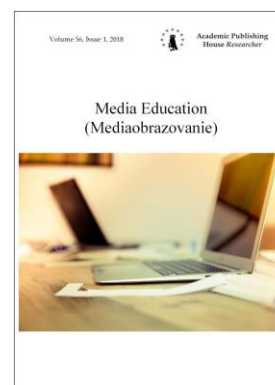




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Digital Storytelling *Vkontakte* as a Device for Media Competence Development of Modern Schoolchildren

Olga Petrova ^{a, *}, Irina Belyakova ^a

^a University of Tyumen, Russian Federation

Abstract

The article addresses the issue of media competence development in teenagers through digital storytelling using a social networking service. It highlights the importance of finding solutions to change passive media behavior of young Internet users. The study of research papers on the active user's position sheds light on the mechanisms stimulating media creativity. The conclusion is drawn that such mechanisms correlate with those of professional journalistic work.

The article studies modern tendencies in media journalism, particulars of multimedia storytelling and creative resources of multimedia formats. The social networking site *Vkontakte* is considered as a suitable platform for creating media projects.

A new methodological guidance on the technology of creating a multimedia article in *Vkontakte* is presented. The article describes major stages and gives methodological recommendations for the project called "A Hero of our Time".

The results of testing the media education technology are commented on. The analysis of questionnaires and multimedia articles helps evaluate changes in the media competence of schoolchildren and outline a number of difficulties. Working with images and ideas and using the technique of multimedia storytelling is believed to develop practice-operational and creativity competences and to influence the idea of media sharing on social networks.

Keywords: media competence, journalism, digital storytelling, hero, social media, site *Vkontakte*.

1. Introduction

The discussions of the issue of developing media competence in schoolchildren have been long and fruitful. Templates of Russian media education (Media..., 2010) have been developed, collections of programs and methodological recommendations on organizing majors at schools are being published, media educators are sharing their research results (Chelysheva, 2014; Fedorov, 2007; ImPRO..., 2015; Iwanicka, 2018; Park, 2017, School..., 2015, etc.). However, the sphere of media education and media pedagogy is one of the most changeable and innovative as it has to constantly adapt to rapid changes in the media environment.

Analysts state that Russians extensively use social networks (in 2018, 47 % of the population had network accounts) and point out that, in 2019, social networks and blogs were gaining more and more credence among young people becoming an important source of news (Internet..., 2019; The study..., 2020). The top three websites most popular with Russian youngsters are *vk.com*,

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: petrova-o-a@yandex.ru (O. Petrova), i.e.belyakova@utmn.ru (I. Belyakova)

youtube.com and yandex.ru. The most popular network among teenagers aged 14-17 is *Vkontakte*, vk.com. (The audience..., 2016).

Local researches of the social media users demographics performed in 2017–2019 prove that a high percentage of network content is viewed by teenagers on a daily basis (Atsuta, 2017; Borovlev, 2017; Morozova, Popova, 2019). A similar situation is found in the UK (McDool et al., 2020) and almost all European countries (Šupšáková, 2016).

According to the findings of S. Tsimbalenko's research published in "The media portrait of a teenager in the 2000s" (Tsimbalenko, 2017), in 2017, the leading source of information for Russian teenagers, aged 13-16, was the Internet, not teachers or books (Tsimbalenko, 2017: 21). Analysis of their Internet requests revealed that they search for information, download (study, etc.) materials, interact with each other and read newsfeeds. Recent data provided by the companies studying media consumption habits confirm that the trend continues this year too (Internet..., 2019; Sarimova, 2020).

Rapid development of social media and their becoming more ingrained in teenagers' lives has come to challenge practitioners and theoreticians in media education looking for effective methodological solutions.

