

Conference Paper

Reading As a Democratic Value and Resource for the Formation of the Communicative and Cultural Memory of a Nation

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Abstract

The article actualizes the humanitarian aspect of the problem of preserving text reading in a new technological environment as a number of specific institutionalized and communicative practices. This phenomenon as one of the fundamental subsystems of culture, based on the results of sociological research, is considered in the context of the implementation of value, training and educational functions. Reading is not merely a process of consumption of a certain kind of information, it is not just a technology of interiorization of texts and an essential resource of communicative and cultural memory, but also a factor that largely determines the general and historical culture of a generation, and as a result, the cost of the products materialized by it, left to descendants. The highlighted intergenerational contradictions/gaps, as proved, show that reading in the era of post-literacy should be the most important resource for the formation and development of the communicative and cultural memory of the Russian nation.

Keywords: reading, culture, post-literacy, communication, mass media, education, sense creation, communicative and cultural memory

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1. Introduction

In modern society, the topic of the advantages of texts broadcast by electronic and network media over traditional print media is often discussed. It is often even said that by the mid-30s of this century, this type will disappear from the world's media map. At first glance, these statements are quite conclusive. Indeed, the rejection of paper as an archaic translator of journalistic texts, and in general the use of new information technologies can not only accelerate, but also significantly reduce the cost of communication processes. Besides, "journalism of fact" almost completely characterizes the benefits of not even modern radio and television, but of news agencies and Internet resources, for example, "live magazines" and social networks, through which eyewitnesses have the opportunity to tell about what happened in real time.

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However, is it possible to reduce all the problems of translation and internalization of information that are pragmatically demanded by man today only to technology? Recent practice shows that the discussion of the print media is only the tip of the iceberg in understanding the development problem in the context of constant social and technological transformations of reading in general as a complex of institutionalized activities. In addition, its reflection should urgently include the humanitarian aspect. Because in fact the latest technologies with the necessary format, limiting the brevity and maximum visualization of texts "for the convenience of the user", are gradually being pushed into the background of reading as an implemented centuries-old dialogue process between you and the reader, as the most important for the education of the individual. After all, the value of reading, in the opinion of many great thinkers, has never consisted only in gaining knowledge, simply in gaining new information or leisure. One of the main advantages of this process has always been the factor of self-development. In the end, according to Confucius, "no matter how busy you are, you should devote time to reading or indulge in your ignorance" (<https://blog.kniga.biz.ua/55-tsityi-o-knigah-ichtenii>. Accessed 8 August 2019).

The aim of our work was to identify and analyze two aspects of this problem: the role and forms of the productive activity of modern media in promoting the institution of reading, and the consideration of reading as one of the most important resources for the formation and development of the communicative and cultural memory of society as a whole and its individual societies.

2. Research Material

2.1. Studies of Reading

In recent studies, reading is identified as one of the fundamental subsystems of culture [1]. Functions such as the transmission, preservation and interpretation of socio-cultural information, carried out by this social and intellectual activity, characterize reading as a socio-cultural communication system. It is easy to understand that systematic reading develops much more than a simple visual perception of information --- for example, when watching TV or briefly viewing news feeds on the Internet. After all, reading full-length texts in a newspaper, magazine, on a website, not to mention books, we are only involved in this process and make huge mental efforts, because all kinds of memory are involved, and the human mind performs a vast number of other mental operations. "Turning to the work of V. I. Dahl", the psychologist says on this subject, "we find out

that "reading" and "respecting" are related concepts. Therefore, it means that anyone who starts reading a book is obliged to respect and honour the author by treating the text thoughtfully and trying to understand the main idea of the author. There is already an ethical moment -- an attribute of Culture" [2].

2.2. Process effectiveness

Literacy improves de facto while reading, because, as evidenced by numerous experiments, sentences, phrases, punctuation, and spelling are automatically memorized. However, among other things, reading also stimulates the imagination and, in turn, has a positive effect on the processes of thinking, develops creativity and intelligence.

