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## **Religious Media Dynamics in Russia after 'Perestroika' (1991–2017)**

### **Rozwój mediów religijnych w Rosji po Pierestrojce (1991–2017)**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

The paper analyzes the religious media subsystem in Russia focusing on main religious media, their place in Russian media system, digital and social networks impact, specific features of the mediatization of religion in the country. These results of the research provide confirmatory evidence of the weakness of religious initiatives on media policy (regulation and co-regulation), the primarily ethnical approach to religious identity ("if you are Russian you should be the Orthodox"), religious media difficulties in handling of new digital communication technologies. Author addresses the problematic areas and challenging issues of Russian religious media (understanding journalism as PR, missing mission and target audience, lack of professionalism).

#### **KEY WORDS:**

mediatization of religion, Russia, religious identity, Orthodox media, social networks.

#### **STRESZCZENIE:**

Artykuł analizuje media religijne w Rosji, koncentrując się na najważniejszych z nich. Opisuje ich miejsce w rosyjskim systemie medialnym, pokazuje wpływy mediów społecznościowych i cyfrowych, a także charakterystyczne cechy mediatyzacji religii w kraju. Rezultaty badań wskazują na: (1) nieskuteczność inicjatyw religijnych we wpływaniu na politykę medialną (rozwiązania prawne) w Rosji; (2) przeważnie etniczne uwarunkowanie identyfikacji religijnej („jeśli jesteś Rosjaninem, to musisz być prawosławnym”); (3) nieumiejętność mediów religijnych w posługiwaniu się nowymi technologiami. Autor omawia problemy i wyzwania jakie stają przed mediami religijnymi w Rosji (postrzeganie dziennikarstwa jako działalności PR, brak misji i określenia odbiorcy docelowego, brak profesjonalizmu).

#### **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**

mediatyzacja religii, Rosja, tożsamość religijna, media prawosławne, media społecznościowe

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The relations between religions and media – their tensions, conflicts, mutual understanding and “*modus vivendi*” – make a significant factor responsible for social stability and modernization of the post-Soviet Russia in the perspective of civil society. That is why they are becoming more attractive for research – from phenomenological description to structural and functional analysis.<sup>1</sup>

After many decades of atheism and persecutions in the USSR Russian Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and other religious structures found themselves in a very difficult situation when the freedom of religion was declared in the early 1990s.

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The historical analysis of the religious media in Russia explicitly shows two stages: a) *rapid development of all religious media* (1990–1997) and b) *their stratification after the division in 1997 into so-called “traditional”* (Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist) and „non-traditional” (Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, new religious movements and others).

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The historical analysis of the religious media in Russia explicitly shows two stages: a) *rapid development of all religious media* (1990–1997) and b) *their stratification after the division in 1997 into so-called “traditional”* (Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish and Buddhist) and “non-traditional” (Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, new religious movements and others). The most “traditional” Orthodox media were favored by the state (on the national and regional levels), some of “non-traditional” religious media decided to choose the strategy of “self-silencing”.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Luchenko, *Orthodox Online Media on Runet: History of Development and Current State of Affairs* in “Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media”, 2015 / 14, pp. 123–132.

According to *self-identification data*, approximately from 60 to 80 % of Russian population claim themselves to be Orthodox Christians. Radically different results are obtained by estimating the number of *observant followers* of every religion, the reason being that members of many ethnic groups often choose to self-identify as adherents to a certain religion for cultural reasons, although they would not fit any traditional religiousness criteria (church attendance, familiarity with basic dogmas of their faith). For example, even though 80% of ethnic Russians self-identify as Russian Orthodox, less than 10% of them attend church services more than once a month and only 2–4% are considered to be integrated into church life.

Sociological service “Levada Center” confirms this hypothesis (see table 1).

Table 1. Question: What is the role of religion in your life? (answers in %)

	Oct.05	Sep.07	Jun.12	Mar.13	Feb.16
Very important	11	6	6	5	6
Enough important	27	26	24	29	28
Not very important	39	41	45	43	40
Not important	20	24	20	19	22
Difficult to answer	2	3	5	4	4

(Source – Levada Center. Last poll details: 12–13 February, 2016, ‘face-to-face’ interview, representative sample throughout Russian urban and rural population, 800 people aged 18+ in 137 settlements of 48 regions of Russia. Statistical discrepancy does not exceed 4, 1%).

According to the Levada Center longitude research, religious identity for Russians is still much less significant in comparison to ethnic identity. Responses to the question “Who do you perceive yourself with pride that in the first place add your self-respect?” show that during the period from 1989 to 2008 the share of respondents that chose “I am Russian” rose from 43% to 50%, while those who chose option “I am a believer” – from 4% to 15%. Nevertheless, the religious identity comprehension grows faster, than ethnical identity.

Describing in his research the increase the ideological uncertainty and eclecticism with beliefs in reincarnation and astrology, ufology, energy vampires, witches, shamans and so on, sociologist D. Furman suggested, that religion is not winning vs. atheism in Russia, rather atheism wins vs. religion.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. RUSSIAN MEDIA SYSTEM IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

Hallin and Mancini<sup>3</sup> (2004), following classical work *Four Theories of the Press*<sup>4</sup>, presumed that there are stable connections between media and political systems. For comparing media systems, they focused on four principal dimensions: the structure of media markets, the degree and form of political parallelism; the development of journalistic professionalism; and the degree and form of state intervention in the media system.

