Russian media generation of the "digital borderline": Theoretical reflection and empirical verification[1]

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Abstract

This study verifies the authors' sociocultural concept of media generations. This concept helps to identify media generations in accordance with significant socio-political and cultural events taking place along with the technological development of the media industry, according to K. Mannheim; and behavioral patterns, according to X. Becker. This study uses a sample of 30 respondents interviewed during a series of in-depth interviews. The results showed that the most significant characteristic of this Russian generation is so-called ambivalent Soviet and Russian identity. The socio-economic transformations of the 1990s and the ubiquitous spread of the Internet and information technologies, which led to the 'digital lifestyle', played a big role during the formative period of the generational group. Being adherents of the analogue television in childhood and adolescence, representatives of the media generation, with some effort, have mastered digital technologies and are actively using many of the achievements of digitalization, including social networks. Although media practices of urban and rural informants differ in some ways, they still show significant conceptual similarities that allow us to classify the respondents as belonging to the same generation of media communicators - the "digital borderline" generation.

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Keywords

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Introduction

Digitalization has led to the changes we observe in our everyday life: virtualization of communication, mediatization of life practices, the development of the digital media industry, the rise of programmable media and, accordingly, the transformation of media consumption. One of the most important changes is the transition from analogue to the digital mode of production and broadcasting. Until the 1980s, the global media industry predominantly relied on the analogue broadcasting models. Radio and television used an analogue (wave) method of signal transmission, having such characteristics as continuity, duration, and strength, while limiting the quality, quantity, and security of information transmission.

The Internet first appeared in the USSR in August 1990. The spread of the Internet and digital technologies in Russian media practice proceeded gradually and regionally rather unevenly. Undoubtedly, this influenced the specifics of the development of the Russian media industry: the media slowly, but surely switched to the digital format of production and distribution to meet the requirements of the time and maintain competitive attractiveness. At the same time, not all readers, listeners, and viewers of traditional (analogue) mass media mastered information technologies and preferred digital versions of mass media. Usually, this is the older age group, because "Adolescents are widely assumed to adopt 'the spirit of the age,' whereas adults are expected to persist in their previously acquired attitudes and behavioral patterns" (Van den Broek, 1999: 503).

A significant part of the users/audience of the media, having spent their childhood and adolescence in the so-called 'analogue' period of their upbringing, and their youth / primary professional socialization years during the development of the Internet, still predominantly mastered the digital environment. In addition, several generations of media users have grown up, who have been defined as 'digital' all over the world (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2008; Mccrindle, 2014; Soldatova, Rasskazova, & Nestik, 2017; Scholz, & Renning, 2019; Kulchitskaya, Vartanov, Dunas, Salikhova et al, 2019; Dunas, Vartanov, Kulchitskaya et al., 2019; Dunas, & Vartanov, 2020; Vartanov et al., 2021; Solomeina, & Sumskaya, 2022). In this vein, we can single out not only two major generational clusters – 'analogue' and 'digital', but also an intermediate, 'echo-media generation', or 'generation of digital borderline', transitional bet

ween 'analogue' and 'digital', attention to which not only in Russian, but also in foreign studies, is undeservedly small.

Understanding the essential characteristics of this media generation is significant both for the modern media industry and for the organization of intergenerational institutional media communication. This is crucial because in the methodological paradigm of media studies in the post-Soviet period, the media audience has been the subject of the scholarly analysis, with the audience being identified as an active subject of communication processes (Vartanova, 2019: 16). The purpose of this study was to identify the essential characteristics of the representatives of the "digital borderline" media generation, including the use of digital media.

Theoretical background

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research is the provisions of the sociological, historical-cultural, anthropological and media approaches, applicable to generational topics. The importance of referring to the concept of generations is beyond doubt. Gasset wrote that the generation "is the most important concept in history" (Gasset, 1933: 15), and Shanin recognized the generation as the most important element of social division (Shanin, 2005: 8). Finally, Mannheim, the founder of the generational theory, recognized the phenomenon of generations as one of the main genetic factors in the dynamics of historical development (Mannheim, 2000: 55).

The Oxford Dictionary (2021) helps us understand a generation as "all the people born and living at about the same time, regarded collectively. In later use frequently with implication of shared cultural and social attitudes". For Mannheim, the central aspect of understanding "generation" and differentiating between generations is the concept of close meaning: "The fact that people are born at the same time, or that their youth, adulthood, and old age coincide, does not in itself involve similarity of location; what does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data, etc., and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly 'stratified' consciousness" (Mannheim, 1952: 297). Mannheim argues that an identical experience gained during the formative period of personality development contributes to the formation of a joint unique worldview, which can be a powerful force in people's lives, and "...feeling for the unity of a generation is consciously developed into a basis for the formation of concrete groups" (Mannheim, 1969: 165).

