

**MULTIMEDIA LONGREAD STORIES  
AS A NEW FORMAT FOR ONLINE JOURNALISM:  
“SNOWFALL” PROJECTS  
AND OTHER EXPERIMENTS WITH CONTENT**

**МУЛЬТИМЕДИЙНЫЙ ЛОНГРИД  
КАК НОВЫЙ ФОРМАТ ИНТЕРНЕТ-  
ЖУРНАЛИСТИКИ: “СНОУФол” ПРОЕКТЫ  
И ДРУГИЕ ЭКСПЕРИМЕНТЫ С КОНТЕНТОМ**

*Diana Yu. Kulchitskaya, PhD, Researcher,  
Chair of New Media and Theory of Communication,  
Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University,  
Moscow, Russia  
Diana\_ku@mail.ru*

*Диана Юрьевна Кульчицкая, кандидат филологических наук,  
научный сотрудник, кафедра новых медиа и теории коммуникации,  
факультет журналистики МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова,  
Москва, Россия  
Diana\_ku@mail.ru*

*Artem A. Galustyan, PhD Student,  
Chair of New Media and Theory of Communication,  
Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University,  
Special Projects Editor at Kommersant.ru,  
Moscow, Russia  
gallustyan@gmail.com*

*Арте́м Арка́дьевич Га́лустян, соискатель,  
кафедра новых медиа и теории коммуникации,  
факультет журналистики МГУ имени М.В. Ломоносова,  
редактор спецпроектов в Kommersant.ru,  
Москва, Россия  
gallustyan@gmail.com*

*The article examines a new format in online journalism, which is taking shape and developing very fast: multimedia long-read stories. Different definitions of this new format are presented. Additionally, the authors try to outline what makes this new phenomenon so popular, and how it differs from other pieces of multimedia content. The second part of the work is devoted to the analysis of Russian multimedia stories, which are inspired by the famous multimedia masterpiece of “The New York Times” – the “Snowfall”.*

**Key words:** *multimedia story; media text; presence effect; parallax; online journalism.*

*В статье рассматривается новый формат онлайн журналистики: так называемый мультимедийный лонгрид, который сейчас приобретает осязаемые черты и развивается очень быстро. В работе приведены различные определения этого нового мультимедийного произведения. Кроме того, авторы пытаются ответить на вопрос о том, почему этот формат приобрел такую популярность и чем он отличается от других мультимедийных произведений. Вторая часть статьи посвящена анализу мультимедийных историй, появившихся в российских СМИ и вдохновленных знаменитым проектом газеты Нью-Йорк Таймс под названием “Сноуфол”.*

**Ключевые слова:** *мультимедийная история; медиатекст; эффект присутствия; параллакс; онлайн-журналистика.*

## **Introduction**

During the last few years, the amount of produced multimedia content in the sphere of journalism is growing rapidly. Both traditional

media in their online versions and exclusively online projects try to experiment with multimedia. The journalism community is now taking multimedia journalism seriously and realizes that it has a great potential, which is needed to find how to use multimedia. One fact proves this statement: the prestigious US Pulitzer Prize changed its entry requirements in 2011 allowing journalists to take part in it not only with print publications, but also with any kind of multimedia materials.

We witness a significant growth not only in the quantity, but also in the quality of multimedia content. The materials become increasingly compelling with a combination of audio, video, text, and graphics. Different experiments along with multimedia content have given rise to new genres and formats. One of them is the multimedia story. This term has come to Russian journalistic theories from the West. We easily noticed that this format is already taking shape, but very often different terms are used to describe it. Among them we find such collocations as multimedia articles, interactive features, web-documentaries, etc. However, we believe the multimedia story is the most appropriate one, as it presents the features of new multimedia texts in the best way. This term is used by researchers from the New Media Research Centre at the University of Berkley, and it has been introduced in the thesaurus of both practitioners and theorists.

The emergence of this new format is an important step in the formation of a new kind of digital storytelling, which is embraced by many news organizations and is said to be the future of journalism. That is why it is especially important to study these pieces of multimedia content as a new type of media text and to define its core characteristics, as well as to realize how different it is from traditional storytelling.

In this paper we focus particularly on a specific type of a multimedia story: the multimedia long-read materials called the “Snowfall” projects. The first news outlet to start producing this kind of multimedia content was the world renowned newspaper, “*The New York Times*”, which published on its website a multimedia story called Snowfall, which combined a long text and a number of multimedia elements (video, audio, animation, infographics, etc). The project became so popular that it produced a wave of similar multimedia stories in the U.S. and abroad. Russian online news outlets followed suit and made a number of “Snowfall” projects.