During his presentation in Moscow Readings conference at Lomonosov Moscow State University on the 17 November, 2016, Finnish scholar Kaarle Nordenstreng called media systems «a popular, useful and messy concept». Acknowledging, that “the media system is an important intellectual vehicle to understand media landscapes and focus on big stories”, Nordenstreng suggested that “it is typically used as a label not properly defined, taken for granted”. Supporting a call for re-thinking and re-approaching the notion of ‘media systems’, we still consider it to be useful for understanding the place, fixing the locum of religion media in national media landscape.

Traditionally, researchers in order to describe and compare media systems, examine socio-political context, legal regulation (Constitution, media laws, etc), state administration, media structure, ownership and proportions (weights), as well as the audience (population reached by each media). The model of

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<sup>2</sup> D. Furman and K. Kaariajnen, *Religioznost' v Rossii v 90-e gody XX – nachala XXI veka [Religiosity in Russia in 1990s and 2000s]*, Moscow, OGNI TD, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Hallin, and P. Mancini, *Comparing media systems. Three models of media and politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> F.S. Siebert, T. Peterson, and W. Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press. The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1956.

Russian media system has been described as 'transitional'<sup>5</sup>, 'post-socialist'<sup>6</sup> and 'post-communist'<sup>7</sup>.

During the Soviet time, the government, controlled by the communist party was the biggest owner, employer, distributor and decision-maker, national TV, wire radio and print press together comprised a consistent hierarchical structure. It was controlled on the basis of the official communist doctrine about mass media and has been censored by a special institution – Glavlit, established in 1922. 'Perestroika' (1985- 1991) was a time of openness and publicity in the public sphere (Glasnost'). The Law on Press and other Mass Media (1990) prohibited censorship and allowed organizations and individuals to set up media which did not have to be dependent on the state, but the high level of inflation turned most of them unprofitable. Financial 'oligarchs' launched their own media.

Russian researcher Elena Vartanova reminded that the Soviet Media Theory was a normative guideline, demanding from journalists to be affiliated to the Communist party, news reporting was subordinated to feature stories and columnists.<sup>8</sup> Later on, during 'Perestrojka', despite the media had been liberalized "from above", the administrative-bureaucratic model had been adjusted to Western ideal of free and open society. Adopted in 1991, the Russian mass media law was based on the Anglo-American watchdog philosophy and therefore the censorship was forbidden, the rights to create privately owned media and the independence of editorial bodies and journalists were confirmed. But, later one Polish scholar Karol Jakubowicz recognized that Glasnost led to "a false optimism about the future of the Russian media".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Curran, and M.-J. Park, (Eds.), *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, London, Routledge, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> L. Giorgi, *The Post-Socialist Media : What Power the West? The changing media landscape in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> C. Sparks and A. Reading, *Communism, Capitalism and the Mass Media*, London, Sage, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> E. Vartanova, *The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics*, in: Hallin, D., Mancini, P. (eds.), *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> K. Jakubowicz, *Normative Models of Media and Journalism and Broadcasting Regulation in Central and Eastern Europe*, in: "International Journal of Communications Law and Policy", 1999 / 2, [http://www.digital-law.net/IJCLP/2\\_1999/ijclp\\_webdoc\\_12\\_2\\_1999.html](http://www.digital-law.net/IJCLP/2_1999/ijclp_webdoc_12_2_1999.html) (accessed 01.07.2018).

International experience made evident impact on the Russian media system. The implementations of information standards of Western journalism – mostly British and American – led to the separation “news” from “opinions”, but in the times of the propaganda rebirth this distinction is getting blurred again.

Vartanova proposed to divide Russian media system evolution into three stages: 1) ‘oligarchization’ (1991–1996), 2) ‘balkanization’ (1996–1999) and 3) neo-authoritarianism (2000 – till now). During the first stage, after a very short period of four-five years, Russian media became a source of political influence because of the integration between media and political elites with low profiled professional ethics among journalists. TV became as powerful, as a political party, the informal mechanisms were heavily used to manipulate the audience. In early 1990s created by foreign advertising agencies commercials, Latin American television soap operas were dominating in Russian TV program agenda. Then, during the second stage, the media ownership had been restructured, the legislative activity was very weak to regulate the media and journalists were disintegrated. Global media companies arrived in Russia (*Axel Springer*, German concern *Burda*, Swedish *Modern Times Group*, Finnish *Sanoma*, Norwegian *Orkla*, etc). And, finally, the third, neo-authoritarian period shows the rise and strengthening of state bureaucracy that spreads its control – direct or indirect – on any influent medium. After taking over the power, Vladimir Putin eliminated all alternative political forces and established control over the media system, and the public interest shifted from politics to the entertainment. All three main TV channels at the moment are controlled by the state. Paternalistic model of relationship between power and media led to the ignorance towards the audience, and later on the concept of so-called “state information policy” had been introduced.

The Russian media landscape is complex: the Internet penetration is growing, 71.3% of Russians (80% in big cities) use the Internet.<sup>10</sup> The largest daily, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, has 3 million readers a day, and the largest TV channel, *Pervyi*, attracts a 50 million audience each month and only 20% of Russians read the national dailies.<sup>11</sup> At the same time the concentration of media ownership continues, and the largest media holdings are still growing.

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<sup>10</sup> Internet Live Stats, *Internet users by country*, 2016, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users-by-country/> (accessed 01.07.2018).