Naturally, the problem is not that schoolchildren are increasingly active on social media, as there is little to be done about it in today's digital world. The problem, it seems, is how to make the best use of the new media environment. Researchers have noted a low level of media production on the part of teenagers and their predominantly passive user's/follower's position (Atsuta, 2017; McDool et al., 2020; Tsimbalenko, 2017). "Less than 50 % of the users take part in creating and spreading information on the Internet", concludes A.I. Atsuta, referring to the survey conducted among 550 12-18-year-olds (Atsuta, 2018: 17). As stated by S. Tsimbalenko, the author of a large-scale survey, half of Russian schoolchildren consider themselves to be "ordinary users of the net" (Tsimbalenko, 2017: 35) and only 13 % – "creators" (Atsuta, 2018). According to the data collected by G.U. Soldatova, 11.4 % of teenagers opt for the social role of a creator (Soldatova, 2020). As a result of the extensive empirical research, G.U. Soldatova also comes to the conclusion that children acquire computer skills themselves and cannot boast outstanding digital competences (Soldatova, Rasskazova, 2017).

"Children need media literacy to be able to verify and know what news to trust. Many rarely or never check the source of news stories" (Notley, Dezuanni, 2018).

Threats and resources of social media have become the subject of heated academic and professional debates. The issues in question are those of communication among teenagers, accessibility and influence of dangerous information on the Internet, online education, educational services and the like. Researchers' opinions oscillate from those of imposing rigid regulations to and putting a ban on social networking sites to including them into the educational landscape.

We believe that the only way to tackle this problem is to work on the formation of the media competence in adolescents. In Russia, the concepts of media pedagogy through activity-based teaching methods were elaborated on in the theories of A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov, 2007) and I.A. Fateeva (Fateeva, 2007).

Foreign educationalists treat youth journalism as the best way to build media competence in young children and professional journalists as the best teachers. "As AI and machine learning envelopes our world, this most human of professions [journalism], defined by ethical conviction and honesty, is fundamental to education in our schools and purpose for our world (Smith, 2020).

It should be stressed that in Russia, at the federal level, measures were already taken to stimulate development of the digital media learning environment for schools. In 2015, the all-Russian public-state children and youth organization "Russian Schoolchildren Movement" was founded by the Presidential decree. The aims of the information media section of the organization are based around the UNESCO concept of media and information literacy.

Besides, it is widely accepted that in the digital age, media literacy adds up to information literacy, ICT skills, and creativity. This means being able to handle media messages and information coming from and being transmitted to all sources and platforms. Consequently, "the media literacy takes this series of new communication skills, including the ability to search for, to select, to analyze, to evaluate, to create, and thus pass on information in a variety of formats – via word, image, sound, and, recently, through using the multimedia formats – by integration of all these elements" (Šupšáková, 2016).

The idea of fostering creativity through digital communication skills in schoolchildren as part of their media education is emphasized in (A tool..., 2020; Deuze, Witschge, 2018; Mills et al., 2019; Smith, 2020; Soh, 2017; Stolaki, Anastasios, 2018; Van der Vaart et al., 2018; Witschge et al., 2019). The task of media educators is “to create a space for young people to freely express themselves and exercise their right to obtain information” (Šupšáková, 2016:42).

Presently, we find the social networking site *Vkontakte* as a convenient space for teens' media education projects. It is already involved in the above mentioned social and educational Russian Schoolchildren Movement. Within the network, children create regional, municipal and school groups where they act as coordinators and authors.

Therefore, we think that the social networking site *Vkontakte* is best suited for our project through which we give schoolchildren the necessary tools to engage in creative work in social media and increase their general media competence.

2. Materials and methods

Researchers characterize *Vkontakte* as a media resource with a wide spectrum of multimedia possibilities (Morozova, 2019; Stepanov, 2015). It is known to promptly upgrade its tools to allow for “experimentation with formats and genres” (Stepanov, 2015: 90). In 2017, *Vkontakte* introduced a function of creating articles and long-reads with multimedia content which have become commonplace in modern-day journalism.

We hypothesize that *Vkontakte* is an optimal digital learning environment for developing media competence in schoolchildren. The digital storytelling is a suitable method. The project shall result in a multimedia article posted in *Vkontakte*. It will promote the skills of creative writing, digital storytelling and multimedia. It will also let children achieve a tangible result in the context of the media educational aims.

A number of reasons determined the choice of the media educational technique. First of all, it builds in-demand skills of currently popular occupations: an online journalist and a multimedia storyteller (“a specialist in creating clear-cut and demanded multi-platform media products”), whose popularity will only keep growing in the future, as V. Gatov, an expert in the field of new media, wrote in 2016 (Gatov, 2016: 262).

