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# MOBILE REPORTING IN THE ASPECT OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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## Abstract

Modern possibilities of people participation in political and social life do not coincide with real practice of civil journalism functioning on terrestrial TV. Amateurs do not compete with professional journalists on TV and are not regarded as equal partners in the context of vague professional identity as they do not follow the proper standards. Mobile reporting materials are mostly cameramen videos, their reports need interpretation and can be interpreted in different ways. There are evident confines in the mobile reporters' activity on terrestrial TV. That is why amateur video are likely to be a mark of democratization and citizen journalism than the phenomenon itself and can be treated as an additional expressive method and mostly from the aesthetic point of view than from real functions of journalism.

*Keywords:* mobile reporting, terrestrial TV, civil journalism, amateur video

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## 1. Introduction

New TV technologies have brought to life journalistic practices based on the alternative ways of producing materials, their usage and consumption. Great variety of amateur video often presented as mobile citizen journalism appeared on TV, in social nets and video hosting. There is different treatment of the amateur journalism phenomenon optimistic and sceptical ones.

New media ideologists stated that new practices of rather high credibility level among the audience will withdraw professional journalism, turning it to the "people to people" model. [J.D. Lasica, *What is Participatory Journalism?* Online Journalism Review, August 7 (2003), <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/10602171063>; D. Gillmor, *We the Media. Grassroot Journalism By the People, For the People*, O'Reilly.com, <http://oreilly.com/catalog/wemedia/book/index.csp>, accessed December 15, 2013; J. Rosen, *The People Formerly Known as the Audience*, PressThink, June 27, 2006, [http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl\\_frmr.html#more](http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html#more), accessed December 10, 2013; 1]. Some researchers tend to evaluate amateur journalism as an additional information resource for professionals [2] others show how professionals keep the decision-making

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power at each stage as journalists are retaining the traditional gate keeping role in adopting people journalism to traditional media, putting it in traditional frames [3].

Professional community reveals an ambivalent attitude to such public practices. International net of independent PR-agencies Oriella PR Network and Buman Media conducted a survey among 550 journalists of 15 countries in Europe, Asia-Pacific region and America. According to the survey public journalism is regarded as a valuable source of information especially in the cases when the coverage is impossible for staff journalists. But not all the respondents are sure that public journalists are trustworthy not less than professionals, some countries are rather positive about such a practice - 58% in France, 43% in India, 37% in China, and some are sceptical - 3% in Great Britain, 2% in Sweden, 1% in New Zealand and 0% in Russia [World journalism trends in 2013, accessed December 15, 2013, <http://www.medianet.kz/2112>].

Mobile reporting phenomenon debates used to be included in professional identity discourse. As an alternative model of journalism it can be treated even as a threat to institutional frames in the field [4]. On the other side “lack of citizen journalists involved in professional sphere, lack of professional skills not injures communication but enriches it making more effective because of breaking of professional stereotypes in presenting information and thanks to more close relations with the audience” [5]. Wilful refuse from professional standards can be defined as a way to overcome the crises of trust to media [6]. Such a trend can be regarded not in the aspect of modern technical possibilities but in a wider context. “What we take as professionalism is amateur performance in fact”, declared more than 10 years ago well-known TV journalist and moderator L. Novozhenov [7].

Contradictive interpretation of the phenomenon is connected with the mobile reporting content role, in particular on terrestrial TV which is still the most popular and accessible channel for such materials. According to the survey of Analytical centre of Yuriy Levada, TV is the main source of information for those, who use the only source (85%); Russians prefer news programs on state channels Perviy (First Channel), Russia-1 and NTV; the aggregate audience of alternative channels, such as Ren TV, Euronews and Dozhd (Rain) is not more than 17-18% [D. Volkov and C. Goncharov, *Russian media landscape: television, press, Internet*, Analytical review of analytical Center of Yuriy Levada, June 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/books/stal-dostupen-otchet-rossiiskii-media-landshaft-televidenie-prensa-internet>]. Being the most widespread TV information becomes also the most trustworthy for the audience.

