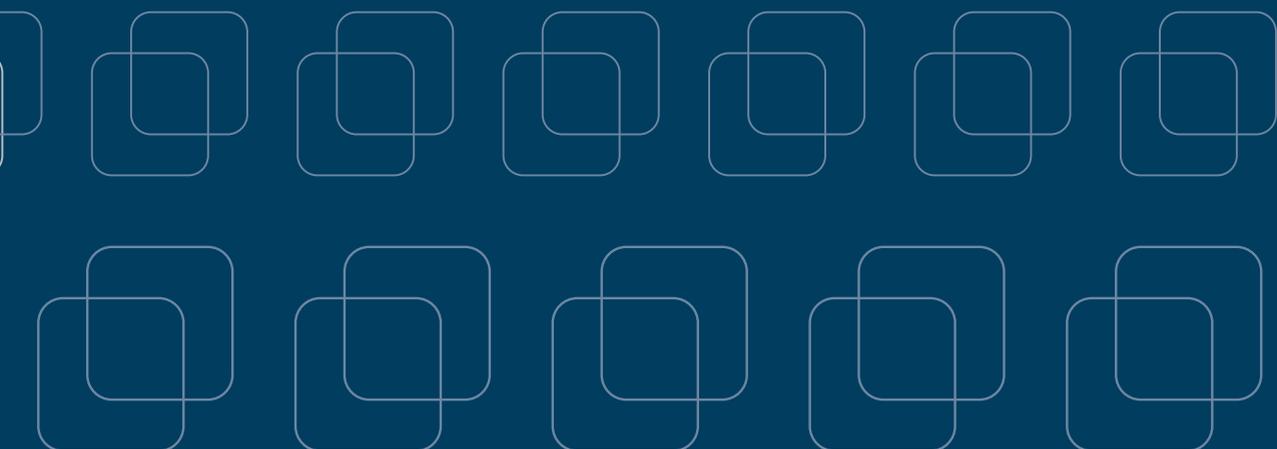


Faculty of Journalism  
Lomonosov Moscow State University

# World of Media

Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies

**Issue 1, 2022**



# World of Media

## Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies

### Issue 1, 2022

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# **LEAD ARTICLE**

# A cultural discourse studies approach to communication

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## Abstract

Just as the old problems of the world, such as poverty, climate change and nuclear weapon rivalry, are being exacerbated by the new virus of COVID-19, humanity has not chosen solidarity and cooperation. The human science of Communication Studies does not seem to be concerned, or equipped, to help with the existential crises, either. In this article I introduce as alternative Cultural Discourse Studies (CDS), an emerging culturalist paradigm of communication research, in terms of its conception, direction, operation as well as production. It is characterized by engagement with culturally diversified and competing discourses with a view to combating cultural hegemony on the one hand and enhancing cultural harmony on the other. To illustrate this culturally conscious and critical programme, a case study of Chinese defense policy discourse is presented.

## Keywords

Culture, diversity, power, discourse system.

## Introduction

The global village has never been so chaotic as today since the end of the Cold War. A few figures speak volumes. The 2018 World Bank report says that ‘almost half the world’s population – 3.4 billion people – still struggles to meet basic needs,’<sup>2</sup> while, according to Global Wealth Report 2021<sup>3</sup>, the top percentile

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<sup>2</sup> Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/17/nearly-half-the-world-lives-on-less-than-550-a-day>

<sup>3</sup> Credit Suisse Research Institute, [research.institute@credit-suisse.com](mailto:research.institute@credit-suisse.com); [credit-suisse.com/researchinstitute](http://credit-suisse.com/researchinstitute).

possesses half household assets of the world and nearly 2/3 of the household wealth are found in North America and Europe which account for 17% of the world's adult population. According to the World Health Organization, about 7 million people die of air pollution.<sup>4</sup> The Swedish Thinktank reports that as of the start of 2021 there stored on the earth are 13,080 nuclear warheads and the US and Russia account for over 90% of them.<sup>5</sup> As the old crises of poverty, climate change and nuclear weapon rivalry are being exacerbated by the new virus of COVID-19, the world has chosen anything but solidarity and cooperation. At the recent 76th UN meeting, the Secretary General Guterres summarized it well, 'Our world has never been more threatened. Or more divided. We face the greatest cascade of crises in our lifetimes. The COVID-19 pandemic has supersized glaring inequalities. The climate crisis is pummeling the planet. Upheaval from Afghanistan to Ethiopia to Yemen and beyond has thwarted peace. A surge of mistrust and misinformation is polarizing people and paralyzing societies. Human rights are under fire. Science is under assault. And economic lifelines for the most vulnerable are coming too little and too late – if they come at all. Solidarity is missing in action – just when we need it most.' But it may be reflected: Which of these contradictions does not have to do with culture deep down?

The mainstream scholarship of communication has not however seemed to be concerned, or equipped, to help with the existential perplexities. For example, a total of 1817 articles published between 2018 and 2020 in fourteen SSCI indexed international journals on communication were examined in terms of key words of poverty, climate/environment and nuclear (weapons), respectively.<sup>6</sup> Only 5 articles involve poverty, 106 climate/environment, and 0 nuclear weapons. More broadly, as may be observed, mainstream communication research, when considered as a cultural discourse, universalizes Western bias and dominates the field and consequently the non-western world is stereotyped, devalued, marginalized or simply excluded (Asante, 2006; Gordeon, 2007; Ishii, 2004; McQuail, 2005; Miike, 2006; Shi-xu, 2009).

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<sup>4</sup> Available from: [https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/air-pollution#tab=tab_1)

<sup>5</sup> Available from: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/china-india-pakistan-expanding-nuclear-arsenal-says-swedish-think-tank/article34814508.ece>

<sup>6</sup> They are: *Communication Theory*; *Discourse & Society*; *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*; *Journal of Intercultural Communication*; *International Journal of Communication*; *Media Culture & Society*; *Western Journal of Communication*; *Human Communication Research*; *European Journal of Communication*; *Asian Journal of Communication*; *Communication Monographs*; *Critical Studies in Media Communication*; *Political Communication*.

The present article is concerned, then, to delineate an alternative mode of communication research, Cultural Discourse Studies (CDS), in terms of its conception, assumptions and key notions therein, as well as the aims, tasks and norms for doing CDS. A distinguishing feature of this line of work is that it is culturally conscious and critical in that it takes seriously the cultural diversity and division of communication by combating cultural hegemony on the one hand and enhancing cultural harmony on the other. As part of this explication, a set of academic platforms will be shown as well that foster and facilitate its growth. Since CDS is an emerging paradigm, relatively young and evolving, an illustration of its use will be offered through an empirical case study of the Chinese national military strategy discourse.

### **Aculturalism in communication studies: An example**

Above I alluded to the inadequacy and counter-productiveness of mainstream communication scholarship. Now let us examine in some detail an exemplar thereof before expounding CDS. A typical strand in the field, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), has excelled with its functional and ideological analysis of socio-political texts; it has demonstrated its ability and efficacy in making transparent indirect and hidden forms of repressive or prejudicial language (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2001a; Wodak, 2001). Its capacities and achievements notwithstanding, however, this lineage is constituted out of Western concepts, values, ways of thinking, analytic tools and topics of interest, as any cultural comparative perspective would reveal; by smoothing over its cultural idiosyncrasies, inadvertently or consciously, and by presenting human discourses as if they were universally organised, and, aided by corporate publishing and international marketing, it has become itself a global dominant ideological discourse itself. Consequently, the actual cultural diversity and divisiveness of human discourses are obscured, possible intercultural-intellectual dialogue and debate repressed, and scholarly heritages of the developing world left in decay (Alatas, 2006; Scheurich, 1993; Shi-xu, 2009).

It is true that CDA is internally varied to some extent in its conceptual and analytic tools and research objectives; Van Dijk (2001b) has called for disciplinary diversity; Wodak (2001: 2) suggests that CDA should be considered as but a 'shared perspective' on discourse analysis. But all variants, like much of mainstream discourse analysis (see Van Dijk 1997), share two interrelated and defining features, seen but often unnoticed, namely, (a) imbuing its system of research with Western way of thinking, concepts, values, interests, on the one side but on the other hand (b) universalising and globalizing its discourse,

through ignoring non-Western research and practice while marketing its own academic production across the world, despite its purported commitment to combating domination, prejudice and exclusion. Ultimately, it becomes a Westcentric discourse, over the Rest.

The concepts, theory, methods, research topics and questions that CDA (not only the master texts but also applications under its banner) presents and practices are Western by origin, tradition and perspectives. It may be called that here the text (whether written or spoken), i.e. the linguistic form, is the focus and end goal of analysis; context is used as given, a mere tool or clue for interpreting the former; the speaker's purpose, or textual function, is regarded as sole organizing principle for communication, regardless the reader/hearer('s response); observable data is the only valid form of evidence; linguistic features are defined or adjudicated often without taking into account broader context involved. Needless to say, if and when compared with other cultural styles of research tradition, it may become clear that such an approach may at best be partial, even misleading or irrelevant; from a Chinese perspective, for instance, which is profoundly wary of words and exhorts attention to deeds, text analysis is simply misplaced.

On the other hand, CDA routinely portrays itself as if it were culturally neutral, universal and standard, nevertheless, implicitly or explicitly. It presents concepts, theory, methods, topics, criteria, as a matter-of-course, regardless cultural differences and alternatives, real or potential, and apply them irrespective of local circumstances and concerns. In addition, the social and cultural background of the researcher is also removed from the picture. This is not just the case with master texts, but it is also emulated in their applications the world over. In fact, the cultural commandments, values and principles of the CDA are imposed on other cultural and diverse discourses, while at the same time marginalizing domestic science. One should realize that, aided by economic advantages, this academic discourse is reproduced and amplified through international teaching, meeting and of course multinational corporate publishing, marketing and distribution across the globe. In this way CDA becomes a monologic, exclusionary and hegemonic discourse, flowing uni-directionally from the Euro-American metropolitan centres to the rest of the world. Consequently, stereotypic knowledge and colonial power relations, especially over non-western Others, are consolidated (Said, 1978; 1993), possibilities of research innovation through intercultural dialogue and debate are repressed, and scholarly heritages of the non-western communities eroded (Shi-xu, 2005; 2009; 2012). Many a critic (e.g. Jones, 2007; Tyrwhitt-Drake,

1999; Widdowson, 1995) has raised similar issues: they have questioned the CDA's basis of its self-appointed ethical authority and intellectual certainty and drawn attention to such diverse aspects of the research process as the bias of the researcher, the complex and dynamic nature of the world's affairs, the inalienable interconnections of texts with the political, economic, historical, and cultural as well as a host of other contextual facets of the discourse under study.

Below I shall turn to present a culturalist approach to communication studies, Cultural Discourse Studies, that purports to intervene in the field and more widely to confront global plights by exercising a culturally conscious and critical way of understanding and resolving local and global issues emanating from cultural forms of communication.

### **A cultural turn**

Alongside of and owing to the cultural blindness and Westcentrism of the mainstream tradition of Communication Studies (CS), there has been a cultural turn – developments of various cultural approaches (Collier, 2000; Gavriely-Nuri, 2012; Gordon, 2007; Ishii, 2004; McQuail, 2005; Miike, 2006; 2009; Pardo, 2010; Prah, 2010; Shi-xu, 2005; 2009). They form part of the background for CDS as they provide inspirations and frames of reference. It seems that these approaches can be best characterized as 'communication as culture-general,' represented by ethnography of communication and cultural discourse analysis, 'communication as culture-particular,' represented by Asiatic & Afrocentric theories, 'communication as culture-incident,' represented by intercultural communication theory.

