალითი)

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¹ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ჟურნალისტიკის დოქტორი, ასოცირებული პროფესორი; ²ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, ჟურნალისტიკის დოქტორი, ასოცირებული პროფესორი; ³კავკასიის საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტის დოქტორანტი, სამცხე-ჯავახეთის უნივერსიტეტის მოწვეული სპეციალისტი

რეზიუმე

უკანასკნელ ათწლეულებში მზარდმა ტექნოლოგიურმა განვითარებამ და აღნიშნული მიზეზით სახეცვლილმა ტრადიციულმა მედიაგარემომ ჟურნალისტიკა სრულიად ახალი გამოწვევების - მცდარ/ყალბ ინფორმაციასა და პროპაგანდისტულ ნარატივთან ბრძოლის საჭიროების წინაშე დააყენა. ციფრული მედიის განვითარებამ აუდიტორიას შესაძლებლობა მისცა, ერთი მხრივ, თავად აერჩია ინფორმაციის წყარო, მეტიც, თავადვე შეექმნა და გაეზიარებინა ინფორმაცია, მეორე მხრივ კი - გადაუმოწმებელი, ყალბი, პროპაგანდისტული და სიმულვილის ენით დატვირთული მედიამასალების გავრცელების რეალური შესაძლებლობა შექმნა.

ის ძირითადი ფუნქციები, რისთვისაც, საუკუნეების წინ ჟურნალისტიკა შეიქმნა, მისი საზოგადოებრივი დანიშნულება, უპირველესად, აუდიტორიის ინფორმირებას ეფუძნება. ინფორმაციას როგორც ცალკეული ინდივიდის, ისე მთლიანად საზოგადოებისათვის სასიცოცხლო მნიშვნელობა აქვს. ცნობილი ხატოვანი დეფინიცია ინფორმაციის მნიშვნელობასა და არსს „დემოკრატიის ვალუტად“ განსაზღვრავს. თუმცა ოპერატიული ინფორმაცია ფასეული მხოლოდ მაშინაა, თუკი ის ინარჩუნებს ყველა საჭირო ნიშანს (ფაქტობრივობა, აქტუალურობა, კონკრეტულობა და სხვ.) და, ამავდროულად, იძენს ახალ თვისებებსაც, რაც მისი გადაცემის არხის (ბეჭდური, სამაუწყებლო, ციფრული მედია) გამოსახვით საშუალებათა სპეციფიკითაა განპირობებული.

გადამოწმებული, ფაქტებზე დამყარებული ინფორმაცია ხელს უწყობს ინდივიდის სრულფასოვან მონაწილეობას თანამედროვე ცხოვრებაში, რაც საზოგადოებრივ ურთიერთობებში სწორი ორიენტირებით გამოიხატება და სამყაროს აღქმის საკუთარი კონსტრუქციის შექმნაში უწყობს ხელს. აღნიშნულის საპირისპიროდ მუშაობს დეზინფორმაცია და ყალბი ამბების გავრცელება, რომელიც მიზნად ისახავს აუდიტორიის

შეცდომაში შეყვანას, საზოგადოებრივი აზრით მანიპულაციასა და მომხმარებლის ინფორმირებულ არჩევანზე გავლენას.

წინამდებარე ნაშრომის მიზანია მიმდინარე ინფოდემიის ფონზე სოფლის მეურნეობის დარგის ე. წ. „ახალი ნორმალობის“ ანალიზი, რომელსაც განვიხილავთ, როგორც ცალკეული ინდივიდებისა და ორგანიზაციების მიერ ათასწლეულების განმავლობაში გამომუშავებული ქცევის ნორმების ჩანაცვლებას ურთიერთობის ახალი ფორმებით.

თავად ტერმინი ინფოდემია კი, ონლაინ და ოფლაინ ინფორმაციის მოზღვავებად განისაზღვრება და ცრუ ცნობების განზრახ გავრცელების მცდელობით მიზნად ისახავს ცალკეული ჯგუფებისა და ინდივიდების ალტერნატიული დღის წესრიგის ხელშეწყობას.

კვლევის ამოცანა საქართველოს მცირე და საშუალო ფერმერების საქმიანობის მაგალითზე, ახალი ნორმალობის პირობებში, მომხმარებელთან კავშირისა და ბაზრის წვდომისთვის, კომუნიკაციის არხებისა და ფორმების ანალიზია.