

**RUSSIAN MEDIA IN TELEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
AS A METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGE:
RECONSTRUCTING GOALS FOR
UNDERSTANDING EFFECTS**

**РОССИЙСКИЕ СМИ
В ТЕЛЕОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ
КАК МЕТОДОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ВЫЗОВ:
РЕКОНСТРУКЦИЯ ЦЕЛЕЙ
ДЛЯ ПОНИМАНИЯ ЭФФЕКТОВ**

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The media effects studies are more precise in a teleological perspective implying that the effects are analyzed in terms of goals. The teleological approach to journalism must be based on an analysis of the transparency and regularity of the goal formation process, the level of consistency and hierarchicality of goals and their compliance with the social mission of the media. The author considers it useful to engage in an interdisciplinary cooperation in the area of teleological studies of journalism and mass media with sociologists, linguists and psychologists.

Key words: *journalism, goals, teleological model, social mission, intent analysis.*

Изучение эффектов деятельности СМИ корректно проводить с учетом поставленных целей, то есть в телеологической перспективе. Телеологический подход к журналистике подразумевает анализ степени прозрачности и системности процесса целеполагания, уровня согласованности и иерархичности целей, а также их соответствие социальной миссии СМИ. Автор полагает, что плодотворность такого подхода во многом зависит от состояния междисциплинарного сотрудничества в области исследований эффектов СМИ, взаимодействия исследователей медиа с социологами, лингвистами и психологами, в частности, при развитии метода интент-анализа.

Ключевые слова: *журналистика, цели, телеологический подход, социальная миссия, интент-анализ.*

Invisible Problem with Fundamental Impact

There are many papers and books analyzing the current state of Russian media – from its technological aspect to its ethical perspective, and there is no shortage of estimates and prognoses (Vartanova, 2013; Ivanitskiy, 2010). However, the overall context of perception and evaluation of national mass media, in our opinion, lacks a perspective on journalism in terms of its goal-setting or, in other words, a *teleological* perspective. Such a perspective is necessary for the construction of a *normative* model to overcome the current crisis – not only structural, technological, but also ethical and axiological. Thus, we are dealing with the *teleological* nature of

the processes that are increasingly the subject of analysis in the texts of philosophical or theological approach.

The formation of strategic and tactical agendas and the configuration of information filters at all levels of communication are directly related to the goal-setting media activities which form the primary, basic system of goals, that later develops into an extensive network of more concrete objectives and aims. At all levels, goal-setting is based on the will of editors, journalists, publishers, business and political actors, etc. Some of them are internal players, some act from the outside of media institutions, but in any case goal-setting is a natural arena of their conflicts, mediated via negotiations or fights, finished with victory, defeat or consensus.

The purpose of this article is to examine Russian journalism theoretically from a *teleological* perspective and to invite colleagues to an empirical analysis of journalistic practice in the framework of the question of *diachronic (temporal)* and *synchronic (structural and hierarchical)* aspects of goal-setting's fundamental importance. The first of these aspects is connected with goal production and its development through various stages of media, and the second – a teleological correlation (coherence of the objectives in relation to their conflicts) between different “levels” of modern Russian media system and their impact on journalism.

In the framework of this paper we consider the teleological factor as normative and will-based with all relevant legal and ethical consequences. We are convinced that the accountability of journalism – in any society – starts with goal-setting (at all levels), therefore the teleological approach is considered to be an integral part of any media accountability analysis. If you are not able to retrieve and reconstruct the goals of media – how can you evaluate and measure their accountability?

Teleology in Historical and Contemporary Context

Teleology (from the Greek. *teleos* – “goal” and *logos* – “teaching”) is called: 1) ontological doctrine on nature and society objective goals; 2) methods of learning in terms of goal-setting, and 3) a description of the activities from the perspective of goal-setting and achieving goals.

The word “*teleology*” was first used at the beginning of the XVIII century by H. Wolf – one of the disciples of Leibniz – and originally stood for the part of the natural philosophy that deals with the description and explanation of the nature of things in terms of their objectives.

However, the teleological approach has been known since the times of ancient philosophy. “There are external and internal teleological perspectives. First, the *Plato approach* proposes the consideration and explanation of the organization of the world in relation to the behavior of the subject of intentional action. Intentionalism considers human behavior as conscious, as a deliberate pursuit of certain goals. People can foresee the possible deployment of the events and organize their behavior in order to realize their intentions. The second, *Aristotle approach*, suggests that the world itself has within itself its own goals – immanent forms. Everything has its own fundamental purpose and all entities are designed to realize that purpose. Goals are criteria to measure the maturity and completeness of things. Each of the goals presupposes the existence of a definite plan, which governs the development of the world or of things” (Entsiklopediya, 2009: 209).