At the same time, according to Kalmikov [8], in the absence of subject-subject relations on mass TV traditional broadcasting paradigm will be withdrawing by multiple polylog of the subjective information and communication entities. That is why modern attempts of traditional TV channels to be involved in interactions with the audience seemed to be rather artificial. But TV content will change inevitably influenced by new technologies. ‘Form is certainly important but it works if content meets actual trend as a watcher does

not want to remain only a watcher, he wishes to act' [K. Vainshtein, *Diving into reality: what content can do?* Broadcasting, 7 (2009), accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.broadcasting.ru/articles2/content/pogruzhenie-v-realnost-na-chto-sposoben-kontent>]. It's time to define the real situation with amateur/non-professional video on broadcasting TV. Regarding new technologies impact on journalism it should be necessary to understand that emerged media life is realized in the great number of everyday practices and is determined not only by technologies but most with the aggregate economical, social, psychological and other factors [9, 10] and what is the most important to keep in mind - media life should be regarded not in the aspect of communication *with* media but in the aspect of media *usage* [M. Shilina, *Media communication: trends of transformation. New paradigms in mass communication studies*, Mediascope, 5 (2009), <http://www.mediascope.ru/node/404>, accessed December 15, 2013].

The research question is: what does mobile reporting mean as a part of the video TV content on Russian channels? Whether mobile reporting usage on Russian TV really correspond the idea of alternative journalism and reveals the democratic trends of modern TV or it just pretends to relate to participatory communications and people to people journalism model? To answer these questions it is necessary to understand the TV audience treatment of mobile reporting and to evaluate its real functions on TV.

## **2. Background**

Mobile reporting is a part of alternative video content which evidently qualitatively different from the whole video TV content. We can regard the phenomenon in different aspects: production, consumption, profession, quality. Hence we have on TV: materials produced with non-professional equipment; video for administrative usage – out of TV standards; home video produced with any kind of equipment for private view; video for public view but non-professionally produced. It is possible to distinguish such materials while compare them with other broadcasting video: they can be good, for example, for police, but poor for terrestrial TV. Amateur video materials have certain features which define their quality: wrong colours, poor colour balance, camera trembling and jerking, long frames with shooting afoot, excessive zooming in and out, irrational and jerky camera movement, panorama shooting abuse, missing of the frame centre, sound recording with build-in microphone, lack of expressive close-ups and interchanges of plans, poor comments and etc.

In 1997 V. Egorov expected video to become one of the main trends of amateur creative activity development being able to fix the key moments of life [11]. By that time TV practice gave grounds to such statements. Freedom of information in 1990-s and possibilities to acquire home video cameras caused the rise of great interest to amateur filmmaking stimulated by the new TV projects, such as 'Producer myself'.

Amateur video appeared in TV projects in the 1980s and was regarded mostly not in professional but in socio-psychological discourse. Experts pay attention on voyeuristic practices as well as topics preferences of amateur trash-reporters according to the TV audience demands. Waters [H. Waters, *America's Ugliest Home Videos*, Newsweek. June 15 (1992) 59, accessed December 20, 2013, from [http://www.vesti.ru/only\\_video.html?vid=510540](http://www.vesti.ru/only_video.html?vid=510540)] stated that CNN thus legitimize such news events as earthquakes, terrorist attacks, or sports injuries L. Grinstaff [12] opines that 'trash TV' reveals the desire of amateur reporters to appear on television as well as their voyeuristic desires. 'Every sixth American family has a video camera, and according to the observations of critics, they all seem to want their films to be on TV.' She discovers also that despite the challenge to traditional dichotomies (public/private information/entertainment, mind/feelings, etc.) there are many important parallels between the talk shows and 'serious journalism'. In particular they can be found in the selection criteria and the presentation of news on TV - in announcements, formation of the balanced output, stories submitting, etc. According to O. Yatchuk [13] the main motivation for "mobile reporters" in Russia is not to appear on TV but to produce their own video. As for TV channels motivation, amateur video projects can be of commercial interests - financial gain for the company (the sale of advertising time, additional 'off-air' profits, for example, from the sale of tickets for entertainment show with heroes, etc.) And also can bring image dividends that are forming a definite relation to the channel, which declares and demonstrates the openness and willingness to listen to the audience. This motivation - the *income and image* - is embodied in the functioning of amateur video on modern TV.

Taking into account quality requirements on modern television low-quality video on terrestrial channels should have some additional meaningful advantages over the main content and is itself an evidence of something important, when quality can be ignored for the sake of the subject. Two main justification of amateur video on TV can be defined, they are *entertainment and disclosure*, which correlate with commercial and image motivation of its functioning.

Superficial analyses of Russian federal channels content makes it possible to define some constant functions of non-professional video (efficient coverage of sudden and extraordinary cases, investigations, humane stories, entertainment), forms of presentation (short raw documentary evidences without comments or with TV professionals remarks, included in reporters materials, in series of similar videos or in special programs), prevailing topics (terrorist attacks, technical damages, accidents, complaints, social actions, soft news with animals, children, funny cases and etc.). TV channels not only select for broadcast certain subjects, but also try to channel the amateur reporters.

