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Bulatova, Madina; Beisenkulov, Ayazbi

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Contemporary Journalism in Central Asia: Media Practice and Prospects in the Republic of Kazakhstan

MADINA BULATOVA¹ & AYAZBI BEISENKULOV²

¹Kostanay State University, Republic of Kazakhstan

^{1,2}L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Republic of Kazakhstan

Along with the rapid expansion of new media in Kazakhstan, traditional mass media continue to develop, increasingly intersecting and converting to a convergent form. However, in many respects country's traditional media are still the main source of information due to deep-rooted traditions and the state of the modern media system. Applying the model of ethnographic research, the authors analyze the use of social media by Kazakh journalists.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, society, journalism, new technologies, new media

The well-known aphorism of the Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan (2001), "The medium is the message," proves the idea that media reflects dominant social organization. Besides, as Teun A. van Dijk states, in general media power is symbolic and persuasive, in the sense that the media primarily have the potential to control the minds of readers or viewers and sometimes their actions as well (van Dijk, 1995). For almost two decades, the web has totally changed the world and revolutionized the way information is searched, stored, and published. It has transformed the whole world into a global village [Adedeji, 2011]. The ripple effect has extended so wide that it influences politics, business, industry, education, medicine and, of course, media, turned it into social one.

Social media is about networking and communicating through text, video, blogs, pictures, status updates on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn or microblogs such as Twitter (Alejandro, 2010). Kaplan and Haenlein define it as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thomas Poell and Erik Borra (2011) try to explicate social media in relation to communication, underlying that it is "alternative platforms of public communication". Manuel Castells (2009) considers social media to be a process of users building their own mass communication systems, via SMS, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, and wikis.

Analyzing social media, Poell and Borra (2011) come to the conclusion that so called "mass self-communication" makes each individual a media outlet in himself/herself, and that such methods have led to the diminishing of journalism as a profession. Indeed, the emergence and development of social media, including such popular services as image hosting Flickr, networks Bebo, Facebook, MySpace, free encyclopedia Wikipedia,

Correspondence to: Madina Bulatova, Department of Journalism and Communication Management, Kostanay State University, 47 Baitursynov Street, off 227, 110000, Kostanay, Republic of Kazakhstan.

advertisements website Craigslist, video-sharing website YouTube, etc., allows talking about the growth of the democratic potential of modern media, since it democratizes rather than monopolizes information and knowledge (Cairncross, 2002). Moreover, it evidences the formation of a serious alternative to the mass communication system, which becomes “the communication processes taking place in a global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages and documents from many-to-many in chosen time” (Arsenault & Catsells, 2008).

The western democratic tradition sees the media as a constituent of the public sphere, which every citizen, endowed with certain rights by the state, has access to. Communication theorist Jürgen Habermas (1989) was the first to speak loudly about an open and independent forum of opinions—a public arena or public sphere. This sphere lies outside the biased zones and serves as an arena for interaction between social groups. Social media went further than this concept and proposed an even more radical formula – the so-called “forum of individualities”, where each person contributes a little to the creation of a general picture of the society, and the network is filled with the forces of “collective mind”.

Surveys among Americans conducted by the Pew Research Center found 90 per cent of young people aged 18 to 29 constantly use social media. Besides, usage among those 65 and older has increased more than threefold since 2010 when social media were utilized by 11 per cent. At present 35 per cent of respondents older than 65 years age use social media; while in 2005 their amount was just 2 per cent. Women use social networking services more frequent than men, though since 2014 this difference has been modest. In 2015, a study found 68 per cent of all female-respondents utilized social media, compared with 62 per cent of male-respondents. However, there are not remarkable differences by racial or ethnic groups: 65 per cent of whites, 65 per cent of Hispanics and 56 per cent of African-Americans actively use social media today. Americans living in rural areas use social media a bit less than those live in suburban and urban communities – 58 per cent, 68 per cent, and 64 per cent respectively (Perrin et al., 2015).