The first, culture-general approach assumes that culture exists across human communication such that it is possible to use a general method to discover the system of cultural symbols, or the cultural pattern, that organizes a community's communicative practice (Carbaugh, 2005; 2007; 2017; Carey, 2008; Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; Saville-Troike, 2003; Scollo, 2011). Ethnography of communication (Bauman & Sherzer, 1974; Gumperz & Hymes, 1986; Hymes, 1962), for example, argues that to be a competent speaker requires knowing how to speak in culturally appropriate ways – 'communicative competence' as it is called. Communication research should then focus on the speech events of different communities, for which a general, multi-faceted, analytic framework, under the acronym of 'SPEAKING', is proposed. This culture-general approach emphasizes cross-cultural comparison in order to understand the diversity of communicative systems and practices. Although it recognizes cultural variability of human communication, the culture-general approach fails nonetheless to take

account of the interaction between different cultural systems of communication and consequently possible unequal power relations involved therein.

The second, culture-particular approach proceeds from the notion that different cultures, in terms of ways of thinking, world views, concepts, values, rules, etc., organize and so characterize different communities' communication, hence the need for formulating, for example, Afrocentric and Asiatic meta-theories and theories of communication (Asante, 2006; Miike, 2009; Xiao & Chen, 2009). Such a move not only encourages and enables establishment of cultural models of communication, but also effectively reclaims the identity and authenticity of relevant but marginalized scholarly communities, undermining the presumed universality and superiority of Westcentric theory thereby. However, similar to the approach delineated above, the ensuing indigenous theories fail to pay attention to the interaction between different cultural systems of communication and so also the power relations therein.

The third, culture-incident approach is predicated on the understanding that the question of culture or cultural background sets in when people from different communities come into contact and communicate with one another. Here communication itself is considered universal and separate from culture whereas different cultures, in terms of native language, knowledge, rules, etc., could become external factors that engender miscommunication (e.g. Spencer-Oatey, Isik-Gler & Stadler, 2012). Thus, the task of intercultural communication studies is to identify cultural factors that cause misunderstandings in communication. A variant of this approach, critical intercultural communication studies, goes one step further in that, besides cultural factors as explanation, it searches for other dimensions as power, history socio-economic relations, institutional/structural forces as well (Holliday, 2011; Nakayama & Halualani, 2011; Neuliep, 2011). All the same, cultures are taken here, not as dialectically embodied in relevant discourses and so as part of analytic focus as is the case with the previous two modes, but as resource for explanation.

Beyond these, it may be noted that tenets over power and prejudice from a diversity of intellectual heritages, movements and currents, such as Chinese and African philosophy (e.g. Tianren Heyi, Umbutu) (Cheng, 1987; Krog, 2008), postmodernism (e.g. social construction of reality, de-centering; Carpentier & Spinoy, 2008), postcolonialism (e.g. resistance to prejudice against and repression of the non-Western world; Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978), antiracism (e.g. fight against white supremacy; Scheurich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997), feminism (e.g. fight against gender inequality; Spender, 1980; Stanley & Wise, 1983), have fertilized CDS, too. But because they are less focused

with communication as envisaged here, I shall discuss no further and turn to a culturally more radical paradigm below.

## **Cultural discourse studies**

It is against the backdrop of the cultural crises, both societal and disciplinary, as well as the promising turn to culture, as delineated above, that Cultural Discourse Studies has emerged since the first decade of the 21st century (see Shi-xu 2005; 2009; 2014; *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* since 2006). As a new paradigm of research, it is manifested in the forms of (a) participants from especially the (under)developing world, (b) heightened cultural consciousness and criticalness in the field, and above all (c) an emerging system providing for and constituted by culturally conscious and critical modes of communication studies, which are committed to combating cultural hegemony on the one hand and enhancing cultural harmony on the other hand (completing the cultural turn in communication studies). Around these features, one may observe an assortment of oeuvres, conferences, publishing platforms, teaching programmes and research frameworks springing up like mushrooms (Shi-xu, 2016).

CDS is predicated on a number of interlinked assumptions. First and foremost, communication is a global system of social interaction in which members use language and other media to achieve purposes in historical and cultural contexts. Secondly, communication is also at the same time a culturally organized system in that it consists in diverse and competing discourses of ethnic communities (hence cultural discourses). This implies that cultural discourses are sites of cultural contention, cooperation and transformation. Thirdly, communication constructs reality, performs action and exercises power, bringing about cultural change thereby. Fourthly, cultural discourses are enabled, guided and shaped by their underlying discourse systems. Finally, the global order of communication in general and of cultural discourses in particular is unbalanced, unfair and unjust but, with the perennial awakening of humanity, is always subject to change towards a higher level of civilization.

Explication of some of the key concepts here is in order. ‘Communication’ refers to total amount of human social interaction composed, heuristically, of six interlocking components: Communicators, Act, Medium, Purpose, History and Culture (CAMPHAC). Specifically, they are:

*Communicators:* Speaking/hearing actors, for studying who is (not) speaking/acting, from what social position, in what capacity, etc.;

*Act:* Verbal as well as non-verbal actions and their constituted social relations, for studying what is (not) said, what is (not) done, how it is said or done, how it is responded to, what kind of social relation evolves, etc.;

*Medium:* Use of communicative mediums (languages, non-verbal symbols, conventional and new media, channels of communication (legal, governmental, etc), time, place, etc.), for studying what communicative means are (not) used, how they are coordinated, etc.;

*Purpose:* The motives, goals, effects, outcomes, for studying the reasons and causes of the interactions under study, their results and consequences, whether communicative or further afield;

*History:* The historical relations involved in all the above, for studying the changes, processes, (dis)similarities of discourses from a temporal point of view;

*Culture:* The ways of thinking and ways of acting by a social community in power relation to other such communities, usually involving ethnicity, language, religion, habits, tradition.

Methodologically, they become analytic categories for describing, analysing, explaining, interpreting, evaluating discursive practice. Here it may be noted that the all-encompassing analytic framework of CDS is different from the classic 5-W questions used in media studies (Lasswell, 1948; McQuail, 2002) in that the latter fails to pay attention to the historical and (inter)cultural dimensions of communication.

‘Discourse’ refers to a form of communication (real or potential) of a community in which members use language and other media (e.g. gesture, art, technology, channels, time, place) to achieve purposes in relation to specific history and cultural contexts (e.g. another group’s form of communication). Culturally shaped, it constructs reality and exercises power.

‘Discourse system’ is considered as the configuration of (a) communicative institutions (groups, organizations, facilities, platforms, media, etc. – ‘communicative hardware’) and (b) communicative know-how (concepts, values, information, principles, tactics, etc. – ‘communicative software’) which enable, organize and sustain a cultural community’s discursive practice and are in power relation with the discourses of other cultural communities; it is their discursive competence and soft power designed to achieve certain goals – parallel to Bourdieu’s habitus and social, symbolic and economic capital. It can have profound impact on the success or failure of communication.

‘Culture’ is used to mean the ways of thinking and ways of acting, including the concepts, values, identities, rules and artefact (spiritual or material) involved, that members of historically evolved ethnic communities (e.g. Chinese/Asian/Developing/Third World, American/Western/Developed World) construct, maintain and use in and through communication in relation to other ethnic communities, usually involving language, ethnicity, religion, habits, history, etc.

In this light, culture is interactive and therefore relational and so also saturated with power. This concept, as well as the East, West, China, Asia, the global South and the like, categorically cannot be understood essentialistically, as if it represented some reified, fixed or homogeneous entity. Moreover, culture is not considered metaphorically along national, gender, generational, professional or organisational lines. Rather, it is conceived of holistically, and so, historically, socially, economically, politically, ethnically, and globally (Roberston, 1992; Tomlinson, 1997), but above all as being embodied in communication, hence cultural discourses. As such, culture is constantly changing and blurred in boundary (Pang, 1993; Shi-xu, 2005). As we believe the power relation and practice, beyond 'differences', of contemporary cultures are central and need urgent attention, the notion of culture is designed also rhetorically to confront cultural hegemony.

Profoundly concerned with the cultural diversity, dynamic and divisiveness of the current human discourses which have hitherto been much been ignored, obscured or explained away in the mainstream, the new paradigm of CDS is designed and dedicated to guiding and practicing culturally conscious and critical modes of CS with a view to fostering cultural innovation and advancement at the level of scholarship and cultural unity, diversity and prosperity at the level of society. 'Culturally conscious' means to be mindful of cultural diversity of communication; 'culturally critical' means to be attentive to power relations in communication. In this sense, CDS is a cultural form of intellectual work and an intellectual form of cultural policy.

To achieve the goals of CDS, practitioners can and should take up a number of interrelated tasks, which may be carried out separately, in tandem, in parallel, or ensemble. These are, to name but a few general ones, (1) to expose and deconstruct ethnocentric discourses of domination, prejudice and exclusion, whether global or local, societal or scholarly; (2) to re-construct locally-grounded and globally-minded frameworks of unfamiliar, mystified or otherwise marginalized cultural discourses; (3) to discover and highlight discourses of cultural cooperation, mutual learning and shared benefit, as well as repressed cultural experiences; (4) to craft action strategies for disadvantaged communities to re-claim cultural identity, authenticity and freedom, and (5) to invent ways for Western and other communities of CS to work together in order to confront the most urgent crises facing humanity. These tasks may be accomplished through researching a large variety of specific questions, such as:

(1) How does the field of CS constitute ethnocentrism (i.e. cultural domination, prejudice and exclusion), e.g. who are the dominant speakers/

gate-keepers and who are excluded? Specifically, whose cultural scholarship (theory, concepts, values, methods, topics, questions, etc.) is being universalized, whose marginalized? What is the current order of information flow like? What does scholarly ethnocentrism imply for academic innovation and societal development? How are we to transform the current unbalanced order of CS discourse in favour of cultural-intellectual diversity and so creativity for CS?

(2) How can we (re)create a culturally conscious and critical framework of cultural discourses, such as the Asian, African, Latin American, or developing world in general, that have so far been insufficiently theorized and studied? What should be the agenda for their scholarship in CS? What are the philosophical, theoretical, methodological and topical assumptions for researching their discourses?

(3) What are the properties, problems and potentials, not just of the culturally dominant discourses, but especially of those that have hitherto been misunderstood, misrepresented, or else silenced? How have the disadvantaged discourses been evolving? How are they related and compared with their historical past? Similarly, how are they related and compared with their cultural others? How are discourses of cultural cooperation, mutual learning and shared benefit constructed?

(4) How can marginalized communities, hence their discourses, be re-invented and empowered, so strategically re-organized, in order to re-claim their identities, re-assert their voices, re-build their images, and so re-gain their positions in the global order of communication?

(5) How can the culturally diverse communities of CS start to engage in egalitarian and sustainable dialogue and debate with a view to enlivening, enriching and enhancing CS? How can we work together to reorient CS toward solutions of the most urgent existential problems facing humanity, say poverty, climate change and nuclear threats?

The research tools in CDS as one can imagine are diversified and dynamic. They are transdisciplinary, multilingual and multicultural; the choice and use of methods are wide-ranging and eclectic, depending on the nature and conditions of the discourses under investigation and the specific research aims.

As part of CDS's methodology, there is a common set of evaluative standards, which are local and global, for researchers to interpret and evaluate cultural discourses. Whilst the global criterion, subject to continuing dialogue across our discipline, is whether and to what extent a discourse is in favour of human cultural flourishing –cultural equality, freedom and prosperity, the local criteria are contingent upon the specific native values and concerns of the relevant cultures, whether or not it has to do with sovereignty, security, or socioeconomic

development. These measures are used to help identify, characterize and adjudicate practices of cultural deprivation, ethnocentrism, imperialism, or otherwise cultural inclusion, cooperation, empowerment.

