CHAPTER 9

Digital Journalism: Toward a Theory of Journalistic Practice in the Twenty-First Century

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9.1 Introduction

The digital turn has made a profound impact on journalism, ranging from the ways in which journalists collect and display information to how journalistic items are perceived by the publics in regional, national and transnational contexts. Among other things, the proliferation of digital technologies has allowed for a number of transformations, including new genres of journalistic output (for example, reports organized and presented as questionnaires), new forms of collaboration among journalists (for example, files sharing and remote uploads of content which makes communication and reporting instantaneous) and new methods of carrying out journalistic investigation (for example, the use of databases and information available on digital networks in the public domain). Moreover, new models for journalistic entrepreneurship emerged (for example, setting up media outlets in "non-geographic" areas such as offshore areas and tax-free zones and outsourcing content production to individuals in other countries). At the same time, new regimes of exploitation imposed by owners of the media outlets and resistance by journalists became apparent (for example, zero-hour contracts and situations when journalists are exposed online making them objects of public shaming and threats).

In addition to the changes in terms of how journalists work, there have been changes in terms of journalistic agency, institutions and drivers of innovation.

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D. Gritsenko et al. (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Digital Russia Studies*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42855-6_9

For example, the increased speed with which reports are released is a hallmark of digital journalism, and it has led to an even greater competition among different media outlets, each aiming to be the first to report an event. Contrary to this trend, some media outlets have chosen to focus on "slow news," that is, analytical reports which are aimed at reflective consumption by the users.[1]

Innovative organization of the news flow and innovative use of new technologies have helped re-define the relationship between content producers and content consumers. For example, on one level (micro-)blogging is just a new form of journalistic output. On another, it refers to a new relationship among producers and users of news items. As a result, the traditional notion of "audiences" has been re-considered to include networked, de-centralized and geographically unbound agency. These audiences are not simply more "active," rather they are more dynamic and diverse in terms of how they relate to news items and reports.

Similarly, as a result of digitalization, there are entirely new players on the field such as media institutions and tech companies. The former include organizations that focus on other sectors but utilize sophisticated tools that affect other media. This is evident in the proliferation of Russian media interests in other countries.[2]

In terms of technical companies, Microsoft and Google have been influential in the Russian Federation (the RF), especially after the introduction of localized versions of their software. Their Russian competitors, Mail.ru and Yandex, have been backers of journalistic innovation such as live streaming. For example, Yandex, which builds products and services powered by machine learning, has a video stream for live and on-demand video on the company's streaming content platform, Yandex.Live. By circuiting live-streaming in digital realms controlled by Yandex, the company has increased demand for new content, including journalistic outputs and entertainment pieces (for more on social media, see Chap. 19).

Not all Russian services have been built as "alternatives" to western technologies, that is, Yandex versus Google. There are many examples of transnational convergences and collaborations, too. In terms of live streaming and video content sharing, Rutube, which belongs to Gazprom, is a competitor to YouTube; however, in terms of built-in videos, its strategic partner is Facebook. At the same time, Rutube is used by Russia Today (RT), the government-backed television and online platform, which has been accused of disinformation and propaganda. RT uses Rutube as one of its main channels of content dissemination. The analysis of these digital ventures—in this case Facebook-Rutube-RT—reveals a somewhat unexpected mix of national and transnational corporate and government interests.[3]

Mail.ru has benefited from the mutability of digital media, for example, when they make use of convergent flows of news reporting and banking. This is when the news agenda is organized in ways that advance public interest in financial instruments, and vice versa. This reveals not only a convergence across

platforms but also across perceptions of media genres and information per se, thus pushing boundaries between different kinds of journalism.[4]

To account for all the changes in journalism that had occurred thanks to the proliferation of digital technologies would be an impossible task. Hence, in this chapter, I reflect on the processes of digitalization of journalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, on digital forms of investigative journalism. The latter means journalism which is native to digital realms and which utilizes digital-only means to conduct research and publish reports. So, my account supplies not a survey of technical innovations and cultural forms, but a conceptualization of transition from legacy to digital journalism in the RF and Russophone world. To confirm, I pay special attention to how in journalistic practice, the use of digital technologies had emerged from being an auxiliary tool to being the main—and only—method of producing, delivering and consuming news. My approach allows the following definition of "digital journalism." The term designates the transition from one technological base to another and the transformations in the profession and practice of journalism which had occurred during the process. The term does not designate the broad field of contemporary journalism which is extremely diverse in terms of technologies, forms, "audiences" and other factors.

