

# CHRISTIAN MEDIA IN RUSSIA IN THE AGE OF “NETWORKIZATION”

## РОССИЙСКИЕ ХРИСТИАНСКИЕ СМИ В СЕТЕВУЮ ЭПОХУ

*Victor M. Khroul, PhD in Philology, Associate Professor,  
Chair of Sociology of Journalism and Mass Communications,  
Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University,  
Moscow, Russia  
Victor.khroul@gmail.com*

*Виктор Михайлович Хруль, кандидат филологических наук, доцент,  
Кафедра социологии журналистики и массовых коммуникаций,  
Факультет журналистики,  
Московский государственный университет имени М. В. Ломоносова,  
Москва, Россия  
Victor.khroul@gmail.com*

*This paper analyzes the subsystem of religious media in Russia, with a focus on Christian media and their place in Russia's media system in the context of “networkization”. The dilemma faced by the Russian Orthodox Church in coming to terms with new digital communication technologies, and the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ of using social networks, are considered by specialists in the field. The author underscores three problem areas for Christian media in Russia: (1) the requirement that journalistic endeavors remain subordinate to the goals of proselytization and public relations; (2) a blurry understanding of the target audience, and (3) the use of a barely understandable archaic ecclesiastical language. The author hypothesizes that some recent approaches to the challenge of “networkization” on the part of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant thinkers may hold promising solutions to the problem*

**Key words:** *media, religion, social networks, religious identity, Christians, Russia.*

*В статье представлен анализ российских христианских СМИ в национальной медиасистеме в контексте стремительного развития социальных сетей. Трудности в освоении новых цифровых коммуникационных технологий Русской Православной Церковью, «плюсы» и «минусы» использования социальных сетей оцениваются ведущими экспертами в этой области. Автор подчеркивает три проблемные области христианских СМИ в России: (1) подчиненность журналистской деятельности миссионерским и рекламным целям, (2) размывание представлений о целевой аудитории и (3) использования малопонятного для массовой аудитории архаичного церковного языка. Автор полагает, что некоторые инициативы российских православных, католиков и протестантов, предпринятые в последнее время, могут стать адекватным ответом на вызовы сетевой эпохи.*

**Ключевые слова:** *религия, религиозная идентичность, социальные сети, православие, католичество, протестантизм, Россия.*

## **Introduction**

Relations between religion and media – their tensions, conflicts, mutual understanding and “*modus vivendi*” – constitute a significant factor for social stability and modernization of post-soviet Russia in the perspective of civil society. That is why they are becoming more attractive for research – from phenomenological description to structural and functional analysis (Luchenko, 2015).

After a long period of absence in the national media system, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the focus of revived media outlets for Russia religious organizations (predominantly the Russian Orthodox Church – ROC) remained fixed on traditional media – press, radio, and TV. Until Christian religions unexpectedly found themselves faced with the prospect of media “networkization”.

The notion of “networkization” arrived in media studies from economics (i.e., the model of supermarket networks) and telecommunications (the network architecture of information systems) (Liu, 2002; Kroger, Kroger, 2008). Castells emphasizes that network society means not only social networks per se, but also social networks built around digitized information and ultra-fast processing capacity (Castells, 2007). At the same time Castells observes that the technological innovation develops faster than does the human capacity to absorb it, so comprehension of a network’s impact on society is subject to a “time lag” respective to technological progress.

This observation fully applies to religious organization in post-Soviet Russia. For a long time, there was no articulation or discussion of the need to re-think media strategy, to revise priorities in media development in the context of the growing impact of social networks on the audience – networks that compete with and often win audience from traditional media. Recently the attention of ROC and other religious structures to social networks as channels for distribution of information and recruiting audience has become more visible.

The aims of this paper are: 1) to describe the evolution of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant media over the last two decades in the context of Russian national media system; 2) to explore reflections of editors and journalists on digitalization and networkization; and, 3) to identify problematic areas for Christian media in Russia.