## **Literature review**

Multimedia journalism is developing rapidly, and news outlets all over the world are increasing the number of multimedia materials in their content, however, there are very few research papers devoted to the analysis of various modern kinds of multimedia formats in online journalism. This lack of literature is partly connected to the fact that the multimedia stories are a new phenomenon, which emerged just a few years ago. One can find a number of journalistic articles in this field, but almost no in-depth research works, analyzing the characteristics of these new types of media texts.

However, there are scholars who started analyzing the Internet content from the beginning. One of them was Mark Deuze from the University of Amsterdam, who was among the few researchers trying to define multimedia journalism and the challenges it poses to traditional storytelling. In one of his works, he argues that multimedia journalism forms a new professional identity of journalists, and it sometimes questions the traditional idea that journalists are the ones who define what the public sees or hears

(Deuze, 2004). He also attempts to differentiate multimedia and online journalism, saying that “digital storytelling using multiple media can be seen as a potential but not a necessary element of added value to an online journalistic presentation” (Deuze, 2004: 140). In another paper, he analyzes news sites and defines three major qualities of online journalism: hypertextuality, interactivity and multimediality (Deuze, 2003).

Recently, more scholars have turned to the analysis of multimedia content. Susan Jacobson, for example, focuses on the multimedia published on “*The New York Times*” site for almost a decade: from 2000 until 2008 (Jacobson, 2010). Her research analyzes a wide range of materials labeled as multimedia in the newspaper’s search engine. She pays special attention to the interactive features, some of which can be regarded as predecessors of the multimedia long-read stories. According to her findings, during the period from 2000 until 2008 the number of multimedia materials on the site, nytimes.com, has increased sevenfold. She also uses the term multimedia story, but she does not give it a distinct definition in her paper.

Russian researchers have also tried to analyze the field of multimedia journalism. In 2010, several scholars from the Faculty of Journalism at Lomonosov Moscow State University published a book based on their research of multimedia formats. One of the definitions, which may be found in the course book “Internet medial: theory and practice”, is as follows: “Multimedia story – a journalistic material, where the topic is presented using different platforms: text, audio-visual means, the unity of which creates a multidimensional picture of an event” (Lukina, Loseva, 2011: 343).

Another definition may be found on the site of the Knight Foundation for Digital Journalism (University of Berkley)<sup>1</sup>. These

---

<sup>1</sup> URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek>

researchers believe that a multimedia story is a combination of text, photos, videos, audio, graphics, and interactive elements, which are presented on the website in a non-linear form where various elements of the story are complimentary and not redundant (Stevens, 2013).

More or less the same thought is expressed by the authors of the textbook, “Internet media” (Lukina, Loseva, 2010). They note that the inability to get access some of the elements of the story should not distort the general message of the story and prevent the user from understanding the material.

Many researchers note that multimedia stories are the height of creative endeavors in many convergent newsrooms. All multimedia elements should be combined with such kind of content, balanced perfectly, and we should take advantage of the strong points of each mechanism. Thus, we can say that such materials express the fundamental goal of multimedia, which is to have an over-all impact on the audience through the use of a whole set of tools (audio, video, graphics, text, animation, etc.). The way multimedia is regarded by many scholars, who define it as a metamedium, is something “that would appeal to all the senses simultaneously – a medium that would mimic and enhance the creative capacities of human mind” (Multimedia: from Wagner to Virtual Reality, 2002: xvi).

We should acknowledge that not all events can be presented in the format of a multimedia story because of its special orientation towards visualization of information. As Maria Lukina and Natalia Loseva note, an event should meet certain criteria to be transformed into a multimedia story. Here are some of them:

- the news story should evolve in time;
- the news story should include episodes, which can be described with the epithet “the most”;
- the news story should contain details, which can be easily presented; graphically, rather than described with words;

- it should have many opportunities for shooting videos;
- the story should contain a lot of background information;
- the news story potentially may be developed with the usage of user generated content (UGC) (Lukina, Loseva, 2011).

As we can see, there are many events and news stories, which can be used as the basis for a multimedia story. That is why it is especially important to note that this is not a genre, but a format, presented in various genres: multimedia reportage, feature, interview, etc.

Multimedia stories are usually based on certain topics. For example, the life and death of a famous hockey player, the story of a group of tourists who are climbing a dangerous peak, etc. To be able to present a theme, the journalist must use different elements – slideshow, audio-podcasts, video, separate photos, texts, etc. As a result, we produce a very compelling and vital story. Because of the whole set of expressive means and the special orientation towards visualization, the audience gets great emotional reactions. The effect of presence and empathy contribute very much to the popularity of this format among users. Additionally, the work on multimedia stories requires on-the-spot reporting and recording information directly from the scene where the event is unfolding. Thus, the format is oriented toward great actuality and exclusivity of the content.

As some theorists argue, multimedia stories can be presented not only in various genres, but also in different formats depending on the structure of the material. Researchers from the media centre at the University of Berkley tried to classify different types of this media text. They distinguished 17 different formats (Grabowicz, Hernandez, Rue, 2010). Two special types have become very popular now: immersive multimedia and timelines. These two terms have

already been introduced into the lexicon of Russian journalists and theorists.