Western scholarship has focused on the economic and technological implications of the shift (see, for example, Jones and Salter 2011), often citing challenges in terms of identity politics, power structures and professional networks (see, for example, Anderson 2013; Bradshaw and Rohumaa 2013). A critique of Western neoliberal order from the perspective of the changing dimensions of journalistic profession is available in a number of publications, too (see, for example, Franklin 2017). Most recent debates have been about the automation of news (Diakopoulos 2019) in the context of populist political campaigns in the USA (Bucher 2018; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019). In their most recent publication, Bob Franklin and Lily Canter (2019) offered a classification of possible fields of application of digital technologies in journalism, thus broadening the notion of journalism per se. This corpus of literature complements numerous critical anthologies assessing skillsets of journalists in the digital era (for example, Hill and Lashmar 2013; Zion and Craig 2014). These publications reveal the complexity of digital journalism as a phenomenon; they also signpost the developments exclusively in the Western context. Hence, my discussion contributes to the existing debate by deliberately internationalizing the phenomenon of digital journalism and offering alternative modes of conceptualization. These modes stem from the analysis of the context, producing an original paradigm (Sects. 2 and 3). Moreover, the emphasis is on the transnational characteristics of Russian digital journalism, thus avoiding the redundancy of the "West-versus-the rest" approach (Sect. 4). Finally, the proposed typology (Sect. 5) helps categorize digital journalism and also social, political and cultural phenomena in the Russian context, thus offering a more universal model for consideration.

The chosen understanding of digital journalism has informed the selection of the cases and the organization of the discussion. To confirm, the first subsection provides a theorization of Russian digital journalism from the perspective of its evolution and types of activity. In subsequent subsections I analyze cases that shed light on pivotal moments in the development of Russian digital journalism. In the conclusion I summate the discussion, arguing that the digital turn has provided Russian journalists with new opportunities such as setting a transnational media company and building and engaging with translocal communities in the RF and abroad, as well as new challenges such as increased surveillance by the state and security services and new regimes of exploitation such as unregulated job markets.

The discussion is based on my research of Russian digital media and journalism[5] and on interviews with journalists and editors which I collected during a major study of contemporary Russian media in 2014–2018.[6] The discussion is additionally informed by my survey of literature on new media, digital media and contemporary journalism available in specialized publications.[7] I am grateful to all the journalists, editors and media practitioners who had agreed to talk to me about their transition to digital journalism.

9.2 "Alternative" Journalism

Initial studies of digital journalism (e.g., Thorsen and Jackson 2017) focused on the ways in which journalistic materials were produced and presented to the public. Journalists had to make a choice about which platform to use to publish their story. This practice was multimodal insofar as it included multiple platforms to deliver content and also multimedia to present it. For example, writing in Novaya Gazeta about local elections,[8] Lilit Sarkisian uses text, photographs, scans and videos to provide a report about the role of political parties in the RF. The piece is written in the documentary style whereby the analysis of the situation is mixed with documentation and evidence. All citations are carefully attributed and all pictures are geo-tagged thus making the user feel like they are part of the investigation. The piece includes multiple hyperlinks enabling the user to check some other facts to view related content. The piece is easily sharable on multiple platforms. All of these elements of digital journalism are incorporated in the story, thus making it not only about the use of technologies but also about the ways in which to narrate about an event or a social concern.

Journalists would also invite comments and feedback from the users and would customize their outputs to meet expectations of specific groups of users. Between 2005 and 2015, user commenting was a common feature in online media outlets; it has been gradually phased out as the media outlets shifted discussions and user interactivity onto social media, making them responsible for the user-generated content, on the one hand, and on the other, making them part of the story-telling. So, when posting texts online journalists would use hyperlinks to connect their story to others and to build news archives. For

example, Sarkisian folds her story about local elections in Novaya Gazeta's publications about United Russia, the dominant party in the RF which has been accused of corruption on all levels. She links her argument to other stories and requires that the user should carry out the work of putting the evidence together by following this and other stories. Thus, the political stance of Novaya Gazeta emerges not from a single publication but from a database of publications on a specific topic.

