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Transformation of Russian Women's Media Consumption: from Magazines to Blogs

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Abstract

For a long time in Russia, women's glossy magazines have had a significant impact on the socialization of women, shaping their lifestyle and gender identity. They not only met the needs of women, but also defined them.

The study examines and evaluates the changing trends in the behavior of media consumers in the digital age. The main focus is on analyzing the reasons why young women prefer websites and blogs to traditional magazines. Because of this we need some changes in media educational activities.

The article tests the hypothesis that nowadays modern women's magazines, whose models were created abroad, do not take into account the real interests of the local audience, which affects the media consumption of such press by young women. Also the critical thinking skills of young women were checked.

This article will examine the change in young women's attitudes towards gender-oriented periodicals and mass media, and the transformation of their priorities in choosing women's magazines and websites. Methods of media consumption are changing, but the level of media literacy is still low – the young women prefer the entertainment content and some of them think that such information is important. Creating media literacy courses and course about women's press (it's studied by journalism students) we need to pay attention to this.

Keywords: media consumption, gender-oriented magazines, glossy magazines, women's media, media literacy.

1. Introduction

Today the term "media consumption" is widely used in the context of describing the characteristics of media process and media audience. This term usually means a list of media (mass media, media communications) used by an individual or a group of people in course of reading, watching, listening. It is also related to the concept of media literacy because the tasks of media literacy are the transformation of media consumption into an active and critical process, helping people better understand commercial and other types of manipulation, as well as helping people understand the role of the media and civic, collaborative media in building views on reality.

It should be noted that the identification of audience interests in the process of building a typological model of mass media is an established practice in the periodical editor's activities. Even

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in press system before Russian revolution in 1917 magazines and newspapers were classified: for children, youth, family reading, for women, students, etc. The Party-Soviet press structure has the differentiation by territorial criterion; there were media in national languages; for children, adolescents and youth; media with specialization in science, technology, and professional environment. Considerable attention was paid to the women's press in the Soviet period. There were published central and republican magazines, as well as publications of autonomous republics (Takayangi, 2018; Utiuzh, 2018). In the post-Soviet period the volume of women's press increased (Chermenskaya, 2006; Gudova, Rakipova, 2010), men's magazines were opened (Belskij, 2015): so, there was a big interest in gender-oriented press. Nowadays publishers continue to develop the practice of publishing gender-oriented media products (Ovshinskaya, 2013; Rymareva, 2021; Sivrikova, 2016).

Despite the existing demand for gender-oriented media and mass media, it is necessary to note changes in the consumption of such types of media. For example, the circulation *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestyanka* magazines, popular in Soviet Union, decreased significantly in 1990s; Russian-language versions of international women's periodicals have spread in the Russian media market. Foreign researchers attributed the popularity of women's magazines to the desire of Russian women to look beautiful, surround themselves with beauty, strive to have an ideal figure and focus on American models (Goscilo, 2000). Than the model of a glossy women's printed magazine, popular in the post-Soviet period, was replaced by online media addressed to women (e-magazines, websites, portals, blog platforms and social networks communities). The audience's choice of women's media is shaped by the socio-political, economic, cultural, and technical characteristics of modern society.

It is necessary to reconsider the role of gender magazines in a woman's life, because of globalization, modern Russian young girls are so-called "digital natives". This term was introduced in 2001 and means people who grew up in a digital environment (Prensky, 2001; Thomas, 2011).

The changing society determines the need to study the peculiarities of media consumption of a gender audience, which is relevant in the light of improving the effectiveness of journalists, marketers, publishers working in the segment of women's media and mass media and media literacy education specialists working with students.

2. Materials and methods

The authors conducted the study using the following methods: review of scientific literature, observation, survey, questionnaire, description, comparison.

The results of study are based in a sociological survey (questionnaire). Chronological framework of study: from 2016 to 2024. Characteristics of respondents involved in the sociological study: young women aged 18 to 22 years old, living in Rostov-on-Don, students of Southern Federal University, Rostov State Transport University, Don Industrial and Technical College named of B. N. Slyusar. The questionnaire survey was conducted in person, in the presence of researchers.