The most recent work devoted to the “Snowfall” projects belongs to the researchers David Dowling and Travis Vogan from the University of Iowa. In their article they analyze three pieces of multimedia content, including the “Snowfall” project itself and the trend present in contemporary multimedia journalism: the growing number of projects similar to Snowfall. They also address that “digital long-form... represents a major shift away from brief breaking news toward a business model built on a carefully crafted multimedia product sensitive to users’ appreciation of multimedia narrative aesthetics” (Dowling, Vogan, 2014: 12).

## **Methodology and hypothesis**

The empirical base of this study comprises of 5 multimedia stories, which were published on the websites of various media outlets from 2012 until 2014. The sample includes the original “Snowfall” piece and another similar story, which was produced by “*The New York Times*” a year after that – “The Game of Shark and Minnow”<sup>2</sup>. The other 3 stories were made by Russian media outlets: *Lenta.ru* (“The end of the Soviets”)<sup>3</sup>, the wire news agency *ITAR-TASS* (“900 days of life”)<sup>4</sup>, and the newspaper “*Kommersant*” (“Alienation land”)<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> URL: <http://age.lenta.ru/1993>

<sup>3</sup> URL: <http://itar-tass.com/tsp/900days>

<sup>4</sup> URL: <http://kommersant.ru/projects/chernobyl>

<sup>5</sup> URL: <https://source.opennews.org/en-US/articles/how-we-made-snow-fall/>

All the stories fall under the definition of a multimedia long-read piece: they are based on a long text, which lies in the center of the story; they comprise various multimedia elements (video, audio, animation, infographics, etc.); they are published on a separate webpage and form a unique multimedia canvas; and they are read in a linear form which can be moved further by scrolling down.

Since we wanted to do an in-depth analysis of each media text and find certain regularities in their creation, the number of stories is connected with the goals of our research. The chosen time slot enables us to analyze the way multimedia long-read pieces evolved over time.

The two main methods chosen for the research were a) a complex analysis of the multimedia stories and b) in-depth interviews with the creators of the long-reads. The complex analysis included thorough analyses of the materials, their genre, their composition and structure, the design particularities of different elements of the story on the webpage, and the meaning of each part of the story. The in-depth interviews were supposed to shed light on the working process of the journalists. Additionally, during the interviews we managed to collect information about the feedback the media outlets received from their audience after the publication of these stories. In the case of “*The New York Times*”, we used interviews available online, which explain the creation process of the two long-read stories analyzed in this paper (“How we Made “Snowfall”, interview on the website).

The main hypothesis of the research was: multimedia long-read stories represent a new type of media text and vividly illustrate the new, specific features of multimedia storytelling. They change the way journalists work on their stories, but, at the same time, they still need to rely on basic journalism principles, such as information balance, double-checking, and impartiality.

Our research was aimed to answer the following research questions:

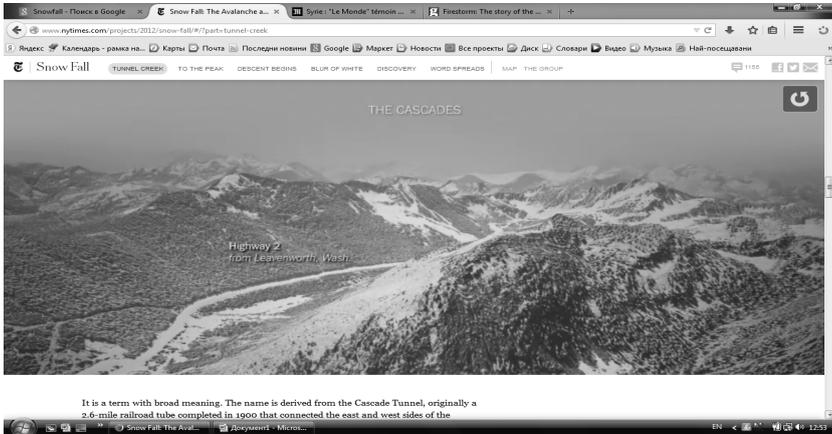
- What are the core characteristics of a multimedia long-read story?
- How it is different from other multimedia formats?
- What are the specific features of the working process, when creating a multimedia long read? How different are they in comparison to the work in traditional journalism (especially in print)?
- What feedback do journalists get when creating such stories?

## **Results**

The original “Snowfall” project was published on the website of “*The New York Times*” in 2012 and described a journey of a group of US skiers who went to the Cascade Mountains and witnessed an avalanche. Several people were killed by the thick layers of snow. If we try to define the genre of this story, we would definitely lean towards the genre of a feature story. From a reader’s point of view, this story provokes genuine human interest, as it deals with life and death in extreme conditions. All the elements are designed in such a way that the material creates great effect of presence and empathy. On the screen the users can see smoky snow and hear wind howling, and the audience is almost transferred to the scene when seeing a 3-d model of the mountains.