<sup>11</sup> E. Vartanova, *Russia: post-Soviet, post-modern and post-empire media*, in K. Nordenstreng and D. K. Thussu (Eds.), *Mapping BRICS media*. London and New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 125–144.

“Contemporary Russian media find much in common with authoritarian regimes across the world and are not *sui generis* as some have argued”, underlined Jonathan Becker. He classifies Russian media system as ‘neo-authoritarian’: “In the Putin era, the Russian state has increasingly interfered with media autonomy. One would not want to romanticize the Yeltsin presidency, for Yeltsin was not averse to using levers of government power to threaten opposition media”. According to Becker, it is the bifurcation between broadcast and print media what particularly distinguishes the neo-authoritarian system: “In neo-authoritarian systems, the state asserts the capacity to control broadcast media, particularly television, because it is perceived to be the most important medium through which to communicate with the population”.<sup>12</sup>

The situation in Russian news media and public sphere differs from the situation in traditional Western democracies. The differences are rooted in the understanding of press and religious freedoms. By contrast to a million French people gathered to express their solidarity with Charlie Hebdo journalists, a few days later 1 million Russian citizens – mostly Muslims and Orthodox Christians – came together on the streets of Grozny (the capital of Chechnya) to support Islamic values.

Lack of experience of the two freedoms – of media and of religion – in Russia and the principle difference between the secular and Christian understanding of the limits of freedom of communication give us interesting material for analysis.

In the ethical perspective, the Congress of Russia’s Journalists adopted a Code of Professional Ethics (1994). Journalistic standards listed in the Code are similar to those adopted by journalists worldwide. However, its norms are hardly applied or respected by the majority of journalists.

In the press media industry, many publications are struggling with shrinking advertising and subscription revenue and the challenges of media convergence. Online media has the potential to become a stronger arena for public discussion – or to become more restricted. The Russian media model is still divided into two main formats: commercial capital and capital owned or manipulated by the state.<sup>13</sup>

TV has remained the most important medium, and it does not appear that it will lose its prominence in the near future. As De Smaele put it, Russia became

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<sup>12</sup> J. Becker, *Lessons from Russia. A Neo-Authoritarian Media System* in “European Journal of Communication”, SAGE Publications, 2004 / 19(2), p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> K. Lehtisaari, *The new rules for the advertising market in Russian TV* in: “Aleksanteri Insight”, 2015 / 2, 1–2.

a 'watching nation' instead of a 'reading nation',<sup>14</sup> therefore any actor seeking the impact on the audience TV remains a strategic resource. But in contrary to European "success stories", the history of the attempts to create Public TV in Russia and implement it into the existing media system, for last two decades, has been the history of failures.

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In the religious perspective, Christian, Muslim and Jewish leaders in Russia are much more focus on the critique of the TV content rather with organizing their own TV channels or programs, they demand media civic accountability. But the civil society in Russia is in general not mature enough to have strong and influent body for TV control from moral perspective, because in fact there is no consensus on the moral norms, on what is good and what is bad inside the society.

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### 3. RELIGIOUS MEDIA LANDSCAPE: DOMINATION AND MARGINALIZATION

#### 3.1. Orthodox media

The ROC remains one of the most highly trusted social institutions, around 70% identify themselves as 'Orthodox believers',<sup>15</sup> which is a 'marker' for Russian national self-identification. Some anti-ROC's campaigns and scandals ('Pussy Riot'

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<sup>14</sup> H. De Smaele, *The Applicability of Western Media Models on the Russian Media System* in: "European Journal of Communication" June 1999, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 173–189; D. Volkov, and S. Goncharov, *Russian media landscape: TV, press, Internet*, 2014, [Rossijskij media-landshaft: televidenie, pressa, Internet], Levada Center, <http://www.levada.ru/2014/07/08/rossijskij-media-landshaft-televidenie-pressa-internet-3/> (accessed 01.07.2018).

<sup>15</sup> *Prazdnovanie Paskhi [Easter Celebration]*, Levada, 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/05-05-2014/prazdnovanie-paskhi> (accessed 01.07.2018).



punk prayer in Moscow Cathedral and other) have not significantly decreased the trust to the ROC. Experts agree that a common trope for self-positioning of the Church is that the ROC is a 'state-shaping' religion.<sup>16</sup>

As Kishkovski reminded, "by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, there were nearly 600 newspapers and magazines throughout Russia devoted to Orthodox subjects. They were all shut down by the Soviet regime by 1918".<sup>17</sup> The rebirth of the religious media in Russia, and Orthodox in particular, started during 'Perestrojka'.

According to Anna Danilova, the Editor-in-Chief of "Orthodox Christianity and the World" web portal Pravmir.ru, there are several essential negative pre-suppositions in the Orthodox religious identity for the missionary work within mass media. "Still for a religious community the process of exploring new media normally is connected with at least these potential obstacles: 1) tendency of any religious institution to be conservative in everything including the media; 2) unclear impact of the new media on the psychological state, society and interpersonal relationships; 3) tendency to interpret many innovations as "diabolic ones" (one of the best cases of that behavior was the fear of many people in Russia to accept personal tax identification code, even though the Church has officially stated that it had nothing to do with the number of the Antichrist)", writes an Orthodox journalist.<sup>18</sup>

The ROC has its own sense of mission and doctrinal grounds clearly described in the '*Basis of the Social Concept*', adopted in 2000. The document states that the mass media play an ever-increasing role in the contemporary world, and the Church respects the work of journalists which are referred to as the "interpretation of positive ideals as well as the struggle with the spreading of evil, sin and vice".<sup>19</sup> "Journalists and mass media executives should never forget about this responsibility," reads the document.

