

## The impact of the transformation of the media environment on the media consumption of Russian youth

By

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### Abstract

The modern society of the twenty-first century is now considered by researchers to be "information", or "digital". The information society, the digital transformation of the media have a great impact on the development of the relationship between media and society, thus it can be argued that the study of the impact of the media on the younger generation, the motivation of media consumption, as well as audience behavior are relevant aspects of research. The development of new technologies, transformation of information and communication processes, and total content consumption leads to an urgent need for systematic study of the current state of media consumption by young people and the media environment in general. The analysis concludes that the new communication space is developing rapidly, which suggests that the digital transformation cannot be limited to the introduction of technology - in its process, a new culture of consumption and behaviour of young people will inevitably emerge. As part of the transformation of media consumption, it is worth noting another peculiarity: the media audience is no longer homogeneous, which makes it necessary to identify more precise criteria for identifying the consumers of media products. Here, we are witnessing a large digital divide between generations, too, which manifests itself not only in a mismatch in the level of digital competence of different generations, but also in the specifics of their representatives' existence in real and virtual space.

**Keywords:** Information society, media environment, media consumption, digitalisation, internet consumption, television viewing.

### Introduction

In the course of informational transformation, changes in communication technologies are observed, leading to the globalisation of society's media space, consumption culture and behaviour, and human cultural identity. Thus, the structure of "information society" today needs to be disclosed in different planes, philosophical, psychological, political science, legal and sociological. Disclosing the essence of the concept of "information society", we can consider the following approaches:

society in which there is rapid development and integration of information and telecommunication technologies;

society in which knowledge acquired through unhindered access to information and the ability to use it, is a key element in the development of the individual and the state as a whole; global society in which there are no temporal, spatial, political or social boundaries;

A society in which intercultural boundaries are blurred, opening up new opportunities for communities to modernize [1].

"The information society is a society in which information and the level of its application and accessibility dramatically affect the economic and socio-cultural living conditions of citizens". Media consumption, as an integral part of the information society, is changing rapidly today [2]

## **Methods**

The basic methods used were secondary data analysis, a sociological survey (sample quota survey), general logical methods of induction and deduction and comparative data analysis. The method of quota survey was chosen because of its high efficiency, verifiability of the obtained data and adequacy to the purpose and objectives of the study. The survey of students of Kazan Federal University was conducted in 2022. The general population based on student population reports was 34,708 students. The sample in each study was determined in accordance with the general statistical-probability rules of calculation and amounted to 380 people.

## **Results And Discussion**

The modern media system involves the interdependence and mutual influence of media production and society's perception of the media environment [2]. Thus, the new media evolving in the course of digital transformation create not just new forms of media consumption, but enable society to be an active participant in the media process, shaping new aspects of audience social behaviour, which means that media consumption becomes an important phenomenon, a process of interaction between the media and society, a certain social indicator of the media environment [3].

Mediatization is one of the key processes of modern world development, a metaprocess that, according to N. Cauldry and A. Hepp, covers all areas of society functioning and human cultural practices [4]. At the same time, the authors of mediatization studies believe that it is not just a process, but a state of society. It is impossible to disagree with this statement, as mediatization is becoming a qualitative characteristic of the social order, actively included in the process of socialization of young people and the formation of both social culture and political [5].

B. P. Kolomiets believes that media consumption should be considered "not as a passive perception of media products, but as an active social practice of processing symbolic material". [6, P. 2-15]. Accordingly, media consumption is characterized not as a passive but as an active process that includes decoding, perceiving, and processing information, and using it for one's own purposes and interests. The analysis of the social experience of the audience, then, becomes an important element in the study of media consumption. However, the social

experience of the audience and interest in this or that content does not have a research value in itself; it is necessary to consider these elements through the prism of the target audience's behaviour. It is this combination of research elements that enables the prediction of the impact of media on audience behaviour.

