

# Regional Online Media as an Instrument of Language Policy: Case Study – Tatarstan, Chuvashia

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a comparative analysis of the regional Internet mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Chuvash Republic. The purpose of this study is to identify the penetration of regional languages into the modern mass media. It is known that among the main ways and methods of public influence on the language functioning, the priority is given to language policy, which is important in forming and changing the language situation in the state and the world. Any policy pursued by the state uses the appropriate technologies to achieve its objectives, and the language policy has its tools of influence and control as well. As one of such tools, we will consider the Internet mass media, which has resulted from the scientific and technological progress, which has radically influenced all spheres of modern society, including the mass media system. This fact predetermines the relevance of the study. The regions are actively implementing innovations in the field of information technology, which have primarily led to the transformation of traditional mass media and the emergence of electronic versions of print mass media, web television, online radio. In view of the Internet media, the researchers also use such terms as “electronic mass media”, “online mass media”, “network journalism”. For the comparative analysis, the authors identified sources of the Internet mass media in the Tatar and Chuvash languages, which are the languages of the titular ethnic groups of the national regions of the Russian Federation. We analyzed the following types of Internet mass media: newspapers, magazines, television and radio. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the Internet mass media has shown the level of functioning of regional languages in certain types of the Internet mass media, as well as the role of regional Internet mass media in preserving and developing the analyzed regional languages. The research results will allow assessing the state of functional capacity of the Tatar and Chuvash languages in the titular regions and becoming an argument for increasing the effectiveness of the regional language policy in the future.

**Key words:** Internet mass media, Regional language, Language policy, Tatar language, Chuvash language

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of Internet mass media was repeatedly raised by researchers in the works on the theory of journalism, which unanimously emphasized the importance of Internet mass media in the modern information society.

In general, the mass media are an important component of the society. The fact that the modern society is formed with an active participation of the mass media remains indisputable. The mass media offer young people the

models for imitation - when children from the national minorities have the opportunity to identify themselves with the prominent figures speaking their language. This can significantly affect their language settings, motivation in choosing the communication language.

The mass media today, as a well-organized structural system, have enormous power over the individual and form certain, often unconscious language tastes, among the consumers of mass communications [1]. Every day the language of the mass media unites millions of people, integrates them into a single information and axiological space, create the nation culture not only inside, but also outside the territory of the Russian state [2].

The activity of the mass media, as a special sphere affecting the ethnic renaissance (or, conversely, the ethnos dissolution), covers education, culture, science, socio-economic, political, legal basis for the development

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www.ijss-sn.com

**Month of Submission** : 05-2017  
**Month of Peer Review** : 06-2017  
**Month of Acceptance** : 07-2017  
**Month of Publishing** : 08-2017

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(or degradation) of ethnic communities. In the really coming information age, the role of print and electronic mass media, which fulfill the function of a mechanism of influencing on the course of national development, is dynamically growing [3].

The development of information and communication technologies has led to the emergence of electronic mass media, which is happening mainly due to the use of the Internet computer network.

According to D. Crystal, one of the six postulates of the theory of language animation is that “a vanishing language will progress, if its speakers can use the electronic technology” [4].

Daniel Cunliff believes that the World Wide Web offers minority languages the opportunity to reach a wide audience at a relatively low cost compared to the traditional mass media. It can be argued that the presence of a minority language in this new mass medium will be just as important for the language survival, as is the presence in the traditional mass media [5].

Lukina defines the Internet mass media as a kind of resources on the Internet, performing the mass media functions in her book. The mass media on the Internet, as well as the traditional mass media - newspapers, television, radio broadcasting - produce information that is created with a certain periodicity by a journalistic collective and reflects the life of society. The Internet technologies empower the Internet mass media with the specific features such as: multimedia, interactivity, hypertext properties [6].

Defining the concept of the “Internet mass media” Vul V.A. emphasizes that the modern meaning of the term should include exactly the electronic form of print publication, or the mass media created directly on the Internet [7].

A.A. Grabelnikov considers the role of network journalism, its relevance in the information processes of the country, in the conditions of changing conjuncture in the free information market in his monograph. The author emphasizes that it is the network mass media that can adequately and timely inform a certain layer of the information-dependent people [8].

Unlike the traditional mass media, the Internet mass media do not require the presence of editorial staff, concentrated in one place and the development of content proposed does not involve the intensive centralized efforts of the society.

In addition to the information and value-regulating functions that are inherent in all mass media, Fomicheva distinguishes the communicative function of the mass media, emphasizes the special importance of the Internet mass media. There is a transition from one-sided to two-sided communication model in the Internet mass media. In the Internet conditions, not only a journalist, but also an audience can participate in the production and exchange of information [9].