Figure 1

## “Snowfall” project done by “The New York Times”



However, the structure of the material is the factor that really matters. First of all, the story is situated on a separate webpage with special design. The multimedia elements are not put to the side, but appear smoothly in the long text, which is the logical core of the story. Scrolling down we automatically open different multimedia materials (audio, video, graphics), which appear on the screen progressively. Here we can see for the first time the parallax effect, which creates an illusion of a three-dimensional space. Parallax (from the Greek “change”, “alternation”) is a special technique in web-design, which is based on the change of the apparent position of an object against a remote background when viewed from a different angle. It has been used in online games; however, “The New York Times” was the first media outlet to use it in a journalistic project.

It is quite interesting that “Snowfall” first emerged as a traditional story for print. In February 2012, the newspaper published a piece about an avalanche on its front page. However, the multimedia editor

realized the story had a big multimedia potential. It was then that the idea to make an in-depth multimedia project emerged. Nine months passed from the first sketches to the actual publication of the project online. However, the work on the multimedia story was interrupted from time to time due to other projects.

The first person, whom the editors turned to, was the reporter John Brunch, who was actually the journalist who prepared the initial story about the snowfall for the print edition. Photographers and video-journalists worked with him extensively. According to the creators of the project, at first they all shared their ideas and produced patchwork, and in the beginning they didn't have a vivid understanding how the story would look on the webpage. However, journalists and editors realized that they would like to produce a unified multimedia canvas, where all the multimedia elements would be complimentary to the text and would be inserted in the right place to create the effect of additional reading with video clips and photo illustrations.

One of the main challenges the crew faced during production was connected to the need to select the right materials from huge volumes of photos and video footage. Often they had to combine the text and the visuals in different ways, dismissing the video clips and photos that were repeated the text. Usually the visual part was inserted when it was easier to use a visual elements (still or moving), rather than describe something in words.

Another problem, which the creators had to face, was linked to the adaptation of the project to different platforms (tablets, mobile phones, netbooks, etc). Journalists and editors in "*The New York Times*" wanted the readers to be able to feel the visual potential, which was based on the story, regardless of the platform they use. At the same time it was crucial to avoid the users getting tired of a heavy load of information.

In the table below we presented an overview of the analysis of the long read story.

Table 1

## Analysis of the “Snowfall” multimedia story

| Facts and figures                     |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| URL                                   | <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek">http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek</a> |
| Genre                                 | Feature   |
| Number of parts (chapters)            | 6   |
| Text length                           | 16, 635 words   |
| Overall number of multimedia elements | 53  |
| Usage of parallax effect              | Yes   |
| Number of people involved in creation | 17  |
| Duration of work                      | 9 months  |

As we can see from the data, the work on the multimedia piece involved a large crew and was really time-consuming. According to the creators, they even had to hire a physicist, who would help them create an online animated model of the snowfall.

The project became a hit on the Internet and brought a Pulitzer award to the creators of this multimedia masterpiece. The “Snowfall” was “retweeted” and posted on different social networks, as well as being viewed by more than 3.5 million users. “*The New York Times*” received more than 1000 comments on the project. The site gave the possibility to “retweet” the link, post it on Facebook, or send it as an email. Those three buttons were integrated into the story.

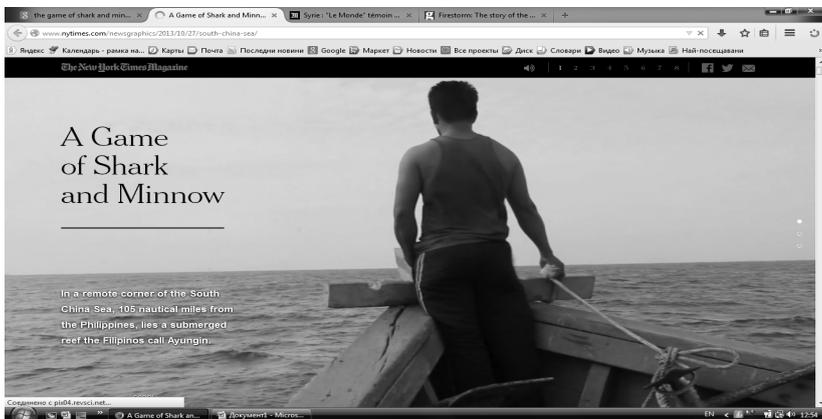
Despite the huge breakthrough in multimedia journalism, the “Snowfall” also received some negative comments from some media theorists and practitioners. The main reproaches were connected with the text-centric model of the project. Some specialists argued

that it was highly unlikely that there were many people, who actually read the whole story from the beginning until the very end. The vast amount of information involved could have scared away some users.