It is important to note that Plato’s and Aristotle’s teleological concepts developed in the centuries that followed, presenting heuristically rich background to study *subjective* goals designed for media by political subjects and media managers and the *immanent*,

objective mission of journalism: the “gap” between what is being done and what should be done. A “gap” between the two modes of professional reflection becomes obvious when analyzing the results of sociological research; in the polls, journalists are in favour of ethical behaviour, while in everyday practice they often make exceptions and violate ethical codes (Anikina, 2013).

The concept of the ultimate goal (*causa finalis*) has been developed in medieval philosophy and theology. According to Thomas Aquinas teleological proof of God’s existence, every active act has a goal, and ultimately goes step by step to some higher source of goal-setting, that is, God.

In modern times, the rationalization of knowledge has superseded the transcendental teleological approach to the periphery of scientific research (Benedict Spinoza even called the concept of an ultimate goal to be a “refuge of ignorance”), but Leibniz brought back teleological principle in the arsenal of scientific knowledge (though over the centuries it remained in the shadow of positivist methodology).

“The projection of the mechanical view of the world of natural science on human life and activities in the sphere of morals threatened to eliminate the concepts of purpose and meaning from this area,” – suggested P. Gaidenko (Gaydenko, 2003: 24). Then the scholar notes that by the end of the XIX century the principle of expediency in the natural sciences has been narrowed down to a causal link “in the sense of acting, mechanical; rather than the target, the ultimate cause” (Gaydenko, 2003: 25). Gaidenko calls to form the basis of natural science and the cultural sciences from single source, “a single principle of expediency, breaking at last their chronic dualism” (Ibid.).

Moreover, a number of modern researchers consider it necessary to return to the “final cause,” underlining its heuristic potential and

noting that teleology is not only sacred but also rational in nature (Razeev, 2009: 22).

Historians of philosophy point out that the teleological approach, returning from the “exile” of modern times, consolidates its position in psychology, sociology (in particular, the teleological Weber’s concept of *goal-oriented* rational action), cybernetics, systems theory and other disciplines, providing at the same time increasing influence on modern science.

The “comeback” of goal-oriented approaches is becoming more prominent in contemporary Russian journalism studies. In particular, it is a remarkable fact that the new series of “Theory of Journalism Proceedings” has opened the collection of works “Mass media and the value-centred attitude of society,” which is considered as the methodological approach to the study of values in the public sphere (Lazutina, 2013).

In this article we will not analyze transcendental goals or consider journalism as part of an immanent teleology; instead, we will focus on rational goal-setting without correlation with transcendental factors. Stressing the rationality of goal-setting, some researchers propose to replace the term teleology to “teleonomy”, but it seems excessive to us.

Goal-setting in Russian Journalism: Actors and Manifestations

The question “for what purpose?” has been missing in different models of communication for quite a significant amount of time. In particular, the first Lasswell’s model – “who – says what – in which channel – to whom – with what effect?” – did not contain it (Lasswell & Bryson, 1948: 117). A question about the effect of

communication contains a latent question about the purpose (as the effect is the result of the process of achieving the goal), but the question itself “for what purpose?” appears in an improved model in the late 1960s (McQuail, 1993: 13–15).

The delay of teleological questioning and furthermore, teleological analysis in comparison to structural and functional analysis seems to be quite understandable: researchers firstly deal with more simple, obvious and empirically observable things.

However, it is not only theoretically, but also practically possible to compare the different media systems in terms of their teleological goal-setting: the transparency of the process, the level of consistency, the hierarchy and subordination of goals, the degree of autonomy/dependence from political forces and other factors.

The differentiation between goal-setting of the media system in longer terms and goal-setting in the texts, in the content, leads to two possible levels of teleological analysis – sociological systematic analysis on a macro-level of the national or even transnational media system and content analysis on the micro-level of journalistic texts transmitted by all kinds of media.

The evaluation of the goal’s effects on the audience consciousness presumes the third kind of analysis on the level of public opinion. However, academic discourse on the effects of journalistic texts and the effectiveness of the media in general in many cases does not take into consideration real objectives of journalists and media managers. Theoretical models need a more detailed “operationalization”, and empirical studies aimed at identifying the real objectives pursued by the journalists themselves and other influent players. We consider to be appropriate at least three levels of such an analysis: strategic, tactical and operational.