Despite the efforts of parents and teachers to speak and teach ethnic dialect in the family and at school, living languages become critically dependent on broadcasting for their continuation and survival. The broadcasting puts some status in its content; so the languages used on the air have legitimacy and are trustworthy in the minds of the audience. This prestigious factor is especially important for children and minorities, since they are the key to the future of minority [10].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The choice of Tatarstan and Chuvashia for the comparative analysis of functional state of the Internet mass media in the titular languages is determined by the quantitative and qualitative indicators. Two regions border each other and belong to the same federal district. The titular population is 53.2% and 67.7% both in Tatarstan and Chuvashia, respectively. In addition, there are about 3% of citizens representing the neighboring titular nation in each of the regions.

The websites and electronic versions of the Internet mass media of Tatarstan and Chuvashia, selected by the method of continuous sampling, served as the work material. In order to study the presence of the Tatar and Chuvash languages in the regional Internet mass media, determine their role in the development and popularization of regional languages, we selected quantitative indicators, rating and attendance of the sites as the criteria.

The review of the Internet mass media of Tatarstan and Chuvashia showed that all types of Internet mass media are represented to some extent in both regions: newspapers, magazines, radio and television. To carry out a direct analysis, we selected the sources of Internet mass media functioning in the regional language and in both regional and Russian languages. The quantitative parameters of the Internet mass media of each of the studied regions - rating and attendance - have been studied using the Internet portal LiveInternet.ru, which provides the statistical analysis of the sites [11].

We also made the content analysis of the Tatar and Chuvash Internet mass media, which allowed revealing the features of providing information to the users, in terms of those signs, whereof the Internet mass media are empowered: multimedia, interactivity, hypertext properties.

The comparative analysis method of the received quantitative and qualitative data allowed determining the effectiveness of functioning of the regional Internet mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Chuvash Republic.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study has showed that there are 137 electronic mass media in the Republic of Tatarstan. The analysis of the Tatarstan Internet mass media revealed that most of them (47) function only in the Tatar language, for example, Intertat, Sheñri Chally electronic newspapers, Meydan Internet magazine, Bolgar radiosy Internet radio, Meydan TV channel, etc. 17 of 32 Internet mass media of Chuvashia provide the information exclusively in Chuvash language (Krasnoe znamya, Put Pobedy, Rodnaya Volga, etc.). In Tatarstan 39 Internet mass media carry out activities in Tatar and Russian languages (Tatar-inform, Idel magazine, TNV TV channel, etc.), while in Chuvashia 11 resources are working in Chuvash and Russian languages (Nashe slovo, Chuvashskiy mir, Igrushka, etc.), thus implementing the law on bilingualism.

According to the received statistics of Livenetnet.ru, the leading positions on the number of visitors are occupied by TNV TV channel and two electronic newspapers - Matbugat.ru and Intertat - that do not have print versions. The statistics of the Chuvash Internet mass media showed that the sites of GTRK-Chuvashiya TV channel, Tavanen (Krai rodnoy) and Ireklesamah (Svobodnoe slovo) electronic newspapers are the most visited (Table 1).

Regarding the sites of TV channels, it should be noted that the data are often changed, since they are presented taking into account that the sites have not only the Tatar or Chuvash version, but the Russian version as well.

According to the statistics of the Tatarstan Internet newspapers, it should be noted that the following positions

in the general rating with a small quantitative difference are occupied by the sites of the city and regional Internet mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan: Hezmat (38<sup>th</sup> place), Saba tannary (40<sup>th</sup> place), Mayak (55<sup>th</sup> place), Sheñri Kazan (55<sup>th</sup> place), Nash Cheremshan (59<sup>th</sup> place), Tugan yak (60<sup>th</sup> place), Yakty yul (61<sup>st</sup> place), Elmet tannary (64<sup>th</sup> place), Vysokogorskiye vesti (66<sup>th</sup> place), Agryzskiye vesti (70<sup>th</sup> place), Kyibitskiye zori (72<sup>nd</sup> place) newspapers. As for the Chuvash Internet newspapers, the Internet portal LiveInternet.ru does not provide their rating indicators. In addition, the readers can find online versions of Chuvash newspapers exclusively on the official portal of the Chuvash Republic [12].

Tatarstan Internet mass media also offer online versions of children and youth magazines: Sabantuy (616 visitors per month), Kumesh kygygyrau (168 visitors per month), Salavat kupere (101 visitors per month), Tatarstan yashlere. While the magazine Tete (Ihrushka) is the only representative of the Internet mass media for children in the Chuvash Republic.

8 radio stations give residents of the Republic of Tatarstan the opportunity to listen to the radio on-line while broadcasting mainly in the Tatar language (Bolgar radiosy, Tatar radiosy, Radio Tatarstana, Tertip, Kurai, Kunel radiosy, Archa radiosy). There is 1 radio station with the Chuvash language of broadcasting in the Chuvash Republic (Table 2).

According to the Internet portal LiveInternet.ru, the most popular resources of Internet TV in Tatarstan are TNV, Maydan, Aksu, the latter of which does not have a traditional form of broadcasting. Also, Tatar TV broadcasting is carried out by other sources of Tatar Internet television, including the municipal and district television resources - TMTV, Chally-TV, Teleche Inform, Almetyevsk TV, GTRK Tatarstan, Archa kheberlere, etc. The Chuvash Internet TV is represented by three websites: Kanash TV, GTRK-Chuvashia and National Television and Radio Company of Chuvashia.

