

SAINT PETERSBURG STATE UNIVERSITY  
School of Journalism and Mass Communications  
Global Communication and International Journalism

*Manuscript*

**Darina D. GRIBOVA**

**Professional standards of covering Russia by citizen journalists: The case of  
Global Voices**

Master Thesis

Research supervisor:  
Kamilla R. Nigmatullina,  
PhD in Political Science

Inc. № \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Saint Petersburg

2015

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>Research Premises</b> .....	10
The transformation of journalism.....	10
Citizen journalism: characteristics and development.....	14
Journalism cultures and professional standards.....	20
<b>Relevant Background</b> .....	30
The Global Voices and RuNet Echo.....	30
Covering Russia: tradition and expectations.....	36
<b>Method</b> .....	43
Research design.....	43
Case study.....	46
In-depth interviewing.....	48
Document analysis.....	54
<b>Results and Discussion</b> .....	60
The interviews analysis. Being the part of Global Voices team.....	60
The documents analysis. Comparing the guidelines.....	67
Discussion.....	57
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	79
<b>Bibliography and Sources</b> .....	83
<b>Appendices</b> .....	90
Appendix 1. The interview guide.....	90
Appendix 2. In-depth interviews transcriptions.....	92

## Introduction

Citizen journalism was never considered as something that appeared unexpectedly: it is rooted in a longstanding history of blogging. Active citizens have been contributing to the news flow worldwide, sometimes changing the media landscape, ever since; “through shared information-exchange practices, citizens could not only advocate their social causes but also reinvigorate their own affiliations to the community of practice”<sup>1</sup>.

The field of citizen journalism can be explained through four main points: it is not produced by a traditional news organization; it is produced by a group; it is open to audience contributions and participation; it strives to cover marginalized communities through recruitment of members of these communities and coverage of these communities.<sup>2</sup> Along with the notion of *citizen journalism*, one of the key constructs in our study is professional journalistic culture which in social research reflects the “whole way of being”, “common ideas and practices in a group that separate it from other groups.”<sup>3</sup> It contains professional roles, norms and standards and is applicable for analysis of any field of journalism.

Such activity in producing information as citizen journalism builds a stronger commitment to civic actions in any community, even if it is a huge amount of Russian Internet (or “RuNet”) users who seek for the alternative – non-governmental, which in the most cases means non-traditional – sources of news stories. It has to be noticed that RuNet is has been facing legislative restrictions and censorship for a while now, gaining thereby a lot of interest from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, S. (2014). The active citizen's information media repertoire: an exploration of community news habits during the digital age. *Mass communication and society*, 17(4). P. 509.

<sup>2</sup> Rutigliano, L. W. (2008). *Covering the unknown city: citizen journalism and marginalized communities*. The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>3</sup> Nygren, G., & Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2015). Journalism professionalization and journalistic culture as a method of research. Introduction in *Journalism in Change: Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden*, Peter Lang. P. 11.

worldwide audience – with all these changes often being (mis)interpreted in media. The coverage of Russia is a specific aspect of this study: misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the political and social life of Russia by professional foreign correspondents sometimes deforms the real picture, so potentially citizen journalists can be closer to the “ground truth”.

RuNet Echo, a side project of the leading citizen journalism platform named Global Voiced, aims to be clear and sustainable on such topics as Russian Internet policy, information security and cyber-warfare, civic society, human rights and the freedom of speech. Anyone who is able to analyze and think critically is invited to be the part of the community, to interpret Russian Internet writing stories from local's perspective, or just to be an active reader and commentator; RuNet Echo keeps gathering such people on their website, and that is why the project should be examined closer from the academic point of view.

Innovation is happening everywhere in media, and the internet with its native support for both building groups and creating conversations at the same time “has changed something fundamental about the way people can learn about events and people who live on the other side of the world”<sup>4</sup>, as MacKinnon and Zuckerman put it. Since blogging became a frequently emerging topic in the scientific research, scholars have inquired about the transformations in citizen journalism and its impact on traditional journalistic practices. A lot of questions have surfaced around this topic, such as following: How big is the impact of this alternative and volunteer form of journalism for the traditional one (and vice versa)? What roles, traditional for mainstream journalism, do citizen journalists perform? What makes Internet users become citizen journalists anyway? Which norms and practices do they adopt? And, looking at it from the different angle, it is interesting what challenges do contributors covering Russia and RuNet meet – taking into consideration its very nature and the complexity of the topic.

---

<sup>4</sup> MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman E. (2006). Gathering voices to share with a worldwide online audience. *Nieman Reports*. P. 47.

Most of the academic works explaining and exploring citizen journalism were written in back in 2005-2009, but we must admit that the perception of this journalistic field has changed since then. The “romantic” understanding of a citizen journalism hardly exists today; though the line between the notions of “professional journalism” and “citizen journalism” is blurred, the “participatory journalism” (which is about the usage of the user-generated content by mainstream media) is already detached from the field of our interest in academia. We admit that “an unpaid and untrained amateur reporter” is no longer a thorough definition of a citizen journalist. Global Voices, for instance, has the whole code of practice, rules and regulations – completely voluntary, though – which gives a common ground to a citizen journalism website and any professional media outlet such as The Guardian or The New York Times with their Guidelines for journalists.

The **timeliness** of this study is proved by the recent works by MacKinnon, Lindner, Robinson and those who try to reconsider the notion of citizen journalism, its relationships with the professional journalism, the very values, norms and practices inherent in this sphere. In the world where everyone can be a media outlet himself, people still unify and work as a community to gather, process and deliver information, and this phenomenon should be analyzed in the development. For example, the process of mass amateurization of social communication first noted by Clay Shirky<sup>5</sup> keeps pace with the noticeable professionalization of the journalists on citizen websites – and there are more important tendencies in the field of citizen journalism.

The interest towards Russia in the rest of the world has risen significantly during the last five years, so the choice of RuNet Echo project of Global Voices for the analysis also stands for the relevance of the study.

We would say that the **novelty** of this research involves trying to estimate the professional standard – a complex of norms, values and practices in a field of

---

<sup>5</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 61.

citizen journalism – using the case of one particular citizen media, the Global Voices. Moreover, narrowing this case to the particular RuNet Echo project of Global Voices, we use the opportunity to concentrate on concrete topics and people building this citizen community, getting closer to their own perception of their activity. Therefore, the subject of the study is new and there is also a new aspect of the topic being investigated.

The phenomenon of the professional standard in citizen journalism became the **object** of the study. The **subject** is the set of particular norms and practices used by the Global Voices (RuNet Echo) contributors from all over the world covering Russian segment of Internet.

**The purpose** of this thesis is to reveal the characteristics of the professional standards set and used in non-traditional journalism using the case of Global Voices. To compass this purpose, it is necessary to concentrate on the following **focuses**:

- to analyze the prerequisites, characteristics and the current development of citizen journalism;
- to define the notion of “professional standards” in journalism;
- to get an insight into the tradition of coverage of Russia;
- to compare the journalistic standards for citizen and professional journalism;
- to study out what challenges do citizen journalists covering Russia meet.

**The theoretical background of the study** is based on the academic research in the fields of networking and networked journalism (with Manuel Castells, Rebecca MacKinnon, Clay Shirky, Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler leading in this sphere), blogging and citizen journalism (works by Deborah S. Chung, Seungahn Nah, Serena Carpenter, Louis W. Rutigliano, Sue Robinson,

Luke Goode and others), and journalism cultures (Thomas Hanitzsch, Maria Anikina). Also, a phenomenon of coverage of Russia and the perception of the country by foreign correspondents is explained in the works by Felicitas Macgilchrist, Iver B. Neumann, Elena Vartanova, Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinsky (who concentrate more on cyberspace, thus, on RuNet) and partly by Rebecca MacKinnon, too. To explore the methods of the qualitative social research, we referred to the communication scholars: Earl Babbie, Thomas R. Lindlof, Bryan C. Taylor and Anol Bhatacherjee.

Driven by the intention to investigate the focuses stated above, we have decided upon a qualitative interpretive analysis as a basic **methodological direction** of this research – the type of analysis that deals with the interpretation of text, not figures, with the emphasis in “sense making” and understanding of the researched phenomenon. Three qualitative methods are used for this study, the initial one including two others in itself: first, a case research or case study method; second, in-depth interviewing which lets a researcher to capture a comprehensive look at an issue through the thoughts and experiences of the respondents; third, a document analysis. Such multiple case design is more appropriate for “establishing generalizability of inferences and for developing richer and more nuanced interpretations of a phenomenon”<sup>6</sup> of our interest.

A case study method is defined by Bhatacherjee as “an in-depth investigation of a problem in one or more real-life settings, or case sites, over an extended period of time”<sup>7</sup>. Except for interviews and the document analysis, the data was also collected by using personal observations – it should be taken into attention that the author of this study is a part of RuNet Echo citizen journalists' team.

---

<sup>6</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). *Social science research: principles, methods, and practices*. University of South Florida. P. 94.

<sup>7</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 40.

In details, we have conducted in-depth interviews with four RuNet Echo authors; the interviewees have various project status (editor, co-editor, contributors), country of residence (as Global Voices is a global community by its definition) and previous journalistic experience. By exploring the personal norms and standards of the journalists with personal interviews, this study contributes to the better understanding of professionalism within citizen journalism. We have also analyzed the editorial documents regulating “the standard” of contributing to the Global Voices website (concerning everyday editorial practices and values) and compared them with the analogous guidelines of several traditional news outlets.

Therefore, **the empirical material** for the research is the following: four transcribed semi-structured interviews and the internal documents – guidelines – at the Global Voices, the BBC, the Guardian and the New York Times.

To give a concrete expression to the purpose and focuses stated above, we pose two research questions: first, *In what way citizen journalists' standards differ from the standards of professional journalists?* Second, *How professional journalism influences citizen journalism – and vice versa?* Trying to answer these questions with this thesis, we therefore hypothesize the following: **(H1)** There are following dissimilarities between these two assumed types of journalism in terms of culture: (1) citizen journalism tends to be subjective rather than objective; (2) a populist mobilizer role is mostly peculiar to citizen journalists rather than to traditional journalists; (3) during news production, citizen journalists are more likely to work on local, narrow and under-reported issues; **(H2)** The influence is mutual. Citizen media tend to enlist the cooperation with professional journalists and share professional standards and editorial practices with the mainstream quality media, while mainstream outlets often pick up the certain topics from citizen websites and implement readers' communities and commentary sections.

The study was tried out at the 14<sup>th</sup> scientific conference “Mass media in the modern world. Young researchers” on March 13-15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

This paper consists of the introduction, research premises, relevant background, method, findings and discussion, conclusion, bibliography list and appendices. It begins with a focused literature review describing the theoretical background in the transformation of the journalistic profession, more specifically – in blogging and citizen journalism phenomenon, and then in the field of journalism cultures, in order to survey the current state of knowledge in the area of inquiry and to identify gaps in that knowledge. The notion of the professional standard is highlighted there as well. In the next chapter, we concentrate on the relevant background looking closer at the case of the study, the Global Voices and RuNet Echo as its spin-off project, and at the coverage of Russia in general. Next, the qualitative methods used in the work are introduced, followed by the phase-gate analysis of results along with the discussion. Lastly, the most important conclusions are drawn from the study with a look to possible development of the findings in future research.

## Research Premises

### *The transformation of journalism*

The appearance of any new technology connected to process of communication always leads to the changes in the whole sphere of life, in different professions and in people's behavior, too, because “when we change the way we communicate, we change society”<sup>8</sup>. The rapid emergence of the internet has accelerated the transformation in the journalistic profession (among other professions, too) and has totally changed a way people consume information<sup>9</sup>. “If professional journalism's model has been ‘vertical’, ‘informational’, or elite-dominated, the great promise of the internet is its capacity for expanding horizontal conversations”<sup>10</sup>, as it is put by Lindner et al. Both options – building this conversation and creating groups at the same time – became possible; none of the existing media as we knew it in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was capable of it.

An old model of one-way communication in journalism became not only two-way – for instance, with the introduction of the commentary section on media websites – but an inter-mutual one. The development of technology in the field of information and communication has empowered internet users with the unbounded options to create and disseminate the content. Consumers of information became its *prosumers* – with the emphasis on the process of production. Especially after the uprising of social media, mass media have lost their monopoly on dealing with the information flows, and were called upon learning not only how to compete with the user's content, but also how to benefit from it.

---

<sup>8</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). *Here comes everybody: the power of organizing without organizations*. Penguin Books. P. 17.

<sup>9</sup> See: Christakis, N. A., & Fowler, J. H. (2009). *Connected: the surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*. Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company; Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: the new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

<sup>10</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). Professional journalists in ‘citizen’ journalism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5). P. 554.

The whole body of academic works investigates user-generated content (UGC), which is also called “consumer-generated content”<sup>11</sup>, “reader contributions”<sup>12</sup> or “participatory journalism”<sup>13</sup>. In whatever way researchers name it, this type of content refers to “all publicly available media content that is produced by audiences rather than by the broadcaster”<sup>14</sup>. The examples of this content working outside journalism are such tools as Wikipedia and Flickr, or “weblogs that provide those same people with the ability to distribute their creations to others”<sup>15</sup>. In a lot of cases, content (take, for instance, family-related Facebook posts) is not created for general consumption at all.

The change of attitude towards UGC became noticeable since 2005 when news organizations started “to see a greater value in user media”<sup>16</sup>, as Hermida and Thurman explain it. The notion of *prosumerism* is often investigated, which is the way users – passive before, now active, “engaged, expressive and collaborative”<sup>17</sup> – contribute to the news-production process<sup>18</sup>. Naturally, the news consumption patterns have changed significantly<sup>19</sup>. This situation urges not only those in

---

<sup>11</sup> Scott, M. (2009). *Guidelines for broadcasters on promoting user-generated content and media and information literacy*. London. P. 10.

<sup>12</sup> Jönsson, A. M., & Örnebring, H. (2011). User-generated content and the news. Empowerment of citizens or interactive illusion? *Journalism Practice*, 5(2). P. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Paulussen, S., & D'heer, E. (2013). Using citizens for community journalism. Findings from a hyperlocal media project. *Journalism Practice*, 7(5). P. 591; see also Fischer, E. (2015). 'You Media': audiencing as marketing in social media. *Media, Culture and Society*, 37(1). P. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Scott, M. (2009). P. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2007). Comments please: How the British news media are struggling with user-generated content. *Presented at 8th International Symposium on Online Journalism*. P. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Fischer, E. (2015). P. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Örnebring, H. (2008). The consumer as producer – of what? User-generated tabloid content in *The Sun* (UK) and *Aftonbladet* (Sweden). *Journalism Studies*, 9(5). P. 776.

<sup>19</sup> Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012).

profession, but also the “scholars of journalism studies to re-evaluate many tacit assumptions and rituals of professional praxis”<sup>20</sup>.

As many newsrooms (BBC, CNN, The Guardian being among the most influential ones) have showed over the last decade, the benefits from working with consumer-generated content are definitely worth such extra work for journalists as moderating or verifying the information – “the burden [of constant moderation] increases as the participation of users rises”<sup>21</sup>. These benefits are: free access to materials which could not be otherwise obtained; competitive advantage for the media; “a wide range of content, from personal biographies, to fictional stories” from outside of the newsroom; finally, “as well as providing material for current news stories, audiences can also generate news stories by suggesting ideas and providing new insights”<sup>22</sup>.

The concepts of “participatory journalism” (described above) and “citizen journalism”, though, should not get mixed up<sup>23</sup>. Firstly, such characteristics as aim, topics, form and structure of the contributions are mostly different; secondly, participatory journalism is never institutionalized, while citizen journalism is<sup>24</sup> – at least on the level of such media as Global Voices. And even where the institutional independence from traditional media is evident, Goode notes, “citizen journalism sites may draw (consciously or otherwise) on norms and traditions associated with mainstream journalism”<sup>25</sup>. The further research will show that it exactly what is happening now in citizen journalism – the process of professionalization.

---

<sup>20</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). How can global journalists represent the 'Other'? *Journalism*, 3(1). P. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Hermida, A. & Thurman, N. (2007). P. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, M. (2009). P. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Paulussen, S. & D'heer, E. (2013). P. 589.

<sup>24</sup> Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media and Society*, 11(8). P. 1289.

<sup>25</sup> Goode, L. (2009). P. 1289.

At the same time, some other – completely opposite by sense – processes are currently trending in the communications field. With the ubiquitousness of technological devices and various platforms, every internet user can become a media outlet now, claims Clay Shirky in his book titled “Here comes everybody”; the voice of an average user is now empowered. The same communication tools are applied to the collective action of the users, too – this is how the citizen media (and activists' initiatives) are launched, no matter, chaotically or well-considered. “The media industries have suffered first and most from the recent collapse in communication costs<sup>26</sup>,” the researcher writes. “Now, the problems of production, reproduction, and distribution are much less serious. As a consequence, control over the media is less completely in the hands of the professionals”<sup>27</sup>.

The outcome, states Shirky, is a switch from “Why publish this?” question to “Why not?” (which implies the delay in filtering the information) and the *mass amateurization of publishing*, “of efforts previously reserved for media professionals”<sup>28</sup>. Being once an activity meant for an elite group of people educated for the profession, publishing became massive now – “in short, information is unleashed when it takes digital form”<sup>29</sup> – which diminished a need for a trained professional in the field. Or did it really?

Until recently, “the news” has meant two different things – events that are newsworthy, and the events covered by the press. In that environment what identified something as news was professional judgment. <...> There has always been grumbling about this system, on the grounds that some of the things the press was covering were not newsworthy (politicians at

---

<sup>26</sup> Talking about historical changes in the overall system of information, Shirky draws a parallel between internet causing threat to print press – and the onset of the printing press which made the ancient profession of a scribe obsolete.

<sup>27</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 59.

<sup>28</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 55.

<sup>29</sup> Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: the new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. P. 224.

ribbon cuttings) and that newsworthy stories weren't being covered or covered enough (insert your pet issue here). Despite the grumbling, however, the basic link between the newsworthiness and publication held, because there did not seem to be an alternative.<sup>30</sup>

This link is now broken; with the digitalization, the cost of producing and disseminating content, “of finding like-minded people has been lowered and, more important, deprofessionalized”<sup>31</sup>. Any piece of information – no matter if it is important news or a cat video – can now break into people's computers and, abiding by the laws of internet, immediately become newsworthy without the interference of traditional media. There will be said a lot in this work about the influence professional media have on citizen journalism, but now the opposite tendency should be admitted, too: the news media can actually end up “covering the story *because* something has broken into public consciousness via other means”<sup>32</sup>. By “other means” we consider, among other, the contributions of amateur reporters at citizen journalists websites.

### ***Citizen journalism: characteristics and development***

In the related literature discussing blogging<sup>33</sup> researchers have predicted a tremendous impact of blogs on mass communication media, showing that blogging doesn't necessarily means self-expression, but can be quite serious and influential. Being a “grassroots form of journalism”<sup>34</sup>, blogging can even “shape democracy

---

<sup>30</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 64.

<sup>31</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Shirky, C. (2009), pp. 64-65.

<sup>33</sup> Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz L. (2004). Why we blog. *Communications of the ACM*, 47(12), 41-46; see also Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2009). Rating citizen journalists versus pros: editors' views. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 30 (2), 71-83.

<sup>34</sup> O'Donnell, P. (2009). Journalism, change and listening practices. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23 (4). P. 506.

outside the mass media and conventional party politics”<sup>35</sup>. The ability of blogging (and of citizen journalism, in more recent works) to facilitate healthy democratic discussions was underlined by many researches<sup>36</sup>.

It became clear to the world that blogging in particular and collaborative production of information in general *is* definitely a big deal when it started influencing the whole concept of mass media and challenging the profession of journalist. For instance, in 2005 it were people on spot with simple camera-phones who have provided the first photos of the London Transport bombings. A photo aggregation service, Flickr, “beat many traditional news outlets by providing these photos, because there were few photojournalists in the affected parts of the transport network”, writes Shirky. “Having cameras in the hands of amateurs on the scene was better than having cameras in the hands of professionals who had to travel”<sup>37</sup>.

As it was stated above, blogs were expected to totally change the traditional world of mas media, and the leading roles in this revolution were given to new technology – and, of course, to bloggers' passions. Several years ago a group of Taiwan researchers explored the topic further, having noticed that most research studies focus on blogs rather than bloggers and decided to investigate the links between blogging motivation and behavior<sup>38</sup>. Taking as a base five existing blogging motivations that may be played out simultaneously – “to document life experiences, to provide commentary and opinions, to express deeply felt emotions,

---

<sup>35</sup> Nardi, B.A., Schiano, D.J., Gumbrecht, M., and Swartz L. (2004). P. 41.

<sup>36</sup> O'Donnell, P. (2009). P. 503; Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2012). When citizens meet both professional and citizen journalists: social trust, media credibility, and perceived journalistic roles among online community news readers. *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 13(6). P. 715; Min, S-J. (2015). Conversation through journalism: searching for organizing principles of public and citizen journalism. *Journalism*. P. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Huang, C-Y., Shen, Y-Z., Lin H-X., & Chang S-S. (2007). Bloggers' motivations and behaviors: a model. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 47 (4). P. 473.

to articulate ideas through writing, and to form and maintain community forums”<sup>39</sup>, these scholars added an “information seeking” as an extra motivation factor. They also named the information search and social interaction the two basic behavioral orientations of blogging.