In Soviet times, the process of setting goals to a large extent – at the strategic level – was removed from journalism, and there was

only a tactical goal-setting on the instrumental level. The post-Soviet journalism with declared independence had a chance to regain the full frame of goal-setting, but, according to our observations, it has not happened.

Russian journalists were offended by provocative statements of Deputy Minister of Communications and Information Aleksei Volin made during the International Conference at Lomonosov Moscow State University, Faculty of Journalism in February 2013. He said: “The task of the journalist is to make money for those who hired him” (Oskin, 2013).

Therefore, facing difficulties in mainstream media, the dialogue on the media teleology – both at the tactical level, as the goal-setting of the individual journalist, and at a strategic level, as the social mission of the entire profession – is being moved to social networks.

Teleological questions about the real purposes of politicians and media managers cause simulative quasi-dialogue about the basic values of the most influential media (first of all – TV). The reduction of a wide range of values to a narrow set of political or consumer interests cannot be the work of only the politicians, the “curators” of media in government. Journalists – in their goal-setting – are also involved in the crisis in the media, but with varying degrees of responsibility and liability, depending on the degree of freedom of decision-making.

The symptoms of the crisis of goal-setting, which manifest themselves primarily in the real contradiction between the objectives of the journalists and the common good, the public interest, further manifest in the following ways:

1. The lack of systematic goal-setting. According to precise observation of Russian researchers, today’s media face “a deep deficit of goal consistency in a long-term run.” (Pankeev, 2013: 236);

2. Pragmatic, business-oriented goal-setting. Public interest and societal strategic goals are subordinated to profit and commercial success.

In both cases, journalists face ethical challenges related to their awareness of their social mission. Leading journalists of “*Russkiy Reporter*” – Andrei Veselov, Victor Dyatlikovich, Dmitrii Kartsev, Andrei Konstantinov, Konstantin Milchin, Evgenia Ofitserova, Ekaterina Nagibina, Anna Starobinets and Dmitry Sokolov-Mitrich, thinking about the main trends in the media, journalism and public communication, are trying to help colleagues in setting goals, coherent to audience needs: “Only now, after the fever of subjectivity and the anabiosis of objectivity, Russian journalism is gradually obtaining a harmonious way of development. The audience requests the quality of real meaning, real sense. People are not willing to pay those who provide them with a maximum of news or entertainment, but to those who save them from the noise of too much information and emotions” (Veselov, Dyatlikovich et al., 2012).

According to the authors of “*Russkiy Reporter*”, the strategy of further survival of the media in the market is directly linked to the exact definition of objectives in the context of a social mission: “Those media will benefit in the next decade in the media market that will guarantee the highest standards of journalistic work, will provide social navigation for the audience, will respond to the main issues of our time and eternity” (Ibid.).

The future of Russian media will show whether these predictions and warnings are heard. Meanwhile, awareness of the social mission of journalists in Russia appears in slightly different forms.

In March 2012, in the midst of political rallies (also an important form of representation of values and their presentation to the public) there was another initiative – an initiative of the rally “against all

rallies.” Journalists claimed they were tired of working overtime on covering rallies. It is interesting that journalists manifested against rallies, i.e. against the freedom of speech and assembly, but they did not criticize their employers. It is hard to imagine that, in countries with established journalistic culture and journalistic standards, the journalists came to “rally against the rallies...”

Dmitry Kiselev, the head of the International Agency, “Rossia Segodnia,” who is also the author and presenter of the program “Vesti Nedeli” on the TV channel “Rossiya 1” put the social mission of Russian media in the following statement: “Russia, of course, wants to compete in the field of international information, as information warfare has become the practice of modern life and the main type of warfare... Earlier there was artillery action before the attack; there is information warfare now” (Kiselev, 2014). According to the head of the agency “Rossia Segodnia,” propaganda is acceptable in journalism: “I am accused of the fact that I’m doing propaganda. But ‘*propaganda*’ from the Greek is just ‘the dissemination of information, ideas, thoughts, and philosophical positions’” (Ibid.).

The articulation of the social mission is a very important challenge for journalism, but the Russian journalistic community was not successful in surmounting it. “There are journalists in Russia, but there is no journalism. Journalism as a profession which unites a large number of people who consider themselves the fourth power. There are some journalists who are honest, professional, accountable, and who work in risky conditions with clear social mission. But they are a minority,” said well-known journalist Vladimir Pozner (Pozner, 2013). Meanwhile, a well-formulated, clear, and understandable mission that is accepted by the journalistic community could become a source of setting strategic goals that enhance the credibility of the profession and social dialogue.

