

THE DIGITAL DEVICES IN JOURNALISTS' PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY IN RUSSIA

ЦИФРОВЫЕ УСТРОЙСТВА В ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ РОССИЙСКИХ ЖУРНАЛИСТОВ

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The article presents the first results of the research “The Digital Devices in Journalists’ Professional Activity in Russia”. The research is set to define which digital means of collecting, processing, creating and storing information are currently used by Russian journalists in newsrooms of the traditional and new media. Special attention is given to the influence of such factors as age groups, gender, and journalistic specialization. The aim of the research is to determine the key factors affecting the growing digital gap between the different generations of journalists and the peculiarities of the digital divide in the Russian context.

Key words: *Russian journalism; journalist’s profession; technological transformations; digital divide.*

Статья представляет результаты первого этапа исследования, определяющего, какое место занимают цифровые устройства в поиске, сборе и подготовке информации в профессиональной деятельности современных российских журналистов. Особое внимание уделяется таким категориям возраст, пол и специа-

лизация в журналистике. Основной целью исследования стало определение ключевых факторов, влияющих на цифровой разрыв между разными группами журналистов и особенностями цифрового неравенства в российском контексте.

Ключевые слова: *российская журналистика; профессия журналиста; технологические трансформации; цифровое неравенство.*

The rapid development of information and communications technologies has brought about significant changes in all the spheres of today's society. Researchers believe that "the quantitative transformations in the information field have preconditioned the emerging of a fundamentally new social form and namely the information society" (Webster, 2004).

The appearance and development of cable and satellite television, personal computers, the Internet and mobile communications have led to unprecedentedly far-reaching and rapid distribution of the journalist content.

However, above mentioned changes are not limited to the media functioning and distributing information. Since the 1990s, the integration of computers and other digital means into the work of not only the media on the whole, but also separate journalists, has led to major transformations both in the media system and the nature of journalists' and other media employees' jobs. The given period may be regarded as a time of the dramatic technological modernization of journalism. We hear more and more about a universal journalist whose ability to employ information technologies is turning into one of the key skills. In times of the informational revolution new technologies are becoming an integral part of journalism.

Journalists themselves agree that their profession has transformed, its borders expanded as a result of such objective factors as the surge in speed of distributing information, the unprecedented growth in information volumes, the development of new data carriers, the availability of information to the mainstream audience, etc.

To estimate the significance of the above mentioned changes, we can recall the communication tools available to journalists just a couple decades ago: their range was limited to telephone, postal service and fax. Mobile communications first appeared in Russia in the early 1990s, and obtained wide circulation only by the end of the previous century. To get to the information source, a journalist had to use his own feet or company vehicles. Nowadays it is only in the old films that we can see a reporter rushing to the nearest phone trying to outrun his competitors and be the first to break the sensational news. This situation can make today's journalists equipped with mobiles and tablet PCs with access to the Internet laugh.

Surely, one's "feet" can still be viewed as an irreplaceable means of making an exclusive report or an interview, as one still has to rush to the site in many cases. Nevertheless, the current level of information speed makes it impossible for a journalist to get to each and every news peg, besides, there is no necessity therein.

A poll conducted among journalists working for the federal and regional media in Russia was aimed at defining the way in which new technologies enter their job (Kikhtan, 2004). Summing up the poll findings, we can say Russian journalists regard the Internet and other digital means as first and foremost the bridge connecting the post-Soviet space to the international community. A new way of thinking, new structure of the profession and new professional skills, access to the global information resources irrespective of whether the newsroom is based in the capital or a regional centre, new means of communication expanding its borders and other factors were named as the advantages of new technologies.

Not only does the modern journalist act fast, he/she also possesses the complete and detailed information. It is a qualified journalist that looks deeply into each subject. "The fullness of information brings about comprehensive ideas which in their turn provide efficient ways to resolve problems" (Frolova, 2009). Thus, the digital means have not only expanded the range of journalist's tools, they have also provided the funda-

mentally new opportunities for information search and the unlimited variety of information sources; new choices for professional and interactive communication as well as the more efficient means for self-development and self-realization.