The survey conducted in Kazakhstan during the winter of 2015-2016 by Media Systems agency with the assistance of Brand Analytics service indicates that social media monthly active users is 3.3 million people, that is 18.32 per cent of the country's total population. The survey demonstrates that VKontakte is the most popular social network amongst Kazakhstanis. It has 1.945 million users, who monthly share about 45 million posts, comments, and likes. VKontakte boasts more men (53.8 per cent) than women (46.2 per cent). Among its users, a greater percentage belongs to young people under 18 years of age. The age category 18 to 24 years use VKontakte a bit less, while people over 25 years old are less than a quarter of active users. Facebook is used by 1.25 million people, most of whom are women (60.3 per cent). It is noteworthy that only 0.1 per cent of Kazakhstani teenagers actively use Facebook. 45.4 per cent of its audience is 25 to 34-year-olds. About 5 per cent of Facebook users are over 55 years old.

The most age-related social network is “Odnoklassniki” that is utilized by 693,000 users from Kazakhstan, the vast majority of whom are over 25 years old. In addition, every fifth user is over 55 years old. 74 per cent women and 26 per cent men prefer this social network to communicate with family and friends, share personal photos, news, interesting facts, etc. Twitter with audience of 16,600 users is the last in the rankings. It is of particular interest that 52 per cent of male-respondents choose it to interact with other people.

As one can conclude, now-a-days journalists should be some kind of experts to bring the Internet into the service for making journalism better. It is obvious that in their everyday life reporters, correspondents and pressmen use social media for ordinary

personal purposes, but they should think about their usage for professional reasons as well, which make benefits to their job. The development and growth of social media as a popular intercourse medium over the last five years significantly influenced and changed the way the professional journalists make and promote news.

The immense information that the social media contain and the opportunity to exploit them alongside with the prevailing tools, methods and techniques of journalism make journalists see their role in terms of these media in a new light, learn thoroughly and become real experts in social media to stay competent in their profession. Regardless of the controversial idea that Internet has become a print media's killer and that the social media invasion led to citizen based journalism as a new type of journalism, a great number of editors, newsmakers, and scholars are persuaded that social media should be considered as an integral part of the traditional journalism.

Nic Newman (2009) gives convincing reasons that citizen-led and social media will never substitute mainstream, established media; on the contrary, they will augment it. Rather than thinking of citizen journalists as rivals, opponents or antagonists or disregarding their assistance and effectiveness in reporting and storytelling, these days a lot of journalists view social media as a new and helpful source for researches and more precisely for breaking news that can be improved and amplified by the mainstream (McClure, 2010). Moreover, journalists agree that social media turned out to be an essential and valuable tool that makes their journalistic practice better.

The conducted studies served as a basis for scientific research and surveys among Kazakhstani journalists which goal was a comprehensive assessment of the social media impact on journalism in Kazakhstan.

Research Questions

Based on previous researches, this study try to answer the question how new social media influenced the journalism of Kazakhstan, which has certain peculiarities based on deeply rooted traditions and the state of the modern media system. The following research questions were formulated to develop this study:

RQ1: What impact do social media have on the professional practice of Kazakhstani journalists?

RQ2: What do journalists identify as the positive influence of using social media?

RQ3: Does the use of social media lighten or increase journalist workload and pressure?

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to provide a large amount of data. The choice of quantitative approach is explained by the fact that quantitative data are more accurate, valuable, and contribute to the generalization and establishment of cause-effect relationships between the phenomena occurring in objective reality (Cassell & Symon, 1994). Qualitative study suits best to extract interpretive data from a source about one's experiences and actions (Brennen, 2012). It differs from quantitative research, especially in journalistic studies, because it pays attention to understanding factors, like in-depth motivation of using social media and attitude to them, the effect of social media habits on journalism, etc.

Methodology

The study was conducted in two stages. At the first stage, we surveyed Kazakhstani journalists registered on the blogging platform LiveJournal. The choice of this platform is explained by its popularity among Russian-speaking users in the post-Soviet space. The

blogs were selected by monitoring "Journalist.kz" group. The number of participants in the group was 260 people (as of January 4, 2017). The main criterion for the respondents' selection was the last entry in the personal diary, which does not exceed 10 days from the survey beginning. Thus, 178 active respondents were selected. Based on the sample size with a confidence probability of 95 per cent and a confidence interval of ± 3.2 per cent, the required sample size was 150 informants. The survey started on January 18 and lasted until February 18, 2017. The survey was carried out in Russian and Kazakh languages via LiveJournal messenger.

At the second stage 30 anonymous in-depth interviews were conducted to better understand the results of the polls. The list of participants in the in-depth interview was compiled on the basis of data gained as a result of an expert survey. In addition, the list was completed with the "snowball" method according to the recommendations of the editors of the leading republican mass media.