Furthermore, there are reflexive principles binding the academic actions of the CDS researchers themselves: (a) do not dominate scholarship (e.g. by ignoring cultural diversity, refusing cultural dialogue); (b) do not exercise ethnocentrism (e.g. by universalizing one's own culture); (c) do not forsake one's own culture (e.g. by giving up one's own cultural value and vision); and (d) do not exclude or marginalize cultural-others (e.g. by treating other cultures as deviant).

By now, it may be realized that CDS is both a meta-system, inventing guidelines and tactics for studying cultural discourses, and system-practice, following those guidelines and executing those tactics.

### **Study of Chinese discourse as exemplar of CDS**

Whatever other identities and stance practitioners of CDS may have, they are supposed to proceed from the culturalist stance, as described above, and on that basis, to enrich and enliven CDS, and thereby CS, by drawing upon their own cultural wisdom and values. But it also implies that researchers should 'narrate a "local" story' from a global perspective and 'narrate a "global" story' from a local perspective; when a 'story' is both local and global, as is often the case just as our case below, then the researchers should employ both perspectives, in tandem or parallel. In this light I shall turn to scrutinize the Chinese discourse of defence policy.

It is well-known that Western media as well as academia have been continuously accusing Chinese military of being 'ambitious', 'aggressive', 'opaque,' constituting a Western discourse of what has been termed 'China-threat theory.' My aim then is to study and shed light on the nature and characteristics of China's national military strategy (NMS) discourse as a way of participating in the international debate. It may be noted here that the relation between national military strategy and discourse is dialectic and so discursive: the former must have appropriate organs to formulate and express it through certain mediums to domestic and foreign audiences. The 'Chinese defence discourse' as is studied here has clearly two sides to it: it is local in that it is rooted in Chinese culture and history, but it is global as it has international relevance and audience in view. Given our understanding of the cultural nature of communication, I shall place China's defence discourse in the global interactive context with special reference to the US counterpart.

I have developed a locally-grounded and globally-minded system for studying contemporary Chinese, call it Chinese Discourse Studies, composed of distinctive philosophical, theoretical, methodological and topical frameworks (Shi-xu, 2012; 2014; Shi-xu & Feng-bing, 2013; 施旭, 2010), which may be well suited for the current problem. Thus, philosophically, discourse is taken as unit of diverse elements inter-opposing, interpenetrating, interchanging one another and consequently in constant flux ('holistic ontology'); knowledge of discourse is obtained through dialogue between the researcher and the researched as well as among disciplinary colleagues ('dialectic epistemology'); the moral ethic for discourse research is to help with Chinese society and the humanity as a whole ('use axiology'). Theoretically, where discourse is defined as communicative event in which people interact with one another using language as well as other means in particular historical and intercultural context, the most important norm or principle of contemporary Chinese discourse is 'equilibrium,' i.e. to achieve or maintain harmonious relationship with others through attending to others' interests, incorporating differences, avoiding conflicts, balancing powers, etc.; the rule of communication is making (sense of) meaning beyond language ('harmony-and-supra-language theory'). Methodologically, discourse is studied as a multi-faced and multi-dimensional event where what is (not) said and what is (not) done, for example, are investigated into together ('word-and-deed methodology'). In particular, the development of not only China, but the developing world as a whole, as well as many other related issues and phenomena such as human rights, trade disputes, urban development, security, form the core of the research programme.

To illuminate China's NMS, the white paper entitled China's Military Strategy published by the Information Office of the State Council on June 26, 2015 (examples below are taken from this document unless otherwise indicated, the number following the example indicates the paragraph in which it appears), together with eight white papers since 1998 were collected as core data. To put that in the globally relevant context, America's counterpart, the National Military Strategy of the United States of America, 2015: the United States Military's Contribution to National Security published on July 1, 2015, plus the other five publications since 1992, were used as comparative and relational data as well.

The NMS discourse is analyzed in terms of its key constituent elements: (a) conception, (b) act, and (c) medium. These are examined from historical and cultural dimensions where appropriate. Further, they are evaluated against the criteria of whether they support peace and unity and whether they convey explicit principles of action.

At the level of conception of the NMS discourses, that is, the view of the locus of security, it may be seen that China is inclusive, mutual and cooperative in posture, whereas America is exclusionary, divisive and dominant. Compare: (bracketed numbers below indicate relevant paragraphs):

*China:* China's destiny is vitally interrelated with that of the world as a whole. A prosperous and stable world would provide China with opportunities, while China's peaceful development also offers an opportunity for the entire world (2).

Countries are increasingly bound together in a community of shared destiny (4).

*America:* As detailed in the 2015 National Security Strategy, our enduring national interests are: the security of the United States, its citizens, and U.S. allies and partners; a strong, innovative, and growing U.S. economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity; respect for universal values at home and around the world; and a rules-based international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges (25).

At the level of act of the NMS discourses, that is, what the discourse does (to the international community), it may be seen that China embraces peace and cooperation whereas America mounts pressure and barricade:

*China:* In their endeavor to realize the Chinese Dream of great national rejuvenation, the Chinese people aspire to join hands with the rest of the world to maintain peace, pursue development and share prosperity (1).

*America:* ...we will press forward with the rebalance to the Asia- Pacific region, placing our most advanced capabilities and greater capacity in that vital theater. We will strengthen our alliances with Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. We also will deepen our security relationship with India and build upon our partnerships with New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh (41).

At the level of medium of the NMS discourses, that is, the way media are mobilized, it may be seen that China employs a variety of communication organs, a diversity of media outlets and a range of semiotic means all at the same time to publicize and explicate its NMS – take for example the media screen shots below, whereas the US merely publishes the documents on the internet. Besides, throughout the 10 white papers of its national defence published so far, China has maintained a stable and nearly predictable defence plan: 'defensive national defence policy' ( '防御性国防政策' ) and 'active defensive national military strategy' ( '积极防御的国家军事战略' ), whereas the US continuously evolves its policies and strategies (e.g. 'Defensive national defense strategy/

military strategic guideline of active defense’, ‘A strategy of flexible and selective engagement’, ‘An integrated military strategy’).

### Media screen shots



#### 国防白皮书披露军兵种发展战略 将加快网络空间力量建设

新华社北京5月27日电

26日上午，《中国的军事战略》发布，阐述了新的历史时期我国军事战略方针，介绍中国国防和军队建设取得的新进展新成就，明确军事斗争准备的基本方略和任务。这是中国继1999年发布《中国的国防》白皮书，也是继2002年发布《中国的军事战略》白皮书，继出中国第三份国防白皮书。

The infographic consists of five vertical bars representing different time periods: 2016-2020, 2020-2025, 2025-2030, 2030-2035, and 2035-2040. Each bar has a corresponding icon and text describing the focus for that period, such as '加快网络空间力量建设' (Accelerate construction of network space forces) and '提高战略威慑能力' (Improve strategic deterrence capabilities).

#### 国防白皮书提出海外利益攸关区 维权斗争长期存在

新华社北京5月27日电

军种建设规划“加强海外利益攸关区安全合作，维护海外利益安全。”同时，国防白皮书《中国的军事战略》白皮书上提出，要“加强海外利益攸关区安全合作，维护海外利益安全”的表述，表明中国将把海外利益攸关区安全合作作为重要任务，维护海外利益安全。

This is a screenshot of a news article on the website 'military.people.com.cn'. The main headline is '中国发布《中国的军事战略》白皮书' (China releases 'China's Military Strategy' White Paper). The article includes several sub-headlines and text blocks:
 

- 我军各军种发展战略转变以国家核心安全需求为导向** (The development strategy of each branch of the PLA changes to be guided by the core security needs of the country).
- 专家解读国防白皮书：中国在南海保持了最大克制** (Experts interpret the defense white paper: China has maintained the greatest restraint in the South China Sea).
- 国防白皮书披露军兵种发展战略 将加快网络空间力量建设** (The defense white paper reveals the development strategy of the military branches, accelerating the construction of network space forces).

 The article also features a small image of the white paper and a '全文' (Full Text) link. The website's navigation bar and search function are visible at the top.



[中国政府发表《中国的军事战略》白皮书](#) [图片](#) [新闻](#) [中国政府网](#)



2015年5月26日 - 5月26日,国防部新闻发言人杨宇军在国新办新闻发布会上介绍《中国的军事战略》白皮书。当日,中国政府发表《中国的军事战略》白皮书,强调...

[www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015...](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015...) [V3](#) - [百度快照](#)

Culturally speaking, China's contemporary defence discourse has reflected and carried over the Chinese traditional holistic world view and the balanced-harmony value, which are by the way also consistent with the nation's socialist system. But America, under capitalism where money speaks, must exploit the military to its fullest.

### Conclusion: A disciplinary agenda

For a decade and half or so, CDS has been firming up as a new and alternative paradigm in CS which provides for the construction of cultural frameworks on the one hand and empirical investigation into cultural discourses on the other hand. In the next decade, CDS ought to strive as its goals for the consolidation of the existing global network of CDS whose model of research continues to guide and sustain collaboration and innovation, the expansion of a sizable and influential body of work to change the existing order of CS (by advancement of current projects and creation of new projects on still other cultural discourses the world over and in different socioeconomic domains), and the rejuvenation and elevation of the non-Western community of CDS.

To achieve those goals, culturally conscious and critical scholars across the globe, especially from the non-Western world, must make efforts to

increase international and intercultural communication, mutual learning and collaboration (e.g. between Asian, African, Latin American and any other culturally conscious communities), to explore and develop cultural systems of research by tapping into native realities, experiences and traditions, and to search for ways of empowering discourses of especially marginalized or otherwise disadvantaged communities; and continue to confront and undermine discourses of cultural domination or of any kind threatening human survival.

Fortunately, we now have easy access to the internet and new media, already at our disposal an organization (International Association of Multicultural Discourses), a biannual forum (International Conference on Multicultural Discourses), a periodical (*Journal of Multicultural Discourses*), the book series (*Routledge cultural discourse studies series*), a website (shixu.hznu.edu.cn), as well as a guide (*Handbook of cultural discourse studies*) in the making.

The road is tortuous, but the future is bright.

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# ARTICLES

# Media activity of modern Russian youth in the context of value systems<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The socio-political system of Russian society is currently functioning in relatively stable way, with the normative and informal practices of interaction between political and public institutions and actors being largely established and worked out. The situation in the non-institutional segment of the sociopolitical sphere is somewhat different: social media provide the public with new opportunities to express their perceptions and opinions about sociopolitical events based on the value systems of a specific social group. These contradictions make it important to study and analyze the current system of socio-political values of specific groups in order to understand the specifics of the political consciousness and behavior of different groups in society and to reach a consensus of values that is an important factor in the sustainability of Russian society as a whole. Modern Russian youth is, on the one hand, the most active in terms of media expression of their opinions on all socio-political issues and, on the other hand, the most vulnerable part of Russian society in terms of the level of influence of various external and internal threats. This article describes the first results obtained in the course of the project 'Socio-political values of modern Russian youth in the social media discourse' (project number 21-011-31701).

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## Keywords

Values, youth, media activism, society, state.

## Introduction

Political, economic, spiritual and cultural transformations taking place in our country and the rest of the world have a powerful impact on the development of a young citizen's personality and the formation of their value orientations. Social and political values of youth and society as a whole have been studied by Russian and foreign science for quite a long time from different theoretical and methodological viewpoints, including philosophical, cultural, sociological, politological, and psychological ones (Chuev, 2017; Tsygankov, 2012). However, recent research in political science, psychology, and media communication has revealed that the younger generation is guided by the values of self-expression and self-actualization, mainly using the media communication space rather than the real space of communication (Vartanova & Gladkova, 2020).

