

Media Consumerism as a Socio & Cultural Trend in Modern Russian Media Space

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ABSTRACT

The article is of a controversial nature. According to the author, media consumerism is becoming one of the leading sociocultural practices of media consumption. This is a narrower concept compared to media consumption in general, and it involves a number of features that can be traced in the material of modern popular media products. In particular, it is argued that modern media consumerism was initially formed in Russia against the background of fatigue from news content and currently satisfies and at the same time provokes the entertainment needs of the younger generation.

The author's analysis of popular media products shows that the success of their consumption depends on a number of factors: they are aimed at the younger generation, but imply a universal audience, and are trend-setting and diffuse in nature. All this together ensures high ratings for media projects, which in turn attract even more users. But the specificity of media consumerism is such that, despite all the success and comprehensiveness, the demand for such products is very short-term, since the audience always demands something new. It is assumed that such characteristics give grounds to consider modern media consumerism as a certain phenomenon that requires careful study.

Keywords: society; media consumption; media consumerism; media audience; media trends

INTRODUCTION

The term «media consumerism» is based in its definition on a number of conceptual concepts. First of all, these are, of course, ideas about consumer society and related sociocultural processes, which have been formulated for the second century. Thus, were devoted to the analysis of consumer society, its problems and characteristics at different times the works of J. Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2006), P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2007), T. Veblen (Veblen, 1984), D. K. Galbraith (Galbraith, 2018), F. Jamieson (Jamieson, 2004), E. Fromm (Fromm, 1998), G. Marcuse (Marcuse, 2003), L. Sklair (Sklair, 1995), S. Ushakin (Ushakin, 2007), V. G. Fedotova (Fedotova, 2005), V. I. Ilyin (Ilyin, 2000), A. A. Ovsyannikov (Ovsyannikov, 2011), M. B. Rakitnykh (Rakitnykh, 2004) and other authors.

Today, in the context of global digitalization, the topic of consumption not only remains relevant, but is also revealed in completely new dimensions, largely moving into the media space. This, in turn, allows researchers to talk about such a concept as media consumption. However, despite the fact that in Russia the first works on this topic appeared back in the 2010s, their range

remained very limited: most of the research is devoted to the media environment, communications in the media space, marketing technologies that accelerate consumption, etc. The phenomenon of media consumption itself has not yet received proper scientific understanding, and the idea of it still remains debatable. One of the most significant can be the publication of V. P. Kolomiets, where the author considers media consumption as «the social practice of using communication means (media) to obtain and master symbolic content and implement social connections and interactions» (Kolomiets, 2010, p. 61).

An important stage in understanding media consumption was the dissertation of M. V. Novak, where, in the context of a philosophical and cultural analysis of the consumer society, the researcher defines such a concept as consumerism, explaining the pattern of its spread in mass culture based on the texts of mass Russian culture. In addition, agreeing with the negative aspects of consumerism as a cultural and ideological trend, M. V. Novak argues that it also brings positive changes: «the individual's desire for achievement, career development and personal qualities. And of course, like any ideology, consumerism performs an important function – the integration and consolidation of people» (Novak, 2012, pp. 3–4).

In 2013, T. S. Krainikova published an important, in our opinion, article, where, reflecting on various definitions of the term «media consumption», she made an attempt to explain its functional, communication and social aspects: «media consumption – 1) activities related to acquisition, use, exchange, storage of media products, during which the consumer satisfies his information, communication, economic and other needs and interests (reading printed newspapers, browsing web pages, listening to radio broadcasts, watching TV shows, purchasing and storing antiquarian books, spending time online -games, etc.); 2) a socio-communication phenomenon, which manifests itself in various interactions of individuals and social groups with the media and is an integral factor of modern media culture (Krainikova, 2013, p. 169).