The second orientation is the one which, according to Huang et al., forms the “community” focus related to virtual communities consisting of various blogs. The very understanding of who bloggers are stems from the vague image of participants in “virtual communities”<sup>40</sup>, and such communities are the essence of what Global Voices represent. Virtual communities are defined as “a group of people with common interests or goals, interacting *predominantly* in cyberspace”; predominantly – because off-line activity, along with leader's enthusiasm and enjoyability, is the reason for any person to be the part of such community<sup>41</sup>. Logically, Carpenter formulates the definition of online citizen journalist as “an individual who intends to publish information online that is meant to benefit a community.”<sup>42</sup>

While we were not used to “thinking of 'groupness'<sup>43</sup> as a specific category”, says Shirky, now “our electronic networks are enabling novel forms of collective action, enabling the creation of collaborative groups that are larger and more

---

<sup>39</sup> Nardi, B.A., Schiano, D.J., Gumbrecht, M., and Swartz L. (2004). P. 43.

<sup>40</sup> Koh, J., & Kim, Y-G. (2003). Sense of virtual community: a conceptual framework and empirical validation. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, (2). P. 75.

<sup>41</sup> Koh, J., & Kim, Y-G. (2003). P. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Carpenter, S. (2008). How online citizen journalism publications and online newspapers utilize the objectivity standard and rely on external sources. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85(3), 531-548.

<sup>43</sup> This 'groupness' appears as 'togetherness' in the terminology of Manuel Castells; it is created by “horizontal, multimodal networks, both on the internet and in the urban space”. See Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the Internet age*. Polity Press. P. 225.

distributed than at any other time in history”<sup>44</sup>. Citizen journalism is definitely not only about on-the-scene reporting; it was illustrated with the media picture from the earthquake in Sichuan Province in China in May 2008, when right after the tragedy internet users all over the world began to figure out that the reason so many schoolchildren had died during the earthquake was that a lot of school buildings had collapsed, and the reason for this was that corrupt officials had taken bribes. So that was reported as well, which is a very high level of investigative and analytical journalism.

The crucial point in the citizen journalism research is the distinction between the notions of “professional journalism” and “citizen journalism”. In the dominant academic discourse, these two are counterposed, and “a clear dividing line is drawn between professional journalists working for corporate for-profits and citizen journalists nobly working for the common good”<sup>45</sup> – while this line is in fact quite blurry. The first half of the quote from Nygren and Dobek-Ostrowska – “Journalism is for society and to serve the public sphere, but it is *also* a business to create the necessary economic conditions”<sup>46</sup> – is applicable for every possible kind of journalism guided only by ethical imperatives, but this “*also*” puts additional meaning that concerns the traditional journalism only. But even here, the situation starts to change slightly.

Blogger in the beginning (an amateur reporter, untrained and unpaid), citizen journalist now is much more than a common image of a protester with a mobile phone on the Tahrir Square or a participant of the Occupy Wall Street movement using his Twitter account to report on spot, although the early mentions of citizen journalism communicate this “romantic” point of view. Studying the organizational

---

<sup>44</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 48.

<sup>45</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 555.

<sup>46</sup> Nygren, G., & Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2015). Journalism professionalization and journalistic culture as a method of research. Introduction in *Journalism in Change: Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden*, Peter Lang. P. 9.

characteristics of US online community journalists, Carpenter and her colleagues discovered that some citizen journalism websites are on a par with the professional media outlets in terms of profit orientation of its contributors, paid labour, and the obligatory copyediting of reporters' content<sup>47</sup>.

In his book, Rutigliano explains citizen journalism through four main points: (1) it is not produced by a traditional news organization; (2) it is produced by a group; (3) it is open to audience contributions and participation; (4) it strives to cover marginalized communities through recruitment of members of these communities and coverage of these communities.<sup>48</sup> Defining the citizen journalism phenomenon via its relationship with communities is one of the most crucial points for this study as we explore the professional standard via one of these communities: Russian segment of internet, or RuNet, where users become those who contribute to RuNet Echo project of Global Voices.

Scholars in the field have also examined attentively the relationship between professional and citizen journalists. “The acts of 'blogging' and 'journalism' are different, although they do intersect,” writes MacKinnon. “While some blogging is journalism, much of it isn't and doesn't aim to be. Both serve different and valuable functions within the new evolving media ecosystem”<sup>49</sup>.

Nah and Chung have produced several papers while consistently exploring these connections. Having conducted a statewide survey of community newspaper editors, they found out how these editors perceive the roles of both professional and citizen journalists and what are the differences between two domains. Nah and Chung took the decades-long researches about the journalists' roles by Weaver and Wilhoit as point of departure: they distinguish *interpretive*, *disseminator*,

<sup>47</sup> Carpenter, S., Nah, S., & Chung, D. (2013). A study of US online community journalists and their organizational characteristics and story generation routines. *Journalism*. P. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Rutigliano, L. W. (2008). P. 25.

<sup>49</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010). Networked authoritarianism in China and beyond: implications for global internet freedom. *Stanford University*. P. 15.

*adversarial* and *populist mobilizer* role conceptions, with the first two leading in journalists' surveys for years. To explain what is at the back of each conception, we would quote the scholars themselves:

The interpretive role consists of investigating official claims, analyzing complex problems and discussing national and international policies. The disseminator role consists of getting information to the public quickly, avoiding unverified facts, reaching the widest possible audience and providing entertainment and relaxation. The adversarial role consists of being adversaries of businesses and officials and the populist mobilizer role consists of letting people express views, developing cultural interests, motivating people to get involved, pointing to possible solutions and setting the political agenda.<sup>50</sup>

The study argues that, though the reporting through citizen stories and finding a symbiotic relationship with them became an everyday practice for editors in traditional media outlets, they rated the importance of professional journalists' roles higher than citizen journalists' roles. At the same time, “citizens are perceived as potentially serving important roles as new information providers”<sup>51</sup>. Moreover, according to Huang and his fellow researchers, “communicator, producer, explorer, collector and player in terms of their consumption of information” are the perceived roles for bloggers; they haven't changed a lot since then<sup>52</sup>.

In a more recent study examining how – this time – ordinary citizens rate such roles, Nah and Chung<sup>53</sup> shared similar results: professional journalists were rated higher in terms of media credibility, although social trust was positively associated with the role conceptions of both types of journalists. *Media credibility*

---

<sup>50</sup> Nah, S. and Chung, D.S. (2009). P. 73.

<sup>51</sup> Nah, S. and Chung, D.S. (2009). P. 81.

<sup>52</sup> Huang, C-Y., Shen, Y-Z., Lin H-X., & Chang S-S. (2007). P. 480.

<sup>53</sup> Nah, S., & Chung, D.S. (2012).

(or reliability) and *social trust* in their paper are perceived the core elements of social capital.

It is important to mention here that the reporters for citizen media websites are often activists themselves, since they are actively engaged to political life. Probably because of this fact they are blamed of subjectivity and bias<sup>54</sup> and they “compete against conventional and traditional journalistic practices and norms as they often deliver news from ordinary citizens' perspective”<sup>55</sup>, with objectivity forming the acknowledged journalistic standard.

### ***Journalism cultures and professional standards***

According to Thomas Hanitzsch, journalism culture as an analytical concept can be defined as “a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, it “builds the identity features of the roles and routines that, in the abstract context, represent the symbolic framework of a collective”<sup>57</sup>. It has to be noted that journalism culture is always considered on two levels: an individual level and a collective one, and it's always actor-oriented.

A notion of journalism culture provides “a more intuitive way of looking at the diversity of journalistic practices and orientations” and “captures the field of journalism as being constituted and reaffirmed by a set of culturally negotiated

---

<sup>54</sup> Blaagaard, B. B. (2013). Situated, embodied and political. *Journalism Studies*, 14(2). P. 187.

<sup>55</sup> Nah, S., & Chung, D.S. (2009). P. 71.

<sup>56</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). Mapping journalism cultures across nations. *Journalism Studies*, 12(3). P. 273; cf. Hanitzsch, T. (2007). Deconstructing journalism culture: towards a universal theory”, *Communication Theory*, 17(4). P. 369.

<sup>57</sup> Alonso, M. O., & Ibáñez, D. B. (2013). Intermediate journalistic cultures. International comparative studies in journalism. *Medij. Istraž.*, 19(1). P. 40.

professional values and conventions that operate mostly behind the backs of individual journalists.”<sup>58</sup>

These values and conventions in general are exactly what we can call “professional standards” in journalism, proviso that they depend on particular *culture* a journalist comes from, with its inclusiveness and openness – thus, they can vary. There are multiple ways journalists can make sense of their work and profession, and the concept of journalism culture aims to comprise them all.

A comparative research of 18 countries conducted by Hanitzsch and his fellow researchers surveys (1) role perceptions, (2) ethical views and (3) epistemological orientations of 1800 journalists with different cultural backgrounds. In the paper, they criticize the existing research for analyzing these three central areas independently from each other. Having explored the variation of journalistic cultures across nations, the scholars outlined the following results:

**(1) Professional role perceptions.** *T h e interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer* institutional role conceptions (referring “to the normative and actual functions of journalism in society”<sup>59</sup>) have already been introduced and explained in the previous chapter; what Hanitzsch et al. argue in their study (unanimously with another theorists from the field) is that the perceptions of the roles diversify significantly even among journalists from western countries, and “this is especially true for the perceived importance of analysis, partisanship, entertainment and a critical attitude towards the powerful.”<sup>60</sup> The journalism's institutional role as seen by these scholars varies according to

---

<sup>58</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 273.

<sup>59</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 275.

<sup>60</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 274.

three dimensions: *interventionism* (involvement vs detachment), *power distance* (challenging the power vs being loyal to the ruling elites) and *market orientation* (addressing the audience primarily as either citizens or consumers).

“The results show that detachment, non-involvement, providing political information and monitoring the government (in other words, acting as a watchdog of the government) are considered essential journalistic functions around the globe.”<sup>61</sup> In western countries, the watchdog function applies in respect of business elites, too. Moreover, though in general “journalists tend to stray away from influencing public opinion and advocating social change”<sup>62</sup>, it is claimed that journalists from non-western contexts (developing societies and transitional democracies) tend to be more interventionist in their role perceptions.

**(2) Ethical ideologies.** Ethical standards are about the journalists responding to ethical dilemmas on their way in four different ways categorized by Keeble: “standard professional approach” (stresses the commitment to the editorial guidelines and codes of ethics), “liberal professional approach” (admits more freedom in choices), “cynical approach” with no frames at all and “ethical relativism.”<sup>63</sup>

“Journalism cultures materialize – and can therefore be observed – in terms of the professional values journalists embrace”<sup>64</sup>. According to the study, the adherence to universal ethical principles as well as impartiality, the reliability and

---

<sup>61</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 273.

<sup>62</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 280.

<sup>63</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 276; *cf.* Keeble, R. (2005). Journalism Ethics: towards an owrellian critique? In: Stuart Allan (Ed.), *Journalism: critical issues*, Open University Press, 54-66.

<sup>64</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 274.

factualness of information are valued worldwide though with a different degree of their perceived importance, with questionable methods of reporting being generally avoided. Talking in short about the major differences among the respondents, we would note that journalists from non-western contexts tend to be more flexible in their ethical views (with Chinese and Russian reporters being the most open to situational ethical decisions). Nevertheless, neither that nor the fact that “Western journalistic culture (dominated by the Anglo-American variant) is often taken as example or standard”<sup>65</sup>, doesn't imply “that western values are generally ‘better’ or ‘more professional’ than others.”<sup>66</sup>

**(3) Epistemological orientations** which are tied up with the notion of professionalism. Two dimensions of journalism's epistemologies are presented here: *objectivism* and *empiricism* (the latter juxtaposing the empirical justification of truth claim – evidence, experience, etc. – and the analytical justification – reason, values, analysis, etc.). “Various aspects of interventionism, objectivism and the importance of separating facts from opinion seem to play out differently around the globe,” says the paper. “Western journalists are generally less supportive of any active promotion of particular values, ideas and social change.”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, “journalists around the world feel that personal beliefs and convictions should not influence their reporting”<sup>68</sup>, and that is the strongest agreement between journalists from different countries.

As we are talking about Russian realities (albeit in a global context), it is necessary to emphasize the names of Russian scholars who have contributed the

---

<sup>65</sup> Alonso, M. O., & Ibáñez, D. B. (2013). P. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 276.

<sup>67</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 273.

<sup>68</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 282.

body of knowledge about journalism norms and values. Since 2002 Svetlana Pasti has conducted a great deal of national-level surveys exploring the transformations of the journalistic profession in Russia. One of her findings perfectly correlates the following patterns in our study – citizen journalism, Russian segment of Internet, journalists' motivations: she has proved that alternative online journalism had a surge of popularity during the protests of 2011 when “street people flowed the profession”<sup>69</sup>; having started with the reporters from the demonstrations, a lot of young people then joined the Russian journalists' community. Pasti's findings often resonate with the studies of another respectable scholar, Maria Anikina, who proved, for instance, that this community consists – for the most part – of young professionals. Russian journalists participating in one of her surveys named *objectivity, impartiality, honesty, efficiency, responsibility, reliability, accuracy and precision* among significant and important professional standards; Anikina, though, has a rather critical view on that: “If all the journalists would follow this list and choose these standards for themselves in practice, the situation in Russian journalism would be next to ideal.”<sup>70</sup>

It is crucial that the epistemological foundations that implicitly underlie the journalists' work – such as objectivity or impartiality norm – vary from culture to culture. In this regard, more needs to be said about the objectivism (which considered a myth by many researchers and sometimes even denied<sup>71</sup>).

Aren't live streamers broadcasting events in real life (via Periscope, for example) way more closer to being objective than professional journalists who

---

<sup>69</sup> Pasti, S. (2013). Building democracy in Russia: Online media and protests. A presentation at the *BASEES/ICCEES European Congress “European Crisis and Renewal”*, Cambridge, UK. Slide 16.

<sup>70</sup> Anikina, M. (2012). Journalists in Russia, in *Journalism in Russia, Poland and Sweden – cultures and research*. Södertörns högskola. P. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Negrea, X. (2014). Objectivity between illusions and professional standards in today's journalism. *Social Sciences and Education Research Review*, 1. P. 30; see also MacKinnon, R. (2010). P. 12.

inevitably use the lens of their media outlet to cover the event? (Because “behind the text there is an employer who is usually involved in other types of financial and economic relations and, thus, he has personal expectations from the publication he finances.”<sup>72</sup>) “Journalists close to the correspondence pole claim the existence of an objective truth ‘out there’ that can be reported ‘as it is’, and they believe that one can and should separate facts from values. Subjectivist journalists, on the other hand, adhere to the view that there is no such thing as an objective reality, news is just a representation of the world, and all representations are inevitably selective and require interpretation.”<sup>73</sup>

There is no consent among the journalists about the separation of facts and opinion. “Objectivity is most of the times understood as fidelity for the facts with the famous irony 'facts are sacred' ”<sup>74</sup>; at the same time, this practice is flexible – it is not solidified for none of the national cultures. Schudson, for instance, claims in 2001' essay that “objectivity as a norm emerged first and most fully in the United States rather than in European journalism”<sup>75</sup>. A decade later, Hanitzsch et al. notice among the US reporters “a remarkable tendency to let personal evaluation and interpretation slip into the news coverage. This indicates, once again, the growing importance of interpretative elements in American journalism <...>. As a consequence, the United States might no longer be seen as the epitome of an “objective” journalism.”<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Negrea, X. (2014). P. 29.

<sup>73</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 276.

<sup>74</sup> Negrea, X. (2014). P. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism*, 2 (2). P. 149.

<sup>76</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 287.

What is professionalism anyway, and who can be considered a professional? “Professionals see the world through a lens created by other members of their profession”<sup>77</sup>, Shirky writes, illustrating this statement with the Pulitzer Prize award which is largely a recognition for journalists from other journalists. What is more, professional behavior is usually driven by – of course, the “commercial imperative” and service to the society, but also by a group-defined code. This code exists both in wider context (“set of norms about what newspapers are, how they should be staffed and run, what constitutes good journalism, and so forth”<sup>78</sup>) and more narrow one (the editorial *guidelines* for a particular newspaper). Under standards and practices in this case we mean the rules applied to selecting, processing, and publishing online content<sup>79</sup>.

The discussion on professionalism and objectivism inevitably involves the credibility concept which was previously mentioned. Proving that the media landscape has changed completely over the last decades and the whole idea of media credibility is now reversed, findings from Johnson and Kaye's article<sup>80</sup> show that, first, internet newspapers sometimes are viewed as more credible than traditional news media sources; second, in most cases this statement is fair for blog users who prefer blogs to traditional media sources and consider them more credible. It became clear for them that the truth – put it another way, the reliable information – cannot only come from professional journalists representing one single profession. That is what has been happening in Russia for the last several years, with the growth of registered users in the Russian segment of Twitter and the

---

<sup>77</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 58.

<sup>78</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 57.

<sup>79</sup> Navasky, V., & Lerner, E. (2010). *Magazines and their web sites*. A Columbia Journalism Review survey and report. Columbia University. P. 5.

<sup>80</sup> Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2004). Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(3), 622-642.

protesters' blogs, along with the government's intervention into the editorial policy of more or less independent media outlets (*Lenta.ru*, *Grani.ru*, *Dozhd'* TV channel, *RBC*).

“There are no clear answers about how credibility is won, lost, or retained – for mainstream media or bloggers. It's impossible and undesirable for anybody to set “ethical standards” for bloggers, but it's also clear that certain principles will make a blogger or journalist more likely to achieve high credibility. Transparency is key but isn't enough. Credibility also depends on a relationship of trust that is cultivated between the media organization or blog and the people it aims to serve”<sup>81</sup>, MacKinnon concludes.

Most of the researchers (see, for example, Shirky, MacKinnon, Goode) agree that citizen journalism has developed to challenge the dominance of professional media. At the same time, the recent investigation by Lindler et al. has proved that “contrary to popular expectations, a large number of citizen journalism sites include current or former professional journalists as contributors, calling into question the new field’s independence from the mainstream media”<sup>82</sup>. Having analyzed English-language US-based citizen websites, the scientists came to the conclusion that professional journalists contributing to citizen journalism websites (mostly for-profit, but this factor is not obligatory) help to “gain legitimacy within a new organizational field” and indicate a growing professionalization among citizen journalists along with “the persistence of a public sphere dominated by elite actors”<sup>83</sup>.

It should be taken into account that – by gaining legitimacy – citizen-created journalistic websites are considered *the organizations*. Shirky reminds that the word “organization” means both “the state of being organized and the groups that

---

<sup>81</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010). P. 15.

<sup>82</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 553.

<sup>83</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 553.

do the organizing <...>; the former seems to imply the latter”<sup>84</sup>. Moreover, new social tools has lowered the costs of coordinating group action. “The cost of all kinds of group activity – sharing, cooperation, and collective action – have fallen so far so fast that activities previously hidden beneath that floor are now coming to light”<sup>85</sup>. A “serious” kind of citizen journalism became one of such activities. Lindner and his colleagues add that “within the young organizational field of citizen journalism, organizations might aim to reduce risk by adopting traditional journalistic practices such as relying on official sources, avoiding first person subjectivity, or by adopting the ‘objectivity norm’ ”<sup>86</sup> (provided that there is an admitted tendency of “organizations within the same field to adopt similar innovations and practices that have proved successful”). Such organizational standards in some citizen media as *hiring the editorial staff* (because the typical organization *is* hierarchical!) and *professionalized journalists*, as we underlined it earlier, are also in compliance with this tendency.

The researchers in the field of citizen journalism underline that citizen journalism is “inevitably 'in conversation' with professional journalism, acting as an alternative, a complement, or a replacement”<sup>87</sup>. In case of Global Voices, this 'conversation' becomes a real collaboration – with The Guardian, for instance, when the chosen pieces from a citizen journalism website appear on the website of one of the most respected media outlet in the world. In addition, citizen journalism is often portrayed “as a field with the potential to expand the public sphere to be more inclusive of unofficial sources, opinions, underrepresented groups, and local communities”<sup>88</sup>.

---

<sup>84</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 47.

<sup>86</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 557.

<sup>87</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 557.

<sup>88</sup> Lindner A.M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 557.

As we remember from Rutigliano's work, journalism is considered citizen if it is not produced by a mainstream news outlet (“the very phrase attests to the scarcity of institutions that were able to publish information”<sup>89</sup>), it is produced by a group, not a single person (as in a blogger's case), and – most importantly – the citizen journalism media constantly seeks for new contributors, often from the very community it is covering. However, it is still media – and that distinguishes it from “participatory journalism” phenomenon. This is why, even though the participation is voluntarily, a set of rules (professional standard for this particular community) is usually established. It can possibly work the other way around: the global citizen media such as Global Voices online have gained recognition and success *because of* the established standard – GV Guides for newcomers.

---

<sup>89</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 64.

## Relevant Background

### *The Global Voices and RuNet Echo*

In a series of works dedicated to journalists in Russia, Maria Anikina uses the legal definition of a *journalist* provided in the Russian federal law “On Mass Media”: “The journalist shall be understood to mean a person who edits, creates, collects or prepares messages and materials for the editor’s office of a mass medium and is connected with it with labor and other contractual relations or engaged in such activity, being authorized by it”<sup>90</sup>. It reflects different types of journalistic activity and the principles of collaboration between the journalist and other actors; however, “contractual relations” are still among key constructs in this description. What if there is no editor's office, or legal authorization, or any obligatory activities?

