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ЧТО МЕШАЕТ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКЕ БЫТЬ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКОЙ

Лекция для студентов института социальных наук
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Лекция посвящена глобальным тенденциям развития современных медиа, тому, как в сложившихся условиях остросоциальные темы представляются в российских СМИ. В лекции анализируются мультимедийные инструменты, при помощи которых журналисты стремятся обратить внимание аудитории на общественные проблемы.

Ключевые слова: *журналистика, медиа, медиаобразование, медиаграмотность, информационная лавина, поколение Z, цифровое поколение, метрики, остросоциальные темы, гомосексуализм, наркозависимость, домашнее насилие, журналистика прямого действия.*

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WHAT PREVENTS JOURNALISM FROM BEING JOURNALISM

Lecture for students of Social Studies School
(Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands, March 2019)

I would like to share with you my observations on the global development of modern media and journalism and the development of media in Russia. I will also pay attention to how acute social issues are presented in Russian media. We will see what tools journalists use to make the society to face to these problems.

Keywords: *journalism, media, media education, media literacy, information avalanche, digital generation, metrics, acute social issues, homosexuality, drug addiction, direct journalism.*

1. Media Education is not Media Literacy

In last years the Internet and the market of information technologies have changed not only the face of mass media, but also the reality surrounding a person and the foundations of interpersonal communication. The world is hard to imagine without available information, social networks, video hosting and instant messengers.

Different problems are often associated with such changes as

- manipulation of public opinion,
- loss of privacy,
- information overload.

A person is not able to resist an information avalanche without developing individual ways for the interpretation of information, its evaluation and systematization.

Media literacy contributes to effective interaction with the media in the context of the constant evolution of the media environment.

The concept of Media literacy is understood widely. Media literacy is a set of knowledge and skills. These knowledge and skills help you to select, analyze and evaluate media texts. These knowledge and skills help you to create and transmit media texts in various forms and genres. These knowledge and skills help you to analyze the complex processes of functioning of media in society.

The development of media literacy of the audience is traditionally associated with educational practices in the context of formal education in schools and universities. But in a situation of permanent media transformation, inflexible formal education programs in this sphere often lag behind the real agenda.

For example, traditional strategies of classroom practice seem to be particularly ineffective in the situation described by the media educator M. Prensky (Prensky, 2006). It's when the digital generation is taught by teachers who are digital immigrants adapted to new realities.

For example, many media educators and child psychologists believe that YouTube videos are information garbage. They believe that children should play in the playground and not in Minecraft. Parents limit access to the computer for children.

But there are experts who say that the playgrounds have become too safe. They say that the child needs a spontaneous unstructured game for the development. They say that creating own rules of the game and pushing with danger is an important experience for a child. I remember my childhood. I did not like to play in the yard near my house, where everything was familiar. It was boring. We preferred to play on construction sites and in abandoned buildings.

That is why some experts say that for the digital generation, traveling from video-to-video in YouTube and strange games like Minecraft are variants of a spontaneous game, an opportunity to face danger.

Of course, you can doubt the effectiveness of media education for other reasons. For example, art historian and critic James Elkins wrote the book *Why Art Cannot be Taught* (Элкинс, 2017). The title of the book is not a provocative metaphor. The author really doubts that formal education in art is possible. However, he himself is a teacher at the Art Institute of Chicago. I think that such a rhetorical position can also be in teaching journalism. Of course, journalism is not art, but the concepts of authorship, creativity, style are in media discourse too. I can teach students smart words and theories. I can also teach them to construct the news and the fact-checking algorithm. But they must learn to write news on their own. To do this, they must learn to read the news, to practice in the media.

Journalism in universities and institutions is journalism of last days. In five years, any new textbook becomes a "classic" or a history of journalism or

simply rubbish. That is why in the field of media education, the conflict of theory and practice is felt very much. Teachers and students have a joke about the “third year crisis." In the third year of education many students are disappointed in the profession and journalistic education. They perceive further training, taking a diploma, as a ritual dance. Some students understand that this is a difficult, low-paid, and sometimes dangerous profession. They begin to find themselves in other, sometimes similar fields. There are students who do not cover cynicism and openly express their readiness to compromise with conscience. I am glad that these students are in a minority. Other students feel their vocation, but they think that further systematic training is meaningless.