Modern authors both in Russia and abroad focus their attention on the features and trends of media consumption, and in this sense seem significant the works of O. V. Tretyakova and co-authors (Tretyakova & Karakozov & Voevoda, 2019), E. A. Zvereva and V. A. Khvorova (Zvereva & Khvorova, 2020), Murzina (Murzina, 2021), T. I. Nikitina and A. A. Nikitin (Nikitina & Nikitin, 2023); P. M. Valkenburg (Valkenburg, 2000), H. I. Wada (Wada, 2019), K. Jones (Jones, 2020) and others.

As an analysis of sources shows, the topic of media consumption has been sufficiently developed both abroad and in Russia. However, the question of the representation of consumerism in the media space remains open. In our opinion, this phenomenon is relatively new for modern Russia and is concentrated exclusively in the entertainment media industry. Its surge is associated with a number of objective circumstances and, first of all, with digital intoxication with news content. Global upheavals, caused first by the Covid-19 epidemic (Jones, 2020) and then by the military conflict in Ukraine (Zaitsev & Akhunzianova, 2023), have forced people of almost all ages to closely follow the news posted in the media space. At the same time, the abundance of fake and dishonest information required consumers to carefully analyze the products they received, which quickly led at least the younger part of the audience to become tired of the necessary thought processes, although the habit of consuming not only remained, but became even stronger. K. Jones, reflecting on why people have turned away from news, writes: «Generation Z has other plans, since they are the only generation more likely to listen to music than to look for news <...> Millennials also stand out as the foodie generation, since they are most likely to search for recipes or read about healthy eating» (Jones, 2020).

As E. Murzina rightly notes, «the media space... is constantly filled with content that is designed to influence the formation of opinions and the behavior of objects» (Murzina, 2021, p. 124). On the other hand, the audience ceases to be passive in consuming media content (Nikitina & Nikitin, 2023, p. 41), users of the media space are constantly in search of a positive attitude and the ability to switch off in order to better cope with the drama of everyday life, and therefore streaming visual platforms: Netflix, Disney+, domestic and foreign online cinemas. There is a process of formation of a new structure of media consumption. As a result, media consumerism as media «fast food» in the entirety of its production and consumption becomes one of the leading sociocultural practices, and young people, as the most active media audience today, most vividly personify the fundamental changes in media practices.

METHOD

It seems that the methodology for studying media consumption of Russian audience can be based on three groups of theories. The first group of theories – media-cultural, describes digital media culture as a special entity generated by new media and communication technologies. The second – is related to the understanding of mediatization as a process and state of modern society

and its individual structures; finally. The third group of theories accumulates ideas about the motives for using media in dynamics, i.e., it considers the theory of media use not as static, but as a dynamic theory that evolves in accordance with the development of media communications.

In addition, this research uses the generational approach as a current method used in various theoretical and practical studies. Today, one of the main areas where the generational theory proposed by N. Howe and W. Strauss (Howe & Strauss, 1991) is used especially actively is the study of the audience and its preferences, primarily in connection with the formation of a new, «digital generation». Generational theory allows us to most accurately formulate the main characteristics of media consumption and their relationship with the sociocultural and behavioral traits of generations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to WCIOM-Sputnik survey data obtained at the end of 2022, media consumption in Russia represents a stable pattern in which young people are more inclined to consume online content: the share of Internet users in the 18-24 age group is 66%; in the age group 25–34 years – 52%; There are practically no active TV viewers (0 and 1%, respectively). But it is also significant that more and more mature Russians are beginning to join this group: today many people aged 40–59 are supporters and active users of both television broadcasting and the Internet, i.e. watch TV and use the Internet at least several times a week (Trends in media consumption, 2023). This determines an important feature of modern media consumerism – its universality in the sense of audience.

Researcher Novak noted in 2012 the desire of consumerism to divide, segment the consumer audience and offer each «segment» its own product. Now, in our opinion, this characteristic is outdated. Products that are of interest only to certain categories of people do not bring the desired effect, and therefore become unprofitable for media production. Those products that «shoot» are those that affect the widest possible range of consumers of different social statuses and roles. Therefore, among the latest sensational creations in the forefront are those that are based on the ideas and associations of several generations at once.