“*The New York Times*” crew realized the drawbacks of their first multimedia long-form piece and soon produced another story, which took into account the reproaches. The new project appeared online in 2013 and was called “A Game of Shark and Minnow.” It described the story of the Spartly Islands, a disputed territory in the South China Sea, where the Philippines, China, Taiwan, and Malaysia have settlements. The reporter of “*The New York Times*” magazine spent some time on an abandoned ship near the islands, and he tells the story of the ordinary people who live there. If we define this story, we can define it as a feature story.

Figure 2

### “A Game of Shark and Minnow” project done by “*The New York Times*”



The story, in many ways, has the same characteristics as the “Snowfall” project. It is based on a separate web-page, integrates different multimedia elements smoothly, uses the parallax effect, and has a long text as a central element. It also is divided into several chapters and uses the presence and empathy effects, which are achieved due to a number of multimedia techniques. The users can hear the sound of the sea waves, and the trembling of the camera in different video clips recreates the feelings of a person experiencing the vessel rocking.

However, there are significant changes in comparison to the “Snowfall” project. “A Game of Shark and Minnow” achieves a better balance between the text and the visuals. There are more video clips and photos, than in the “Snowfall” piece. Also, the text length is different – only 6,712 words compared to the 16,635 in the Snowfall. In addition, the creators managed to solve another problem of minimizing the resources for the work. They had a lot of experience with coding the “Snowfall” project and some aspects managed to fall into templates, which facilitated the work. According to the creators, it took them only a month to put the project together and they had only 10 people involved in its creation. Thus, the creators managed to challenge the myth that Snowfall-style projects are too expensive and difficult to achieve for news organizations with limited resources.

Table 2

**Analysis of the story “A Game of Shark and Minnow”**  
(*NYtimes.com*)

| <b>Facts and figures</b>              |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| URL                                   | <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/10/27/south-china-sea/">http://www.nytimes.com/newsgraphics/2013/10/27/south-china-sea/</a> |
| Genre                                 | Feature   |
| Number of parts (chapters)            | 8   |
| Text Length                           | 6 712 words   |
| Overall number of multimedia elements | 36  |
| Usage of parallax effect              | Yes   |
| Number of people involved in creation | 10  |
| Duration of work                      | 1 month   |

Another change in the user experience was the way different multimedia elements opened. There was no need to click on the “play” button; they automatically turned on by scrolling down. This was a significant difference in comparison to the “Snowfall” project, where the slideshows, audio podcasts, and video clips turned on only by clicking.

“A Game of Shark and Minnow” also received a lot of positive feedback from the readers. The creators of the project did not include a comment bar to the webpage, but left the three options – “retweet”, share on Facebook, or email.

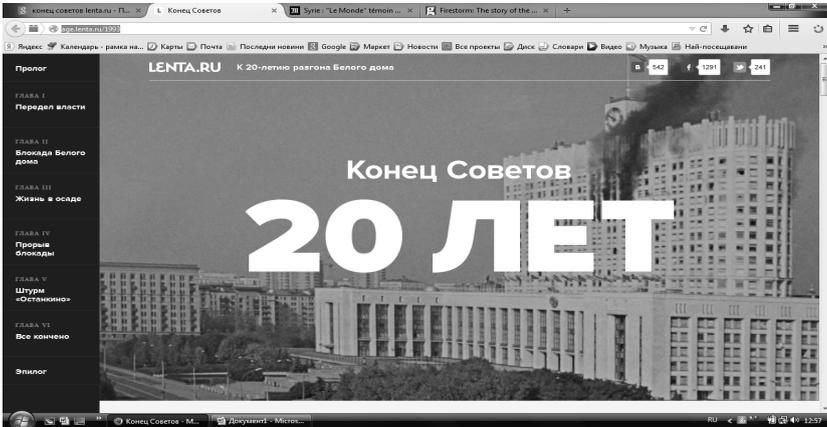
Since the launch of the two projects of “*The New York Times*”, the fashion for “snowfalls” came along to the media sphere, and many online media outlets tried to make something similar. These attempts were made not only in the USA, but also in other countries (stories like Firestorm done by the UK newspaper, The Guardian,

and some attempts done in the field by the French newspaper *Le Monde*). Thus, we can say that the “Snowfall” has become a common noun; many journalists started calling any multimedia project of a similar format, which are designed with the usage of the parallax effect. Additionally, a special verb emerged: “to snowfall,” meaning creating a story using the same technique that was used by the *NYtimes.com*. However, we believe that we should not abandon the term “multimedia story,” as the “Snowfall” project is only a particular case. It is characterized by a number of specific features, which allow us to distinguish it into a separate group called multimedia long-read. First of all, the core element of this story is the text. Secondly, it is perceived as a unique multimedia project, since it is presented on separate webpages, and the multimedia elements are smoothly inserted into the story. Thirdly, we see the parallax effect, and, lastly, the story is perceived in a linear manner.