Trying to find a proper definition for a journalist in a *new* ecosystem, Shirky comes to the point that it impossible to include bloggers in this idea – because journalists form “a professional class of truth-tellers” with a certain latitude, and “journalistic privilege has to be applied to a minority of people, in order to preserve the law's ability to uncover and prosecute wrongdoing while allowing a safety valve for investigative reporting”<sup>91</sup>; every blogger on the planet can't claim a legal protection. At the same time, bloggers can't be just excluded either: many well-read bloggers are journalists, just as Rebecca MacKinnon whom Shirky holds up as a model for proving this statement. MacKinnon is an American scholar who was formerly in CNN and then, in 2005, went on to cofound Global Voices (or Global Voices Online) together with another scholar, Ethan Zuckerman – and “it's hard to imagine any sensible definition of journalist that would include her and

---

<sup>90</sup>Anikina, M. (2012). Journalists in Russia, in *Journalism in Russia, Poland and Sweden – cultures and research*. Södertörns högskola. P. 13; cf: Law of the Russian Federation “On Mass Media”, 1991: art. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 71.

exclude him, but it's also hard to imagine any definition that includes him without opening the door to including tens of millions of bloggers, too large a group to be acceptable.”<sup>92</sup>

The Global Voices is a platform for citizen journalists from all over the world, or a “non-profit bloggers' network”<sup>93</sup>. The Global Voices Manifesto, introduced by the founders in 2006 in Nieman Reports publication, stays the same ever since. It claims the strong belief in free speech and in universal access to the tools of speech, thanks to which now “anyone can tell their stories to the world”<sup>94</sup>.

A rapidly growing blogosphere became the point of departure for citizen journalism in general, so it is logical that Global Voices Online started as a small Harvard-based blog<sup>95</sup>. Supported by Berkman Center at Harvard University, Reuters and the MacArthur Foundation, the project has grown fast and changed significantly for the last 10 years, having changed the initial academic approach to the texts published to the more mainstream journalism style – in order to stay competitive with the traditional media. The community is volunteer (“completely virtual non-profit newsroom”, as they put it); some of the regional editors are paid.

Currently around 1400 writers, analysts and translators are working for several sections Global Voices was divided into: the *Newsroom* creating the alternative global news stream; the *Lingua project* translating content to 35 languages; *Global Voices Advocacy* struggling with censorship and supporting community members who got direct threats because of their activity; and *Rising*

---

<sup>92</sup> Shirky, C. (2009). P. 72.

<sup>93</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010). P. 12.

<sup>94</sup> MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman, E. (2006). P. 47.

<sup>95</sup> MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman, E. (2006); see also Lucas, M. (2007). Creating multiple global publics: How Global Voices engages journalists and bloggers around the world. *Centre for Social Media*, CUNY.

*Voices* created for communities underrepresented online<sup>96</sup> – those communities that have been underrepresented in traditional outlets for years, before the online blogs and projects covering a wider range of stories came into force. Finally, the fifth part of this huge body of Global Voices is an “opinionated and often controversial section”, as Zuckerman himself calls it – the RuNet Echo project launched in late 2009.

RuNet Echo is funded by the Open Society Institute, and this fact has definitely determined the range of topics covered by the project team: human rights, the freedom of speech and the freedom of expression. The slogan “Interpreting the Russian Internet” explains its mission in the clearest way, and there are more details about it on the website: the goal of RuNet Echo is “to become a leading source of objective, comprehensive and valuable information on the Russian Internet” and “to contribute to ongoing research of RuNet by providing a more extensive look into Russian online communities and the whole range of issues associated with them”. More specifically, these are internet policy, information security and cyber-warfare, changing media landscape, and the role of internet in Russian politics and civic society. “What blogging, citizen journalism and social news sites yield,” Goode wrote in 2009, the year when RuNet Echo started, “are new possibilities for citizen participation at various points along those chains of sense-making that shape news – not only new possibilities for citizens to ‘break’ news”<sup>97</sup>. It is worth noticing: sometimes the Global Voices contributors manage to use their “being hyperlocal” advantage and publish breaking news, but in most cases the work of a citizen journalist consists of re-writing, re-considering, enriching the text with new details.

Except for RuNet Echo, Global Voices online has no more stand-alone projects covering any other country in the world. So why did the worldwide

---

<sup>96</sup> Lucas, M. (2007). P. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Goode, L. (2009). P. 1291.

audience even need it back in 2009? In Russia, as Hanitzsch et al. noted in 2011, “journalists still operate in a political climate that is often hostile to press freedom. This might be the reason why journalists perceive themselves more in a cooperative and supportive role in their relationship to the government and official policy”<sup>98</sup>; it had to be changed, and this might be the reason why a project like RuNet Echo has appeared.

At the beginning, blogs, forums, online media and social networks in Russian language excited the curiosity because of “the *increasingly* complex nature of RuNet” and the growing number of internet users in the country (Pasti reminds here that “Russians are in the first place in the world on the amount of time on social networks”<sup>99</sup>). But very soon independent local views from Russia started getting more and more hits due to the wave of protests in 2011-2012: “RuNet has enjoyed ballooning attention [...] following spontaneous and online-organized mass street demonstrations against voter fraud in the December 2011 federal parliamentary elections”<sup>100</sup>. Since then a lot has changed (no shifts in power, though), and today's poor situation with democratic freedoms in Russia – internet freedom in particular – creates so much buzz in the world's information field that RuNet Echo appears to be probably the most interesting case to study in terms of the citizen journalism phenomenon.

Here how one of our interviewees, an America-based contributor to RuNet Echo and freelance correspondent Will Wright, describes in short the net freedom issue in the Russian-speaking Internet:

---

<sup>98</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 282.

<sup>99</sup> Pasti, S. (2013). Slide 8.

<sup>100</sup> Rothrock, K. (2013). Forget Hollywood: the Russian Internet's anti-opposition as a social movement. *ASEEES*, University of Pittsburgh. P. 1.

Russian Internet is a very lively place. There is a lot of stuff going on, the authorities are trying to crack down, and I am getting tired of reading the articles about what is getting banned today. It just never stops.<sup>101</sup>

In one of the chapters of her “Consent of the Networked” book, MacKinnon discusses what happens “when it comes to controlling and manipulating the internet within a nation's borders”<sup>102</sup>. She assigns to Russian Internet the same characteristics China has (characteristics of *digital bonapartism* – “a political leadership by a populist demagogue who seeks to legitimize himself with democratic rhetoric and trappings”<sup>103</sup>) and states that China has been the most successful country so far to develop its own domestic Internet and telecommunication companies, in order to make the blocking of foreign web services easier. “Regimes seeking to control and stifle dissent have been learning quickly from one another as well as from China,” she adds, “about what can be done”<sup>104</sup>; interestingly, some dictatorships “have actually survived the internet challenge and got even more repressive”<sup>105</sup>. The scholar also puts examples of Egypt, Iran with its “halal internet” and Belorussia with “lawful intersect” system during the protests in 2010. To be fair, this is a concern of not only authoritarian governments, but also of Western countries with developed democracies, argues Evgeny Morozov: they are frightened of the unlimited internet freedom none the worse. “That the government needs to be brought into cyberspace or else

---

<sup>101</sup> Wright, W. (2015). Personal interview.

<sup>102</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2012). *Consent of the networked. The worldwide struggle for internet freedom*. Basic Books. P. 53.

<sup>103</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2012). P. 66.

<sup>104</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2012). P. 68.

<sup>105</sup> Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: the dark side of internet freedom*. Public Affairs, New York. P. 130.

cyberspace may lead to lawlessness in the real world is a view rapidly gaining traction among Western policymakers.”<sup>106</sup>

The new digital-age version of digital bonapartism model became even stronger for the Russian politics (including internet and mass media policies) since the “Consent of the Networked” was written. Strong nationalist discourse of pro-Kremlin media, populist rhetoric about stability, censorship<sup>107</sup>, political environment with hardly any alternatives<sup>108</sup> could not do any good to the freedoms of speech and expression<sup>109</sup>. MacKinnon's statement that “the Russian government does not filter the internet as China does: antigovernment websites [...] are not blocked from view”<sup>110</sup> can barely be considered correct now.

In an earlier article on the networked authoritarianism in China and beyond<sup>111</sup>, MacKinnon bases herself upon the book “Access controlled: the shaping of power, rights and rule in cyberspace” written in 2010 by Deibert, Rohozinski, Palfey and Zittrain. The researches divide the techniques used by governments for internet control and censorship into three steps, or “generations”. The first one focuses on “Chinese-style” internet filtering and surveillance; the second-generation controls create a normative environment that, when needed, can *legally* block access to information resources – and that is exactly Russian case. In RuNet, “control

---

<sup>106</sup> Morozov, E. (2011). 219.

<sup>107</sup> Pasti, S., Chernysh, M., & Svitich, L. (2012). The Russian journalists and their profession, in Weaver, D. H., & Willnat, L. (eds.) *The Global Journalist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Routledge. P. 280.

<sup>108</sup> See, for example, Pomerantsev, P., & Weiss, M. (2014). *The menace of unreality: How the Kremlin weaponizes information, culture and money*. Institute of Modern Russia; also Foxall, A. (2015). The Kremlin's sleight of hand: Russia's soft power offensive in the UK. *Russia Studies Centre*. Policy paper No. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Pasti, S. (2013). Slide 3.

<sup>110</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2012). P. 67.

<sup>111</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010).

strategies tend to be more subtle and sophisticated and designed to shape and affect when and how information is received by users, rather than denying access outright.”<sup>112</sup> The question is – how soon will Russian government move to the third-generation controls that “take a highly sophisticated, multidimensional approach to enhancing state control over national cyberspace and building capabilities for competing in informational space with potential adversaries and competitors”<sup>113</sup>. Russia, as well as some other countries with hybrid model of power, uses these techniques in the way “that contributes to the erosion of democracy and slippages back toward authoritarianism. This situation is enabled by weak rule of law, lack of independent judiciary, weak guarantees for freedom of speech and other human rights protections [...] and weak political opposition that is rendered even weaker by clever manipulation of the media, legal system, and commercial regulatory system”<sup>114</sup>.

### ***Covering Russia: tradition and expectations***

There are general tendencies of how countries are grouped together in comparative media research: those are “western journalism cultures” (the United States, Germany, Australia, etc.), “peripheral western” (Israel, Brazil, Mexico, etc.) and a third group that “largely consists of developing countries and transitional democracies, of which some tend to be non-democratic”<sup>115</sup>. Turkey, Chile, Egypt, China and, naturally, Russia are listed in this last group.

---

<sup>112</sup> Deibert, R., Rohozinski, R., Palfey, J., & Zittrain, J. (2010). *Access controlled: the shaping of power, rights and rule in cyberspace*. MIT Press. P. 16.

<sup>113</sup> Deibert, R., Rohozinski, R., Palfey, J., & Zittrain, J. (2010). P. 7.

<sup>114</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010). P. 11.

<sup>115</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011), pp. 287-288.

In the context of unequal power-relations and constant confrontation between the West and the “non-West”, the truthful representation any country – especially Russia – is probably impossible. More precisely, if to transfer the academic approach suggestion Vartanova made (the introduction of “locally grounded and globally minded approaches to communication and media in order to deconstruct ethnocentrism and develop culturally sensitive frameworks”<sup>116</sup>) to the practical field of journalism, the problem seems to be solved. “The strategies of media representations must be continuously questioned, because cultural practices are also constantly changing.”<sup>117</sup>

According to Fürsich, the representation of the “other” refers primarily to “a whole range of theoretical writings and studies about how ‘our’ identity is shaped by distancing ourselves from some perceived or assumed Other with regard to ethnicity, race, class or national difference.”<sup>118</sup> It happens inevitably: journalists do not constantly cast doubt upon the country of their coverage (or the topic they cover) but “fall back on established and recurring ‘frames’ often limited to a binary (us/them distinctions), following the US journalistic ideal of ‘getting both sides’.”<sup>119</sup> The key issue, as the scholar puts it, is the following: *Is any “fair” knowledge about Others impossible?*

The answer is yes and no. First of all, fair representation is only possible if a close contact is established; second, the theorists “argue that the concept of constructing the Other should be transferred from a passive strategy of critique to an active strategy for change,”<sup>120</sup> which in journalistic terms means that “a passive

---

<sup>116</sup> Vartanova, E. (2014). Constructing ourselves through constructing others. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 9(2). P. 100.

<sup>117</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 72.

<sup>118</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 57.

<sup>119</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 59.

<sup>120</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 65.

strategy of text critique” should change to “an active strategy for change of media production.”<sup>121</sup>

The media coverage of Russia resembles the academic point of view on the country (mentioned in the previous chapter) and on the state of its social and political development: the common discourse is critical and often contains fear, prejudices, and some kind of misunderstanding. The study by Felicitas Macgilchrist titled “Journalism and the political. Discursive tensions in news coverage of Russia” (2011) is one of the most crucial and most representative in this field; the scholar thereat concludes that in most cases the country is seen as brutal and aggressive, sharing completely “other” values: “Although there is often no deliberate manipulation of the news agenda, some story-lines – such as threat from Russia – seem intuitively more plausible, more publishable, more headlineable than others”<sup>122</sup>.

RuNet Echo definitely does benefit from this in terms of views and shares, as the interest towards Russia is constantly warmed up by its contributors with memes, catchy headlines (see, for example, “Selfie Empowerment: Russian Communists Want Your Lenin Selfies”<sup>123</sup> or “Pro-Russian Web Network Digs Up

---

<sup>121</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 66.

<sup>122</sup> Macgilchrist, F. (2011). *Journalism and the political. Discursive tensions in news coverage of Russia*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. P. 72.

<sup>123</sup> Selfie Empowerment: Russian Communists Want Your Lenin Selfies. (2015, August 2). Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2015/08/02/selfie-empowerment-russian-communists-want-your-lenin-selfies/>

the Dirt on Kremlin Critics”<sup>124</sup>) and provocative featured photos<sup>125</sup>. The reporters' texts themselves, however, are kept balanced.

Since the tension between the West and non-Western countries has raised in the last several years, Russia is often portrayed through the political lens – more specifically, through the image of either its political leader or Kremlin. A report by the Russia Study Centre acknowledges and deepens this fact: “Much of the commentary on Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and its destabilization of eastern Ukraine since, has focused on its hard power – its geopolitical designs and strategic objectives in the so-called ‘near abroad’, its use of new and less conventional military techniques, and its military capabilities.”<sup>126</sup>

In order to improve the image of Kremlin abroad, Russian policymakers have introduced “soft power” – a term came to prominence during the 2012 presidential-election campaign, when Vladimir Putin, writing in the *Moskovskiye Novosti* newspaper, described it as 'a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy [sic] goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levers of influence.' ”<sup>127</sup>. To project a positive image of Russia internationally – as it turned out later, to “weaponize information and culture”<sup>128</sup> and “to promote values that challenge Western traditions”<sup>129</sup> – in 2005, the 24-hour news channel *Russia Today*

---

<sup>124</sup> Pro-Russian Web Network Digs Up the Dirt on Kremlin Critics. (2015, August 10). Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2015/08/10/pro-russian-web-network-digs-up-the-dirt-on-kremlin-critics/>

<sup>125</sup> Russia's Democratic Coalition Is On The Ropes. (2015, August 8). Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2015/08/08/russias-democratic-coalition-is-on-the-ropes/>; see also Vladimir Putin's UN General Assembly Speech: Beyond Hashtags. (2015, September 29). Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2015/09/29/russia-vladimir-putins-un-general-assembly-speech-beyond-hashtags/>

<sup>126</sup> Foxall, A. (2015). P. 3.

<sup>127</sup> Foxall, A. (2015). P. 3.

<sup>128</sup> Pomerantsev, P., & Weiss, M. (2014). P. 4.

<sup>129</sup> Foxall, A. (2015). P. 3.

(RT) was established. In due course, its mission found expression in the following: “instead of trying to promote Russia, RT now focuses on making the West, and especially the US, look bad”<sup>130</sup>, and foreign reporters criticize it heavily. Kremlin now invests into less obviously pro-Russian media – like *Russia Beyond the Headlines*.

If now we bring into view the English-language west media reporting on this country's issues, we notice that “the mainstream coverage of Russia is generally fairly negative. Despite inevitable dissonances and alternative deconstructive readings, the discursively prioritized accounts generally position Russia as the aggressor in any two-state encounter, with Vladimir Putin busy rolling back democracy.”<sup>131</sup>

Neumann gives us an insight to the history of perception of Russia in the past and concludes that this pattern is not new at all<sup>132</sup>. Being always only partly true, nowadays it depreciates the complexity (“Russia' will mean different things not only in different periods, but also in different contexts during the same period”<sup>133</sup>) and diversity of the real image of the country and its people. Vartanova also associates herself with this statement. “The binary opposition of ‘Western–non-Western’, which came into the media representation of Russia with the media discourse of the developed (Western) world,” she writes, “minimized the importance of the political complexity, nonlinear social change, and multiculturalism of Russian society.”<sup>134</sup> Now, “only self-reflective, open and

---

<sup>130</sup> Pomerantsev, P., & Weiss, M. (2014). P. 15.

<sup>131</sup> Macgilchrist, F. (2011). P. 171.

<sup>132</sup> Neumann, B. I. (1996). *Russia as Europe's Other*. Robert Schuman Centre.

<sup>133</sup> Neumann, B. I. (1996), pp. 2-3.

<sup>134</sup> Vartanova, E. (2014). P. 102.

critical approaches towards traditional-ritualistic reporting and production strategies can help to disentangle problematic media representations.”<sup>135</sup>

It would be unfair to say that *all* media presenting Russia to the English-speaking audience follow this path: sometimes publications dare to challenge the existing stereotypes about the “other”. Such professional media as Calvert Journal (“a guide to creative Russia”) or the New East Network project of the Guardian try to deliver the balanced picture, covering – among others – under-reported cultural, historical and social issues. RuNet Echo of Global Voices became the first of serious citizen media to do so. It comes as a no surprise that introducing Global Voices Online in one of her articles, MacKinnon presented it as an “attempt to help curate and aggregate credible voices coming from bloggers in the developing world and *non-West*”<sup>136</sup>.

“Media systems are not homogeneous because they have specific characteristics, specific political systems, communication variables, and social, technological and economic factors that define different journalistic cultures”<sup>137</sup> while the emergence of the *global journalist* has blurred somehow these “specific” factors. We must admit that in some cases such factors as the profiles, socio-demographic variables and personal characteristics of journalists play a greater role now in defining journalistic cultures or finding out the professional standards in different fields of journalism. For citizen journalism it works for sure. Fürsich insists that global journalists (including citizen ones) are not those who cover foreign news from a one-nation perspective, but rather “an increasing number of

---

<sup>135</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 58.

<sup>136</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010). P. 12.

<sup>137</sup> Alonso, M. O., & Ibáñez, D. B. (2013). P. 43; *cf.* Hallin D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Sistemas mediáticos comparados: Tres modelos de relación entre los medios de comunicación y la política*. Barcelona: Hacer editorial. P. 271.

media workers who supply content to transnational media corporations and produce their content for a global market.”<sup>138</sup>

With Global Voices being global (in terms of news production and distribution geographical reach; “globally-minded”) and local (in terms of the topics and volunteer contributors from every possible part of the world; “locally-grounded”) at the same time, its contributors differ from each other in terms of background and socio-demographic characteristics, but there is something that unifies them all: interest, knowledge and expertise in the understanding of processes happening in Russian society. Thus, almost for non of the RuNet Echo authors representation of Russia is the representation of the “other”. The project manages to gather experts who know a lot about the country, no matter if they are Russia-born, Russia-based, or not – and we expect these experts to deliver news explaining it carefully, breaking the “othering” frames, *contextualizing* the coverage.

Based on existing theoretical background and relevant context, we therefore ask two research questions and hypothesize the following:

*RQ1. In what way citizen journalists' standards differ from the standards of professional journalists?*

**H1.** There are following dissimilarities between these two assumed types of journalism in terms of culture: (1) citizen journalism tends to be subjective rather than objective; (2) a populist mobilizer role is mostly peculiar to citizen journalists rather than to traditional journalists; (3) during news production, citizen journalists are more likely to work on local, narrow and under-reported issues.

*RQ2. How professional journalism influences citizen journalism (and does it also happen the other way round)?*

---

<sup>138</sup> Fürsich, E. (2002). P. 59.

**H2.** The influence is mutual. Citizen media tend to enlist the cooperation with professional journalists and share professional standards and editorial practices with the mainstream quality media, while mainstream outlets often pick up the certain topics from citizen websites and implement readers' communities and commentary sections.

## Method

### *Research design*

As research method (or, in other words, empirical data collection and analysis) is only one phase in the research process<sup>139</sup>, we first concentrated on working out the general outline of the methodology. The research questions of the study identified during the exploration phase helped to define its basic research design – or, in Bhattacharjee's words, a comprehensive plan for data collection in an empirical research project<sup>140</sup>.

Given that any scientific research operates on two levels: a theoretical level (concerned with “developing abstract concepts about a natural or social phenomenon and relationships between those concepts”) and an empirical one (concerned with “testing the theoretical concepts and relationships to see how well they reflect our observations of reality, with the goal of ultimately building better theories”)<sup>141</sup>, we have distinguished these levels in our work writing first a theoretical and then a practical (empirical) chapter.

Having gotten familiar with both the theory and data, we had to preliminarily conceptualize the main constructs of our research: following Hanitzch, we understand “professional standards” in journalism as a set of culturally negotiated professional values and conventions that operate mostly behind the backs of individual journalists; this notion, however, partly includes the individual professional ethics, too. The main concept is inseparably associated with the definition of journalism culture which is “a particular set of ideas and practices by which journalists legitimate their role in society and render their work meaningful” (see *Journalism cultures and professional standards* sub-chapter for more details).

<sup>139</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). *Social science research: principles, methods, and practices*. University of South Florida. P. i (The Preface).

<sup>140</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 35.

<sup>141</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 3.