Thus, in the period of early digital journalism, multimediality, interactivity and hypertextuality were key methods with the help of which to produce content, including engagement with users (for more on hypertext, see Chap. 15). Eventually, digital journalism emerged to encompass a wide variety of ways in which digitalization has influenced news production. Nowadays, digital journalism also incorporates related areas and forms of activity, arrangement and engagement, including communication among journalists, their work environment, and so on. This means that digital journalism should be considered as an entirely new practice and institution of journalism, not just a particular practice of writing and publishing. In many ways, digital journalism has supplanted "analogue" journalism of the twentieth century.

Some commentators have described these changes as "the death of journalism," meaning that journalism as it was known in the twentieth century had seized to exist. For others, just like with the previously announced death of the novel and death of cinema,[9] the digital turns mean a re-interpretation and reinvigoration of journalism. To go on with the analogy, just like celluloid cinema is perhaps dead, but post-celluloid, digital cinema is thriving, supplying new genres, stories and visual regimes, and using new platforms for content distribution, digital journalism is an emerging and expanding field of activity aimed at informing the public about current events and providing political, social and cultural commentary along with organizing and maintaining new spaces for information sharing and collaboration among the publics, in the national and transnational, and local and global settings.

One of the principal outcomes of the death and re-birth of journalism in its digital phase is the emergence of "alternative journalism." I define alternative journalism in the following way. The difference between professional and alternative journalists is in how people understand their objectives and acceptable levels of responsibility. The former group—professional journalists—includes any kind of journalists whereby individuals, associations of individuals and officially accredited companies engage in journalism as their primary activity. For example, it can be an individual with a university degree in journalism, or someone without formal education in journalism,[10] for whom still journalism is a professional occupation. They can be members of a professional society such as the Russian Association of Journalists, or, they can belong to an informal network of individuals and companies involved in similar activities. They can be on a permanent contract with one company or work part-time or as freelancers for a number of media outlets.

The latter group—alternative journalists—encompasses individuals and companies that are responsible for news content but who do not consider themselves reporters per se. For example, it can be an arts organization—like London-based Calvert and its equivalents in Russia such as Afisha.ru and The Village—that informs the public about events concerning contemporary arts and culture in the national and international context. Or, it can be an individual who makes regular posts on current affairs in social media and attains a high level of visibility and credibility in their circles. For example, in the late 2010s, Dr. Ekaterina Schulmann emerged from an academic active on social media into an important, liberally minded political commentator appearing on federal channels.

Indeed, in the twentieth century there were individuals and organizations that attempted to create their own news flows,[11] yet it is with the arrival of the digital era that the opportunity to build their own news flow and provide media content to a niche or general audience became available. As the Schulmann example demonstrates, the boundaries between professional and alternative journalism are fluid and transitions from one to another are enhanced thanks to the digital media. Some organizations like universities encourage alternative journalism when it serves the needs of the organization. Others, for example, banks are nervous about the release of any data by their employees.[12]

To be absolutely clear, the difference between professional and alternative journalism is not that of quality, but that of the relationship of an individual or an organization to the broader journalistic field. In other words, alternative does not mean "amateur," a term which implicitly designates poor quality of content. Instead "alternative" stands for the new ways of organizing production and circulation of content which is possible thanks to digital technologies.

In this framework, alternative is also different from grassroots journalism. In the early new media parlance and digital criticism, the term meant journalistic practice stemming from the activities of "ordinary users." It was believed that these users were happy to "share" their (local) insights and independently produce content with professional media companies. Eventually, it became apparent that grassroots journalists would not only collaborate but also compete with professional journalists in terms of salaries, contracts, awards, visibility, authority, and especially symbolic capital. These were no longer grassroots reporters but media content producers of significant influence in their own right. The shift was noticeable in how major media companies such as the (British Broadcasting Corporation) Russian Service went from inviting user comments, that is, building news stories on the basis of "grassroots journalism," to disabling user comments altogether, that is, aiming to maintain "a professional stance" as a marker of journalistic quality. This way they differentiated themselves from the range of new media outlets that had carved out their share of the media market in a direct threat to legacy media outlets such as the BBC.

