

Information Behavior Culture of the RuNet Audience



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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to analyze the formation of a media consumption culture in the information-rich multiconfessional and bilingual region of the Russian Federation – the Republic of Tatarstan. The authors of this article conducted a survey of 200 respondents aged 19-55 who are active users of the RuNet. The survey was carried out among students of the Kazan State Institute of Culture and Kazan Federal University, as well as media professionals from the Republic of Tatarstan. The anonymous survey was conducted in January-March 2019. Of all the respondents participated in this survey, 56% were aged 19-20. Eighty-three percent of the respondents were female – students, teachers and media workers of the Republic of Tatarstan. Sixty-five percent of them combined their education with work. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents received information from the Internet, 76% watched information programs on television, 27% listened to the radio and only 7.5% of the respondents still read newspapers. Sixty-eight percent of the surveyed trusted messages received from news agencies, while 78% trusted news messages received from news aggregators. Ninety percent of the respondents trusted information received from online media; 11% trusted the information received from social networks and only 4.5% of the respondents trusted the information discussed in blogs. The high percentage of trust to information obtained from the media and the low percentage of trust to information obtained from blogs indicates the current culture of media use and media literacy of the population in the situation with fake news. Of all the respondents answering the question "Do you refer to the source of information you use on the Internet?", 91.5% answered positively. Disturbingly, 92.5% of the surveyed believe that they do not have to pay for the information received from online media. The authors explain the refusal to pay for content with a small amount of exclusive and analytical materials in the information field of the Republic of Tatarstan.*

Index Terms: *citizen journalism, Internet environment, online communications, public opinion, RuNet, social networks.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Intensive development of online communications results in the transformation of many professions related to information, such as advertising professional and journalist. Today, the profession of a journalist does no longer imply exclusive access to limited information. Development of the Internet environment and digital technologies has led to the emergence of a large number of authors and citizen journalism [1]-[3]. Of the total world population, 7,593 billion people are Internet users. Four thousand twenty-one billion people, representing 53% of the world's population. Three thousand one hundred ninety-six billion people constituting 42% of the world's population are active users of social media. In 2017, the Russian Internet audience reached 90 million people or 73% of the country's population. Thus, 7 out of 10 people in Russia use the Internet, and the RuNet audience increases by 4% every year [4]. The increase in the number of active users of the RuNet causes information threats, such as the spread of fake information. On March 18, 2019, the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin signed the amendments to Art. 15 of the Federal Law No. 149-FZ "On Information, Information Technologies and Protection of Information" of July 27, 2006 [5]. Citizens will face fines for publishing dangerous fakes. Citizen journalism performs traditional journalist functions and tasks: formation of public opinion, broadcasting of values, converting virtual users into a huge physical collective. As an example, a fire in the Kemerovo shopping center, which occurred on March 25, 2018, can be cited, when ordinary citizens acted as participants of public control. Internet users on a voluntary basis assumed the mission of fire safety violations inspectors, previously performed by government agencies and journalists.

Users of the RuNet posted video reports on fire safety violations in shopping centers and cinemas on social networks. With the rapid development of Internet communications, information behavior and communication culture in the RuNet play a particular role. The Republic of Tatarstan is an information-rich region in which media are presented both in the Russian and Tatar languages. Study of the media consumption culture formation in the multiconfessional and bilingual region of the Russian Federation, which has a rich history, cultural and national peculiarities, is a topical research issue [6].

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The Internet media of the RuNet were examined in the works by Kachkaeva [7] and Manovich [8]. The use of Internet resources and social networks for social and political purposes were analyzed in articles by Reutov, Trishina [9], Mikhailenok, Malysheva, Dokuka [10]. Problems of the Tatar Internet media and blogs were discussed in the works of Kazan scientists Garifullin and Sabirova [11].

The working hypothesis of the study is based on the assumption that the presence of a monopolist – the state media holding Tatmedia AO – in the information market of the Republic of Tatarstan negatively affects the development of journalism in Tatarstan, as the media belong to the state and reflect the interests of political elite in Tatarstan. The authors believe that the monopoly presence of Tatmedia AO in the media market resulted in a change in information preferences of the audience, namely the loss of interest from the audience aged 19-35 to political topics, as well as the loss of interest from the young audience to the Republican media.