It is only recently that the phenomenon of the social distance (or the digital divide) has become the subject of research. Such researchers as Norbert Wiener, Herbert Marshall McLuhan, Wilbur Schramm, Herbert Schiller and others focused on the processes affecting the transformation of the society: the social structure changes, the cultural and industrial dynamics or, on the contrary, the psychological transformations of the personality due to the intensification of information exchange, etc.

According to the concept of an information society, an industrial society passes through the following phases of development: material production (early industrial society), service industry (post-industrial society) and information technologies (information society). What distinguishes an information society is that information technologies take on a determining role in all areas of life. Among theorists who contributed most to understanding of the problems of an information society and information inequality are Ioney Masudu, Elvin Toffler, Manuel Castells, Frank Webster. This phenomenon was subjected to serious analysis by Manuel Castells in the trilogy "The Information Age".

The most important thesis behind the concept of the information society is that not only the volume, but also the nature of information changed the mode of life of the contemporary society, above all because economic growth today is based on theoretical knowledge which relies upon information within the broadest interpretation of the term (Webster, 2004). This is the understanding of information which served as a basis for the concept of an information society.

However, a long while passed before investigators understood that the information society does not only bring new advantages and achievements.

When accessing their foreign counterparts' approach to the above mentioned problems, Russian scientists pointed out at its typical "technocratic" and "psychometric" features (Zemlyanova, 1995). To a great extent, the theorists' efforts were aimed at explaining the information society realia, its general characteristics, at detecting the key factors affecting the human. Besides, the researchers concentrated on the influence of digital technologies on the development of the media as such and their system (Vartanova, Smirnova, 2009; Vartanova, Smirnova, 2010).

As for the effect of the digital technologies on inner transformations of journalism, we believe the researchers have not been paying significant attention to this aspect. For the last decades journalism studies in Russia have focused a lot on creative, deontological, legal, and economic dimensions of the profession. However, recently the nature of journalism as a profession has been substantially influenced by the technological development. That is why special attention should be paid to the impact that ICT and their consequences have made on the professional journalistic culture in Russia.

1990s were crucial for the Russian mass media that have been changed both qualitatively and structurally. The transformations have reshaped the profession dramatically. That is why researchers in the 1990s paid special attention to the new professional standards and values of journalists, and also to the factors defining the development of mass media, changes in patterns of ownership, the legal status, the status of mass media and journalists, their social and professional values, and especially to the problems of their freedom and independence. Consequently, in the 2000s the Russian journalism has attained its current state. This served as the background and the content for the formation of the modern professional identity by the Russian journalist that was seriously affected by the technological transformation in media and profession.

Let us now take a closer look at the first results of the research "The Digital Devices in Journalists' Professional Activity in Russia".

The first stage of the research included polling 86 MSU students. It was aimed at defining how frequently and how intensely they used digital devices depending on the following factors:

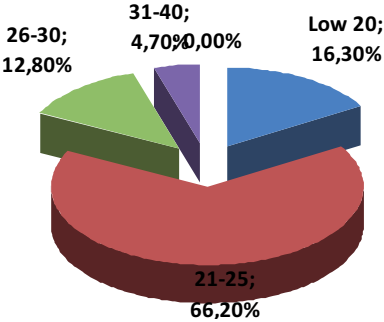
- gender;
- age;
- type of media the respondent is employed with;
- the conditions of working with the media.

The following respondents' characteristics were defined in course of the research:

Age. The polling was voluntary, and therefore various age groups took part in it. The most active participants (accounting for the largest part of the respondents) were aged 21–25 (Figure 1).