Thus, alternative journalism signifies new arenas of journalistic activity, both in terms of production and consumption of materials, and new forms of content, user engagement and circulation patterns. In the beginning, alternative journalism carried hallmarks of mainstream digital culture, that is, it was markedly different from professional journalism. However, eventually, the boundaries between the two became increasingly blurred. This was one of the transformations that led to the decline of legacy journalism in the late 1990s–early 2000s. Some Russian media outlets easily adapted to the new realities of digital journalism; others were less successful and have disappeared from the Russian market or have developed into completely new projects. In the end, what has remained is digital journalism: nowadays virtually all existing Russian media outlets function according to the logic of digital journalism. This allows me to suggest that in the RF all journalism is digital journalism, if not in terms of technology used but in terms of structure and processes.

9.3 All Journalism Is Digital Journalism

The transition to digital journalism means more than a greater use of digital tools. It encompasses major transformations of media flows, systems of authority and trust, business arrangements, everyday practices of journalistic work, for example, opportunities to work remotely, and so on. In the RF, the transition to digital journalism occurred at the same time as in developed economies in the Anglophone West, which means that the processes and practices of digital journalism are not dissimilar in these countries.

For example, because of the changing fabric of the journalistic profession including the spread of digital technologies, we see the rise of influential female journalists in the RF and the United Kingdom. For example, Èlina Tikhonova is a business and culture reporter on RBC (Russian Business Consulting), a principal Russian-language media outlet for business reporting, and Laura Kuenssberg is a political editor on the BBC, the United Kingdom's most important public broadcaster. The authority of these journalists had been established thanks to their activity on social media such as Twitter and Facebook.[13] To confirm, having built a reputation in social media, they gained greater visibility in their respective media outlets. In return, the media outlets have started to use the authority of these journalists to advance their agenda in social media, which signals a convergence of digital spaces and tools. Their case exemplifies a transfer of alternative and professional strands of journalism within their professional career. The fluidity of agendas, forms of reporting, modes of expressing an opinion, and relationship to and within their media outlets points to a new system of journalism.

This new system of journalism provides individuals with new opportunities. For example, both Tikhonova and Kuenssberg have used their professional reputation in order to advance emancipatory agenda. Kuenssberg has promoted the issue of gender equality and diversity, making it one of the most visible social concerns in the United Kingdom. Conversely, Tikhonova took

part in the Russian spin-off of the global #metoo campaign, urging RBC and other journalists to boycott reporting from the State *Duma* (lower house of the Federal Assembly of Russia) after allegations of sexual harassment against its deputy Leonid Sluckij became public. Kuenssberg and Tikhonova have operated in realms that are highly politicized in the United Kingdom and RF, thus straddling the traditional arenas of reporting and activism. We observe a convergent of national and transnational realms of journalism and activism, and a transfer of agendas from essentially the journalistic domain to that of broader societal concerns (for more on digital activism, see Chap. 8).

This case demonstrates that currently the processes and practices of digital journalism in the RF and other western countries are not dissimilar. Yet, there is a big difference in terms of the general evolution of journalism and what it means to the respective societies. The point I wish to emphasize here is that in the RF, the rise of digital journalism coincides with the rise of Russian journalism per se. To confirm, modern Russian journalistic practice is based on the neoliberal form of journalism that was imported from the West as part of Gorbachev's perestroika of the 1980s and Yeltsin's privatization campaigns of the 1990s. This journalistic practice had supplanted the system of media organization and journalism that had existed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The transfer was complete by the start of the twenty-first century when digital technologies were becoming mainstream. So, in the United Kingdom, the transfer to digital journalism was a gradual process of transformations of journalistic practice; in the RF it signified a radical break from the tradition of Soviet journalism.

