'Digital youth' agenda in social media: The study of popular Russian platforms[1]

Denis Dunas[2],
Dariana Babyna,
Elena Salikhova,
Anna Gladkova
Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia

Abstract

This study pays close attention to the agenda of the most popular social media public pages among digital youth. It was revealed that the key ideas contained in community publications are in line with the contemporary Russian state ideological course and traditional culture. Among the values promoted by the communities, historical memory, family, patriotism, protection of the weak and economic growth are prominent. The study of the media geographic agenda shows that events taking place inside Russia are most widely covered, while international news is of interest to young people only if it is relevant to Russians. Culture and humor are among the most frequent topics of publications.

Keywords

Introduction

The media consumption practices of 'digital youth' are qualitatively different from the media patterns of older people. Moreover, they constantly demonstrate dynamics, which is explained the extensive development of digital media communication technologies and the determined approach of young people

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[2] **Corresponding author:**
Denis Dunas, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia.
Email: denisdunas@gmail.com

to their use. It is the representatives of young people, according to studies of audience behavior, who are often included in the group of 'innovators' of the conceptual model of diffusion of innovations.

Recent data from Mediascope (TV Index, Russia 100k+) show that traditional media are less attractive to schoolchildren and students than social media. Only 30% of young respondents turn to television, radio and print, while 70% do not use them at all. The functions of traditional media for this audience are performed by the Internet. At the same time, 99% of Russian 'zoomers' actively use messengers and social networks. Digital products of social media platforms, as well as official Internet sites, are singled out by representatives of young people aged 14 to 24 as priority news sources: according to Deloitte, 67% and 55%, respectively, turn to them, while only 34% turn to television. According to other data, more than 41% of Russian schoolchildren turn to social networks and Internet sites, while less than 7% turn to traditional media channels (Dunas (ed.), 2021: P. 120).

Spending a lot of time in social media, young people are obviously influenced by media socialization as a process of assimilation of socio-cultural norms and values from mediatized (personal and social) experience as a result of media consumption. The authors of this article proceed from the position of the ubiquity, large-scale and irreversibility of media socialization. The recognition that individuals can be socialized simultaneously by different social agents cannot but cause concern and raises research questions about the consequences of the conflict of norms and values between the social and mediatized worlds. Researchers talk about a 'co-constructed' world with the help of media, where the question of the well-being of a young person remains open (Anderson, & McCabe, 2012).

The information agenda of young people today is formed mainly by digital social media, in the space of which, in addition to texts professionally produced by journalistic editorial offices, fall the materials of bloggers, influencers and the audience itself, and not only traditional and registered federal state media services. As a result, not a single information picture of the country and the world is formed for all citizens, but a fragmented social reality determined by various factors. For each representative of the audience, their own agenda is constructed, which is created by 'non-news' non-institutionalized media, as a result of a combination of algorithmic technologies of social networks, microtargeting of the advertiser and personal preferences of the media consumer (Kampes, & Brentel, 2020; Vartanova et al., 2021; Vartanova, 2022; Dunas, & Salikhova, 2022). There is no longer a single agenda, and many agendas that

are being formed reinforce contradictions both in social communication and in society, not uniting it, but dividing it into many communities that support contradictory value and ethical norms.

The scientific problem is the unstudied agenda of social media (the agenda that is set not only by news media, but by all subjects of social media – bloggers, influencers, audience, traditional media, Internet communication in communities in general), aimed at representatives of 'digital youth', with the identification of frames as 'semantic framework', containing interpretation, their classification and verification based on the study of media practices of representatives of 'digital youth', with subsequent prediction of socio-cultural effects. A more widely posed scientific problem is the need to identify links and dependencies between the arrays of data on the media consumption of 'digital youth' (agenda, frames, confirmed or refuted effects of framing on the audience) and the directions of social development, the establishment of the main qualitative and a number of quantitative patterns between them.