I will give you an example. One of my friends decided to return to the journalism after six years of work with homeless people. Before that, she graduated with honors the Faculty of Journalism. But she understood that excellent diploma didn’t guarantee her work in the editorial office. I remember how she permanently read the local press. She tried to understand what they were writing about and how they were writing. It seems that she has not read anything for these six years. Today she is a successful journalist. But this example tells us that in media education a very important role is played by conscious interaction with the media.

Students of elementary journalism courses are not much different from a mass audience. They are also disoriented and hardly imagine the functioning of modern media. What is the reason? Let's look at some of the trends in the development of modern media.

2. Journalism and Information Avalanche

The first thing to note is the constant increase of information flows. TV channels produce thousands of hours of original content every day. Professional online media daily produce hundreds of reading hours.

At the same time, professional media compete with user-generated content today. The situation was different when most of used now journalism textbooks were written.

350,000 posts are sent to Twitter every minute. YouTube users download about 300 hours of video every minute (Амзин, 2016). And this is not the latest data. I am sure that today this amount is much bigger.

It is becoming more and more difficult for professional journalism to get the reader in this information streams. Journalists have to use dirty methods. There is a joke about this: “Everything that I know about Kim Kardashian, I’ve learned without my wish.”

Choose on which news you will click:

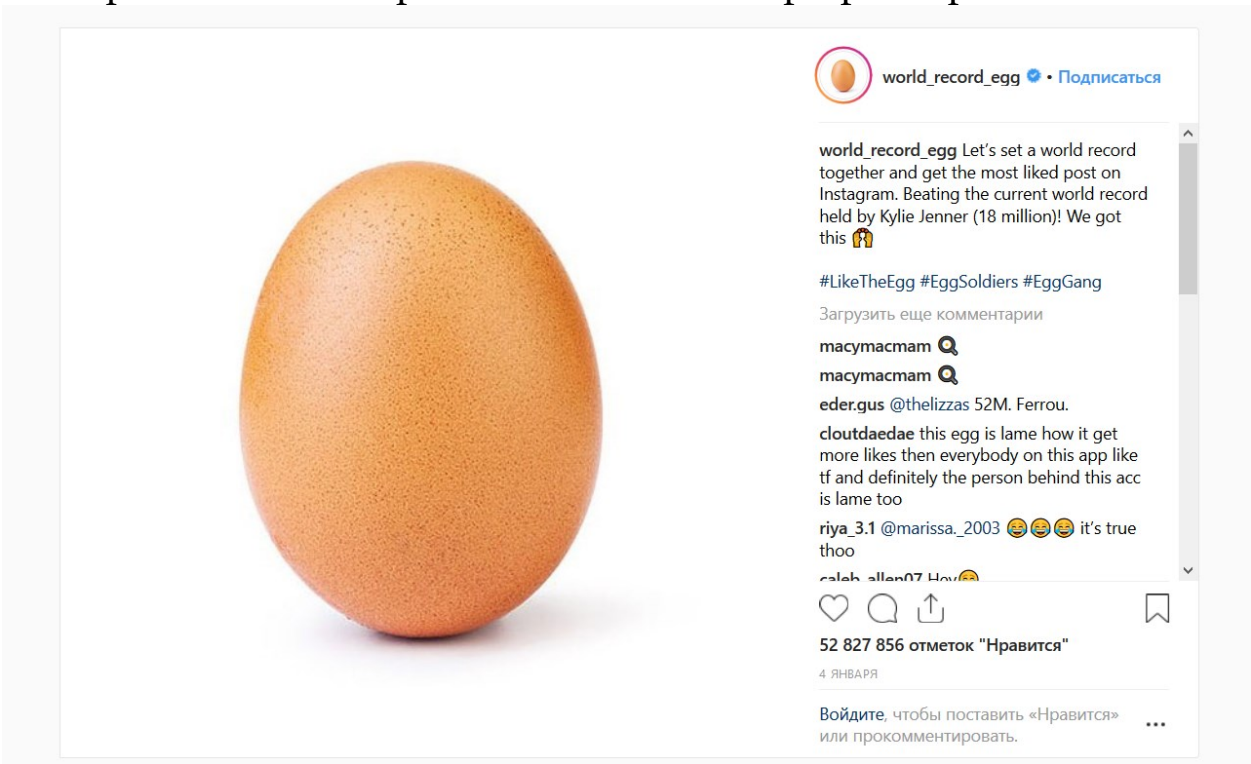
- Regular details of Brexit;
- Earthquake with victims in Asia;
- Russian hackers have stolen intimate photos of Hollywood stars.