Secondly, the format lends itself well to the creative purpose. N.F. Hilko's conceptual idea of an audio-visual culture within the framework of creative fulfillment of a personality is still relevant if we analyze resources of the digital multimedia environment. N.F. Hilko considers media creativity as an innovative tactic “with an unusual approach to composition, content and means of conveying information through text and images” (Hilko, 2001: 33). The modern multimedia environment allows for the interconnection of elements belonging to visual, textual, graphic and audio-visual languages (Kiriya, 2010: 18), which opens up a lot of opportunities for the application of expressive means, their combination and hybridization. According to M.M. Lukina, a multimedia article is “a story told with the help of several multimedia means” (Internet..., 2010: 269–170) that extend and develop the story. One of the most popular algorithms of creating a text in the multimedia environment is storytelling – a narrative with its own character, plot and conflict.

Writing such stories is impossible without understanding the structure of text, its composition, and cultural background. For this, one needs to know how to work with photo, video, audio and graphic content, and fundamentals of directing. Thus, immersion in the position of a professional storyteller, combining different languages and tools, helps mold the rational and creative within the media-competent persona.

While writing the methodology section (requirements, tasks, teaching materials, etc.) and evaluation criteria for the final product of the creative projects, we drew upon the existing research papers on storytelling as a multimedia education tool (Kiriya, 2010; Mills et al., 2019; Multimedia..., 2018; Silantyeva, 2016; Simakova, Yenbayeva, 2019; Skvortsov, 2007; Song, 2018; Stolaki, Anastasios, 2018; Šupšáková, 2016; Ureta, Fernandez, 2018).

Summing up the resources, we identified the following mandatory elements of a digital story for our project: 1) hero/character; 2) conflict/problem/changes/inner turmoil; 3) resolution/way out of the situation/action/inducement; 4) empathic effect; 5) place and time of the action; 6) facts, events, and examples. Such format entails reasonable usage of basic multimedia components: “images (photo, illustrations, graphics, caricature, animation, slide-show); video (video illustrations, video materials of traditional genres of TV journalism); audio (podcasts, audio

illustrations, audio text, audio slideshow, audio of traditional genres of radio journalism), infographics (graphic representation of data)” (Dukhan, 2017).

Working on a multimedia story means using a director’s approach. A media coach O. Silantyeva points out that “every element of the project is meaningful and, together with the other elements, it must constitute a complete picture, a coherent story, a multi-sided representation of the event, the subject matter, the person, and the issue” (Silantyeva, 2016: 156).

Our educational digital storytelling project took place in 2019 within the framework of the annual festival of young journalists’ projects named *Medianavigator* which is held by the Department of Journalism at the University of Tyumen. We called it “A Hero of our Time”.

At the end of the project, we conducted a survey of the participants, studied motivation letters attached to their applications, and performed a typological analysis of the multimedia articles that schoolchildren created.

3. Discussion

Analysis of the contemporary research of modern media education showed that in Europe, Asia, and North America educationalists are calling for the development of media competence in schoolchildren. “We media” such as blogs, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, micro-blogs, *YouTube*, *Wikipedia*, and citizen journalism sites have created a participatory media environment. Today’s Net-Generation students are not only media consumers but also media producers” (Lee, 2016).

Having analyzed how social networks influence the young user’s position, Russian researchers and professors in journalism departments agree that once a user is online, s/he is no longer a consumer, but a participant of a communication process and a co-author of the media text, as stated in the collective monograph “Social media as a resource of integrated communication practices” (Social..., 2017: 24). The audience becomes “a media generator and a media creator in the new communicative public sphere” (Multimedia..., 2018: 16).

However, the degree of involvement in creating media content and media writing skills in young users vary.

The media analyst A.A. Miroshnichenko argues that all young users are ‘technically’ entitled to be actual authors and can perform “random acts of journalism” (Ingram, 2011). In reality, though, many of them do not always want to be authors (Multimedia..., 2018: 74). He classifies all young users into two categories of authors: 1) the ‘lazy’ authors with little involvement limited to pushing the ‘like’ button, reposting and writing short comments; 2) the ‘hardcore’ authors actively producing their own original content (Multimedia..., 2018: 74-75).