An attempt of content-analytical research of the materials of the communities most in demand among young people on the VK platform was the purpose of this study. The object of the study were particularly popular communities on VK ('Rifmy i panchi' (Rhymes and punches), 'Ovsyanka, sir' (Porridge, Sir) and 'Leonardo Dayvinchik') and Telegram channels ('Topor 18+' (Axe 18+), 'NE MORGENSTERN' (Not Morgenstern) and 'Krovavaya Barynya' (Bloody Lady), uniting the largest number of representatives of the 'digital youth'. The subject of the study is community publications that represent a complex media text consisting of a set of elements: a title, news information, a photo, an editorial comment or opinion, emojis accompanying text, emojis and commentary discourse (if any) produced by the audience.

Setting agenda and the theory of framing:
Features of Russian approaches to studying

The theory of setting the agenda suggests that the media force citizens to consider some events more important than others, performing the function of social construction of reality. A conventionally unresolved issue in the academic community remains the differentiation of the types of agendas that are represented by political, media, public, interpersonal and personal agendas (Kazakov, 2014; McCombs, & Shaw, 1972). However, in the era of universal deep mediatization (Couldry, & Hepp, 2017) and the networking of society (Castells, 2000; Latour, 2020) the listed types hardly continue to remain relevant. It is probably more methodologically correct to talk about a mediatized agenda, in

which the issue of transit of social problems from the media to the public is removed, as well as about the personal-group refraction of its reproduction.

Setting the agenda is the most significant function of the media, to which an enormous number of both classical and modern works in Russia and abroad are devoted. It is obvious that in recent years, social media have begun to make considerable changes in setting the agenda, liberating and complementing the agendas of traditional media, even forming parallel agendas, expanding the range of news available to society. The next step after parallel agendas is to create alternative agendas. Parallel agendas need not necessarily be alternative. The alternative agenda appears mostly in non-professional political media, being in close connection with their audience communities. Non-professionals put forward issues relevant to the ideologically, politically and culturally close users in the public discourse. And these alternative agendas, which are being reinforced and supported by modern technical means, as a rule, fill those niches that often remain outside the media's attention (Vartanova, 2021a, 2021b).

In the Russian literature, the theory of setting the agenda has been thoroughly developed within the framework of a political approach (D'yakova, & Trakhtenberg, 1999, 2001a, 2001b). The peculiarity of this approach is the identification of correlations between information and socio-political agendas and an attempt to fit them into the Russian national context. Studies have shown that Russian journalists often use allegories, hidden meanings and subtexts that the audience willingly searches for and finds (D'yakova, 2002). Studying the behavior of Moscow viewers while watching information programs has revealed that the audience retained the Soviet habit of being wary, even suspicious of any political message, people tend to interpret texts, monitor internal inconsistencies and contradictions in them, as well as interpret in whose interests this or that information is being reported. In everything, even in the order of the reports in the program, viewers still successfully find a hidden agenda behind the explicit one (D'yakova, 2002). This feature of media communication, explained by the Soviet past, is confirmed by the study of Mickiewich (1999).

Problematizing the agenda, Russian media researchers seek to understand how the fragmentation of the media system can affect the overall information agenda, whether the time of traditional agenda-forming media has passed, how great is the role of social media in shaping the agenda (Nazarov, 2019). That is why in recent years the attention of researchers has been focused on the information agenda of social media, more precisely on the difference between the agendas in social and traditional media. Comparing agendas is becoming one of the most common types of media research. The result of such studies, as

a rule, is the conclusion that there is a significant difference in the content of the agendas. The content of social media is more in line with the public agenda than the content of traditional media (Kaminchenko, 2020). Public space can be divided into several communicative fields with narratives prevailing in them. The information agendas of various media, which differ in their content, confirm this idea (ibid).

Media texts and the media environment generated by them have systemic characteristics that have a complex impact on a person in the formation of identity, mentality, ideology, that is, they have a culture-forming potential. This approach gives grounds to consider the media environment and media consumption practices as a media culture, which in turn becomes an integral part of the modern culture of the society.

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Since social networks have become the leading channel of information for young people, the question becomes relevant: can social networks set the agenda in society and how strong can the influence of individual bloggers or channels be against the background of the general information flow? As the conducted research has shown, quirky news prevail among secondary topics. Professional journalists and media researchers usually perceive them as 'garbage' content. But quirky news is actively used by political technologists to create information noise that 'drowns out' socially significant topics (Garbuznyak, 2020).