In Russia the fashion for “Snowfall” projects came a little bit later than in some other countries. The first multimedia stories, which tried to copy the way “*The New York Times*” masterpiece was done, were not so technically impressive and lacked some significant features of the original material. One of the first pieces of multimedia content, inspired by the “Snowfall” project, was the material of *Lenta.ru* information portal called “The end of the Soviets: 20 years.” The story described the events, which took place in Russia in 1993 during the siege of the White House and was published in 2013, marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historical event.

Figure 3

## “The End of the Soviets” project by *Lenta.ru*



At first, the material has some resemblance to the Snowfall, as it is situated on a separate webpage, it is composed of several chapters containing still photos and videos, and the text story is the core element.

However, there were significant differences in comparison with the original “Snowfall” project. First of all, the creators of the story didn’t use the parallax effect. The web-page doesn’t look as sophisticated as “*The New York Times*” masterpiece and the layout is not quite functional. The multimedia long-read uses only three types of content: still photos, videos, and text. There are only a few slideshows and no complex animation clips included. The video shots are embedded from Youtube, so the story resembles a blog with a lot of text material, accompanied by different multimedia elements.

As for the text, it is quite long and fragmented. It is hard to define the genre of this piece, as it consists of quotes belonging to different

participants of the events. The authors quote some paragraphs from newspaper accounts. Thus, they try to achieve an effect of a documentary, in which the story is told in an unbiased and balanced way and all the viewpoints are expressed.

*Table 3*

**Analysis of the story “End of the Soviets: 20 years” (*Lenta.ru*)**

| <b>Facts and figures</b>              |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| URL                                   | <a href="http://age.lenta.ru/1993">http://age.lenta.ru/1993</a> |
| Genre                                 | Fragmented text   |
| Number of parts (chapters)            | 6   |
| Text length                           | 4,936 words   |
| Overall number of multimedia elements | 16  |
| Usage of parallax effect              | No  |
| Number of people involved in creation | 6   |
| Duration of work                      | 1 month   |

As we can see from the results, the newsroom of *Lenta.ru* managed to prove that Snowfall-like projects don’t always need to be very expensive and time-consuming. The programming tools they used were very basic and didn’t require additional coding specialists.

This multimedia project had significant feedback from users, who commented on it and posted the story in the social networks. However, some media theorists and practitioners expressed the thought that too much information was packed into one story, so you could hardly find a reader who read the entire text attentively (the same reproach, which was addressed to the creators of the original “Snowfall” long-read).

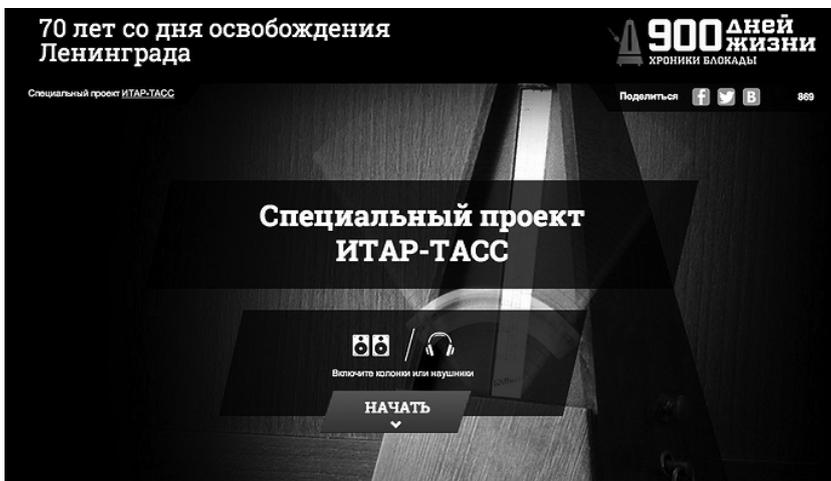
This project could be regarded as one of the first long-read stories in the Russian segment of the Internet. From a journalistic

and historical point of view it is very progressive, since it tries to reconstruct the events of a certain time and gives many valuable archive materials.

Another Russian media project inspired by “Snowfall” is the multimedia story created by the *ITAR-TASS* news agency dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Leningrad after the siege by the Nazi regime during World War II.