Methodologically, the paper is based on interviews with Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant journalists and experts in the field of religion and media, as well as secondary data analysis and research on the profiles of social networks.

The paper tries to answer on the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent is the challenge of networkization reflected upon, and comprehended by, the decision makers behind Christian media in Russia?

RQ2: What is the impact of social networks on Christian news production, channeling and understanding by the audience?

RQ3: What is the difference in impact of networkization on the dominant Russian Orthodox Church (around 70% of population) and on the churches of minorities – Catholic and Protestant (both – less than 1% of population)?

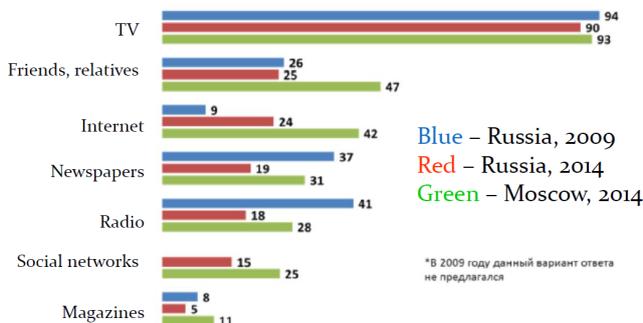
### **Networks vs TV: adjusting to new media dynamics**

A profile of Russian audience media consumption clearly shows the leading position of TV (see *Figure 1*), which in many cases it is the only source for news for Russians (see *Figure 2*).

Figure 1

## The profile of media consumption in Russia

Data from Levada-Center, July 2014 (Volkov and Goncharov, 2014).

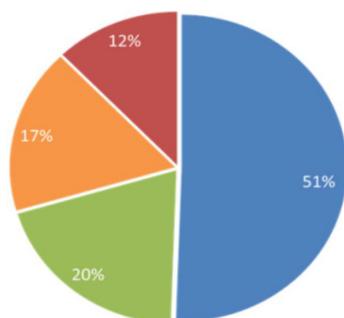


Source: Levada-Center, June 2014

Figure 2

## Number of news sources used by Russian audience

Blue – one source (51%), green – two sources (20%), yellow – three sources (17%) and red – four and more sources (12%). Data from Levada-Center, July 2014 (Volkov and Goncharov, 2014).



The growing influence of networks is a consequence not only of expanding internet penetration (71.3 % of Russians use the internet, in big cities over 80%) (Internet Live Stats, 2016), but also of their “filtering” function: more and more users come to mainstream media web portals via “Facebok” or “Vkontakte” (Van Der Haak, Parks, Castells, 2012; Panchenko, 2011: 87–118).

Are Christian churches in Russia ready for such a turn? Have they elaborated clear and effective strategies in regard to this development?

The ROC remains one of the most highly trusted social institutions in Russia. Around 70% of the population of the Russian Federation identify themselves as “Orthodox believers” (Levada, 2014). Some anti-ROC’s campaigns and scandals (the “Pussy Riot” punk prayer in a Moscow cathedral, among others) have not significantly decreased the broad trust invested in the ROC. Experts agree that, “a common trope for self-positioning of the Church is that the ROC is a ‘state-shaping’ religion” (Suslov, Engström, Simons, 2015).

“Today Russian society wants to hear the Church voice on some controversial and crucial questions that concern every citizen. These include corruption, the legitimacy of parliamentary elections, social instability, ethnic tensions, and the effectiveness of public participation in combating social ills such as alcoholism and drug addiction. Both society and the journalistic community await honest, authentic and even undiplomatic answers from the Church. The readiness of the Church engage in such open discussion will determine the degree of credibility accorded to the Church”, – suggested Zhosul (Zhosul, 2014: 12). Social networks demand such a voice of ROC and are ready to channel it.