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<sup>16</sup> M. Suslov, M. Engström and G. Simons, *Digital Orthodoxy: Mediating Post-Secularity in Russia*. Editorial, in: "Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media", 2015 / 14 (2015), pp. i-xi.

<sup>17</sup> S. Kishkovsky. *In Russia, a religious revival brings new life to Orthodox media*, in: "The New York Times", Dec. 21, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> A. Danilova, *The Russian Orthodox Church and the New Media*, in: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Religion and New Media in the Age of Convergence*, Moscow, MSU, Journalism Faculty, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> *The Basis of the Social Concept, Church and mass media*, 2000, <https://mospat.ru/en/documents/social-concepts/> (accessed 01.07.2018).

Concerning the possible complications and serious conflicts (because of inaccurate or distorted information about church life, putting it in an inappropriate context, etc.), ROC calls to solve such problems “in the spirit of peaceful dialogue with the aim to remove misunderstandings and to continue co-operation”. In the cases of blasphemy, bishops “after issuing an appropriate warning and at least one attempt to enter into negotiations, may take the following steps: to rupture relations with the mass medium or journalist concerned; to call upon the faithful to boycott the given mass medium; to apply to the governmental bodies help settle the conflict; to subject those guilty of sinful actions to canonical prohibitions if they are Orthodox Christians.

In 2005, ROC Synod adopted a regulation “About some aspects of Church information activity”, which says: “The status of ROC official informed can be only granted to the Church hierarchs, official information materials about its activity, about other important events happening in the Church or about the position of the Church hierarchs upon this or that issue. This information can be given in the form of documents, information messages or comments given under the blessing of the Hierarchy and accessible in the text form. Opinion pieces, interviews, discussion performances, journalistic articles, oral comments are not considered official information”.<sup>20</sup>

As it comes to titles, the first one to be mentioned is well-known Journal of the Moscow Patriarchy (*Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii*), published for many decades by the Department of External Relations and the Publishing Department (*Izdatel'skii soviet*). In 1990s, Orthodox Encyclopedia website ([www.sedmitza.ru](http://www.sedmitza.ru)) and the festival of Orthodox mass media “Faith and Word” (*Vera i Slovo*) have been launched. The press service of Moscow Patriarchy (*Press-sluzba*) started its work as such in 2005. The most influent Orthodox media in Russia are presented in table 2.

In 2009, after his election and enthronization, Patriarch Kyrill announced the establishment of a new Synodal Department of Information (*Sinodal'nyi informatsionnyi otdel*), which is in charge of the ‘imprimatur’ – permission for distribution through church channels for the media that claim to be Orthodox, whose production does not misrepresent Orthodox doctrine, or contradict the official position of the ROC.

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<sup>20</sup> *Meeting of the ROC Holy Synod* from 16.07.2005, Journal №64, <http://www.mospat.ru/text/desicions/id/9730.html> (accessed 01.07.2018).

Table 2. Russian Orthodox Media (biggest, from oldest to newest)

Name	Status	Date (from)	Brief description
Khristianskoje chtenie	magazine	1821–1917, from 1991	Theological magazine of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy
Zhurnal Moskovskoj Patriarchii	magazine	1931–1935, from 1943	Official organ of the Moscow Patriarchate
Tserkovnyj Vestnik	newspaper, web site	1989	Official newspaper of ROC
Radonezh	radio and newspaper	1991	One of the oldest Orthodox informal media holdings
Alpha and Omega	magazine	1994	Cultural and educational magazine devoted to theological questions of Orthodox Christianity
Tatianin den'	magazine	1995	Moscow State University church publication
Foma	magazine	1995	Target audience – Orthodox intellectuals – ,intelligentsia'
Vstrecha	magazine	1996	Moscow Theological Academy
Mospat.Ru	web portal	1997	Official website of the Department for external Church relations, before 2009 the official web site of ROC
Orthodox Radio St. Petersburg	radio	1997	Influent radio station in St. Petersburg
Russkij dom	magazine	1997	Orthodox oriented patriotic magazine
Blagodatnyj ogon'	magazine, website	1998	Problematic issues of Orthodox Christianity
Kifa	newspaper	2002	Community of archpriest Georgy Kochetkov
Pravoslavie i mir	web portal	2004	The biggest non-official portal in Russia
Soyuz	TV channel	2005	Ekaterinburg based channel, available in many Russian regions
Spas	TV channel	2005	Moscow based channel, available in many Russian regions
Patriarhiya.ru	web portal	2006	Official website of the ROC, till 2009 – the site of the press service of the Moscow Patriarchate
Bogoslov.ru	web portal	2007	The biggest theological web portal in Russia
Voda Zhivaja	magazine, website	2007	St. Petersburg
Youtube – Russian Orthodoz Channel	web channel	2010	Channel of the ROC on Youtube
Vera	radio	2014	Orthodox radio for all
Tsar'grad	TV channel	2015	Moscow based channel, available in many Russian regions

In 2010, an Orthodox video channel on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/russianchurch>), has been launched, as well as the chair of religious journalism and public relations at Russian Orthodox University has been established.