*Figure 4*

**“900 days of life” project done by *ITAR-TASS* wire agency**



The city was blockaded for 900 days, which the journalists attempted to document in their multimedia story. We should note that for the news agency this project is the first piece of multimedia content of such a large scale that involved so many interactive elements. “900 days of life” exists on a separate webpage and gives a detailed account of life in the city. The users may click on different

buttons in order to view interactive maps, showing the movements of the Russian and German troops. The project also includes interviews with veterans, who witnessed the siege. The structure of the story is linear and orients all the events that unfolded during the siege in chronological order. Similarly to the “End of the Soviets” story, this one uses a lot of archive photos and videos, allowing the journalists to reconstruct the events. Special attention is paid to the music, which accompanies the historical pictures and maps. However, there are some differences, which make the *ITAR-TASS* project different from the story of *Lenta.ru*. First of all, the structure of the text is even more fragmented and presents short descriptions of different events. Sometimes the texts look like captions to the photos, and the story includes slideshows. There is a navigation bar on the left side of the page, which allows the users to jump from one date to another and skip some descriptions. In general, it is more interactive than the project of *Lenta.ru* and uses more visual information.

*Table 4*

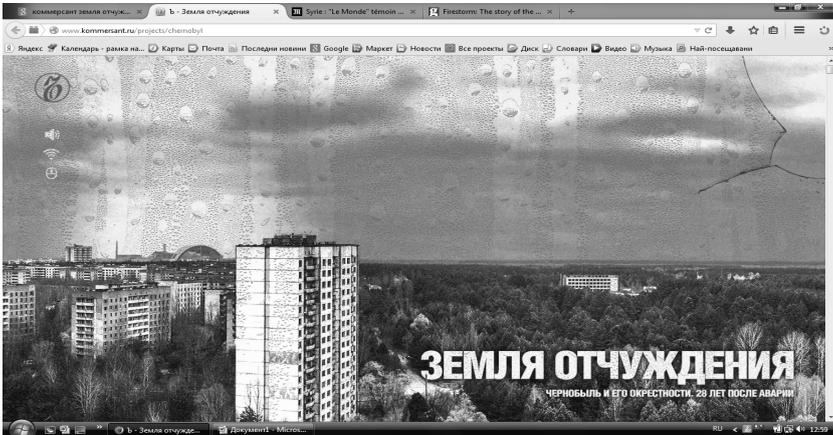
**Analysis of the “900 days of life story” (*ITAR-TASS* news agency)**

| <b>Facts and figures</b>              |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| URL                                   | <a href="http://itar-tass.com/tsp/900days">http://itar-tass.com/tsp/900days</a> |
| Genre                                 | Fragmented text   |
| Number of parts (chapters)            | 4   |
| Text length                           | n/a   |
| Overall number of multimedia elements | 53  |
| Usage of parallax effect              | No  |
| Number of people involved in creation | Nearly 20   |
| Duration of work                      | 1 month   |

Although there are various Russian projects copying the “Snowfall” story, there is one which actually is the closest analogue of the US multimedia masterpiece, and, for that reason, it deserves special attention. It was published on one of the biggest Russian business newspaper sites, *Kommersant.ru*, in 2014 and marked the anniversary of the tragedy of the Chernobyl nuclear station. The creators of this multimedia piece had to face a serious challenge because there are so many stories written and published about this event. It was really hard to surprise the audience and make something genuinely new. However, they managed to be successful in their endeavors. The story called “Alienation land” revealed what is happening now on the territory having been infected by the nuclear leakage.

*Figure 5*

**“Alienation land” done by *Kommersant.ru***



“*Kommersant’s*” journalists tried to show an undistorted image of the life in the alienation zone and challenge the myth that

Chernobyl is a haunted and abandoned place. Since the newspaper is also famous for the coverage of business affairs, it also touches upon another angle – the shady deals with the construction of the new dome, which is supposed to protect the nearest territories from the nuclear radiation.

The creators of the story confess that their work was inspired not only by the Snowfall, but also by other projects, including the Firestorm<sup>6</sup> created by the Guardian and “*The New York Times*” “A game of shark and minnow.” According to them, their main goal was to show the users a place where the audience would hardly go and to make the story immersive and compelling.

They managed to meet their goals and create a very impressive and capturing story. They used the parallax effect for the first time in the Russian media. The immersive potential of the project was very strong thanks to the wise usage of different types of mediums.

“Alienation zone” is a chronological story of the trip to the Chernobyl station, and it documents the atmosphere in different places near the nuclear plant. “*Kommersant’s*” journalists especially emphasized the photo galleries, since this news outlet is famous for its talented photo correspondents. However, video is also used widely. As in the “Snowfall” project, multimedia elements open automatically by scrolling down. The presence effect also relies on different sounds from the scene. For example, the cover photo of the project is accompanied by the sound of a squeaking radiation detection device.

The crew of the *Kommersant.ru* tried to put an emphasis on the exclusiveness of the content. They recorded special interviews with the locals, liquidators, and officials. The journalists managed to generate a special algorithm for how to produce a multimedia

---

<sup>6</sup> URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/may/26/firestorm-bushfire-dunalley-holmes-family>

story. They came to the conclusion that it is important to outline a detailed plan of the future story, including drawn plans with marks showing where to put a photo or a video. Thus, the work in the field becomes easier and you may economize valuable time.