L.A. Braslavets looks into the notion of civil journalism in relation to social media. In her opinion, social media let ‘the public’ take part in collecting, processing, publishing and spreading important information. L.A. Braslavets divides users into publishers and audience representatives. Publishers perform functions similar to those of journalists working in a traditional editorial office, and occasionally play a role of “an amateur journalist” (Braslavets, 2010).

A.A. Morozova suggests calling users of social networks who create content and help spread it “media makers” (Morozova, 2017). This term underlines originality of the content such media authors produce and can be aptly used to differentiate between them and professional journalists (Morozova, 2017: 79). According to A.A. Morozova, the reasons behind activity of some users are either personal (personal benefits or self-fulfillment) or social (need to inform others or solve social problems) (Morozova, 2017: 79).

I.V. Zhilavskaya defines two types of media activity among youngsters: consuming and creative media activity. Creative activity is revealed through media work and media creativity “thanks to the internal and external resources of a person” (Zhilavskaya, 2013). This process is not arbitrary because young people are motivated by their media-related professional activity or their own media project targeting or already winning over a specific audience (Zhilavskaya, 2013). They are also driven by an appealing topic and a desire to get feedback (Multimedia..., 2018).

However, even the most passive consumers can witness something unusual or “experience an insight” (Multimedia..., 2018:75). Unfortunately, due to their journalistic immaturity i.e. absence of the necessary communicative or critical thinking skills, they are unable to share this experience. They “need to cultivate media literacy to achieve “critical autonomy” and for that they need guidance” (Lee, 2016).

The US Department of State Network worked out guidelines for encouraging young users to generate acceptable, meaningful, and beneficial content in the social media (Be digitally..., 2018). One of their strongest appeal is to create.

According to a well-known Singaporean educationalist K. Soh, “fostering student creativity has become an added responsibility of classroom teachers” (Soh, 2017). It is especially true for the journalism classroom (Archetti, 2017; A tool..., 2020). “Creativity... allows us to gain insight into experiences, motivations and emotions in journalism, allowing us to tell the diverse stories of journalism in a more inclusive way” (Witschge et al., 2019). Creativity “can be flexibly applied in a variety of contexts and can serve as an effective bridge between generations, cultures, socioeconomic classes and people who are divided along habitual lines determined by existing agendas and interests” (Van der Vaart et al., 2018).

To support creativity a variety of digital tools and applications have been designed. Nowadays, digital technologies and social media create an environment conducive to creative journalistic activity from school age. The studies of media researchers and practitioners on the changing mechanisms of authorship in the social media conclude that they correlate with the conventional professional journalistic work. Since the social media environment is open, young writers can and should become involved in participatory journalistic work to gain professional experience and simultaneously actualize their creative potential.

For this purpose we conceived our project. We used a digital storytelling method to develop a media educational technology to involve teenagers in participatory journalism. The participants were given a task to create a multimedia story about any person, a hero of our time. The participants had to comply with professional journalistic standards: identify pressing problems, tell the truth, be loyal to citizens, exercise their personal conscience, and be responsible for the outcome of the project (Fundamentals..., 2000). The finished multimedia text was then posted in VKontakte.

A number of steps were taken to organize schoolchildren’s work on their digital stories during the project.

At the preliminary stage we defined the theme “A Hero of our Time”. Its selection was prompted by the current trend of putting the person back at the center of journalism stories, as, for example, was formulated by the information portal *Takiye dela* (translated from Russian as “So it goes”). Not once did the older generation of journalists declare the idea of paying attention to ordinary men with their own struggles and dreams. We did not mean to focus on the genesis or interpretation of the notion “a hero of our time”. What we did was suggest the vector of attention towards the person, not the event. Our research interest was focused on whom teenagers would choose to write about once they went beyond their personal space into the open social media landscape.