2.3. Formation of communicative and cultural memory

Another significant parameter that determines the importance of reading as an individual and social activity, which consists of two parts, is associated with its direct participation in the formation and development of the communicative and cultural memory of society in the new socio-cultural parameters, called by Herbert Marshall McLuhan as the era of postgraduate study [3, 96]. The latter, increasingly referred to as the digital era in the scientific literature, characterizes the pragmatic need for a harmonious "coexistence" of the individual's ability to process and master information transmitted both in a purely verbal (textual) and multi-channel (multimedia) form, which should be today the most important qualifying quality of any subject of general and information culture.

2.4. Research methodology

The basis of our concept is a system-culturological approach that predetermines the understanding of culture as a systemic whole, affecting the functioning and evolutionary development of its specific subsystems and individual elements. In our case, mass media as the leading translators of discursive practices related to reading as an object of cultural activity, and the influence of reading on the formation and development of collective communicative and cultural memory as the most important indicator of the development of society on the basis of civilizational humanistic traditions were identified as such.

Following Ju. M. Lotman, we consider culture in its human modality [4] and read in the context of not only intellectual skills for decoding cultural texts, but also their

continuous improvement in subjects and the general development of creativity and the skills of productive creative activity [5], [6, 229-243]. Problems of effective functioning of the subsystem "texts -- reading -- literacy" in the age of postgraduate study was analyzed by Gudova M. Y. [7, 58-62], [8, 172-176], discussions about various forms of contemporary literacy is reflected in the publications of domestic and foreign researchers [9], [10, 1-25]. To describe the functioning of socio-communicative system of the modern practices of reading as Dialogic, we relied on the philological conception of M. M. Bakhtin [11] and U. Eco [12], as well as works on communicativeness of Manovich [13]. The task of considering reading as a resource for the formation and development of communicative and cultural memory was justified primarily by the works of Jan and Aleida Assman [14], [15].

As a result of the methodological work and the analysis of sources, our approach to the aforementioned problems has been significantly refined and concretized by the features and specifics of the subject of research and research tasks. Empirical base of the study was the results of the thematic monitoring of mass media of the Urals region during 2014-2019 and interviews with 164 students from four universities (Ural Federal University, Yugra and Humanitarian universities, as well as Surgut Pedagogical University), carried out in 2018-2019, correlated with the data of our survey to 288 students of the Ural and Far Eastern Federal districts 2011-2014.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Description of the study

Reading as a micro-level of cultural processes is constantly in the focus of researchers. For example, according to the sociological monitoring results at the Levada center since 1988, ten years ago it became known that "the total circulation of books in Russia has decreased by 2.5 times since 1990. Moreover, in 2008, 34 % of respondents with higher education do not read books and hope to fill these gaps through the Internet content, and among those who read the web only 6% look for educational texts" [16]. These trends, unfortunately, have developed at present, because, as evidenced by the data of sociologists obtained in 2019, "more than half of the inhabitants of Russia read cool artistic statements. Fiction is read several times a year (27%) or not read at all (28%). If in general the share of respondents who have never read fiction since 1994 has decreased by 2019, though not critically (5 points), the proportion of Russian citizens who read it daily or weekly has significantly decreased -- doubled from 23% up to 14% and from

26% to 14%, respectively" [17]. In support of the United States survey of literary reading, symbolically entitled "Reading at Risk", a very vivid image was used: "if humanity does not change the situation within 20 years, it will return to the historical period before the XIV century. That is, it will be a world where specially trained people read in designated areas, and the rest do not read at all. This does not mean the catastrophe of world civilization, but simply civilization will be different. Do we want this?" [8, 18].

Recent studies have repeatedly proved that oral and written forms of communication are two dialectically interacting manifestations of the same language. They are similar in content, different in means of expression and perception. Electronic media -- radio and television, and multimedia as the development of media in the digital age -- to a certain extent make it easier for humans, these processes make the contents more visible by visualizing it, but at the same time, often in general a very high rate flow of this type of information is offset by the semantic dominant. In 2018-2019, we interviewed and conducted a series of experiments with the students of four universities of the Ural region. According to the hypothesis, 164 respondents were offered texts about different political, economic and social events in three forms: verbal written (from a newspaper), in a targeted address by a contextual link to the materials of one of the online publications, and the form of a TV report. Also, each time the respondents had to answer 15 identical questions, allowing finding some logical and semantic connections in the incident. It turned out that in the perception of texts for an equal amount of time, essence of events in full and factually accurate, most of the respondents were able to perceive the message only after the interiorization of the newspaper text. The network version of the content, as evidenced by the experiment, was only viewed, and very superficially; "headline", and the TV report was perceived on a purely emotional level - what was liked and what caused irritation.