According to Anna Danilova, the editor-in-chief of the web portal “Orthodox Christianity and the World” (Pravmir.ru), there

are several essential negative presuppositions in Orthodox religious identity that mitigate against using mass media for missionary work. “For a religious community, the process of exploring new media normally is connected at the very least with the following potential obstacles: 1) the tendency of any religious institution to be conservative in everything, including the media; 2) a lack of clarity about the impact of new media on the psychological state of the individual, society and interpersonal relationships; 3) a tendency to interpret many innovations as “diabolic” (one of the best examples of which is illustrated by the fear of many people in Russia to accept a personal tax identification code, even though the Church has officially stated that it has nothing to do with the number of the Antichrist)”, writes an Orthodox journalist (Danilova, 2011: 20).

The ROC has its own sense of mission and doctrinal grounds clearly described in the “*Basis of the Social Concept*”, adopted in 2000. The document states, that the mass media play an ever-increasing role in the contemporary world, and that the Church respects the work of journalists, who are charged with the “interpretation of positive ideals as well as the struggle with the spreading of evil, sin and vice” (Basis, 2000). “Journalists and mass media executives should never forget about this responsibility”, – the document says.

Concerning possible complications and serious conflicts (because of inaccurate or distorted information about church life, putting it in an inappropriate context etc), ROC calls to solve such problems “in the spirit of peaceful dialogue with the aim of removing misunderstandings and continuing co-operation”. In cases of blasphemy, bishops “after issuing an appropriate warning and at least one attempt to enter into negotiations, may take the following steps: to sever relations with the mass medium or journalist concerned; to call upon the faithful to boycott the given mass medium; to apply to the governmental bodies help settle the conflict; to subject those

guilty of sinful actions to canonical prohibitions if they are Orthodox Christians” (Basis, 2000).

In 2005, the ROC Synod adopted a regulation “about some aspects of Church information activity”, which states: “The status of ROC official communications can only be granted to the Church hierarchs, who alone are permitted to convey official informational materials about its activity, about important events happening in the Church or about the position of the Church hierarchs upon this or that issue. This information can be conveyed in the form of documents, information messages or comments given under the blessing of the Hierarchy and accessible in text form. Opinion piece, interviews, discussions, performances, journalistic articles, and oral comments are not considered official information” (Synod, 2005).

In 1997, Patriarch Aleksii II blessed web technology as a new means for Orthodox missionary work, but attempts to use the possibilities of cyberspace for Orthodox teaching and witnessing started much earlier, attested to by the history of “Orthonet” (the Orthodox segment of Runet). Today, there are many Orthodox search services, information agencies and social networks. Patriarch Kirill is active on “Facebook”. Some priests have blogs and “Twitter” accounts.

“Orthonet” attempted to become the leader, the most influential source for people about Orthodox Christianity, but in fact, its impact is far from that of Runet leaders. According to the service top100.rambler.ru, the most popular Orthodox webpage (pravoslavie.ru) comes in at number 101 in usage on the list of Russian web-resources (Rambler, 2016). The most popular Orthodox blog, run by deacon Andrei Kuraev, has about 1,1 million comments and thereby lags behind the leading sites for Russian bloggers outside of the leading group of Russian bloggers. The web portal “Orthodoxy and the World” (“Pravoslavie i mir” – www.pravmir.ru), launched in 2004,

is at the moment the leading multimedia portal about Orthodoxy and society, publishing news and analytical reviews, comments and interviews, audio, video, and info graphics. Monthly visitors to the portal number around 2,5-3 million. Also of note among the leaders are the official portal of the ROC ([patriarchia.ru](http://patriarchia.ru)), and the portal of the Moscow Theological Academy ([bogoslav.ru](http://bogoslav.ru)) (Suslov, Engström, Simons, 2015).

In 2009, after his election and enthronization, Patriarch Kyrill announced the establishment of a new Synodal Department of Information (Sinodal'nyi informatsionnyi otdel), which is in charge of the “imprimatur” – permission for distribution through church channels for media that claim to be Orthodox, the content of which does not misrepresent Orthodox doctrine and does not contradict the official position of the ROC. In 2010, an Orthodox video channel was launched on You Tube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/russianchurch>).