II. METHODS

The authors conducted an anonymous survey. Of the whole population: 36,676 students of the Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, 2,064 students of the Kazan State Institute of Culture, 191 employees of the branch of the All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company Tatarstan STRC, 700 employees of the Television and Radio Company Novyi Vek AO, the authors allocated 200 respondents aged 19-55, who were active users of the RuNet. The anonymous survey was carried out from January 10 to March 31, 2019, in the city of Kazan. The respondents were asked to specify their age, gender and employment status. The questionnaire included such questions as: "From what sources do you receive information?", "What type of information sources on the Internet do you trust?", "When using the information on the Internet, do you refer to its source?", "In your opinion, do you need to pay for the information obtained through the Internet media?", "In which form would you prefer to receive information?", "What social networks do you use?", "Which media groups are you subscribed to in social networks?", "Do you proceed to the media site if the news interested you in a social network?", "What news interest you most?", "Which topic in the media do you notice first?" Processing of the survey data was carried out using the Excel software. Furthermore, for the period from April 1 to April 30, 2019, the authors monitored several media and media accounts in social networks, which were most mentioned by students and employees of television and radio companies. The monitoring of media and social media accounts was carried out on the following analysis units: typological characteristics of the media, type of ownership, number of visits per day, the number of subscribers in social networks and the methods of adapting media content to different social networks.

III. RESULT ANALYSIS

Of all the respondents participating in this survey, 56% were aged 19-20. Eighty-three percent of the respondents were female – students, teachers and media workers of the Republic of Tatarstan. Sixty-five percent of them combined their education with work. Ninety-eight percent of the

respondents received information from the Internet, 76% watched information programs on television, 27% listened to the radio and only 7.5% of the respondents still read newspapers.

The survey data confirm the results of the subscription campaign held in the Republic of Tatarstan: "Since 2014, the subscription rate in Tatarstan has fallen by 30%" [12], [13]. The reason for the decline in subscription was the increase in subscription prices against the rapid fall in the national currency exchange rates, as well as an increase in postal subscription rates, migration of readers to the Internet, and the rise in paper prices.

Sixty-eight percent of the surveyed trusted messages received from news agencies, while 78% trusted news messages received from news aggregators. Ninety percent of the respondents trusted information received from online media; 11% trusted the information received from social networks and only 4.5% of the respondents trusted the information discussed in blogs.

The high percentage of trust to information obtained from the media and the low percentage of trust to information obtained from blogs indicates the current culture of media use and media literacy of the population in the situation with fake news.

Of all the respondents answering the question "Do you refer to the source of information you use on the Internet?", 91.5% answered positively. Disturbingly, 92.5% of the surveyed believe that they do not have to pay for the information received from online media. The authors explain the refusal to pay for content with a small amount of exclusive and analytical materials in the information field of the Republic of Tatarstan. Limited news opportunities result in the fact that the same news migrates from one site to another. In the Republic of Tatarstan, most media belong to the state media holding Tatmedia AO, founded by the Ministry of Land and Property Relations of the Republic of Tatarstan. Tatmedia AO owns "98 district, city and Republican newspapers, 14 magazines, 17 television channels, 10 radio channels, 80 websites on the Internet, and the new agency Tatar-inform [14]. Thus, the official point of view on the events taking place in the Republic prevails in the information space of Tatarstan. Readers see no sense in paying for content that they can find on 80 other sites owned by Tatmedia AO. The distribution of paid content in online media (paywall) will be possible with the creation of exclusive content and solidarity with other members of the Tatarstan media market, who will also ensure paid access to publications on their websites.

The fall in print runs and readers' migration to the Internet makes the editors of online media look for new methods of interaction with the audience – through social networks and instant messengers. Mass media are forced to adapt their content to the new culture of media content consumption. The survey results show that the reader is used to receive information in a multimedia format. Eighty-five percent of the respondents would like to receive information simultaneously

in the form of text, video and audio messages, 51% prefer text and photos, 20% prefer the audio format, and 1.5% prefer text. When answering the question "Which social networks do you have a profile in?" – 95% of the respondents indicated VKontakte (vk.com), 75% – Instagram.com, 53% – Facebook.com, and 41.5% – Twitter.com. When respondents were asked to indicate which groups they subscribed to on social networks, the following media and Internet resources were most common: the news agency RIA Novosti, the news agency of the Republic of Tatarstan Tatar-inform, St. Petersburg's trendsetting magazine Sobaka.ru, the Russian news website Lenta.ru, the online magazine about life and entertainment of new Kazan Enter (<http://entermedia.io>), the Internet magazine about life in the cities of the Republic of Tatarstan INDE, the Russian 24-hour information channel Dozhd, the Russian-language Internet publication Meduza, and the modern media market KazanFirst.