Consider, as an example, the acclaimed series «Wednesday» (2022). Already in the first season of 2022, it broke the Netflix streaming service record (for the week from November 21 to 27, 2022, the number of hours watched for the Wednesday series was 341.2 million) and topped

the charts in 83 countries («Wednesday» broke..., 2023). This is a fantasy detective story about a teenage girl from the so-called «Addams Family». The name Wednesday refers to the children's poem «Monday's Child» – the main character quotes lines from it in a conversation with her mother («Wednesday's child is full of woe»). According to the plot, Wednesday is expelled from all possible «normal» schools and sent to study at the unique «Nevermore Academy», where she must unravel many mysteries, including family ones.

From an artistic point of view, the series is filled with references to various works and authors of fantasy and gothic genres (Kornilova, 2023), there are also clear echoes of Japanese anime plots, but they are included so straightforwardly and obviously that it is difficult to talk about the artistic value of this product. This is an exclusively commercial project created by professionals who understand the trends of modern media consumption and want to maximize the interest of audiences of all ages.

A number of scenario accents were called upon to solve the assigned tasks. First of all, the series was created on the most prepared soil. The history of the Addams Family now spans over 80 years of representation. These characters first appeared on the pages of *The New Yorker* in 1938 thanks to cartoonist Charles Addams. From cartoons they quickly moved into comics, and in the mid-1960s they first appeared on television. Creepy characters with meaningful names firmly won the sympathy of the audience and remained in popular culture for many years. The 1991 feature film from director Barry Sonnenfeld and a number of accompanying animations actually provided these images with a «second» birth, although it must be emphasized that the daughter of the Addams couple all this time remained a minor character without a name. However, in 2019, in the animated 3D film «The Addams Family», the roles change: it is a small, school-age girl who is not like ordinary children, who already has a name – Wednesday, who comes to the fore. This move allowed the cartoon to win the love of the youngest generation around the world, and its characters consolidated their recognition.

In addition, the educational process is practically removed from the plot of the series: the academy is presented as a place where a variety of activities take place, but not studying. This makes the series in common with a lot of other, earlier, youth products, for example, «Beverly Hills 90210» (1990–2000), «Ellen and the Boys» (1992–1994), «Buffy the Vampire Slayer» (1997–2003), «Hooligans and Nerds» (1999–2000), «Gossip Girl» (2007–2012), «Victorious» (2010), «The House of Anubis» (2011), etc. Instead of an educational line, the attention is focused

on the personalities of teenagers. Their diversity is presented under the guise of their paranormality – everyone has some kind of supernatural abilities. But these abilities are always monstrous, i.e. turn their owners into monsters (witches, werewolves, mermaids, etc.), which symbolically indicates the outcast status of teenagers, subject to forced separation under the influence of «normal» society (read: society of adults). «Renegades in the cesspool of adolescence» is how Wednesday characterizes himself and the rest of his students. Also indicative is the paradigm of the so-called «eternal» teenage problems associated with pressure in the family, giving rise to the slogan-trope «I am not my mother/father», with the caste system and bullying in the team, for the solution of which, as in the rest of the world, everyone chooses their own path.

Thus, the originality of the heroine of the series, her status as an «outcast», combined with high intelligence, black humor, dark texture and a desire for destructive behavior, organically resonated in the perception of not only modern young media consumers, who were a priori the main target audience, but also their parents. The media space immediately exploded with videos and photo sets in the style and theme of «Wednesday». Thus, a Wednesday's dance became a trend on the TikTok: videos of social media users of all ages imitating Jenna Ortega's broken moves received millions of views, and streams of the song «Goo Goo Muck» increased by 9500%. Videos dedicated to «make-up like Bianca», «coloring like Enid» & etc. have also become very popular. The Internet is filled with tests like «Who are you from the “Wednesday” series?» or «Who are you in “Nevermore”?» and instructions like «10 ideas for decorating a room in the spirit of Wednesday» or «Party in the style of Wednesday». The world of fashion and show business has been captivated by the total black image, which has been tried on by perhaps every public media person.

