

## Conference Paper

# Digital Amnesia of the Youth Mass Media Audience and Ways of Its Overcoming

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## Abstract

'Digital Amnesia' as a result of the dependence of Internet users is considered in this article on the example of students' mass media audience. The empirical basis for this article was formed by the results of sociological research obtained by the authors in the framework of the project "Digitalization of communicative-cultural memory and the problems of its intergenerational transmission" conducted in 2018–2020. Young people in the digital age not only face drastic changes in media practices but also the development of factors affecting the formation of communicative-cultural memory of various societies representatives. This makes it possible to identify some methods of preserving the role of the most important social institution by journalism, as well as the formation of meaningful components of mass media activity under conditions of permanent social and technological transformation. Several conclusions have been drawn from the system analysis. Firstly, the need to introduce the notion of 'functional media literacy' into the theory of communication. Secondly, it is possible to overcome digital amnesia by increasing the number of multimedia products of mass media of various subjects. As an example, the Russian Digital project "1968", created specifically for smartphones and addressed primarily to the generation Y. evoked a wide public response, and this project offers a method to present and promote specific events, facts and phenomena in the form of multimedia stories. The use of the project materials in university pedagogical practice is one of the most effective ways of interaction with a young audience. Thirdly, the study confirms the hypothesis that a method of information selection focused on sensationalism, discontinuity and conflict is not typical for students as consumers of media products. For most of this demographic, the mass media act as a cognitive and ideological phenomenon that primarily assumes a dialogical relationship between the communicator and communicants. This allows us to conclude that digital amnesia as a form of psychological dependence arises in representatives of this audience group most often when the media discourse lacks intellectual and emotional involvement.

**Keywords:** mass media, students, audience, digital amnesia.

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## 1. Introduction

'Digital amnesia' or, in another way, 'Google effect', is a result of users' dependence on the Internet, is systematically considered most often in the context of an activity approach in experimental psychology [3, 7, 12] and media education [6, 21]. At the same time, the transformation of the media communications fundamentals functioning in society has affected not only the practices of mass media consumption by young people as an audience group, as well as the forms and methods of broadcasting [4] but has also led to a shift in the moral assessment of memory in general. For example, the results of a sociological survey conducted by Kaspersky Lab showed that 91% of Russians and more than 80% of respondents from European countries consider the Internet to be an addition to their memory. The typical answer was: "there is much information to remember" [5].

Since young people, as the media audience in the most pronounced form, represent the dramatic changes in media practices in the digital age, with an urgent need to develop theoretical knowledge in the humanities, the authors have formulated the following objectives of their research: a) Identification of factors influencing the formation and development of communicative and cultural memory of representatives of a given society as a whole through the example of media activity [18]; b) to describe the contradictions typical for the modern mass media process and to find ways to overcome them. In our opinion, this will make it possible to highlight some directions for solving the problem of preserving the role of the most important social institution by journalism, as well as the formation of meaningful components of mass media activity in relation to a specific audience group under conditions of permanent social and technological transformations.

## 2. Methodology and Methods

The key theoretical approaches for consideration of processes of use of mass media texts by youth audience in a digital environment, reflecting their information needs, are the theory of use and satisfaction [4, 11, 20] and theoretical studies of communicative-cultural memory [1, 2, 18]. The empirical basis for this article was formed by the results of sociological research obtained by the authors in the framework of the project "Digitalization of communicative-cultural memory and the problems of its intergenerational transmission" conducted in 2018–2020. During this time, 208 students from four universities of the Ural Federal District studying in the field of "Journalism" were surveyed, and

the texts of eight mass media from the region were analyzed during the same period using the methods of content analysis and thematic monitoring. The main feature of the selection of publications was the components that are important for the research goals. First of all, the factors that predetermine the interiorization of media information by the youth audience, which characterized the practical development of the theoretical basis of the research.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Psychological experiments of the initial period of all spheres total digitalization of our life [19] testified the following thing: if people think that they will be able to return to the facts and information communicated to them, they tend to remember where exactly to look for them, rather than what exactly the received information contains. Dr Betsy Sparrow from Columbia University concluded that the Internet has become a kind of transactional memory.

