Digitalization in the Development of Media Systems: The Impact of Youtube on Traditional Television

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Abstract. Purpose: The article examines the impact of digitalization on the global mass media system at various levels, including the production of journalistic content, the choice of technology for its delivery to the target audience, the transformation of the media market, and the organization of media editorial offices.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The main focus of the research is on the digitalization of the television industry as part of the process of mass media convergence and the transition of traditional television to digital video broadcasting – terrestrial (DVBT), including via the Internet.

Findings: On the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the structure and content of three popular YouTube channels, the global media – CNN, BBC News and RT (Russia Today), conclusions about the reasons for the orientation of the editors of these channels for long-term and mutually beneficial cooperation with YouTube, as well as the technological, socio-communicative and marketing advantages of their interaction.

Originality/Value: The study confirmed the significant impact of digitalization on the modern mass media system as a whole, which is reflected in the ongoing functional transition of traditional television to digital format. According to the results of the study, the growth of traditional television channels in digital format on web-based platforms created for the demonstration and public discussion of video content is predicted. It is established that using Internet-based platforms for distributing video content, TV channel editors receive three significant advantages: technological, socio-communicative, and marketing.

Keywords: Global TV media · Digitalization · Convergence · Media system · Technological changes

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1 Introduction

The development and global spread of digital technologies has had a significant impact on socio-economic systems and various sectors of the economy. A study conducted by Digital Pulse showed that mass media took the first place among all the industries most affected by digitalization – its penetration rate was 72% (Chesky 2017). Scientists and
practical economists consider the media industry as the vanguard of digital transformation of the economy, calling the natural consequence of digitalization blurring the boundaries between mass media and the technology industry, in which the fragmentation of media content for different devices, the partnership of editorial offices with industrial companies to access new technologies and adapt them to the needs of journalists will determine the evolution of the media industry over the next decade (World Economic Forum 2016).

In 2019, the daily consumption of digital media exceeded the traditional media in total time spent for the first time, leading researchers to conclude about a decisive influence of digital content on the media industry as a whole and significant changes in the media system that manifested, by definition of Rungfapaisarn (2019), in the following trends: media due to the reduced cost of digital devices that improve access to news, displace traditional print publications from the media market or force them to switch to digital format; digital technology, low barriers to entry and easily accessible content distribution channels contribute to the emergence of new producers of media content, as the Internet allowed everyone to become a part of the media industry, so the large editorial offices are forced to compete with small businesses for the same audience; the digital industry encourages the growth of media content and the development of technologies for its personalized delivery; in the context of a large number of media materials, the audience’s distrust of this content is growing, so the issues of reliability, quality, creativity and relevance of media content are becoming more and more important for the media industry.

Digitalization has affected not only the media market and the ways of content distribution, but also the internal organization of the media business and the work of editorial offices. According to the observations of the researcher Lareau (2010), the main consequences of media digitalization have been: a) reduction of the number of jobs in the industry, as digital technologies simplify the production of journalistic materials, many media employees perform a wide range of technical tasks in addition to basic functions, and some content is produced outside the editorial office; b) reduction of wages for full-time editorial staff, since digital technologies allow to outsource some of the journalistic work to cheaper countries; c) increasing importance of the stress factor and the need for efficiency; d) increasing influence of media on the collective actions of the public and the government, since the media are able to unite and coordinate people, bring them to the streets for large-scale protests, media are important participants in all the so-called “colour revolutions” of recent years. In addition, digital technologies have been particularly developed in the form of special systems and applications that allow organizing and coordinating the work of journalists located in different parts of the world, since remote work in this area is essential, and applications allow companies to manage a large volume of content produced by them (James 2018).

In these conditions and taking into account the described trends, the study of the impact of digitalization on certain areas of the world media industry, and especially the sphere of television, which has undergone the most significant changes, is considered an urgent research area. A special case of this process is the influence of digital video content platforms such as YouTube on the organization of traditional television, on the use of these platforms by TV media editors, which will be discussed in this article.
2 Materials and Method

To assess the impact of digitalization on the media industry and, in particular, on traditional television, it was decided to conduct a study of the functioning of global television mass media on the largest and most famous digital platform in the world – YouTube. For this purpose, a comprehensive analysis of YouTube channels of three popular TV media – the American TV company CNN (URL: https://www.youtube.com/user/CNN), the British BBC broadcasting company (URL: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC16niRr50-MSBwiO3YDb3RA) and the Russian international TV channel RT-Russia Today (URL: https://www.youtube.com/user/RussiaToday/featured) was carried out. Qualitative and quantitative indicators of their work, including the period of operation, the number of videos published, frequency of publication, number of subscribers per channel, the presence of related thematic channels and playlists, the principles of their formation, forms of interaction of the channel with their audience within the platform YouTube, use YouTube channel for marketing purposes, etc. were studied.