Since 2014, the Russian International News Agency Rossiya Segodnya – RIA Novosti – is a news agency and online publication. The main objective of the news agency is to highlight Russian news to foreign audiences. The founder of the agency is the Federal State Unitary Enterprise International News Agency Rossiya Segodnya. Every month, more than 40 million unique users visit the agency's online projects. "The audience of Rossiya Segodnya in social networks exceeds 20 million subscribers" [15]. Two million four hundred seventeen thousand people subscribed to the RIA Novosti group on VKontakte (vk.com), on facebook.com – 1.6 million people. The news agency content is selected and adapted to the target audience of the social network. The news agency Rossiya Segodnya regularly prepares publications for the social network VKontakte covering socially significant political news, as well as sensational news of a social nature. Publications are made in the traditional style for social networks – the news title is placed in the photo, and when the reader clicks the photo, he proceeds to the RIA Novosti website. Text publications alternate with video materials. The RIA Novosti media group has its own rules of communication in the VKontakte community; these rules form a law-abiding and respectful attitude to the participants in the discussion. The Tatar-inform news agency has 1 million unique users per month. According to data from Liveinternet.ru, 33 thousand users visited it daily. In 2018, according to the media monitoring and analysis system Medialogia, the Tatar-inform news agency ranked first among the Tatarstan media. The founder of Tatar-inform is Tatmedia AO. The official profile of the Tatar-inform news agency on VKontakte has 23 thousand subscribers. It should be noted that the news agency Tatar-inform has two independent editions – Russian and Tatar. The Tatar edition of the news agency also promotes content in social networks and runs independent groups [16]. The trendsetting magazine Sobaka.ru has branches in 21 regions of Russia, including in Kazan. The founder of the magazine is Zhurnaly i saity OOO. It is noteworthy that the magazine specializes in social issues and does not cover policy, economic and crime themes. St. Petersburg branch of the magazine has 175 thousand subscribers on VKontakte.

Lenta.ru is one of the oldest online publications in the RuNet. It was created in 1999. According to the media monitoring and analysis system Medialogia, Lenta.ru ranked

5th in the "Top 30 Most Cited Internet Resources in February 2019". According to data from Liveinternet.ru, 12 million 301 thousand users visit Lenta.ru daily [17]. It is noteworthy that Lenta.ru has moved away from traditional headings. Instead, on its website, one can find such headings as "Power structures", "Internet and mass media", "Values", "Public life". There is a separate section named "Good news", where one can find only positive news. The official page of Lenta.ru has 512 thousand subscribers on VKontakte and 760 thousand subscribers on Facebook.com. On its website, Lenta.ru publishes news on politics, economics, while on the pages in social networks it mostly shares links to materials devoted to scandals, murders, and other high-profile sensitive cases.

Enter is a city online magazine, which covers topics related to the life of Kazan citizens. Nearly 18 thousand subscribers visit the magazine's website daily [12]. The Enter page on Facebook.com has 903 subscribers, while its page on VKontakte has 75 thousand members. Journalists of the Enter magazine post announcements of city activities and upcoming events on social networks.

The editorial staff of the INDE website presents itself as a website about life in Tatarstan. The target audience of the website is youth. The website covers the development of urban communities, news and problems of modern art and science, as well as issues of national heritage. Its editors are actively involved in organizing cultural events: film screenings, lectures, parties, performances, and exhibitions. The most popular sections include "What is happening", "Way of living", "Heroes", "Places", "Food", "Self-education". The website raises questions of politics, economics only in the context of social environment development in the cities of Tatarstan. The official INDE page on VKontakte has 30 thousand subscribers, on Facebook.com – 4 thousand subscribers. Social networks mainly post the announcements of cultural and social events in Kazan city.