Interested schoolchildren submitted their applications and motivation letters. They had to name reasons why they wanted to take part in the project, tell about their previous experience of creating media texts (including those posted online), working for school/college/city media, and share their project expectations. All candidates could familiarize themselves with the project assignments for both preliminary (remote) and in-person stages posted online. By the time applications were submitted, several creative teams had already been formed. Each team chose a person who met the criteria of a modern day hero.

All participants from schools or children’s centers were grouped into production teams (3-4 members). The groups were given a task to choose a person who they could call a hero of our time, collect information about him and creatively process it: prepare a script for a multimedia story, take a series of photos, record an audio or video interview with the hero.

Teenagers were given instructions regarding collection and processing of preliminary data; provided with remote consultations; recommended multimedia storytelling resources; and offered guidelines on using copyrighted Internet materials and the digital tools of the article editor in VKontakte.

The main stage was in person and took place on campus. It included workshops on audio and video content production and a role play called *A Multimedia Burger* (developed by A.A. Andreeva). The main aim was to teach students how to structure a multimedia article.

At the final stage, teenagers learned to use the digital tool of an article editor in VKontakte, create multimedia texts and publish them on the social networking site. All their works were evaluated by experts who analyzed the quality of the articles, page views, reposts and readers’ comments.

Each production group was supervised by 2nd-4rd-year university students majoring in journalism. They were in charge of the creative process and technical support such as providing internet access, consulting on the digital tools offered in *Vkontakte* as well as stylistic editing and proofreading.

Thus, at each stage schoolchildren developed skills raising the level of their media competence.

4. Results

To evaluate the media activity and competence of our participants we studied their motivation letters and personal network accounts. In the motivation letters, they described their media experience and expectations for the project. In total, we received 30 group applications from 50 schoolchildren, aged 13-17. The majority of participants were from Tyumen, Tyumen region, and the town of Shadrinsk in Kurgan region.

Twenty-two teenagers mentioned that they had some previous experience in creating their own media projects for their school media centers or talent shows. Ten students took part in designing their school accounts or worked for a creative association in *Vkontakte* or *Instagram*. Four participants reported having their own blog in social media “to share [their] own ideas on different issues in posts”, “to post photos and write short notes”.

The opportunity to try their hand at multimedia journalism was one of the major reasons for participation in the festival. In their applications, twelve students admitted that they would want to build a career in journalism, four students – in blogging. Others wrote that they “want to feel the taste of journalism”, “experience the profession firsthand”. Those who had already had experience of working with multimedia information were eager to put their learned skills to test and get experts’ approval. Twenty-one students mentioned in their applications that they would want to learn something new and gain hands-on experience.

Participants expressed their wish to acquire/perfect/master their skills in the field of journalism and develop professionally. Four respondents linked the festival with career orientation events implying that it would help them make their career choice. The others, however, expressed no doubts in terms of their future career. Most schoolchildren referred to multimedia production in terms of self-development and creativity. They wrote about their motivation and expectations in a positive tone using such words as “develop”, “take it to the next level”, “get new ideas”, etc. Some of the reasons for partaking in the festival were media literacy related. Three respondents wanted to learn to assess, verify and make acceptable use of information. Some reasons were media text related. Four people wanted to learn how to write texts, shoot reports, and produce media projects. Experiencing positive emotions was important for six teenagers. Eight respondents expected to get acquainted with some interesting people, both peers and journalists. Twelve teenagers were motivated by the task itself and wanted to tell about a hero of our time. Young people referred to the heroes from their projects as ordinary people doing their duties, inspiring and surprising everyone with their moral courage.

The review of the applications has shown that the participants had some media experience and were eager to test their competence in media work, they were striving to learn more and acquire new skills. They thought of the work they were to do as an opportunity to convert their creative ideas into a reality and viewed the task as part of professional journalistic practice.