The indicators of the three selected TV channels CNN, BBC News and RT were also compared to identify common trends. The data obtained as a result of the study were evaluated to determine whether they partially or fully correspond to the general trends of recent years in the development of the media industry.

3 Results

The main advantage gained by traditional TV media due to the process of digitalization is technological one. The digitalization of television has provided an opportunity for integration and convergence with other communication networks, where television services can be provided using high-speed networks using Internet protocols (Menezes and Quadros Carvalho 2009). Media convergence is defined as “the ongoing process of consolidation and expansion that enables global media companies to become larger, integrated, and networked” (Sueres 2016). Convergence in the media industry implies the merging of old and new forms of mass media, the interconnection of various media formats (Nadaf 2019).

Despite the continued popularity of traditional media, new digital channels are actively developing, offering multi-platform, high-quality content available on a wide range of devices (Singca 2016). The transition of traditional media to digital broadcasting allows them to provide non-linear services to their viewers who prefer to watch videos at a convenient time, or arrange live broadcasts of significant events over the Internet (Aggarwal et al. 2016). CNN, BBC News, and RT early realized the technological advantages of displaying content through the digital video content platform YouTube, creating their official channels on it in October 2005, April 2006, and March 2007, respectively (YouTube itself appeared in 2005). By the beginning of 2020, CNN’s YouTube channel had already posted 147.5 thousand videos, BBC News - 10.9 thousand videos, and RT - 48 thousand videos.

RT is the most active of the three media outlets on YouTube, which posts an average of 10 to 20 new videos per day, both individual journalistic reports and live news broadcast available via YouTube. For the convenience of users, RT journalists
use such technological features as a) creating YouTube channels linked to the main channel, which can be accessed through links from the main channel and which are advertised in the report descriptions on it. In particular, these are separate channels for different languages (RT Chinese, RT in Russian, RT Arabic, etc.), dedicated to RT representative offices in individual countries (RT UK, RT France), channels with collections of programs of a specific topic or genre (RT Sport, RT Documentary, RT Digital, etc.); b) RT editorial staff daily compiles and updates playlists with programs dedicated to current events and feature stories (the impeachment of D. Trump, coronavirus in China, elections in the UK, etc.).

CNN posts less than RT – an average of 5–10 videos per day – on its YouTube channel, and almost always these are individual reports, rather than full news releases. In terms of technology, CNN also has dependent thematic YouTube channels - CNN Livestreams, CNN Politics, CNN Business, which are advertised on the main channel’s page; there is a separate language version of CNN en Español with 1.35 million subscribers, and a country version - CNN Chile. The CNN editorial board pays considerable attention to playlists, and they are formed by journalists (the best prepared by one or another reporter/presenter), by invited experts (comments by one scientist or public figure on various issues), by the publication’s heroes, and – as with RT – by feature stories, and these stories are about the same for RT, CNN, and BBC News.

The BBC News YouTube channel is characterized by posting, on average, from 2 to 5 videos per day on the main channel, but it has the widest network of dependent channels from the three media under consideration, which indicates the editorial board’s desire for greater fragmentation of both content and audience for the convenience of users. In particular, these channels are such as BBC News-Russian service, BBC News Mundo, BBC News Türkçe, BBC News Brasil, BBC News Tiếng Việt, BBC Persian, BBC News Hindi and many others. In addition to the geographical principle, a thematic one is also used, when individual channels are dedicated to issues of a specific program or show (BBC Reel, BBC Click, BBC HARDtalk, BBC Newsnight, BBC Newsbeat, etc.). Playlists on BBC News are few and are formed by popular news stories.

In general, all three channels under consideration, CNN, BBC News and RT, use the technological advantages of the YouTube platform to a comparatively equal extent. At the same time, the social and communicative advantage obtained as a result of digitalization of traditional television is no less significant than technological advantage for TV media editorial offices. In this regard, the modern media industry is undergoing a revolution, when a broadcaster provides content that it chooses for viewers to watch on a schedule on TV, viewers are now increasingly choosing any content that they want to watch, that they want to consume, from any media organization, at any time convenient to them and on any device (James 2018). In this situation, it becomes critically important for media companies to navigate the changes, study and understand their audience, record which programs, what volume and at what time are most popular with the public, and so on. Accordingly, in the scientific world, one of the regularly discussed aspects of the process of digitalization has already become a change in the relationship between media producers and their target audience, provided by technical means, as well as the expansion of opportunities for interaction between journalists and viewers (Kroon and Eriksson 2019).
In modern conditions, the relationship between the mass media and the audience is becoming more complex and multi-level (in contrast to the one-sided in the twentieth century). The new model is described as “we the media”, where traditional journalism is replaced by “participatory journalism”, which includes citizen journalism, comment blocks, discussion forums, and journalistic blogs (Wilding et al. 2018). In this model, by definition of its supporters Wilding D., Fray P., Molitorisz S., McKewon E. the audience is no longer passive, it filters and discusses the content of news, while, thanks to digital platforms, the relationship between news producers and consumers is becoming more interactive. In addition, digitalization affects the relationship between media editors and the audience in such a way that journalists strive to create media content suitable for multiple views, preparing program cycles for a particular news story, when at the beginning of a new program, viewers are encouraged to read previous issues and subscribe to the channel so as not to miss new videos on this topic (Yaseen 2014).