As the key platform for political socialization of today's youth, the media have obvious value-generation potential and a significant impact on the forms and tendencies of integrative behavior and the lifestyles of the rising generation. Young people form a life and activity space around themselves based on a sophisticated system of values, taking into account individual preferences, ideals, symbols, and objectives; at the same time, they connect this space to the global sociopolitical field and often localize it in the media communication space, primarily in the space of social media (Gorshkov, Sheregi, 2010; Zubok, Chuprov, 2020; Arif, 2019; Gureeva & Samorodova, 2021; Ugwuoke & Erubami, 2021). The ongoing transformations give us reason to believe that studying socio-political values of Russian youth within the media-centric paradigm is high on the agenda (Vartanova, 2015; Dunas, 2013).

It is important to note that studying social and political values of young adults through the prism of their media communication activity on social media requires a multidisciplinary approach. The sociocultural determinacy in the formation of Russian youth's political values makes it necessary to employ the methodology and conceptual/theoretical foundations of several subject areas of science, such as political science, sociology, psychology, and philology (media research) (Vartanova, 2015; Vartanova, Cherevko, Tolokonnikova & Dunas, 2019; Bodrunova, 2014; Rakityansky, 2008; Rokeach, 1972; Ross, 2018). This article describes the first results obtained in the course of the project "Socio-political values of modern Russian youth in the social media discourse" (project number 21-011-31701). The project includes three areas of research:

conceptual/theoretical area (Gureeva, Anikina, Muronets & Samorodova, 2021; Gureeva, 2021), a series of expert interviews describing youth's value models, and an analysis of young people's media activity in social networking services (quantitative and qualitative aspects).

## Literature review

Studying the system of social and political attitudes is becoming one of the topical tasks of modern academic research (psychology, political science, philosophy, sociology, philology (media research), etc.). The study of the social and political values of society in general and of its individual groups is of burgeoning interest to both foreign (Tomas & Znaniecki, 1918; Allport, Vernon & Lindzey, 1960; Rokeach, 1972; Hofstede, 1984; Hall, 1990; Inglehart, 1997) and Russian (Popov, 2001; Yakunin, 2007; Shestopal, 2011; Stepanishchenko, 2011; Gutorov, 2013; Galkin, 2016; Selezneva, 2019) researchers.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, the topic of values has gradually entered the range of research interests of sociology, political science, and psychology. Later, the study of human values has been predominantly seen in the context of social psychology (Rokeach, 1972; Hofstede, 1984; Schwartz, 2012). Since the second half of the twentieth century, scholars have increasingly begun to address the relationship between the value orientations of the individual and the state in their research. In the context of the concept of political culture, Almond and Verba identified political values as the main component that determines the behavior of actors (Almond & Verba, 1989). Other studies (Durkheim, 1933; Merton, 1938; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Pantich, 1997; Fedotova, 2011; Mikeshina, 2007; Popova, 2002) examine the dynamic aspects of society's system of political values, the directions and forms of value change, and the psychological features of value formation.

Russian researchers have defined political values as the "stable, implicit semantic dominants of an individual, social group or society in general, which determine ideological priorities and political principles of social relations" (Selezneva, 2019). The most relevant political values for Russian youth – peace, human rights, security, justice, and freedom – are universal in terms of political science, although, no one can give an explanation as to why they are universal and binding on people (Rakityansky, 2008).

Modern researchers have noted that in the process of mediatization of politics, the system of the formation of the individual's socio-political values is changing (Andrianova, Rakitov, 1991; Krotz, 2008; Hepp, 2013; Deacon & Stanyer, 2014; Labush & Puyu, 2019). The media are becoming a factor in shaping

a new system of values and attitudes among young people, as well as the main platform for young people's self-actualization (Castells, 2007; Lippman, 2004; Gold, 2013; Huss & Magos, 2014). The importance of youth in the development of society determines the sustained interest of researchers in the representatives of the youth community (Il'inskij, 2001; Gorshkov & Sheregi, 2010; Lukov & Pogorskij, 2014; Konstantinovskij, 2014; Zubok & Chuprov, 2020), and requires further study, considering different aspects and scientific paradigms.

### **Social media activism of today's youth: expert opinion**

As part of this project, a qualitative research strategy was implemented and a number of in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with various expert groups to accurately describe Russian youth and obtain extra information required for data interpretation. The purpose of this research procedure was to identify the causes and effects of the relationships in the social and communication activity of young adults in the context of value models existing in our society. The selected qualitative research strategy provided an opportunity to discuss the appropriate range of topics with the informants in line with the research program and also left open the possibility to expand the discussion field in accordance with the informants' status and experience. The first part of the discussion referred to youth as a social and psychological group and its characteristic features shaped by the system of values existing in society. The second content-related part of the interviews focused on young people as the audience and media users. The third part of the discussion was structured according to the informants' field of expertise and provided information on case studies regarding various initiatives with the participation of Russian young people. The selection included experts professionally involved in the studies of young adults as part of the Russian society, people who build a system of communication for the youth community and teach young people the principles of balanced existence in the media communication space, and political actors responsible for implementing various public initiatives involving youth at the federal and regional levels.

Our findings allow us to point out several characteristics of Russian youth important for the topic of our research. The current value models of young people contain fundamental and transformational elements. Along with the core values that are passed down from generation to generation in the minds of young people, today experts often identify elements of new sets of values associated with the changing sociopolitical and economic conditions of life in Russia. *"I think core human values still exist: human life, health, socialization,*

justice. They are still preserved. I think justice has even intensified among young people” (IE-8).

If we review the relationship between the external context for personality formation and the personal system of values, we will see certain development: *“When our parents’ generation was young, they lived in an atmosphere of collectivism. Now young people are more individualistic in the way they look at the world. <...> ... there has been some shift in values. Young people are looking for a place where they feel more comfortable” <...> this is a more cynical and pragmatic view of the world”* (IE-2).

A shift in values is governed by the desire for a tangible result of efforts and the awareness of the importance of meaningful action taken: *Compared to other generations, they are clearly focused on the outcome, maybe even expressed in material terms; it does matter to them”* (IE-8).

Today, the general profile of youth is supplemented by individualistic strategies: *“Young people are characterized by individualistic values related to personal freedom and personal fulfillment. These things are best expressed in young people who are not burdened by family, work or other responsibilities...”* (IE-3). Interestingly, public discourse and various social transformations influence the views of young people, their value orientations, and behavioral patterns in a certain way: *“... in the surveys, we note great environmental friendliness in the broad sense of the word, that is, a desire to be more aware of what we consume”* (IE-3); *“...young people are proactive. We will change our consumption to save nature, rather than wait for someone to come along and do it”* (IE-7). It is fair to assume that such distinctive features of modern youth’s consciousness partly determine the potential involvement of young people in a number of public (in particular, environmental) initiatives, complementing their traditional qualities such as activism, a high degree of motivation in various types of activity, and experimentation.

For centuries, a combination of the above features has maintained the role of youth as a major force for the development of society: *“Youth have at all times had a passionate challenge. It is young people who change the world <...>. Young people are ready and able to change the world, this is their challenge”* (IE-5), *“... they are the reproducing part of society, its driving force”* (IE-2).

The mediatization of all sectors of public life in Russia affects the ways of development of value models currently existing among young people and also explains the perception of social media, and in particular social networking services, as a key space for debating the most important issues for youth and society (Stro mba ck, 2008). Such influence is felt both at the level of actualization

of certain values (“... *the example of patriotism and youth: the environment is what matters here. The Internet is an environment. The communities to which a young person belongs have an impact on his or her worldview and values*” (IE-1), and on the process of perception of values as a whole in modern media communication space (in terms of values, young people “*are characterized by who they look up to when they decide for themselves what is valuable and what is not. Macro-influencers, who don’t have such a strong impact on adults, are very important for the younger generation; what is valuable and what is not, they very quickly take it from these people, read it from them*” (IE-8).

Given the above characteristics, it is crucial to see the differentiation of this part of society and use it in different interactions: “...*these teenagers and young people are very different. You don’t even need to compare the urban and rural populations; we can compare different cities and there will be completely different youth dialogs, and youth myths, and pastime, so they are all very different. In general, I consider young people to be really active, progressive, tolerant, and nonjudgmental towards something new*” (IE-6).

Young people continue to be a significant part of Russian society, with certain age-specific and social psychological characteristics, and they are quite actively involved in volunteer initiatives. In this respect, it must be noted that the involvement of young people in volunteering at the beginning of the 21st century is driven by several factors.

The first group of factors that prompt young people’s desire to participate in various socially important projects is associated with psychological traits of the community’s representatives. Leadership skills and experimentation with the status of a leader bring a young person to more active participation: “*Today, a young person wants to feel like a leader in some kind of communication. This person is interested in the communication where he or she is in charge, where he or she can lead, so they are ready to participate in this communication, to prove their worth. Elements of charity and co-participation practices should act on this aspect in the qualities of a modern young person, the desire to be a leader*” (IE-8); “*for teenagers and young adults in general, it is typical to compare themselves with others, to position themselves in society. It is very important how they are perceived by their peers in particular*” (IE-6). The understanding of the symbolic meaning of activities and psychological satisfaction with participation also explain why volunteer initiatives are so popular among young people: “*When we created Molodezhka ONF (youth division of the All-Russia People’s Front), the motto was “for reasons of conscience” and also “after one’s own heart”. There are some professions that cannot be classified as services, because it is a mission,*

*allegiance <...>. Our teams are also formed from those who come answering the call of the heart, who cannot imagine their life without helping others” (IE-4). In some cases, the need for involvement among young people is met through a passion for game formats of communication, which allow for a more diverse self-realization and new experiences: “... our mission is to bring people to our team through ‘hype’ formats. And it’s amazing that a person who came just to play quest begins to help veterans six months later... It’s exciting when a person gets involved in our team through a game...” (IE-1).*

The second group of factors is clearly related to the pragmatic segment of value models prevalent among young people. At the beginning of the 21st century, it becomes more and more common to discuss the directions and ways of implementation of personal life strategies (including career strategies) and evaluate planning horizons. In these discussions, the interpretation of volunteering as a way to use means of social mobility attains its proper position: *“Young people see opportunities in volunteering, including career prospects. That is, it is an opportunity to get a foothold in a particular company or organization without experience and generally an opportunity to see some new places. Although the idea of volunteering as a way to help is definitely there, too” (IE-3); “There is a large-scale campaign... and then there is a local story. It seems to me that committed people would participate in anything if they see value for themselves. Social mobility, networking, commendation, etc. It’s the profit that matters to young people. <...> Volunteering has transformed; being a volunteer is prestigious...” (IE-7).*

It is already a common thing that the formation of modern teenagers and young adults takes place in a mediatized environment, so various forms of activity of those who represent the coming generations are realized in the information and communication space and are governed by its parameters.

It is important to remember that at the beginning of the 21st century it is quite difficult, and sometimes impossible, to clearly distinguish between traditional and new, real and virtual fields of young people’s lives: *“With the advent of social media and alternative communication platforms, young people today live in two formats that are inextricably linked: offline and online” (IE-4).* It is essential that new, virtual formats are attractive, e.g. that they include game elements and take into account the content gamification trend: *“... it is very important to find some interesting format online as well, which would be understandable” (IE-1).* However, it should be remembered that media socialization follows its own trajectories and differs from the usual, traditional socialization, which leads to certain traits being ingrained in the behavior, reactions, and thinking

of representatives of the coming generations: “... *the more a person is socialized through the media, the slower he or she undergoes the processes of transformation and transition to adulthood; such people remain very young in spirit...*” (IE-8).