Babbie notes, however, that the process of conceptualization is a little different in a study like ours, “less tightly structured research such as open-end interviews”, for the reason that “an important part of the research may involve the discovery of different dimensions, aspects or nuances of concepts.”<sup>142</sup>

In this paper, we followed the inductive scientific approach and test the hypotheses stated above, with the goal to possibly to refine, extend, or improve it; we are not into the real theory-building a lot, so this study has a potential to be extended into a more fundamental scientific research in the future.

In accordance with the purpose of research, different academic projects in theory can be grouped into three types, such as: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research. The purpose of this work is to reveal the characteristics of the professional standards set and used in citizen journalism exploring the case of Global Voices (RuNet Echo project in particular). To compass it, several focuses are defined – the detailed evaluation of citizen journalism, an insight into the “professional standards” phenomena, etc. (for more, see the Introduction). It means that we have adhered to to the *descriptive type* of research, the one which is “directed at making careful observations and detailed documentation of a phenomenon of interest”<sup>143</sup> – in our case, a phenomenon of professional standards in non-traditional journalism. Bhatacherjee exemplifies the descriptive research with “chronicling ethnographic reports of gang activities among adolescent youth in urban populations” or “the role of technologies such as Twitter and instant messaging in the spread of democracy movements in Middle Eastern countries”, or “the persistence or evolution of <...> practices in select communities”<sup>144</sup> (that

---

<sup>142</sup> Babbie, E. (2013). *The practice of social research*. 13<sup>th</sup> international edition. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning. P. 114.

<sup>143</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 6.

<sup>144</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 6.

pertains to our research, too). Without further ado, descriptive type examines the *what*, *where*, and *when* of a construct of interest.

This particular research is conceived as an *interpretive* (not a positivist) one, which means it relies heavily on qualitative data both in collection and analysis processes. It should be taken into attention that though the term “interpretive research” is often used a synonym to “qualitative research”, these concepts are different with the first one being first of all a research paradigm “that is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology), and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (epistemology). Because interpretive researchers view social reality as being embedded within and impossible to abstract from their social settings, they 'interpret' the reality though a 'sense-making' process rather than a hypothesis testing process.”<sup>145</sup> Interpretive designs aim to get subjective interpretations of social phenomena from the variety of perspectives of the subjects involved – that is why qualitative data used for it is often a combination of interviews, personal observations, and documents, internal or external.

In this paper, we employ case research as an example of interpretive research design, but this is not the only one scientific method chosen: “for complex, uncertain, and multi-faceted social phenomena, *multi-method approaches* may be more suitable, which may help leverage the unique strengths of each research method and generate insights that may not be obtained using a single method.”<sup>146</sup> In addition, Bowen states that in a lot of cases “documentary evidence is combined with data from interviews and observation to minimize bias and establish credibility”<sup>147</sup>, so for these purposes we have combined case study with the in-depth interviewing and document analysis – provided that the first-mentioned

---

<sup>145</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 106.

<sup>146</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 22.

method to some extent comprises the latter two (which are formally just the techniques of case research), and that participant observation was also used as a method but not documented anyhow. We also feel that alternative methods might be inappropriate for this kind of study.

In the next three sub-chapters, we describe how the research was conducted concentrating on the data collection along with research methods<sup>148</sup> used, and pointing out their strengths and limitations.

### *Case study*

According to Bhattacharjee, case study or case research method can be characterized as “an in-depth investigation of a problem in one or more real-life settings, or case sites, over an extended period of time”<sup>149</sup>. Being an instrument of a social science research (implies an investigation “of people or collections of people, such as groups, firms, societies, or economies, and their individual or collective behaviors”<sup>150</sup>), case study is all about the interpretation which may lead to ambiguous, non-deterministic and – to some extent – uncertain results. We assume, though, that the case captures 'the typicality' of the sites, settings, people, activities under the study.<sup>151</sup>

As we have decided already, a construct of a *professional journalistic standard* should be understood as a multi-dimensional combination of a set of

---

<sup>147</sup> Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9 (2). P. 38.

<sup>148</sup> Scientific research method “refers to a standardized set of techniques for building scientific knowledge, such as how to make valid observations, how to interpret results, and how to generalize those results.” See Bhatacherjee, A. (2012), p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 40.

<sup>150</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 1.

<sup>151</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. P. 115.

related concepts such as objectivity, balance, ethics (also a set of several underlying concepts) and so on. In order to analyze it properly, we need the frames that only one particular case can provide.

It is one of the remarkable features of the interpretive case research that the concepts of interest “need *not* be known in advance, but may emerge from the data as the research progresses” (such as the constituents that form the notion of the standard in our case), besides “the inferences about phenomenon of the interest tend to be rich, detailed and contextualized.”<sup>152</sup>

Among several unique strengths of this scientific method Bhattacharjee places emphasis on (1) “its ability to discover a wide variety of social, cultural, and political factors potentially related to the phenomenon of interest that may not be known in advance”<sup>153</sup>; (2) its ability derive “more authentic interpretation of the phenomenon of interest than most other research methods by virtue of its ability to capture a rich array of contextual data”; (3) the possibility to study the desired constraint “from the perspectives of multiple participants and using multiple levels of analysis (e.g., individual and organizational).”<sup>154</sup>

At the same time, the quality of the outcome a researcher get from this method depends first of all on the integrative powers of the researcher. The subjectivity<sup>155</sup> is common for the results of some – especially novice – researchers,

---

<sup>152</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 93.

<sup>153</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 40.

<sup>154</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 93.

<sup>155</sup> In more details: “Researchers are often embedded within the social context that they are studying, and are considered part of the data collection instrument in that they must use their observational skills, their trust with the participants, and their ability to extract the correct information. Further, their personal insights, knowledge, and experiences of the social context is critical to accurately interpreting the phenomenon of interest. At the same time, researchers must be fully aware of their personal biases and preconceptions, and not let such biases interfere with their ability to present a fair and accurate portrayal of the phenomenon.” Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 106.

and this subjectivity becomes a reason for criticizing the method itself. Finally, the high contextualization of the inferences is not only strength but a weakness, too: we cannot claim that findings from one particular case site may be applicable for and generalized to other case sites, other contexts or other organizations. Generalizability, however, “can be improved by replicating and comparing the analysis in other case sites in a multiple case design.”<sup>156</sup>

The first steps in case research were the same as in any other: we started with defining research questions for the study and, with determining some intuitive expectations to how these questioned could be answered, formulated the preliminary hypotheses to guide case design. A case site was identified beforehand (it is stated in the title of the work: the Global Voices online project) in the process of a “theoretical”, not a random, sampling. The rest of conducting a within-case data collection and data analysis is described below.

Qualitative case research tends to be very nuanced, as it was already stated earlier, so it employs mostly face-to-face interviews, not to mention observations, prerecorded documents, and secondary data. To avoid raising doubts about the reliability of the findings, on the next several pages of the paper we carefully provide a lot of details concerning how exactly qualitative data was collected (including the organizational positions and the age of each interviewee and the documents examined).

### ***In-depth interviewing***

The in-depth interviews let the researcher to capture a comprehensive look at an issue through the thoughts and experiences of the respondents; such conversations have referential purpose at the most basic level, being a source of witness information. Just as in any other method, there are limitations in the in-depth interviews, too; the most significant one (“generalizations about the results

---

<sup>156</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 40.

are usually not able to be made because small samples are chosen and random sampling methods are not used”<sup>157</sup>) is reduplicating the main drawback of a case study research – low generalizability for other people, organizations and cases.

In-depth interviews however, are perfect for presenting an individual point of view of each respondent which is in most cases reasonable and developed. They also provide valuable and detailed information, “particularly when supplementing other methods of data collection. It should be noted that the general rule on sample size for interviews is that when the same stories, themes, issues, and topics are emerging from the interviewees, then a sufficient sample size has been reached”<sup>158</sup>.

An insight into individual evaluations of authors working for RuNet Echo is necessary for my study: “The attitudes of journalists are broadly embedded within meaning spheres that shape typical and traditional values of a common professional conduct.”<sup>159</sup>

Interestingly, conceptualizing journalism culture, Hanitzsch has made all the future empirical cross-national studies in this field *actor-centered* – based on the participants' experience, mostly on journalists' perceptions of their professional values, roles and journalistic norms<sup>160</sup>. Put it another way, “the concept of journalism culture strongly addresses the actor approach, as well as the relationship between media and elites. This actor-centred approach means that personal and professional values (either consciously reflected or not) and actual performance of actors shape daily practices, and such practices in turn create discourses that both

---

<sup>157</sup> Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: a guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*. Pathfinder International. P. 4.

<sup>158</sup> Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). P. 4.

<sup>159</sup> Alonso, M. O., & Ibáñez, D. B. (2013). Intermediate journalistic cultures. *International comparative studies in journalism. Medij. Istraž.*, 19(1). P. 39.

<sup>160</sup> See, for example, Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011).

mould and reflect conventions within the media, as well as relations between the media and other institutions and groups in society (legislatures, courts, communities, etc.)”<sup>161</sup>, notes Harro-Loit.

In order to use this research tool properly, we have referred to the literature written for (and by) communication scholars about the interviewing as a method of analysis. Thus, Babbie in his “The practice of social research” helps to develop the design of a research project and gives the justification to the community (RuNet Echo in our case) being explained through *individuals* as units of analysis<sup>162</sup>. Chapter 6 in the “Qualitative Communication Research Methods” by Lindlof and Taylor, for instance, teaches a lot about the techniques, types and design of an interview; the scholars also explain the specifics of this tool: “The interviewer often yields back some of the control [over the respondent] in order to encourage a full articulation of the respondent's beliefs, interests and experiences. Ideally, what emerges is richly expressive inter-view that neither person could have produced alone.”<sup>163</sup>

The data gathering process for this research involved several stages. In the first stage, the respondents were selected. The sampling strategy was not a difficult task – first of all, because there were very few active contributors in RuNet Echo at the moment, so everyone whose texts were published lately was chosen. Second, usually sampling is connected to the personal approach difficulties, but the fact that the author of this work is also a part of RuNet Echo team and currently works closely with the project editor, facilitated the access to the journalists and the process of interviews, as well as it gave rise to the interviewees' motivation to participate in the research. Being a “trusted confidant”, thus, didn't involve any

---

<sup>161</sup> Harro-Loit, H. (2015). Revisiting national journalism cultures in post-communist countries: the influence of academic scholarship. *Media and Communication*, 3(4). P. 7.

<sup>162</sup> Babbie, E. (2013). P. 97.

<sup>163</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). P. 171.

obstacles during the conversation – even though the interview questions did not implicate revealing any hidden realities. As a “conversation with purpose”, a qualitative interview requires such connection between those who talk in order to reach its full potential.

Therefore, it was decided to talk to project editor Kevin Rothrock (32 years old), co-editor Tanya Lokot (33), and occasional contributors Will Wright (24) and Sergey Kozlovsky (29); different organizational levels and positions are necessary because it is the only way to “obtain divergent perspectives on the phenomenon of interest”<sup>164</sup> in the context of just one case site. What is also important, the four interviewees come from different backgrounds: Kevin Rothrock was previously at the University of Connecticut and worked for a think tank as a research assistant, actively blogging at the same time about Russian politics; he is now also a producer for an English-language version of an influential Russian media outlet called *Meduza*. Tetyana Lokot is a Ukrainian scholar with the radio journalism experience currently based in the United States. She has just obtained a PhD degree at the University of Maryland where she studied protests in social media and in digital media. Will Wright, in his turn, comes from the US as well as Kevin Rothrock, he also worked in a think tank, did blogging about Russia and developed the topics for *Quartz*, *The Moscow Times*, etc. Sergey Kozlovsky, a Moscow-based ex-*Lenta.ru* reporter, is originally from Belarus; at the moment he is a correspondent at BBC Russia.

All the interviewees know Russian, and they either come from Russia or Ukraine (like Kozlovsky and Lokot) or have gained their deep knowledge and understanding of Russia during their academic, blogging (Rothrock) or/and journalistic (Wright) activities. Occasionally, people who call themselves *activists* also write for RuNet Echo<sup>165</sup>; it would be ideal to interview those contributors with a view to professional standards, too, but in terms of this study it seems hardly

---

<sup>164</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 96.

possible considering time constraints and huge amount of data that should be collected and analyzed for the method of in-depth interviewing.

The second stage involved contacting all of the sampled reporters and arranging Skype interviews, as it was impossible to conduct them in person. It goes without saying that during the preliminary conversations the nature and purpose of the study were described to the respondents, as well as “the potential benefits to the case site, how the collected data will be used, the people involved in data collection (other researchers, research assistants, etc.), desired interviewees, and the amount of time and effort”<sup>166</sup> required from them.

In the third stage we have elaborated a list of questions for the *semi-structured* interview; it has to be said that among several distinctive types of qualitative interviews marked out by Lindlof and Taylor, the *respondent* type serves faultlessly our aims: (1) to clarify the meanings of common concepts and opinions, (2) to determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in a certain way, (3) to classify complex attitude patterns and (4) to understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act<sup>167</sup>. Also, there are traits of narrative interviewing in our data collection process, because in theory this method often depends on a long-term relationship with participants and – which is even more important – includes organizational narrative along with the personal one, and the stories told by organizational members successfully make up a web of collective reality<sup>168</sup>.

---

<sup>165</sup> See one of the examples here: On the Ground in Russia's Only Free Election This September. (2015, September 1). Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/2015/09/01/on-the-ground-in-russias-only-free-election-this-september/>

<sup>166</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 96.

<sup>167</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). P. 179.

<sup>168</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). P. 182.

Following the pattern set in the Boyce and Neale guide, we have separated the questions into three sections (see Appendix 1), with the first one being an introductory part with personal questions: such items as name, age, professional status in the project and the place of residence at the time of the interview were clarified, as well as the information about previous journalistic experience. The next section focused on the citizen journalism in general and contained, for instance, questions about the participants' roles, the values introduced in “The Global Voices Manifesto”<sup>169</sup> and the respondents' actual and lived experiences with blogging and journalism. Here we have also brought up a crucial topic of the competition with the professional journalists, as the citizen media usually meet such difficulties as limited resources and low motivation of authors who are not paid.

In the third part of the question protocol, the plan of the discussion moved to the key construct of my research: working for RuNet Echo project in particular and sharing some professional code of practice of the project. The interviewees were asked to name some obstacles they have met writing news about Russian Internet for the worldwide audience, and to provide an example of the topic that would gain lots of hits and shares on RuNet Echo portal for sure. The most delicate question concerned the simplification of information, sometimes too complex and too local, for those readers who have probably never heard about Russian laws, but want to get into the issue anyway.

At the next stage four interviews, averaged 37 minutes each in length, were conducted via Skype in September 2015 and recorded with the consent from the respondents. Considering the established working relations between the author of this study and two editors interviewed, we hope that they were not lead in any specific direction by the researcher and the neutral tone of the conversation (necessary for the interviews taken with scientific purposes) was maintained. The

---

<sup>169</sup> MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman, E. (2006). P. 47.

interviews were then transcribed into a text document (the morphologic naturalness of respondents' speech preserved – on the recommendation of Lindlof and Taylor) and analyzed, or triangulated by comparing responses between interviewees.

### ***Document analysis***

While the first level of interpretive analysis involves viewing or/and experiencing the phenomenon (professional journalistic norms and practices, just to remind) from the subjective perspectives of the social participants, “the second level is to understand the meaning of the participants’ experiences in order to provide a 'thick description' or a rich narrative story of the phenomenon of interest that can communicate why participants acted the way they did.”<sup>170</sup> And documentary materials can for sure be a vital source of field data. There is no getting around the fact that “documents are deeply embedded in people's work and leisure worlds – as prompts to action, as informational resources, as aids in speech acts”<sup>171</sup> and so on.

Document analysis as a qualitative research method has been theorized by many communication scholars. Lindlof and Taylor, for instance, elaborate on some methodological advantages that document analysis comes laden with. First of all, (1) documents are often *rich sources of information* “contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent”<sup>172</sup>, with that richness deriving not only from the amount of data, but also from its quality; second, it is (2) *availability* on low-cost or free basis. If we are exploring the digital environment (which we are), with the highest possibility the document we need would be easily accessible online<sup>173</sup>, sometimes across a variety of internet-enabled platforms.

---

<sup>170</sup> Bhattacharjee, A. (2012). P. 106.

<sup>171</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). P. 231.

<sup>172</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). P. 235; *cf.* Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. P. 277.

Bowen in his article formulates the potential flaws of the method (insufficient detail, biased selectivity of documents, and – one which doesn't fit the online data at all – low retrievability) and claims that the most important challenge for a researcher is to “establish the meaning of the document and its contribution to the issues being explored.”<sup>174</sup> He also describes the specific uses of documents in qualitative research: they provide background and context (“such information and insight <...> can indicate the conditions that impinge upon the phenomena currently under investigation; the researcher can use data drawn from documents, for example, to contextualize data collected during interviews”<sup>175</sup>); possible additional questions; supplementary data for the research; means of tracking change and development; finally, the verification of findings from other data sources.

Karppinen and Moe, in their turn, contribute to this field of knowledge by making a distinction between an interest on documents as a source and as a topic of study:

In the first case, documents are understood as more or less objective sources that can reveal the interests and intentions of their authors or in other ways uncover facts about a policy process. In the second case, documents are treated as meaningful social products or cultural artefacts that have independent consequences and are worth analyzing in themselves.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Karppinen, K., & Moe, H. (2012). What we talk about when we talk about document analysis, in Just, N., & Puppis, M. (eds.), *Trends in Communication Policy Research: New Theories, Methods and Subjects*, Bristol: Intellect. P. 158.

<sup>174</sup> Bowen, G. A. (2009). P. 33.

<sup>175</sup> Bowen, G. A. (2009). P. 29.

<sup>176</sup> Karppinen, K., & Moe, H. (2012), pp. 159-160.

For Lindlof and Taylor, the term “documents” covers “the wide range of symbolic texts generated and consumed by cultural memberships”<sup>177</sup>; textual materials are thus distinguished into two types, *records* and *personal documents*. “Records are designed to capture a wide array of events and activities, including the following: the certification of an act <...>; the enumeration of a membership <...>; *the codification of procedures and policies* (e.g., a manual, a syllabus, a recipe); the routine formatting for an individual or group performance <...>; the reporting of performance results <...>; the historical accounting of an organization or person (e.g., a yearbook, a bio sketch); the rendering of an event (e.g., the minutes of a meeting, an interview transcript).”<sup>178</sup> Technically, in this research we work with the latter type because we analyze the transcribed in-depth interviews; but here we concentrate on one particular kind of records that is emphasized above – *the codification of procedures and policies*.

In general, the control of journalistic conduct exists on two levels – in wider context (common ethical standards, rules and practices of the media applied to selecting, processing, and publishing online content, the constitutions of good journalism, etc.) and the same things just narrowed for the editorial guidelines of a particular media outlet. Researchers agree that codes of journalistic conduct, being “formal expressions of professional norms and values, supposedly guide journalistic activities”<sup>179</sup> and thus can be rightfully analyzed as paper trail.

The documents are always selected for the qualitative research from the perspective of the author's purpose, according to their relevance and value. In this research, framed by one particular case site, we first of all collected the guidelines

---

<sup>177</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). P. 233.

<sup>178</sup> Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011), pp. 233-234.

<sup>179</sup> Van der Wurff, R., & Schönback, K. (2010). Between profession and audience. *Journalism Studies*, 12(4). P. 408.

of Global Voices. On the Community Blog webpage, *Guide* section<sup>180</sup>, the citizen media team got together the whole set of documents regarding all spheres of Global Voices's nowadays work: Rising Voices project, Lingua (the huge volunteer translation service – there are 40 GV language sites at the moment!), Community Guide (intended to explain how the contributors communicate; interestingly, there is special ethics guidelines developed for interacting with each other), offline activities (Global Voices MeetUp Guide), technical instructions (how to work in WordPress properly), Style-guide, etc. The structure of Global Voices is really hub and spoke, it is hard not to get lost in it, and it is seen at once that hundreds and hundreds of people work on it at the same time – the same collaborative effort as Wikipedia, but with the hierarchical structure that is close to traditional media outlet.

What we are interested in is the information about the common editorial standards and goals, not even about how to “define and create a story” but how rather to behave during this process. What we need for analysis is a webpage titled *How to write for Global Voices*<sup>181</sup> which is an introduction into the citizen reporters' working community that involves GV Editorial Code, GV Mission and an insight into news writing (the most important part) together with the definitive rules on story structure (will not be analyzed, as well as the visual material – gif-images – in the document).

As the purpose of our research is to describe the professional standards set and used in citizen journalism, and this purpose implies such focus as “to compare the journalistic standards for both citizen and professional journalism”, we have chosen three quality media outlets for the comparison of editorial codes. Again, a theoretical sampling was used; The New York Times, The Guardian and the BBC

---

<sup>180</sup> Retrieved from <https://community.globalvoices.org/guide/>

<sup>181</sup> Retrieved from <https://community.globalvoices.org/guide/editorial-guides/how-to-write-for-gv/>

chosen for the research are dominant media not only in the countries of their origin, but worldwide, too. Their coverage is global just as the coverage of Global Voices though the basic organization principles are, of course, different.

At The New York Times, *The Ethical Journalism handbook* dated January 2004, which was the model for the company-wide policy, governs journalists' conduct", states the webpage titled *Standards and Ethics*<sup>182</sup>. This "handbook of values and practices for the news and editorial departments" became the major unit of analysis in regard to The New York Times, with *Guidelines on Integrity* seen as an additional source of data ("In a climate of increased scrutiny throughout the news business, these further guidelines are offered to resolve questions that sometimes arise about specific practice," explains the NYT website).