The generation theory of W. Strauss and N. Howe is currently popular all around the globe, which continues the development of American scientific

tradition in the study of generational communities based on historical and anthropological approaches. According to the scientists, values of generations are formed under the influence of four factors: social events, practices of upbringing and education, media and visual environment (Howe, & Strauss, 1991). Although there is a considerable interest in this generational paradigm around the world, it has been heavily criticized by the academic community. Specifically, American academics have criticized the theory for its deterministic approach, lack of empirical evidence (Aanestad, 1993; Giancola, 2006), stereotyping (Hoover, 2009), comparing it to a newspaper horoscope and considering it an example of pseudoscience (Lind, 1997). Nakai recognizes generation as a social construct and believes that "inapplicability of American classification of generations in other cultures seems reasonable, as every society has unique historical experience and emerging generations may well differ in age ranges compared to the claimed universality of W. Strauss and N. Howe classification" (Nakai,2015: 333).

Russian researchers in sociology, anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies have warned against the danger of oversimplifying generation from this theory, the unreasonableness of its use in the social sciences (in particular, practical and organizational psychology, applied anthropology) (Petrushikhina, 2016), the inexpediency of its application in distinguishing Russian generational communities shaped by significant historical events (since, for example, the American birth rate surge that led to the formation of the baby boomer generation cohort in relation to the similar period in Russian history, after the Great Patriotic War (World War II) bears no distant resemblance to events taking place in the USA) (Miroshkina, 2017: 186); they criticize it for being too philological and artistic, calling the generation theory of W. Strauss and N. Howe pop-culture. Strauss and N. Howe's pop-culture theory for its lack of evidence-based empirical data, liberal appropriation of archetype characteristics, and inapplicability to the socio-historical context of our country's development (Popov, 2018: 312).

Nevertheless, we cannot deny the phenomenal success of this theory worldwide. Moreover, since the emergence of this theory scientists from different countries have intensified efforts to develop their own country-related generational concepts. In this situation, the current excessive popularity of N. Howe and W. Strauss' generation theory can be explained by the supposed similarity of modern younger generations worldwide as a result of globalization and use of identical information technologies. We believe that the use of this theory for pre-Internet-era generations can and should be implemented with

caution in different historical and social and cultural generational communities, while application of the theory to generations of the digital age is quite acceptable, as it can provide some insights into the trends of formation and development of these generational cohorts.

Differences in values due to differences in history and culture are shown by the most recent results of the World Values Survey. For example, the value of work is very important to Russian informants at 41%, and only 11.4% for American peers; the value of independence is valued by Russians at 36.1%, and by American youth at 56.7%, but the value of obedience is significant for Russians at 17.6%, and 22.4% for American peers. Willingness to fight for their country is valued by Russians at 70.1%, and by US peers at 39.6%. Finally, Russian youth estimate the importance of technology development at 76.4%, while US youth estimate it at 49.5% (Haerpfer, Inglehart et al, 2021). All of this suggests significant differences between Russian and American youth due to a variety of factors. However, there is an undeniable unifying factor: the Internet is the predominant news acquisition platform for Russian and US respondents, all of whom use or have used transnational media until recently, and social media is the main source of daily news. That is the reason why N. Howe and W. Strauss' generational theory can be applied to the youngest cohorts of the digital generation in a cross-country perspective.

We believe it is possible to consider generations from the perspective of a media approach related to the development of media and technology, including digital technology. Being instrumentally specialized, the media approach allows us to explore the problematic fields of media in interaction with the audience, so identifying the essential features and typological characteristics of media generations can make a significant contribution to the development of communication between the journalistic community and the generational audience groups of media. In our view, a well-known work of the Canadian cultural scientist and philologist Marshall McLuhan on the importance of media in human life, their centripetal role in the development of communication and their influence on civilizational transformations and the formation of technogenic civilizations can be a point of reference in formulating ideas about media generations.

According to the scholar, the media or the means of communication are technological extensions of the human being, and the form of the media is more important than the content being broadcast (The Medium is the Message). That is, the medium on which the content is transmitted, in other words, becomes the message itself, and this form is crucial in the transformation of consciousness (McLuhan, 1962, 2003:25). The German media theorist Norbert

Bolz, elaborating on Marshall McLuhan's ideas pointed out the significance of generational differences due to the media: "Which generation one belongs to today depends on which information culture one belongs to. There are no common media now. Different value systems serve different media. Different information worlds are separated by demographic, political and cultural boundaries" (Bolz, 2011: 15).

Digitalization has once again changed the means of communication, including the media. The result of digitalization is a greater compression and condensation of information, the possibility of non-linear use, the almost instantaneous availability of anything and everything, the possibility of easy copying and dissemination, etc. Therefore, in today's reality, digitalization as a result of the development and transformation of the electrical and the electronic has led to even greater human empowerment, which has given rise to a new way of life – the digital one in which the virtual and the real worlds not only coexist but also mutually influence behavioral patterns.