Not all web sites that claim to be Orthodox are in line with ROC positions, and some of them take different approaches in commenting on everyday life. Web portal Credo.Ru ([www.portal-credo.ru](http://www.portal-credo.ru)), presenting itself as an independent religious information agency, largely supports the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church in its publications. The latter is a ROC rival. “Patriarchia.Ru and Credo.Ru represent two extremes of Orthodox journalism in Russia today. On one end stands the officious, triumphalist, “glossy” Orthodoxy of Patriarchia.Ru; on the other, the so-called “true autonomous” Orthodoxy of Credo.Ru, which goes to absurd lengths to reject any positive characterization of the ROC. The gap between Orthodox media loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate and media alien to it continues to widen. The less transparent the Moscow Patriarchate becomes, the more it lends credibility to its critics, emphasizes Briskina-Müller (Briskina-Müller, 2011).

According to her analysis, “Independent Orthodox media offer serious analysis even if self-censorship is employed in some cases. Official and independent Orthodox media have differing goals. The former seek to propagate a certain image of the church in the eyes of the public. By contrast, the latter are less concerned about the reputation of the church and strive sincerely for a genuine exchange of information” (Briskina-Müller, 2011: 14). The German scholar also believes that the modus operandi of ROC recalls the “the old party style, methods that alienate rather than convince”. According to Sergei Chapnin, So-called “spiritual revival” in Russia presupposes de-Sovietization: “We were in need of *metanoia*: penitence and conversion” (Chapnin, 2015).

Elena Zhosul suggests, that another important issue today is the issue of education and training. “Today there are very few qualified experts in Russia who are competent both in church and media questions, who understand the basics of orthodox theology as well as the basics of media work. The list of such persons is very short, and only part of them forms an information agenda. In contrast, many Russian journalists regularly writing about the Church need at least a rudimentary theological education”, – wrote Russian expert Elena Zhosul (Zhosul, 2014: 12).

Describing the phenomenon of Russian “intellectual social network”, where-in high-level Church-related discussions are conducted not in mainstream media, but predominantly in social networks, Ksenia Luchenko writes: “The answer to that question is closely linked to the analysis of dialogue culture in Russian society as a whole. Social institutions and mechanisms that are supposed to ensure and sustain that dialogue are overwhelmingly dysfunctional. However, the need to discuss, share experiences and monitor publications is still there. And social networks make it possible” (Luchenko, 2015: 130). It is interesting to note that almost all

the largest Orthodox web sites maintain pages in social networks, such as “Vkontakte”, “Odnoklassniki” and “Facebook”. In these social networks, you can find special pages devoted to ecclesiasts, parish groups and Orthodox public associations or churches. Here, notably, a variety of reactions is registered on the same topic. Thus in response to the controversy pertaining to the punk-prayer by “Pussy Riot” in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin called for “criminal sanctions for everyone who affronts the faithful sense”. In contrast, Deacon Andrei Kuraev responded in a very different way in his Life Journal: “If I were a sacristan of the Cathedral, I would feed them pancakes, offer each of them a cup of mead, and invite them to come around for Confession”. (Kuraev, 2012).

In October 2010, Patriarch Kirill blessed the establishment of the ROC channel on YouTube. “We launch it in order to bring God’s word, heavenly wisdom, heavenly law – which is the law of life – closer to the life of contemporary, and especially young, people”, – Patriarch said (Kirill, 2010).

A remarkable roundtable discussion on “The Russian Orthodox Church and new media: to be or to pretend to be?” was held on 28 January 2014 at the Russian Orthodox University in the framework of the XXII International Christmas Educational Readings (Khroul, 2015). Participants from various dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), well-known journalists, heads of internet portals and diocesan press services discussed limits on, opportunities for and threats to the ROC mission in social networks, the developing trends of new media and their influence on the information agenda and the process of evangelization. Some of the suggestions and ideas put forth there merit consideration about the topic of Christian media “networkization”.