The purpose of the in-depth interview was to obtain detailed information about the role and benefits of social media in the professional journalism: RQ2, RQ3. Additionally, it was suggested to discuss the most significant problems that a modern journalist faces when working with social media. To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, the names of the informants and some details have been changed.

Demographics of the Respondents

The selection set of the first stage has the following socio-demographic characteristics. 36.5 per cent of female and 63.5 per cent of male respondents took part in the survey. Almost half of the respondents (48.7 per cent) are people under 29 years old. 20.1 per cent are aged 30 to 39. 16.9 per cent of interviewed journalists are 40 to 49 year olds. 9.7 per cent are people in their 50s and 4.6 per cent are people older than 60 years old. The obtained data make it possible to conclude that the sample is sufficiently representative. However, it is a bit biased, as the sample is over-represented by men and people under 29 years old. It can be explained by the fact that these categories are more able to use social media tools and maintain their own blogs. The interviewed journalists live in big cities, like Almaty (24.1 per cent), Taraz (13.5 per cent), Karaganda (12.9 per cent), and Astana (11.8 per cent).

Besides, the respondents were classified according to age groups and education level. Hence, 6.1 per cent of the surveyed journalists have an academic degree, 54.2 per cent are university graduates or undergraduates, 20.8 per cent and 3.2 per cent have secondary and primary vocational training respectively, and 15.7 per cent of respondents completed their secondary education.

The average age of journalists participated in the in-depth interviews at the second stage of the survey is 30 years old, and their average professional experience is 5.7 years. The largest amount of respondents was from Almaty (78.2 per cent), followed by Astana (21.8 per cent). According to the form of media ownership, respondents are classified as: 36.7 per cent work for state media, and 63.3 per cent work for private media. More than half of the respondents (69 per cent) work for online print media; 22.4 per cent are involved in making news on TV and radio.

As for the issues they work with, 25.67 per cent of respondents provide audience with information related to social sphere (education, culture, health care, social security, physical culture, public catering, public services, passenger transport, and communications); while 23.33 per cent cover politics (see Table 1).

Table 1. Beat-wise distribution of respondents

| Sl. No. | Categories | Respondents | Per cent |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------|----------|
| 1 | Social issues | 8 | 26.67 |
| 2 | Political issues | 7 | 23.33 |
| 3 | Business and economics | 4 | 13.33 |
| 4 | Several categories | 4 | 13.33 |
| 5 | Sport issues | 3 | 10.00 |
| 6 | Entertainment | 2 | 6.68 |
| 7 | Issues in Science | 1 | 3.33 |
| 8 | Information technologies | 1 | 3.33 |
| | Total | 30 | 100.00 |

Study Design

At the first stage, the researchers sent invitations containing hyperlinks to the Survio tool to the members of the "Journalist.kz" group via the LiveJournal messenger. Two weeks before the end of the survey, those who had not previously responded got a reminder. As a rule, reminder letters have a positive response for online polls compared to an email containing a link to the survey (Kaplowitz, Hadlock & Levine, 2004). At this stage of the survey actual answers on a quantitative basis were required to assess the real use of social media.

The questions of the second stage of the survey based on a qualitative framework were aimed at assessing how journalists tend to perceive social media, if they perceive social media as an aid to their professional activities, and if social media increases workload of journalists working with print and electronic media.

To carry out in-depth interviews, the authors of the paper first established a trusting relationship with the alleged respondents via a telephone call. The respondents were sent information about the study and letters of invitation to participate in the project. The respondents were re-contacted by phone some time later to obtain their consent to give a personal interview. The in-depth interviews, lasting about 60 minutes each, were conducted by five researchers in two cities of Kazakhstan: Astana and Almaty. These cities were selected as most of the media having online newspaper are located there.

The following materials were used to conduct an anonymous in-depth interview: (i) an official letter of invitation; (ii) instructions for conducting in-depth interviews; (iii) letter of guarantee confirming confidentiality and anonymity of the interview; (iv) screening questionnaire; and (v) in-depth interview topic guide.