All the above-mentioned judgments about means of communication, their distribution, duration of use and leading to cardinal successive transformations of individuals and society show that it is possible to single out the phenomenon of media generation, whose essential nature is manifested in the priority sustainable use of one or another media in a particular historical time, with the level of penetration of communication and media being linked to the prevailing type of culture in a particular society.

In this study we adopt the understanding of a holistic media generation as a set of media audiences united by a familiar engaging information and communications technology environment with similarly enduring media preferences and media practices. The formation of the media generation and the formation of behavioral patterns is influenced by formative experiences (a period of socialization), leading to solidarity and a shared destiny of the generation in a particular socio-cultural reality. Conceptualization and the study of media generations have been previously successfully implemented in the large-scale international project Global Media Generations 2000. In the course of this research project three media generations (the "press/radio" generation, the "black and white television" generation, the Internet generation) were identified on the basis of qualitative research methods allowing for the reproduction of subjective points of view and a cross-national analysis was made in 12 countries (Volkmer, 2000).

Volkmer (2003) concludes that each generation perceives and constructs a "different" media world: "Media events are stored away in our brain along

with all the other events happening in our lives and years later our memories of them are only selective and merged with personal life experiences. Apparently, the mass media form mutual worlds of knowledge for generations of people" (Volkmer, 2003: 302). Moreover, "in the youngest generation the media shape 'worldviews', not only locally and globally, but also in terms of 'analogue' and 'digital' knowledge. Whereas the oldest generations revealed 'analogue' knowledge, defined their worldviews according to national and cultural specifics, and described media-related memories in great details. The youngest generation shares a great variety of superficial media-related knowledge, when asked to describe this in-depth, they hardly know contexts and facts and use a somewhat 'universal' code" (Volkmer, 2003: 16). This is due to the fact that each generation has its own, so to speak, 'native media', which are the most understandable to use, have shaped the media consciousness of the media audience and evoke the greatest emotional attachment to them (Bolin, 2014: 111).

As for the definition of the boundaries of generations and the formative experience of the individual, at present, the opinions of scientists differ significantly. We agree with the assertion by Semenova (2001) that the 'step' of a generation makes it possible to determine the relationship between the past state of society and its movement towards the future. According to the Russian psychologist Rean (2016), the process of forming the values of generations is considered complete when people reach adolescence (12 years old) and formulate their own individual views of the world. American scientist Nakai believes that "those who were in their teens to early 20s at the time of event may identify it as more influential in their life" (Nakai, 2015: 334).

At the same time, Becker still refers to the years of puberty and adolescence as the most important formative period. In his opinion, "New knowledge and skills are acquired relatively easily during this period, such as working with technical innovations. The stronger the influence of technical innovations at this stage, the better they can be applied in a longer life. This formative period ends at about the 30th year of life. From this moment on, human thought becomes more and more limited by biological and psychological processes" (Becker, 2008: 207). However, Parsons called adolescence a part of the life cycle during which "there first begins to develop a set of patterns and behavior phenomena which involve a highly complex combination of age grading and sex role elements" (Parsons, 1964: 91).

In this case, we agree with the Russian sociologist Radaev, who, in his large-scale population studies, concluded that in the context of recent Russian reality,

"the period when representatives of generations entered adulthood, considering the period of "growing up" (emerging adulthood), or formative years, which is determined by the approximate age interval from 17 to 25 years old", keeping in mind that adolescence is still between 15 and 17 years old (Radaev, 2000: 32).

Mannheim considered it important not only to study the reproduction of generations, to establish their "rhythms", but to study, conditionally speaking, "factories of social processes" localized in a particular cultural-historical time. "Concept of a generational location can be re-defined as a generational 'field', a field defined by the emergence of a changed relationship between past and present social spaces. Generational style or consciousness can be treated, in like fashion, as generational 'habitus' – dispositions that generate and structure individual practices and which emerge and are defined by the forces operating in a particular generational field" (Gilleard, 2004: 114). "A habitus circumscribes a set of dispositions to act and an evaluation frame of perception which are at once historical, social and individual" (Eyerman, & Turner, 1998: 99).

In the context of the historical and cultural approach, the generation is studied in organic unity with the historical era, which, as a 'neutral nerve', forms the historical memory of generations and determines the essence of their change, reflecting the diachronic aspect of social life (Alwin, & McCammon, 2003). That is why we agree with Semenova stating that "a historical event, as a fact that had the greatest symbolic influence on the fate of a social community, that determined the 'spirit of the times', can be considered a more significant starting point in defining the boundaries of generations, realizing, however, that such boundaries are always are quite conventional, as are the types that form them" (Semenova, 2001: 215). Significant cultural and historical events, transformations of society, lived by a person in the formative period, have an impact on the emergence of 'generational phenomena'. "How people think about the social world around them may depend as much on what was happening in the world at the time they were growing up as it does on what is happening in the present. The reference to this as a generational phenomenon is probably derived from the presumption that historically based influences shaped the development of all or most people growing up at a particular time and that there is nearly always a shared cultural identity that sets them apart from the parental generation" (Alwin, & McCammon, 2003: 24).