The Guardian is presented in our research with *The Guardian's Editorial Code* updated April 2007; it elaborates on (1) professional practice and (2) personal behavior and conflicts of interest in the field of practical journalism. "By observing the code," the Guardian website reads, "journalists working for the Guardian will be protecting not only the paper but also the independence, standing and reputation of themselves and their colleagues."<sup>183</sup>

As for the BBC with its archetypal code of conduct necessary for a public broadcasting service, there are so many documents available that it is hard to decide what exactly has to be analyzed and compared to the Global Voices guidelines. *Inside the BBC*<sup>184</sup> section introduces the "BBC strategy, policies and guidelines", and reports outlining how the media company works, with the 215-

---

<sup>182</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/who-we-are/culture/standards-and-ethics/>

<sup>183</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/guardian/article/0,5814,642387,00.html>

<sup>184</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/howwework>

page *Editorial Guidelines*<sup>185</sup> document developed by its governing body, the BBC Trust, which also reviews the impartiality of the company's output.

The analytical procedure regarding the documents employed in the research consisted of three steps as following: “skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation. This iterative process combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis,” Bowen explains. “Content analysis is the process of organizing information into categories related to the central questions of the research.”<sup>186</sup> Even though Karppinen and Moe report on the fact that document analysis, being under-communicated, faces the problem of implicit distinctions between “document analysis, textual analysis and other interpretative techniques used in different strands of media studies”<sup>187</sup>, content analysis as such (being “the study of recorded human communication”<sup>188</sup>) is frequently used as a systematic approach for analyzing the contents of texts.

By the same token, thematic analysis is “a form of pattern recognition within the data, with emerging themes becoming the categories for analysis”<sup>189</sup> during the process of careful, more focused re-reading and review of the documents chosen. This is the way to uncover themes pertinent to a phenomenon of research interest. Bowen justifies here one of our ideas: he says that the concepts “used in interview transcripts, for example, may be applied to the content of documents.”<sup>190</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines>

<sup>186</sup> Bowen, G. A. (2009). P. 32.

<sup>187</sup> Karppinen, K., & Moe, H. (2012). P. 157.

<sup>188</sup> Babbie, E. (2013). P. 295.

<sup>189</sup> Bowen, G. A. (2009). P. 32; cf. Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 80–92.

<sup>190</sup> Bowen, G. A. (2009). P. 32.

The last thing to be said here is that we refer to each of the described documents as to the unit of analysis in this study, on equal terms with individuals – RuNet Echo contributors – in the method of in-depth interviewing, because scholars presume that “two related research questions within the same research study may have two entirely different units of analysis”<sup>191</sup>.

---

<sup>191</sup> Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). P. 10.

## Results and Discussion

### *The interviews analysis. Being the part of Global Voices team*

There are three most common strategies for organizing findings from the interview data transcripts named in the literature on methods of qualitative analysis<sup>192</sup>: (1) by type of participant, (2) by question and (3) by theme. We adhere to the third strategy; because of space constraints, we should skip the detailed respondents' introduction – the background is partly provided already in the *Method* chapter, and all the personal information can be found in the Appendix 2.

#### *Journalists' motivations*

Before joining RuNet Echo in March 2012, its current editor Kevin Rothrock (32 years old at the moment of the interview, US-based) was a “pretty active blogger, who ventured into the blogosphere just because there were a lot of political debates” he was interested in. Now he also works as a producer for the English version of influential Russian media outlet *Meduza*, though he has never worked as a professional journalist before, unlike other respondents. “When the RuNet Echo job came on, it seemed like a good fit, because I was already working a lot with stuff happening in the blogosphere,” Rothrock says. “I guess, the motivation for RuNet Echo was an opportunity to really go in-depth into the Russian society”.

Another Russian-speaking respondent from the US, project contributor Will Wright (24), was also doing some blogs in college about Russian politics, which later led him to the position of a columnist in a website covering Uzbekistan, and then – to freelance in Global Voices, *Russia! Magazine* and *The Moscow Times*. Wright names the opportunity to maintain Russian language skills as one of the motivations to write for RuNet Echo, “because the research for the articles is usually in Russian”. He considers journalism his hobby, says he “enjoys” working

---

<sup>192</sup> See, for example, Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). P. 7.

for RuNet Echo and hopes to continue writing if his full-time job lets him. This “enjoyment” is a significant concept: Koh and Kim found<sup>193</sup> that the sense of virtual community is affected by *enjoyability*, as well as enthusiasm of the community's leaders and offline activities available to members (regular meet-ups and annual meetings of the Global Voices community serve this last purpose). In addition, enjoyability may let members perceive belongingness to their virtual community.

The motivation of the co-editor Tetyana Lokot (33) from Ukraine is closely connected to *when* she started writing for the project: November 2013. “This was around the time when Euromaidan protests were happening in Ukraine. I was in the U.S. that time, and I was sort of feeling very useless as a Ukrainian,” she explains. “I was feeling guilty for not being where all the protests and actions were, and also seeing how people who were not Ukrainians didn't always understand how or why things were happening. I thought Global Voices would be a good platform to explain some points, you know – here is why people are using this particular slogan, here is why if you just follow the hashtag #euromaidan you won't see the whole reality”. The decision she made as an active citizen illustrates well the tendency Pasti revealed in her studies: young people join the journalistic community, whether professional or not, after the protests and demonstrations in their countries to be useful for the society (in Russia, for instance, the protests of 2011 did change the community this way)<sup>194</sup>.

We have also talked to one author from Russia (originally from Belarus), journalist Sergey Kozlovsky (29) who joined RuNet Echo in August 2014. “I left Belarus ten years ago because it was impossible to work there. Writing what you want was prohibited. [...] After I've resigned from *Lenta.ru*, I couldn't find such a place – at least fast – where I could write about anything I wanted,” Kozlovsky

---

<sup>193</sup> Koh, J., & Kim, Y-G. (2003). P. 79.

<sup>194</sup> Pasti, S. (2013).

says, “I want to see the project developing, so that more readers could find (as I see it) the objective information, or at least a position they can never find on TV or in pro-Kremlin newspapers.”

*The insight of Internet freedom in Russia*

Being asked to give the evaluation to what is happening in RuNet now, three of four respondents used the same wording: *crackdown*. At the same time, the journalists do not seem to be too pessimistic about the state of affairs, at least for the “ordinary users”. Wright states that “in general, people are still pretty much doing what they wanna do on the Internet” – for instance, they still can reach Navalny opposition community even though it had to switch the platform when it was banned. Rothrock agrees here (“for the most part it's scare tactics, and the ordinary RuNet user's experience is not very different than it was five years ago”), but states it is journalists who are suffering, because it became much harder to work: “Interventions in *Gazeta.ru*, *Lenta.ru* and stuff like that, when you have owners basically forcing out chief editors, are far greater repercussions than any of the laws.” In general, the situation is still unfolding, because every minute the community is waiting for the next step of the government.

All the interviewees, though, have agreed that the Russian Internet policy inevitably gets more and more attention from the world, which means such projects as RuNet Echo will remain requested. “Yes, there is a heightened awareness, but these laws are reaching their goals anyway,” Kozlovsky adds. “If in 2011 anyone would tell you how much happens in four years, you would not believe”.

This is a weird time, the last several years. [...] And I do think it's fascinating, this whole legal push by Russian lawmakers, because it's gonna be a big chapter in a history book. Russia is now a place where the laws that pass are worth news stories, because they are so interesting, just bizarrely repressive. They are creating stories for journalists.<sup>195</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Rothrock, K. (2015). Personal interview

The idea is developed by Lokot in an interesting way: she says in this context citizen (not only) journalists should keep the critical approach as “sometimes the laws regulating RuNet are problematic not because they are repressive, but because they are very badly written”. What attracts the world's attention is not only the Internet policy, of course; it is about everything Russia-related, and the peak of this interest happened particularly after the conflict with Ukraine. Moreover, mentioning Putin every now and then in the texts, pictures and titles thus help to appeal to readers, Rothrock says ironically.

### *Covering RuNet: challenges*

We asked an open-ended question about the obstacles journalists face during their work for RuNet Echo. As an editor, Rothrock notes that maintaining quality writers is one of the difficulties for the citizen media in general, “just because if you can't pay somebody, you're dependent on their free time and their interest”. The most predictable answers were English (or any other) language issues in case of non-native speakers (Kozlovsky, Lokot) – and “getting all the details for a story sorted out in Russian” for a non-Russian (Wright).

The political stories are usually very complicated indeed, so one of the questions concerned the simplification of texts for an English-speaking audience. Lokot argues here that some things should necessarily be complex, putting in the example with the protest in Ukraine when Western media easily labeled the protesters – right-wing, fascists, or even jews – whereas “the truth is not that simple”. Wright supports this opinion with a note that, according to his experience, the audience of RuNet Echo is very up-to-speed on Russia, so no simplification is needed.

Rothrock, who has been working for RuNet Echo for four years already, is talking more about the accurate *explanation*: “Expressions available in English have been created in the context of American or British politics, let's say, western

civil society. That language does not always work in the Russian context”. He sets an example: for media it was very common to label the 2011–2012 protests in Russia “the middle-class uprising.” In the West this term means a very specific thing (people who own their own business), while in Russia middle class is far more dependent from and far more employed by the government. “So the opinions [political beliefs and persuasions] that you'll find in Russian middle class versus American middle class are very different,” he explains. “There is a kind of liberal interpretation.”

*The relations between citizen journalism and traditional journalism*

There was no disagreement among the respondents about the question whether citizen journalism influences the traditional one: the answer is yes, and this impact is huge. In terms of competition with the professional journalism, interviewees recall several unbeatably strong traits of citizen journalism: (1) underrepresented voices getting the right to speak; (2) narrow focus of the topic is the best strategy (Rothrock, Kozlovsky); (3) in-depth understanding of the issue parachuted journalist can hardly reach; also, (4) sometimes even “the breaking news stories appear, especially if they are very local” (Lokot). We see that traditional media nowadays do respect these traits: some of the Global Voices local stories are chosen and re-published – in terms of pre-determined collaboration and partnership<sup>196</sup> relations – by such media as The Guardian’s *New East Network*, Public Radio International, or Reuters, Deutsche Welle, BBC World News and others in the past. Moreover, some of the experienced and active citizen reporters can be invited to write for professional media.

Finally, the approach mentioned by Rothrock – “anyone can be a storyteller” – is a core (and unique) thing for citizen media, when all the author needs for investigation are analytical skills, good internet connection and – ideally – a good editor. In this way, some findings of the *Pew Internet & American Life Project*

---

<sup>196</sup> Global Voices partners. Retrieved from <https://globalvoices.org/partners/>

survey about bloggers conducted almost ten years ago are applicable to the description of our RuNet Echo authors – and all citizen journalists: “both heavy users of the internet and highly engaged with tech-based social interaction.”<sup>197</sup> The approach mentioned above causes a weak point as well: it can happen that people who are not professional writers, but are willing to contribute, write a text almost like a diary entry (Rothrock), and the very action of editing hurts them (Lokot).

Regardless of the type, though, “both professional and citizen journalists should be critical and adversarial to power holders, such as political and business elites”<sup>198</sup>.

Interestingly, it turned up that the beliefs of MacKinnon and Zuckerman still virtually lead the people writing for their project without facing any skepticism from them. “I’m not an activist by any means, but general values of the project – they are absolutely in harmony with how I view the world,” says Rothrock. Probably, the Global Voices wouldn’t have existed by now if its contributors did not believe in the basic values of the project, free speech above all. On that score, Kozlovsky even calls himself a “fan of freedom of speech.”

Being asked about values of the project, Wright answers: “that’s one of the reasons why I was attracted to, you know, spend my time writing for here rather than for somewhere else [...]. I feel like all the contributors at RuNet Echo do a pretty good job promoting certain values, but also writing in an honest way.” If everyone is biased, Lokot adds, “we are biased because we believe in freedom of speech.”

### *Possible biases and perceived roles*

---

<sup>197</sup> Lenhart, A., & Fox, S. (2006). Bloggers: a portrait of the Internet' New Storytellers. *Pew Internet and American Life Report*. P. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2012). P. 720.

Did the journalists of RuNet Echo manage to get rid of “strong sense of the author’s personality, passions, and point of view”<sup>199</sup> typical for bloggers? Not everyone in the project needs it, argues Lokot, as long as journalists are specific and honest about their biases: “This is something the Global Voices guidelines are very clear about – a lot of people who contribute to Global Voices are not unbiased. They are actors, they are advocates, they participate in the civic activities in their countries, some of them go to prison for what they do”. She thinks Global Voices has been really good about being transparent – about what their biases are, and that's how the project earns the trust of readers. The authors of RuNet Echo are between professional and amateur journalists, thus, social trust plays a crucial role when citizen journalists interact with ordinary citizens.

In regards to how Min puts it, “transparency allows the audience to accept ideas as credible the way the claim of objectivity used to. In transparency, audience can see journalists list original sources, willingly disclose their personal and biased views, if any, and are ready to acknowledge errors and correct them”<sup>200</sup>. This transparency norm is more visible in citizen journalism than traditional media.

As to the perceived roles of citizen journalists, three of four respondents put the “interpretive” role conception (analyzing complex issues, explaining governmental decisions and discussing national policy while it is still being developed) up front. It's important to remember that factors influencing role conceptions are, among others, individual backgrounds and attitudes about professionalism<sup>201</sup>. Kozlovsky was the only one saying that being primarily a disseminator is his professional habit already (“I try not to take sides”). That's representative: journalists refer cautiously to the adversarial role conception (“We

---

<sup>199</sup> Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz L. (2004). P. 42.

<sup>200</sup> Min, S-J. (2015). Conversation through journalism: searching for organizing principles of public and citizen journalism. *Journalism*. P. 8.

<sup>201</sup> Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2009). P. 73.

get plenty of criticism for – some people think we're taking sides”, Lokot says). The populist mobilizing role, in its turn, is also inevitable in some cases as it is connected to the topics of activism and civil society. The importance of this role for the project was mentioned by two of RuNet Echo journalists, both being editors.

### ***The documents analysis. Comparing the guidelines***

Considering that we used the mixture of content and thematic analysis as an approach for exploring the contents of the documents, in this chapter we are going to organize our findings in a respective way – by themes, just as the results from the in-depth interviews. In accordance to the case site chosen for the research, the “How to write for GV” guide is suggested to be seen as a starting point for the analysis within each theme below.

### ***The mission of the media***

The whole Global Voices project has started from articulation of its *Mission*, the GV Manifesto<sup>202</sup>, in Nieman Reports back in 2006, which reported the aim of the media to “seek to build bridges across the gulfs that divide people, so as to understand each other more fully <...> and act more powerfully.” The editorial code calls all the contributors to support the mission of the global media as much as possible. “We work to find the most compelling and important stories coming from marginalized and misrepresented communities,” it is stated there, “We speak out against online censorship why and support new ways for people to gain access to the Internet.” The struggle against online censorship is reflected in the Advox (Advocacy) project and partly in RuNet Echo, too, where it takes the form of the critique of one particular government; the problem of gaining access to the Internet is covered mostly in the Rising Voices project.

---

<sup>202</sup> MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman, E. (2006). P. 46.

The mission also reveals itself in the *values* established for and by the Global Voices community. It is all about ethics and balance, with the *belief in free speech* above all. These values concern (1) avoiding stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status; (2) being aware of the labels attached to individuals, people and groups, questioning all the terms and practices “used in other media and by governments” – when using other media as a source; (2) building community and encouraging meaningful conversation through the reporting. The last one implicitly indicates the main direction in choosing the story to cover: it should be meaningful, at least to some groups of people. Tetyana Lokot, RuNet Echo co-editor, explained it in an interview saying that the possible topic for the publication “obviously has to be something interesting, have an interesting angle, but it also has to be about the community that is big enough, but also pretty niche”.

The New York times name fairness, integrity and truth among its basic values. There is no mission as it is there – rather just a statement about the core purpose of the New York Times which is “to enhance society by creating, collecting and distributing high-quality news and information.”

The Guardian values “its reputation for independence and integrity”, with no special mission mentioned in the editorial code. The BBC appeals, first of all, for following the common ethical values when confronted with difficult editorial challenges: “In a perfect world the BBC Editorial Guidelines would consist of one sentence: use your own best judgement.” In our world, even quality journalists need codes of ethics and professional behavior.

Following the notions explored in Global Voices document, BBC also points out the importance of avoiding unjustifiable offense, being fair, respecting people's privacy – in other words, balancing “our presumption of freedom of expression with our responsibilities.”

There is one significant observation we can highlight here, it tells about the difference between the Global Voices code of conduct and three others: the criteria found is the purpose of creating the editorial document itself. Just as the New York Times' guidelines is there for the protection of the integrity and the reputation of the newspaper, the analogue document of the Guardian protects also the integrity, along with the editorial content this media carries – quite similar. The basic purpose of the Global Voices guide, however, is first of all to *learn amateurs how to write*. It is reflected in the title already. It is probably self-evident but if we are making a comparison, it should be stated.

*The professional standards spoken out*

For the Global Voices, the standards that are decided to be “formalized” (we put the marks because we admit the document has no legal force) in the guidelines seem a bit randomly listed – our suggestion is that they may be ranked due to their importance for the citizen reporters' community. They are mentioned in the document in the following way: *accuracy* (“Be as accurate as possible”); *transparency* about the way journalistic work is done (“Identify sources whenever feasible” and “Be transparent and disclose unavoidable conflicts”); issued from the last one, *honesty* (“No plagiarism”); some kind of *non-involvement* (“Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived”); *commitment / accountability* for one's work (“Minimize harm in your reporting”).

This last standard is unfolded into several more specific norms concerning such sensitive issues as working with children and photos of children, or identifying victims of sex crimes / criminals before they are formally accused, or suggesting anonymity if needed, or dealing with suicide-related stories. It all totally comes from the professional journalistic ethics, which comes from the simple human ethical standards as well so it just cannot be any other way round. Reminders in the code, such as “Be cautious in your language that describes a

person's relationship to their belief system, religious, political or otherwise", are extremely important for – and representative for – the citizen media guidelines, due to the fact that the Global Voices contributors cover stories from all the corners of the world, with different traditions and beliefs, leave alone the languages.

As a community, we are very broadly committed to freedom of expression, peace, and human rights, but our inclusiveness of authors from so many different backgrounds means we must be open-minded and refrain from making statements for or against different issues on behalf of the whole community.<sup>203</sup>

It is seen in this part of the guidelines how much Global Voices try *not to insult* a single human being with their work – probably one of the reasons is that citizen journalists just can not count on any legal support in case of conflict.

The standards found in the New York Times handbook for journalists reflect the ones in the Global Voices document: *impartiality*, *fairness* and *openness* (the second term is equivalent to transparency) in treating readers, news sources, advertisers. "Because our voice is loud and far-reaching, The Times recognizes an ethical responsibility to correct all its factual errors, large and small", just as Global Voices does. Also, the journalists should try to avoid conflicts or an appearance of a conflict, which is, again, *detachment* or *non-involvement*. Naturally, these standards appear in the other guidelines as well, and plagiarism is strongly condemned and never tolerated in the professional community.

On the website, The New York Times team claims that its staff "maintain the highest possible standards" "at the time of growing and even justified public suspicion about the impartiality, accuracy and integrity of *some journalists* and *some journalism*." Could it possibly be that The New York Times refers citizen journalism like this? We do not know exactly, but we can assume that these words are about low-quality journalism and tabloids.

<sup>203</sup> How to write for Global Voices. (2013). Retrieved from

<https://community.globalvoices.org/guide/editorial-guides/how-to-write-for-gv/>

The BBC is quite clear about its editorial values and standards in the guidelines. Here are “challenging requirements, essential to everything [they] do”: trust as a foundation of the company (constructed through *impartiality and honesty*); editorial integrity and independence; truth (through *accuracy*). The BBC Trust illustrates “truth” as “an output, as appropriate to its subject and nature, well sourced, based on sound evidence, thoroughly tested and presented in clear, precise language.”

*The notion of objectivity*

The BBC document does not provide any information on journalistic objectivity as such, neither it draws a clear line between the fact and opinion. The wording of the issue is the following: “Accuracy is not simply a matter of getting facts right; when necessary, we will weigh relevant facts and information to get at the truth.” It reflexes the general “use your own best judgement” approach of BBC's code. It does not by any means indicate that BBC is non-professional, but it does indicate that this media corporation is flexible, always ready to reconsider some used-to-be journalistic norms, and, of course, accept new practices.

The Guardian mentions this separation in the part of the document titled “Personal behavior and conflicts of interests”: “If you are employed as a columnist – with your views openly on display – you may have more latitude than a staff reporter, who would be expected to bring qualities of objectivity to their work ('to report the news, not to make the news')." Also, if journalist writes about something with which he or she has a significant connection, “it is always necessary to declare an interest”. The same works for the New York Times in terms of fact-opinion distinction.

There is no such word as objectivity in the Global Voices document: it is presented, though, in a slightly different wording, namely *the distinction between advocacy and news reporting* (“...Analysis and commentary should be labeled and

not misrepresent fact or context”; talking about guide for writing activist in particular, “Be honest; never misrepresent the relative size, importance or popularity of initiatives you are associated with”).

The Global Voices document contains a detailed news writing guide within the general structure because the community “want GV stories to be well-sourced, accurate and clear.” It is directly stated that this criteria falls under professional news writing standards: “inverted pyramid” structure, concise sentences and balanced arguments, no jargon, no opinions (keeping “an impartial tone” and “quoting multiple voices in a story”), proper sourcing, plus – verification, to which the Global Voices community gives a lot of attention<sup>204</sup>.