Media culture is powered by polarized media discourses, which is why it is not a homogeneous and harmonized entity, but rather represents a confrontation of various strategies of mental and discursive activity of media communications, including manipulation strategies, hedonism, secularization or de-sacralization, and a strategy of cultural shock (Annenkova, 2012: 16).

In the digital environment, social media platforms have turned out to be a new public sphere, where civil dialogue takes place on all issues, including memories of the common past, its discussion and nostalgia for it. Social networks have a powerful potential to influence our collective and historical memory. Researchers distinguish between individual, collective, communicative, cultural, and historical memory. The transformation of the category of memory in the digital space is the subject of separate studies. Digital memory studies

reveal the place of digital tools, services and social platforms in the activation of the past and the construction of the present based on it. The central thesis in the theoretical understanding of memory is the understanding of it as a social construct: memory arises only in the process of socialization of an individual, is mediated by the social environment, the content of memory is determined by external, social and cultural frameworks (Assman, 2004). Today it has become possible to say that in the era of mediatization, memory is not only a social, but a media construct.

Empirical study

In the course of the research conducted by the content analysis method, the posts published during the week from June 20 to June 26, 2022 in three VK communities and three Telegram channels were studied, which showed the highest level of engagement and the share of representatives of 'digital youth' among subscribers. A random calendar week was chosen, which does not differ exponentially in resonant events and holidays. The sample included VK communities 'Rifmy i panchi', 'Leonardo Dayvinchik' and 'Ovsyanka, sir', Telegram channels 'Topor 18+', 'NE MORGENSTERN' and 'Krovavaya Barynya'. The listed communities can be classified as communities of general interest, publishing news about personalities popular among teenagers (bloggers, musicians, etc.) and memes. A total of 1,134 publications were studied.

The content analysis matrix consisted of three main components, allowing to identify the dominant news topics, key newsmakers and audience reactions; the objectivity of the content; and the frames presented (Dunas, Salikhova, Tolokonnikova, & Babyna, 2022). The headline complex of the publication was analyzed (the presence/absence of a title and subtitle, the type, tonality and format of the title), the type, tonality and subject/problematic of the publication, the basis of the information occasion, the scale of the event, the personality of the newsmaker, the type of information source, the presence of links and direct quotes, hashtags. It was revealed for whom the publication is valuable, the key heroes and antiheroes, values and anti-values, as well as the degree of polarization of opinions in the comments were determined.

Our attention was focused on the topics of publications that formed the agenda of the 'digital youth' in social media. We examined the publications for their subject matter, dividing them into the following categories: international, politics, economy, society, lifestyle, army, incidents, sports, humor/ entertainment, culture, medicine, religion, ecology, interpersonal/family/ gender and others.

Thus, the most common publications related to the topics of lifestyle, humor and entertainment, society and culture. 16% of all 1,134 publications studied were on the topic of lifestyle: consumer habits and fashion trends, which makes this topic the most popular among the rest. Humorous publications were also common: 14% of all publications were memes, jokes or news with a satirical component, 10% of the publications were on social and cultural topics.

It also seems important to us to pay attention to the geographical aspect of the agenda, to identify the geography of the published messages. The total media geography of the studied social media comprised 52 states, 3 interstate associations (NATO, CIS, European Union) and an abstract category of global news of a global nature, whose influence extends regardless of the borders of countries.

Publications of global significance concerned mainly lifestyle issues: current fashion trends, memes popular all over the world, dedicated to psychological problems, cultural events. Often in publications related to world issues, authors turned to the representation of nature and animals. The least publications about the world revealed the topic of politics, science, technology and food, and the problems of the army, religion and ecology were not reflected at all.

The activities of the European Union were presented differently. In this case, interest in the political and international agenda prevailed in the statements of political figures concerning Russia's actions in the international arena, as well as threats of new sanctions. This kind of news was presented in a negative tone, any anti-Russian statements were condemned or ridiculed. A similar situation is revealed when studying publications related to the activities of NATO.