The in-depth interview was conducted personally using audio recordings. The most comfortable conditions were created for conducting the interview. For instance, the interviewer's meeting with the respondents was carried out at a pre-arranged time convenient for the respondent either at the working place (in editorial offices) or in the territory of a certain sociological and marketing organization. In addition, respondents had the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions clarifying the conceptual apparatus, goals and objectives of the project. The final processing of the obtained data was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program. Below are the answers for the questions posed in the questionnaire and during the in-depth interview. The texts of the questions themselves are reduced. That is done to identify the most interesting from the research point of view topics and analyze them in more details.

Findings

At the first stage of the survey, the participants were asked to think about the value of social media in the journalistic work (wide audience reach, multimedia, feedback/interactivity, operational reaction) and rank them according to the five-point Likert scale (extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, not at all important).

The results show that more than 44.0 per cent of journalists strongly agree that wide audience reach is an extremely important advantage of social media. 35.0 per cent of respondents indicate the importance of operational reaction. 18.4 per cent of journalists consider hypertextuality as moderately important, admitting that hyperlinks are navigational system that guides users through the incredibly complex and vast online information landscape. The availability of feedback/interactivity is slightly important for 14.1 per cent. Multimedia is not at all important for 13.2 per cent of journalists who are absolutely sure they can make a report without using additional content. For professional purposes interviewed journalists actively use Facebook (62.4 per cent), micro-blogging platform Twitter (22.2 per cent), and social network VKontakte (7.2 per cent) (Table 2).

Table 2. The use of social networks by journalists

| Social networks | Per cent |
|-----------------|----------|
| Facebook | 62.4 |
| Twitter | 22.2 |
| VKontakte | 8.2 |
| Odnoklassniki | 3.2 |
| Instagram | 2.0 |
| Mail.ru | 2.0 |

There is a large volume of *activity* in the blogosphere. 72.0 per cent of respondents prefer to read and/or comment on blog entries at least once a day, and 21.8 per cent make notes on their personal blogs daily or even more often. At the same time, 77 per cent admit they constantly turn to blogs in search of information, *timely* and relevant *to users* from their point of view.

Sébastien Paquet (2003) speaks about six qualities that a blog can be characterized with. They are unique personalized editorship; a hyperlinked posting structure represented in reverse order of time; periodic updates; free public access to its content via the Internet and, finally, archived postings.

Ability to convey truthful information is the greatest motivation for 59.7 per cent of journalists while maintaining a personal blog. As Diana Medvednikova (2012) states, such results are explained by the fact that editorial offices often have a very developed practice of self-censorship, especially in those where journalists know the rules of the game in advance and where the editorial policy is rather limited by the media owner.

Despite that 68.2 per cent prefer social media to traditional ones, 78.6 per cent of the interviewed journalists are not really ready to abandon entirely the traditional channels of communication. The policy of Kazakhstani journalists to rely on the specifics of traditional media, where information is initially verified at the page-proof, prepress and print stages can be seen in the respondents' answers. Thus only 54 per cent check the information published on the Internet, the rest just refer to news sources without verifying the data. It follows that social media provide a journalist for the right to be the editor of his

information; however, they increase the risk of publishing unverified information and inaccurate rumors circulating in social media. More than 68 per cent of respondents do not trust social media, considering them not reliable as a source of information. The rest of the survived journalists, on the contrary, believe that social media are as reliable as traditional media.

As for network education of journalists, more than 76 per cent of respondents admitted that they did not take courses on exploiting and mastering new technologies in journalism and studied the principles of *Internet-working on their own*. At the same time, 54.8 per cent of interviewed journalists still do not have a clear algorithm for searching and processing information content of *the network*. More than 83 per cent of respondents expressed desire to take *Internet literacy* courses, almost the same amount of journalists indicated the need for compulsory training in working with social media in editorial offices.

The results of the second stage of the study show that, in general, journalists (83 per cent) believe that working with social media positively affects their profession:

“Twitter is habitually open on my smart phone or computer. I always check it last thing at night and first thing in the morning to find something interesting and then write about it” – (Zhumanazar, journalist, 37 years).

More than 56 per cent of respondents note that social media is the main source of information for them. In an interview, one of the journalists recalled the days when a journalist came in to the office and said he'd heard his mum, friends or just people in the street talking about something and he created a story based on this or that gossip.

“Nowadays things have changed. Social media gives me a much more complete and wide picture of what people in the city or in the whole country are buzzing about” – (Alibek, correspondent, 43 years).