At the same time, the practice of developing both traditional mass media and new media under these conditions showed that their content was at the same time one of the forms of reflecting the collective cultural and communicative memory of representatives of various societies, which German historian Jan Assmann called "registers of the past" [1]. However, if the communicative memory is formed mainly by the memories of the near past, the cultural memory is the knowledge preserved in the memory about what defines the essence of the mentality of a person. In this connection, as a hypothesis of the research, we assumed a sufficiently high degree of significance of the mass media content being systematically broadcast. Content that is important not only for socialization (primarily young people) but also for meeting their socio-cultural needs and professional interests, which predetermine the acquisition of necessary skills and competences soon.

At the first stage of the study, the respondents were offered a questionnaire with the names of persons of social and economic activity, culture, sports of three periods — the first and second half of the XX century, as well as modernity, i.e. the beginning of the XXI century. Interviewees should have noted with a special sign whether they knew the named persons, as well as to what sphere of life and historical period they could be attributed. It should be noted at once that the results are rather depressing and shows that digital amnesia is a given that characterizes the mentality of the overwhelming majority of the youth audience of modern mass media. Thus, only 12% of respondents — humanitarian students — knew who Lev Trotsky, Nikita Khrushchev and Sergey

Naryshkin are. The other 15% of respondents knew the names of economists Peter Stolypin and Sergey Glazyev, but none of them knew who Nikolai Kondratyev was. Slightly better results were shown when presenting answers about people from the sphere of science (19%), culture (23%), while the leader topics were sports — 33% and cinema — 35%. Besides, there was not a single journalist student from four universities in the region who gave all the right answers.

In the second stage of the survey, we asked all respondents to name three mass media whose texts they most frequently accessed. At the same time, they had to note the regularity with which texts are read/viewed and try to identify the characteristics that determine the choice of these mass media. Thus, we indirectly received an answer to the question of how typical the coverage of the topics presented in the questionnaire is in general. To one extent or another, it made it possible to highlight their role in the formation and development of communicative-cultural memory of the representatives of this generation. The survey has fixed that the Internet as a communicative phenomenon of modernity allows us tracing not only the nature of changes in media content, its evolution [9] but also the importance of transformation of some messages of subjects of information activity into hypertext, was made already at the initial stage of analysis. This was since the specific and exclusive nature of media texts determines how we eventually found out after V. Mosco, not only their communication component but also the "synergy of dialogue relations" [14], which, according to the interviewed respondents, is one of the most significant characteristics of the information received.

Beyond the stated objectives of the research, there were those that characterize the study of the problems of analyzing the causes that determined this ignorance or improving the educational and media education technology itself. At the same time, in the course of the conducted analytical work, we have considered the main subjects and models of discourse on the influence of ubiquitous digitalization of media content on the processes of formation and development of communicative-cultural memory of the representatives of the generation of modern twenty-year-olds (2–3 year students were polled) as one of the typical, but little studied in sociology from the given angle of audience.

Based on the analysis of the content of the eight most frequently mentioned mass media, we have identified two dominant models of media activity. Attracting the youth audience attention to some extent do not allow us its representatives overcoming the factor of digital amnesia. Moreover, we do not support the opinion of some experts [17] who are convinced that digital amnesia is a mandatory consequence of the technological development of modern society as a digital one. Recent humanities studies have

posed challenges related primarily to the need for a relevant description of "a changing personality in a changing world" [8]. After all, the development of personal intellect with urgency requires a permanent process of forming and developing some competences. And, above all, the socio-psychological competence that allows a person interacting with others in the system of interpersonal, and what is important in our case, future professional relations, which is the basic condition for the socialization of journalism students. According to E. V. Rudensky's definition [16], personal victimhood syndrome (in this context – vulnerability) is a system of interrelated social and psychological qualities of a person, differently, the so-called competence deficits, which reduce the potential of individual adaptability to the real and potential transformations of the environment.