“In this waning moment of objectivity as a general principle of journalism,” Min explains, “transparency allows the audience to accept ideas as credible the way the claim of objectivity used to.”<sup>205</sup>

*The relations with the audience: interactivity*

The way media perceive and relate themselves to the audience can be different, though nowadays – with all the transformations in journalism – it is always a *conversation* to some extent (in certain circumstances, such as in citizen journalism, for instance, it is also a real collaboration). Min states that such concepts as interactivity and transparency are at the core of journalism as a conversation. Interactivity mostly refers “to technological tools, the degree to which journalists interact with readers, or readers’ abilities to comment and engage with news contents”<sup>206</sup>, and this perfectly reflect the very nature of citizen journalism. We would state that interactivity is also about the degree of readiness

<sup>204</sup> Verifying social media content. Retrieved from

<https://community.globalvoices.org/guide/editorial-guides/toolbox-for-authors/verifying-social-media-content/>

<sup>205</sup> Min, S-J. (2015). P. 8.

<sup>206</sup> Min, S-J. (2015). P. 8.

to work with the audience, to receive something from it, as the audience is also transforming constantly. “The highly networked publics today do not simply sit and take in every word from news reports, regardless of whether the information comes from professional or citizen journalists,” explains Min. “They are gaining the ability to identify valuable information and call out bad information, which in the end will likely prove more reliable than simply trusting mainstream media outlets and their professionals based on belief in the brand and the promise of objectivity.”<sup>207</sup>

The traditional newsrooms, however, often “only pander to its audience without providing meaningful participation opportunities”, and Min believes that in terms of interactivity mainstream media should implement the citizen journalism experiences and practices, so a greater variety of voices and different competing descriptions of events could be heard. Actually, some media do it already – for instance, collaborating with the citizen media and/or citizen reporters individually.

There is no need to address any editorial documents in case of Global Voices to compose an opinion on how the citizen media can perceive citizens: no doubt, as potential contributors and appreciative readers. The situation is different for traditional media outlets except for, maybe, BBC which is public and serves the public interest. A pride of place there goes to the audiences; “Audiences are at the heart of everything we do. We are committed to giving them high-quality, original and at times challenging output. <...> Their trust depends on it.” (The Guardian also mentions “the bond of trust”).

BBC claims they are accountable for the audiences so they deal “fairly and openly with them. Their continuing trust in the BBC is a crucial part of our relationship with them.”

---

<sup>207</sup> Min, S-J. (2015). P. 8.

Except for ideas and themes unifying the documents, there are also some features that unequivocally distinguish the norms (it is important that we are talking now *only* about the norms that a registered on paper) of professional and citizen journalism. In other words, everything that could not be found in the Global Voices guidelines but attracted our attention in the other three. The New York Times, for instance, stands a little bit aside from them all because the concept of *reputation* seems to lead every line in the both Ethical Journalism Handbook and the Guidelines on Integrity. If we can compare it, the NYT is guided by the integrity and reputation first, while the key notion for Global Voices is the freedom of speech. The adherence to *truth* as a value, though, unifies them more than separates.

We are coming to the end of the analysis, and there is only one normative thing left to be questioned: Who exactly stands behind those documents? Who wrote them? While Global Voices was “drafted and endorsed by the Global Voices Community” in 2013 (which means it was prepared by the community of bloggers and citizen reporters, just as every text on the website), it has its roots in the Code of Ethics produced by the Society of Professional journalists. Moreover, the line about the rules concerning the reporting on children and youth leads to the UNICEF recommendations on the topic. In its turn, the fine-grained 215-page BBC document was developed by the media's governing body, the BBC Trust, and it is totally driven by the very nature of the public company that gets funding from its audience. The Guardian guidelines are half-original, half-determined by the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice which is “a sound statement of ethical behavior for journalism.”

### ***Discussion***

Even though there is no one single unified document for all the journalistic cultures, communities, media outlets (and it cannot be – “these are guidelines

rather than one-size-fits-all rules”, states the Guardian's team), there are loads of intersections among the different existing ones.

It is interesting how, being different, BBC and Global voices resemble each other in terms of editorial guidelines – predominantly with the tone of the documents. The key role formulated by the BBC Chairman – “supporting an informed democracy” – is exactly what MacKinnon has written in the GV Manifesto, said with different words. These two media stand close to each other regarding the perception of the audience and of exploring the new ways of work. Along with traditional practices, BBC tends to “broadcast challenging and innovative work that tests assumptions and stretches horizons.”

As the analysis of the four guidelines shows, the Global Voices code of conduct sees the main goal of the project in claiming, maintaining, struggling for the freedom of speech as a basic and necessary freedom – and constantly proving it with every single text. (We understand that not every citizen media is like that, but in this research the focus is on Global Voices.) The three professional outlets, however, par to the course do not devote so much space in their documents on the notion of the speech freedom but rather treat its existence as a postulate. Interestingly, the Global Voices enthusiastic position concerning this freedom was supported by the three respondents during the interviews – they spoke voluntarily and separately on this notion; only one of them used the neutral wordings like “they [values] are absolutely in harmony with how I view the world” and “I sympathize with the basic contours of the project.”

It is those things Rebecca and Ethan usually talk about: the sense like “I'm here to represent my culture and my country, but I'm also here because I share these values, to enable other people to learn about my country”. It's also not just about culture, or country, it's also about promoting freedom of speech and speaking up about issues which your country probably don't want you to talk about, and maybe tries to restrict discussion of those issues inside the country.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>208</sup> Lokot, T. (2015). Personal interview

“Reliability and factualness of information as well as the strict adherence to impartiality and neutrality belong to the highly esteemed professional standards of journalism around the globe,”<sup>209</sup> as Hanitzsch et al. put it, and this statement proves to be true about the global citizens, too, as both of the research methods show.

A special emphasis needs to be put on the notion of *objectivity*, so actively discussed in both academic and practical journalistic circles. The research premises show that it is mostly a discussion about separating facts and opinion: “objectivity is most of the times understood as fidelity for the facts with the famous irony 'facts are sacred' ”<sup>210</sup> and the subjectivity allows opinions and judgements – and it cannot be perceived as news.

In a news writing guide within the main document, “How to write for GV”, we have found an interesting statement related to the way *sourcing* should be done: “At GV, we rely on trusted citizen media, local or independent sources to back up our facts. We avoid linking, quoting and sourcing to corporate, state and mainstream media because our mission is to provide an alternative to them”. A contradiction appears here because it seems that we have discovered the rule existing only on paper (literally, on the webpage). The participatory observation by the author of this thesis along with the interviewees with RuNet Echo contributors prove that in practice there is no rule about “linking, quoting and sourcing” *only* citizen media.

This leads us to the discussion about gradual interpenetration of citizen and professional journalism, so when mass publishing realized itself in the process of amateurization, the non-traditional media and overgrown blogs (we are not talking

---

<sup>209</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011), pp. 286-287.

<sup>210</sup> Negrea, X. (2014). P. 30.

about the personal blogs, of course) entered the phase of professionalization which gives its first results now. These results are discussed later in the *Conclusion*.

We have managed to detach the notion of citizen journalism from everything that can be mixed up with it – with the help of the case studied. Thus, user-generated content is a group phenomenon and an amateur one. Citizen journalism in common is also based on a group effort and it is also mostly amateur. But here and now we must emphasize a special, more “serious”, half-professional (sometimes completely professional) type of citizen journalism media such as Global Voices which has some special structural elements. These elements are: (1) the editorial hierarchy, (2) the professional or professionalized contributors and (3) the existence of guidelines containing professional norms, rules and practices.

“The horizontality of networks supports cooperation and solidarity while undermining the need for formal leadership”<sup>211</sup>, so the “leadership” – editorship – at Global Voices is quite informal even though the two co-editors of RuNet Echo (names) are paid for their work. At the same time, with Global Voices definitely being a citizen-oriented media in the first place, it stands in the same line with traditional quality media (following the dimension of *market orientation* highlighted by Hanitzsch et al.) while not-quality and tabloid press is always consumer-oriented.

In general, professional standards of traditional media, being carefully brought to life and reporting of citizen journalists, give a common ground for the two dimensions of the journalistic profession. The deemed border between citizen journalism and blogging, contrariwise, becomes sharper. The Global Voices *Manifesto* which has not changed since MacKinnon and Zuckerman introduced it in 2006 still keeps an idealistic rhetoric on participation in the citizen media; some of the actual contributors' motivations (to deepen the knowledge about Russia and Russia-related things, to improve the language skills, to use a huge citizen

---

<sup>211</sup> Castells, M. (2012). P. 225.

journalism platform as a step to a paid job, etc.) are less subtilized, but far more real. This professionalization process is reflected in the Global Voices editorial code (where strong integrity and ethical norms are clearly seen) and corresponding internal policy documents of the media.

One of the understanding of this would be that “professional journalists have skills and values that are particularly desirable to citizen journalism websites” – obviously, so they implement such skills and values into their practices. “In this case, what professional journalists have to offer is legitimacy by way of their past accomplishments.”<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> Lindner A. M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 558.

## Conclusion

Aiming to reveal the characteristics of the professional standards in non-traditional journalism with the case of Global Voices, this research outlined major patterns of similarities and differences between standards seen by both citizen and professional journalists. The paper focused on the following research questions: First, *In what way citizen journalists' standards differ from the standards of professional journalists?* Second, *How professional journalism influences citizen journalism – and vice versa?*

The research showed, first of all, that on paper citizen and professional journalism share more or less the same values and standards in their work. Those are honesty, non-involvement, impartiality, fairness and openness, and others. But if the standards do give citizen and professional journalists the common ground, are there any changes in other dimensions of journalistic culture?

The possible answer for the first research question was hypothesized as following: **(H1)** *There are indeed some dissimilarities between citizen and professional journalism in terms of culture: (1) citizen journalism tends to be subjective rather than objective; (2) a populist mobilizer role is mostly peculiar to citizen journalists rather than to traditional journalists; (3) during news production, citizen journalists are more likely to work on local, narrow and under-reported issues.*

The results for the first (1) statement out of three turned out to be negative; in frames of this research, we roughly connect objectivity to news production and subjectivity to opinion writing. According to the in-depth interviews findings and the analysis of documents, we would argue that the distinction between facts and opinions is a working concept in citizen journalism. Just as The Guardian, for instance, separates the two sections on their website, Global Voices have several different project running at once, dedicated to different journalistic performances:

News section, Advocacy, Rising Voices and so on. The third (3) statement describes well the story-selection process at Global Voices – the conclusion is made on the basis of the empirical data and validated by the theory: Rutigliano, for example, found that the citizen journalism sites he explored “increased coverage of people who are traditionally not found in mainstream news, or, if they are, are portrayed as stereotypes.”<sup>213</sup>

As for the (2) perceived journalistic roles, three of four interviewees see themselves as interpreters and occasionally populist mobilizers (those who let people express views, develop cultural interests, motivate them to get involved, set the political agenda). At the same time, most of the professional journalists surveyed by Hanitzsch et al. worldwide “tend to stray away from influencing public opinion and advocating social change”<sup>214</sup> – which means they are straying away from this role conception, too. There is a possibility that the professionals who see themselves as populist mobilizers are exactly those people who start contributing at Global Voices for free, just because they feel this way.

Concerning the mutual influence of citizen and traditional journalism, there is a clear evidence of how the latter uses in different ways what the former one can suggest. Among citizen journalism's strongest sides, as it was listed by the interviewees, are (1) the right for underrepresented voices to speak, (2) narrow and often unique focus of the topic, (3) in-depth understanding of the issue parachuted journalist can hardly reach, and (4) the ability for locals to catch the breaking news story no one heard about before. The research showed, therefore, that establishing partner relations with citizen websites, the quality media like The Guardian's *New East Network* choose the top stories from Global Voices to publish, and online media like DailyDot.com, for example, ask the top GV contributors to write for

---

<sup>213</sup> Rutigliano, L. W. (2008). P. 2.

<sup>214</sup> Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). P. 280.

them (data from the participant observation). “In many cases,” as Lindler et al. noted, “citizen journalists aim to rectify the shortcomings of mainstream media.”<sup>215</sup> MacKinnon has predicted that: “Many media organizations now see blogging – or the use of some form of participatory citizens’ media – as a way to build loyalty, trust, and preserve credibility. They are still experimenting with ways to do that.”<sup>216</sup>

To answer the second research question fully, we have suggested that the influence of citizen journalism and professional journalism is *mutual* and enriching:

**(H2)** *The influence is mutual. Citizen media tend to enlist the cooperation with professional journalists and share professional standards and editorial practices with the mainstream quality media, while mainstream outlets often pick up the certain topics from citizen websites and implement readers' communities and commentary sections.*

This hypothesis is proved to be right. Not only professional journalism is moving towards the citizen media, closer as the time goes, but citizen media professionalize as well, and here is proof: (1) a lot of experienced professional journalists come to write for citizen media (illustrated by the outcomes from the interviews: three of four RuNet contributors asked have a journalistic background; the fourth was a political blogger and currently works at the quality media outlet); (2) the whole hierarchical system with regional co-editors and editors is functioning at Global Voices; editorial structures are taken from the mainstream media; (3) the professional standards and norms reflected in the Global Voices editorial guidelines mostly align with the guidelines of The New York Times, The Guardian and the BBC. “Consistently high editorial standards add credibility to our content,” reads the “How to write for GV” guide.

---

<sup>215</sup> Lindner A. M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). P. 556.

<sup>216</sup> MacKinnon, R. (2010). P. 15.

The limitations of this research lie in the chosen method: the results of the case study with its in-depth interviews and document analysis are hardly generalizable for findings more significant than just an interpretation of one particular case site. Though both interviews and documents can uncover valuable insights, qualitative data is usually ambiguous, what makes the analysis challenging, time-consuming and sometimes too subjective. The sample, however, can be snowboarded for future qualitative research and more case sites can be studied. Another possible limitation is the following: there are written editorial guidelines, agreed-upon ethics codes and personal norms spoken out loud in the interviews; yet, we must admit that the journalists' professional orientations may not fully correspond with their practices.

We hope that this paper gives an insight about the construct of professional standard in citizen journalism which can contribute to the body of academic works in the area of interest. The results reported here provide first hints on exploring the professional standard phenomena within different journalistic practices, and it should be definitely deepened in the future research.

## Bibliography

1. Alonso, M. O., & Ibáñez, D. B. (2013). Intermediate journalistic cultures. *International comparative studies in journalism. Medij. Istraž.*, 19(1), 39-60.
2. Anikina, M. (2015). Ideas and values of modern journalism: the search for balance, in Nygren, G., & Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (eds.) *Journalism in Change: Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden*, Peter Lngang (153-178).
3. Anikina, M. (2014). Journalism as a profession in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the Russian context. *World of Media, Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies*, 233-252.
4. Anikina, M. (2012). Journalists in Russia, in *Journalism in Russia, Poland and Sweden – cultures and research*. Södertörns högskola (13-31).
5. Babbie, E. (2013). *The practice of social research*. 13<sup>th</sup> international edition. Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
6. Bhatacherjee, A. (2012). *Social science research: principles, methods, and practices*. University of South Florida.
7. Blaagaard, B. B. (2013). Situated, embodied and political. *Journalism Studies*, 14(2), 187-200.
8. Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9 (2), 27-40.
9. Boyce, C., & Neale, P. (2006). *Conducting in-depth interviews: a guide for designing and conducting in-depth interviews for evaluation input*. Pathfinder International.
10. Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.
11. Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the Internet age*. Polity Press.
12. Carpenter, S. (2008). How online citizen journalism publications and online newspapers utilize the objectivity standard and rely on external sources. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85(3). P. 532.

13. Carpenter, S. (2010). A study of content diversity in online citizen journalism and online newspaper articles. *New Media & Society*, 12 (7), 1064-1084.
14. Carpenter, S., Nah, S., & Chung, D. (2013). A study of US online community journalists and their organizational characteristics and story generation routines. *Journalism*, 1–16.
15. Christakis, N. A., & Fowler, J. H. (2009). *Connected: the surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*. Back Bay Books / Little, Brown and Company.
16. Dahlgren, P. (2013). Online journalism and civic cosmopolitanism. *Journalism Studies*, 14(2), 156-171.
17. Deibert, R., Rohozinski, R., Palfey, J., & Zittrain, J. (2010). *Access controlled: the shaping of power, rights and rule in cyberspace*. MIT Press.
18. Fischer, E. (2015). 'You Media': audiencing as marketing in social media. *Media, Culture and Society*, 37(1), 50-67.
19. Foxall, A. (2015). The Kremlin's sleight of hand: Russia's soft power offensive in the UK. *Russia Studies Centre*. Policy paper No. 3.
20. Fürsich, E. (2002). How can global journalists represent the 'Other'? *Journalism*, 3(1), 57-84.
21. Goode, L. (2009). Social news, citizen journalism and democracy. *New Media and Society*, 11(8), 1287-1305.
22. Hanitzsch, T., & Berganza, R. (2014). Political trust among journalists: Comparative evidence from 21 countries, in Canel, M. J., & Voltmer, K. (eds.), *Comparing Political Communication across Time and Space: New Studies in an Emerging Field* (137-156). London: Palgrave MacMillan.
23. Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Kee Wang Yuen, E. (2011). Mapping journalism cultures across nations. *Journalism Studies*, 12(3), 273-293.
24. Harro-Loit, H. (2015). Revisiting national journalism cultures in post-communist countries: the influence of academic scholarship. *Media and Communication*, 3(4), 5-14.

25. Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2007). Comments please: How the British news media are struggling with user-generated content. *Presented at 8th International Symposium on Online Journalism*.
26. Hood, C. C. (2011). Judging the credibility and professionalism of citizen journalism versus professional journalism. *Thesis*. Brigham Young University.
27. Huang, C-Y., Shen, Y-Z., Lin H-X., & Chang S. S. (2007). Bloggers' motivations and behaviors: a model. *Journal of Advertising Research* 47(4), 472-484.
28. Johnson, T. J., & Kaye, B. K. (2004). Wag the blog: How reliance on traditional media and the internet influence credibility perceptions of weblogs among blog users. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(3), 622-642.
29. Jönsson, A. M., & Örnebring, H. (2011). User-generated content and the news. Empowerment of citizens or interactive illusion? *Journalism Practice*, 5(2), 127-144.
30. Karppinen, K., & Moe, H. (2012). What we talk about when we talk about document analysis, in Just, N., & Puppis, M. (eds.), *Trends in Communication Policy Research: New Theories, Methods and Subjects*, Bristol: Intellect (157-176).
31. Koh, J., & Kim, Y-G. (2003). Sense of virtual community: a conceptual framework and empirical validation. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 8(2), 75-93.
32. Lenhart, A., & Fox, S. (2006). Bloggers: a portrait of the Internet' New Storytellers. *Pew Internet and American Life Report*.
33. Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
34. Lindner A. M., Connell, E., & Meyer, E. (2015). Professional journalists in 'citizen' journalism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(5), 553-568.
35. Lucas, M. (2007). Creating multiple global publics: How Global Voices engages journalists and bloggers around the world. *Centre for Social Media*, CUNY.
36. Macgilchrist, F. (2011). *Journalism and the political. Discursive tensions in news coverage of Russia*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

37. MacKinnon, R. (2012). *Consent of the networked. The worldwide struggle for internet freedom*. Basic Books.
38. MacKinnon, R. (2010). Networked authoritarianism in China and beyond: implications for global Internet freedom. *Stanford University, paper presented at Liberation Technology in Authoritarian Regimes*.
39. MacKinnon, R., & Zuckerman, E. (2006). Gathering voices to share with a worldwide online audience. *Nieman Reports*, 45-47.
40. Min, S-J. (2015). Conversation through journalism: searching for organizing principles of public and citizen journalism. *Journalism*, 1-16.
41. Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: the dark side of internet freedom*. Public Affairs, New York.
42. Mossberger, K., Tolbert C. J., & McNeal, R. S. (2008) *Digital citizenship: the internet, society, and participation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
43. Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2009). Rating citizen journalists versus pros: editors' views. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 30(2), 71-83.
44. Nah, S., & Chung, D. S. (2012). When citizens meet both professional and citizen journalists: social trust, media credibility, and perceived journalistic roles among online community news readers. *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 13(6), 714-730.
45. Nardi, B. A., Schiano, D. J., Gumbrecht, M., & Swartz L. (2004). Why we blog. *Communications of the ACM*, 47(12), 41-46.
46. Navasky, V., & Lerner, E. (2010). *Magazines and their web sites*. A Columbia Journalism Review survey and report. Columbia University.
47. Negrea, X. (2014). Objectivity between illusions and professional standards in today's journalism. *Social Sciences and Education Research Review*, 1, 29-35.
48. Negreyeva, I., & Prasad, R. (2012). Developing media literacy by teaching citizens the standards of professional journalism. *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies*, 1(1), 33-53.
49. Neumann, B. I. (1996). *Russia as Europe's Other*. Robert Schuman Centre.

