

Postgraduate School ZRC SAZU

Krešimir Dabo

Art and artists between clickbait and criticism: media narratives in the contemporary digital environment

[Umetnost in umetniki med clickbaitom in kritiko: medijski narativi v sodobnem digitalnem okolju]

Doctoral Dissertation

Ljubljana, 2026

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Mentor: Prof. Dr. Marina Gržinić Mauhler

Co-mentor: Assistant Professor Boris Kern, PhD

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ABSTRACT

ART AND ARTISTS BETWEEN CLICKBAIT AND CRITICISM: MEDIA NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

This dissertation examines the transformation of art reporting and art criticism within the contemporary digital media environment by combining a broader theoretical framework with an empirical analysis of the Croatian media landscape. It starts from the premise that the relationship between art, media, and the public has undergone profound structural changes because of digitalization, platformization, algorithmic visibility, and the emergence of the digital attention economy. Within these conditions, the communicative environment in which art is produced, represented, interpreted, and evaluated has fundamentally changed. Art is no longer mediated exclusively through traditional forms of cultural journalism, such as reviews, essays, interviews, or critical commentary, but increasingly through hybrid communicative forms shaped by visibility, immediacy, emotional engagement, and platform-oriented media logics.

Rather than approaching clickbait merely as a degraded journalistic practice or art criticism as a declining cultural genre, this dissertation investigates the broader transformation of the communicative conditions under which cultural value, legitimacy, authority, and public relevance are produced. The central research problem therefore concerns not whether art criticism has disappeared from contemporary media, but how its communicative role has been reconfigured within digital environments increasingly governed by platform infrastructures, algorithmic visibility, and attention-based economies. The study explores how media narratives about art are produced, structured, circulated, and legitimized, and how they negotiate the relationship between cultural interpretation, promotional communication, journalistic practice, and audience engagement.

The empirical study combines semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors, public relations professionals, and artists, a qualitatively oriented content analysis of 370 articles from Index.hr and 24sata.hr supported by quantitative coding and statistical analysis, and a critical discourse analysis of a purposively selected subsample of 30 articles. The interviews identify pressures arising from audience metrics, promotional demands, accelerated production, and algorithmic visibility, while indicating that criticism is increasingly displaced into new and hybrid formats. The content analysis shows predominantly descriptive and informative

reporting, with promotional forms also prominent and clickbait appearing in more than half of the headlines. Critical discourse analysis reveals how media narratives distribute visibility, legitimacy, and symbolic authority, thereby reproducing asymmetries of power. Together, the findings indicate a dominant hybrid model combining information, promotion, cultural evaluation, emotional engagement, and attention-oriented strategies.

Keywords: art criticism; cultural journalism; clickbait; digital attention economy; media narratives; critical discourse analysis; algorithmic visibility; hybrid media formats

POVZETEK

**UMETNOST IN UMETNIKI MED CLICKBAITOM IN KRITIKO: MEDIJSKI
NARATIVI V SODOBNEM DIGITALNEM OKOLJU**

Disertacija obravnava preobrazbo poročanja o umetnosti in umetnostne kritike v sodobnem digitalnem medijskem okolju, pri čemer združuje širši teoretski okvir z empirično analizo hrvaškega medijskega prostora. Izhaja iz predpostavke, da so digitalizacija, platformizacija, algoritmična vidnost in digitalna ekonomija pozornosti temeljito preoblikovale razmerje med umetnostjo, mediji in javnostjo. V takšnih okoliščinah se umetnost ne posreduje več izključno prek tradicionalnih oblik kulturnega novinarstva, kot so kritike, eseji, intervjuji ali poročila, temveč vse pogostejše prek hibridnih komunikacijskih oblik, ki jih določajo vidnost, neposrednost, čustvena angažiranost in logika platformno usmerjenih medijev.

Namesto obravnave clickbaita zgolj kot degradirane novinarske prakse ali umetnostne kritike kot kulturnega žanra v zatonu disertacija raziskuje širšo transformacijo komunikacijskih pogojev, v katerih se oblikujejo kulturna vrednost, legitimnost, avtoriteta in javni pomen umetnosti. Osrednji raziskovalni problem zato ni vprašanje, ali je umetnostna kritika iz sodobnih medijev izginila, temveč kako se je njena komunikacijska vloga preoblikovala v digitalnem okolju, ki ga vse bolj določajo platformne infrastrukture, algoritmična vidnost in ekonomija pozornosti. Disertacija analizira, kako nastajajo, se strukturirajo, krožijo in legitimirajo medijske naracije o umetnosti ter kako se v njih prepletajo kulturna interpretacija, promocijski diskurzi, novinarske prakse in strategije pritegovanja pozornosti občinstva.

Empirična raziskava združuje polstrukturirane intervjuje z novinarji, uredniki, strokovnjaki za odnose z javnostmi in umetniki, pretežno kvalitativno usmerjeno analizo vsebine 370 člankov s portalov Index.hr in 24sata.hr, podprto s kvantitativnim kodiranjem in statistično obdelavo, ter kritično diskurzivno analizo namensko izbranega podvzorca 30 člankov. Intervjuji razkrivajo pritiske metrik občinstva, promocijskih zahtev, pospešene produkcije in algoritmične vidnosti ter kažejo, da se kritika vse bolj premešča v nove in hibridne formate. Analiza vsebine kaže, da prevladujejo deskriptivne in informativne oblike poročanja, pri čemer so izrazite tudi promocijske oblike, clickbait elementi pa se pojavljajo v več kot polovici naslovov. Kritična diskurzivna analiza razkriva, kako medijske naracije porazdeljujejo vidnost, legitimnost in simbolno avtoriteto ter s tem reproducirajo asimetrije moči. Ugotovitve skupaj kažejo na

prevladujoči hibridni model, v katerem se prepletajo informiranje, promocija, kulturno vrednotenje, čustvena angažiranost in strategije pritegovanja pozornosti.

Ključne besede: umetnostna kritika; kulturno novinarstvo; clickbait; digitalna ekonomija pozornosti; medijski narativi; kritična diskurzivna analiza; algoritmična vidnost; hibridni medijski formati