New technologies have extremely actualized the social component of mass media activity. Today, the possibilities of the Internet as a specific medium allow anyone overcoming not only technological and geographical boundaries in the creation and broadcast of multimedia content but also to achieve an almost immediate response to texts, which expands the potential for various kinds of manipulations. The presence of a large amount of 'information noise' in the global network, the spread of spam through social networks has led to the fact that the representatives of the youth audience, according to our results, use for communication primarily messengers (94%), and to obtain text information of a pragmatic nature do not turn to traditional mass media, but online media (87%). Thus, only 12% of respondents watch TV with varying degrees of regularity, preferring to receive visualized information through YouTube channels (68%). Meanwhile, students who read periodicals (9%) are significantly inferior to those who listen to audio podcasts (34%).

We have tried to compare the versions of individual realities and mass media relations of the respondents that characterize the mechanisms of discursive models that promote or impede the formation of various elements of a person's communicative-cultural memory. The survey has revealed the components of discursive formulas (effective processes of language activity): a) transmission of a certain amount of knowledge pragmatically demanded by a specific individual; b) the popularity of communicators; c) the multimedia nature of the texts, which is mandatory for the auditory group; d) unconventional style of presentation; e) the subject of information activity, as a rule, has an author's algorithm of combining the meanings and methods of objectification.

Focusing on only one aspect of the issue – overcoming digital amnesia through mass media – we correlated the survey results with content analysis data for the same period (three months of 2019) of the texts of the eight most frequently cited publications by respondents. At the same time, in our opinion, it was seen that the advantage of

this or that mass media indicated by respondents were most often not confirmed by the latest presentation of content that helps to overcome factors of digital amnesia.

TABLE 1: Survey results of respondents and media content analysis

Mass media name	Advantage named by respondents (citations)	The result of the content analysis
Meduza	"Convenient, fast, there are texts of different genres"	Lack of system to provide non-operational information
RBK	"Author's projects, podcasts, expanded texts"	Focus on the relevant information only
The Village	"Interesting stories, consideration of topical issues in education"	Focus on entertainment
Rain	"Clearly declared independence"	Often lack of a pluralistic approach to the information broadcasted
RIA Novosti	"Wide representation of texts on social networks"	A large number of texts with propaganda content
Znak.com	"Availability of information on the real picture of life in the regions"	Selectivity in the choice of communicators, not always objective in their assessment of facts and events
Argumenty i Fakty	"An objective review of life events"	Standard/template text construction, often lack of expressive means of speech
Telegram-channel "Mash"	"No taboo topics"	There is a strong emphasis on the sensationalism of the information provided.

#### 4. Conclusions

Thus, since the relationship between the humanities, general education and technical components of the distributed mass information in the digital age is not only closely interconnected but it is essentially equal, we emphasize the need to introduce the notion of 'functional media literacy' into the theory of communication. This assumes that the subjects of information activity in the digital age must have a 'cultural information transmission' and even in everyday practice demonstrate a 'culture of media texts support' [15]

The study has revealed that almost 100% of the surveyed students use smartphones to receive not only operational information but also address the texts of mass media of various genres.

Therefore, overcoming digital amnesia as a factor limiting the information world of the individual is possible only by increasing the number of multimedia products of mass media on a variety of topics, causing this audience group not only interest but also the

need to expand knowledge through traditional sources and media library resources. As an example, the Russian Digital Project "1968", created specifically for smartphones, is a successful option of a search for new ways to present specific events, facts, phenomena as multimedia stories, addressed primarily to generation Y, which caused a wide public response. The authors' use it in the pedagogical practice of the materials of this project, i.e. addressing the events of 1968, the time "when large-scale processes were launched that made the world as it is" [13], allows us asserting the effectiveness of this form of work with the youth audience of mass media. After all, socio-political, cultural, and many other events of that period in the memory of students from now on are not just systematized, but also received an emotional colouring, so important for the development of communicative-cultural memory of individuals.

The study has fixed that students as an auditory group are not characterized by a method of selection of information focused on sensationalism, discontinuity and conflict [10]. For most of them, the mass media act as a cognitive and ideological phenomenon that primarily assumes a dialogical relationship between the communicator and communicants. This allows us to conclude that digital amnesia as a form of psychological dependence arises in representatives of this audience group most often when the media discourse lacks intellectual and emotional involvement.

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