### 3. Method and results

In order to find out whether the 'idea' of mobile reporting corresponds its real practice on terrestrial TV we compared audience expectations and treatment of the amateur video phenomenon and the content of a new TV project *Mobile reporter* (Russia 24 TV channel) based on the audience video materials and aimed at stimulation of the audience participation in actual materials producing. 123 respondents took part in the anonymous survey; all of them are university students, beginners in journalism, potential authors and watchers of mobile reporting projects, Internet users, and social nets participants. The short questionnaire included questions about the ways of amateur video consumption and their attitude to such video. Respondent could rank their answers, but here and further the top variants of their answers are presented for they absolutely reveal the main trends.

1. What are the main source of video information for you?: a) TV channels, b) Internet-resources, c) Nets. Most of the respondents prefer traditional TV – 65%, they also mention professional Internet recourses, among which very often traditional media in the Internet - 26%, as for Nets - only 9% use them as video source (Figure 1).

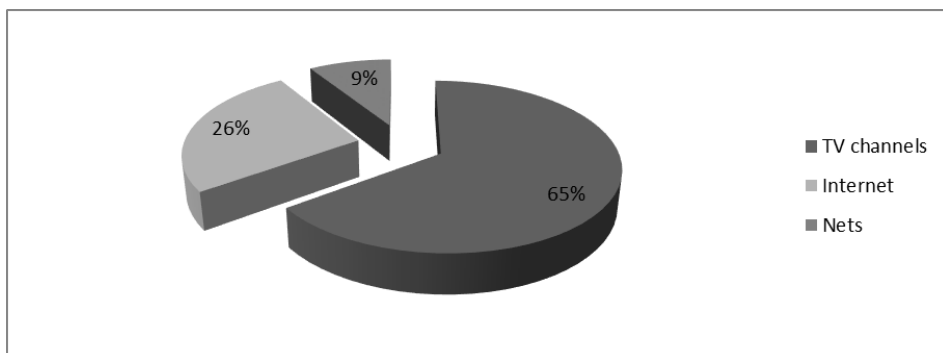


Figure 1. Amateur video consumption.

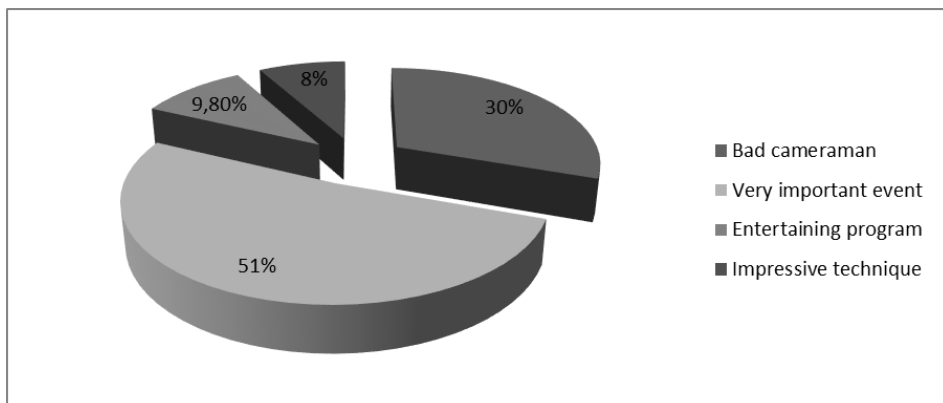


Figure 2. Amateur video treatment.

2. When you watch non-professional video on TV channel you usually think: a) bad cameraman, b) very important event, c) impressive technique, d) entertaining program. Majority of the audience associate amateur video with something very important, also low quality video irritates many respondents (Figure 2).

What video are you going to trust more?: a) professional video of high quality, b) amateur video (mobile video, etc.), c) video presented by authoritative journalist, d) quality does not matter. More than a half of respondent's trusts professionally presented materials, for nearly 1/3 quality does not matter and 13.8% of respondents think that they can trust amateur video (Figure 3).