From the standpoint of the anthropological approach, the concept of a life path is built into a certain generation not as a simple set of life events, but as a structured phenomenon that spreads to all spheres of life. Therefore, the life path and biography become a certain eventful filling of the generation. Author of

his own concept of generations, McCrindle, summarizes, in this regard: "While people of various ages are living through the same events, the age at which one is exposed to a political shift, technological change or social marker determines how embedded it becomes in one's psyche and worldview" (McCrindle, 2014: 3).

The simultaneous involvement of a generation in the historical context, but a different degree of involvement, presupposes a different impact of these events on the life of a particular person. The presence of an integrative factor of involvement in events, but at the same time the differences according to other criteria, makes it possible to identify generational groups united in a common generational field with existing individual biographical differences in life. The generation field can be concretized and structured using the generation formation model proposed by Becker. By a pattern or model of a generation, he understands a complex of characteristics at the systemic (size and composition, general culture, organization) and individual level (biographical characteristics, value orientations and behavioral patterns) (Becker, 1992: 222).

Based on the criteria of Becker's generational patterns in the framework of this study, we distinguish the following five criteria for identifying media generations:

- system characteristics (size and composition of the generation, generational alliances);
- social and technological contexts of the formation of the media generation in Russia (the most important events that took place during their formative period);
- features of socialization, social opportunities during the period of formation that influenced the life path, value orientations and behavioral patterns;
- the state of the media during the formative period;
- the usual practices of media consumption, including in the digital environment.

Media generation of "digital borderline" in Russia: theoretical reflection

For the first time, the generation of the 'digital borderline' was identified in our concept of media generations, within which 'analogue', 'digital' and 'echo generation' are distinguished as intermediate (Sumskaya, & Sverdlov, 2019; Solomko, Emchenko et al., 2022: 155). The program for the study of media generations was set out in our different study (Simons et al., 2021). According to

Nikonov (2021), "representatives of borderline generations possessing the values of two generations, at the junction of which they were born, have competitive advantages due to their ability to build relationships and communicate more effectively".

Mannheim identifies transitional generations as "intermediary", Becker as "borderline". Codrington defines representatives of such generations as "cusper" (edge, at the junction) and specifies that while being born at the end of one generation and at the beginning of another, they combine the main characteristics of neighboring generations, but do not look like their typical representatives (Codrington, 2008: 8). Mitchell metaphorically calls cuspers "generational swings" (Mitchell, 2003), Smit uses the term "lodgers", focusing on the opposition "their own-others" in the context of matching biographical time and identity of typical generation representatives (Smit, 2017). According to the researchers, representatives of such transitional generations are intermediaries, connecting adjacent ones like bridges or glue.

The concept of 'electronic frontier' was introduced by Reingold (1993). This means a transition point, in a sense a milestone, a shift from pre-Internet communication to the widespread use of the Internet and digital information technologies, which led to the network era of communication within virtual communities.

We prefer to use the term "digital borderline" as a more accurate one, applying it to generations of media, since in a broad sense "digital" is a continuation of electronic, and the opposition "analog-digital" to the greatest extent reflects the essence of the transition from wave to digital transmission of information. Generations of the digital age tend to shift the socialization period due to an increase in adolescence. Since the media generation of the "digital borderline" is intermediate between 'analogue' and 'digital', we define its formative period in the 11-27 age range.

The most significant characteristics of this media generation in the Russian context are the following ones:

1. *System characteristics of the media generation.*

This generational group is described most accurately by a Russian sociologist Anipkin: "The originality of [this generation], firstly, manifests itself demographically (there are few representatives of this generation in quantitative terms), and secondly, ideologically (this is a 'perestroika' generation with an ambivalent Soviet and Russian identity). "The locus of the core of the last Soviet generation should be shifted to the range of 1971-1973 years of birth" (Anipkin, 2018: 294).

2. *Social and technological contexts of the formation of the media generation in Russia.* There are two important events spanning time that characterize this generation. The first one was the collapse of the USSR changed by the economic policy, perestroika. The formation of this generation was preceded by a complete destruction of the scale of values and ideals formed under socialism. Anipkin emphasizes that this generation "the children of perestroika" found themselves at the turning point of two eras, having finished school and entered universities/colleges in Soviet times, but whose active work biography began in the mid-1990s" [during the reform time, focused on the formation of a market economy, the onset of capitalism – from the author] (ibid: 292). According to Shamis, this is "a strong generation that broke through the changes of the 1990s and 2000s. It has a special uniqueness, because it turned out to be at the turn of the epochs" (Shamis, 2019).