Since our media technology is mostly aimed at social media, we tracked media activity of the festival participants in social networking sites. We applied random sampling to 15 personal accounts and analyzed them according to the following parameters: original content, usage of multimedia formats, appeal to socially important issues. The greatest part of the participants’ content was photo reposts, videos, texts from groups about fashion, psychology, animals and humor. They never touched upon important social issues. Original content was only found on the pages of schoolchildren who are members of creative media associations. Five teenagers reposted texts or audio tracks they themselves took part in creating. The greatest amount of content was repetitive in its format and no multimedia approaches were used. Thus, even those festival participants who had media background demonstrated a rather low level of practical-operational and creative mediacompetence in social media. These data correlate with the results of the research into media behavior of adolescents by A. Atsuta and S. Tsimbalenko ([Atsuta, 2017](#); [Tsimbalenko, 2017](#)) and with the results of the motivation letter analysis.

Analysis of questionnaires and media projects. At the final stage of the project, the participants posted 18 multimedia articles and answered the questionnaire. The first block of the questionnaire dealt with their work prior to the festival on ideas of heroism and heroes. The second block was based on the motivation letter analysis. We intended to find out if their attitude about the journalistic work experience they expected to gain changed. Thirty-three questionnaires were analyzed altogether.

In most cases, it was school teachers (7) who became heroes of the posts as well as coaches and instructors (4) of creative and sport organizations who work with the students, and one family member. They are all characterized by being committed, initiative, understanding, and capable of creating an atmosphere conducive to creativity. The characters of six posts are people outside the family and friends circle; they are pet shelter owners, fashion designers, peers, etc. They are featured as self-made people who achieve success thanks to their own talent and hard work. According to psychologists, they are typical role models for teenagers. As pointed out by I.S. Kon, teenagers “find their role models not in the people closest to them but in the people from outside the circle of those they know well” (Kon, 1989). “An ideal guide”, in such cases, is the one who is “understanding, responsive and kind-hearted” in the first place (Kon, 1989). Another factor that influenced the choice of a hero was realization of its importance for society. It is confirmed by the answers to the question “What kind of people should be featured more often in mass media and on the Internet?”. The respondents answered: people changing jobs, doing something good, having high moral values or those who work hard and reach their goals.

The images of heroes in the schoolchildren’s posts are archetypical. The heroes are Creators: they founded a dance club, a football club for underprivileged teenagers, a youth organization etc. Some heroes are Curators: they preserve traditions and history; they possess knowledge and experience. The story is usually structured as a description of some events or work the heroes are passionate about. It is always something that helps solve a social issue: e.g. assisting in rehabilitation of schoolchildren with deviant behavior, helping stray or abandoned animals, instilling patriotic values in teenagers, getting children involved in creative activities. The character is associated and disclosed through his/her doings. Another type of story development is based around problem resolution. In this case, the hero is usually facing a problem, e.g. lack of experience, no support or compassion, difficult and demanding work. Overcoming these problems, the hero reaches his/her goals and changes him/herself. For example, s/he finally achieves recognition and inner satisfaction, wins an award or gets some good results, or it may even be that his/her students achieve success.

The structure of the articles is rather simple. In the first case, it runs as follows: exposition (the first meeting and the author expounding heroism) and rising action, then climax (description of an event with a sketch/report/photo or a series of photos/video report or a video clip); and resolution (the author summarizing the ideas on heroism). In the second case, the exposition and rising action are usually followed by an interview/video interview or an audio recording of a story, and photos. Two of the articles had an interactive element at the end (a survey), with the authors trying to engage their audience not only emotionally but also technically.

Not all the participants managed to do the task properly. Some creative teams were not able to step outside the traditional genre of paper and TV journalism and either prepared a biography interview, described their character or ran a questionnaire with the follow-up comments.

Half the posts (9 stories) contained multimedia elements of one type i.e. photos or a series of photos. Seven teams included two multimedia elements, i.e. photo and video (6 projects) and photo and audio (1 project). Two of the posts had three elements. i.e. photo, video and a questionnaire. One post had infographics apart from photo and video. All the posts got feedback in the form of likes, reposts and comments. The number of viewings ranged from 300 to 5500; the articles were viewed not only by the festival participants but also other *Vkontakte* users. The posts evoked emotional responses. Most of the authors reposted their articles on their own pages.