However, by the end of 2022, primarily among young media consumers, the popularity of the series began to fall sharply. They began to actively compare it with other Netflix projects, and the comparison was clearly not in favor of «Wednesday»: «Now a couple of weeks have passed since watching “Wednesday” – there's not much to remember. I was left with the feeling of some cheap product with a teenage theme»; «“Wednesday” looked because of the hype. Apart from the main character, who acted really well, there is nothing to remember. The series as a whole is very weak»; «“Wednesday” is the most overrated TV series» [from comments on the social network «VKontakte», which are publicly available – *Auth.*]. While the older audience was still in the process of mastering this product, the younger generation demanded new experiences.

Exactly a year later, at the beginning of November 2023, the crime drama directed by Zhora Kryzhovnikov, «A Boy's Word: Blood on the Asphalt», based on the book by Robert Garayev, «A Boy's Word. Criminal Tatarstan of the 1970s–2010s». The series set a record for popularity in Russia: according to the Kinopoisk Pro index, the project scored 3400 interest's points – this is twice as many as the previous leader – «Squid Games». From November 1 (a week before the series' release) to December 14, 2023, there were more than 650 000 mentions of the series and its characteristic vocabulary online.

It seems that one of the main reasons for the popularity of this series, as in the case of Wednesday, was the reliance on an audience of different ages. The plot itself is simple. The main character is 14-year-old Andrei from an intelligent Kazan family: he wears a pioneer tie, is a good student, including speaking English, and plays the piano fluently. A chain of circumstances brings him onto the street into the ranks of one of the groups – the so-called «universamovsky», where he becomes a full participant in criminal events. But it was precisely this simplicity – including the transformation of an intelligent, well-mannered, awkward teenager into a street «lawless man» – that was aptly guessed by the scriptwriters from the point of view of proximity to different generations, since the narrative about the division of young men into «normal boys» and «chushpans», born in the street environment of our state at the beginning of the 20th century, it was firmly rooted in the minds of people as the cultural code of proletarian and then post-perestroika Russia and formed the basis of the «boyish» subculture, which was actually institutionalized in the courtyards of various cities of the country. As S. Stephenson rightly noted, «...in Russia, both mass culture and public discourse are still permeated with references to “real boys”» (Stephenson, p. 49)

40–50 year old viewers of the series not only recognized authentically presented musical compositions, which, by the way, found a rebirth with the release of the film, dance movements, elements of clothing, and everyday life, but also involuntarily recalled all the harsh «aesthetics» of courtyard life with its stratification («old people» or «seniors», «running», «shell» or «husk»), concepts, inter- and intra-group showdowns, the key slogan of which can be called the question «Where from, from what area? Who do you know?»

It is this peculiar fusion of community, army and criminal cultures that is reflected in the series, fully correlating with the habitus that has developed since Soviet times. By habitus, following I. V. Kosterina, we understand bodily memory that connects experience with action, it

is embodied in behavior, speech, gait, tastes of a person, social and cultural experience – his own, his class, family, environment, etc. (Kosterina, 2010, p. 126), which is based on models of «militant», aggressive behavior – «a man should always be ready for a fight». In essence, an ideological collaboration of generations has developed, which, according to all market laws, simply had to lead to sales volumes, i.e. consumption.

Of course, there was a certain risk that such a sociocultural model, corresponding to the patriarchal and hierarchical organization of Russian society, would remain misunderstood by the modern younger generation, striving for maximum tolerance, including gender tolerance. From our point of view, a number of circumstances made it possible to overcome this risk. Firstly, the real socio-political agenda associated with the Northern Military District and the surge of patriotism necessitated the emergence of a «new hero», opposed to the glamor and luxury implanted everywhere in the last decade. Secondly, a very successful PR campaign was carried out. For example, widespread advertising of the film was accompanied by the musical accompaniment of the composition «New Hero» by the group «Mirage». The simple, almost forgotten melody easily fit into the context of the wave of interest in culture of the 1990s, which has been noted in the last couple of years in music, fashion, and cinema, went viral in the media space, and against this background, few would have noticed the impact, which is rendered by the lines from the chorus of the song, sung by a pleasant female voice: «Who are you, my new hero? // You will be here, I know». Thus, the idea was introduced that these same boys, the heroes of the series, whose faces are captured in close-up during the commercial under the indicated lines, are the answer to the song's question. Moreover, when it was discovered that for many adults the «new» hero turned out to be quite «old» and recognizable (as we wrote above), this served as a favorable basis for communication, dialogue between fathers and children, albeit short-lived, but still unity of generations.