Dozhd is the Russian round-the-clock news channel that exists only on the Internet. According to the media monitoring and analysis system Medialogia, the Dozhd TV channel ranked 9th in the top 10 most cited media channels in February 2019 and ranked first among the TV channels cited in social media [18]. Its broadcasting schedule includes several informational and analytical programs. The official Dozhd page on Facebook.com has 1 million 129 thousand subscribers, on VKontakte – 444 thousand subscribers. Social networks mainly post the announcements of the most popular programs. When proceeding to the Dozhd website, the visitor is offered to pay a subscription to the TV channel to watch the full version of the program. The cost of subscription is 780 rubles per month. Only registered subscribers can leave comments on the channel's website, while social networks do not have such a restriction. The Dozhd TV channel provides information not only in video format but also in the form of text, which could be accessed free of charge. Meduza was created in 2014 based on free mobile applications.

The publication is registered as a Latvian media. According to the media monitoring and analysis system Medialogia, Meduza ranked third in the citation index among the top 30 most cited online resources in February 2019. Its website includes such sections as "News", "History", "Analysis", "Games", "Chapito", "Podcasts". The "Chapito" section is of particular interest – it covers news about unusual events and developments in Russian society. Meduza runs several independent projects, such as Storm Conference, Farm School, MeduzaCare. The Storm Conference offers to buy a ticket to discuss current issues. The Farm School implements programs to train reporters and editors. MeduzaCare is a charity program available to the general public. Once a month, MeduzaCare collects funds on one of the following topics: "Helping older people", "Blood diseases", "Homeless", "Palliative", "Zoo Protection", "Tuberculosis", "Cancer", "Autism", "Missing people", "Diabetes", "People with disabilities".

KazanFirst is an Internet news portal registered as electronic media in Roskomnadzor, which highlights significant events in the Republic. 168 thousand users visit the website daily. Its page on Vkontakte has 8 630 subscribers, while its page on Facebook.com is not updated.

Ninety-eight percent of respondents answered positively to the question "Do you proceed to the media website if the news interested you in social networks?" According to the survey results, 93% of respondents are interested in international news, 90% – in Russian news, 79% – in Republican news, and 55% – in urban news. Survey results show that 88.5% of respondents are most interested in materials related to the topic of social and cultural life. Fifty-six percent of respondents follow the topic of politics and economics, 77.5% are interested in fashion and the life of stars, 35% follow the topic of sports and 26.5% are interested in sensational news and scandals. Thus, summarizing the results of an anonymous survey, the authors conclude that young, active audience aged 19-35 in Tatarstan prefers to receive information from Moscow media. Internet publications that do not cover the topic of politics and economics are most popular in the information space of the Republic of Tatarstan. The authors explain the indifference to the topic of politics, the unpopularity of the local socio-political media, and unwillingness to pay for content of the online publications with the lack of pluralism in the information market of Tatarstan, the presence of a large monopolist – the state media holding Tatmedia AO, which includes 98 district, city and Republican newspapers, 14 magazines, 17 TV channels, 10 radio channels, 80 websites and the Tatar-inform news agency. The founder of Tatmedia AO is the Ministry of Land and Property Relations of the Republic of Tatarstan.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that the information market of the Republic of Tatarstan is developing in accordance with general world trends, namely the decline in print media circulation and transition to online versions of publications [19], rejection of printed media, transformation of the journalist profession, development of blog journalism and citizen journalism [20], [21], attempts to introduce online

media, social networks and blogs into the Russian legal field [4].

V. CONCLUSION

Young, active audience aged 19-35 in Tatarstan prefers to receive information from Moscow media. Internet publications that do not cover the topic of politics and economics are most popular in the information space of the Republic of Tatarstan. The authors explain the indifference to the topic of politics, the unpopularity of the local socio-political media, and unwillingness to pay for content of the online publications with the lack of pluralism in the information market of Tatarstan, the presence of a large monopolist – the state media holding Tatmedia AO. The information market of Tatarstan is characterized by mass media issued in several national languages: Russian, Tatar, Chuvash, and Udmurt, and creation of content based on the national mentality of the Tatarstan peoples. Such content is popular in online publications in national languages. Today, specialists of Tatmedia AO are trying to improve the efficiency of the media they publish, moving these media to self-sufficiency, forgetting that one of the journalism functions is to control state actions. The audience will always look for alternative points of view missing in Tatmedia publications.

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