50. Neumann, B. I. (1999). *Uses of the Other. "The East" in European identity formation*. University of Minnesota Press.
51. Nygren, G. (2012). The research project Journalism in change, in *Journalism in Russia, Poland and Sweden – cultures and research*. Södertörns högskola (5-12).
52. Nygren, G., & Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2015). Journalism professionalization and journalistic culture as a method of research. Introduction in *Journalism in Change: Journalistic Culture in Poland, Russia and Sweden*, Peter Lang (9-18).
53. O'Donnell, P. (2009). Journalism, change and listening practices. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 23(4), 503-517.
54. Oates, S., & Lokot, T. (2013). Twilight of the Gods?: How the internet challenged Russian television news frames in the winter protests of 2011-12. Paper prepared for *Media and Communication Research Annual Conference*.
55. Örnebring, H. (2008). The consumer as producer – of what? User-generated tabloid content in *The Sun* (UK) and *Aftonbladet* (Sweden). *Journalism Studies*, 9(5), 771-785.
56. Pasti, S. (2013). Building democracy in Russia: Online media and protests. A presentation at the *BASEES/ICCEES European Congress "European Crisis and Renewal"*, Cambridge, UK.
57. Pasti, S., Chernysh, M., & Svitich, L. (2012). The Russian journalists and their profession, in Weaver, D. H., & Willnat, L. (eds.) *The Global Journalist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Routledge (267-282).
58. Paulussen, S., & D'heer, E. (2013). Using citizens for community journalism. Findings from a hyperlocal media project. *Journalism Practice*, 7(5), 588-603.
59. Pomerantsev, P., & Weiss, M. (2014). *The menace of unreality: How the Kremlin weaponizes information, culture and money*. Institute of Modern Russia.
60. Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). *Networked: the new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
61. Robinson, S. (2014). The active citizen's information media repertoire: an exploration of community news habits during the digital age. *Mass communication and society*, 17(4), 509-530.

62. Robinson, S., & DeShano, C. (2011). 'Anyone can know': citizen journalism and the interpretive community of the mainstream press. *Journalism*, 12 (8), 963-982.
63. Robinson, S., & DeShano, C. (2011). Citizen journalism as Third Places? What makes people contribute information online (or not). *Journalism Studies*, 12 (5), 1-16.
64. Rothrock, K. (2013). Forget Hollywood: the Russian Internet's anti-opposition as a social movement. *ASEEES*, University of Pittsburgh, 1-19.
65. Rutigliano, L. W. (2008). *Covering the unknown city: citizen journalism and marginalized communities*. The University of Texas at Austin.
66. Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism*, 2 (2), 149-170.
67. Scott, M. (2009). *Guidelines for broadcasters on promoting user-generated content and media and information literacy*. London.
68. Shirky, C. (2009). *Here comes everybody: the power of organizing without organizations*. Penguin Books.
69. Shoemaker, P. J., Akiba A., Seo, H., Johnson, P. (2012). Comparing news on foreign and international affairs, in Esser, F., & Hanitzsch, T. (eds.), *Handbook of comparative communication research* (341-352).
70. Steger, M. (2003). *Globalization: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
71. Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone Together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books.
72. Van der Wurff, R., & Schönback, K. (2010). Between profession and audience. *Journalism Studies*, 12(4), 407-422.
73. Vartanova, E. (2014). Constructing ourselves through constructing others. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 9(2), 98-103.
74. Wu, H. D. (2000). Systemic determinants of international news coverage: a comparison of 38 countries. *Journal of Communication*, 50(2), 110-130.

## Sources

1. The RuNet Echo of the Global Voices (2009–2016)

2. Global Voices guidelines:

How to write for Global Voices. (2013). Retrieved from <https://community.globalvoices.org/guide/editorial-guides/how-to-write-for-gv/>

3. The New York Times guidelines:

(a) Ethical Journalism. A Handbook of Values and Practices for the News and Editorial Departments. (2004). Retrieved from <http://www.nytco.com/who-we-are/culture/standards-and-ethics/>

(b) Guidelines on Integrity. (2008) Retrieved from <http://www.nytco.com/who-we-are/culture/standards-and-ethics/>

5. The Guardian guidelines:

The Guardian's Editorial Code. (2007). Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/guardian/article/0,5814,642387,00.html>

4. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) guidelines:

The BBC's Editorial Guidelines. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

##### **1. Personal information**

Name

Age

City of residence

Position

RuNet Echo profile

When did you start working for RuNet Echo?

Is it your only place of work? If not, where do you work now?

Please describe shortly your previous journalistic experience.

##### **2. Working as a citizen journalist / editor**

Why did you start working for the Global Voices project? What was your motivation?

Can you say you share the values of Rebecca MacKinnon and Ethan Zuckerman, the founders of the project?

Do you think citizen's opinions may influence traditional journalists' practices?

Is there any competition with the professional journalism? But how exactly citizen journalism platform can compete if it has limited resources, less motivation of authors, etc.?

(to editors) Are there a lot of people who want to contribute – not just once, but constantly?

There are four roles of journalists, pointed out by scholars: interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer. How do you see your role in this project?

### **3. RuNet news, worldwide audience: challenges**

Can you say some words about the freedom of Russian internet nowadays?

Are all the restrictions, laws and censorship gathering more attention from the world now?

Please describe the topics that would gain hits for RuNet Echo for sure.

Do you need to simplify things and suppress some details while writing texts about Russia (sometimes too complex) for the English-speaking audience?

What obstacles do you face during you work for the project?

**Thank you.**

## Appendix 2

## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIPTIONS

01

**1. Personal Information**

**Name** Kevin Rothrock

**Age** 32

**City of residence** New Haven, Connecticut, the U.S.

**Position** Project editor

**RuNet Echo profile** [globalvoicesonline.org/author/kevin-rothrock/](http://globalvoicesonline.org/author/kevin-rothrock/)

**When did you start working for RuNet Echo?** In March 2012. The project was running before that – since 2009. The person who started everything moved on to another project, and they put up a job listing on the Global Voices website, and somebody shared it with me. So I applied.

**Is it your only place of work? If not, where do you work now?** It has never been my only job. Now I work for Meduza, as a producer of the English version – and social media manager. Before that I was actually in grad school, in a doctoral program. Now it's Meduza, and before it was the University of Connecticut.

**Please describe shortly your previous journalistic experience.** This is the first journalistic job that I had. What I did do – I worked for a think tank in Washington D.C. for a couple of years before moving to Connecticut. It wasn't journalism; I was a research assistant, assisted in research that went into writing articles either for journals or newspaper opinion sections. I did get some exposure to the world of journalism – well, at least the world of opinion reporting. RuNet Echo, when I got there, was more academic than journalistic. Two people that ran the project before me were more scholars than journalists. Since I've been there, we've changed more to journalism. Now we do kind of fast-response, breaking news sort of stuff. Ideally.

## 2. Working as a citizen journalist / editor

**Why did you start working for the Global Voices project? What was your motivation?** While I was working in a think tanks, before I got the job in RuNet Echo, I was a pretty active blogger. I wrote Russian politics. I ventured into the blogosphere just because there were a lot of political debates, you can follow them, there's evidence of them there (a blog called "A Good Treaty"). So when the RuNet Echo job came on, it seemed like a good fit, because I was already working a lot with stuff happening in the blogosphere. I guess, the motivation for RuNet Echo was an opportunity to really go in-depth into the Russian society. You know, when they hired me, they knew I was more about politics. We don't write exclusively about politics, though. Before I got to the project, I was interested also in strict criminology stuff, like high politics kind of stuff; in RuNet Echo there is a better opportunity to explore something that is not necessarily about Putin. Although... Just as a general rule; if you're writing about Russia, it helps to appeal to readers: if you can, bring Putin in somehow, because he's the one guy of Russia they all know.

**Can you say you share the values of Rebecca MacKinnon and Ethan Zuckerman, the founders of the project?** Yeah, sure, sounds good, right? I'm not an activist by any means, but general values of the project – they are absolutely in harmony with how I view the world. I don't regard myself as an activist, but I definitely sympathize with the basic contours of the project, certainly.

**Do you think citizen's opinions may influence traditional journalists' practices?** Oh, definitely, I think they have already. When Global Voices started, it was a lot more different from the mainstream journalism than it's now. Now the way that mainstream journalism includes citizen journalists' voices became a commonplace. If anything, it's a challenge for Global Voices, because now we have to distinguish ourselves in new ways, I suppose. The challenge for people who work in citizen journalism is to find out, what's next for this field, what innovations are possible? Because the things that have separated us initially, they have been adopted by mainstream journalism.

**Is there any competition with the professional journalism?** Oh, sure. At least, I mean... RuNet Echo is about citizen journalism often, but I don't know if Tanya and I are qualified as citizen journalists, since we are, you know, paid for the work. But I do think there is competition; if there is a story out there, and you're writing about it, you're trying to be the first one. This is competition just as between the mainstream journalists. I don't think it's unhealthy,

it's all fine, because it's just the nature of – you know, trying to do the best work possible, working in the same field. There's cooperation and there's competition. **But how exactly citizen journalism platform can compete if it has limited resources, less motivation of authors, etc.?** It's definitely a disadvantage when it comes to resources, but at the same time... The best strategy is to have a very narrow focus, when you leverage some kind of access that the mainstream journalist doesn't have. If you're a citizen journalist, you focus on some particular issue, you become an expert on that issue, and mainstream journalists are sort of always balancing from one issue to the next issue, following trends. They can also be experts on one thing, but if you're citizen journalist, you can focus on local issues, on particular topic, and you really learn everything you can about it. You use that, that's your advantage in the competition.

**(to editors) Are there a lot of people who want to contribute – not just once, but constantly?** The more, the better, I suppose, right? There are some people telling they want work with me for RuNet Echo, and basically the thing is the work has to be of a certain quality. Otherwise, it gets more efficient from me to just write stories myself, right? Unless they have kind of spectacular access to some story. By saying quality, I mean it requires the certain amount of time for me to do the proper copyediting, whether it's just language, whether it's the professionalism of the reporting and so on; all those considerations have to be noted. It's good when the person has this kind of story which can't be found elsewhere. You know that.

Anybody can be a storyteller. With a little or a lot of copyediting support stories can be written in a professional way. If it's a general report, it needs to have a certain sort of objective voice to it. Because a lot of people who are not professional writers write it almost like a diary entry; in certain circumstances that's appropriate, but when it comes to reporting, it's usually not the best way to present a story. I mean, everyone can tell a story if you have editors, then it can be phrased in a way that will appeal the maximum number of readers, I guess. It's an opportunity for untraditional storytellers to get stories out there and reach a wide audience. Without this oversight you can still reach people, but it becomes kind of primary source to other, broader forms of writing.

I suppose, I've been credited with a certain intuition, but that's not always right: sometimes I think the story would be viral, but it doesn't go viral. Anything about celebrities would always be viral, though. I just spend a lot of time in the Internet, and if you do that enough and follow what's popular, you gain a certain understanding for what goes viral, what attracts readers. Also, you should just assume that people don't know anything: they don't know the

context, they don't know the characters, and the story has to appeal to people on a fundamental level. If you don't know anything and suddenly just walk up to the headline, and the headline has to be funny, or shocking, all by itself. Otherwise people won't get it. Otherwise you have to assume that you won't go viral, maybe it will be appreciated by the people on the know. I try to balance social media marketing with stuff to appeal to the hipsters, and then with a broad stuff to appeal to people who don't know anything else.

**There are four roles of journalists, pointed out by scholars: interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer. How do you see your role in this project?** I suppose in RuNet Echo we do more the interpretive one, and occasionally we do some populist mobilizing, when we're writing about activists. We do write about activists now frequently. The adversarial stuff – we don't do to much of that, just because we don't really publish opinion material.

### **3. RuNet news, worldwide audience: challenges**

**Can you say some words about the freedom of Russian internet nowadays?** There are all these laws, all these prominent crackdowns on particular websites. I think that for the most part it's scare tactics, and the ordinary Russian Internet user's experience is not very different than it was five years ago. For the most part: the websites and all the social networks are still there, even though there are all these laws that make it possible to shut a lot of it down. They put Wikipedia on a black list for, like, twelve hours; sometimes block the websites not a lot of people know anyway. Others know how to use proxies and Tor browser.

When you write a bunch of stories about these repressive laws, you think: okay, there is no Internet freedom in Russia anymore, and it's logical – but you have to understand that just because there are laws in Russia, it doesn't mean they are enforced. So I don't think it changes that much for an ordinary user, though when it comes to the online-media environment, I do think it has become harder to work. More important than any of the laws that passed, I think, are interventions in Gazeta.ru, Lenta.ru and stuff like that, when you have owners basically forcing out chief editors. These are far greater repercussions than any of the laws. So I would say journalism is suffering right now, because it became much harder to work.

**Are all the restrictions, laws and censorship gathering more attention from the world now?** Yeah, it is an interesting story! And I do think it's fascinating, this whole legal push

by Russian lawmakers, cause it's gonna be a big chapter in a history book. And it will end one day; one day Russia will stop passing, you know, repressive law after repressive law. This is a weird time, the last several years. They didn't do this before; every month there is something new. Russia is now a place where the laws that pass are worth news stories, because they are so interesting, just bizarrely repressive. They are creating stories for journalists. There is no surprise that it becomes a news story, cause these laws are weird, or maybe not weird, but don't exist elsewhere. They are bold, I suppose. And it's not to say that they are unreasonable, or illogical, I mean, they are inspired by things happening either in the world or in Russia. So, you know, whatever: Russia is gonna pass laws, that's fine. They are inherently interesting enough for news, that's why, I think, the world is paying attention.

**Please describe the topics that would gain hits for RuNet Echo for sure.** Except for Internet, we do some civil society stuff, like protests, if it's sort of grassroots kind of stuff. And that can have broader appeal, certainly. But often... It's hard for me to speak beyond the American new consumers' interest; I think we also have a small audience in Russia, of Russians who speak English and either want to know what foreigners think about RuNet, or test their English, perhaps, it can be a language exercise. The audience is worldwide, though – English-speaking, obviously. It is narrow, but it's not one narrow group, actually, but sort of several.

So it's Russian Internet, regulatory politics regarding Internet, activism, protests – but not anything that happens in Russia, just something that have Internet focus or some grassroots focus. Basically, it's supposed to be directed in Russian civil society. We're trying to show what's going on in Russian society, not just government happenings.

I'm not sure about the statistics of RuNet Echo's views, but I think the most popular post was something like 30-40 thousand views, might be more than that. I know that we are read by journalists, by mainstream journalists, who are interested in either news in Russia or the Russian Internet. I know we were read by American technology companies that operate in Russia – for instance, like Twitter and Facebook. People in their offices read us to know about regulatory environment, Russia's regulations regarding Internet. Basically it's kind of niche; occasionally we have something that has broad appeal, but the nature of the project is a narrow focus. Ordinary news readers are not going to even know about RuNet Echo (probably). It's fundamentally atypical thing, it's not like BuzzFeed or the New York Times, we don't just cover stories from anywhere.

**Do you need to simplify things and suppress some details while writing texts about Russia (sometimes too complex) for the English-speaking audience?** It's not necessarily the simplification. Expressions available in English have been created in the context of American or British politics, western civil society, let's say. That language does not always work in the Russian context. For instance, the way we describe the interaction of the people and the state doesn't capture it when you're talking about the situation in Russia.

Okay, I have one example, it's my original observation. In Russia... It's not so common now, but a few years ago, I guess, during the protest 2011-2012, it was very common to say that we were witnessing some kind of middle-class uprising, or middle-class protest. That means a very specific thing in the West, middle class is a very specific thing: these people own small businesses, they are usually not... Actually, I may be wrong about this. Anyways, it's not entirely a class relying on the state, on government jobs, whereas in Russia (as far as I understand) middle class is far more dependent, is far more employed by the government. So the opinions that you'll find in Russian middle class versus American middle class are very different. They get their income from different sources, their political beliefs and persuasions are different, and that just means they are very different. When this was happening, you had a lot of commentaries in the West, basically saying "this is a middle class uprising", and if you're American, that means something specific, like "okay, there's bunch of people that are sick of taxes, or from government welfare", and so on and so forth. There is kind of a liberal interpretation. In a Russian context it doesn't really work out, it's not like that. The middle class is far more loyal to the state, they feel state deserves far more presence in the economy, in their lives and so on. So when you're reporting on Russia, the language you have to describe the civil society, or the politics, is often created in a different context. But you can't speak outside of that language, it's English, you're writing in English, and you can't explain the differences every time when you use it in your work. So you just explain absolutely essential stuff. But sometimes you look at it and think: well, it doesn't really capture it, but if I'll try to explain every little nuance, then it will be unreadable. Only a professor will be able to read it, cause it will just be so tedious.

So you have to forgive some of the shortcomings of language and focus on the really important times when you need to describe a difference, I guess. It can be kind of unsatisfying: you know you're not explaining things as you could in the hope to reach more people. It's a kind of trade-off. You know, RuNet Echo is not BuzzFeed, we're not trying to reach the absolute maximum of people, but this trade-off feels a little bit smarter. It's more ideal to me, though all these trade-off decisions are hard to make.

**What obstacles do you face during you work for the project?** Because we can't pay our writers, nobody sticks around forever. They come to write first, and either lose interest, or they move on in their career, getting pay-work – and that's the best, if we help them to do something. But yeah, I guess one of the obstacles is definitely maintaining quality writers, just because you if you can't pay somebody, you're dependent on their free time and their interest. Beyond that... I guess it would be nice if the website – Global Voices and RuNet Echo – could have more kind of snazzy multimedia. We're not working as a pro-profit organization, and this is kind of a disadvantage; there is so much flashy stuff nowadays out there, it can be hard to compete. But it's not a terrible obstacle, it's fine.

## 1. Personal Information

**Name** Tetyana Lokot

**Age** 33

**City of residence** Kyiv, Ukraine

**Position** Contributing editor (coeditor)

**RuNet Echo profile** [globalvoicesonline.org/author/tetyana-lokot/](http://globalvoicesonline.org/author/tetyana-lokot/)

**When did you start working for RuNet Echo?** I first started as a volunteer – I think, in November 2013. And I, actually, started writing for Global Voices, not for RuNet Echo specifically. They have a section called “Central and Eastern Europe”, and this was around the time when Euromaidan protests were happening in Ukraine. I was in the U.S. that time, and I was sort of feeling very useless as a Ukrainian. So I was looking for something to do to contribute – to cover, to tell people what's happening – and I found Global Voices, a nice platform to do that. I wrote for them about Ukraine since November 2013 to July 2014, and then the position of the contributing editor in RuNet Echo opened up – one of the editors left, so they were looking for someone to do his work, and Kevin (*Rothrock, the project editor*) had already read some of my stuff. I applied for the job. So I am working as a contributing editor since July 2014, for over a year now.

Editors are paid. We work part-time usually, I am considered to be working one-third of full time. I think, we also have some volunteer editors. For some (smaller) countries, where there is not the whole lot of news, there are people who edit stuff for free.

**Is it your only place of work? If not, where do you work now?** I wouldn't call it a job, I'm a doctoral student at the University of Maryland where I study protests in social media and in digital media. That takes over than half of my time, thinking in hours. And RuNet Echo takes up about one-third, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the news. And there are, of course, all kinds of other exiting projects people like us, like crazy academic journalists, get involved into from time to time.

**Please describe shortly your previous journalistic experience.** I started working as a total amateur in radio, when I was in high school. I was DJ-ing, putting on some music,

talking on air, but that taught me a little bit about how radio works. When I went to college, I've started working on a radio station, and I was basically a news reporter. And then I switched to online news, because this radio station in Kyiv also had a news portal: I did some editing and writing news for that one. Then I've decided that I wanted to be a proper journalist (when I graduated, my Bachelor degree was in management, which has nothing to do with what I'm doing now). So I enrolled in a Master's program in journalism in 2002, and there was three years of learning more theoretical and practical things. Then I worked in telecom journalism, I wrote for a magazine about cellphones and all sorts of gadgets; I also started teaching radio journalism in the school where I've got my Master's, in Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. That was the main thing I did for 8 years, also teaching online journalism – you know, it was 2007, a good time to start teaching about new media and online journalism. If you just teach one or two courses in the university, you also have time to do other stuff – media training in various media/NGO-related things, for example. And then I came to the U.S. to do my Doctoral degree in 2012.

## **2. Working as a citizen journalist / editor**

**Why did you start working for the Global Voices project? What was your motivation?** Like I said, I was just sort of feeling guilty for not being there, not being where all the protests and actions were, and also seeing how people who were not Ukrainians didn't always understand how or why things were happening. I thought the Global Voices would be a good platform to explain some points, you know – here is why people are using this particular slogan, here is why if you just follow the hashtag #euromaidan you won't see the whole reality... Basically, I've decided to contribute as a citizen, but I've also decided to use my knowledge of different language to explain people who are native speakers: here is what's happening in the country where people don't speak your language, that's how things are actually happening.

**Can you say you share the values of Rebecca MacKinnon and Ethan Zuckerman, the founders of the project?** Yeah. I think, to some extent, even though this platform is over ten years old, it's still very modern. Global Voices started as a very small thing, but it grew, and I think that every person who ultimately tries to write something and become part of the community, a lot of people who write for Global Voices, they have this sense of an “imagined community” – you know, you are online with other people, there are loads of emails, there is lot of sharing. There is a sense like: oh, there is a group of people, who all speak different languages, and we don't necessarily all have something in common. But then you work

with people from other countries on a collaborative post, or you actually meet some of these people – when we all go to a big conference somewhere, there is usually a group of people from Global Voices from different countries. And that's when you start feeling like: we actually do something in common. It's those things Rebecca and Ethan usually talk about: the sense like “I'm here to represent my culture and my country, but I'm also here because I share these values, to enable other people to learn about my country”. It's also not just about culture, or country, it's also about promoting freedom of speech and speaking up about issues which your country probably don't want you to talk about, and maybe tries to restrict discussion of those issues inside the country.

**In your opinion, does the very idea of citizen journalism work now? What are the strong and weak points in it?** Hmm. We all understand, and this is something the Global Voices guidelines are very clear about, that a lot of people who contribute to Global Voices are not unbiased. They are not observers, you know, they are actors, they are advocates. They participate in the civic activities in their countries, some of them go to prison for what they do. But it's really important (while reporting) to be specific about where your position as an activist is, and where you are as a journalist. That's how we earn the trust of our readers. I know that some people struggle with this, but you can always have very constructive discussions with editors.