In May 2016, 438 young women were interviewed by questionnaire; 324 – in March–May 2021 (COVID-19 period); and 300 – in September–October 2023 (a period of great changes in the Russian media market because of political reasons).

3. Discussion

Scientists analyzing modern media consumption focus on gender, age, territorial, professional and other characteristics of the audience (Kohanaya, 2023; Luchinkina et al., 2022; Shrum, 2009; Vugina, 2017; Zelentsov, 2015; Zvereva, 2018).

New (digital) technologies affect changes in media consumption: "the quantum of media consumption among individualities is adding as new technologies are created" (John, 2021).

Media consumption affect the way people use of media when understanding and monitoring how the media work, how they communicate and how they represent everyday life (Spinelli, 2021).

Changesin media consumption are also influenced by developing of media literacy. Researchers around the world use student surveys to understand the transformation of media consumption and their media literacy (Djumanova, 2022; Velásquez et al., 2017). Media literacyallowspeople to decipherhiddenmessages, biases and falsemessages in media content, which allows them to make informed decisions, challenge social norms and actively choose channels for

obtaining information. Moreover, media literacy gives people the tools to navigate complex media landscapes, resist manipulation and promote social justice (Orfanidou, Panagiotou 2023).

Ideology, views, mental representations, behavioral patterns of individuals are formed in the social system (Berger, Luckmann, 1966). Formation of gender socialization (Komarovsky 1950; Parsons, Bales, 1955), gender identity, gender relations (Goffman, 1976) also occurs on a social level and is the result of social interaction.

Mass media reflects gender ideology and disseminates popular gender concepts and behaviors. Women's media and mass media are a popular type of media due to the effective implementation of its main task – to reflect and maintain gender norms and standards of audience behavior (Smeyukha, 2012). Women's magazines are a kind of construct of gender identities, the authors S.K. Cardoso and V. Cardoso consider the type of women's periodicals as a kind of gender technology (Cardoso, 2020).

At the same time, women's magazines do not always have a positive effect on women, for example, women's fashion magazines negatively affect the psychological health and woman's body dissatisfaction (Ozbek et al., 2023; Swiatkowski, 2016).

However, if women's magazines published in the last century could be considered as part of struggle for the women's political and economic rights, then the modern women's press is apolitical, they are focused on an audience entertaining. "Gender- focused research reveals that women readers obtain a plethora of pleasures though the act of reading/consuming women's magazines and this is one of the reasons that they repeatedly revisit this particular media genre", - so defines the main purpose of women's magazines A. Alexiou (Alexiou, 2020). Women's press does not emphasize the female problems. "Magazines do not present the common problems of women in a political manner. Moreover, if the problems of womanhood are mentioned in some columns of the magazine, the problems of some women are showed with personification and individualization without political implications or views about the women's issues", - M. Furat and O.A. Sonmez wrote (Furat, Sonmez, 2013). Women express displeasure that sexualizing media representation is commonplace across a number of gender-oriented magazines (Graff et al., 2013). Women's magazines can form such a phenomenon as medicalization, when the ordinary elements in a woman's life (menstruation, childbirth, menopause) are perceived as diseases. This contributes to the development of the pharmaceutical industry, but also to the formation of anxiety among women (Can et al., 2023).

A type of women's magazine focused on positioning the canons of female beauty, expanding consumer socialization (Korte, 2015; Stevens, Maciaran, 2005), as well as in unifying the reading interests of the audience grew in popularity due to media globalization and cultural ideals transformation (Andrews, Carter, 2020; Al-Jarf, 2023). As Seliverstova said, "the 21st century is characterized by the development of a new type of society in which its main part holds the material consumption to be the meaning of life" (Seliverstova, 2020).

Different authors (Luo, 2008; Nampoothiri et al., 2023) says that the typological models of international women's magazines do not take into account the national, cultural, economic interests of the audience, as the result some women are not satisfied with the content of the popular women's press. They don't find interesting topics in it, and therefore refuse to read women's magazines.

Young women receive information from social networks, which, like women's magazines, shape beauty standards and influence women's perception of themselves. However, at the same time there are feminist resources and activist bloggers who promote self-acceptance and body positivity in Internet (Caldeira, 2024; Kushwaha, 2024). The thematic diversity attracts a female audience to websites and social networks.