Not all of more than 1,000 Orthodox media outlets, officially registered by the Russian government, are in line with ROC position, and some of them take have different approach in commenting everyday life. Web portal Credo.Ru ([www.portal-credo.ru](http://www.portal-credo.ru)), presenting itself as an independent religious information agency, mostly supports in its publications the Russian Orthodox Autonomous Church.

“Patriarchia.Ru and Credo.Ru represent two extremes of Orthodox journalism in Russia today: on the one side, the officious, triumphalist, “glossy” Orthodoxy of Patriarchia.Ru; on the other side, the so-called “true autonomous” Orthodoxy of Credo.Ru, which goes to absurd lengths to reject any positive characterization of the ROC. The gap between Orthodox media loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate and media alien to it continues to widen. The less transparent the Moscow Patriarchate becomes, the more credibility it lends to its critics.”, underlined Briskina-Müller.<sup>21</sup>

Some non-official outlets, like the magazine Tatiana’s Day (Tatianin den’) and the journal Thomas (Foma) – both founded in 1995 – are not official and enjoy a bigger freedom of discussions that it is allowed in the official sources. Web portal “Orthodoxy and the World” (Pravoslavie i mir – [www.pravmir.ru](http://www.pravmir.ru)), launched in 2004, is at the moment the leading multimedia portal about Orthodoxy and society, publishing news and analytical reviews, comments and interviews, audio, video, infographics. The audience of the portal is around 2,5–3 million visitors per month, or 100,000 – 120,000 people per day.

According to Briskina-Müller, “Independent Orthodox media offer serious analysis even if self-censorship is applied in some cases. Official and independent Orthodox media have differing goals. The former seek to propagate a certain image of the church in the eyes of the public. By contrast, the latter are less concerned about the reputation of the church and strive sincerely for a genuine exchange of information”.<sup>22</sup> German scholar also consider that the modus operandi of ROC reminds the “the old party style, methods that alienate rather than convince”.

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<sup>21</sup> A. Briskina-Müller, *Orthodoxer Journalismus in Russland: Neueste Entwicklungen*, in: “Zeitschrift Religion and Gesellschaft in Ost und West”, 2011 / 10, pp. 12–15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

According to Sergei Chapnin, so-called “spiritual revival” in Russia presumed de-Sovietization: “We were in need of *metanoia*: penitence and conversion”.<sup>23</sup>

Russian mediaexpert Elena Zhosul suggests that another important issue today is the issue of education and training. “Today there are very few qualified experts in Russia who are competent both in church and media questions, who understand the basics of orthodox theology as well as the basics of media work. The list of such persons is very short and only part of them form an information agenda. In contrast, many Russian journalists regularly writing about the Church need at least a rudimentary theological education”, wrote Elena Zhosul.<sup>24</sup>

In 1997, Patriarch Aleksii II blessed the web technology as a new means for Orthodox missionary work, but the attempts to use the possibilities of cyberspace for Orthodox preaching and witnessing, the history of the Ortho-net (the Orthodox segment of Runet) started much earlier. Today, there are many Orthodox search services, information agencies and social networks. Patriarch Kirill is active on Facebook, some priests have blogs and Twitter accounts.

‘Ortho-net’ tries to become the leader, the most influential source for people about Orthodox Christianity, but in fact, its impact is far from Runet leaders. According to the service top100.rambler.ru, the most popular Orthodox webpage (pravoslavie.ru) is number 101 in the list of Russian web-resources,<sup>25</sup> the most popular Orthodox blog run by deacon Andrei Kuraev, has about 1.1 million comments and is outside of the leading group of Russian bloggers. Traditional traffic peaks in ‘Orthonet’ are registered at Christmas, the beginning of Lent and Easter. Among the leaders – Pravoslavie i mir (Orthodox Christianity and the World) portal (pravmir.ru), the Sretensky Monastery site (pravoslavie.ru), the reference data portal azbuka.ru, the official portal of the ROC (patriarchia.ru), and the portal of Moscow Theological Academy (bogoslav.ru).

Describing Russian ‘intellectual social network’ phenomenon, when high-quality Church-related discussions are conducted not in mainstream media but predominantly in social networks, Xenia Luchenko writes: “The answer to that question is closely linked to the analysis of dialogue culture in Russian society as

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<sup>23</sup> S. Chapnin, *A Church of Empire*, in: “First Things”, 2015 / 11, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/11/a-church-of-empire> (accessed 01.07.2018).

<sup>24</sup> E. Zhosul, *Orthodox Christianity and Mass Media after Socialism*, in: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Religious Impact on Journalistic Cultures*. Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup> *Rambler Top 100*, 2015, <http://top100.rambler.ru/navi/?page=4> (accessed 01.07.2018).

a whole. Social institutions and mechanisms that are supposed to ensure and sustain that dialogue are overwhelmingly out of order. However, the need to discuss, share experiences and monitor publications is still there. And social networks make it possible”.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note, that almost all the largest Orthodox web sites have pages in social networks, such as «VKontakte», «Odnoklassniki» and «Facebook». In these social networks you can find special pages of ecclesiastic, groups with parishes, with Orthodox public associations or churches. Different reactions on the situation with punk-prayer by ‘Pussy Riot’ group in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin appealed to “criminal sanctions for everyone, who affronts the faithful sense”, at the same time deacon Andrei Kuraev commented on this fact at his Life Journal in the other way: “If I were a sacristan of the Cathedral I would feed them with pancakes, give a cup of mead to each of them and invite to come round for a confession. And if I were an old layman I would pinch them a bit on parting... Just to make them wiser”.<sup>27</sup>