## **Orthodox networking: strategic priority**

The roundtable began with an expert survey on “The Social Network for the Orthodox people – good or evil?” Chief editor of the portal “Bogoslov.ru” archpriest *Pavel Velikanov* mentioned three pros: 1) the possibility of proclaiming the Gospel, the ability to communicate with people looking for answers on their questions in social networks; 2) the possibility of Christian charity – according to the priest, “charitable organizations are active in networks and live through networks”; and 3) the rapid dissemination of information. Cons, according to the theologian, are the reverse side of pros: 1) it is very difficult to verify information, which often comes from untrustworthy and odd sources; 2) discussions are conducted in a manner inappropriate for Christians; and 3) people spend a lot of time on-line and come back to the real world “just to eat”.

The chief editor of the portal Bogoslov.ru added that anonymity, on the one hand, allows people to overcome the “exclusion zone” between a wide audience and the clergy, while on the other hand, it removes moral constraints. The very possibility of contacting a priest is often associated with the desire ‘just to chat’ and not to learn something really important that could lead a person to faith.

Journalist *Sergey Khudiev* believes that it is difficult to divide the “pluses” and “minuses”. Most advantages are at the same time disadvantages. The subjectivity of publications makes it possible to obtain information that is accurate, but one that reflects the attitudes of the living. Hence, the negative side – you never know the limits of this subjectivity. The opportunity to establish a personal relationship with someone is “neutralized” with the threat that these relations cannot be deep and meaningful. The advantage of anonymity is that many people are able to overcome the exclusion zone between them and the clergy, but the disadvantage is that

the question of anonymity removes constraints on people in the network: they cease to take responsibility for what they say.

Anna Danilova considered as a positive the fact that social networks make it possible to get out of the “ghetto” of a merely Orthodox audience; they make it possible to understand the agenda, find out what people are currently interested in. However, a negative point is the lack of information accuracy and difficulties with verification. Sometimes “fakes” rapidly spread via social networks (for example, the incident of false news spreading about a prohibition on the popular TV show “Good night, kids!” [“Spokoinoi nochi, malyschi!”]). Further, on the negative side, Danilova suggests that social networking generates too quick a reaction; “People react while they still do not really understand the situation, and relationships become strained”, Danilova said and referred to the need for general “internet hygiene”.

Speaking about the advantages of social networks, Elena Zhosul noted that the 1) are one of the main sources of news; 2) allow the establishment of useful contacts and professional relationships; and 3) allow quick collective reflection about what is happening. At the same time, according to Zhosul, “Psychological factors are at play in the use of the internet as a source of information”. On the negative side she mentioned, 1) the overflow of information, when “we are forced to consume, to swallow without chewing”; and 2) the inability to concentrate on some issues, therefore long texts are so unpopular in the network.

According to the journalist Maria Sveshnikova, one of the main problems of Orthodox forums is the level of debate: “In no other network segments are not allowed such an indecent, offensive communication? No other sphere of the network permits such indecent and offensive expressions? Paradoxically, priests often write things that they would never say from the pulpit. They discredit themselves and the Orthodox Church”.

“Especially in the information about people of the Church”, – stated Sergei Khudiyev. “It is very important that we try to say something complimentary and positive, because there is enough strain, swearing, shouting, hatred and fear. It is important to serve a creative purpose, we must strive to find something joyful and positive”.