## CONCLUSIONS

In comparison, it is obvious that according to the number of visitors, the Tatar Internet mass media Matbugat.

**Table 1: The rating of the main Tatar and Chuvash online media**

Internet media	The Republic of Tatarstan			The Chuvash Republic		
	NTV	Matbugat.ru	Intertat.ru	GTRK-Chuvashiya	Tavan En (Rodnaya zemlya)	Irekle Samah (Svobodnoe slovo)
Place in the general ranking	32	33	51	18	64	138
Number of visitors (per month)	30,886	30,576	17,670	15,149	1,539	368

**Table 2: Online-radio of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Chuvash Republic**

The Republic of Tatarstan		The Chuvash Republic	
Online-radio	Language of broadcasting	Online-radio	Language of broadcasting
1. Bolgar radiosy	Tatar	National Chuvash radio	Chuvash/Russian
2. Tatar radiosy	Tatar		
3. Radio Tatarstana	Tatar/Russian		
4. Tertip	Tatar		
5. Kurai	Tatar		
6. Kunel radiosy	Tatar		
7. Nokrat	Tatar		
8. Archa radiosy	Tatar		

ru and Intertat.ru are more popular among users than Chuvash online resources. This phenomenon should be linked, firstly, with such an aspect as the website structure. There are thematic headings that facilitate the search for material and the ability to receive information from those areas that the users prefer on the sites Matbugat.ru and Intertat.ru. The second aspect is interactivity. Both Matbugat.ru and Intertat.ru offer their readers to exchange opinions and comment on events highlighted on the pages of sites. Thirdly, the design aspect is also very important, that is, the publication of a textual material is accompanied by a large number of visual materials, graphs, tables, photos and even video materials. Also, the availability of an advertising space, links to other Tatar-language sites, quick access to archives allow expanding the boundaries of users' work with the Tatar Internet newspapers.

Talking about the effectiveness of urban and regional Internet newspapers, it should be noted that most of district residents are the Tatar-speaking population, so it is preferable for them to receive information in the Tatar language about their district or city, neighboring districts and cities, and about the republic as well. The situation of the municipal and district electronic newspapers of Tatarstan is quite optimistic, which indicates the favorable opportunities of residents to read the district and city news in the Tatar language, without the financial costs of subscribing and waiting for new releases.

The editorial offices of the regional and municipal newspapers of Chuvashia also have their own electronic versions, but if the Tatarstan Internet mass media have their own separate websites, then the Internet versions of the Chuvash newspapers can be found by the readers only on the official portal of the Chuvash Republic. This fact is a certain limitation and the reason for the underdevelopment and low popularity of online mass media among the Chuvash readers.

Talking about the Internet mass media as an instrument of language policy, it is important to cover as many layers of the population of different ages as possible. The bulk of users is the younger generation. The youth and children magazines published in the Republic of Tatarstan prevail here.

A special attention should be paid to the Internet radio. Recently there has been a slow pace or even a decline in the broadcasting development. Almost all the services previously provided by the radio are provided by the Internet today. Consequently, the Internet radio is being developed. The situation with Tatar-speaking online broadcasting in Tatarstan should be considered more favorable in comparison with the Republic of Chuvashia, where only one Internet radio resource is provided, which broadcasts in the Chuvash and Russian languages.

The results of activity analysis of the Internet TV in Tatarstan and Chuvashia show that almost every city and district center has its own television in Tatarstan, however, not all of them have the Internet versions. An important difference of Chuvash Internet TV from some Tatarstan ones is the lack of possibility of online broadcasting. The online broadcasting makes it easy for the users to access certain TV channels, some of which require connection of a paid cable television.

## SUMMARY

Thus, the review and analysis of the Internet mass media of Tatarstan and Chuvashia determined that the Tatar online resources play the most complete role in preserving, developing and promoting the regional language. The quantitative characteristics, attendance and rating of websites show a relatively wide development of all components of the Internet mass media sphere of Tatarstan, in comparison with the Republic of Chuvashia. The republican, municipal and district national Internet mass media of Tatarstan are more effective in ensuring the sustainable dissemination of qualitative and socially and culturally useful information, taking into account the language needs of the population, thereby fulfilling the role of an important tool of language policy. These results indicate a difference in the level of effectiveness of the language policy implementation of two regions. Thus, the Republic of Chuvashia, possessing even more favorable quantitative characteristics of the region (the share of the titular population is more than 67%) to enhance the functional potential of the Chuvash language through the media is able to borrow the technologies and approaches used in the Republic of Tatarstan. To date, the Republic of Tatarstan represents one of the best practices for

other regions of the Russian Federation with regard to the multifaceted support of the title language, including using the modern technologies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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**How to cite this article:** Nurutdinova NR, Mustafina JN, Maklakova EM. Regional Online Media as an Instrument of Language Policy: Case Study – Tatarstan, Chuvashia. *Int J Sci Stud* 2017;5(5):349-353.

**Source of Support:** Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.