Today's existing media consumption indicators and measurement methods cannot provide meaningful research data that can be used to identify mechanisms for predicting human behaviour in order for the information society to function successfully. Mediascope today studies the volume of viewers and provides quantitative media measurements that do not allow predicting audience behaviour. Another problem worth pointing out is the methodology of media measurement. For example, Mediascope uses in their studies peoplemetric surveys, but there is a question about the definition of the sample, as new audience segments (villatic TV viewing, guest TV viewing) began to emerge due to the development of the scientific and technological process. The methodology for studying radio listeners and print media audiences is not ideal either. The study of Internet consumption, on the other hand, has its own peculiarities, as there is a concentration of technological data on different sites, which leads to a lack of a single Internet measurement tool.

When examining the process of media consumption, it is necessary to pay attention to the dynamics of changes in the social reality associated with media consumption. Some general characteristics of the changes will be highlighted:

According to Mediascope, the TV viewing figures for Russian viewers as a whole are changing every year [7]. The average daily TV viewing time among the 18-34 year old audience was 150 minutes in 2017, while in 2020 it will be only 124 minutes. At the same time, a decrease in television viewing in all age categories has been recorded.

If we look at the research in terms of young people, 69% of young people aged 18-24 are active internet users, and another 29% of young people in this age group are active television and internet users (watching TV and using the internet at least several times a week).

Young people aged 25-34 are characterized by a similar share of media consumption, so 50% of young people are active users of television and the Internet, and 48% are active users of the Internet [8].

Thus, we can conclude that the 25-34 years old age group has a larger share of the audience who watch television in parallel with the Internet sources. At the same time, at the age of 18-24 years, the majority of young people are characterized by the variant where the Internet is the engine media, and television is rather an auxiliary source of information. The main feature of preferences in favour of social media and Internet sources are speed, convenience, message format, and pluralism of opinion. The possibility to give feedback is also a plus for receiving information using information technology.

As for the Internet, the number of Internet users in Russia is 124 million people out of 145.9 million (the increase is only 20 thousand (0.1%) in 2021), i.e. the level of Internet penetration in Russia in January 2021 amounted to 85% of the Russians. At that, the figure reaches 98% among young people aged 14 to 21 [9].

Data on Russia's population and % of people using mobile devices, the Internet and social networks (January 2021):



The daily time spent by Russians on the Internet is increasing every year. Analysing global Internet consumption, we see that the Philippines comes first (11 hours), followed by Brazil, Colombia and South Africa (just over 10 hours), and Russia (7 hours 52 minutes) [10].

Today, there is still a digital divide between the regions of Russia. The digitalization process in Russia is not evenly spread, so if we look at the share of Internet users in the regions, it appears that digital development is more rapid in the leading regions. The Oryol, Kaluga and Ryazan regions have the smallest Internet audience. According to the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, the reasons for not using the Internet are [11]:

- No need (unwillingness to use, no interest) - 16.7%
- Lack of skills to work on the Internet - 6.4%
- High costs of connection to the Internet - 4,3%
- Internet access available elsewhere (at work, at acquaintances, at public access points, etc.) - 1.7%
- Lack of technical ability to connect to the Internet - 1.5%
- For reasons of security and privacy - 0.2%
- Other reasons - 2.5%.

On August 12, 2021, the Russian Federation Ministry of Digital Development presented a rating of the digital maturity of the regions [7]. The constituent entities included were divided into three groups:

- nine regions were ranked high (with values above 50%);
- 62 subjects of the Russian Federation got to the middle level (25% to 50%);
- low digital maturity (less than 25%) - 14 Russian regions.