In October 2010, Patriarch Kirill blessed the establishment of the ROC channel on YouTube. “We launch it only to make the God’s word, heavenly wisdom, heavenly law, which is the law of life, closer to the life of a modern, especially young, person”, said Patriarch.<sup>28</sup>

A roundtable discussion on “*ROC and new media: to be or pretend to be?*” was held on the 27th of January, 2014 at the Russian Orthodox University has become an attempt of reflection and self-expertise of the real situation with the leadership of the ROC in digital world.<sup>29</sup> Experts, well known journalists, heads of the internet portals and diocesan press services discussed limits, opportunities and threats of the ROC mission in social networks, the development trends of new media and their influence on the formation and information agendas.

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<sup>26</sup> K. Luchenko, *Orthodox Online Media on Runet: History of Development and Current State of Affairs*, in “Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media”, 2015 / 14, p. 130.

<sup>27</sup> A. Kuraev, *Maslenitsa in Christ the Savior Cathedral [Maslenitsa v Hrame Hrista Spasitelja]*, 2012, <http://diak-kuraev.livejournal.com/285875.html> (accessed 01.07.2018).

<sup>28</sup> *Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill has blessed the establishment of its own channel of Russian Orthodox Church on the video sharing YouTube*, <http://www.lenta.ru/news/2010/10/11/bless/> (accessed 01.07.2018).

<sup>29</sup> Further quotations from: V. Khroul, *Russian Orthodox Church and New Media: To Be or Pretend to Be?* in: “Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media”, 2015 / 14, pp. 175–179.

The chief editor of the portal “Bogoslov.ru” archpriest Pavel Velikanov mentioned three pros for digital activity of the Church: (1) the possibility of Christian witness, the ability to communicate with people looking for answers on their questions in social networks; (2) the possibility of Christian charity – according to the priest, “charitable organizations are active in networks and live through networks”, and (3) the rapid dissemination of information. Contras, according to the theologian, are the reverse side of pros: (1) it is very difficult to verify information; it often comes from not trustworthy and strange sources; (2) discussions are conducted in a manner not appropriate for Christians; (3) people spend a lot of time in the networks and come in the real world “just to eat”.

Chief editor of the portal “Orthodox Christianity and the World” Anna Danilova considered as a positive the fact that social networks make it possible to get out of the “ghetto” of just Orthodox audience and to understand the agenda, to find out what people are now interested in. Negative point is in the lack of information accuracy and difficulties with verification: “fakes” are rapidly being spread by social networks. On the negative side Danilova mentions the fact that social networking presumes extremely quick reaction: “People respond although they still do not really understand the situation, and relationships become strained”, said Danilova and called for general “Internet hygiene.”

Elena Zhosul, speaking about the advantages, noted that social networks 1) are one of the main sources of news; 2) allow to establish useful contacts and professional relationships, and 3) allow quick collective reflection about what is happening. On the negative side, she mentioned 1) the excess of information, when “we are forced to consume and swallow without chewing”; 2) inability to concentrate on some issue, therefore long texts are so unpopular in the network.” Elena Zhosul recalled that in the Church of England had recently published a set of rules about how to behave in social networks. Participants noted that the world of social networks is very fragmented, and the Orthodox part of it is not an exception.

### **3.3. Catholic Media**

The meeting between Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis in Habana airport 12 February 2016 lasted for about two hours, hundreds of journalists and millions of TV spectators were witnesses of signing a joint declaration

by the religious leaders.<sup>30</sup> The Patriarch has called his meeting with the Pope a “brotherly discussion”, journalists in many countries called the event “historical”, Russian Orthodox TV channel “Tsargrad” called it “the Meeting of the Millennium”. This meetings also gave a hope for the re-awakening of the Catholic media in Russia.

After many decades of religious persecution, the Catholic Church in Russia was in a very difficult position when it started to revive ecclesiastical structures in April 1991. Even a brief historical analysis of the development of Catholic media in the USSR and – since 1991 – in Russian Federation which takes into consideration religion suppression/freedom, opening/closing media institutions, their number and circulation, Catholic presence in public sphere, Church-state relations and other criteria, gives us a possibility to divide the whole process into three periods.

The time of Soviet religious persecutions correlates with the period of underground and illegal media activity of Catholic communities. From the moment of the re-establishment of Catholic hierarchy in 1991 the new period of Catholic media revival started. It lasted till the time of restoring dioceses in 2002, strongly criticized by ROC. After 2002, according our observations, the development slows down, then stops, then media go on to close down one-by-one. The period that we consider the time of “self-silencing” might have discontinued after the historical meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, but in fact this has yet to happened.

Between 1991 and 2002 – as Catholic institutions grew and strengthened, local mass media began to appear: radio stations (Moscow and St. Petersburg), video studio (Novosibirsk), and the publications of a seminary, monastic orders and congregations as well as numerous parish bulletin were started. Since it was very difficult and expensive to get access to the government-controlled television and radio stations, print media (newspapers and magazines) played a special role in uniting the Catholics of Russia.