Whenever somebody writes a post where it's really clear that there is a bias, there I always a discussion about – you know, let's separate how you feel from what's really going on. And I think this has been an ongoing process, and that's why right now we have different sections on the website. There is general section where all the news stories are, and there is *Global Voices Community*, where people can post more about personal issues, or community issues. There is also section called *The Bridge*, where people can actually express their own opinions, they can write about things from a position that is not necessarily objective, you know, just expressing their own views. But there is a clear division. **But even news pieces are edited the way which cannot be considered unbiased.** Well, I mean, every person is biased. I think we should be then very clear about what our biases are. You know, we are biased because we believe in freedom of speech. I think Global Voices has been really good about being transparent – about what their biases are. Also, all our internal documents, like editorial posting guides, or style guides, everything is out there, they are open, on the Wiki-site. Anyone can go and look at it. And we have comments open, an author message form – we are very open to feedback.

I think it's also very important when, for instance, a particular author on Global Voices is writing about an organization he is part of; we put a disclaimer saying “This person is a member of this”, or “This author has been participating in this movement”. It doesn't take the bias away, but it makes it apparent.

**Is there any competition with the professional journalism? How exactly citizen journalism platform can compete if it has limited resources, less motivation, etc.?** I think, there are some cases where we can compete. Breaking news is definitely not, because we don't always have enough people to cover anything that is breaking; at the same time, we often have people who are underground and in very sort of hard-to-reach places, like Madagascar or somewhere. They just happen to be there, witness something, then write about it. But the thing is Global Voices isn't aimed being the first, most of people writing for us are volunteers, so they do it when they have time, when they have the inclination. It's very hard to message someone and say – hey, we need you to write this post now, because we wanna beat Reuters, or BuzzFeed, whoever. But sometimes, you know, sometimes it can happen, and we do breaking news stories especially if they are very local. So I think that's one of our advantages – we have people who are in very interesting parts of the world, and they can sometimes bring in not just a breaking news stories, but an understanding of what's happening that is very in-depth. You know, journalists who were just parachuted, don't have this understanding. And also very often just explaining events, for example, from the cultural point of view – some of those stories get republished from us by mainstream media. Stories, that bring in unexpected, insider explanation of something.

Kevin, my colleague, says there is a recipe for stories that go viral – it obviously has to be something interesting, have an interesting angle, but it also has to be about the community that is big enough, but also pretty niche. So I think it's a Bitcoin community, for example – it's worldwide, but you give the story an angle they probably didn't know about. Something happens in this particular country, and of course all the people interested in Bitcoin come and read your article, and somebody retweets, and it goes viral.

**(to editors) Are there a lot of people who want to contribute – not just once, but constantly?** Well, not a lot. I think we have fair amount of people who want to contribute. It's all online, so either somebody writes to us on Twitter, or contacts us through the form on the Website. I think, we get about one or two authors every month or two. In terms of how it works then: some people stay and write regularly; another people just write very occasionally. We had a

guy, who used to work for Lenta.ru, Sergey Kozlovsky. He wrote for us when he was kind of in-between jobs, so he did it pretty regularly, and he preferred to write about business, economic stuff, connected to the Internet in Russia. He wrote a lot for us, maybe one story every week or every two weeks – he was a very regular contributor. But now he has a new job, so he doesn't have a whole lot of time. I think it's important, when volunteers do contact us, to let them decide – is there something they are more passionate about? If someone wants to write about memes, he can write about memes, or about Ukraine and Russia, or do investigative stories – and that kind of makes us more like a real newsroom than just random people. There are also times when Kevin and I have an idea for a story, but don't have time to write it ourselves, and that's when we start going to volunteers and ask if they wanna write about this.

Editors – they are going to edit your stuff, but that doesn't mean they don't like you, right? They edit your stuff to make it better. That's also an issue in Global Voices, some people who are not professional journalists find it hard to work with. They think that if you made extensive edits to their text, the work they did is crap – which is not. You're just making it better. But some people – you know, their English isn't stellar or something – they are very sensitive about that, so the editor has to be gentle. It gets even more interesting if our contributors (some of them) are native speakers, and I'm not, but I edit their texts because it's my job. Trying to remember which person is more sensitive, which one is less sensitive – it's kind of a constant balancing act.

**There are four roles of journalists, pointed out by scholars: interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer. How do you see your role in this project?** I would like to think, especially in terms of RuNet Echo, that my role is mostly and interpretive role; because we are trying to explain people what's going on in a Russian-speaking Internet. Very often that's exactly what people are thankful for, for explaining what the particular cultural phenomenon means, or what all these people are talking about, the meaning of this. So interpretive would be probably the main role.

I don't know about adversarial, I mean, we get plenty of criticism for – some people think we're taking sides. But we're only adversarial insofar as we think that freedom of speech is a good thing, and that Russian Internet should be free. In terms of populism... I think some of our stories (you know, about activism and civil society) are inevitable, it's a big element of Global Voices, but we just explain what kinds of activism Russia has online and offline, and how political actors are using the web, but we are not necessarily promoting something.

### 3. RuNet news, worldwide audience: challenges

**Can you say some words about the freedom of Russian internet nowadays? Are all the restrictions, laws and censorship gathering more attention from the world now?** I think Kevin probably is a better person to talk about long-term changes, but at least during the last year, and especially since the conflict with Ukraine, Russia (and anything Russia-related) is definitely more popular because people are trying to get what's going on, and not just from the part of Russian government, but also asking – what about the people, the civil society, the opposition? All these things are more interesting to people than they were a year ago due to the political transformations that happened. Whereas in cultural terms a lot of exchanges and integration happen in Russia, with the restrictions that authorities are putting on Internet it's the other way around: they are trying to isolate Russian Internet from the rest of the world. That's something people are really interested in seeing: how they gonna do it? Are they actually able to do it – technically, legally? Are they just going to cut off Russian Internet and create their own?

People are really intrigued by that, and it's not just because Russia is a unique case. I mean, Russians would like to think it's a unique case, but it's not. Other countries – like France, or Germany, or even Brazil – are also thinking about separating themselves somehow from the World Wide Web. Each has its own issues, from Western influence to inability to control their own segment of the Internet. This is something that is happening in several countries around the world, and Russia is not unique. But Russia might be unique in how it's approaching the case. **Well, Russia is not unique, but it has always been “the other” next to the Western world.** M-m. But the thing with “the other”, though, is that Global Voices is all about “the other”. It's all about showing everything else that's in the world to, sort of, the western readers. So Russia is not unique, but in the sense how the West sees Russia – it's definitely, you know – “oh, look at those Russians, what are they up to now?”

**Please describe the topics that would gain hits for RuNet Echo for sure.** I think, these are issues like human rights, free speech and free expression are definitely on the top of the list for RuNet Echo, but it would be wrong to think that these are the only things. The cultural side of Russian-speaking Internet (Russian-speaking, because it's not just Russia, but also Ukraine and other former Soviet countries, and even the Russian-speaking Internet users in other countries around the world) is fascinating for people: things like Lurkmore, some of the memes we try to explain... And also arts, creative protests, the customs of Russian cultural beliefs. We

say that we cover the internet, but we actually cover things which are offline as well and just find a reflection online. Some of our top-stories have been either open-source investigative pieces about how Russia is participating in a conflict in Ukraine, but also things like the Peskov's watch and the corruption. Or, for example, sanctions and food story was very popular – not just for the sanctions in the political part, but also for the humor. It all makes the story pretty successful.

**Do you need to simplify things and suppress some details while writing texts about Russia (sometimes too complex) for the English-speaking audience?** I definitely feel this pressure, because sometimes, when you start trying to put all the details, and context, and the background, it becomes just a huge story; and do have to decide sometimes – okay, I'm going to make the summary of this particular part instead of explaining everything. Sometimes you only leave the most relevant details, and you don't have to list everything; but I do not think that simple is always better. Some things should necessarily be complex, and you should try to explain to people – no, this is not that simple as one-two-three, there are a lot of complexities here. Just as an example: of you talk about covering the protests in Ukraine, western media very often try to just say: right-wing, fascists, are running the show. Or jews – they are running the show. The truth is it's not that simple; there are all kinds of people participating in the protests, and they all have different persuasions and beliefs, but also have something in common, which made them to be together in the protests.

You do have to show this complexity, because if you don't, it perpetuates certain frames that are very unhelpful, that narrow people's minds. What Global Voices seeks to do is to expand people's minds. So often it's okay to be complex, as long as you do a good job of putting things apart and showing how everything works. Sometimes the laws regulating RuNet are problematic not because they are repressive, but because they are very badly written – there are no definitions and so on. I do agree, though, that sometimes we simplify some things as authors or editors, making a decision that it can be helpful for the people who don't know anything.

**What obstacles do you face during you work for the project?**

Something connected to the language thing, maybe. In every situation speaking more than one language is a bonus, but certainly here, when you're talking to people from different cultures. I recently did a story about Japanese cosplayers cosplaying Ukrainian army – and I don't know Japanese, but I know a Japanese editor for Global Voices who happens to be Canadian. So I just wrote him asking for help. It's a great community in that sense. You can

always find someone who can either help you translate things, or just explain cultural difference you had no idea about.

## 1. Personal Information

**Name** Will Wright

**Age** 24

**City of residence** Washington D.C., Virginia, the U.S.

**Position** Contributor

**RuNet Echo profile** [globalvoicesonline.org/author/will-wright/](http://globalvoicesonline.org/author/will-wright/)

**When did you start working for RuNet Echo?** It's hard to remember exactly. Maybe January 2015.

**Is it your only place of work? If not, where do you work now?** For the last year I was working in a think tank in Boston, but I'm currently trying to find a job in Washington D.C. I do journalism just like a hobby, hoping that maybe I can get a good full-time job at some point. My full-time job is other than journalism.

**Please describe shortly your previous journalistic experience.** I mainly was writing, let me think... I was just doing some blogs in college, writing about Russian politics cause I was interested in it. And then I've got a position as a columnist in a website where I covered Uzbekistan; that was a paid work at a media outlet instead of just blogging on social media. I did that for like half a year, and then, more recently, I've started doing freelancing – in the most for Global Voices, but also other places (Russia! Magazine, The Moscow Times, Quartz, etc.). I enjoy it, I'm hoping to continue. It depends on a job I'll get, though.

## 2. Working as a citizen journalist / editor

**Why did you start working for the Global Voices project? What was your motivation?** I've studied Russian and political science in college, and I did study abroad for a year, in Moscow and Bishkek. I've been interested in Russia for a long time, and I've learned the language as well. The opportunity to maintain my Russian language skills was one of the motivations to write for RuNet Echo, because the research for the articles is usually in Russian.

**Can you say you share the values of Rebecca MacKinnon and Ethan Zuckerman, the founders of the project?** I like that whole value system, and I like what they are trying to do with the Global Voices project, so that's one of the reasons why I was attracted to, you know, spend my time writing for here rather than for somewhere else. I really support those values, but I also kind of like... This may be interesting for you: obviously the values come true when you write about things, but I like the approach of trying to write more objectively rather than straight-up advocacy journalism. I feel like all the contributors at RuNet Echo do a pretty good job promoting certain values, but also writing in an honest way. **But if we are writing from inside, we are biased somehow, aren't we?** I mean... I would say everyone is biased somehow. I just think journalism is more effective if it leaves something up to the reader, rather than just trying to advance an agenda too explicitly.

**Do you think citizen's opinions may influence traditional journalists' practices?**

Yes, I think so. Journalism and media have been changing really dramatically with the Internet, so I think it's happening every day.

**Is there any competition with the professional journalism?** Yeah. Anyone can get views on the internet, so people can read Global Voices instead of the New York Times, for example, and it is competition. **But how exactly citizen journalism platform can compete if it has limited resources, less motivation of authors, etc.?** I think people like us, who write for RuNet Echo, can highlight stories that are very interesting and important, but don't appeal to the mainstream America, for example. So maybe big groups can't really run them, whereas we can write about them.

**There are four roles of journalists, pointed out by scholars: interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer. How do you see your role in this project?** I think of myself as doing an interpretive work. It fits with the whole "bridge concept" of the Global Voices project. I don't think if I write an article about democratic coalition it's not about mobilizing americans.

Also, I'm trying not to be adversarial necessarily. For the articles that I write, I think of them mainly as understanding a story that's going on in Russia, on the Russian Internet, translating and producing a compelling story in English that connects it with an English-speaking world, allows people who are interested in Russia (maybe only a little bit, maybe they don't speak Russian) to learn things about the country in a deeper way.

### 3. RuNet news, worldwide audience: challenges

**Can you say some words about the freedom of Russian internet nowadays?**

Russian Internet is a very lively place. There is a lot of stuff going on, the authorities are trying to crack down, and I'm getting tired of reading the articles about what's getting banned today. It just never stops. But in general, people are still pretty much doing what they wanna do on the Internet, for instance, Navalny community is really big for opposition politics – I write stories about that. Everyone from this community keeps reading his updates from the anti-corruption foundation, even though they had to switch the platform.

I guess, one big issue is just – what's gonna happen, because I think authorities would like to make some major changes, like with the data localization law, or trying to keep Facebook from posting protest pages, or blocking Wikipedia. So if any of that actually really happens, and Facebook caves into the authorities in a more substantial way, things could change, but I don't think that's really happening yet – even though it looks like the authorities would like it to happen. So it's still an unfolding situation.

**Are all the restrictions, laws and censorship gathering more attention from the world now?** Oh yeah! Big time. You know, my parents are reading articles on CNN about what is Russia up to, so everyone is paying attention to it now.

**Do you need to simplify things and suppress some details while writing texts about Russia (sometimes too complex) for the English-speaking audience?** I understand what you mean. Obviously, as a journalist you have to establish basic facts, before you get into the story, to orient people. But I feel like – at least the way I write in RuNet Echo – it's a tuned audience that is very up-to-speed on Russia, very interested in it. So I usually describe the situation as complex as I understand it, I don't really try to simplify things. If I were writing for some type of mainstream American outlet, I won't really try to do it at all. I just write about it as much as I understand it.

**Please describe the topics that would gain hits for RuNet Echo for sure.** I think, stories about citizen activism are especially popular. That kind of leads into opposition politics as well, so stories about protests, or about Internet censorship (what Roskomnadzor is trying to do now) are always popular stories. I was actually gonna write a story soon about the latest Anonymous International leak.

Everything that is especially related to the Russian Internet is kind of RuNet Echo's niche, I think. In terms of, like – what the authorities are trying to do to control the internet; what citizens are doing to express themselves, especially through the Internet and online communities. These are the best stories for RuNet Echo.

**What obstacles do you face during you work for the project?** For me for these really complicated political stories, it takes me a bit of time to get my head around everything, since I have to try to figure out what's going on in non-native language. So the biggest obstacle for me is just getting all the details sorted out in Russian, but that's also the reason why I like writing these stories: because I learn a lot. And it helps my Russian ability.

## 1. Personal Information

**Name** Sergey Kozlovsky

**Age** 29

**City of residence** Moscow, Russia

**Position** Contributor

**RuNet Echo profile** [globalvoicesonline.org/author/sergey-kozlovsky/](http://globalvoicesonline.org/author/sergey-kozlovsky/)

**When did you start working for RuNet Echo?** I wrote my first text in August 2014. Now I've put this occupation on hold for a little bit, just because I don't have time for it – I was busy.

**Is it your only place of work? If not, where do you work now?** RuNet Echo is not a job, it's volunteering. Certainly I had the main job while I was writing for them, one should make money somehow, right? From time to time I've written for other projects as a freelancer. I am currently working on one project on a permanent basis; we restart the website on business. That's why I have no time to work for RuNet Echo, though I'd love to.

**Please describe shortly your previous journalistic experience.** I graduated from a linguistic university in Minsk. When I was a student, I worked as a correspondent at the regional TV-channel in Belarus. Later, in Moscow, I wrote for the unknown website km.ru, then got a job in Lenta.ru and worked there for 2,5 years.

## 2. Working as a citizen journalist / editor

**Why did you start working for the Global Voices project? What was your motivation?** Topics are accorded with the editors, of course, but it's okay to write there about anything you want. That's what I liked the most. After I've resigned from Lenta.ru, I couldn't find such a place – at least fast – where I could write about anything I wanted. I saw a notice about RuNet Echo in Kevin's Twitter, wrote him, and that's how it all started.

One of my goals, as I write for them, is that I want see the project developing, so that more readers could find (as I see it) the objective information, or at least a position they can never find on TV or in pro-Kremlin newspapers. Moreover, it's interesting when your texts are translated to a language you've never heard about. Sometimes it's amazing to see who is interested in the events happening in Russia.

**Can you say you share the values of Rebecca MacKinnon and Ethan Zuckerman, the founders of the project?**

For sure. I'm a fan of the freedom of speech on that score; how can journalist work without the freedom of speech? Actually, I left Belarus ten years ago because it was impossible to work there. Writing what you want was prohibited. At that times Internet has not been yet developed, and it seemed to me everything was getting really bad. It definitely was the primary cause for which I started writing for RuNet Echo: there it's possible to write freely what you think and see around. From the very beginning this project seemed very powerful to me – you can read any bloggers from any country. It's great.

In February 2015, if I'm not mistaken, we had a Global Voices summit. Zuckerman was there, we've chatted a little bit. I know something about his and MacKinnon's activity, of course. Lots of people whose activity is connected to Internet, who are interested in it somehow, have heard about them without doubt.

**Do you think citizen's opinions may influence traditional journalists' practices?**

It has been influencing already, for a long time, I would say. The authors in our Global Voices community do their work not worse than professional journalists.

Frankly speaking, I don't like how the term “citizen journalism” is interpreted in Russian language. It happens so that citizen journalists are always chased in RuNet. At the same time, if you call yourself jut “blogger”, it's okay. I have repeatedly faced situations when journalists see the term “citizen journalism” anywhere, and freak out. So the term is not very good, but in general it's definitely a good thing – what wrong could be if people are actively involved in the coverage of some issue? They have Internet access; okay, they have no accreditation, no press cards, and maybe they can't get access to some dignitaries. But when Internet is literally the only thing needed, they are not worse than experienced journalists working in media.

**Is there any competition with the professional journalism? How exactly citizen journalism platform can compete if it has limited resources, less motivation of authors, etc.?** I think the citizen journalism can even be better, there are lots of examples of it. Global Voices is a shedloads of interesting texts. The question is not about platform, but always about how competent the author is.

I like to read about issues in Africa on Global Voices. In traditional media such information is not available sometimes, and in this situation citizen journalism becomes irreplaceable. The same happens when citizen journalism occupies a niche underrepresented in traditional media – few years ago that were investigations in social networks. It's easy to talk about competition in the areas where ordinary people the same opportunities as journalists (in other words, where only Internet is needed for writing texts – no press conferences and so on).

Concerning Global Voices, this platform has been around for ten years and it will continue to exist, because there will always be people who want to speak out, especially in countries where freedom of speech is clamped. I told you about the summit: it was great there, great and fun, I've noticed no negative regarding the strategy or the future of the project. It's clear that problems can be found everywhere, but in general there is no skepticism.

**There are four roles of journalists, pointed out by scholars: interpretive, disseminator, adversarial and populist mobilizer. How do you see your role in this project?** Disseminator, I guess, is the most important role. You see, I write for RuNet Echo, but I'm a traditional journalist at the same time, so I can mix it up now, but I'm used to being a disseminator. I try not to take sides, but to simply inform about what I see and hear. It's a professional habit already. As for some bloggers – well, for example, in Belarus it's difficult not to be an opposition member, when there is such a persecution against freedom of speech.

### **3. RuNet news, worldwide audience: challenges**

**Can you say some words about the freedom of Russian internet nowadays?** Everyone, who works in journalism, IT-industry and generally has something to do with the Internet, realizes that what's happening is cracking down, darn well. These laws, websites blocking... Of course, Slon and Dozhd' (oppositional media) are working so far, but it'll be too late to argue when everything is closed down. I have no illusions right now and I think it will only get worse in terms of freedom of speech in the Internet, if the same people remain in power.

People who want to find loopholes, will find them, but the amount of these people will definitely be less than now. Not everyone will be eager to put a lot of effort (with anonymizers, for instance) to obtain the complete information picture.

**Are all the restrictions, laws and censorship gathering more attention from the world now?** Yes, there is heightened awareness, but these laws are reaching their goals anyway. If in 2011, for example, anyone would tell you how much happens in four years, you would not believe. And now, no matter how much these laws are discussed in media, nothing can be actually changed. Even the people working in Internet don't resent these laws anymore and speak of them as of something normal. First, surge of attention and indignation – and then everybody get used to living with it. It'll continue like this.

**Do you need to simplify things and suppress some details while writing texts about Russia (sometimes too complex) for the English-speaking audience?** I write mostly about the economics and business, and I'm making things simple during all my career, all the time. But this can be understood in different ways: you can spell out details of a complex concept for two paragraphs, or you can be close to a mistake – sometimes simplification borders fail. Of course, a lot of readers love it when everything is explained and unscrambled.

Naturally, when I'm writing for the foreign audience, simplification is necessary. But there is another problem, I do not quite understand *what* to simplify. Kevin – he understands, because he is an American who writes for Americans about Russia.

**Please describe the topics that would gain hits for RuNet Echo for sure.** Now, for instance, I'm going to take a deeper look to the social networks and make a text about DDoS attacks on Russian oppositional websites and the political PR.

**What obstacles do you face during you work for the project?** Writing in English when it's not your native language is the most understandable difficulty, I guess. Also, I've never written any texts so resonant they would attract the authorities' attention to me – theoretically it's possible, though. The investigations about Ukraine, where guys use geolocation services and social networks properly, are exactly the texts of that type, texts that in Russia can result in problems. But I've never experienced that so far.