Though social media's positive impact on journalism is obvious, a lot of respondents (63 per cent) are of the opinion that traditional values of journalism must be kept at the heart of any social media use.

“To tell the truth a number of topics emerge from social media, but usually minor topics, that necessitate thoroughgoing checking before publication. I continue believing that informants are the most significant in journalist's work. The web cannot replace this” – (Alan, editor-in-chief, 52 years).

As a negative experience, 49.8 per cent of interviewed journalists note that the verification of information received from the Internet is often delayed; therefore, the audience is not interested in it anymore:

“We had a similar case when we were verifying a user's tweet about the supposed breakthrough of the dam that took plight to the city. The response from the Akimat officials was so late, that unfortunately we were the last to report about the event, when the journalists from the other news agencies did not wait for the officials' response and left for the place of the “incident” immediately” – (Mansiya, journalist, 27 years).

At the same time 39 per cent of the respondents indicate that in the case of situations involving mass shootings, when events develop at a breakneck speed, it is more appropriate to rely only on official sources, bypassing social networks, as it can lead to the spread of potentially harmful and false information:

"I started to use social media to seek information about serious topics more actively in 2011 during the events of the Zhanaozen massacre. Official sources reported that 16 people were killed, while eyewitnesses spoke about 73 killed in Facebook and Twitter and several international outlets placed that information, despite the authorities suppressed all communication with the outside world, cut off cell phone connection and Twitter. To publish any data taken from the social network was like an explosion that would have generated a wave of panic. So it was our primary task to prevent that, relying only on official sources" – (Sultan, journalist, 38 years).

When asked about the positive influence of using social media in day-to-day professional routine, about 73 per cent of the respondents younger than 40 specify that social media allows them to reach readers or audiences in a number of ways.

"Social media is just another manner people communicate with us. In my newsroom interacting with reader is an essential function of everybody's job. And, yes, we're glad to interact, as we want to be relevant" – (Akerke, journalist, 28 years).

"In times of technological growth and progress a lot of people don't read newspapers every day, but still they prefer to get the news in a way they used to. My task is to introduce our on-line version of a newspaper with blogs for news to the reader. And, of course, I let the readers know that I am the person to turn to. I'm in charge with responding to their questions and concerns. Sometimes it is boring, sometimes exhausting, but I try to respond to all of them" – (Alim, journalist, 31 years).

Some interviewed journalists admit that interaction with audience is critical to media success.

"I think number one thing is to listen to your readers or viewers. If a reader is posting something and he wants to know the answer to a question, you just can't leave it blank. You have to, you must respond to all questions. If you're not responding, it means you are not social. Every day, every minute you have to show that you care about your audience" – (Anara, journalist, 34 years).

"I can hardly ever imagine if there is something worse in social media than not to respond to the questions you've been asked. It seems like a digital alternative of someone ignoring you. I bet, you wouldn't like that in real life and you wouldn't like that in social media as well" – (Ruslan, reporter, 28 years).

"Sixty per cent of our readers get news from social media. It can't be ignored. Our circulation is 170,000. If we lose 60 per cent of that, it'll be a huge hit. You see, that's a pretty simple equation to do" – (Marat, executive editor, 47 years).

Although social media is very frequently used to engage with audiences and 58 per cent of informants cite engagement as a positive impact of using social media, far fewer respondents say they very frequently interact with readers. For instance, only 37 per cent say they very frequently pose questions to readers via social media. Only 31 per cent

frequently respond to Facebook comments and only 26 per cent regularly respond to tweets. However, it is traced only in the age category of 41-50, 51 and older. The younger generation is more inclined towards interactivity with its audience on the web-sites.

When queried on if use of social media lightens their workload and pressure, the majority answered (64 per cent) negatively. Notwithstanding the social media and digital technologies are enthusiastically introduced into the news-making, journalists experience the increase of workload, pressure and longer working hours.

“My editor-in-chief expects me to follow what happens on social media daily and nightly. He says if you want to know what is happening you have to be on Twitter 24/7” – (Olga, journalist, 38 years).

