

## FEATURES OF THE LOCAL MEDIA IN INFORMATION SPACE IN CHUVASHIA

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### Abstract

The article deals with the peculiarities of functioning of the local (regional) press of Chuvashia, its typological, genre, and thematic features, and pays attention to the current state and prospects of development of regional newspapers of the Chuvash Republic in the conditions of global digitalization. The authors present their take on the functioning of regional newspapers in the Republic of Chuvashia, where the Russians, Tatars, Mari, Mordva and other peoples live in a friendly family. The authors consider the abandon of the printed media and the passing of the reader to the Internet field. Chuvashia being mostly agricultural region, with most part of active population working outside the republic, the prospect of its local media is not bright without state support. At the same time the regional newspaper is very popular in the rural regions and not a single regional newspaper was closed for the whole post-Soviet period in Chuvashia. The main character of the publications is an ordinary resident with some success in his business, who has lived a full, interesting life, a teacher, a doctor, a farmer. The local newspaper cares about everything that happens in their small homeland. All regional newspapers have their accounts in social networks; journalists promote their newspapers for attracting a wide audience. Digitalization makes the journalists improve their skills and use personal smartphones in the production of multimedia materials and be more creative. Despite the difficulties the regional newspaper remains the most popular and convenient information resource, sometimes the only one for subscribers with a low level of well-being, culture, spiritual needs.

**Keywords:** local media, regional newspaper, tabloid publication, media convergence, press hybridization, network publication, media space.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the study is due to the need to analyze the current state of the local (regional) press of Chuvashia and thus to identify prospects for its development in the digital age of contemporary society.

Recently, there has been a significant increase in public interest to the local press. The reason for this phenomenon is in the lack of specific research on this topic. Therefore, the discussion of topics such as the organization and functioning of the local press in the digital age deserves attention not only in the regional but also in the global context. Viewing the intensive development of digital technologies, one of the key issues remains the effective functioning of the Russian press system and its regional subsystems. In post-industrial society, this problem is primarily related to the history of the periodical press, the structure of the press, and its typological features. Therefore, the study of regional media systems is more important than ever. With the domestic periodical media sufficiently studied, the functioning of the media systems in Chuvashia remains untouched. Foreign scientists W. Lippmann (4), M. McLuhan (5), S. Wolf (13), J. Merrill (6), R. Burnett (1) and others made a significant contribution to the study of mass media and the development of modern multimedia. As for the domestic studies of journalism, the researches related to the study of the role of the media in the life of society. The works of Ya. Zasursky (15), R. P. Ovsepyan (7), A. A. Grabelnikov (3, 4), V. V. Voroshilov (12), I. I. Zasursky (14), A. A. Tertychny (8) and others are devoted to certain aspects of the history of the development of domestic media. These researches set out a systematic take on the development of the periodical press of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Professors of the Department of Journalism of the Chuvash State University named after I. N. Ulyanov try to touch on different aspects of the functioning of the Republic's media. Recently, the priority direction has become the media converging in the region (9, 10).

The local media press is the most numerous group of the Russian state media, influencing the huge population. About 2 thousand newspapers are in the Russian Federal register. Covering broad and universal subjects, the local printed media is actively involved in all spheres of public life. It is an essential link in solving the problems of forming a single information space. In Russia, historically, it was the local (regional, city) newspaper that took on the responsibility of being the "Keeper" of the information space.

In the information space of Chuvashia, the local press is considered to be the most influential media resource. The local (regional) media in the Chuvash Republic has been functioning for more than 90 years. 21 regions of the Republic have each their own newspaper thus forming the general information agenda of the region with a significant impact on the social, political and cultural processes of municipalities and units of the Republic and, most importantly, on its residents.

The present research uses content analysis, observation, and comparison methods to study issues, genre features, and the focus of publications.

## **2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As a result of the administrative-territorial reform in Chuvashia in 2004, 5 cities with Republican status were formed (Cheboksary, Novocheboksarsk, Alatyr, Kanash, Shumerlya). The Republic totals 21 municipal regions, 4 cities of regional significance (Kozlovka, Mariinsky Posad, Tsivilsk, Yadrin), 7 urban-type settlements (Buinsk, Vurnary, Ibresi, Kughesi, Novye Lapsary, Sosnovka, Urmaly), 7 urban and 284 rural settlements.