Surely, there were a lot of challenges and problems accompanying the project. First of all, they were presented with a massive load of information, which is a problem for different browsers. The computer specialists managed to solve this issue by making the webpage download gradually. Another challenge was the adaptation of the format for various devices: tablets, mobile phones, etc.

*Table 5*

**Analysis of the story “Alienation land” (*Kommersant.ru*)**

| <b>Facts and figures</b>              |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| URL                                   | <a href="http://kommersant.ru/projects/chernobyl">http://kommersant.ru/projects/chernobyl</a> |
| Genre                                 | Feature   |
| Number of parts (chapters)            | 4   |
| Text Length                           | 4,559 words   |
| Overall number of multimedia elements | 33  |
| Usage of parallax effect              | Yes   |
| Number of people involved in creation | 13  |
| Duration of work                      | 1 month   |

However, despite the obstacles, the story was a success, which the figures prove. Within the first week the project received more than 200,000 visitors. More than 70% of the visitors viewed all the slideshow photos. About 90% of the audience didn’t include loyal “*Kommersant*” users, but it included new people, who usually don’t visit the site on a daily basis.

Later “*Kommersant*” used the valuable experience of their first project to create other multimedia long-read stories, which also were welcomed by the audience. While working on their “Snowfall” they managed to master other smaller multimedia formats such as photogalleries, video podcasts, etc.

## **Discussion**

The conducted analysis of multimedia stories allows us to point out that a multimedia long-read project is a special piece of content with some specific features. It is a text-centric, linear material, which is devoted to a certain topic and includes multimedia elements that are embedded smoothly into the text. This kind of multimedia content has a strong immersive potential and gives the reader a very genuine reading experience due to different design techniques (parallax effect, scrolling down). As we can see, most of the stories represent feature materials, which are connected to the nature of such media texts. Feature stories usually don’t have a strict deadline and require more time and effort during production. That is why features are rather popular as a genre for multimedia stories.

We should also point out that a digital long-form piece, as the analysis shows, requires an in-depth analysis of the subject. Very often journalists have to spend at least a month or two in order to collect the needed information. They use various types of sources and very often turn to journalistic observations as a leading method. It should also be noted that multimedia long-reads rely heavily on basic reporting principles, which are common for printed journalism. However, the story should also have strong visual potential to be transformed into a long-form piece.

Although at first Snowfall-like projects were regarded as bizarre and too complex to be implemented by a regular newsroom with limited resources, practice shows us that this type of content can be created rather easy, if the journalists manage to realize the basic production principles. Now there are many template widgets, which facilitate the creation of “Snowfalls” and make this format more accessible to various news outlets.

## **Conclusion**

The “Snowfall” project created a whole trend in multimedia journalism, reviving the long-read pieces and allowing newspapers combine visuals with profoundly interesting texts. Some analysts say this contradicts with the general fragmentation and miniaturization of texts and messages. However, the revival of long formats is a positive outcome for journalism in general, which cannot compete with news sites and bloggers in speed of production, but can in in-depth reporting. At the same time, a multimedia story is still a developing format, which may not be based on long-read materials. Multimedia journalists still have a lot of room for experiments and may further explore the endless potential of multimedia content.

## **References**

Deuze, M. (2003). The Web and Its Journalisms: Considering the Consequences of Different Types of News Media Online. *New Media and Society*, 5 (2).

Deuze, M. (2004). What is Multimedia Journalism? *Journalism Studies*, 5 (2).

Dowling, D., Vogan, T. (2014). Can We “Snowfall” This? Digital Longform and the Race for the Tablet Market. *Digital Journalism*, 3 (2).

Grabowicz, P., Hernandez, R., Rue, J. (2014). *Taxonomy of Digital Story Packages*. URL: <http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/taxonomy-digital-story-packages/>

Jacobson, S. (2010). Emerging Models of Multimedia Journalism: a Content Analysis of Multimedia Packages Published on nytimes.com. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 18 (2).

Loseva, N. (2010). *Kontent Internet-SMI. Internet-SMI: teoriya i praktika. Uchebnoe posobie* [Content of Online Media. Online Media: Theory and Practice. Course Book]. Moscow: Aspekt Press.

Loseva, N., Lukina M. (2011). *Kontent Internet-SMI. Mediakonvergenstsiya i multimediiinaya journalistika. Materialy k obuchauschim seminaram* [Content of Online Media. Mediaconvergence and Multimedia journalism. Materials for educative seminars]. Ekaterinburg: Kabinetnuy uchionuy.

*Multimedia: from Wagner to Virtual Reality*. (2002). / Eds. R. Packer, K. Jordan. N.Y.: Norton & Company.

Stevens, J. (2013). *What Is a Multimedia Story?* URL: <http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/starttofinish/multimedia/>