Archpriest Pavel Velikanov expressed the belief that the priest must be present in social networks: “On the one hand, it is easier to move a person to communicate with a priest, asking him what the Church thinks about different issues, but on the other hand, sometimes a man comes to the network not in order to come to the Church, but only to talk with the priest”. He feels that any Orthodox believer must have a “strong immunity” to social networks, yet, he added, “I think that we will not turn away from social networks”. Velikanov calls the Orthodox lifestyle fun, rich, and multi-faceted, reminding us that the social network is not just a network of people; it is also a technology, which must be mastered first before it can bring people together effectively

Summing up, Natalia Loseva noted as “pluses” of the internet 1) the opportunity to reach out to the target audience; 2) new possibilities for communication; 3) the increased speed of information transmission; and, 4) its volume.

Roundtable discussion participants agreed to continue the dialogue on the new media challenges for the Russian Orthodox Church during up-coming conferences.

### **Catholic and Protestant networking: enthusiastic voices of minorities**

In comparison to the dominating and systematically growing Orthodox traditional and digital media, Catholic and Protestant media are almost invisible on the Russian media landscape.

After many decades of religious persecution, the Catholic Church in Russia was in a very difficult position when it started to revive ecclesiastical structures in April 1991. Even a brief historical analysis of the development of Catholic media in the USSR and (since 1991) in the Russian Federation must take into consideration religious suppression/freedom, the opening and closing of media outlets, their number and circulation, the Catholic presence in the public sphere, Church-state relations and other criteria. The entire history can be divided into three periods.

The time of Soviet religious persecution correlates with the period of underground and illegal media activity of Catholic communities. From the moment of the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in 1991, a new period of revival for Catholic began. It lasted until the time of restored dioceses in 2002, which was strongly criticized by ROC. After 2002, according to our observations, the development slows, then stops, as media outlets were closed one-by-one. The period we consider a time of “self-silencing” might end after the historical meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, but in fact, this has not happened yet.

Between 1991 and 2002 years – as Catholic institutions grew and strengthened, local mass media sprang up: radio stations (Moscow and St. Petersburg), a video studio (Novosibirsk), and the publications of a seminary, of monastic orders and of congregations as well as numerous parish bulletins. Since it was very difficult and expensive to gain access to government-controlled television and radio stations, print media (newspapers and magazines) played a special role in uniting the Catholics of Russia.

The first monthly magazine “Istina i Zhizn” (“Truth and Life”) have been established in Moscow in December 1990, and the weekly Catholic newspaper “Svet Evangelia” (“The Light of the Gospel”) – a national Catholic newspaper – was launched in October 1994.

In November 2001, journalists started the Internet-based daily information service in Russian “Cathnews.Ru”. It was growing rapidly and became even more popular than the weekly edition because information arrived in real time. “Cathnews.Ru” planned to start an English version soon, but failed in the initiative because of the lack of resources.

After 2002, open and outspoken positions in regard both to the wider world and to local Catholic community gradually shifted back to “no comment” and a sense of a “conspiratorial” mentality without any explanation. No public announcements accompanied the closing of one media outlet after the other: “Svet Evangelia” (2007), the Catholic radio station “Dar” (2009), etc. Should anyone (journalist, scholar, politician, whoever) wish to obtain even very basic official information regarding the Catholic Church in Russia (for instance, the number of parishes, believers, priests, bishops, structures, institutions, whatever), at the present time they would be unable to locate a valid source (Khroul, 2010).

The existing Catholic web pages are of two kinds: (1) institutional self-presentation (sites of Dioceses – Moscow – [cathmos.ru](http://cathmos.ru), Saratov – [dscs.ru](http://dscs.ru), Irkutsk – [julial72.bget.ru](http://julial72.bget.ru)), Seminary ([www.cathseminary.ru](http://www.cathseminary.ru)), some official structures and (2) private initiatives, run mostly by enthusiasts. In many cases the editorial staff these private initiatives receive neither moral, nor material) support or encouragement from the hierarchy, which rules out possible synergetic strategic planning and systematic work.