“Of course, my boss does not ask me to make non-stop news. But I can’t desist from updating the latest information on the website. When I was in charge of land protests in April 2016, I had worked not less than 40 hours after the first protest in Atyrau without any rest, maybe except dozing a little sitting in the chair. I watched videos posted by activists from Aktobe and Semey, where protesters took to the streets as well. I followed their tweets and read the comments, posted on Nazarbaev’s press service’s Facebook page. Though I am not working for such a big event now, I feel stressed due to updating reports online every day” – (Konstantin, subeditor, 43 years).

Besides, 32 % of respondents mention pressure of constant use of social media in order to keep up with competitors.

“There is a sort of competitors’ pressure, as nowadays all journalists use social media for promoting and popularizing their own content and if one does not do it, he can lose the game. And vice versa an active use of social media means that you are one step ahead your competitors, getting something like handicap in the matter of reaching out their audience” – (Maksim, 36 years).

In addition 41 per cent of interviewed journalists stress emerging difficulties to complete what they call conventionally fundamental and key journalistic job, like interviewing and verifying.

“It is very difficult for me to interview when I am in hurry to post the newest development of an event. I guess good news stories happen after the press conference, when you talk to the people – politicians, sportsmen, public leaders – personally. But I never have enough time to think about proper questions and to do “after-interview”, as I’m busy with news report online. Moreover, I don’t even think about verifying the obtain information” – (Erlan, editorial assistant, 37 years).

“Social media are really great. I can’t imagine my life and my work without them. But their introduction resulted in de-skilling effect. I am unable to keep doing what I consider as the “primary skill” of journalistic work – interviewing and verifying” – (Marina, journalist, 32 years).

During last decade Kazakhstani news media have considered social media. News outlets recognize that social media offer a perfect tool for both disseminating news and marketing their work. But in the process of introducing new digital technologies into the

traditional media, journalists have experienced not only positive, but negative impact of social media on their profession as well.

Discussion

According to the long-established tradition in the USA and European countries journalism serves to lobby, promote the interests and advocate state government and some circles of business elite. Thus, journalists are just information gatherers and disseminators (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Kazakhstani journalism greatly differs from that paradigm. In post-Soviet space journalist must be non-party whose task is to collect, analyze, verify, edit, and publish the news. But at the same time he is accountable to readers, listeners, or viewers (Zassoursky et al., 2004).

Therefore, the collected data has provided some interesting opportunities for debate. Within the discussion, these results will be looked while considering the research questions, and in relation with previous studies and researches that help to gain a greater understanding of the significance of the findings.

The conducted survey demonstrate that social media is not an entirely new tool for journalists in Kazakhstan. The level and frequency of use varies in relation to diverse services and platforms, notwithstanding journalists use social media for their benefits. Hence, Kazakhstani journalists are much similar to their colleagues abroad (Hermida, 2012; Alejandro, 2010; Liu, 2015).

Taking into account that in Kazakhstan a journalist is a new profession in general, social media is delineated as the new source for journalists, being one of the most outspread network methods of newsgathering. The importance of social media is clearly visible through the emphasis on regular social media use, with most of the respondents being active users of social media platforms in order to communicate with their audience. The most preferable social networks are Facebook and Twitter, used by 62.4 per cent and 22.2 per cent of respondents respectively, while abroad these figures are much higher (nearly 100 per cent and 94 per cent) (Bullard, 2013). The popularity of Facebook among journalists can be explained by the fact that it boasts well over a billion monthly users. Every quarter of an hour Facebook finds over 50 million new posts, every minute users are sharing on average 1.3 million pieces of content (Paine, 2015). Not only that, but users are active, and users are talking. According to Pew Research Center study, in 2015 the number of Facebook monthly active users was 1.2 billion, every hour about 385 million users discussed the news with other people online (Perrin et al., 2015). That was higher than the weekday circulation of the top 10 newspapers in the USA put together and multiplied by 40, and it is 21.3 times higher than the population of Kazakhstan.

Besides, blogging is very favoured activity for Kazakhstani journalists. The bulk of respondents (72 per cent) reads and comments on blog entries every day. Moreover, 77 per cent declare constant turning to blogs for searching various information. Indeed, blogs are one of the most distinguished social media that have influenced up-to-date news-making profession. The surveys show that the majority of journalists prefer to use blogs as they give the possibility to express news freely without the inner pressure (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). In China state controls media and government censorship usually stonewall newspapers reporting, but independent bloggers are able to uncover corruption, thus spurring political action (Hassid, 2012).