Figure 1

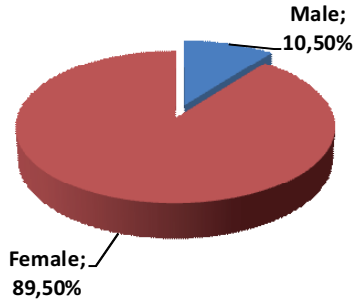
Respondents' Characteristics: Age



Gender content. The diagram shows that female students made up about 90% of the respondents. This fact reflects the general situation at the Faculty of Journalism: through the last 10–15 years the share of male students has been fluctuating between 20 and 10%. Such feminization trends are typical of the modern Russian journalism on the whole (Figure 2).

Figure 2

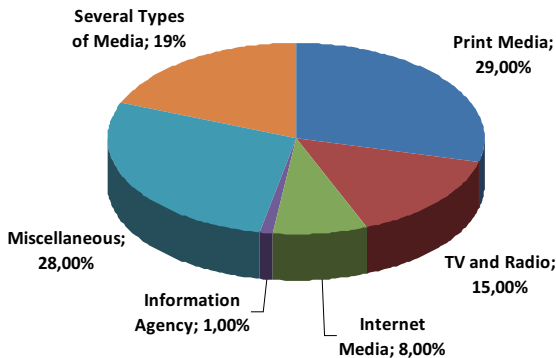
Respondents' Characteristics: Gender



Types of Media the respondents are employed with. A significant part of about 30% work for the print media, about 15% for television and radio, 8% work for the Internet media. A separate group of respondents cooperating with several media was singled out and made up about 20%. Quite a large part of respondents referred to the so-called “miscellaneous” group, including press relation services, advertising agencies, photo agencies, publishing houses, etc. (Figure 3).

Figure 3

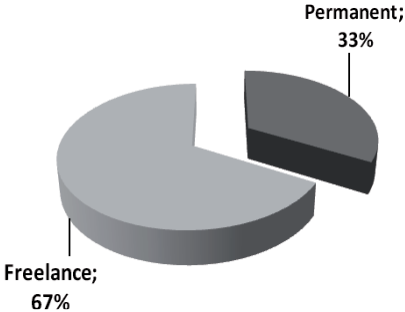
Respondents' Characteristics: Types of media the respondents are employed with



One of the conditions the respondents had to meet to take part in the poll was their permanent or temporary *employment with some kind of media*. It should be mentioned that the students of the Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University, normally combine their studies with a job in the media. The situation is typical for Russia in general. Most of them do freelance, but about 33% of the respondents still have a permanent job in the media (Figure 4).

Figure 4

**Respondents' Characteristics:
permanent or temporary employment with some kind of media**



Further on, let us present some of the research findings. It was highlighted in the poll framework that only the professional and not the personal use of digital devices would be taken into consideration.

Analysis Category “*Employing Technical Means of Communication at Work*”.

94% (that is the vast majority) of the respondents mentioned they used the Internet (including e-mail and other services) for communication.

About 80% said they used mobile services.

Only about half of the respondents claimed they used wire telephones.

It should be mentioned that there was hardly any difference in answers to this question provided by male and female respondents.

As for the “age” sub-category, despite the fact that the age gap was quite narrow, the answers varied greatly: only a small percent of the respondents under 25 said they used wire telephone services.

In the *Types of Media* sub-category, the difference was even more obvious. For example, wire telephone services are used by almost 90% of the respondents employed with the press and only 3% of those working for the Internet media.

The results in the category “*Using Digital Devices at Work*” were as follows:

Mobile services are used by the vast majority of respondents (about 90%), both males and females.

As for the *desktop PC* position, this kind of PC is used by only about a half of all the respondents (about 40% males and 60% females), whereas *portable computers* (including laptops, iPads and so on) are used by more than 80% of the participants, with females being significantly more active users than males (86 and 67% respectively).

Among other digital devices, the most frequently used ones were digital cameras (43% of the respondents, with almost the equal share of males and females), and digital dictaphone recorders (used by slightly more than one third of the respondents, with males being twice as active as females).