Most schoolchildren reported to have had no difficulty choosing a hero for their posts. Twenty-one respondents (69 %) say their attitude to the people they had chosen changed after they gathered more information. Their respect has grown even higher as they discovered some new personal qualities: “Irene turned out to be open and sociable”, “He appeared to be a fun person”, “I realized that not everyone could be dedicated to their job so much”, “He is an interesting personality”. Eight respondents did not change their attitude to the heroes because they had already known them for a long time. Four people were unsure of what to say.

The questionnaire run among the team leaders (university students majoring in journalism) showed that schoolchildren used the new information they had learnt during workshops and games to analyze the material they had collected and to introduce some changes into the structure of the article. They also inserted multimedia elements after being prompted to do so. Besides, some teenagers were struggling with the digital tool of the article editor in *Vkontakte*.

In reply to the question “How has your idea of the profession of a journalist changed after the festival?”, thirteen respondents said that journalistic work was tough but they were still interested: “I realized that it is a cool thing to do but not as easy as it seems”, “I realized that it is not an easy job but no doubt an interesting one”. Two of the respondents used to think of a journalist working with paper format only: “I realized that a journalist is more than a person writing articles”, “I’ve always thought it is so easy to just sit and write something. But once I started making the project, I realized that it was not easy”. Eleven schoolchildren wished to continue working in the field of journalism, while the other nine replied briefly that their idea of journalism did not change.

5. Conclusion

The festival participants delved into professional work while trying to find a hero for their posts and preparing material about them. This process formed a stable motivation in the participants to tell about the chosen character and receive feedback. Working on their projects, schoolchildren learnt the importance of addressing the human dimension of journalism and media work.

The results of the survey show that collecting information about the characters and talking to them face-to-face not only brought up the issue of heroism from the social point of view, but also drew attention to regular people, someone teenagers see every day – school teachers, managers of creative studios and sport organizations. Despite the controversial image of the teacher created by the Russian mass media, the presentations were not in any way affected by it. Teenagers portrayed their role models as dedicated and committed people capable of overcoming all difficulties. By the end of the project, they discovered an array of new, sometimes unexpected, character traits and qualities in their heroes.

Most heroes were creators of something new. The theme “A Hero of our Time” has become an inspiring creative concept. We modeled a situation “the very essence of which was creatively stimulating” (Hilko, 2001: 257).

Analysis of the multimedia articles showed that most participants used techniques of multimedia storytelling: the articles had characters, a plot, narrative devices when the author’s text intermingled with the character’s direct speech either in a text, audio or video format. Implementation of multimedia elements to construct their stories made teenagers search for new ways to approach their material and find original director’s solutions for text, photo and video combinations, and include such interactive elements as a questionnaire.

Our participants learned how to create original content in *Vkontakte* using its default tools which were developed to meet the needs of modern media environment and journalism. The project revealed for them ways to incorporate journalistic work into the familiar social media environment.

Testing of the media educational technology of creating a multimedia article in a social network identified several challenges:

- difficulty in preparing infographics and audio materials (podcasts, audio illustrations, audio text, etc.); unlike photo and video, such formats were used only a few times;
- a tendency to use the conventional paper-based approach to organizing material, i.e. photo+text;
- taking an easy route when selecting a hero for the project by merely picking them from a circle of friends;
- using stale stereotypes about heroism, the static character of the hero’s inner world, and poor use of standard Russian language affected the general impression produced by the projects.

The festival did live up to the participants’ expectations, the schoolchildren mastered new types of media production and were given a chance to fulfill their creative potential. Working with images and meanings in addition to the application of multimedia storytelling techniques helped them get a glimpse of the complexities of the modern media text and the profession of a journalist.

All things considered, the suggested technology stimulated creativity and provided an active user’s/“influencer’s” experience in social media, thus increasing the level of media competence in schoolchildren. Immersion in the work with images and meanings and the use of multimedia

storytelling techniques enriched participants' understanding of contemporary media texts and journalism. Journalistic career remained an attractive choice for many participants.

In addition to teenagers' engagement in school centers for multimedia journalism or media projects of traditional formats, we should ensure their beneficial active social media behavior with the goal to enhance media competence and create conditions for self-actualization and socialization. It is important to accept the dynamic development of the social media and Internet environment and design media education technologies taking into account features of teenagers' media behavior.

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