The data on Russian youth's presence in the media space confirms that they are very much familiar with social media and reinforces the trend of visualizing communication and the growing popularity of short formats: “*first of all, this is the consumption of visual content, this is YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, this is the consumption of short content, of course, based on the format of social networking sites, and this is being interested in what is trending now ... This is what is now the key for young people in media consumption*” (IE-3). Moreover, the inclusion in the functioning of resources and specific groups in the online environment turns out to be a factor potentially limiting communication that must be taken into account: “*Media consumption most likely takes place via social networking sites, which build a different way of presenting information for everyone, and this information is sorted by interests. On the one hand, it is convenient; on the other hand, it limits the field of vision for young people*” (IE-5). At the same time, the potential advantage in young people's presence on social media is the guarantee of choice and the opportunity to take an active part in communication: “*Social media allow you to choose the content you consume... Content on social media is systematized. It is important for young people that it is they who choose what content to consume. Young people are willing to create content and to publish posts that someone needs*” (IE-7); “*Today's youth feel more comfortable on the Internet because there is an illusion of detachment... The first part of young people is definitely comfortable virtually; the second part, those who are closer to (years old – author), still feels the need to go out and speak in public. It is clear that for the first group that does not go out and avoids social interaction, it is essential to go online and communicate there through the resources that they read. For the older group, a platform for discussion has to be created*” (IE-2).

The profile of young people based on the available expert opinions allows us to knowingly rely on the study of specific patterns in the behavior and communication of young people in the social media space related to the implementation of important social and political actions and initiatives.

## **Communication activity of Russian youth on social media with regard to topics related to social and political events**

The review of communication platforms such as social networking services seems essential in the context of studying the social and political values of contemporary youth. Young people who are in the process of developing a

system of values act as one of the most vulnerable social groups (Shapoval, p.171-172). Social networks give this group an opportunity to speak out, participate in the country's social and political life, and put their initiatives into action. Thus, one of the lines of this study was to describe the nature of communication interaction of young people in the social media space using the discussion of the country's social, political and cultural life in the comments on official accounts. The study used frequency analysis and analysis of the content of comments, which are convenient methods to identify and analyze the actual value models of young people.

Official accounts of the national social movements *Volontery Pobedy* (*Victory Volunteers*) and *My vmeste* (*We Are Together*) in the social media VK and Instagram and their publication activities in August 2021 were selected for the analysis. Comments by registered users were analyzed by certain criteria to draw conclusions about the sentiment of reactions, involvement in the discussion, the level of consideration of the topic, etc. The total number of comments was 763. The sample did not include comments in the form of smiley emoji, stickers, images or videos, as well as response comments to SMM strategy CTA (Call to Action) applied to increase user interaction with the account. Therefore, 183 comments were selected for this study (VK: 22 – *My vmeste*, 137 – *Volontery Pobedy*, Instagram: 13 – *My vmeste*, 11 – *Volontery Pobedy*).

Most of the users' comments on the *Volontery Pobedy* accounts are about values (55% of the total number of comments in the VK group and 54% on Instagram); the users share their family stories and advocate the preservation of the historical memory and historical truth. On the contrary, in the *My vmeste* campaign accounts, comments from the registered users are about getting more information on organizational issues (68% of the total number of comments in the VK group and 70% on Instagram). The users ask how to register for local campaign projects, get a certificate of participation, etc. Based on the fact that comments more often focus on personal stories or organizational issues, the topic or problem is explored mostly on a personal level (VK: 73% – *My vmeste*, Instagram: 73% – *Volontery Pobedy*, 92% – #МЫВМЕСТЕ (#wearetogether)). It is worth pointing out that in the *Volontery Pobedy* group in VK the topic is discussed by the followers at the public and national levels (72% of the total number of comments), and the comments refer to topics of importance for the entire country, such as patriotism, volunteering, and heroic deeds of veterans. When the users registered in the *Volontery Pobedy* group in VK voice their opinion in comments or get into a discussion, they give reasons for their viewpoint, mostly appealing to emotions and feelings (50% appeal to feelings;

33% appeal to reason and logic; 17% appeal to values), and add smiley emoji to their responses (Russian flag, white dove, etc.). Followers in other groups appeal to logic and reason (VK: *My vmeste* – 68%, Instagram: *Volonteriy Pobedy* – 67%, *My vmeste* – 62%). To support their viewpoint in a discussion, followers cite personal experience (VK: *Volonteriy Pobedy* – 66%, *My vmeste* – 71%, Instagram: *Volonteriy Pobedy* – 91%, *My vmeste* – 100%). In terms of sentiment, comments are predominantly positive (VK: *Volonteriy Pobedy* – 66%, *My vmeste* – 54%, Instagram: *My vmeste* – 55%); the sentiment in the *My vmeste* account in VK is predominantly neutral (59%).

As part of the project, an empirical procedure implied refining and expanding the information obtained through the quantitative analysis of posts on social media accounts. Given the applicability of a comprehensive research methodology at the program stage, it was decided to implement a qualitative strategy and conduct a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives of the youth community who took part in two selected campaigns both in online and offline formats, after the completion of the content analysis study and the frequency analysis of youth communication in the social media (social network) space.

To achieve this, an interview guide was compiled to develop conversations from comprehending the motivation for participation in social projects to reflecting on the informants' communication activity on social media. The informants provided information about specific aspects of their participation in the two selected projects, their status in the projects, difficulties in the implementation of the projects and interaction with various social actors, and the effects of participation in social and political initiatives. As part of this procedure, significant age differentiation seemed meaningless; a more important characteristic of the informants were status parameters related to the experience of participation in projects or online communities supporting the projects (these factors are highlighted in the relevant fragments at the stage of presentation, analysis and interpretation of empirical research data). The sample included 11 *My vmeste* project volunteers and 5 *Volonteriy Pobedy* representatives.

For easier analysis of responses, the informants representing the *My vmeste* project are designated as IM-1, IM-2, etc.; the informants from *Volonteriy Pobedy*, as IP-1, IP-2, etc. Notably, some of the respondents from *My vmeste* first joined online volunteering activities. This is how the respondents answered the question “In your case, what came first – participation in online or offline activities?”: [IM-1] “*My very first activity was giving an online lecture. We told*

people about myths, benefits and harms of blood donation”; [IM-2] “The first one was participation in online activity”; [IP-2] “That day I was preparing for the Victory Dictation, which was postponed to early September because of COVID-19 measures. I saw the Become a Volunteer button on the dictation website, and I clicked, because I was curious to know what volunteers do”; [IP-3] “The first one was participation in online activity, when I was invited to take part in creating social media content.” However, personal meetings with active volunteers proved to be an equally important channel of influence at the start stage: [IM-3] “Representatives of Medical Volunteers came to us, then the first-year students, and told us about what they did in such an interesting way that I wanted to take part in their activities”; [IM-4] “I got involved in projects through my friends; the topic was interesting, and my friends invited me – it was the Vsmysle forum in 2018”; [IM-5] “I had my first volunteering experience when I studied at the medical institute, and it was the Day of Health campaign initiated by the Institute”; [IM-9] “I began to participate in volunteer projects as part of my work for Dobro.Magazine published by the Association of Volunteer Centers”; [IP-4] “It just so happened that I got into this circle of people who are engaged in such activities. As someone who was skeptical about it all, without even understanding it, I just got involved in the whole thing.”

Young people form a life and activity space around themselves based on a sophisticated system of values, taking into account individual preferences, ideals, symbols, and objectives; at the same time, they connect this space to the global sociopolitical field and often localize it in the media communication space, primarily in the space of social media (Gureeva, Anikina, Muronets & Samorodova, 2021). All the informants note that social media publications are important for the development of the volunteer movement. Respondents emphasized that discussions on social media have a positive effect on project implementation: “Thanks to social networking sites, people can learn more about volunteering and get involved” [IM-1]; “Thanks to social networks, a large number of people are involved. You can find a lot of useful information in the communities.” [IM-2]. In addition, they pointed to the need to use social media to ensure full coverage of projects and cultivate a good image: “Contemporary realities dictate that if an event is not covered on social media or in the Internet, then it did not happen. The higher the level of coverage, the more trust people will have” [IM-5]. Volunteers also acknowledge both the outreach and the practical effect of social media posts and give recommendations for the content: “It seems to me that there’s a better chance that people who don’t care at first will come across a post on social media and get interested. But here, the format is what matters: posts

*about the results of an activity are not that interesting. What's important are some infographics and cards about the challenges the organization is facing" [IM-9]; "Any movement needs support. Thanks to the Internet, any movement gives the knowledge that a volunteer or an ordinary person who is concerned about the issue needs. Through the text and video, there is involvement and so people get involved in socially useful work" [IP-2].*

Volunteers say that the formation of patriotic values and moral attitudes of modern youth becomes a key focus for most volunteer projects: *"As press secretary of the local headquarters and the person whose primary job is to establish contact with the local media, I can say that this is the second most important reason for our activities. The first is to help veterans, and the second is to educate the younger generation and teach them moral values, so that they make the right choices in life at all times" [IP-3].* Coverage of projects in the media space, particularly in social media, helps to support volunteer activity: *"Support and coverage are always important and needed. Thanks to this, more people will be able to learn about our movement and join us" [IP-5].*

Therefore, the need for social networking to support volunteer activity is fully confirmed by all informants, which proves the thesis about the mediatization of young people and their perception of virtual space as a natural part of everyday life. However, the interpenetration of virtual and real is not complete: media activism, i.e. online activity only, without stepping out into the real world, also exists in the volunteer environment (Omelchenko, 2005). So, we received contradictory answers to the question "How actively the participants of the project community on social media are involved in real-life activity": [IM-1] *"Based on my observations, all participants work actively and are ready to develop in this area of activity"; [IM-2] "Based on numerous publications and comments, we can conclude that the audience is fully involved in real activity"; [IM-3] "Unfortunately, [the participants are] not very active. Many are looking for benefits for themselves; some prioritize their studies, but there are active guys who are looking for new opportunities, knowledge and friends"; [IM-5] "Not everyone is involved, because everyone has a limited time resource, I think that after the activities are publicized, the community participants will develop an interest and take part, and the number of active volunteers will increase"; [IM-6] "Quite a few people are involved in real-life activity from social media, at least, based on my observations. That's what these social media communities are for"; [IM-9] "Quite often, especially when it's quite easy to take part, which suits busy people"; [IP-1] "It depends. All people are different. There are some people who find themselves both online and offline"; [IP-2] "Participants of our movement are very active and*

*if possible, each of them does their best to take part in offline events”; [IP-4] “About 70-80% of those who are on social media are active volunteers who participate [in events] in real life”; [IP-5] “[The participants are] very active. They see who they can join and where they can help.”*

Thus, the thesis about the readiness of young people to participate in online projects and then proceed to real activities they are sincerely interested in, is confirmed. In this context, the significance of official accounts as “guides” that help young people get involved in full-fledged activities increases, which is important for volunteer projects.

It is common knowledge that for young people the support of their relatives and friends on important issues is essential; this position remains in the category of traditional values for many. Consequently, the general public is also a target audience for the communication activities of volunteer projects, although they may have indirect (and accordingly less or distorted) information about volunteering. The informants noted that the reaction of their family, friends, and colleagues to volunteer activities was most often positive.