In addition, there are 1,720 rural localities. According to Chuvashstat, as of 19.03.2019, Chuvashia has a population of 1.223.400 people, of which 770.700 are urban residents, and 452.700 are rural residents. Representatives of 128 nationalities and 8 ethnic groups live in the Republic. There are also 28 national - cultural associations. 67.7 % of Chuvash Republic population is Chuvash, 26.9 % - Russian, 2.8% - Tatars, 1.1.% - Mordva, other nationalities belonging to the remaining 2%. According to the Department of Roskomnadzor for the Chuvash Republic, 112 mass media were registered on its territory in 2019, including 92 periodicals and 20 electronic media.

The Chuvash were one of the first people in the Volga region to publish their own newspaper in their native language. The first issue of the newspaper "Khypar" (Vesti) appeared in 1906, it was founded by an outstanding scientist-encyclopedist, historian, public figure N. V. Nikolsky, who was both its first publisher and the first editor. It is with "Khypar" that the Chuvash journalism and press begins.

The newspaper "Khypar" lasted only about 17 months, playing an important role in the development and strengthening of the Chuvash revolutionary-democratic thought, in the growth of the political consciousness of the Chuvash people. The first newspaper allowed the Chuvash to realize the importance of information, expressing their own interests through the media, and beginning a systematic study of their native language, traditions, customs, and culture.

The first of the local newspapers (city and regional) in Chuvashia is the newspaper "Znamya Truda" (literally "Banner of labour"), appeared in June 22, 1917. It was at this day that the trial issue of the newspaper was

published in the city of Alatyry. But, it should be noted, Alatyry was not attached to the Chuvash Autonomous region, being part of the Simbirsk province (as part of Chuvashia since September 30, 1925). The region having been included in the Chuvash territory, the newspaper acquired the status of both city and regional newspapers. During its century-long history, for various reasons, it changed its name eight times and since January 1, 1992 it has been published under the name "Alatyry news".

In the early 30s of the XX century, two decades later, 3 more regional newspapers received their birth in the Republic. After Alatyry, the village of Vurnary, the cities of Yadrin and Tsivilsk also started publishing their own newspapers. The history of regional newspapers of the Republic coincides with the history of the first regional division in the Chuvash ASSR. Then the media acted as an organ of district committees, district Executive committees and trade unions; newspapers were published 3 times a week, often changed their names.

The typological characteristic of the edition is one of the important components of any newspaper. A characteristic feature of the media of Chuvashia is a small number of local and national newspapers, which is explained by the compact location of the region and high population density; the structure of the media is traditional: regional and local publications of socio-political orientation with a geographically limited information agenda. The newspaper market in municipal areas is characterized by one or two editions not included in the "publishing chain" and almost no competitors.

The local press of Chuvashia today has a different format, frequency, printing performance, circulation. In 16 municipal regions of the Republic, newspapers are published twice a week in A3 format on Tuesdays and Fridays or on Wednesdays and Saturdays. 6 regions of the Republic have their newspapers as weekly tabloids represented by the newspapers "Alatyry news" for Alatyry region, "Forward" for Sumerlinsky, "Native land" for Cheboksary, "Our life" for Krasnochetaysky, "Banner" for Kozlovsky, "Banner of labor" for Yadrinsky region. As a rule, the advantages of a weekly edition in 12-16 pages are pages for special subjects, analytical materials and media texts of different genres, photos, and infographics. In our opinion, the disadvantage of this format is that the materials of the information genre quickly become outdated, their novelty and relevance are lost. Now everywhere in the world newspapers are reoriented to the Internet. The Republic's tabloids with one more Urmarsky region newspaper, have registered themselves as independent network editions in the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Communications. In an independent web resource, the content is updated daily, and the information feed is updated hourly.

The printed version of the Cheboksary regional newspaper "Rodnoy Krai" ("Native land"), for example, excels in printing performance, design and content. The crimson color of the first and last page makes it recognizable among other regional newspapers. The proximity to the capital of the Republic and the high population density around the city has always created problems, so journalistic performances are much more acute and critical. There are a lot of hot analytical materials in it. The online edition of the newspaper is popular among readers. Attendance per day reaches an average of 9,000 people. The newspapers of Yadrin, Alikovsky, Morgaushsky, Kanash, Ibrinsky, Urmarsky, Poretsky regions stand well among the viewers with not only printed, but electronic versions attractive.