All this suggests that young women are trying to read and analyze images and implicit messages in all types of media content, and on media literacy education courses we can provide platforms for debate on gender issues.

4. Results

The segment of Russian mass women's magazines is mostly represented by the localizations of popular international publications. In 2016, the rating of 20 monthly magazines by audience per issue included the following women's magazines: "Cosmopolitan" (3.8 million people), "Burda" (2 million), "Glamour" (1.3 million) (Rossijskaya periodicheskaya..., 2017). In 2020 The statistics have hardly changed: "Cosmopolitan" (3.2 million people), "Burda" (2.1 million), "Glamour"

(1.8 million) (Rossijskaya periodicheskaya..., 2021). In 2022, there was a transformation caused by changes in the international politics. The number of women's magazines decreased, and their total circulation fell by 24 % to 24.6 million copies. Some of magazines changed their brands. At the same time the websites audience was increasing. For example, in September 2023, "Cosmopolitan" magazine (the Russian version was named The "Voice") had an audience more than 5 million, while "Harper's Bazar" (published in Russia under the name "The Symbol") had an audience of about 1 million (Mediascope, 2023).

At this time social networks are a popular source of information for young women, as was indicated by 80 % of respondents (for comparison websites were chosen by 67 %, television -32 %, newspapers and magazines -12 %, radio -4 %). In comparison with the data obtained during the study in 2021, the priority of these information resources remained: then 70 % of respondents indicated social networks as the main source of information, 54 % – websites, 2 1% - television, radio -11 %, 9 % – newspapers and magazines.

In the media space, young women are interested in the following women's topics: fashion (68%, according to the study in 2023, and 50% in 2021), appearance care (73% and 46%), cooking (58% and 30%), relationships (47% and 38%), needlework (14% and 21%). It should be noted that the interest of the female youth audience in needlework is falling. In addition, during the 2023 study, young women were asked to indicate topics that interest them (in addition to women's ones): 40% chose the topic of sports, 35% chose politics, as well as topics of tourism, investment, vocational training and technical innovation.

Respondents most often find information on women's topics of interest: on social networks (87 % of respondents in 2023 and 80 % in 2021), on websites (75 % and 59 %), in television programs (34 % and 15 %), newspapers and magazines (9 % and 5 %).

The majority of respondents (58 %) in 2023 have a positive attitude towards women's media (magazines, websites and social networks groups). In 2021, only 33 % of respondents indicated that they were interested in women's publications. And in 2016, 46 % responded that they read women's media and use media resources addressed to a female audience.

Responses to the question "Do you visit women's groups on social media" were different: in 2023 and in 2016 25 % of young women gave a positive answer, in 2021 – only 15 % said that they visit such groups. At the same time a significant part of respondents don't remember the names of these groups (63 % in 2023 and 46 % in 2021).

Majority of young women do not demonstrate social activity in them, but 15 % of respondents said that they leave comments under texts, participate in the discussion in 2023 (for comparison – 17 % in 2021 and 14 % in 2016). The interviewees criticize the information or leave approving comments.

Printed women's magazines were read by 20 % of respondents in 2023, 23 % – in 2021 and 26 % in 2014.

To the question: "Why don't you read printed women's magazines?" the answers in 2023 were different: 59 % do not read the paper press (in 2021 this figure was equal to 42 %), 14 % indicated that they do not buy women's printed periodicals because of its high cost, compared to 12 % in 2021 and 20 % in 2016. And 12 % of young women do not buy printed women's magazines since this type of publication does not contain interesting and necessary information for them (in 2021 - 9 %, in 2016 - 37 %).

The question: "What names of women's magazines (websites) do you know?" caused difficulties for the audience in 2023. The respondents' answers were distributed as follows (magazines titles' translated): "Vogue" (37 %), "Elle" (23 %), "Cosmopolitan" (15 %), "Elle Girl" (5 %), "Lisa" (4 %), "Harper's Bazaar" (2 %), "Good Advice" (2 %), "Glamour" (2 %), "The Voice" (2 %), "I'm Buying" (2 %), "Caravan" (2 %), "Marie Claire" (1 %), "Shape" (1 %), "Women's Day" (1 %), "Working Woman" (1 %). It should be noted that for the period of the study in September–October 2023 the magazines "Vogue", "Elle", "Elle Girl", "Glamour" were not published in Russia (their activities were suspended in the Russian Federation in 2022), "Shape" (has not been published in Russia since 2014 due to changes in the economic situation in the media market), and Russian magazine publishers Cosmopolitan and Harper's Bazaar rebroadcast them in 2022, after which the publications began to be published under the names "The Voice" and "The Symbol".