However, it is possible to distinguish a clear trend. So, this was done to a greater extent in order to make students realize the importance of reading culture as an essential component of the socialization of the individual, which predetermines new media education programmes. In our opinion, it is they who, thanks to the rapid coverage of Internet technologies to all groups of society, need to purchase "nevozmoznoe" and "vnegrupповoy" character because the mass media remain the most important channels to broadcast the most different, including the underlying -- philosophy of information.

However, teachers are the first who express alarm when it concerns changes in media and educational dominant. "A brave new post-literate society is replacing the sluggish old. Circuits embedded in our brains are supposed to be overwritten by digital

devices -- so sociological changes are replaced by physiological ones, and the criterion "thoughtfully and deeply" is replaced by "effectively and directly." Simple and accessible modern texts fit these criteria, quickly and correctly scaling them and our brains" [19].

As the results of our study show, the rejection of the habit of "slow reading" (according to Nietzsche) characterizes primarily the need to change educational models at various levels. First, we must admit that the generation of people born in the XXI century, and even those who were born at the turn of the century, most often use today the fundamentally different methodology of reading: along with the traditional book and magazine - screen, audio, context (links accompanying texts in the global Network), etc. Our study characterized the respondents' transition (from 28% to 89%) over the last five years to the three techniques/methods of obtaining information. Consequently, it seems that the number of teaching in new techniques and diverse multimedia material used in the educational process of students at these universities (earlier only 17% of the total number), also significantly increased. Secondly, in the Russian state standards so far, we found as missing the concept of "professional reading" at all three levels of higher education (except the "library"); this concept promoting self-efficient mindful speech and intellectual activity was also absent in the programs of academic disciplines. Deep immersion in the material as a means of systematic professional, scientific and methodological growth, on which the general cultural development of the individual directly depends, has appeared today on the periphery of modern Russian education. At the same time, Western researchers have shown that without mastering the competence of "functional reading", specialists of any field of human activity will ineffectively cope with the increasing volumes of diverse information [20, 385-398].

3.2. Reading as a democratic value

At the same time, as far as we know, no one has raised the question that among other things, reading is one of the most important democratic values of any society. Moreover, the loss, or even a simple refusal to consider reading as an essential component of the information culture of an individual and certain societies, can lead to irreparable consequences in the future. After all, the system of social, political and other values is a "world of values, through which a person is attached to something more important and enduring than his empirical existence. Thanks to the introduction to the values, life of the individual makes sense" [21, 184]. The value spectrum of politics and public life, in general, is also one of the important topics that determine the activities of modern mass media. After all, they dialectically reflect the convergence of some preferences and the

opposition of others, form, or at least, according to Parsons, must form the highest principles of social action that ensure the unification of individuals into a community and harmony in it.

However, the paradox of the current situation is that the analysis of the meaning-forming foundations of life, which determine the direction and motivation of human life, cannot be carried out using only the rapidly changing agendas, which today so saturated any information space. The modern person, who is under the constant pressure of new technologies of transfer of messages, has no time to stop and look back. On the one hand, it is because of the rhythm of life, especially in the urban environment, and on the other -- there are fewer economic conditions to acquire, and not just free to receive information.

We must also recognize the fact that in the conditions of constantly emerging socio-economic crises (1998, 2008, 2014) and the associated deterioration of the material conditions of certain groups of Russians, it was possible to see how reading gradually lost its primary intellectual functions for people, while reducing not only the circulation of printed publications but also the number of active, regular readers. The polls and the fact that during these periods, just "there is a change of elites in our society -- the spiritual, the humanitarian elite becomes not prestigious, gives place to economic and technical "information", which resulted in that reading loses its status as a prestigious class" [22].