Thus, despite positive trends in the development of digitalisation in Russia, there is a large "digital divide" in the level of information and communication technology penetration between the federal districts and the rest of the country.

an "audience engagement in the media sphere" is becoming very important concept. The number of users and views is no longer the main parameter of media measurement. There are many factors that influence audience engagement. For example, text length is one factor. According to studies, a small number of readers read the whole text. According to the Chartbeat analytics system, most users read only 60% of the material, 52.4% view media content to the end and 10% only open the opening page. However, it can be argued that viewing a page in its entirety does not necessarily mean that the user actually reads the text and shows engagement, which will subsequently be reflected in behaviour [12]. Another factor that affects the degree of engagement with media content is the number of characters per visual element. Studies have documented that the percentage of views decreases dramatically when the number of characters per visual element increases. At the same time, the static factor is also interesting. Inefficient technology is the use of interactive visual elements (videos, sliders, animation). The subject matter and interests of the audience also affect the degree of engagement. According to sociological research among students, the priority among respondents is "culture and art" (47%), "music" is preferred by more than 45% of respondents, "hobbies and interests" - 40%, while the service sector is not interesting at all.

The issue of trust in information sources among young people is not unimportant. Thus, the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center conducted a study on the portrait of modern youth [13]. One of the questions that was asked to respondents was the question "Do you trust the following media or not? This question was asked to two groups of 18 to 24 year olds and 25 to 34 year olds. The results showed the following:

Among respondents aged 18-24, social networks and blogs are the most trusted (51% of the entire sample trust social networks), followed by news, analytical, official websites on the Internet (42% of respondents expressed confidence in these sources of information). Messengers (40% of respondents trust them) and regional and local television (39% of respondents) come after them. The data shows that regional and local sources of information are more trusted than federal sources of information, such as central television, radio and the press. The lowest percentage of trust is in the central press (23% of those surveyed trust this source of information).

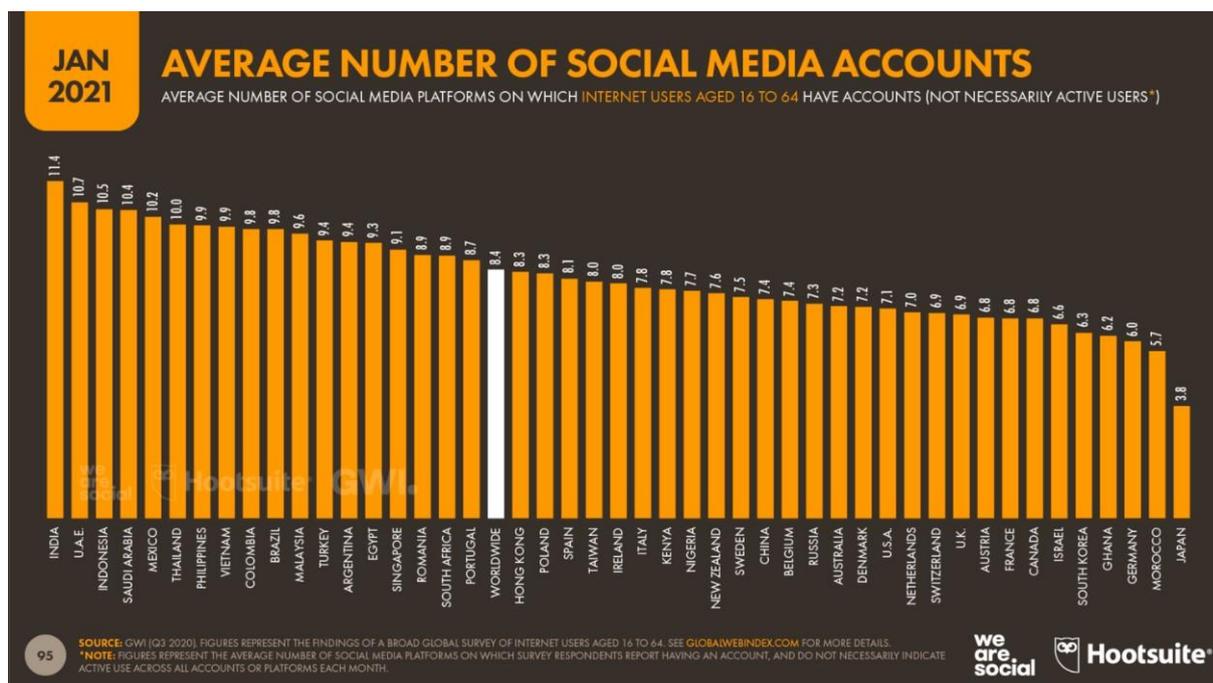
Among respondents aged 25-34, the most trustworthy are news, analytical, official websites on the Internet (49% of respondents), followed by regional, local television and regional, local press (both sources are trusted by 44% of respondents). Next come social networks and blogs (42% of respondents), regional, local radio (41% of respondents) and then central television, radio and press. Noteworthy for both samples is the fact that central TV channels, radio stations and publications are least trusted. But in the age range of 25-34 years old trust in central television, radio and the press is higher than in the age range of 18-24 years old. A characteristic feature is the fact that the most trustworthy among this age group are news, analytical, official Internet sites, regional, local television and regional, local newspapers, but a large part of this segment is using social networks and blogs. That is, perhaps they trust social networks less, but it is either more convenient to get information there, or it is a matter of normative behaviour that has developed over the years of using social networks.