The survey showed that young women do not read regional, national and confessional women's publications. For example, they do not read Orthodox women's magazines Slavyanka or

gender-oriented Muslim magazines Nana (published in the Chechen Republic), The Woman of Dagestan (published in Dagestan). Regional women magazines such *Moskvichka* (Moskow) and *Rostovchanka* (Rostov-on-Don), *GL* (Samara) are not remembered too.

The main reasons for choosing women's publications (magazines, websites) have not changed during the study period: respondents read women's media, because they contain information of an entertainment nature (43 % of respondents in the 2023 study believe so, 21 % – in 2021, 51 % – in 2016), these publications introduce with information from the fashion world, which is important for a gender audience of this age looking for their own style (41 % in 2023, 25 % in 2021, and 66 % in 2016) (see Table 1). Didactic aspect of publications attracts little audience: only 8 % of respondents like the fact that the mass media teach what a modern woman should be like in 2023, 15 % – in 2021, and 16 % – in 2016.

Table 1. The responses to the question: "Why do you choose to read women's magazines, websites?"

Nº	Answers	Respondents (%)		
		2023	2021	2016
1	They contain information of an entertaining nature	43	21	51
2	They provide fashion information	41	25	66
3	They provide information about celebrities	35	20	33
4	They give problem solving advice	23	13	17
5	They help to choose my image and get closer to it	15	8	19
6	They teach me to be a modern girl	8	15	16
7	They publish information on housekeeping (cooking, needlework, design and decoration)	21	6	29

Respondents prefer women's websites of multi-thematic nature (websites dedicated to entertainment information, covering the lives of celebrities, writing about fashion, style, women's health, traveling, etc.): in 2023, 69 % of young women indicated this. In 2021 and 2016, culinary sites were in the first place in popularity among young women (30 % and 49 %), multi-thematic websites were in second place (25 % and 43 %). The parenting and crafts websites are the least popular among respondents (see Table 2).

Table 2. The responses to the question: "What women websites are you interested in?"

Nº	Answers	Respondents (%)		
		2023	2021	2016
1	Multi-thematic	60	25	43
2	Parenting	10	6	7
3	Culinary	39	30	49
4	Crafts	8	9	16
5	Fashion	21	18	39

Studies of foreign women's magazines have shown that a decrease in audience interest in reading popular women's magazines occurs due to their inconsistency with readers' interests and expectations. Our research has revealed the narrowness of the functional orientation of this media type. So to the question about the women's media role the respondents answered as follows (see Table 3): they help to get important information, develop interests and help to form your own style. And, according to the young women, these publications are not focused on helping the audience in the psychological sphere, the professional segment and everyday life.

Table 3. The answers to the question: "What role do women's media and mass media play in young woman life?"

No	Answers	Respondents (%)		
		2023	2021	2016
1	Help with important information	43	30	67
2	Develop interests	49	25	52
3	Help with a style	48	33	61
4	Help to find a life partner	12	9	8
5	Help with personal, family problems	22	12	14
6	Help to organize your household	9	19	14
7	Help in career	7	4	4

To the question (2023): "Which women's magazines do you read regularly?" the respondents gave the following answers: "I don't read magazines, sometimes I open them to look at a horoscope or read jokes. I am looking for other information on websites", "I do not regularly read women's magazines, I try to find interesting information on the Internet", "There are no certain preferences, I am looking for a topic that interests me on the Internet", etc.