During the week under study, Russia was represented most often and in a variety of ways, which is generally logical for Russian-speaking online communities in domestic social media. Informational occasions related to Russia mainly related to the topics of lifestyle, humor and entertainment, society and culture. A more detailed examination reveals the connection between the representation of social, political and lifestyle topics in publications containing reflection on changes in the life of Russians due to the withdrawal of a number of foreign brands from the Russian market, restrictions on movement, as well as in the understanding of such information cases in a humorous way. The cultural agenda is mainly related to the coverage of the release of new musical tracks by Russian artists popular among young people. It is noteworthy that the news of Russian culture dominated over similar news from other countries and even with global events from the world of cinema and music.

The internal Russian agenda in social media during the week under study was presented by 44 subjects and a separate category of all-Russian news that have a common importance for Russians or have no affiliation with a specific region. The most covered topics in this category were related to changes in the lifestyle of Russians, topics of humor and entertainment, as well as culture, describing both the upcoming premieres of new Russian films and music tracks, and the premieres of foreign cinema taking place in Russia. Public topics were also widely presented by publications about the decisions of top officials of the state that are significant for Russians, the impact of the current international and political situation on the state of socially important spheres and problems related to social injustice. Due to the specifics of such informational occasions, in addition to public topics, the authors covered economic and political issues in their publications.

Important in the week under study was the topic of death, the memory of celebrities who had passed away, in particular in the context of the death of singer Yuri Shatunov that occurred during the study period. In such publications, the author's intention was revealed to draw attention to the need to honor the memory of media heroes and cultural figures who influenced childhood – the time of a Russian's life, which is represented as the happiest.

It is also possible to consider the topic of interpersonal and family relations as an important part of the all-Russian agenda in social media. In this context, mainly reports and photos were published showing the happy family life of Russian celebrities popular with representatives of the 'digital youth', as well as news about interpersonal conflicts of celebrities and ordinary people who came to the attention of the media, but destructive manifestations of human communication were presented with negative connotation, condemnation, and sometimes ridicule. The dominant and approved by the community manifestations were precisely the pictures of friendship or a family with children.

Among the cities, Moscow had the widest thematic representation, which is explained by the status of the administrative center of the country and the most frequent venue for protocol events. Most often, when mentioning Moscow, the topics of lifestyle, death, animals and politics were raised. The topics of incidents, humor and entertainment were often raised, and posts on public topics were published. It is noteworthy that when publishing news reports about events in Moscow, a specific toponym was also mentioned – a district or street of the city, which was not revealed when studying publications about events in other cities. Moscow can also be considered a key city from the point of view of forming

ideas about the lifestyle: most of the publications on this topic correlated with the capital.

Another city with a high level of thematic diversity on the social media agenda is St. Petersburg. Most often, the 'Northern capital' was mentioned in the context of the public agenda and in publications about lifestyle, which was primarily associated with the celebration of school graduation. It is noteworthy that the congratulations were associated with the socially significant issue of citizens' responsibility for cleanliness in the streets and civilized pastime in public places.

The Krasnodar region seems to be the place of natural accidents, but at the same time, large cities with airports have made a variety of reports of tornadoes off the Black Sea coast, due to the extension of their closure. Thus, the Krasnodar region has become the third region of Russia in terms of the diversity of thematic representation on the agenda in social media, being mentioned in the context of two main information occasions of a different nature. A similar trend can be observed when studying the media representation of the Kaliningrad region: the land blockade of the region by the decision of the Lithuanian authorities provoked references to the region in an international and political way, as well as in connection with the topics of the army, economy, society and incidents.

Another 40 regions of Russia did not demonstrate diversity in the topics of related publications, however, using their example, it is possible to identify another feature of the representation of Russian regions on the agenda in social media — the uniformity of their representation. The breadth of coverage of various events that took place in Moscow is explained by the status of the city as the capital of Russia, while the increased attention to St. Petersburg, the Krasnodar region and the Kaliningrad region is due to the specifics of the informational occasions that marked the week under study.

Events related to the United States had a level of diversity in representation comparable to Russia, but they were written about less often than about Russia. The informational events that occurred in America or related to it were mainly related to the topics of humor and entertainment, lifestyle and politics, and humorous publications similarly were not independent memes or jokes, but ironic news coverage, ridiculing the behavior of American politicians, primarily US President Joe Biden. Publications about the American lifestyle also often had a contextual connection with Russia during the coverage of brand policies towards Russian consumers.