The most successful recent Catholic initiative in the social networks is the so-called “Vechernjaja katolicheskaja gazeta” (“Evening Catholic newspaper”) on “Facebook” ([www.facebook.com/giornaledellasera/](http://www.facebook.com/giornaledellasera/)) and “Vkontakte” ([vk.com/giornaledellasera](http://vk.com/giornaledellasera)). The daily overview of Catholic News (mostly from abroad and with only scanty news from Russia) enjoys growing interest from the public.

The major television project of Russian Protestants is “Television of Good News” (TBN), which began as part of the global Trinity Broadcasting Network and is now positioning itself as an independent public broadcaster. Without any doubt, this is the biggest Protestant media resource that broadcasts via satellites and cable networks.

Protestant radio “Teos” lost its frequency and is now a fully Internet based station. Nevertheless, it is developing in new directions as it invites interesting presenters, such as the Orthodox journalist Sergei Khudiyev and a number of others. “Teos” wants to be interesting and relevant to a wide range of audiences, and not have its listenership be only for Protestant. The newspaper “Mirt” is a serious newspaper for ministers and parishioners, publishing reflections and sermons, which are, sometimes difficult to grasp for non-Protestants. There are also a number of successful printed media outlets outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg, including newspapers in Yaroslavl, Penza, Yoshkar Ola, Voronezh, Vladivostok, Irkutsk and other cities of Russia.

Among the internet portals, the leading site is Protestant.ru, which represents a good example of successful migration from the printed newspaper to web portal.

Anton Kruglikov, the press secretary of the Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) in Russia remarked on two major visible trends in Protestant media during his presentation on the “Religion and Media” panel at the 8th International Media Readings in Moscow “Mass Media and Communications – 2016”: 1) to move the content from printed media to the digital platforms and 2) to address the general public, not only those who are already Protestants.

## Conclusion

Despite the fact that it has been over twenty years since the revival of religious media, according to our observations, religious institutions have not implemented even a half of what potentially they could. Because of this, audiences seeking religious information have switched their attention to other sources of information, mostly secular, which broadcast religious information with inevitable distortions.

Networking activity of Christians in Russia could be a good tool for the correction of mistakes made by secular journalists, however only in the case of ROC, could this be successful.

In conclusion, we would like to draw your attention to some common problems and challenges faced by Russian Christian media.

1. *Subordination of journalism to PR.* Many of the employees of religious media in Russia find themselves serving the goals of religious institutions in terms of public relations and advertising of their churches rather than pursuing topics of journalistic interest about religion and the Church. Both employers and employees do not find such a situation strange (Amialchenia, 2014). The lack or total absence of professionalism in religious media is rarely considered to be a problem; a journalist must be a good Christian.

2. *Missing the target audience.* Religious media seem to have forgotten to ask themselves questions about their mission and target audience. They fall into the trap of thinking that their structure conveys “media for all”, but in reality, they find themselves lacking listeners (Luchenko, 2015). Religious media audience are largely “religious” people, although now attempts are being made to gain an audience among non-believers or atheists. For Christian media, which by nature have a social character, it is very important to find

a way to communicate with the rest of the society, to opening the doors of their “self-imposed ghetto”.

3. *Clerical language instead of secular.* Archaic ecclesiastical language creates a distorted image of the religious message and “corrupts” > severely curtails (or obscures) the religious vantage point on the cultural and social issues in Russia. Christian media lack a clear and responsible > transparent and accountable? Language and as a result they find themselves ad marginem of the national media system (Khroul, 2012).

From a journalistic perspective, several problems lead to poor and stereotyped coverage of Christian life in the secular media. Agenda-setting processes in mainstream media are not oriented toward ethical questions: the principal players are mostly focused not on the audience, not on public interest, but on political subordination and commercial profit, therefore moral issues remain secondary. Religious media are not able to change the content management: “infotainment” and “advertainment” oriented media decision makers do not seem to be concerned with fitting their products into even secular moral norms, so inherently more strict and rigorous religious ideals are all the more ignored.

