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The digital challenges for Russian and American traditional media

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The last editor-in-chief will sign “to print” the last issue of the last Russian newspaper on the 28th of December, 2037, at 4.20 pm.

Why 4.20 pm? Because it should be signed at 4 o'clock, but no one in the editing house ends his or her work in time. Why 4 pm? Because it will be a small local newspaper which is called *rayonka* in Russian, and people at *rayonka* never sit till late.

Why will it be December 28th? Because it will be the end of financial year and newspaper will have to perform all its obligations toward the last five advertisers and the last one hundred subscribers.

Why 2037? This is the main question. This date relates to the concept of the Last Newspaper Generation.

In Russia, the Last Newspaper Generation consists of people who were born in the 1980-s. How can we define it? All of us, who were born before the 80's, received the personal experience of newspaper consumption in childhood. We were familiar with not only how to read but also how to obtain newspapers or magazines. As a child, I knew that I should stay in line near the newsstand or ask my parents to subscribe to my favorite magazine. In school, we were forced to subscribe to Pioneer and Komsomol newspapers. So, normally, everyone got the skills of media-consumption in their teen-age years.

The teen-age years of people who were born after the 80's - in the 90's - fell in the 2000s when subscription to newspaper decreased dramatically. The first reason is the Russian Post worked badly, and people stopped trusting postal delivery. The second reason is the Internet came into our homes. As a result, in the beginning of the century the family tradition of subscription in Russia was interrupted.

So, the boundary between 80's and 90's generation is the frontier between the Last Newspaper Generation and the First Digital Generation.

The word “subscription” in Russian sounds like “podpiska”. And there is very close definition – “podpiska o nevyezde” which means “recognizance not to leave” (the obligation not to leave, given by a person who is under criminal investigation). In 2010, in Moscow colleges, a survey was taken,

In Russia, when I made my calculation, the life expectancy for men was less than 60 years. So the formula is: 1980 plus “less than 60” gives us the end of the 2030’s. This is the time when the Last Newspaper Generation will have shrunk enough to lose the ability to support the existence of newspaper. That is how the year 2037 was figured out.

Of course it’s a sort of provocation. The exact date is not significant. It is more important to define the borders between Generations and define the cultural changes, conditioned by the change of Generations.

Speaking about the newspaper crisis, we usually mean the Internet. We assume that newspapers and TV can be replaced with multimedia.

However, technical changes are not the only threat to old media. The most important issue deals with the phenomenon of the Emancipation of Authorship.

How many authors has mankind had before? When I say “author”, I mean the people who are able to publish their ideas on the public scale.

As you may know, the Google Books project digitizes all books. In August 2010, Google Books has calculated that nearly 130 million books have been published throughout all of history. Taking in account the amount of scientists, writers, journalists and others, we can suggest a crude calculation, which gives us such number: mankind has had, maybe, about 200-300 million authors altogether.

Nowadays, more than 2 billion users are connected to the Internet. All of them have received the technical possibility of authorship. This is a real explosion of authorship. In a historical moment, the quantity of authors has reached the number which is approximately 10 times larger than the number of authors throughout all of history. Now we are roughly in the middle of this explosion, because the quantity of people who can publish something will grow.

The concept of the emancipation of authorship makes it possible to analyze many problems connected with the Internet influence not only on media but on entire society.

Earlier, mass-media were separated from public by the barrier of access to broadcasting. Now, the internet has given an access to everybody. It has mixed audience and authors. Mass-media have lost the monopoly on production and delivery of messages. Self-publishing Audience is arisen.

There are some remarkable quotations on this topic coined by American media-gurus. «The People Formerly Known as the Audience», - Jay Rosen says about all of us.

Clay Shirky considers that in the new media-environment the inner message of every message is: «You can play this game too». You can say something, too.

And finally, Dan Gilmor develops Rosen’s thought and notices: «The former audience joins the party».

It is an absolutely new type of person and a new class of society, unknown earlier. Who are they — these two billion (not publishers but) *publicators*? What do they want? We know nothing about them, being of them. How will they influence society, which will consist entirely of them after one more historical moment?

The concept of the Emancipation of Authorship is not only about quantity but about quality, too. It can explain, for example, how the evolution of the personal media activism has led to social protests in Russia.

Initially, people who surf the Internet and find something fun or attractive start sharing it. Suddenly, they realize that they can personally provoke the reaction to their activity far outside their immediate physical surroundings. They can be media. Nobody, of course, understands it, but attracting people by means of content technically means to be media.

Experts discuss the concept of citizen journalism. Let us not forget about *guerilla journalism*

either American or Russian biggest journalistic institutes, which theoretically have to keep people informed, in fact want to stop sharing the important, really valuable information. The reasons are of course different, but new environment, where the access is free, has exposed old media's wish not to be a gateway because they used to be a gatekeeper. Thus the fear of new environment destroys the very ethic basis of the good old journalism.

Now the biggest publishers like Rupert Murdoch or Big News Agencies try to keep the walled garden closed by means of creating the *PayWalled* Garden. What I think about paid content: you can continue, but it is too late to start.

Media need in barriers of access around it, but it is impossible to build barriers in the open environment of the Internet, where everyone can become media. And even media-apps for tablet have not become savior: this hope is already going away.

Post's articles online, but they still continue subscribing, although it is pretty expensive. It is deprived of any economic sense, but it is just a habit. I asked such persons about the reason of subscribing and found that they pay to support their own habit, not to purchase the product.