The second was the development of the Internet and the first experiences of digitalization of all spheres of life. Castells states: "In the 1990s, the Internet became the backbone of global computer communication. In the mid-1990s, it connected 44,000 computer networks and about 3.2 million host computers worldwide, with approximately 25 million users and rapidly expanding" (Castells, 2000: 330). By the end of the 1990s, it became obvious that ubiquitous computerization makes changes in all spheres of human life, thus forming a network society. In those years, the development of digital technologies turned computers into universal carriers of culture, and media into new media, justifying the transformation of previous meanings and cultures. Thus, according to Shestakova: "This generation in Russia has felt the whole drama of life, because all the shocks of the new reality ricocheted against them, making it not just sag, but radically rebuild the entire foundation of human existence. A generation that turned out to be beyond the turning point when scientific and technological achievements transforming the life of a person and society appear many times during the life of one generation" (Shestakova, 2017: 48).

3. *Features of socialization, social opportunities during the period of formation that influenced the life path, value orientations and behavioral patterns.*

Childhood and adolescence spent during the stable Soviet era with the verified ideological support of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and youth, including the first years of professional socialization in the reformation period of Perestroika had a significant impact on the value orientations and behavioral patterns of this generation. Let us turn again to the apt statement of Anipkin: "They had expectations and hopes that never came true. They planned some career paths, but completely different ones were in demand. Their

personal future, like the future of the country, turned out to be different from what they had seen then" (Anipkin, 2018: 294). According to Levada, "this is the first generation of pragmatists in a century. They are mainly committed to the existing market and limited political diversity, but not because they preferred them to some other order, but simply because they saw nothing else" (Levada, 2001:14).

   4.   *The state of the media in the formative period*.

Radical changes in the socio-economic development of the country, of course, led to significant changes in the media. Economic transformations in Russia, the powerful development of the information space and the formation of the information market, the tremendous speed of technological digital innovations have opened opportunities and prospects in the field of electronic media. The commercialization of the media is one of the most significant vectors of development of the media of that period. The transformation of the Soviet production model was the result of a significant reduction in government funding and was based on the introduction of the advertising business model into the practice of the Russian media industry (Vartanova, 2020). According to Kirshin, the editor of the regional newspaper *Chelyabinsk Rabochy*, "the change in the social system naturally led to a change in the ideological base and professional guidelines of our journalists" (Kirshin, 2004: 14).

Among general trends in the development of the media of that period the adoption of the first law on the media in the history of the Russian Federation, in many respects the independence of the founders of the media from the state, and therefore an atmosphere of free thought, pluralism of opinions, and rare availability of political information should be mentioned. In those years, there was a clear tendency of a rapid growth in the number of newspapers and magazines (both socio-political, advertising, and entertainment "tabloid", including "erotic", etc.), because periodicals were read by almost 90% of the country's population, the most powerful media holding was formed, VGTRK (All-Russian State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company), which still holds the leading position in the Russian media industry. At the same time, a significant decrease in circulation of newspapers and magazines was noted, which was due to the need for independent funding by the editorial teams of the media outlets, and a decrease in the purchasing power of Russians in the context of the collapse of the ruble and hyperinflation.

The difficult and sometimes contradictory process of transformation and development of the media during this period was marked by new opportunities in the development of the industry, capitalization of production, a more

meaningful understanding of the audience's demands in the conditions of the emerging market economy, redistribution of the infrastructure of the media industry, the introduction of new forms and methods of media activity in connection with the development of information technologies opportunities for digitalization.

It is important to note another phenomenon that was a consequence of the development of the Internet the emergence of social networks. Their distribution and transformation took place in several waves: from simple and local social network resources of the first wave in the 1990-2000s (Livejournal, LunarStorm, Cyworld), the emergence of specialized social networks of the first five-year plan of the new millennium (MySpace, Professionali.ru) during the second wave, to the social networks today, primarily focused on communication and self-expression, including Russian networks VKontakte and Odnoklassniki (2006) in the third wave.

5. *Habitual media consumption practices, including in the digital environment.*

This media generation grew up when television (first black and white, and then color) was present in every family, in every household. The parents of the younger generation of the "digital borderline" ardent adherents of the print media and the few state TV channels. Therefore, watching TV for this generation has become a family-forming, such a cozy holiday of education, enlightenment and culture, a kind of admission into adulthood.

Today, representatives of the "digital borderline" generation prefer 'background' television viewing and radio listening to a greater extent, because the media have become a kind of "audio-visual environment with which we constantly and automatically interact. Very often television first of all means the 'presence' of other people in the house a precious property in a society where more and more people live alone. Usually listening to radio broadcasts and watching television programs "are combined with homework, common meals, social interactions. It is an almost constantly present background, the fabric of them life.