Still the findings of the research show that 68 per cent of Kazakhstani journalists do not consider Internet as a main source of information, as it contains much unverified data. The interviewed journalists think that to be a journalist means to search for reliable

information, prepare and disseminate it. He has certain obligations tied up in his professional identity and rules to be followed. Writing the objective truth is chief among them (Alexander et al., 2014). Reed writes that to be a journalist means to be engaged in criticism, entertainment and information (Reed, 2001). Thus, 63 per cent of informants consider that traditional values of journalism must be kept at the heart of any social media use.

In comparison with the traditional ways of disseminating news social media have extremely important benefits. According to Kazakhstani journalists they are wide audience reach, operational reaction and the availability of feedback or interactivity. Actually, a greater number of social media benefits should be mentioned. For instance, journalists from the European Union regard as the benefits the following: speed and instantaneous access, easier access to information, variety, credibility and authenticity, easier to make contacts with people, obtaining focused information, increasing the profiles of journalists, finding story ideas, cost-efficient, always at hand, generally keeping up with events, freedom of speech (Journalists and Social Media, 2012).

On the other hand, the use of social media can be characterized as a pressure in the journalist profession, a push to be incorporated in an ever-changing society, with newsmen feeling the danger and threat of refusing to adapt to the new media content. That's why 64 per cent of respondents consider social media negatively influence the journalism, provoking the increase of workload, pressure and longer working hours. The results correspond to answers of Asian (Liu, 2015) and European (Journalists and Social Media, 2012) colleagues, admitting that nowadays they are constantly under greater pressure to produce a story quickly and report on changes as the story evolves.

The findings of the survey also signify that being technologically literate is a key aspect for modern Kazakhstani journalists. The bulk of informants (83 per cent) realize the importance and necessity for compulsory training in working with social media, as they had to master new technologies in journalism and learn the *Internet-working guidelines on their own*.

In general, the findings of the conducted survey prove that in Kazakhstan the journalism step by step enlarges the use of social media that is the most significant and far-reaching tool utilized by Kazakhstani journalists sometimes regardless of lack of technological literacy and increase of workload. It clarifies that social media is getting an integral and non-avoidable part of journalist profession and is changing the way and methods news is produced in traditional media.

Conclusion

The obtained data and analysis of previous researchers emphasize the fact that Kazakhstani media experience transition from traditional to social media. The key features of that transition are the following.

Firstly, arrival of such social networks as Facebook and Twitter has brought new journalistic trends to Kazakhstan as they greatly assist journalists with the stories and lead during breaking news events. There is an obvious advantage of using Facebook and Twitter for gathering information for articles and reports, because it is a much faster approach than traditional media.

Secondly, blogging platforms like Live Journal are also rather popular among the Kazakhstani journalists. Maintaining own blog gives them an ability of being subjective to the issues they are reporting objectively for their media.

Thirdly, comparing to mainstream media social media is a more convenient way to promote news and stories. The majority of the interviewed journalists admit that wide audience reach, multimedia, feedback, and operational reaction are measures of popularity and success and social media always offers immediate feedback in form of comments, likes, retweets, and reposting.

The transition from traditional media to social one and rapid growth of the latest in Kazakhstan can be explained by the fact that more and more Kazakhstani journalists see immense prospects in social media considering them a crucial and foremost tool for making, reporting, and promoting news. But for all that, the amount of journalist completely relying on data on social networks is not much inspiring. Kazakhstani journalists get used to rely on official press-releases and interviews with the participants of the events.

Besides, despite the provision of greater accessibility to sources of information, social media maintain a lower level of reports, posts and messages quality that is related to several things: a competitive urgency to report, lack of time to double check the information, etc.

Nevertheless, this investigation presents only a primary analysis on this issue, and further researches employing more systematical methods are necessary for us to understand how Kazakhstani journalism and journalists are and will be influenced by social media on their way from traditional media.

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Dr. Madina Bulatova is an assistant in the Department of Journalism and Communication Management at Kostanay State University, Republic of Kazakhstan. Currently she is pursuing her PhD in innovation journalism at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. Dr. Bulatova's areas of scientific interest are: new media technologies, social media, and future of journalism.

Dr. Ayazbi Bâisenkulov is an associate professor in the Department of Teleradio and Public Relations at L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. His research interests include modern mass communications and the influence of social and digital media on human behavior.