Circulation is a direct indicator of the audience size and the success of the media. These parameters depend on the age of the target audience. The audience age of regional newspapers is diverse but mostly the newspapers are read by middle-aged and older people. But, it should be noted, the population of the Republic's regions is aging, and young people prefer to read electronic resources.

Internal migration of the active population to megacities is also an acute feature of the Republic. The subscription campaign analysis of the first half of 2018 shows that the circulation of Republican, local (district and city) newspapers and magazines financed from the Republican budget amounted to 125.997 thousand copies, an increase of only 0.5% to the first half of 2017. At the same time, in the second half of 2019, circulation decreased by 4.9% and amounted to 118.632 copies, the main reason being the financial instability of subscribers and the passing of readers to the Internet. According to the "Mail of Russia", as of March 2019, high circulation newspapers are in Morgaushsky (4.398 copies), Yalchiksky (3.438 copies), Vurnarsky (3.783 copies) regions, but newspaper circulation in Shemurshinsky and Yantikovsky regions is low. According to the all-Russian rating, the results of the subscription campaign for the 2nd half of 2018 showed the Republic's 10th place in Russia and the 2nd place in the Volga Federal area as for quantity of subscribed editions. And according to the results of the subscription campaign for the 1st half of 2019, most newspapers had a significant decrease in subscription: for example, in Shumerlinsky region by 20.7%, in Shemurshinsky by 16.9%, in Urmarsky by 15%, Kozlovsky by 12.9%.

To maintain their subscribers Republican and regional newspapers offer the subscription directly in the newspaper office and door-to-door delivery by courier to the subscriber as an alternative subscription. Electronic subscription or Internet subscription in the regions of Chuvashia is poorly developed and is still not in demand with lack of access to the Internet as one of the main reasons. Internet covering in the rural area leaves to be desired. For example, the electronic mailing of the Cheboksary regional newspaper "Native land" is carried out only at 128 addresses, in the other areas it is even less. The method of selling newspapers in specialized kiosks and retail chains does not justify itself. Financial unprofitability led to the closing of special kiosks "Subscription Chuvashpechat" and "Soviet Chuvashia" not only in regional centers, but also in the capital of the Republic.

One of the features of the local media is the replication of the edition. In Chuvashia from time immemorial, the Russians, Tatars, Mari, Mordva and other peoples live in a friendly family. Newspapers of 5 regions of the Republic (Tsvil'skiy, Yadrinskiy, Marposad'skiy, Shumerlinskiy, Kanash'skiy) are published both in Russian and language of the titular nation - Chuvash. Regional newspapers in Batyrev'skiy and Komsomol'skiy regions ("Avangard" and "Koshelev'skiy krai") - in Tatar language. The editorial staff provides for the position of translator. It should be emphasized that the Chuvash themselves live in the republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, in Ulyanovsk, Samara, Orenburg and other regions. The "publishing chain" of the joint-stock company "Tatmedia" includes all national and local editions with seventy-seven branches. In Kazan, for the 126 thousand-Chuvash diaspora of the Republic, a weekly Republican newspaper "Suvar" is published in the native language. Chuvash-language newspapers are also published in 4 regions of the Republic (Aksubayev'skiy, Buinskiy, Drozhzhanov'skiy, Nurlatskiy). In the city of Ulyanovsk, the regional newspaper "Kanash" is published for the Chuvash population of the region. For more than 30 years in the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Republican socio-political newspaper "Ural Sassi" (Voice of the Urals) has been published in Chuvash language. Our neighbors in the Volga region also have a drop in circulation and interest in printed products for the audience, both at the level of state and regional newspapers.

Currently, all regional newspapers are autonomous institutions in terms of ownership. Republican and local editions, "National television of Chuvashia", "National radio of Chuvashia", "Tvan radio" (Native radio) are subordinated to the Ministry of digital development, information policy and mass communications of Chuvashia. Having received the status of an "Autonomous institution", the editorial board has the right to earn on selling their own advertising, printing and other services, but all budgets are different. Today, the editorial offices of only 5 regional newspapers have closed the year with a positive financial balance, the rest have an unstable financial and economic condition, although local editions are actively involved in the implementation of socially significant media projects and win grants.