According to Shestakova, this generation, knowing the era of slow changes and pre-digital existence, nevertheless "jumped into the outgoing tram and managed to keep up with all the innovations. Representatives of generation X are active users of digital technologies, but they are not yet a 'digital' generation" (Shestakova, 2017: 50). They know and remember about the possibility of writing with a pen and compare it with working on a computer, testing all the possibilities. There is an element of pleasure for these people in the new info

communication reality: computers, smartphones, Skype, and Internet. "They are delighted, seeing all these miracles taking place, and cannot enjoy all the opportunities that have opened up" (ibid).

The results of a study led by Radaev show that the share of users of personal computers of this media generation in 2000-2018 increased from 45 to 77%. "In general, in 2007-2018. The share of Internet users in the reform generation has grown from 54 to 84%. Share of smartphone owners in 2010-2018 increased from 3 to 60%. By 2018, the share of social media users in this generation was 62% (for example, compared with American peers of generation X - 75%), while women used social networks much more actively than men (70 and 52%, respectively). Actually, these generations began to use social networks at the age of 34-36" (Radaev, 2020: 42).

In 2016, representatives of the "digital borderline" generation in rural areas access the Internet via mobile devices only 34%, and only 56% are involved in social networks (Radaev, 2019). Representatives of this generation in social networks are looking for news about domestic politics, economics and the environment (Gudkov, Zorkaya, Kochergina, Pipiya, & Ryseva, 2020: 88). However, already in 2020, the most significant increase in the use of social networks occurs in the age group 40-54 years old (Volkov, & Goncharov, 2020: 144).

At the same time, the Russian research group of the Internet Development Fund nevertheless concludes that "the general pattern of digital competence since 2013 among parents [representatives of the generation of the "electronic borderline"- from the authors] has remained unchanged: with a general high level of knowledge, they have there is a certain lack of skills and responsibility and a pronounced unwillingness to improve their knowledge of the Internet" (Issledovaniye…).

Research methodology and characteristics of the group of respondents for empirical research

Based on an analysis of the dates of the emergence and period of digital media technologies in Russia, the period of their adoption by the Russian media industry and our application of our knowledge of the formative period of the media generation, 30 informants born in 1964-1983 were invited to participate in this study. Considering the importance of regional factors for the Russian media industry, understanding the uneven development of territories in the context of "centre-periphery" (Gladkova, Vartanova, & Ragnedda, 2020; Zubarevich, 2017), the group of informants included representatives of the media generation living in large metropolitan areas of Russia and peripheral

territories. In addition, the survey involved respondents who moved from provincial territories to megacities during the formative period.

In this situation, we focused on the statement of Radaev (2019): "within one generation, significant differences in behavioural practices generated by the characteristics of the external environment persist. In less developed communities (for example, in rural ones), the environment is more conservative and traditionalist, there are fewer changes and at a slower rate". In addition, M. Anikina's conclusion about the role of settlement type as a more or less favourable environment for the formation of a media culture of media users is important for us (Anikina, 2017:56).

In our work, following Radaev and Anikina, we will proceed from the assumption that new behavioural practices within one generation are distributed unevenly and differences in the level of development of territories/settlements may be superimposed on generational differences.

The work carried out, in fact, was a qualitative non-representative study, the results of which do not allow a statistically accurate assessment of the entire generational population. However, the selection of respondents was carried out in accordance with the requirements for a distinctive sample, the concept of data saturation or data redundancy, "selected by representativeness of concepts" (Strauss, & Corbin, 2001:158).

Therefore, we consider the results obtained to be comparable, allowing us to discursively formulate a certain framework that reflects the essential characteristics of the "digital borderline" as generations in Russia and draw conclusions based on the general logic of the informants' narrative.

So, the primary sample of respondents included 10 people who were born and live in the Russian province, 10 were born in the provinces, moved to a metropolis, 10 were the indigenous inhabitants of the metropolis).

At the first stage of the study, all participants were asked to answer two questions:

1. What Russian events during your growing up years left the greatest mark on your life?

2. At what age did you learn to use a computer and the first office programs? What is the reason for the need for this training/learning, how did it happen and how long did it take to form the skills of a confident user?

Thus, we tried to follow the technology of Semenova (2003: 219) and based on subjective indicators, that is, mentioning significant events that most closely resemble the idea of a generation to determine the approximate boundaries of the media generation.

At the second stage with 30 informants who showed the most "significant presence" markers of the digital borderline media generation, identified theoretically, and realizing that a certain density of empirical evidence has been achieved, in-depth interviews were conducted to identify and clarify events and facts modeling generations. Thus, the group of informants included 30 people (9 men, 23 women). 25 informants have higher education, 3 secondary, 2 secondary specialized. The sphere of employment includes: 7 representatives of the creative sphere; 6 representatives of private entrepreneurship; 5 representatives of science sphere; 3 representatives of primary and secondary education sphere; 3 representatives are self-employed; 2 representatives of municipal government; 1 representative is a housewife; 1 representative of the law sphere; 1 representative of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1 representative of the blue-collar occupations.