All this is quite exciting, but the photos... And of course, they can be viewed...

Today, news introduced by professional journalists is often secondary to user-generated content. Information on Twitter and Facebook appear before the relevant news appears in professional media. Professional media often refer to Twitter and Facebook.

Last year, the Russian edition of the magazine "Interview" was closed with its site. This situation is quite logical. The magazine was specialized in celebrity interviews. But who needs this magazine in time when the stars talk everything on their Facebook and Instagram?

Journalism has to fight for the attention of the audience in a world where the picture of an egg on Instagram gets 50 million likes. And at the same time photos from flashpoints do not make the proper impression.



Pic. 1. *Journalism has to fight for the attention of the audience in a world where the picture of an egg on Instagram gets 50 million likes.*

But that is not all. Journalism fights for the attention of the audience, not only with user-generated content, but also with programs that constantly distract the reader.

In such situation it is difficult not only to attract the attention of the audience, but and to keep the reader's attention. But the resource of this attention is not unlimited.

Imagine that you are talking with two people at the same time. You will find it difficult to answer, but you can still listen to them. And try listening to three speakers at the same time. It is absolutely impossible.

You can drive and listen to the radio without any problems. Thus, you have two information channels working. Each channel of information is about 60 bits of attention in 1 second (Амзин, 2016).

A person can perceive about 120 bits of information per second. Some

hard maths. 60 bits of attention for your looking at the road, plus 60 bits of attention you need to listen to the radio. But you will not be able to drive the car, listen to the radio and respond to a message in WhatsApp. These are already 3 channels. And this is 180 bits of information. As a result, one channel should go out of your attention. And let it be WhatsApp.

Now you understand why people who watch television look like zombies. Television speaks and shows. And these are 2 channels of information at the same time. Television needs all your attention.

A great number of sources and channels of information want the attention of the user. As a result, users get information in fragments. In a moment users make a decision to read or leave a web page. Users read not linearly. They scroll through the text.

The Italian philosopher Umberto Eco once remarked that earlier one had to go to the library to get knowledge. You took 10 books on your topic. And you read these books. Now computer gives you ten thousand headlines and introductions. And now you read 10 thousand headlines and introductions (Эко, 2015: 199).

There was a time when all the professionals said that journalism of large texts died. They tell that there is too much information, and users read fragmentary. That's why there is no sense in telling large and complex stories. These articles will not be read, and they will not be paid off. But it is not true. Later we will see how journalists today tell long and uncomfortable stories.

In the battle for the attention of audience, professional journalism is trying to develop a strategy by analyzing statistics data — metrics. There are different web analytics services which are connected to the site and generate reports. These metrics show the number of visitors to the page, your gender and age. We can see how much time you spent on the site, from which type of device you visited: a computer or mobile phone, how many pages you visited, what you clicked on, how you got to the page. And we can see from which region you visited the page. The map of click shows what you click with the mouse.

Editors are trying to evaluate this data and build a strategy. Good metrics mean many visitors, good page depth, not big amount of bounce rate. The logic is this: better metrics mean more successful editorial strategy. But you need to remember that these are just numbers. Statistics data are interpreted by a man. It does not always work.