Opinion leaders and Internet Influencers can be included among the tools that influence the degree of trust of the youth audience. However, according to a survey conducted by the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center and the Platform Social Design Center on the attitude of Russians to bloggers (published on September 24, 2020). trust in bloggers in Russian society is rather exaggerated [14].

At the same time, in absolute values, the majority of internet users do not read or view blogs (54% are not interested in blogs, against 46% who are). However, if we consider this question in terms of age, 63% of respondents aged 18 to 24 are active bloggers, 50% between 25 and 44 years, 43% between 45 and 59 years, and only 30% over 60 years. This fact can be explained by the similarity of most parameters (interests, stylistics, linguistic forms, etc.) of bloggers and youth audiences.

There is also a tendency to use the Internet in order to solve communication tasks and meet their communication needs [15].

Studies show that there are 7.3 social media accounts per Internet user in Russia:



Thus, the average level of media consumption has increased over the past year, but interestingly, fewer respondents have started using the Internet for media content consumption and leisure activities.

## Summary

Thus, we can conclude that the different level of "digitalization" of the Russian Federation subjects is associated with the unevenness of their socio-economic development and technological capabilities, which, in turn, has a negative impact on the social living conditions of the country's citizens, economic and social opportunities. As SKOLKOVO researchers have found out, the digital divide of Russian regions is determined more by the demand, by the needs and demands of residents than by the services of suppliers and providers [16-17]. It is important to understand the threshold of the socially and politically unacceptable digital divide.

Today, we can talk about the need to revise the methodology of media measurement. The most commonly used metrics for analysis (page views, clicks and email disclosures), provide little scope for detailed analysis of exactly how content works, what behaviour is

induced.

In the process of digitalization, we can observe a trend of non-linear media content consumption, especially for the young generation between the ages of 14 and 21. There is a rapid increase in the daily volume of information consumed and produced, and this is related to the acceleration of the population's rhythm of life. This trend in media consumption is leading to the following changes:

- There is a tendency for audiences to spend less time on content;

The large volume of information received does not allow for high-quality processing of information through the prism of communication and interaction, a barrier to selective perception is created. Visual images begin to prevail over the logical perception of the semantic content of information content, which complicates the adaptation process of young people;

there is an independent choice of information content, which leads to the fact that people, unconnected by traditional media, live in completely different information realities;

Opportunities to independently create mass-market content emerge, and audiences cease to be passive consumers of media content. However, by adjusting the media environment to their rational needs and interests, recipients can decode the information they receive in their own way, which can be quite different from what the producers intended.

## **Conclusions**

Today, we can objectively say that modern society is oversaturated with information and content, and that an individual is in a state of constant media consumption, which borders on the concept of media environment. The transformation of the media environment entails a new structure of media consumption and social development. Thus, information and technological progress requires organic integration into a holistic system of socio-cultural interaction.

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