The informants were asked about the reactions of their family, friends, and colleagues to volunteer activities: *“I have their full support” [IM-2]; “[The reaction is] very positive. They support me and are very happy that I have found something I like to do and something which is important for society”; I think they are used to my activities and trust the projects in which I take part, eventually approved it” [IM- ]; “My relatives like my progress in this field. They responded positively to my participation in the projects” [IM-6].*

Promoting cultural and moral values becomes the focal point of the government youth policy (Gureeva, 2020). The main instruments for implementing this policy are developing volunteer activities and creating conditions for the successful functioning of youth public associations. At the same time, it should be recognized that in the current circumstances social media are turning into a natural environment for determining the value priorities of modern youth. In this regard, the coverage of volunteer initiatives on social media is of paramount importance not only to raise awareness about the ongoing projects, but also support volunteer activity, engage new participants, and provide patriotic and moral education for today’s youth.

## **Values and social activity of Russian youth**

Social and political values depend on the person’s vital needs and are governed by them. Therefore, people value what they lack. Moreover, both social and political values have a regulatory nature with regard to the political behavior and

social activity of the individual. The relationship between values and behavior is manifested in the fact that values determine people's actions and are expressed in them. That is, values have a direct impact on political choice, political activity, and implementation of a certain range of social roles through them.

As noted above, the translation of meanings and the formation of values take place today in the context of the actualization of media logic as a factor that shapes the mutual influence of the media and other social actors. With respect to studying the process of shaping the values shared by Russian youth, it is important to realize that the opportunities for value dialog are expanding in parallel with the expansion of the set of communicative practices and social activity of the individual. This draws our attention to the media consumption characteristics of young people. If we analyze specific information and communication preferences of Russian youth, we will see that they are different from those of other age groups, which leads to a number of conclusions: the value models that exist today among young people contain fundamental and transformational elements; the involvement of young people in volunteering in the early 21st century is due to a mix of factors, and various forms of activity of the new generations are realized in the information and communication space and are governed by its parameters.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

It can be concluded that the fundamental generational differences are associated with the widespread adoption of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) by young people, the changing picture of media consumption, and the transformation of the entire system of values.

The study confirmed the importance of the mediatization of social space as a factor determining not only the communicative practices of modern people, but also social transformations. Young people are becoming active participants in the technologically determined process of social development. The experts who took part in the study indicate that Russian young people have already successfully mastered the new media space, making it an integral part of their lives, and they are enthusiastic about the emergence of new communication platforms, quickly adapting new technologies to meet their own personal and professional needs. It is important to note that in the first decades of the 21st century the media remain a factor of age and socio-psychological differentiation of Russian society in general and its youth segment in particular. Therefore, they require special attention from the academic community. At the same time, the media play a significant role, often influencing the process of transforming

existing value models by promoting certain value orientations in specific age and/or social groups. The empirical material obtained during the project allows us to draw cautious conclusions regarding the persistence of traditional values among young people, while at the same time introducing transformational elements into the generalized value model. It is important to note that the recorded value shift is characterized by the desire of young people to increase the efficiency of their own activities, to achieve concrete results in various types of activity.

Summarizing the data obtained, the issue of media activism and the relationship between virtual and real practices among young people can be noted as an important problem from a scientific and practical point of view. In the current situation in Russia, due to a set of objective circumstances, an environment is taking shape that offers young people many opportunities to participate in a variety of both group and mass, formal and non-institutionalized initiatives. Young people's motivation to participate in specific initiative and in the functioning of certain communities is changing. For example, experts note a decline in the popularity of subcultural communities that have been widespread in past decades and, conversely, there is an increase in attention to socially oriented initiatives. However, the situation is difficult to call unambiguous, because interviews with different groups of informants allow us to identify factors that may affect young people and their willingness to participate in various initiatives. The first group can be conventionally called personal factors related to the young person's interest in the project idea. The second group can be described as socio-political, which is embodied in official support for projects involving young people.

Young people shape the space of life and activity around themselves based on a complexly organized system of values according to individual preferences, ideals, symbols, and reference points, at the same time linking it to the global socio-political field and localizing it in media and communication space, primarily in social networks. The role of youth as a key social actor in the development of Russian society is being realized in various ways, including accessible, actively developing formats of new media, as well as game formats of communication, which allow young people to gain new experiences and define their place in the social space more successfully.

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# Mediamorphosis: Assessing the influence of digital media on traditional newspapers in Nigeria from the audience and media managers' perspectives

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## Abstract

There is an ongoing debate that conventional print media are becoming seriously threatened and facing possible extinction due to the penetrating presence of the digital media. This paper discusses, from the perspectives of the audience and media managers, the situation as it evolves in Nigeria. Applied and survey research methods are adopted for the study. Roger Fidler's theory of Mediamorphosis and the Toronto School's Medium theory constitute the theoretical framework. The study identifies that traditional print media are becoming endangered due to low circulation figure, dwindling advertisement revenue, and even closures of newspaper businesses. It, therefore, concludes that change has indeed swept through the media environment, and conventional media in Nigeria should adapt to this change in order to remain relevant. In recommending the way forward, the paper advises Nigerian newspaper owners and managers to create new ideas, new value propositions, and new ways to engage with customers so as to improve on their revenue and ultimately remain in business.

## Keywords

Information, mediamorphosis, new digital media, newspapers, traditional mass media.

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## Introduction

Nigeria has a good number of daily newspapers circulating across the country. According to a report by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2019), there are ‘more than 100 national and local press titles, dailies, tabloids and publications which champion ethnic interests’. Some others actually champion political and partisan ideologies at the expense of national ideologies. Interestingly, at the moment, we have the *Daily Trust* newspapers as the champion of northern agenda; the *Sun*, clamouring for the eastern block; and the big four – *Guardian*, *Vanguard*, *Punch*, and *The Nation* as pro-western Nigeria, with a twinge of biases for southern stories. The underlying dynamics in all of these is that most publishers of these media are not from those newspapers’ areas of influence. For instance, *Daily Trust* is owned/published by a northern Christian from the central region but yet it clamours for the information needs of the core Muslim North; *Vanguard* and *Guardian* are owned by core southerners, but they leverage more on business interests of the western axis of the country than on ethnic affinity. This may be why, in that report, BBC describes Nigeria’s media scene as ‘one of the liveliest in Africa’ because it can assume shapes and colourations that swing on several pendulums.

This assessment notwithstanding, the very existence and sustenance of these national newspapers which constitute a prominent segment of the print media genre, have recently been faced with grave challenges. A good number of the newspapers have metamorphosed while some have gone extinct, and a few had taken newer colouration to be able to survive the times. Some observers believe that these challenges have to do with the emergence of new media technologies, dwindling readership of the hard copies because of the ease of the mobile version that comes with the mix of adequate technologies, advertising revenue, and the inability of newspapers to optimally monetise their online efforts (Uduma & Obukoadata, 2016; Yap, 2009). Newspapers generally have lost considerable advertisement revenue to new media carried on the internet platform. On the other side, a depressed economy has forced cancellation of newspaper subscriptions, cut in advertising budget by advertisers, and even closures of newspapers, bankruptcy, layoff of staff, and salary cuts (Mahmud, 2009).

Search engine giants, Google and Yahoo, have been accused of ‘stealing’ the contents of print media by prominent media owners across the globe. Rupert Murdoch, the proprietor of News Corporation and *The Wall Journal*, had declared in April 2009: ‘The question is, should we be allowing Google to steal all our copyright...?’ (Kraverts, 2009). Also, Sam Zell, owner of Tribune

Company that publishes *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Baltimore Sun*, had asked, 'if all the newspapers in America did allow Google to steal content for nothing, what would Google do, and how profitable would Google be?' (Masnick, 2007; Pawlak & Ko odziejczak, 2020). These and many other accusations against Google and other search engines/metadata base service providers are attributable to them becoming very powerful at the expense of the traditional newspapers which are gradually being forced out of business. Google sees these allegations and accusations as unfounded and ungrounded. The search engine giant's response is that it is the internet which has posed the threat to the traditional newspaper business and not its services which only enhance the ease of going through the internet. According to its United Kingdom boss, Matt Brittin, 'we do not steal content from newspapers' (*The Telegraph*, December 2, 2009). Rather than harming the industry, Google says it is helping to increase traffic to newspapers' web-sites. It explains that Google News shows only the headlines, a line or two of text and links to the story's web-site, which is fair in copyright laws.

Barthelemy, Bethell, Christiansen, Jarsvall, and Koinis (2011) observe that there are clearly significant shifts taking place within the print media industry, particularly around attempts to monetise online content and find alternative sources of revenue to replace falling advertising revenues. They, therefore, believe that the decline of the industry is overstated. News organisations are going through a process of change and adaptation. Some observers see the arrival of New Communication Technology (NCT) as bringing with it a set of opportunities and challenges for traditional media professions such as journalism (Garrison, 1996). Journalists, especially when writing for magazines and newspapers, can gather news via the internet protocols and do their fact-checking or inquiries into facts and figures or background historical information directly from their homes or offices.

The main focus of this paper, therefore, is to assess if and how the conventional print media in Nigeria have been threatened with possible extinction as a result of the overwhelming penetrating presence of the new media. To guide the research, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ: To what extent, according to the audience and media managers' perspectives, have new digital media usage and penetration impacted on traditional newspapers?

RQ: What constitute the distinctions and complementarities between online and traditional newspapers?

## Literature review

### Print media, online media and information cycle in Nigeria

According to Ola and Ojo (2006), quoting Okojie (1993), despite keen competitions from other mass media, the print media have exerted the greatest influence because of the inherent advantages of being relatively cheap, quite portable, more widely available and frequently published thus ensuring the most up-to date information and readability by individuals with varying reading abilities as and when they like. This position was re-echoed by the then editor-in-chief of *Vanguard* newspapers, Gbenga Adefaye in 2010 in the paper, 'Forget circulation figures, print media is still very relevant', where he argued that the print media was evolving, adding that in spite of the influx of new technologies, it was still regarded as one of the most trusted sources of information by many Nigerians. He noted that though the new media at present provided various platforms for communicating, a lot of Nigerians were not sophisticated enough to take full advantage of the new technology which has redefined the latitude of the media and made it a stronger competition like the broadcast media. His voice was strong on the undercurrent of both print and electronic media using the same technological platform in serving the day's events as there seem to be no more boundaries between both, thus necessitating the couching of the multimedia design approach.

The structuring of print media suggests they perform the intrinsic functions of informing, interpreting the news, providing service to readers, and entertaining society. These functions explain the necessity of the print media. The print media aim at a large circulation of general readers and are primarily vehicle for topical news and information (Rudin & Ibbotson, 2002). Nigeria has one of the most pulsating media systems in Africa. According to Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011), there are 400 identifiable and consistent print titles of varying formats in the country, out of which 216 are newspapers, 63 magazines, 44 interest magazines, 16 vernacular publications and 16 religious publications with a diverse string of ownership pattern ranging from government to private to groups and institutions. There are still many fledging others whose consistency cannot be vouched for but could raise the figure to over a thousand. Some are tailored towards ethnic issues, others religious, educational and diverse interests.

Abdulraheem, Adisa and La'aro, (2012) state that the print media in Nigeria aid readers become informed citizens and make better decisions by providing lots of facts. Hard news stories, vital statistics, weather, sports stories, and event calendars are examples of items that help inform readers. Some newspaper articles help to interpret, or explain, the meaning of news to readers. These

stories often include the opinion of the writer or newspaper management. Editorials, opinion columns, news analysis, and reviews are some examples. These authors argue that the newspaper stories provide information that helps readers solve their business, home, recreation, and daily living problems. Advertisements assist in informing readers about products and services. Hard news stories, feature stories, classified adverts, and display adverts are items that provide a service. Some items in the newspaper are designed to amuse or provide enjoyment to readers. Feature stories, comics, puzzles, and humour columns are entertainment items. At the risk of generalisation, newspapers will normally contain a mixture of hard news and features including sports, finance, foreign affairs, opinion, analysis, reviews, leaders, etc.