Globalization, optimization and concentration dictate their own "rules of the game" for the media. The trend towards unification has become not only a national but also a global practice. There was a period when the Republican Chuvash-language editions were attached to the publishing house "Khypar". But the regional media operate autonomously. Two major Republican editions ("Khypar" and "Soviet Chuvashia") are more than one-hundred years old and are now quite independent. Publishing house "Khypar", for example, releases 3 magazines and 7 newspapers of different types (for children, youth, women, etc.) their total one-time circulation is 52.855 copies. Two or three years ago, there were 2 times more editions. The creative team of the newspaper "Sovetskaya Chuvashia" is developing new platforms, being actively involved in the process of media convergence. A group of journalists leads a fully-fledged video channel on YouTube, where they post their own video reports, publish fresh Republican video news. But electronic versions and websites of printed publications are not yet profitable. Production of video content involves considerable costs and organizational difficulties, but there is an increase in the youth audience which cannot help encouraging.

The local press remains still faithful for rural residents of the Republic. Local news is closer and important to the reader's heart. Due to the financing resources, local government control over the newspaper's activities remains high hence the uncritical view of modern reality, the fear of "the power will not like it" leaves an imprint on the tone and character of publications. Smoothing of sharp corners in publications is a characteristic phenomenon for many regions of Chuvashia.

"Perhaps regional newspapers do not always suit their readers, but no Central newspaper from the heights of its view on the world will descend to the reader," writes researcher O. A. Voronova (11). Speaking about the concepts of the local newspaper, the researcher identifies several types and models: "newspaper-advisor", "newspaper-forum", "newspaper-hostess", "life routine", "old woman-villager". The media in "regions" of Chuvashia have an alloy of elements of the above-mentioned models, but in pure form no model is found.

Local editions have a lot in common, and at the same time differ in their content. The territorial-limited subject matter of local newspapers imposes a calm tone when speaking about what is happening in rural settlements. The newspaper acts as a chronicler of the native land. It must build a dialogue with the local authorities, express their view. The local press pays attention to education, housing, transport, pension reform, solid waste removal, agricultural production, and family and child education. Chuvashia is primarily an agricultural region, so the pages of regional papers are regularly devoted to the problems of rural peasant farms, environmental protection.

But at the same time, with no living standards improved in rural areas, no new jobs appeared, no corresponding state support, the prospect of an agricultural region is not bright.

Preserving the identity and specificity of the Chuvash people, their language and culture, folk traditions – these are the hot issues on the pages of regional newspapers.

Our time of information and globalism threatens the identity of small peoples. So far, the authorities' attention to national policy and national issues leaves much to be desired. It should be noted that students of the Department of Journalism of the Chuvash State University have been participating in the project of the Guild of Interethnic Journalism for 3 consecutive years, which has been implemented since 2015 with the use of a grant from the President of the Russian Federation for the development of civil society. 25 regions were involved in the project and soon-to-be-journalists gained experience in the profession, learned to cover interethnic topics correctly, and avoid the language of hostility at the school of interethnic journalism.

The cities of Novocheboksarsk, Alaty, Kanash, Shumerlya, Yadrin and Mariinsky Posad are monocities of Chuvashia (cities with a single-industry economy, where the city-forming enterprises are located), with their own numerous social problems. Media coverage of the problems of monocities / monotowns is at the responsibility of journalists of local media resources. For example, the local paper "News of Alaty" (Alatyrsky region) has special pages for covering regional problems. On the pages of the newspaper the life of the city and region is widely covered, summarized, commented on, and many social problems are evaluated. Numerous acute problems affect the newspaper "Native land", Cheboksary, "Our word" in Mariinsko-Posadsky region, "Forward" in Shumerlinsky region. The proximity of these areas to cities has always generated more questions and, consequently, problematic publications from journalists. Content-analysis of the genre component on the pages of regional newspapers is as follows: the predominant genres are interviews (35%), reportage (31%), correspondence (25%), information note (23%), portrait essay (17%) and report (12%); rarely published are journalistic investigations, reviews, summaries, sociological surveys. Attention is paid to literary and artistic genres, quarterly reports on literature are published, a lot of space is given to local authors. The main character of the publications is an ordinary resident who has achieved some success in his business, a person who has lived a full, long, interesting, bright life. Here they write about teachers and doctors, farmers, schoolchildren, disabled people, etc. The newspaper's reporters and their readers are extremely caring about everything that happens in their small homeland.