Istina i Zhizn (Truth and Life), the first monthly magazine, was established in Moscow in December 1990, and the weekly Catholic newspaper Svet Evangelia

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<sup>30</sup> *Meeting with Pope was prepared in secret because of too many opponents – Patriarch Kirill*, in: Interfax, 24 February 2016, <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=newsanddiv=12782> (accessed 01.07.2018).



(The Light of the Gospel) started to be printed in October 1994. There were several other publications (see table 3). Some of them disappeared, some still exist, being printed from time to time.

Table 3. Catholic press in Russia (from oldest to newest).

Publisher	Publication (started/closed)	frequency
Truth and life	Istina i Zhizn (Truth and Life, 1991–2008)	monthly
Catholic College in Moscow	Theologia (Theology, 1992–1997)	6 per year
Russian Bishops' Conference	Svet Evangelia (The Light of the Gospel, 1994 -2007)	weekly
Franciscan publishing house	Malenkij Rytsar (Little knight, 1994–1997) Brat Solntse (Brother Son, 2006–2009)	2 per year 2 per year
Silesians' publishing house (Moscow)	Sviataya Radost' (The Holy Joy, 1994–2010)	monthly
Catholic Seminary in Saint-Petersburg	Prizvanie (Vocation, 1994-till now)	monthly
Diocese in Novosibirsk	Sibirskaya katolicheskaya gazeta (Siberian Catholic newspaper, 1995–2008, 2009 – till now)	monthly
Diocese in Saratov	Kliment (2005–2008)	4 times a year
Catechization commission, Russian Catholic Bishops Conference	Raduga (Rainbow, 2005-till now)	4 per year
Catechization center in Moscow	Stromaty (1997–1999)	monthly

“Svet Evangelia” was a National Catholic newspaper. It provided information about the history, traditions and liturgy of the Catholic Church for readers from all over the Russian Federation as well as from former Soviet countries and abroad. “Svet Evangelia” has been sent to public libraries and universities and distributed among the intellectuals. The weekly became the paper not only for Catholics but for all Russian-speaking public interested in the Church teaching and Catholic culture.

In November 2001, journalists started the web-based daily information service in Russian Cathnews.Ru. It was growing rapidly and became even more

popular than the weekly edition because information arrived in real time. Cathnews.Ru planned to start an English version soon, but failed in the initiative due to the lack of resources. In January 2002, "Svet Evangelia" started the "Roma Locuta", a monthly supplement, which consisted of Vatican documents in Russian. It was an initiative of the Vatican State Secretariat. "Roma Locuta" published in Russia Pope's messages, documents of Congregations and Pontifical Councils, etc.

There are neither Catholic television channels in Russia nor any regular broadcasts on secular channels. In Novosibirsk, the Catholic video production studio "Kana" has been launched in 1994. It produced "Catholic Video Magazine" for parishes in the former Soviet Union. Now, "Kana" makes Russian dubbing for "Rome reports" production from the Vatican. The "Dar" Catholic radio station in Moscow broadcasted for one hour every day on a Christian radio channel (1995–2009).

Catholic media in Russia faced the following challenges:

1. *Coordination.* Despite the fact that "Inter Mirifica", "Communio et Progressio" and "Aetatis Novae" require the establishing of special pastoral mass media programs in Russian dioceses resources, the local church diligently works on the spiritual nourishment of local journalists, honoring them on days of their patron saints (St. Francis de Sales and St. Maximilian Kolbe) and celebrating every year World Communication Day.

2. *Financing.* Catholic mass media are being distributed primarily among Catholics and, therefore, have a relatively small audience and will depend for the foreseeable future on the support of sponsors (which is also the case with other religious mass media operations in Russia).

3. *Partnership with secular mass media.* Journalists are poorly informed about the life of the Church and this leads to numerous mistakes and distortions. The mass media pay attention to the Catholic Church only during Christmas, Easter, St. Valentine's Day, Carnival with an emphasis on how these holidays are exotic in Russia and how they are celebrated in the West.

After 2002, in contrast to other neighboring countries, where Church media continue to develop (Kloch 2012), open and outspoken position of Russian Catholic community gradually changed back to "no comments" style and "conspirative" mentality without any explanations towards both external world and local Catholic community. There were no public explanations regarding closing media one-by-one: "Svet Evangelia" (2007), Catholic radio station "Dar" (2009), etc.

Among some external reasons of the “self-silencing” the ecumenical context should be mentioned (Khroul 2010). Catholics in Russia have been accused for many years of the “proselytizing activity” and “stealing Orthodox souls” without concrete facts given.<sup>31</sup>

### **3.3. Protestant, Muslim and Jewish media**

In comparison to the dominating and systematically growing Orthodox media, the media of Muslims, Jews and other religious minorities are almost invisible in the landscape of religious media in Russia.

The only major television project Russian Protestants is “Television of Good News” (TBN), which began as part of the global Trinity Broadcasting Network and now is positioning itself as an independent public broadcaster. Without any doubt, this is the biggest Protestant media source that broadcasts via satellites and cable networks.

Protestant radio “Teos” lost its frequency and is now fully a web-based station. Nevertheless, it is developing, inviting interesting presenters, such as Orthodox journalist Sergei Khudiyev and a number of others, trying to be interesting and relevant to a wide range of audiences, not only for Protestant “ghetto”. Newspaper “Mirt” is a serious newspaper for ministers and parishioners, publishing reflections and sermons, sometimes not understandable for non-Protestants. There is also a number of successful printed media outlets outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg: newspapers in Yaroslavl, Penza, Yoshkar Ola, Voronezh, Vladivostok, Irkutsk and other cities of Russia.