Nevertheless, it is not the fault of secular journalists that Christians in Russia have problems with news production, channeling, transmitting, broadcasting, interaction and understanding. Without solving these problems in the age of “networkization”, Christians can hardly expect to make their voices heard in Russian society.

## References

AMIALCHENIA, A. (2014). Christian Media After Socialism: Major Trends. In: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Religious Impact on Journalistic*

*Cultures*. Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University. pp. 16–20.

BRISKINA-MÜLLER, A. (2011). Orthodoxer Journalismus in Russland: Neueste Entwicklungen. *Zeitschrift Religion & Gesellschaft in Ost und West*. 10. pp. 12–15.

CASTELLS, M. (2007). Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society. *International Journal of Communication*. 1. pp. 238–266.

CHAPNIN, S. (2015). A Church of Empire. *First Things*. [Online] Accessed from <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/11/a-church-of-empire>

DANILOVA, A. (2011). The Russian Orthodox Church and the New Media. In: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Religion and New Media in the Age of Convergence*. Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University.

KHROUL, V. (2010). Catholic Diaspora in Russian Media: «Marginalization» and «Self-silencing». *Religion in Eastern Europe Journal*. New York. 30(4).

KHROUL, V. (2012). *Religion and Media in Russia: Functional and Ethical Perspectives*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing.

KHROUL, V. (2015). Russian Orthodox Church and New Media: To Be or Pretend to Be? *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*. 14. pp. 175–179.

KIRILL. (2010). *Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill has Blessed the Establishment of its Own Channel of Russian Orthodox Church on the Video Sharing YouTube*. [Online] Accessed from <http://www.lenta.ru/news/2010/10/11/bless/>

KROKER, A., KROKER, M. (eds.) (2008). *Critical Digital Studies: A Reader*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

KURAEV, A. (2012). *Maslenitsa v Hrame Hrista Spasitelja* [Maslenitsa in Christ the Savior Cathedral] [Online] Accessed from <http://diak-kuraev.livejournal.com/285875>

LEVADA. (2014). Prazdnovanie Paskhi [Easter Celebration]. [Online] Accessed from <http://www.levada.ru/05-05-2014/prazdnovanie-paskhi>

LIU, C. (2002). Information Networkization and Network Economy. *Telecommunications Science*. Beijing: Institute of Communications. 1.

LUCHENKO, K. (2015). Orthodox Online Media on Runet: History of Development and Current State of Affairs. *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*. 14. pp. 123–132.

PANCHENKO, E. (2011). Integratsiya internet-SMI i sotsial'nykh setey v Runete: Novaya publichnaya sfera ili prostranstvo kontrolya? [Integration of Online Media and Social Networks in the Russian Internet: A New Public Sphere or a Space of Control?] *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*. 5. pp. 87–118.

RAMBLER (2016). Rambler Top 100. [Online] Accessed from <http://top100.rambler.ru/navi/?page=4>

SUSLOV, M., ENGSTRÖM, M., SIMONS, G. (2015). Digital Orthodoxy: Mediating Post-Secularity in Russia. Editorial. *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*. 14. pp. 1-11.

SYNOD (2005). Meeting of the ROC Holy Synod from 16.07.2005. Journal №64. [Online] Accessed from <http://www.mospat.ru/text/desicions/id/9730.html>

The Basis of the Social Concept. Church and Mass Media. (2000). *Basis of the Social Concept of Russian Orthodox Church*. [Online] Accessed from <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/>

VAN DER HAAK, B., PARKS M., CASTELLS, M. (2012). The Future of Journalism: Networked Journalism. *International Journal of Communication*. 6.

VOLKOV, D., GONCHAROV, S. (2014). Russian Media Landscape: TV, Press, Internet. [Online]. Accessed from <http://www.levada.ru/2014/07/08/rossijskij-media-landshaft-televidenie-prensa-internet-3/>

ZHOSUL, E. (2014). Orthodox Christianity and Mass Media after Socialism. In: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Religious Impact on Journalistic Cultures*. Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University. pp. 9–13.