Educators a priori have shown that both reading and many other personal attitudes are formed at an early age, and that main factors are family and immediate environment, and that makes it difficult to modify these attitudes in the future. However, negative trends in the promotion of reading as an institutionalized practice are not only a contemporary problem. In the surveys (2011-2014), carried out in several universities of the Ural and Far Eastern Federal districts [23, 76-84], it was found that at the literature lessons in schools teachers provided no analysis of meaning-values components of specific works and questions to help prepare for the Unified State Exam. Of the more than 200 respondents interviewed, only 22% said that they were enrolled in the library before they began to prepare for the exam. Also, almost 60% of them admitted that they read literary works only in electronic form and, most often, in the digest version. It should also be noted that the percentage of those who had constant information requests, including in the media, turned out to be quite low. 67% of respondents agreed with the statement that they are most often situational and associated with the satisfaction of immediate pragmatic or purely hedonistic needs.

Often one can hear that the era of paper press is over. They also ask whether it is worth reviving the outgoing formats of mass media. However, it is precisely in the conditions of permanent expansion of multimedia branded media, we should talk not about the form of broadcast content, but about its content and overall marketing of the Institute of reading. In addition, the latest practice makes adjustments in the activities of top management, since the rejection of a full-format printed or full-text PDF-version often brings reputational losses, and as a consequence --- advertising losses. So, the most famous American Newsweek with a long history returned a full-text version of the magazine, from which his leadership refused a few years ago. Another online American publication *Politico* has launched a print magazine called *Politico Magazine*. There are many similar examples in the Russian media landscape. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Argumenty i Fakty* editions successfully function both in print and multimedia formats. According to the report of the authoritative expert company «Ovum», published in the newspaper *The Guardian*, "the share of income from digital content in the total market of newspaper, book and magazine industries in more than 50 English-speaking countries in 2020 will be only 24 per cent. So, spending of consumers and advertisers, despite all the talk about the decline of print media, will be concentrated on the printing press" (<https://echo.msk.ru/blog/oskin/1610612-echo/>).

Naturally, many regional mass media should popularize, along with online magazines, a variety of resources and applications for smartphones and tablets, and their printed versions. Meaning-making is what, in our opinion, will return the authority not only to printed publications as a type of mass media demanded by the mass audience, but also will allow the social Institute of journalism as a whole to develop at a high level.

3.3. Promotion of the experience of reading

Another aspect of this problem is related to the fact that in the digital age it is vital to accumulate grains of experience that allows changing the development of negative trends in the media sphere as a social one. For example, the journalists of the information portal *Mediazavod.ru* within one academic year implemented outreach projects "Virus read" (<http://www.mediazavod.ru/sections/readingvirus>). The task was to approach the discussion of a complex of problems concerning quality of education, which can be applied, as sociologists have testified, to practically every other family in the Chelyabinsk region. The discussion was run through the prism of culture of reading in a non-trivial way. It was organized as follows. The widest audience through the notification on social networks and on the site, which the Urals directly correlated with the newspaper

"Chelyabinskiy rabochiy" with more than a century of history, was invited to participate as part of the regional essay contest "the Near Future of the book". Later they were divided into four age groups: 10-15 years, 16-22 years, 23-45 years, and the fourth group designated as "older generation". The project was implemented in three stages and went in parallel: selection of the best essays about the near future of the book; analysis of the opinions of the citizens of the region about the print media as a social phenomenon; development of "reader-book" recommendations for librarians and specialists of the book industry.

Discussion in the media is not just a one-time formulation and analysis. We agree with the statement that their "function is the continuous generation and processing of irritations", the result of production and interpretation of which are "descriptions of the world and society, which is oriented to modern society inside and outside the system of its mass media" [24, 152]. As such "irritations" in the project "reading Virus" was made by, first, news of the literary circles of the Chelyabinsk region; second, weekly analytical reviews submitted for the week's essay and publication of the best works; third, a series of interviews with prominent cultural and scientific environment of the Chelyabinsk scientists, writers, publishers, librarians, bloggers -- the fate of reading in the twenty-first century. As an example of the value of this project, which caused a region-wide response, are the words of the blogger Maxim Bodyagin, "Modern reader needs a clear institution: a living literary critic sets milestones for memorization, a transparent, easy to access book market, in other words, the ability to know what is worth reading and where you can legally take" (<https://www.livelib.ru/author/363686-maksim-bodyagin>). Such projects are visible experience of the implementation of not only educational but also organizational functions of journalism as a social institution.