Among the Internet portals the leading project is Protestant.ru, that presents a good example of successful migration from the printed newspaper to a web portal.

The press secretary of the Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals) in Russia Anton Kruglikov in his presentation during the “Religion and Media” panel at the 8th International Media Readings in Moscow “Mass Media and Communications – 2016” (November 17–18, 2016), there are two major visible trends in Protestant media:

- 1) to move the content from printed media to the digital platforms and
- 2) to address general public, not only those who already are Protestants.

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<sup>31</sup> V. Khroul, *Religija, mass-media i predstavlenija o Boge v sovremennoj Rossii. Opyt mezhdisciplinarnogo issledovanija. [Religion, mass media and concepts of God in modern Russia. Interdisciplinary Study]*, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012.

The premiere English language Islamic portal in Russia is Islam.Ru; in the Russian language domain it has a competitor, a web portal Muslim.Ru. Both cover news from all over the Muslim World, publish views and articles on various issues affecting Islam and Muslims ranging from politics, economics, social life, interpersonal and interfaith dialogue, classical Islam, Islamic thought. According to the mission statement, Islam.Ru tries "to become a primary source of authentic information on Islam and Muslims to be an agent contributing towards positive change, world peace and harmony". Portal Muslim.Ru does not have any kind of mission statement, but both of them are promoting moderate Islam with no radical content.

Paradoxically, main Jewish media in Russian language are concentrated not in Russia, but in Israel, that has a huge part of Russian speaking population. A well known expert in Jewish media, Semen Charnyi said during the "Religion and Media" panel at the mentioned above Moscow conference in November, that some of Moscow based Jewish media projects have been closed or temporary stopped (recently – Agentstvo evreyskich novostej – Jewish news agency).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that it has been over 20 years since the revival of religious media, according to our observations, religious institutions have not implemented even a half of what they possibly could. Therefore, the audience switched its attention in the search for religious information to other sources of information, mostly secular, which broadcast religious information with the inevitable distortions.

In conclusion, following some colleagues,<sup>32</sup> we would like to mention some common problems and challenges that religious media in Russia face.

1. *Subordination of journalism to PR.* Many of the employees of religious media in Russia find themselves serving the religious institutions in terms of public relations and advertising much more than following journalistic standards. Both the employers and the employees do not find such a situation strange.

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<sup>32</sup> A. Amialchenia, *Christian Media After Socialism: Major Trends*, in: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Religious Impact on Journalistic Cultures*, Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2014, pp. 16–20; E. Zhukovskaya, *The Russian Orthodox Church in the Media Sphere: Information Management*, in: Khroul, V. (ed.) *Christianity in Media: Central and Eastern European perspective*, Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University, 2016, pp. 9–16.

2. *Out of mission and target audience.* Religious media seem that they have forgotten to ask themselves questions about the mission and target audience. They fall into the trap of thinking that their structure would be “media for all”, but in reality, they find themselves out of the audience.

3. *Populism and primitivism.* Religious media sometimes in order to be closer to common people pursue a populist content through primitivism of the message. Such a simplification creates a distorted image of the religious reality and also “corrupts” the religious view of the cultural and social issues in Russia.

4. *Conflict of formats.* Religious media are facing a challenge of language learning transfer messages, they lack clear and responsible language. In many cases, religious media spread among Russian journalists the idea that religious world is strange and hardly understandable and later on find themselves *ad marginem* of national media system.

5. *Religious media as the “ghetto”.* Religious media audience are just “religious” people, with no attempts to gain the audience among non-believers or atheists. Religious media still do not realize the need to be part of social dialogue. Meanwhile, media and digital culture is increasingly becoming a space of public life and cognition. For Christian media which by their nature have a social character it is very important to find a way of communication with the rest of the society.

6. *Lack of professionalism is not understood as a problem.* The lack or total absence of professionalism in religious media often is not considered to be a problem.

7. *Religious media are still run mostly by enthusiasts.* In many cases the editorial staff enthusiasm does not receive any moral (and the more material) support and understanding of the hierarchy of religious organizations, and that makes it hardly possible for the synergetic strategic planning and systematic work.

So, from religious perspective there are visible problems with the news production, channeling, transmitting, broadcasting, interaction and understanding, therefore the voices of religious leaders are hardly heard in society.

From the journalistic perspective, we observe a problem of journalistic autonomy. According to recent studies, journalists in Russia do not enjoy their autonomy because of their political and economic dependence. Secondly, it appears that the challenge of objectivity leads to poor and stereotyped coverage of religious life in secular media. An agenda-setting process in media is not ethics-oriented: main players are mostly focused not on the audience, not on public

interest, but on political subordination and commercial profit, therefore moral issues are secondary. Therefore religious media are not able to change the content management: “infotainment” and “advertainment” of affiliated media decision makers do not seem to be concerned with fitting their products into even secular moral norms, so as religious norms are more strict they are ever more ignored.

Finally, after examining religious media in the Russian context, we found out that the mediatization of religion in this country faces 1) ignorant to ethics and social accountability media practitioners, 2) normatively disoriented audience with a low level of media literacy and religious practice and 3) predominantly secular public sphere with problems in social dialogue processing.

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## Biogram

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