To elaborate, these reforms introduced during the perestroika period and the 1990s included the abolishment of censorship, greater freedom of expression and more emphasis on the protection of journalists. This was a positive outcome of the reforms. The negative outcome was in that these reforms put journalists on a collision course with private business which, in order to grow, employed aggressive and sometimes brutal methods of control. These reforms also gave rise to unregulated lobbying and the use of illegal and semi-legal promotional campaigns, especially during political elections. Early digital journalism—in the spirit of digital utopianism—attempted to eradicate two problems at the same time: the old practices of Soviet journalism, on the one hand, and on the other, the new practices installed as a result of the neoliberalization of journalism in the 1990s. The attempt was partially successful: propagandistic features of Soviet media were carried over to Russian state-funded television channels and also to the international broadcaster RT,[14] and commodification of information in the 1990s gave rise to sensationalist and click-bait media. At the same time, Russian contemporary understanding of privacy is informed by the notions and practices formulated in the digital realm, which, to remind the reader, remained completely unregulated for a significant period of time, relying on self-regulation instead.

As a result, many problems of contemporary Russian journalism are accounted for by the gap between legacy and digital journalism, and between

professional and alternative journalism. For example, the safety of journalists in Russia is a recurring concern. Western media and scholarship have addressed this issue from the perspective of the oppression of journalists by the state (see, for example, Oates 2006). The case of Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered in 2006, is indicative. However, researchers have overlooked other aspects of oppression, resistance and safety such as corporate controls over journalists, privacy, wellbeing and intellectual property. Indeed, my interviewees had complained about their experience of working in small and medium-size media outlets.[15] In terms of the digital realm, they noted that, due to the lack of training provided by the media outlet owners, they are exposed to threats such as harassing in social media, data breaches, illegal file sharing, and so on.

How did these concerns develop? What were the pivotal moments in the development of digital journalism? In the subsequent sections I answer these questions from the perspective of the evolution of digital journalism (Sec. 4), and from the perspective of its form and functionality (Sec. 5).

9.4 Historical Overview of Russian and Russophone Digital Journalism

I have established that in case of the RF, the emergence of digital journalism is a complex process that signifies a lot more than the transition to new technologies employed in the production, circulation and consumption of journalistic items. In this regard, what has the evolution of digital journalism been like? Is it possible to identify significant trends and phases that help us understand these transformations?

In previous publications, I have argued that the proliferation of digital technologies in the RF includes four distinct stages, each defined by the type and frequency of use.[16] In this section, I intend to use the historical periodization of the evolution of digital technologies to develop a periodization of digital journalism in the RF. I identify four stages that correspond to and underpin four stages in the development of digital journalist that I outline below.

The first phase—the early 1990s—was characterized by the experimental use of digital technologies. At that time, scientific labs, artistic collectives and creative individuals began to use advanced digital technologies. Soviet-era computers had become most obsolete, with users relying on technologies imported mostly from the West. Users would engage in the exchange of data, including news, across the Russophone space of the internet. Cross-border, politically unhindered exchange of information was particular to this period of the evolution of digital technologies. For example, the art collective known as net.art were responsible for building first international networks, sharing information, pieces of news and pieces of code.

During the second phase, the experimental users of the 1990s became established in their professional circles, including journalism, giving rise to what I have labeled (Strukov 2014) the elite user of the late 1990s–early 2000s. For

example, in the 1990s Anton Nosik was based in Israel working as a programmer and running a number of internet-based projects among Russian speakers. In the 2000s, thanks to his proven record of successful media projects, he relocated to Moscow in order to direct major web-based news agencies such as Lenta.ru. Together with other elite users, all of whom were journalists and programmers living in large urban centers and being in charge of the strategic development of media, culture, science and technology, Nosik was responsible for building what was to emerge as the Runet. During this phase, technological innovation provided elite users with significant symbolic capital (for more on history of Runet, see Chap. 16).[17]

The third phase relates to the late 2000s when digital technologies including mobile phones became commonplace, and different kinds of users started using digital technologies for work, socializing and networking. The mass user challenged the authority of the elite user, effectively diversifying Russian digital system. During this phase, the Russian government became more active on the internet, launching a series of "national projects" aimed at stimulating economic and cultural activity in certain sectors of the digital technologies. The government was responsible for the technological upgrade of the Russian media system. For example, it set deadlines for the digital switch-over, compelling Russian companies, media outlets and users to accept new technologies such as digital television (see Strukov 2011). During this period, individuals such as Nosik switched from building their authority online to monetizing their symbolic capital. For example, Nosik was the director of high-profile investment projects concerning digital media such as his company SUP which purchased *LiveJournal* and transferred it to the RF.