Often, the editorial media staff can act not only as a co-organizer of the regional competition, but also as a catalyst for discussion on the role of literature and reading problems in modern society. For example, in the city of Severodvinsk, Arkhangelsk region, was organized a literary café with a sonorous name of "CHITAlmer/READcity" (<http://biblioteka29.ru/libraries/nordlib/events/virus-chteniya-aktivirovan-v-severodvinske>). Young people come here to discuss literature and recite love works. In Krasnoufimsk, Sverdlovsk region, "reading viruses were instilled in readers by friendly librarians. Preschoolers and younger students planted the virus of magic, curiosity, discovery, musical virus, and the 9th grade students -- the virus of art and satire" (<http://vkrasnoufimske.ru/index.php/town/kategorii/page-1/kultura/item/1150-virus-chteniya-podkhvatili-zhiteli-krasnoufimska>). The paper *Orenburgskaya nedelya* stands out for its originality for the organization of such journalists events. They are in the framework

of the competition "reading family of Orenburg", talking about booksellers in a playful manner, and this explains why the action has caused a wide response from readers. "The library is much closer to people than modern journalism, - not without bitterness notices the Kurgan librarian Anastasia Rusina. After all, the library is not shelves and chairs, not records in forms, not silence in the reading room; the library is a poetry reading in a low voice in the twilight, in the book found by chance, remembered for a lifetime; these are people who share something -- a common cultural code" (<http://tarja-yara.livejournal.com/36902.htm>). Perhaps it is better not to say anything about what is and will be related to a book, an entertaining magazine, or an article from the newspaper that has caused serious thought.

However, our analysis revealed the fact that in the Russian press, and, indeed, in most electronic media, online media, when covering the topic of promotion of the Institute of reading there was a reasonably clear division: major federal and regional mass media see here informational reasons only in connection with major literary events (47%), the release of new books of the iconic authors (34%), new understanding of adaptations of classics (12%), and the local media -- often limited to publications reporting nature (78%), written by librarians and teachers. However, a conscious transition to the information age is merely impossible without the preservation and promotion of the Institute of reading. This, in our opinion, should also determine the logic of the professional journalists' culture, which is vital, first of all, from the point of view of the formation of the future of the young generation. Systemic cultural projects must also be an indicator of how mass media can be included in the processes of real social activity in the information age.

3.4. Strategic reading resources

The importance of reading in the implementation of the social policy of any state is evidenced by the conclusions of the intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO program "Information for all". It focuses on the fact that "all over the world, there is a decrease in interest in reading, in the competent development of serious texts, and their perception is becoming more superficial. As a result, the native language proficiency deteriorates, that is why people lack understanding of the complex meanings of a complicated, globalizing reality and are unable to express any complex thought even in their native language" [25, 7-8]. However, the contradictions highlighted above suggest that it is reading in the age of postgraduate study that is the most important resource for the formation and development of communicative and cultural memory of the Russian nation, as the new reality of the search for strategy is understood as the agreement of

different cultures and their dialogue as a political rather than ethnic community, because "the Russian Federation is a nation-state with different ethnic and religious composition of the population and regional characteristics" (<https://iz.ru/news/687767>).

Cultural memory, formed over the centuries primarily through reading as an institution of socialization, was and is today a unique form of not only actualization, but also the translation of various cultural meanings, including shaping the behaviour of people. According to Jan Assmann [26], this type of memory is primarily "attainment/resurrection sense", because its "hot" actualization of the version of practice, the scientist is convinced, has power for the cultural value orientation.

However, the life of meaning, both in individual and collective memory, is subject to the laws of natural development, which dictates the inevitability of its inevitable oblivion, movement, replacement with a more significant or seeming such. Therefore, no less important was the conclusion of the scientist that "memory lives and is preserved in communication. If the latter ceases or disappears, or changes the reference sphere of communicative reality, forget it" [26, 37]. Therefore, as he argues, cultural reproduction of the meanings important for society, which determine social development, and not stagnation, cannot be carried out without educational institutions and direct or indirect participation of the mass media.