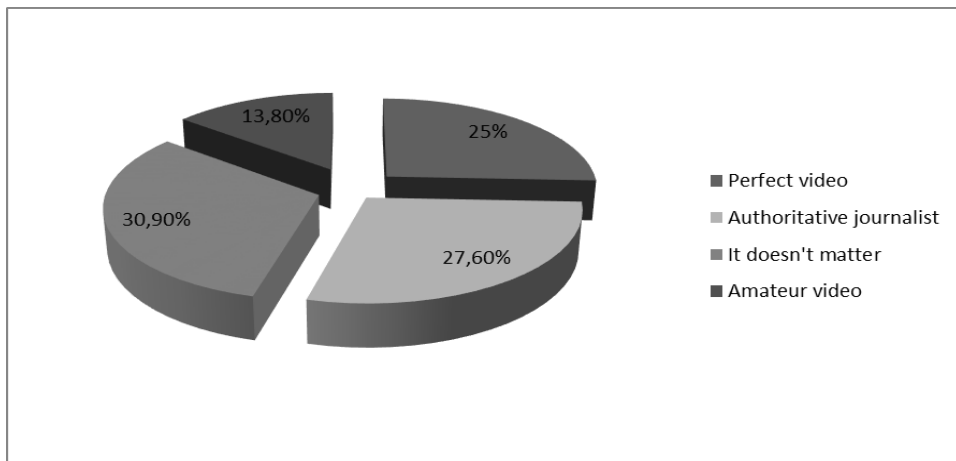


Figure 3. Trustworthy video.

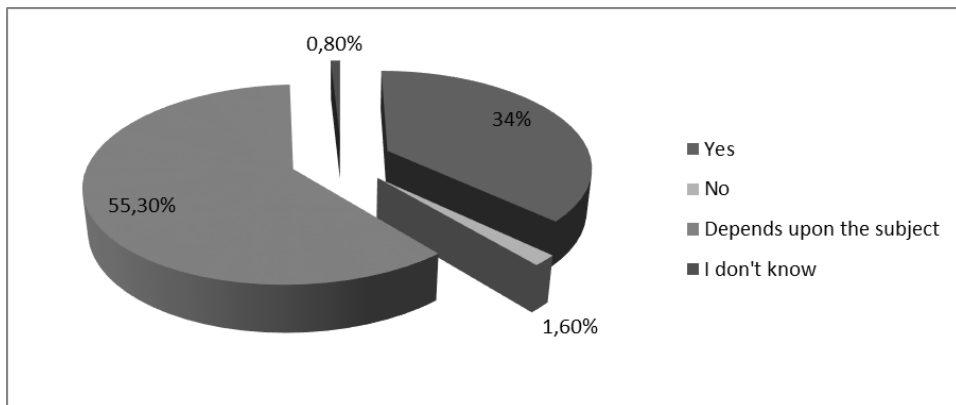


Figure 4. Attitude to the quality of the video.

Is quality of video is important for you in general?: a) Yes, b) No, c) It depends, d) I do not know. As we can see (Figure 4) audience can excuse bad video in case of extraordinary subject and quality of the video is important for the respondents.

Relying on the survey results we can conclude that modern audience, even Internet and gadgets users, prefers high quality video, authoritative professionals and can excuse low quality in case if some important event. This is the one side. On the other side is what terrestrial TV presents as mobile reporting.

*Mobile reporter* was born as an Internet project in November 2010. On 11/02 2013 a weekly 20-minutes issues of *Mobile reporter* appeared on *Russia 24* state channel consisted according to the producers of the most interesting and unusual amateur reports. Authors of the reports which were included in the TV issues receive some fee for the materials. The aim of our research was to define functions of the project on the broadcasting TV – whether the format is really a phenomenon of citizen journalism or it is mostly an image program and demonstrate new democratic aesthetics on the state channel. In the focus of our analyses there were topics, video source, and video quality (video with an anchor comments, video with an author comments, and effectiveness of the publication).

**Table 1.** Mobile reporter content.

<b>Traffic accidents</b>	<b>107 materials</b>	<b>15%</b>
Weather, natural disasters, wonderful weather phenomena	169 materials	23.7%
Incidents, fires, explosions, fights, violations of public order	203 materials	28.5%
Funny and touching videos	106 materials	14.5%
Housing and communal services	38 materials	5.4%
State and reparation of roads	43 materials	6%
Ecology	11 materials	1.5%
Interviews with mobile reporters and skill lessons	20 materials	2.6%
Others - new, non-standard topics	73 materials	10.3%

There are 10000 visits on the *Mobile reporter* site every day, 200 reports are published on-line, 25-30 are shown in the program. First half a year of the program existence has formed the sample – from February to August 2013: 26 issues, 712 reports were shown in the program during the period (Table 1). 275 (38.6%) were created by mobile reporters and were taken from the site; 432 (60.7%) were taken from YouTube and are not the results of the project; 5 (0.7%) of reports were not amateur video and were based on watchers' proposals by professional reporters or were taken from the foreign TV channels. 20% of all the materials were foreign and 3% were professional ones. Mobile reporters' materials with rare exceptions had all the features of amateur video, not less than 20% had more or less perfect comments, had stand-ups and interviews; the rest materials were accompanied with anchor's comments, were supplemented with additional information, internet forums materials and used as a basis for thematic reviews.