The most recent period—the late 2010s—is characterized by "total" digitalization. Around that time, digital technologies and media had been firmly established as the main means of communication among the majority of users, with "old" media and non-digital technologies increasingly playing an auxiliary role, especially in urban centers. During this phase, the government has been extremely active on the digital field launching a few initiatives that have effectively nationalized the Runet, for example, precluding "foreign" companies to own solely media in the RF. The purpose of this activity was to make the Runet less transparent to the Western observers and to protect the economic interests of the Russian political elite. During this period, the role of the elite users such as Nosik has diminished whilst the new trends have been set by Russian major tech corporations such as Yandex and social media influencers such as Yury Dud', the editor of the principal sports outlet Sports.ru who had built notoriety due to posting his controversial interviews with celebrities on YouTube. In fact, this example reveals the merger between tech and media giants such as YouTube and individual content producers such as Dud'. It blurs the boundaries between individual and corporate agency, between news reporting and lifestyle media, between customized and universally available content, and so on.

These stages of technological and media development correspond to the stages in the development of Russian and Russophone digital journalism, including:

(a) exchanges of essential information and news items through email and messaging on personal and professional networks, including transnational exchange; emerging digital networks remain completely unregulated until the intervention of the government and security services at the start of the twenty-first century;
(b) the emergence of alternative media outlets taking advantage of the unregulated realms of the early internet; these encompass web sites and mail lists that circulate information and news items to a target group such as subscribers to a service; by the start of the new millennium these services emerge into big players on the Runet; state-backed and corporate media scramble to increase their presence on the internet in order to catch up with services such as Lenta.ru;
(c) lifestyles media and media outlets based on personalized media flows such as *LiveJournal* proliferate, effectively diluting the impact of online investigative journalism; with the launch of (Russophone) social media at the end of the decade, the media landscape is entirely transformed with legacy media such as official television channels playing a catch-up game with digital media; and
(d) the government begins to regulate aggressively the digital realm in order to protect the interests of large digital corporations[18]; it introduces legislation which effectively “nationalizes” the Runet, that is, makes it possible to separate domestic and transnational media flows. Alongside government regulation, digital media corporations such as RBC and Mail.ru bid to increase their share on the internet, including mergers and collaborations with global media companies. For example, Mail.ru becomes one of the flow amplifiers for the BBC World Service and Yandex taxi service merges with Uber. At the same time new formats of news and lifestyle media emerge on the internet, especially on services that enable streaming audio-visual content such as YouTube. They impact the processes of information gathering and presentation styles on legacy media; digital natives begin to dominate professional and alternative forms of journalism.

This cross-check of technological, social, political and cultural developments allows an historical, dynamic consideration of digital journalism. In this system, the ways in which digital journalism works become apparent. It reveals the realms and modes of digital journalism, the role of government and corporate regulators, and the role and expectation of digital audiences. It also signposts areas of innovation which can be used in both the progressive and regressive manner by individual, state-aligned and corporate agents. In this process, the question of practice of digital journalism becomes important. In the final section of the chapter, I attempt to conceptualize these practices from the perspective of their function, not form or outreach or frequency.

9.5 Typological Overview of Russian and Russophone Digital Journalism

In the previous section I apprehended the realms of digital journalism by considering the principal areas of impact in the historical context. In the concluding section, I consider digital journalism in its most contemporary form by analyzing a number of interrelated phenomena. I account for the nature and configuration of each of them by introducing a particular case. It is meant to reveal current debates and help me relate back to the discussion presented at the start of the chapter. Thus, I wish to argue that digital journalism defines new spaces of activity and problematizes existing social, political and cultural concerns such as the notion of privacy and geographical distribution of data.