This position avertedly places the print media on the driving seat. The question is, is it the traditional newspapers that is in extinction or the circulation figures or the platform for circulation or the content?

## **Overview of the newspaper market in Nigeria**

The name, newspaper, is from the words, 'news' and 'paper' which roughly means a paper that carries news as its content. However, a more embracing definition of newspaper can be a publication which circulates periodically and contains news, features, opinion articles, pictures and other information as well as advertisement. Newspapers have helped the processes of communication at the local, national and global levels, and have acted as agents of change and globalisation, to a large extent (Ezuilo, Okon, & Okugo, 2020).

As explained by McQuail (2010), there are various forms of newspaper. These include 'free newspaper' paid for by advertising, and 'more recently, the "electronic newspaper" that is offered online [which] lacks the limits of time and location of the traditional newspaper'. In Nigeria, both the traditional and online (or electronic) newspapers are published, while the 'free newspaper' is not in existence.

For the traditional newspapers in Nigeria, they are characterised by hard and soft news stories, deploying significantly different writing styles and story structures. The hard news focus on discrete events, statements, coverage of politics and government as well as disasters. Of recent, the dominant theme has been that of terrorism, kidnapping and banditry; while the soft news focus on romance, religion and human interests. The tribal and ethnic elements are very strong in the whole construction of the newspaper framing themes. Ownership is more in private hands as over 95 percent of Nigerian newspapers are owned by private entrepreneurs (Okon, 2018; Sunday, 2017). Government, at different

levels, used to have majority stakes, but such is thinning out by the day. This could possibly explain why it was easy for most of the newspapers to transit from physical to online publication. The news content, too, has heavily tilted towards satisfying the local audience with bits of some national and international trends that have been adjudged to reclassify the newspapers as national. No single Nigerian newspaper currently has the international tag, except such is considered within the ambit of technology use.

Prominent features in the newspapers are photo-news, celebrity engagements and gossips, politics and crime. Readership is across the broad spectrum of the society, with those in the upper and middle class less likely to read hardcopies of newspapers except issues concerning them are discussed. It is the low-class persons that spend more time to read newspapers at the local vendor shops through the 'free-reader club' (PRC). It is this same tradition that has been catapulted into the online frame of free newspaper reading, such that even before the incursion of technologies, readership and circulation figures had begun to drop. This created serious concern then, as it has today.

At a forum organised by the Advertising Agencies' Association of Nigeria (AAAN) in Lagos in 2010, the future of newspaper in Nigeria was debated in which there was a majority cry that unless the print media braced up to the challenges posed by the new digital media, it might go extinct in the nearest future. This position was a fall-out of the report which portrayed an alarming slide in the patronage of the newspaper where the daily sales figure of all the newspapers was less than 300,000, meaning that, as at then, only one in more than 410 Nigerians buy newspapers daily (Ekeng, 2010). Considering Nigeria's current estimated population of 206.14 million as at 2020, and ranking as the seventh most populous nation (Worldometer, 2020), this ratio has now come to 1:687. The dwindling trend has continued unabatedly over the years, with circulating and subscription worsening despite the availability of the e-copy of the said newspapers in circulation. The argument has always been that the ease of sharing and storage as a defining quotient of the new media is an albatross for the traditional newspapers, even in Nigeria (Uduma & Obukoadata, 2016).

Popoola (2010) had earlier contended that all the newspapers in Nigeria today have combined circulation figure that is far less than the 500,000 copies per day of the *Daily Times* in 1980 when the population of the country was about half of what it is today. At present, the stockpile of unsold copies of newspapers and magazines in the circulation departments of most print media organisations is a vivid sign of this challenge. Ekeng (2010) discloses that *The Punch*, leading the top-eight-selling national dailies and adjudged as number

one, only circulated 34,264 copies. *The Sun* was ranked third with 25,632 unit sales. *Vanguard* got 25,241, while *Guardian* and *This Day* came fifth and sixth respectively, with 25,222 and 21,703 daily sales. *Daily Trust*, the most popular newspaper up North had 11,672 daily unit sales. *Tribune*, the oldest surviving newspaper in Nigeria, was another surprise, managing only 8,314 daily sales. On the lower side were *Compass*, *Daily Independent*, *Leadership*, *National Life*, *New Nigeria*, *Mirror* and *Westerner*, which barely raked up 1,600 daily sales.

Though these figures have been disputed by Nigerian newspaper proprietors, they remain, according to Olaniyan (2019), as the only published information 'regarding the circulation of Nigerian newspapers'. The situation has remained this confusing because, as noted by Ayankunbi (2020), no Nigerian newspaper is a committed member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), the organisation set up to certify and provide accurate and comparable circulation figures for newspapers and magazines. Any figure put forward, therefore, by owners of these newspapers are merely speculative. This explains why a Federal Government agency, the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), set up to regulate the print media in the country, cannot provide the average daily circulation figures of major Nigerian newspapers in its inventory of newspapers and magazines published in Nigeria (NPC, 2013).

The Nigerian NCT newspaper experience is remarkably not different from what is obtainable in other climes. The hard copies of national newspapers are becoming less popular due to technology that has provided processes for bypassing the everyday street vendor (Hassan, Azimi, & Nasidi, 2018; Obukoadata, 2010; Okon & Ekpe, 2018); and has enabled the reader with a smart device to access all sorts of news content free of charge. And there are many of these mobile phone users in Nigeria where 122.7 million of the citizens are active internet users and around 24 million Nigerians (comprising 12 percent of the population) are active on social media as at January 2019 (BBC, 2019). Yet, unlike other global news outlets, the Nigerian newspapers, even though with strong online presence, are usually accessed free of charge, thereby creating a situation whereby they could be described as 'charity'. They only rely on advertisements paid on their web-pages to earn money. This, no doubt, implies that the newspapers are yet to appreciate how to utilise the NCT to their business and professional advantage.

We could add that the Nigerian newspapers do not readily deploy cookies or other analytical tools that should help them to become more prominent and sell their contents directly. They rely heavily on other search engines and microblogging sites to drive traffic to their contents. This is antithetical approach

to deployment of technologies (Obukoadata, Uduma, Okon, & Ulam, 2020). Besides, their online presence is clearly not any different from the physical presence which helps readers to just be satisfied with the free online presence. Nonetheless, this may not all be negative as the consistency in online and offline presence can help resonate the brand. In all, the newspapers, through their online versions, are inadvertently exposed financially.

## **Theoretical framework**

In any research endeavour, theories play central role in situating the study (Thompson, 1995). For this study, theory of Mediamorphosis, propounded by Roger Fidler in 1997 and Medium Theory, set forth by the Toronto School – founded by the Canadian economic historian, H. M. Innis, were found to have relevance in identifying the challenges and prospects of the traditional newspapers in the era of new media incursion, especially from the perspective of media stakeholders.

In Mediamorphosis, Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008) observe that owing to the complex media systems that are equally occasioned by other complex societal structures, external pressure is exerted on the media and forces its reorganisation towards survival. Specifically, it was stated that the new media do not arise spontaneously and independently, but are occasioned through gradual metamorphosis of the traditional older media thus forcing the question of what is the new media in the real sense of the older ones; and if the old will wear a new wine skin or remain within the purview of the old.

As for the Medium Theory, also known as ‘channel theory’ or ‘media formalism’, it was deemed useful in this study on mediamorphosis because it ‘explains how the media are influenced in propagating information physically and psychologically’ (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2016). This theory, according to McQuail (2010), sees a medium as ‘any vehicle for carrying meaning, with some distinctive characteristics in respect of technology, form, manner of use, means of encoding or social definition’. It surveys the influences of communication technologies; describes the differences among communication environments; emphasises the features of each medium of communication that make it distinct from other media; and examines how one medium (such as the traditional newspapers) differs from another (such as the new digital media).

As this study focuses on the traditional newspapers as channels of communication and how they are influenced by the digital technologically-driven new media, Baran and Davis (2012) argue that ‘changes in communication technology inevitably produce profound changes in both culture and social

structure'. This position, however, seems to question the stand of McQuail (2010) that technologies are unlikely to have a direct impact on cultural practices because their effects can only be mediated through a relevant institution which, in this case, is the mass media.

Therefore, this study is expected to scrutinise and come up with the position as canvassed by industry players in Nigeria as to whether new media incursion has produced any significant changes in the activities of the traditional newspapers in the country. Thus, this becomes a querying point for this research.

## Research methodology

This study adopted as its research design the applied and survey research methods. The applied method is used to examine specific practical issues and also, in some cases, to solve a specific problem (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu and Okpanachi (2017), citing Asika (2002), note that this type of research explains or exposes 'a situation in order to enable the researcher understand it better, hence, it is often regarded as explanatory research or expository research'. Applied research method is, therefore, used here to test the empirical content or validity of Fidler's Theory of Mediamorphosis as it relates to how traditional newspapers can survive in the age of digital new media in Nigeria. The survey method, on the other hand, is a specific type of field study that involves the collection of data from a sample of elements drawn from a well-defined population through the use of questionnaire or any other instrument for data collection.

In line with these definitions, the applied research method was seen as being very appropriate for this study, especially as this paper focused on examining the extent of the dwindling fortune of the traditional newspapers vis- -vis the penetrating influence of the digital new media. In all, 18 currently nationally circulating newspapers – *Blueprint, Business Day, Champion, Daily Times, Daily Post, Daily Trust, Guardian, Independent, Leadership, Nation, New Nigerian, Nigerian Pilot, Punch, Sun, The Cable, This Day, Tribune, and Vanguard* – were assessed.

For the survey, a Google Forms questionnaire was used to contact respondents across Nigeria through different groups on *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* social media platforms out of which 976 persons responded by the deadline. This number, therefore, constituted the sample for the study, and was adopted, using 95% confidence level, 80% expected response rate and loss of sampling efficiency at 1.5 from an infinite population since there are no defined population statistics of the audience and media managers. The audience includes civil servants,

students, tertiary institution lecturers, politicians and political office holders, professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, etc., applicants/unemployed and media managers – journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, media owners, editors.

The two adopted research methods were used with the qualitative analytical approach to discuss this evolving phenomenon.

## **Results and discussion**

Out of the 18 traditional newspaper media managers contacted for this study through an online questionnaire which sought to assess the way their mainstream newspapers in Nigeria have been affected by the advent of the new media, 13 (representing 72.2 percent) answered the questions asked. Their responses are aggregated and summarised here.

Eleven of the 13 media managers (84.6 percent) agree that their newspapers are threatened by the penetrating presence of the new media while only two (15.4 percent) feel unthreatened. On what those who feel threatened have done to contain the threat, their responses include: make the production more aesthetically attractive; engage good writers as columnists; expand circulation network; have an online version; and embark on more aggressive canvassing for advertisements. These are evident in the new looks of Nigeria papers today. They are aesthetically appealing and further enhanced by the colours they display.

All the 13 media managers (100 percent) affirm that they operate an online version for their newspapers. Eight of them (61.5 percent) agree that their advertisement revenue has ‘very much’ been affected by this development while the remaining five (38.5 percent) rate the effect as ‘fairly much’. None of them accepts the ‘not at all’ option.