Among the least frequently used gadgets named during the poll, one can mention the hidden camera and the e-book device. The use of hidden camera was not commented upon. The poll participants who had mentioned the e-book explained that they viewed it as a very efficient tool in cases when their job involved analyzing great amounts of information and regular addressing to the same sources. The use of e-book allows one to return to the necessary data without addressing the Internet every time.

The results in the sub-category “Age” were not too impressive. However, it was determined, for example, that the oldest age group within the given poll stage (31–40 years old) used desktop PCs and portable PCs with approximately the same intensity.

Another analysis category, “*The Frequency of Using Digital Devices at Work*” revealed the following:

Most of the respondents (more than 70%) constantly used digital devices at work and simply could not do without them; about 16% used them very often. Thus, the vast majority of respondents, about 90%, demonstrated the maximum level of activity in employing digital devices for professional needs. Only about 10% said they used them seldom, an insignificant part of respondents were undecided. The option “never” was not chosen by anyone.

Finally, the last analysis category was “*The Use of Digital Devices at Different Stages of Work*”. The analysis showed that most respondents (77%) use digital means when searching for information. At all the other stages, their use is not as active. For example, only 57% of participants said they employed digital devices when writing/preparing the media materials.

However, in this case, male respondents demonstrated a higher level of activity, with almost 80%. The least active use of digital devices was in the aspect of communication with both information sources and colleagues: slightly above 50%, with almost the same percentage of males and females.

Thus, the key research findings have shown that the Internet remains the most important means of communication for journalists, being used by the vast majority of respondents. Mobile services are used less actively. The wire telephone is obviously losing its ground. The intensity of its use depends on the type of media a journalist is employed with. It fluctuates between 90% and 3% of respondents working for the print and Internet Media correspondingly. Similar trends can be singled out in the use of desktop PCs: not more than a half of respondents use it at work.

The results in general confirmed the fact that wire devices are stepping back under the pressure of mobile ones. The respondents mentioned that popularity of wire telephones and computers is fading out, they are not even installed at some offices or flats. Digital devices provide the background for journalists’ mobility. They allow them to become in-

dependent from a particular workplace and at the same time to create a full-scale workplace and transmit information from wherever they are to wherever they need. Today's journalist has to be available any time, be connected to *Twitter* or *Facebook*.

Digital devices have become a tool journalists employ every day, most of them simply cannot cope without them.

Personal digital devices are the element a journalist cannot do without at any work stage. They allow to conduct constant news monitoring reducing the time limits spent on the information search, collection and processing, to communicate with the editorial office. However, their use is most intense when searching for information. The respondents mentioned that one of the key advantages of the personal digital devices was the opportunity to optimize information processing. Besides, it should be mentioned that the respondents sometimes viewed digital devices as an image attribute of the modern journalist and described them as a tool of success and professional growth.

Male and female journalists employ digital devices equally actively in spite of the types of media, employment conditions and so on.

Therefore, the results confirm the suggestion that young Moscow journalists have become quite advanced in their use of personal digital devices. On the one hand, this increases the efficiency of their working activity. But on the other hand, the signs of the digital addiction of journalists have been demonstrated as well.

They often become totally helpless without their digital tools and lose traditional communication skills. Some of them realize it and even suffer of it. When commenting the use of digital devices, the respondents pointed out at their drawbacks as well. In particular, they mentioned the minuses of such digital addiction:

“A laptop or a mobile got broken, and the newspaper was outrun by the competitors”, “A journalist shouldn't rely solely on technologies as they are not a 100% substitute for the flexible human mind” and so on.

On the whole, the research confirmed that digital devices have become an irreplaceable tool for a journalist. However, too much expo-

sure or addiction to the digital devices can cause great damage to one's professional achievements. In times of the tough competition with civil journalism, with amateur users intensely employing digital tools, only the combination of professional skills and experience of a journalist and their resorting to modern technologies can bring true success and efficient results.

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