The representation of life in China was also distinguished by a significant thematic diversity. Users of Russian social media were offered publications

about social problems, issues of economic partnership between Russia and China, as well as incidents. In the reports containing information about China, deep partnership relations with Russia were noted, an attractive image of this state was formed as a reliable ally and a strong partner capable of positively influencing the solution of urgent economic problems of Russia, as well as the restoration of the usual lifestyle, for example, the return of familiar goods.

The remaining 49 countries were mentioned much less frequently and with much less thematic diversity, which indicates a geographical imbalance in the representation of the international agenda in social media popular with 'digital youth'. The media geography of the agenda in social media mostly coincided with the agenda of the official media, however, in social media, the assessment of the actions of representatives of states or events taking place in countries is expressed not in a direct evaluative statement, as it happens in traditional media, but in ironic headlines or the last sentences of the publication, thematic memes and emojis.

Thematic agenda of individual online communities

Despite the fact that it is fair to consider the media geography of the agenda in social media to be common to all the sites studied, then with a more detailed examination of the thematic diversity of individual communities, it is possible to identify differences due to both the functionality of each platform and the general orientation of a particular community.

Of the publications posted by the VK community 'Rifmy i panchi', 32% were devoted to cultural topics. It is important to note that modern musical culture, in particular, related to the Russian-speaking rap culture, is also accepted as part of it, since it is significant and relevant for the youth audience. Significantly less, i.e. 14% of publications were devoted to the topic of lifestyle. In the case of the 'Rifmy i panchi' page, lifestyle posts were often associated with political, sanctions-related topics. The editorial board of the site covered the withdrawal of foreign companies from the Russian market, the change in the names of popular brands and successful examples of import substitution. The tone of such publications was mostly neutral or negative in relation to the companies that left Russia, which was reflected in the comments: their authors expressed disagreement with such brand policies. There are comparable indicators for humorous, social and political topics (11% each), which often intersected within the same publications. For example, American political leaders have become the cause of ridicule, as well as the heroes of memes, especially in connection with the incidents of US President Joe Biden or Donald Trump's penchant for

scandals. Controversial statements of Russian politicians were also placed in a humorous context.

Other communities under study, i.e. 'Leonardo Dayvinchik' and 'Ovsyanka, sir' due to the lack of a cultural agenda have almost identical distribution of topics raised. Both communities published mostly memes but paid special attention to the choice of informational occasions, linking them with the news agenda and news from the life of bloggers.

Thus, 41% of the publications in the 'Ovsyanka, sir' community are devoted to the topic of lifestyle, and 25% are devoted to humor and entertainment. Interpersonal, family and gender issues were not ignored (12%), which also affected the coverage of conflicts between bloggers. The topic of family turned out to be important, as in the 'Rifmy i panchi' community, celebrities (rap artists and bloggers) who got married became the heroes of the approving publications of the 'Ovsyanka, sir' community.

A thematic policy similar to 'Ovsyanka, sir' was also observed in the 'Leonardo Dayvinchik' community, that is a classic meme public. The ratio of humorous (41%) and lifestyle posts (30%) was slightly different. Interpersonal, family and gender topics were in demand (17%), in which events from the life of public figures were covered. The topic of culture was not ignored: 9% of publications are devoted to it, some of which are associated with the death of Yuri Shatunov.

The differences in the agendas can be explained both by the editorial independence of the communities and by the peculiarities of the presentation of information – purely news or ironic, focused on the creation of memes. For example, irony has become an integral element of news publications in the'Leonardo Dayvinchik' community, but not in the 'Rifmy i panchi' community. First of all, we are talking about irony as a tool for 'packaging' content and do not refute both the unity of the informational occasions underlying the publication and the integrity of the key values that unite all three communities.

A different thematic diversity is represented in Telegram channels, which, unlike VK communities, presuppose mainly the publication of texts. In the Telegram channel 'Topor 18+', humor/entertainment (31%), incidents (28%) and lifestyle (25%) became frequent topics of publications. It is worth noting that one publication could be simultaneously devoted to several topics, so we can talk about humor not as much as a specific topic of publication, but as a kind of humorous support of news, the formation of a joke or meme based on an informational occasion.