When you choose a movie, do you pay attention to the IMDB or Rotten Tomatoes rating? Many people do this way. But I think you can see that this does not always work. Sometimes a low or not high enough rate discriminates a film, and a high one determines its perception.

For example, I like Paolo Sorrentino's film "This Must Be the Place". I think that its rate is unreasonably low. What am I talking about? Statistic data does not always show the real situation.

Positive metrics tell about skillful distribution, interface quality, but not about journalism quality. But sometimes editors forget about this. Focusing on metrics, journalism tries to give readers what they want. But this is a wrong way. As we see, users want a chicken egg. Following only statistics, journalism forgets about its mission — to inform and educate.

3. Real Problems vs. Chicken Egg

But the question is — how to make the audience read articles on non-comfortable topics, how to make them pay attention to real problems? What do the media do for this?

Now I would like to continue the conversation already on the Russian experience. Media in Russia is developing in line with global trends. But the Russian media system has special things. And journalism in Russia has some other difficulties.

Among the disciplines that I teach, there is several practical subjects. On these disciplines, I train students to create a full media product — from the choice of the topic of the article to the realization of the concept and page making.

Work on any media text has: the choice of topics, the search for heroes and experts, work in the field (interview, observation, experiment) work on text and illustrative material, editing and page making.

At each stage, students have various difficulties. The main difficulty that almost all students face is the choice of topic. The topic for a journalist is his bread. It is very important to know what you want to write about.

At the first practice lesson, students should bring 10 prepared topics. From them we choose one topic. The student will work on this topic during other six lessons. Of course, the topics should be enough volume. Topics should include a specific problem that the student will research.

Almost all students leave after the first lesson without approved topics. Most of the topics they bring are banal and are without research potential. Their topics are not new and actual. There is no social acuity in these topics.

It is strange. Usually students have a great sense of justice and a desire to change the world.

Here are the topics that students usually propose: coffee and coffee shops; tattoos; cybersport; hitch-hiking; local poets, photographers, street musicians; homeless animals; about where to rest and how students can earn money; about local theaters, dance and musical bands; about grandmothers who cross-stitch better than other grandmothers; about “new” subcultures; about favorite films; about volunteers.

All this is very good, and sometimes even important, such as, for example, topics about volunteers. But local and federal editions often write about this.

Why does it happen? Are students lazy? No, they are not. Are they afraid of anything? No, they are not. They really do not know what to write about. Difficult topics simply can’t go into their information bubble.

Many students after visiting a new cafe consider it their duty to write a evaluation post on the social network. This is how they understand journalism. But not all journalism is a restaurant critic. There are also such topics as domestic and sexual abuse, problems of sexual, religious and ethnic minorities, gender stereotypes and others.

It's a pity, that professional journalists pay little attention to these topics too.

But there is another problem — it is difficult for such texts to find a way to the mass reader. I've said about this before. They have to compete with memes, pictures with cats, crime chronicles, serials and pornography. Today it's not enough to write a big social text. We also need to find our reader. But this is not enough. We should make the reader not only open the text, but also read it.

The low coverage of some problems in the Russian media associated with restrictions in laws. For example, Russian law bans gay promotion and puts restrictions on coverage of drugs and suicide problems. It is impossible to publish content that hurt the feelings of religious people or extremist content, which can be seen as a danger to the constitutional order. And it is impossible to publish text which can make ethnic conflicts.

Many media, especially in the regions, completely refuse to cover the problems of gays. Editors do not take up materials that can be defined as drug-positive.

The liberal opposition sees in these laws signs of a totalitarian regime. But I should say that many of these laws are logical in the Russian reality.

So, I must say that Russian society is extremely negative about gays. According to the statistics of the Levada Center (it is an independent research organization) 74% of Russians think that gays and lesbians are immoral or psychically disabled. Only 15% responders answered that homosexuality is equal to traditional sexual orientation. 39% believe that gays should be forcibly treated or isolated from society. 4% believe that people with non-traditional sexual orientation should be liquidated. 84% are against the same-sex marriages in our country (Газета.ru, 2010).