Finally, we note that the attempt to present a new cultural hero in the form of a «boy from the street» caused a heated discussion on the Internet. Researchers from Tomsk University, analyzing this discussion, described it as a debate about whether the film romanticizes violence or not: «Among the published opinions there are those who claim that the series represents propaganda of a criminal lifestyle that motivates teenagers to commit crimes» (What they say..., 2023). In our opinion, this is far from the case: the message of the film is the futility of violence, since the heroes of «A Boy's Word» betray everyone, even those closest to them, hiding behind

«boyish» concepts. In addition, multi-stylism is considered a feature of modern youth culture, which is expressed in the free choice of identities and the search for different rules of behavior and self-expression (Kosterina, 2010, p. 123), and in this sense, «The Boy's Word» for modern teenagers is no different from the same series «Wednesday», being the same entertaining exotic. Nevertheless, the discussion generated an additional portion of «hype», attracting maximum attention to the film.

And again, it is indicative that young people, being consumers and having received the necessary impressions, have already lost interest in the film and relegated it to memes. But the older generation is still learning the dances of the «boys» and re-listening to the songs of bands of the 90s., takes out cockerel-hats or earflaps and records videos in the in style of «The Boy's Word».

Such a reaction indicates that the projects under consideration have a trend-setting character, manifested at such levels as: «to see», «to consolidate through appearance» (styles of clothing and shoes, hairstyles, makeup, design, paraphernalia, etc.), «to represent» (thematic photo shoots, parodies, use of names, songs and dances, as well as characteristic actions of the characters). It must be said that not every well-known project is different in this regard. For example, the series «The Squid Game», which far outstripped «Wednesday» in number of views, did not set creative trends either in media representations, or in design, or in any paraphernalia. At the same time, penetration into all layers of society and into many cultural and economic segments indicates the diffuse nature of the phenomena of media consumerism.

All of the above allows us to draw a conclusion about one more property of modern media consumerism – its products have an extremely short lifespan. While the wave of their fame is reaching the most conservative consumers, progressive consumers are already consigning these products to the media dustbin in the form of memes. They cease to be news providers; everyone is ashamed talking about them, much less following any trends set by these products. This property does not allow media products, despite their trend-setting and universal nature in terms of the target audience, to become conceptual, invariant foundations of any ideologies.

CONCLUSION

The conducted research shows: media consumerism does not form a collective identity, does not generate new cultural codes, this phenomenon only briefly carries the masses in one direction or another, forcing them to constantly chase something new. Some researchers (e.c., Oberst et al.,

2017; Tandon et al., 2020, Barry et al., 2020) even talk about such a mental manifestation as FOMO – «fear of missing out», defining it as a critical, «dark» component of media consumerism. At the same time, media consumerism contributes to the consolidation of a new type of needs – entertainment, including the need for pleasure, in obtaining certain emotions and impressions, in sublimation, on vacation. This is a pastime, a way to occupy leisure time, a background accompaniment to other activities, and simply aesthetic pleasure.

Today, in our opinion, the phenomenon of media consumerism refutes the established opinion of sociologists and psychologists that a person's ideas about the world around him and about social reality largely depend on the content of the media space with which he encounters (e.c., Arendt, 2010, Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, Potter, 2011). Rather, the content itself depends on social demands, and in this regard, media consumerism can be represented as a symbolic media Ouroboros: trying to absorb its audience, it absorbs itself, forming an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth of media products in the process of their consumption.

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