The second Telegram channel under study was 'NE MORGENSTERN'. The most frequently published messages related to lifestyle (31%), humor and

entertainment (25%), as well as the topic of society (22.5%). The role of humorous topics is similar: in the publications of the channel 'NE MORGENSTERN' it occurs both as an independent and as an additional one, for example, in the review of incidents, economic and political news.

The Telegram channel 'Krovavaya Barynya' differs significantly in thematic content from the other two in the sample. The most frequent publications were devoted to political (47.5%), public (38%) and international (26.5%) topics. The topic of humor and entertainment, typical for other channels, was touched upon in 15% of publications. In general, this Telegram channel can be attributed to the information and analytical genre, especially popular on this platform.

Conclusion

The empirical research has shown the presence of not only a single information agenda in all analyzed communities, but also the mechanism of formation of common frames, which once again convinces of the need to consider the agenda inextricably with the analysis of frames in conceptual unity (Dunas, Salikhova, Tolokonnikova, & Babyna, 2022).

The agenda of digital youth in social networks consists mainly of content about Russia and relevant for Russians, as evidenced by both the numerical superiority of local information occasions over global ones, and the representation of foreign information occasions in the context of their connection with Russia. Russian youth are interested primarily in lifestyle publications that reveal both current trends in fashion and consumption and refer to memories of the past through publications that compare modern goods and practices with those that cause associations with childhood.

Despite the general media-geographical and thematic concept of the media, each community has its own internal thematic agenda, which causes differences in the details of the coverage of key ideas. These ideas, which we find in the media texts of the communities, correspond to the ideological basis of Russian society: patriotism, family and loyalty, economic stability, and prosperity, as well as historical memory[3]. They are encoded in the conclusions set out in the media texts that the user comes to as a result of the process of media consumption. When creating such texts, communities mostly resort to the theme of memory, i.e. collective or historical.

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[3] On the approval of the Foundations of the state Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 809 dated 09.11.2022. The official portal of the President of Russia Kremlin.ru. URL: http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/48502

For example, the ideas of patriotism are transmitted through the thesis 'a strong Russia – a decent standard of living' and an appeal to the importance of preserving the memory of significant events (historical memory), people and even household items associated with times of prosperity and abundance of goods. The growth of the ruble exchange rate observed during the study period was actively covered in the communities and compared with the events of 2015. Representatives of the 'digital youth' were still children or younger teenagers at that time, so publications about the strengthening of the national currency were side by side with the mention of music tracks and Russian-made goods popular in those years. Probably, this technique can be considered a thoughtful media technology associated with provoking the audience with joyful and at the same time sad memories of the past and the motherland – nostalgia, which is inherently a deeply patriotic feeling. However, nostalgia as a media technology aimed at a young digital audience is an innovative and understudied practice, since older people are prone to nostalgia. This practice is found mainly in communities on the VK platform, where celebrities most often became newsmakers.

Due to the fact that ordinary people most often became newsmakers on Telegram channels, the main hero of this platform can be considered an ordinary Russian, and the ideas being disseminated are patriotism, security, resistance to violence, a healthy lifestyle, a decent standard of living, the work of officials for the real improvement of the life of an ordinary citizen, positive business decisions that contribute to growth the quality of life of ordinary people. The actions of criminals, unscrupulous officials (including foreign ones who negatively affect the lifestyle of Russians), violators of public order and representatives of the LGBT community were covered in a negative way. Among the lifestyle practices and topics that have received a negative assessment in publications, alcoholism, violence, corruption and anti-Russian sanctions are highlighted. There has rarely been criticism of individual statements by Russian politicians that affect the standard of living of an ordinary person.

So, it is possible to talk about the identification of a kind of humanistic and patriotic discourses in the studied Telegram channels, sometimes criticizing, but mainly aimed at constructive. Through ideas transmitted through publications that make up the agenda of the 'digital youth' in social media, images of the most socially acceptable social practices, views and preferences in culture, everyday habits, politics, and other spheres of life are formed.

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