The question: "Which bloggers do you subscribe to?", on the contrary, did not cause any difficulties for the respondents. The following bloggers were named in the responses: Alexander Bulkin (autoblogger, author of the Bulkin channel with an audience of 4.7 million on YouTube) (6 %), Booster (blogger, streamer, author of entertainment videos, Booster channel with an audience of 3.6 million on YouTube) (5 %), Alexander Zubarev (blogger, streamer, Zubarev channel with an audience of 3 million on YouTube (4 %), Nastya Ivleeva (blogger, TV presenter) (4 %), Karina Kasparyants (author of a blog about style, makeup, travel) (3 %), Dmitry Maslennikov (video blogger, musician, TV presenter, author of the Dima Maslennikov channel with an audience of 18 million on YouTube, which hosts videos in an entertainment format, extreme videos, ghost hunting) (3 %), Maria Tarasova (journalist, blogger, author of videos about women's health, beauty, style) (3 %), Gosha Kartsev (stylist, blogger, TV presenter) (3 %), Oleg Gaas (actor) (1 %), Katya Klap (video blogger, makes videos in genres: sketch, conversational videos, musical parodies, unpacking goods, travel, author of The Kate Clapp channel with an audience of more than 7 million on YouTube) (1 %), Dmitry Kuplinov (blogger, streamer, the owner of the Kuplinov Play channel with an audience of 16.8 million subscribers on YouTube and more than 800 thousand on Telegram) (1 %), Nikolay Sobolev (video blogger, writer, singer, creator of the SOBOLEV channel about public events with an audience of 4.9 million subscribers on YouTube) (1 %), Masha Zoom (blogger, shoots videos about unpacking goods, humorous videos, author of the channel Masha Zoom with an audience of more than 4 million on YouTube) (1 %), etc. 5 % replied that they did not subscribe to bloggers. 37 % of the respondents did not answer this question (2023). The expansion of the blogosphere and the identification of a wide thematic spectrum in it provide a significant choice of personalized media channels; at the same time, most of the media resources that young women choose are presented in an entertainment format.

5. Conclusion

Popular glossy magazines remain the predominant segment of Russian women's magazine periodicals. However, the audience of the women's print press continues to decline due to the emergence of new media channels and the differentiation of readers' interests.

Gender-oriented magazines (in this case, women's publications) describe popular gender concepts of behavior, reflect changes in society concerning the interests of a gender audience and its lifestyle. Thus, the conducted research showed that the main reason why the youth female audience turns to reading women's publications is to be informed about the lifestyle, as a result of which young women are interested in multi-thematic gender-oriented magazines. The leisure time of the female youth audience has been transformed, which explains the decrease in its interest in crafts and, as a result, in this topic in the media. The average age of childbearing has increased (this trend is becoming global) – and parenting magazines addressed to mothers have become less popular.

Young women are unaware of the existence of special (religious, regional) women's magazines, which raise serious gender issues. Moreover, the youth audience may not remember the names of the sites they visit, which is a feature of the modern media process. The modern media consumption of young people is characterized by: hours spent in the Internet environment, the predominance of entertainment video content and the rejection of the use of traditional media.

The study shows that women are tired of stereotypes in traditional women's magazines. However the changes in media consumption are not related to the growth media literacy. Answers to questions about the functionality of women's media show that some of respondents can identify the concepts of "entertainment nature" and "important" information (this is confirmed by the answers from Table 1 and Table 3).

Developing media literacy courses for female students of Russian universities, it is necessary to pay attention to the analysis of gender-based media content.

Analyzing the media texts of women's magazines and watching bloggers' videos will help develop critical thinking. We can suggest: indentifying the essence of the message, separating gender stereotypes from the message, searching commercial information or manipulation elements in texts and videos.

The media literacy course should include practical exercises that will help distinguish important problem-solving information from entertaining and memorable information. It is necessary to include explanations of the functions of journalism and the Internet environment: informational, educational, communicative, cultural, educational, recreational (entertainment), and so on. So, the students will know different content channels (specialized women magazines, blogs about gender problems). One lesson can be devoted to the analysis of various women's media and the functions they perform. The lesson will help young women to understand the sources of important information.

Also, in media literacy lessons, it is necessary to explain why it is necessary to remember the source of information. Young women should understand that the skill of identifying the source of information helps to verify content and assume the purpose of its creation. We recommend to include a task with reports about popular bloggers in the media literacy course for students. Students may be asked to talk about the topics of bloggers' materials, about the promotion of commercial information by bloggers, about techniques for attracting audience attention, and so on.

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