In general, the errors of humanitarian education mistakes as a result of these errors are already clearly characterized by intergenerational gaps in Russia: the decline in the culture of written communication among young people, technological dependence on the surrounding representatives of the older generation, and narrowing of the language thesaurus of politicians and professional journalists, etc. The lack of reader's practices also prevents a person from defining or expanding his or her own understanding of the boundaries of the truly moral, ethical, acceptable in a civilized society, which is eventually characterized by the loss of continuity. Besides, in the context of the information revolution, the heroes/anti-heroes of social networks often become influential actors in the formation of behavioral strategies.

Reading as an intellectual work of an individual with full-fledged texts, and not only viewing their creolized components, is also a source of contact with the knowledge that does not allow falling into historical and cultural amnesia, but appeals to other forms of thinking that allows systematic formation of communicative and cultural memory. It is this kind of memories that "accumulates" over time in the memory of representatives of different social groups and ultimately forms the memory of one generation, leaving a trace, disappears with the disappearance of the corresponding generation. Which, undoubtedly, actualizes, some researchers say, and the subject of disclosing "the

dangerous dynamics of the constructs of collective memory and the development of criteria for an objective assessment of negative factors" [1, 26].

Thus, reading is not just a technology of interiorization of texts and an essential resource of the communicative and cultural memory, but also a factor that largely determines the general and historical culture of the generation, and as a consequence, the value of the products materialized by it, left to descendants.

4. Conclusions

4.1. As the first systematic conclusion of the research, it is possible to assert that besides the semantic component of reading and its educational function, this type of social activity contributes to the free spiritual unity of people, which is possible to carry out only under the influence of literature and argumentative journalism. However, the principles of "attraction, not retention of attention", "depiction", "the main thing is fact, not opinion", which are increasingly adhered to by modern mass media, do not always contribute, as evidenced by recent practice, to the progressive development of Russian society in a globalizing world. Moreover, since the modern system of values of Russian society does not yet have a holistic character, the timely adaptation of political institutions to various transformations, including media, primarily technological, is possible only with a developed institution of political participation, which forms a citizen.

4.2. A priori, it can be argued that in the conditions of permanent technological and social transformations characteristic of the first decades of the XXI century, all institutions of civil society are called upon to intensify activities for the organization of dialogue relations between the government, business and the general population of states. However, it is difficult to imagine that this kind of activity will be possible at the level of consumption of only relevant information. Also, this brings to the fore the problems of formation through the Institute of reading, especially among young generations, practical skills to work with voluminous, informative and conceptually rich texts.

4.3. Overcoming the contradictions that characterize the obvious gaps in the sphere of communicative and cultural memory among representatives of different generations of Russians, as well as the separation of carriers of values between the elite and ordinary citizens, as evidenced by the results of our study, can only be possible on the basis of media activities that combine the existing modern multimedia possibilities with a system of verbalized text creation. Only this kind of information resources can be a source of the volumetric spectrum of opinions of active citizens of all social groups without exception.

This is in contrast to the fact that semi-anonymous social networks broadcast, as well as short-lived radio and television text, print/network publications and their full-length websites, as well as civic journalists, are ready to bear full responsibility for the "word of mouth".

4.4. At the same time, reading as a daily skill required by a person is currently located on the periphery of Russian higher education at all three levels, which implies the inclusion of the "professional reading" competency in the number of basic fields of study for all, without exception areas of training. Reading, as we have proved, is not merely a process of consuming a particular kind of information. In the intergenerational cultural and civilizational interaction between the Institute of reading, it plays the role of a bridge that forms not only dialogical relationships, but also implements specific media education technologies that are more necessary than ever, creating text and art to highlight the most important and essential in increasing information flows. That is also the constitutional right of the individual to receive reliable, systemically built information from those who should be responsible for the word spoken. At the same time, the assimilation of democratic values, as the thirty-year experience of democratic Russia shows, is directly dependent on the possibilities of their implementation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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