Since 2006, local newspapers have the Internet version. For this purpose, the Government of the region launched a special platform "Media of Chuvashia" in the Internet. However, the site was malfunctioning and updated irregularly. For the last 7-8 years local publications have had to operate on the basis of the portal of the Chuvash authorities' cap.ru. But this portal site does not meet the needs of readers as it abounds in the official information only. Now "rayonki" (regional resources) complete a large-scale project to modernize the sites, they have moved to the updated platform. Nevertheless, the newspapers of the Krasnoarmeysky, Marposadsky, Poretsky, Tsivilsky, and Yantikovsky regions remained on the old platforms. Other regional newspapers provided significant changes for their sites, keeping the old sections: "Hotspot", "In the region", "In the Republic", "Publications". New columns appeared - "Advertising", "Contacts", "Ask a question", "Photo Gallery", "Subscription", "Video". New Internet platforms made it possible to unload the sites of regional publications, remove unnecessary sections. Most websites have improved their efficiency when posting information about important events and phenomena.

However, digitalization requires editorial staff to be competitive and review certain approaches to journalist work. If we take into account that the staff of the local newspaper is mainly 1-2 correspondents, rarely 3, then they have an additional task of filling content in web resources, promoting material in social networks, attracting subscribers on their pages. "Universalism" is achieved by self-development, by trial and error. It is lack of webinars for journalists on the use of new information technologies in production and creative activities.

At the beginning of digitalization, local newspaper sites contained entirely the same materials as those in the printed version. Now everything has changed - editorial offices provide unique multimedia content (audio,

photo reports, infographics) for their readers. Local newspapers do not produce video content and mostly propose stories about the native area made by reporters of the National television of Chuvashia, colleagues of VGTRK GTRK "Chuvashia".

In addition, all regional newspapers are represented in social networks, journalists actively promote their accounts and attract a wide audience. For example, the Alikovsky region newspaper has 1.918 subscribers in Odnoklassniki network, only 200 in Vkontakte, and the Cheboksary district newspaper has 3.000 followers in Odnoklassniki, in Vkontakte -4.500, in Instagramm - 1.500. Paper of Shumerlinsky region has 1.287 followers, Yadrinskiy region paper has 2.384 followers, both in Vkontakte social network, with a few followers in Odnoklassniki. Residents of different areas give different preferences to social networks. In recent years, more and more people have started using Telegram, WhatsApp and Viber messengers with various functions for information and communication purposes. This platform is still little mastered by regional journalists, except for the Cheboksary regional newspaper. Mobile versions for the above platforms and paid subscription to electronic content seem to enter our lives providing there is a sufficient funding and development of technologies.

Today, many regional newspapers have improved their printing quality and diversified their content. However on the pages of newspapers there are misprints, poor-quality photos, hastily prepared materials, incorrectly specified primary sources of information.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The Chuvash local printed editions keep the biggest part of all media resources in Chuvashia. In the age of information technology, the regional newspaper has managed to keep its position, maintain circulation and adapt to new digital conditions. The main indicator is that not a single regional newspaper was closed for the whole post-Soviet period in Chuvashia. The regional newspaper is very popular among the rural readers. Local media resource is sometimes the only edition available for subscribers with a low level of well-being, culture, spiritual needs, reading skills. Informational nature, accessibility, simplicity of presentation – all this satisfy the population. It is not an exaggeration to say that the regional newspaper is truly a mass and popular edition, the most affordable to the readers. The regional newspaper is both an official source of local news and an operational information channel that allows the reader to navigate well in local affairs, so it will not lose its relevance among local communities for a long time. In addition, the local press is an effective means of implementing social activity of people. Today, the local press, performing journalistic functions, contributes to the formation of a single free media space, provides citizens with access to electronic resources. Active digitalization transforms the journalist's work in the regions. Despite the fact that the regional editorial offices are experiencing a shortage of technological equipment, journalists are trying to independently improve their skills and use personal smartphones in the production of multimedia materials. The economic crisis forces the founders to "optimize" the number of employees, leads to staff reduce while increasing the burden on the creative team. Despite the difficulties, the regional newspaper remains the most popular and convenient information resource, it is not overfilled, it has no competitors except the Internet and it has a long life.

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