In social and communication terms, the main achievement of the studied YouTube channels CNN, BBC News and RT is the constant increase in the number of subscribers to the channel (at the beginning of 2020, CNN had 8.38 million people, BBC News – 6.03 million people, RT – 3.78 million people). The second value is the growth in the number of views: in total, during the existence of channels on YouTube, CNN videos on it received 5.9 billion views, BBC News -1.4 billion, RT has 2.9 billion views. On all the three channels, users can express their opinions by clicking Like/Dislike, they can leave comments – they are open under all the videos, despite the fact that editorial journalists do not enter into communication, viewers exchange opinions with each other. In addition, videos of all the three media can be freely saved and distributed, and links to them can be published in social networks.

The difference between the three media is how they use the section “Communities”: in particular, CNN does not maintain such a section, while the “Communities” section of BBC News is periodically updated with new up-to-date videos with descriptions, and dozens of comments from viewers are left under them. RT is the most active community-based channel. It regularly posts new videos in this section, and the number of viewers’ comments ranges from a few dozen to several hundred. This constant work with viewers explains the fact that with fewer subscribers (almost half of what BBC News has), RT, however, has already gained twice as many views.

The third advantage for TV media editors from digitalization and the use of digital video content platforms like YouTube, after technological and socio-communicative, is the marketing advantage. For decades, traditional television has been the key mass media for marketers, the main way to display ads to a target audience, and it was considered the most effective, although quite expensive, especially in prime time (Nielsen 2016). This situation changed in the 2010s when digital media proved to be the most promising due to their rapidly growing audience and the ability to segment this audience by various parameters for targeted advertising. It is projected that by 2023, the total revenue of the global media and entertainment industry will reach 2.6 trillion dollars, with digital revenues, i.e. revenue from content intended for various types of digital devices, including computers and mobile phones, will account for more than 60% of total revenue (Wahid 2019).
In marketing terms, digitalization has led media companies to focus on making a profit by displaying content on digital devices and platforms. Accordingly, three main business models for generating profit have formed: a) a video-on-demand model with advertising support, which provides viewers with free access to a large archive of video content, while the company receives revenue from ad impressions; b) a transaction-based video-on-demand (TVOD) model in which the consumer can own or rent media content for a one-off fee; c) subscription-based video on demand (SVOD) model that allows the audience to access all existing and new media content for a monthly fee (Aggarwal et al. 2016). All these models are successfully used by media companies around the world as part of the general trend of commercialization of media content.

However, as for the three global TV channels under consideration, CNN, BBC News and RT, it should be noted that they are developing their YouTube channels not in line with this global course of commercialization and display of advertising, since their journalistic materials do not contain advertising. On the other hand, maintaining these YouTube channels performs another important marketing function, i.e. it serves as a tool for promoting the TV companies themselves and attracting new viewers to the official website of the corresponding media, as well as to watching programs on the TV screen. Broadening its audience through their YouTube channels, CNN and RT editors eventually attract new viewers to watch ads on the main sites, on TV, and BBC News gains new subscribers for their services.

4 Conclusion

The study confirmed that digitalization has a significant impact on the modern mass media system as a whole, which is reflected in the ongoing functional transition of traditional television to digital format. Using web-platforms for distributing video content, TV channel editors receive three significant advantages: technological, socio-communicative, and marketing. The technological advantage is to facilitate the process of public demonstration of journalistic content to a wide range of people in 24/7 mode, the ability for journalists and the audience not to depend on the broadcast schedule, to group materials by topic and language, publishing them on the appropriate dependent YouTube channels and playlists. The socio-communicative advantage is that editors receive rapid feedback on the proposed journalistic content from the audience in the form of likes/dislikes, comments on the video, statistics of views and reviews of each video and display the number of those who shared this video in social networks or sent a link by mail; as well as gaining permanent subscribers to the YouTube channel, waiting for new videos. The marketing advantage consists in additional advertising for the main TV channel, demonstration of the most high-quality and relevant content on the Internet in order to attract new viewers to the official website of the TV channel or to the TV screen.

The audience of YouTube channels of traditional TV media is constantly growing, which means that we can expect their presence to expand on digital video platforms.
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