As to other reasons the online version has helped to keep their newspapers in business, their responses include costing less to reach their readers; the cost of maintaining the online site as compared to that of the machines, production offices, circulation network, etc. which is negligible; less control of the media by government; it helps to preserve readership of the young-generation audience; it allows for instantaneous feedback from readers; and it reaches a wider audience across the world.

Answering the question, ‘Do you think that traditional newspapers will outlive the new media or there will be a marriage at a point?’, seven media managers (53.8 percent) accept that ‘traditional newspapers will outlive new media’, three (23.1 percent) think they will not while another three (23.1 percent) see a marriage taking place between the two.

For the audience survey, the 976 respondents were distributed thus: 279 civil servants (28.58%), 224 students (22.95%), 135 tertiary institution lecturers (13.93%), 92 politicians and political office holders (9.43%), 87 professionals – doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, etc. (8.91%), 58 applicants/unemployed (5.94%), 56 media practitioners – journalists, broadcasters, bloggers, etc. (5.74%), and 45 business owners/operators (4.61%). The media practitioners were evaluated differently from the managers because they are seen as obeying the dictates of the managers more than making any managerial inputs into the newspapering business. The audience's responses are recorded as follows, using a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (S.A.) to Agree (A.), Disagree (D.), and Strongly Disagree (S.D.).

*Table 1*

**Audience members' assessment of the impact of new media on traditional media in Nigeria**

S/N	Question	S.A.	A.	D.	S.D.	Total
1.	New media usage and penetration have positively impacted the audience of traditional newspapers.	201 (20.5%)	237 (24.2%)	463 (47.6%)	75 (7.7%)	976 (100%)
2.	New media have positively impacted traditional newspapers in term of quality of production in such areas as page design, choice of typefaces, as well as use of pictures and colours.	325 (33.3%)	226 (23.2%)	113 (11.6%)	312 (31.9%)	976 (100%)
3.	New media have impacted traditional newspapers positively as regards quality of news.	304 (31.1%)	311 (31.9%)	243 (24.9%)	118 (12.1%)	976 (100%)
4.	New media have positively affected traditional newspapers' readership.	183 (18.8%)	230 (23.6%)	262 (26.8%)	301 (30.8%)	976 (100%)
5.	New media have impacted traditional newspapers as it affects comprehension of news content.	237 (24.3%)	304 (31.1%)	207 (21.2%)	228 (23.4%)	976 (100%)

## Discussion of findings

*RQ : To what extent, according to the audience and media managers' perspectives, have new digital media usage and penetration impacted on traditional newspapers?*

'New media' is a broad term in media studies that emerged in the later part of the 20th century to suggest newer approaches to the use of technology as a platform for sharing of ideas. New media hold out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the 'democratisation' of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. While the traditional media are characterised by one-to-many communication, reaching out to anonymous receivers, employed through one-way communication channels and with a clear-cut distinction between producers and receivers, the new media forms are marked by interactivity, borderless approaches, speed and seamlessness. All these attributes of the new media have been confirmed by the data generated in this study.

The click of the button provides the leeway for today's information flow which the print media have equally benefitted from. The early 1990s ushered in the Information Revolution or the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution which has occasioned a paradigm shift in production processes and relations, the emergence of a new knowledge-based economy, and a quantum leap from an industrial society into an information society. The internet, the major force behind information technology, and argued by Song, Shao and Wu (2010) to represent the most significant change in the media market during the past decades, has established itself as the dominant force in the information world, transforming the ways in which information is aggregated, stored, searched, and retrieved and facilitating media convergence which are the pin-point of mediamorphosis (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2009).

Meyer (2009) argues the point of advantage for the print media in adapting the new media technologies for their e-newspapers where portability becomes classic and accessible almost everywhere and any time. This point is amplified by the miniaturisation of computing devices which accommodate the nuances of the configuration of the print media. The traditional medium for publishing content is paper; but now, newspapers have tried certain new options such as online newspaper edition and mobile phone newspapers. At present, about 60 Nigerian newspapers are online; and remarkably, out of the 13 newspapers that participated in the study, all of them, representing 100 percent, as seen in the data generated, publish online editions in addition to their print editions.

This indicates that a fusion of both the traditional and new media would likely happen at a point, and copiously blur the distinction between both. The issue though is what name would we call such fusion at the end?

There is a spiral growth in the audiences for online journalism; and print media publishers have responded adequately to the challenges from this new media, clearly adopting the multimedia platform to grow their popularity and attract more revenue as bailout from the dwindling newsstand newspapers. Baran (2002) underscores this position by stressing that the internet is different from these traditional media in that rather than changing the relationship between audiences and industries, the internet changes the definition of the different components of the process and as a result, changes their relationship. On the internet, a single individual can communicate with as large an audience as can the giant, multinational corporation that produces a network television programme. All these point towards the direction from an earlier warning by media mogul, Rupert Murdoch, chairman and chief executive officer of News Corporation, in a speech delivered to an audience of newspaper editors, where he noted that the 'dynamic revolution taking place in the news industry today revolves around the fact that "technology-savvy young people" are becoming increasingly likely to turn to the web as their news medium of choice' (Abdulraheem, Adisa, & La'aro, 2012).

Also, as can be seen in the data obtained from this study, all the 13 newspaper editors who participated agreed that new media affect the advertisement and circulation bases of their newspapers though in differing dimensions and to a very great extent. Their responses were shared between advertisement revenue being affected 'very much' (61.5 percent) and 'fairly much' (38.5 percent). It is necessary to note here that this effect has been more negative than positive on traditional newspaper circulation, which is seen in only 44.7 percent of the audience members 'strongly' agreeing or just agreeing that new media usage and penetration have 'positively' impacted the audience of traditional print media.

In all, though 84.6 percent of the media manager agreed that their newspapers were threatened by the penetrating presence of the new media and 53.8 percent believed that traditional media might outlive new media, it should be noted that to predict the future of the new media is dangerous as the spiral growth is a function of several isolated individuals under a platform trying to harness the potentials of the carrier. Mass media news outlets are struggling with changing gate-keeping standards due to demands for interactive content produced by the audiences themselves (Bennett, 2003). The traditional Nigerian newspapers, as shown in the study, are trying to contend with these demands by diversifying into online publication.

*RQ : What constitute the distinctions and complementarities between online and traditional (print) media?*

In exploring the distinctions and complementarities between online newspapers and their mainstream counterparts, one must understand the technical distinctions between these various media forms (Brydon, 2011). Fortunati (2005), in an earlier description of this process of complementarity or mutual convergence, had emphasised the parallel tendencies of what he referred to as ‘mediatization’ of the internet and the ‘internetization’ of the mass media.

As confirmed in this study, the mainstream mass media are typically highly centralised, require significant investment and resources and can be heavily influenced by governments through various mechanisms and forms of control (Banerjee, 2008). The new media, represented here by the online newspapers, have radically different diatribes offering use for all forms of communications. They are also extremely de-centralised, require very low investment, provide greater interactivity and public participation and are much more difficult to control (Banerjee, 2008). This scenario has opened the gain-door of popularity and acceptance which has shifted focus from the conventional media stream. Creating media content is now a priority for individuals rather than the exclusive preserve of the traditional mass media (Rosenstiel, 2005). In order to continue remaining in business in Nigeria, the newspapers need to do a lot more than they hitherto had been doing. In this wise, the editor-respondents in this study reveal some approaches they have adopted, which include improving on the attractiveness of their production; engaging good writers as columnists to attract more readers; expanding their circulation network; having an online version for their newspapers; and working harder to improve their advertisement base.

The new digital media have opened up a whole lot of activities for both producers and receivers of communication contents in Nigeria; helping to define communication as sharing process in the real context of it. As experiments with global citizenship go forward, the empowerment offered by distributed, networked digital communication may become more widely shared. Does this, therefore, warrant an adjustment to media hegemony theories?

Responses of the Nigerian newspapers’ audience members as shown in *Table 1* provide the needed answers to this question. Majority of the respondents agree that online newspapers do positively impact the quality of production, quality of news, sustainability, credibility, comprehension of news, and economic concerns of the traditional newspapers, while the traditional newspapers’ acceptance, distribution, and readership are negatively affected. This is possible because though there is, technologically, a clear distinction between online

and traditional newspapers, both work to complement each other with the traditional print media providing the acceptance and credibility for the business while the digital media make up for the reach-out, sustainability and economic gains required.

Also, as explained by the media manager-respondents, the internet has made possible online publication and sustainability of newspapers at lower cost and under a less controlled media environment with less demanding annual licensing scheme. This has, therefore, made some people to dub the new media, represented here by online newspapers, as the mainstream media. The comments of Syed Hamid Albar, a former member of the Dewan Rakyat and Malaysian Home Minister, in this direction is noteworthy where he stated that the internet/digital media cannot be called an 'alternative media' anymore as it is a more popular medium than the traditional mainstream media in Malaysia: 'I think we have to call the alternative media the mainstream' (*Straits Times*, October 22, 2008). As seen in the outcome of this study, this comment fits the situation in Nigeria as well.

## **Conclusion and the way forward**

Change has swept through the media environment and the conventional media should adapt to the change so as to keep fitting in as canvassed by mediamorphosis and medium theory. Change is propelled by technology and carried by adaptation, and most times, these technologies release harsh propane on the older formats, and attack the very essence of what was, to create what is. Some observers think that conventional media managers should do some serious soul-searching and accurately feel the pulse of the change agent in order to stay relevant (Yapp, 2008), by not just fighting the new, but seeking mutual grounds that would better the old, and keep the new in track. The new digital media have come to stay, and their penetration is challenging every sector of society, especially with the normal approach to life. Traditional newspapers may sound their own death knell if they remain rigid to change.

The credibility of the new media continue to soar by the day especially with more sectors embracing it strongly, hence the print media should not lag. Perhaps among the reasons new media appear to gradually be gaining more credibility are the perceptions that the conventional mainstream media are government- and institutionally-controlled, which limit the essence of voice. The fact that we are increasingly living in an era of media convergence, distinctions among traditional mainstream mass media and the new media such as the internet are getting more and more blurred (Banerjee, 2008). Despite these distinctions,

there are still complementarities between the new media and conventional print media. They will continue to coexist and reinforce each other in Nigeria for now, but the future is not guaranteed.

However, in spite of the pervasiveness of new media in Nigeria, the newspaper is still a more trusted medium of communication. This is premised on the observed tendency of new media in Nigeria to be extremely sensational, propagandistic, and full of fake and outright false information.

The way forward for mainstream newspapers as well as other conventional print media would be, first of all, to improve their credibility since most people see them as a follow-up of the online version. At other times, they are viewed as propaganda organs of their promoters and/or owners. Gilbert (2002) observes that, first and foremost, newspapers should separate their news venture and their core business, the news venture being the online digital newspapers and their core business being their already existing newspaper business. These separate sites dedicated to only online newspapers will be successful in building new markets with new sources of revenue.

The way out for newspapers and other media will always be on the revenue side, creating new ideas, creating new value propositions, and creating new ways to engage with customers. In other words, newspapers could work with search engines and Internet Service Providers to provide and include in the ISPs' package access to digital newspapers. Newspapers could also charge a subscription fee for their online version where, upon payment of the fee, a password is given to the subscribers. Online presence as well as print version of the newspaper should run side by side.

Equally, newspapers in Nigeria should also consider exploring free circulation, as some of their counterparts across the globe are doing, which makes them purely advertising-based. This will attract younger readers who are not willing to pay for newspapers and have thus been moving to free or less expensive, more advertising-based circulations. The media managers may have argued that the traditional newspapers are going nowhere soon, but the audience think that they are gone as majority of them rarely mention or talk about traditional print title. These perspectives provide grave implications for mediamorphosis and denouement of an age-long tradition.

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