With this group, we proceeded to the empirical part of the study. The results, which will be described in the section below, showed that participants born in 1964 and 1983 identified the era of growing up with factors other than those that we identified theoretically and described in the structure of generational patterns. At the same time, most respondents named the factors that we formulated, which nevertheless confirmed the correctness of our reasoning.

Results

Firstly, the representatives of the digital borderline generation in this particular case include informants who were born between 1965 and 1982. Secondly, among the most significant events of the formative period that influenced the worldview and the life path, value orientations and behavioral patterns of the respondents is Perestroika (1985-1991) as a "sharp change in the course of the country's development", which causes an ambivalent attitude to what happened. On the one hand, these are negative memories of a "*dark, terrible time*" (food coupons, queues for groceries, the collapse of Yeltsin era, the destruction of the secondary education system, and on the other, pride in a country that has entered a new stage of development, the opening of interstate borders and the ability to travel around the world, access to the entire world heritage, holidays discos, understanding that "now we will be 100 times happier because we have the opportunity to achieve what we want." 25 participants out of 30 note the significance of this event, and there are still more negative memories than positive ones.

In addition, the Putsch and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 are also highly significant for the generation. Some of the respondents' recollections:

"*Fear, anxiety for the future*", "*The picture of the world collapsed, the unshakable collapsed*", "*The programmable future was gone*", "*I did not suspect that somewhere abroad there was another life altogether, but I had to learn about it. By the way, she turned out to be better than she thought*", "*admission to the pioneers did not happen, and it was so important for me*", "*I wrote an essay that I dream of joining the CPSU, which was read to all Komsomol members, and suddenly the CPSU was gone. The dream of several years has collapsed*", years of hunger, "delayed wages even in budgetary organizations") 12 of respondents note the significance of these events (negative evaluative vocabulary prevails).

Finally, the respondents consider the advent of the Internet and information technology to be an important milestone in their formative period. All 30 of the respondents received their first experience of acquaintance with a computer during their school years in computer science lessons, but this gave a minimal result. As a result, 28 of respondents now know how to use a computer, 7 respondents learned how to use it independently during their student years to prepare coursework and diplomas. The rest learned to use special computer literacy courses in the first years of their professional activity to fulfil professional tasks or to prepare dissertation research (4 people), to fulfil the need for computer games (1 person). 21 respondents learned to use within 2-3 months (simple office programs). For one respondent, "*a personal computer at home is an indicator of wealth and status*", therefore the respondent "*married the owner of a computer*".

When asked about the presence of a computer at home, the frequency and purpose of its use, the answers were received that all of respondents have at least one computer in the house, only 1 person does not use a computer at home. Half of all respondents use a computer at home every day, but if in the provinces this is 3 people, then in the metropolis it is 7 people, and the time of interaction with the computer is 8 hours a day or more. For 7 respondents, "the phone is my home computer, which is used for communication and messaging." For those who use a computer at home not every day, as a rule, they resort to it to work (perform professional functions), print something in case of urgent need, communication, shopping, searching, etc.

Thus, we have confirmed the significance of the Russian reform changes in the 1990s and the years of mastering information technologies, therefore, it seems, we can initially identify the respondents as representatives of the "digital borderline" generation and continue the study of the media activity of this media generation.

With regard to media consumption and media use practices, the situation is as follows.

Television viewing has a large role in the media practices overall (Lopes da Silva, 2020; Vikhrova et al, 2021) and specifically when it comes to digital borderline generation. The top five TV channels for the whole sample are: Russia 1 with 15 respondents; Channel One with – 14 people; Russia 24 with 7 respondents; TNT and STS with 6 respondents; Pyatnitsa and NTV with 4 respondents; and Karusel with 3 respondents.

There are differences in media consumption among provincial, urban and migrant audiences. In particular, for the provincial audience, Channel One remains the undisputed leader in television viewing. For other viewers in this sample of respondents this is Russia 1 and Russia 24. Residents of the provinces are more inclined to watch regional TV channels and channels such as Domashniy, Hunter and Fisherman, while the "migrant" audience is more inclined towards film channels such as Nashe Novoye Kino, Russkiy Roman, and others. Television viewers, natives of megacities, prefer business TV channels (e.g. RBC), Animal Planet (stopped broadcasting in Russia due to sanctions on 09.03.2022), RT (broadcasting is blocked throughout the European Union after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine); international TV channels CNN, BBC.

All respondents listen to Avtoradio, Russkoe Radio and Radio Dacha. But there are also clear differences. If in the provinces the group of leaders includes Radio Chanson, then native inhabitants of megapolises prefer such radio stations as Echo of Moscow (ceased operation as of 04.03.2021), Radio SI (Yekaterinburg), Radio Monte Carlo. The audience of "migrants" prefers radio stations such as Silver Rain, Na semi hills, Radio record, Business FM, Zvezda, Detskoye radio, Taxi FM, and online Radio 101.ru.