Digital journalism has problematized the notion of media and media outlet through the use of new platforms. Platforms are digital realms identified by a particular distribution model, content organization and visual language that allow new modes of production and distribution of content. For example, Telegram is an instant messenger that was created by entrepreneurs Pavel Durov and his brother Nikolaj in the early 2010s. Since then it has emerged into one of the most powerful platforms for messaging, micro-blogging, storytelling and channeling of information including audio-visual materials. Created to assist communication, Telegram is nowadays used by many journalists to enhance their professional activities such as secure communication with other journalists. Telegram advocates complete privacy of communication, that is, information distributed on its platforms cannot be filtered by security sources.[19] For many journalists in the RF, Telegram symbolizes freedom of communication and freedom of speech. And so, Telegram is considered by many to be a means to protect human rights. As a result, Telegram is used to launch and sustain independent alternative media outlets such as Telegram groups, for example, LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) groups. (The highly private nature of Telegram means that it is also used to deliver questionable content such as pornography.)

Groups on messengers are a form of news delivery which, when applied at a mass scale, can be employed as a powerful tool for distribution of content. They are related to news aggregators, meaning they provide information including news in a structured and/or customized way. These are algorithms and networks that allow the collection and distribution of items on a massive scale; news aggregators blur the boundaries between original and unoriginal/re-published content, thus posing the question of authorship and intellectual property in the digital age. The proliferation of aggregators in Russian and Russophone media is due to the weakness of the Russian law and its ability to protect intellectual property. At the same time, news aggregators advance the culture of sharing, collaboration and mobilization by creating a sense of commonality and belonging among users. In some cases, the use of aggregators has enabled media startups to grow so that eventually they are able to produce their own content. A good example is the Riga-based Meduza who, in the

beginning, re-posted reports and news items from established media, for example, Kommersant, and eventually developed into an independent information producer, sharing content across a range of platforms and outlets.

The emergence of news platforms such as Meduza is possible to increase datafication of all aspects of life. Datafication is the process through which, on one level, journalists make use of digital tools such as computer-assisted reporting, digital indexing and database researching, and on another, they present their findings in the form of data such as data visualizations. In other words, datafication defines the omnipresence of data—the data turn in journalism—whereby journalists use data to present information about the world and to conceive of the world as data. In terms of journalistic output, nowadays there is less emphasis on story-telling and more on organizing information as banks of data whereby the user is expected to do their own research and arrive at a conclusion. In this respect, there is a growing problem with verification of information, resulting in abuses of data and spread of conspiracy theories. There is also a problem with the assumed neutrality of data: in the early 2000s, in reporting, data was considered a means to achieve impartiality; in the late 2010s, data is seen to contain its own ideologies, impacting how data is gathered, processed and stored. Recently, the rise of affective journalism—the use of deeply personal experience such as sexual problems to account for the changes in the world—can be attributed, in many ways, to the backlash against datafication of journalism.

Datafication accounts not only for new technologies and new ways of structuring information and communication but also for new ways of thinking about ourselves and our world. Reading the world as data results in the new position of the subject in the physical world and the world of data whereby the boundaries between the two become increasingly blurred. In some cases, this new ambiguity reveals the complexity of the use of digital tools in journalism such as mapping and surveillance tools and recognition tools. Mapping and surveillance tools are gadgets and applications that help journalists gather information that is otherwise not available. For example, Alexei Navalny, who, in the West, is routinely described as the Russian opposition leader, uses leaked and hacked documents, and open source investigation to counteract corrupt elements in the Russian government. For example, he uses drones to survey properties of the members of Russian political establishment. He incorporates footage obtained by these means—which would be illegal in the West—into his investigative reports about the wealth and corruption of Russian nomenclature which he releases on his channel on YouTube. This kind of practice occupies a gray zone from the point of view ethics of journalism and legal framework (arguably, Navalny uses loopholes in existing legislation). And recognition tools are applications that allow journalists to identify subjects and maintain effective networks. For example, those working in big media organizations have reported using apps that help them catalog contacts including their own colleagues. For example, they use feature recognition tools to "recall" the names and positions of their peers and contacts. Findface was a media startup