If we talk about the LGBT topic in the Russian media, here the media follow this formula: you can't say that being gay is good. For example, you can't write about LGBT parties. But the topic of LGBT is not closed. For example, you can interview a cleaner in a gay club. Yes, there are gay clubs in Russia. But there is also a cult of masculinity.

LGBT articles constantly appear in the media. There are interviews with LGBT activists, articles about discrimination, interviews with transsexual people and parents of LGBT children. These materials are not blocked by the supervisory authorities, and no one takes editors to the forest to serious talks. Journalists can write about it, and they do wright about it.

In Russia, journalists writing such texts are not imprisoned, as, for example, in Egypt. Not so long ago in Egypt the journalist was punished by

one year in prison for an interview with a gay man. Journalist said that the interview was made against gays. Earlier he told negatively about gays many times.

For example, in January 2018, the Russian media reported again about chasing of gays in Chechnya. This problem has been actively discussed since the end of 2017 after the investigation of the newspaper Novaya Gazeta. But some editions prefer not to see these topics.

As for drug addicts, 19 percent of Russians believe that they should be liquidated, and another 36 percent think that they should be isolated from society.

In this situation, the existence of relevant laws seems enough natural. It turns out ambivalent situation. On the one hand, these laws are a natural reflection of the majority opinion, and on the other hand, these laws block comprehensive coverage of the problems. These laws do not allow the media to change public opinion and create a public debate.

In this situation, it sometimes seems that the coverage of these topics by independent mass media becomes not only a reflection of their social position and a desire to inform and make public opinion. But it is also a kind of political protest.

For example, at the end of 2018, an interview with a girl addicted to heroin Teo appeared in the edition which is popular in a creative community. In several days, the article was blocked by the supervisory authorities. This text was considered as drug-positive not only by supervisory authorities, but also by many journalists. The opinion of the audience was also separated. In this interview, a girl using heroin talks about her life position and lifestyle. Teo says that a person can take heroin and look good. She tells how she does this, and she is not going to give up drugs. She says: “I didn’t degrade, I didn’t get sick of anything. If I exist, then maybe there are other people like me? I’m not completely done, but I have been taking drugs a lot and for a very long time.”

Anna Sarang is the president of a non-commercial organization that helps drug users. She was as an expert in the article. But even she saw exotisation of women who use drugs in that article, and she wrote about it in Facebook.

The publication of this text is like the action. It was instantly noticed and shared on the Internet. It made an intensive discussion. Blocking of this article only added interest to it. Of course, smart users can find it on other resources.

The special thin of local media in Russia is that most of them cannot have not only a full-time lawyer, but also a proofreader. That is why, most local editions prefer not to write on topics that may attract the attention of supervisory authorities.

But this does not mean that Russian media are focused only on publishing boring official chronicles. Russian journalists try to attract the

attention of the audience to complex social problems.

Website: s_menya_hvatit.tilda.ws

So, last autumn a special project by Olga Alfyerova about domestic violence "Enough" was released at one of the local Belgorod sites.

The problem of domestic violence had escalated after the law about decriminalization of domestic violence was taken in Russia. At the same time, according to official statistics in 2016, 60 thousand people suffered from domestic violence. Most of the victims are women. Public organizations say that only 3% of domestic violence cases go to trial. Before that, the Belgorod regional media did not do any special projects, especially on such a complex and unpopular topic.

Olga had to act at her own risk. The editor did not approve the subject and refused to give resources for the project. The editor said that journalism was not a propaganda of values, but a business. The editor said that the coverage of such topics should be complex and different points of view should be presented. But Olga saw only one point of view — it is impossible to beat women. And the legalization of domestic violence is impossible. In my opinion, this is correct. That is why Olga asked me for help. We decided to design the project on a separate site and do it outside the edition. Olga collected a large amount of interesting and useful material. She spoke to the victims of domestic violence. A man who beat his wife trusted her and told her his story. She found important statistics, interviewed a psychologist at the crisis center, who answered difficult questions. For example, about if it is possible to save a family in such a situation, why women suffer beatings and how to help a close person in this situation.