Content-analyses revealed several groups of the often topics (some of the materials were put in two or three groups, for example, weather + funny case or violations of public order + funny case, that is why the final amount is more than the sample) which make evident the whole project trends: *accidents, incidents, weather and funny cases are nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all the materials. Social topics are not more than  $\frac{1}{4}$ .* The same trend is observed in the weekly competition TOP-5 (February–June 2013): *in 16 ratings traffic accidents were 8 times on the first line, and 6 times on the second.*

Explosions, fires, traffic accidents, scandals usually are presented as interesting event, as trash, and entertainment overtakes disclosure. There were attempts to improve professional skills of the participants during the first months of the project – camera skills lessons, tips on video editing and etc. But those were not journalism lessons and there was an evident content shift from social topics to weather and accidents reviews during the research period. Participants were motivated to produce the reports devoted to certain topics. First – on some social problems and it made *reporters* fix violations, abuses in various cities in Russia. There were also information about the effects and results of such publications (6 cases). But later attention moved to the weather surprises and traffic accidents probably as the most often and popular events. There was evidently biased coverage of some important political events – riot in Pugachev (July 2013) and elections in Moscow (September 2013) were ignored, and information about Birulevo (October 2013) was presented not with reports but as a series of short advocacy videos with the same slogan *Crime has no nationality*. During the first months of the project the constant reporters-activists appeared, they were invited at the studio to share their experience: how to find a story, how to shoot in difficult weather conditions, how to edit material and etc. Program also promoted some of the internet-projects, such as: ‘helpforest74’, supported by the Ministry of Emergency Measures of Cheliabinsk region; ‘10russia.ru’ – that was a competition of the best videos about the country; and also the public ‘vc.com/typical-chapaevsk’, which became a source of current information while the series of explosions at military warehouses in Chapaevsk. There were few such examples but they took profound tie in the program. Also amateur reporters’ interest to social topics was supported in the beginning with the help of competition ‘Burning issues’. Thus the program received videos about violations and abuses and managed to get positive results of the publications and inform the audience about that (6 times). But very soon the focus of the attention moved to ‘Weather surprises’ and traffic accidents, probably as the most frequent and accessible for the reporter’s cases.

As Manskiy remarked, “it is not enough to make a record. There should be a personality in it. One thing is to inform about something even important and sharp, but quite different is to communicate with people.” [Y. Shekman, *We are witnesses of a catastrophe. Interview with V. Manskiy*, 2013, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2330452>] Mobile reporting practices on TV are mostly cameramen videos, their reports need interpretation and can be interpreted in different ways. The usual form of such materials - short (10-30



sec) video evidence, often without editing, with no comments or with non-professional comments, fragments of stories. There are evident confines in the mobile reporters' activity on terrestrial TV. That is why amateur video are likely to be a *mark* of democratization and citizen journalism than the phenomenon itself and can be treated as an additional expressive method and mostly from the aesthetic point of view than from real functions of journalism. Being included in general video content also as a result of *crowd sourcing* amateur video acquires an additional function of a frank and ingenious view which can produce a favourable contrast with professional materials of high technical quality, and is perceived among the other means of information display on TV. This feature caused the imitation of amateur video style in travel programs, investigations and etc. in order to achieve a documentary impression.

#### **4. Conclusions**

*Mobile reporter* project stimulates people participate in mass communication by arranging competitions and professional training, but amateur TV content is not independent it corresponds channels information policy, and it is used as additional source of information, as a ground for future professional reports and discussions. Mobile reporting materials are mostly cameramen videos, their reports need interpretation and can be interpreted in different ways. Content analyses of mobile reporting project reveal constant functions, prevailing topics and forms of amateur video presentation. There are evident thematic niche for amateur reporting such as local social problems, weather, traffic, accidents and crimes, curious and funny cases.

Modern audience mostly relies on professional quality materials and perfect video except the very important cases coverage.

Amateurs do not compete with professional journalists on TV and are not regarded as equal partners in the context of vague professional identity as they do not follow the proper standards. Modern possibilities of people participation in political and social life do not coincide with real practice of civil journalism functioning on terrestrial TV

Further research should be devoted to certain important cases coverage and comparative analyses of on-line and off-line video materials presentations. Development of mobile reporting media segment can be connected with its verification - professionalization of mobile videos on TV and integration of amateur reporting with social activities in the Internet as in a different communicative environment.

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