that launched a free service in 2016 enabling users to identify passers-by by taking their pictures and linking the individuals to the profiles on social media. Very soon Findface closed its operations; however, online communities discussed how their services were acquired by security and commercial enterprises. For example, in June 2018, S7 Airlines, the chief competitor of Aeroflot, started using face recognition tools in its lounges allowing passengers to check in automatically. This event was reported neutrally in Russian progressive media,[20] meaning that digital innovation of this type has been securitized in popular imagination.

These developments signify that in digital journalism, various platforms, tools and databases are employed to carry out journalistic investigations and produce and deliver content across a wide range of networks. This creates and sustains a constantly evolving news world so that the user is continuously engaged in this world on all available platforms. This form of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2007) blurs the boundaries between "real" events, media events and mediated events, on the one hand, and on the other, advances new social interactions and cultural phenomena. All of them foreground digital journalism as a new system of complex social and political realities.

Notes

1. By occupying a particular section of the market, namely, the publication of analytical reports in the evening, in just three years Meduza has emerged from a niche media outlet to one of the most important Russophone content producers.
2. For example, Calvert is a London-based arts foundation directed by Nonna Materkova, a Russian entrepreneur and investor. In addition to exhibitions showcasing the arts of the New East, Calvert runs an online magazine about art and culture in the former communist countries. Thanks to an appealing design of the journal and innovative approach to news selection—they tend to write about new trends in fashion, music and architecture, as well as provide critical reflections on social and political transformations in the region—Calvert Journal has become an influential media outlet. Their impact is evident on how the Guardian and other British media re-publish items from Calvert Journal and/or respond to the available items. In other words, through its innovative focus on the creative industries of the New East which has been attained with the help of digital collaborations with artists, musicians and photographers from the region, the Calvert Journal has broadened the agenda of other media. Indeed, writers working for the Calvert Journal also work as freelancers for other media, thus building a specific circuit of exchange whereby journalists no longer have to be present in an office and instead work from multiple locations for multiple media outlets.
3. In fact, mail.ru is used as an amplifier by the BBC World Service.
4. For example, news items published on mail.ru tell a story about events in Russia and abroad, and this is a traditional concern of journalism; however, these items are linked to financial data, including Mail.ru online banking services, thus, impacting the range and applicability of traditional reporting and other activities such as investment and banking, and so the realm in which journalism exists in

the digital era is big and complex. From introducing "native advertising" to developing and incorporating elements of machine learning and artificial intelligence, Mail.ru, Yandex and digital startups have transformed the processes and practices of journalistic work in the Russian Federation, as well as in other countries through their subsidiaries.

5. See, for example, Strukov 2011 and 2014.
6. Fifty semi-structured interviews with media practitioners were collected. Their duration varies between sixty and ninety minutes.
7. See, for example, interviews with Russian journalists and media practitioners published in *Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* (www.digitalicons.org).
8. https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/07/05/81136-sobolinaya-ohota.
9. See, for example, Boxall 2015.
10. I deliberately do not call these individuals "amateurs" insofar as their activities are professional albeit lacking recognized formal qualifications.
11. The notion of citizen journalism is a related concept.
12. Stories about how Sberbank controls the use of mobile phones by its employees are a common feature in Russian media.
13. This assertion is based on my interviews with the RBC and BBC journalists and editors (2014–2019).
14. See, for example, Hutchings 2018.
15. Citation.
16. The classification is based on my analysis of Russian transition from Soviet to Western digital technologies and computational system presented in Strukov 2014.
17. See my discussion of Nosik's *LiveJournal* activities in Strukov 2010.
18. For example, the so-called Yarovaya Law which introduced "counter-terror and public safety measure" but in fact allowed Russian companies and security services to control economic aspects of media flows such as data mining and sale of personal data.
19. Telegram's refusal to share the code with the government had led to attempts to shut down the service in 2018 which were unsuccessful.
20. https://www.the-village.ru/village/city/news-city/355649-pass.

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