Olga made a checklist «How to recognize violence», a list of help centers, useful books and much more.

Olga was assisted free of charge by colleagues with design, editing, photography. So, together with the Belgorod photographer, she prepared a project. The photographs showed objects that were used by men to beat up women: a leg from a chair, a knife, a saucepan, an ax, a door handle. Next to the photos there are texts from the trial decision. For example. "Using a metal saucepan as a weapon, he beat her face." Was found guilty. Punishment — compulsory work (250 hours).

Olga did a lot of hard work. It was difficult to find characters. One of the reasons, there was the Football World Cup and there was no time for the police to give comments and interviews about incidents of domestic violence. Secondly, in the local organizations of assistance to women, none of the victims agreed to tell their stories: women were ashamed and did not want publicity.

I was asked to pack it all up. Today, it is not enough to collect a lot of interesting information, it is important to give it so that the audience is distracted from Instagram and pay attention to it. It should look nice and be convenient.

We were saved by the site builder Tilda. This resource helps you to create your own website without the help of programmers.

As a result, the editors evaluated the result and published the project. Other media wrote about this project. The project was nominated for several journalistic awards, and Olga was even paid for it. To tell the truth she was paid like for the ordinary article. But this is already something.

Modern information technologies have made journalists more mobile and independent. Today, you can create and visualize your own multimedia project without the expensive services of programmers, without moneys of a media holding company and a large staff. Thanks to this, monetization schemes change too.

That is why, I want to pay attention to the acute projects of the non-large independent studio Gonzodizayn. This small studio offers help for creating websites, interfaces and storytelling. But they have their own projects. I would like to pay attention to how they made and promoted them. I think that in this you can see new perspectives for the development of journalism.

Website: inthecold.ru

The project “In the cold” is a documentary story about the families of work migrants from Tajikistan. The problem of migrants is very serious in Russia.

The author of the project, Ksenia Diodorova, spent a month in the Pamirs in Tajikistan, where she filmed the parents of migrants. When Ksenia returned to Russia, she began to search and shoot close relatives and children of her Pamir heroes.

Here is what the author says about the project: «This is a two-way story which we can learn a little more about migrants or “from the beginning” — see where they were born and how they grew up, who their parents are, what their children draw, what they believe and dream about. In my opinion, it is important how the project was presented to the audience. I said that to make a media text is not enough — it is important to find an audience. It is important the text to be read».

Ksenia released this project in 3 formats.

The first format is an online project. You can watch it now. This is a multimedia story. It contains photos, audio recordings, video and a text. The text of the project consists of interviews with the characters, statistics, and notes of the author.

This project was made with the help of the online site builder Redimag. This is an analogue of the site builder "Tilda", which helped us to do the project "Enough". These tools help the journalists and any users to engage in web design without special knowledge, to make their own independent projects.

The second format in which the project was presented is a book in Russian and English.

«The book includes about 200 photos, and the author’s text about the

traditions of the Pamiris, their culture and the stories of those families that became the heroes of this project. In addition to the usual content for the photobook format, inside, next to the photos, there are QR codes, each of them leads to a small video that shows what is happening on this image».

Money for publishing this book was collected by crowdfunding. 243 sponsors donated about six thousand dollars.

The third format is the exhibition. The project was presented in various exhibition spaces in Russia and Italy.

Much has been written about the project in the media, the author has been interviewed, real discussion has taken place on the Internet. The project found its reader, viewer and listener. And this is important. As I said before, writing a text today is not enough.

Website: dreamsbehindthehijab.ru

I would like to show another project that was also made with the help of the Redimag service. It is called «Dreams behind the hijab».

The authors say that this is a try to get closer oneself and perhaps someone else to the understanding of women of another culture. Russia is a multinational country. In many of its regions, most of the population confesses Islam. Of course, cultural dialogue is very important for us.

The visual component dominates in last two projects.