The set of goals should be classified according to several criteria: the time (long-term, medium-term and immediate), the level of priority; the level of implementation, etc.

Attempts to consider the goals of the reporting in various media “from below,” i.e. from the standpoint of audience understanding, do not bring satisfactory results. Visiting the site of the leading Russian TV channels, we found manifestos and program declarations with teleological content (missions, goals, objectives, etc.), but in most cases the statements are of “self-advertising” nature focused mostly on how attractive the channel is for advertisement placement. Here are some examples: “The Channel One Russia credo is to be on the leading edge, to set the market trend, to be full of surprises and not afraid of experiments. Day after day, Channel One Russia lives up to its name by producing unique entertainment, news, and analytical content, releasing world premieres, localizing the best international formats, exclusively broadcasting sports and musical events, producing Russian film releases to great box office success, and developing thematic TV broadcasting. Today, Channel One Russia is the leader among Russian TV broadcasters in reach and popularity, both in Russia and abroad... Being the most loved and popular among its audiences, being demanded among advertisers, being the benchmark of quality among partners and competitors, and being the leader in reach is exciting, interesting, and challenging, and the only possible mission for Channel One Russia” (Pervyi, 2015).

“The TV channel “Rossiya” – one of two national television channels – has a broadcasting coverage of almost the entire territory of Russia. Its audience is 98,5 percent of the Russian population. The TV channel “Rossiya” today is a dynamic broadcaster, is a leader in documentary and feature film screenings, production of television entertainment programs, a leader in information broadcast.” (TV Russia, 2015). “Today the media holding REN-TV is one of the

largest Russian national broadcasters” (REN-TV, 2015). Even the channel “Dozhd”, whose positions differ a lot from the mainstream channels, indicates its attractiveness and uniqueness: “Dozhd” is the first and only Russian TV channel broadcasting on all existing platforms, delivering its signal to the viewer in all possible ways” (TV Rain, 2015).

Difficulties with the understanding of media goals by the audience are rooted also in a low level of teleological reflection. The limitations of freedom naturally lead to the dysfunctions in the system for setting objectives and their interpretations, and this phenomenon is observed not only by journalists, but also media managers.

Teleological Analysis: Methodological Challenge

Goal-setting in any field of activity, including journalism, does require an understanding of the role and the mission and derives from the fundamental mission of human development.

The mission of any activity is closely linked to the interests of all stakeholders. The *owners* of the media expect the stability of the media business, the increase of revenue, and they can be agents of certain political objectives, which are not always transparent. The *media workers*, in addition to the stability of labor relations, expect respect for their professionalism and their values. They need to be critical space of autonomy, which implies a personal choice and personal responsibility for it. The *audience* expects quality media products, which would have preserved the balance of objective information, education and entertainment, information sources and partners. The *advertisers* expect respect and mutually beneficial cooperation, competition, compliance, loyalty and manageability.

Society as a whole expects the totality of the media to perform functions for the common good.

According to teleological normative model of social dialogue optimization (Khroul, 2013), there are some goals that seem to be important for Russian media:

- the pursuit of the common good;
- qualitative and quantitative completeness of the agenda;
- optimization of channels;
- mediation, moderation, and creation of platforms for discussion;
- peacemaking and peacekeeping;
- professional solidarity.

Due to the lack of transparency of the goals of modern Russian media as well as the possibility of a fundamental discrepancy between the goals declared and actual, teleological analysis will be useful for many professionals – media experts, researchers, the media, sociologists, psychologists and others. Teleological analysis as a matter of course will face objective difficulties connected to the reconstruction of the true goals of the subjects of communication.

The teleological “matrix” of the goals of journalism elaborated according to the concept of civil society imposed on the practical journalism in Russia might be a tool that exposes the real hierarchy of objectives of media owners, media managers and other subjects.

In addition, the term “teleological analysis” seems to produce output in interdisciplinary space, in particular, methodical and methodological consultations with psychologists and linguists who are engaged in so-called “intent-analysis” – the direction of the research questions focused on the reconstruction of the speech of a subject and its intentions (intentions, goals, focus, and consciousness of an object). The researcher’s task is to reveal the hidden meaning, implications and true purpose of the speech that are not available

in other forms of analysis. (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Pavlova, 1998).

Teleological analysis in media studies – as intent-analysis in linguistics – seems to be promising from a heuristic perspective, as it could generate interesting results which would help to understand and explain the current situation of journalism in Russia.

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