Traditional print media is hardly used by the digital borderline audience, except for provincial readers of municipal newspapers and mass papers such as Argumenty i Fakty.

However, digital media is actively used by the audience. All respondents are fans of Yandex services, so Yandex-news and Yandex-Dzen are a priority for them. Provincial readers turn to digital versions of the same municipal newspapers (e.g. Nyazepetrovskie Vesti, Satkinski Rabochy, Magnezitovets), mass papers (like Komsomolskaya Pravda) and quality publications (e.g. Kommersant) as well as numerous communities in social networks (for example, Podslushano social project, automobile and cookery forums). The migrant and native metropolitan audiences prefer online digital media projects and personal channels on YouTube.

Let us move on to diagnosing activity in social networks. 27 respondents are registered in various social networks. The rating of the importance / relevance of social networks for all respondents is:

1. VKontakte – 27 users.
2. Instagram* – 14 users.
3. Odnoklassniki – 12 users.
4. Facebook* – 10 users.
5. Telegram – 5 users.
6. Moi MIR – 2 users.
7. Professionali.ru, ResearchGate – 1 user.

It can be stated that the social network "My MIR" is used by some, but only by residents of the province. The importance of the social network "Odnoklassniki" is decreasing among the residents of the megalopolis compared to the residents of the provinces, and for the residents of the megalopolis, the social network Facebook* is becoming more and more important. The low level of use of the social network VKontakte by residents of the province is not confirmed by our research. On the contrary, we can attest to the popularity of this social network among the residents of the provinces both based on our research and on the basis of personal daily life observations, since one of the authors of this study is a typical representative "digital borderline". Non-indigenous residents of metropolitan areas are registered in greater numbers and on different social networks than indigenous residents of the province and metropolis.

Finally, the study revealed that the activity of the studied media generation in social media is more related to professional activity than to the territory of residence. It is perhaps important to mention another result of this study. 24 respondents indicated that they felt more comfortable writing with a ballpoint pen than typing on a computer. And 3 out of those often write with a pen due to the requirements of their profession. All provincial residents do not write notes on their phones, but 7 out of the metropolitan residents noted that they take notes on their iPhones and androids.

Thus, in our opinion, representatives of the media generation of the "digital borderline" managed to very successfully "immigrate" to the digital space and actively use the possibilities of digitalization and communication in the network media space. By using the media, they seem to be successfully fulfilling emerging needs. This finding seems to be in consonance with the results of another large-scale study carried out by scholars from Lomonosov Moscow State University,

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* Belongs to Meta company, banned on the territory of the Russian Federation.

which, based on a rethinking of the theory of use and satisfaction, concludes that media practices are social (Mediapotrebleniye, 2021). Finally, it also confirms the conclusion of Bourdieu that "habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation cause group to experience as natural and reasonable practices or aspirations" (Bourdieu, 1985: 78).

Conclusion

During the study, the media generation was studied from the standpoint of sociological, historical cultural, anthropological and media approaches, the essential characteristics of the media generation of the "digital borderline" were revealed based on generational patterns of the media generation using the conceptual framework of Becker. The most significant characteristic of this Russian generation is the ambivalent Soviet and Russian identity. The socio-economic transformations of the 1990s and the ubiquitous spread of the Internet and information technologies, which led to the 'digital lifestyle', had a colossal impact in the formative period of the generational group. Being adherents of analogue television in childhood and adolescence, representatives of the media generation, with some effort, have mastered digital technologies and are actively using many of the achievements of digitalization, including social networks.

The results showed that members of the "digital borderline" are both active viewers and listeners of traditional media, as well as users of digital media. Of course, the media practices of urban and rural informants differ, but nevertheless they have significant conceptual similarities that allow them to belong to the same media generation. User activity is mostly represented by the so-called 'immigrants' who, during the formative period, moved from provincial territories to megacities. It seems that this is the result of adaptation strategies, the need to be in demand in the new cultural and territorial environment.

Thus, the results of the study showed that theoretical ideas about the media generation of the "digital borderline" are supported by empirical data. We can state not only the transitional nature of the media generation from "analogue" to "digital", but also identify this media audience as a kind of frontier, but not in the Turnerian sense of the economic and geographical term, but in the cultural, temporal and virtual-spatial senses. Andreeva identifies the frontier as "the interpenetration and contradictory combination of different cultural and civilizational practices" (Andreeva, 2014: 12), calling cultural space a special communicative universe. The media generation of the "digital borderline" is then a frontier that accommodates ambivalent behavioural media patterns in media communication space, occupying an intermediate position between stable "analogue" and "digital" media generations.

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