The author of this project asked the women in hijabs to lay down composition from 6 objects that they would find at home. Every object in this composition is an image or an association with one of the important parts of life: home, childhood, dream, work, believe and family.

I showed you 3 media projects. They differ from traditional texts.

The non-verbal component is very strong in them. A modern man — a man who is looking at. In modern communication the visual image is very important. We read visual images very quickly.

The Chinese artist Xu Bing wrote a novel using pictograms. This book can be read by any person anywhere in the world. Its language is universal.

That is why, telling long stories, modern media pay great attention to images — illustrations. Journalists do not only write, but they also direct their stories.

Let's look at a few examples from the online edition «My Dear, you Are a Transformer», the edition which published the issue on heroin addiction patterns.

Website: dom.batenka.ru

In this longread, journalists explore the concept of "house".

What is a house? Favellas, a house during a war, what is a house for seamen and other texts on the topic “House”.

Journalists are exploring the phenomenon and the number of floors in the house is added. It is interesting to look at illustrations, and it is nice to read clever texts. I should remark, that journalists advise to read these texts

on a computer. This is a slow reading journalism with a cup of coffee. The animation does not work on the phone and the illustrations do not have the planned effect. I should say that the technology of step-by-step animation is very simple. This animation is made like animation in PowerPoint.

Website: bio.batenka.ru

This is the text about biohacking. It is about how people try to make their body better. We read the text, and the components of the collage change with the content.

Website: taxi.batenka.ru

This is a big and exciting story about a Russian taxi driver.

There is a lot of text, but it does not push away by its size. There are a lot of illustrations. This text is very nice to read. Chances are good that a text will be read for long time and people will share this story on social networks.

4. Conclusion. What Should Journalism be?

I would like to pay attention to another trend, which is becoming more noticeable in our days. I observe that the concept of "direct journalism" is becoming popular in the Russian media. The idea of the concept is that the media do not just write about people's problems but try to make the society pay attention to them and help the heroes directly following their destiny.

The traditional concept of journalism looks cynical.

Often, the heroes of publications trust to journalists in the hope that they will be heard and helped. But no one hears. And sometimes no one reads. Often the journalist thinks that if he found a hero who and told an impressive story about him — that's enough. He made his task — talked, photographed, wrote and published the article. It is end of his responsibilities. No matter what will happen with hero in future. Maybe the publication only damaged hero's life. The journalist forgets about him as a developed resource. He is just waiting for the prize for resonant article.

The traditional concept of journalism is to cover, observe, but not interfere. Perhaps the metaphor of such controversial journalism can be a photo of the British photographer Nick Ut. It is believed that this photo has influenced significantly on public opinion about the war in Vietnam. Naked burned girl running from napalm is in the photo. There are photographers around her. They are trying to find a good angle. No one is trying to help her.

Of course, these extra details were cut cropped during the publication.

Now I would like to go back to the story about Teo, a yang woman addicted to heroin. I just talked about it. Let me remind you that the article was blocked after a few days. But that's not all. Teo was arrested. Journalists could predict this effect.

The concept of direct journalism destroys the status quo. Journalists not only write, but also offer audience to help people in difficult situations. It has become a standard practice for the online edition Takie Dela (So it goes). Takie Dela is an information portal of the foundation, the main aim of which

is to attract public attention to social problems. The edition not only writes about the disabled, problems of women, children, migrants, the poor and many other things, but also collaborates with various foundations and collects money.

Website: takiedela.ru/2018/12/terpet-radi-detey

For example, this article is about Fatima, a woman from Chechnya, whose husband illegally took away her children.

The woman appealed to the elders, wrote to President Putin. In the courtroom she was told: “You are a Chechen, go and sort it out according to your own laws”. One of the public organizations helped her. Children were returned after a long and difficult trial. This article is not only described a drama story. At the end of the text we can find a donation form for the Madina project. This is an organization that helped Fatima and helps other women who are in a similar situation.

At this point, I propose to end our conversation. And I want to wish the journalists to remain journalists and in the commercial battle for the attention of the reader not to forget about their mission — to inform and educate.

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