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E. V. Rodionova, J. P. Bayer

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МЕСТО СПАСЕНИЯ ИЛИ МУЧЕНИЯ: ОБРАЗ РУССКОЙ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЦЕРКВИ В СВЕТСКИХ СМИ ВО ВРЕМЯ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19

Elizaveta V. RODIONOVA[1] — Cand. Sci. (Soc.), Associated Professor at the Department of Sociology of Culture and Communication
E-MAIL: e.v.rodionova@spbu.ru
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1787-4025

Julia P. BAYER[2] — Cand. Sci. (Soc.), Associate Professor at the Department of Social Technologies
E-MAIL: bayer-yp@ranepa.ru
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1866-3633

[1] Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia
[2] North-West Institute of Management, branch of RANEPA, Saint Petersburg, Russia

РОДИОНОВА Елизавета Валерьевна — кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры социологии культуры и коммуникации, Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Санкт-Петербург, Россия
E-MAIL: e.v.rodionova@spbu.ru
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1787-4025

БАЙЕР Юлия Паулевна — кандидат социологических наук, доцент кафедры социальных технологий, Северо-Западный институт управления РАНХиГС, Санкт- Петербург, Россия
E-MAIL: bayer-yp@ranepa.ru
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1866-3633

Abstract. Hjarvard in his work "Mediatization and religion" noted that it is becoming increasingly difficult to control public representations of religion in the media. The difficulty is that religious media, religious journalism, and "banal religion" speak very different languages. During the pandemic, a debate broke out among believers and non-believers about whether to close churches and parishes on the quarantine period. By the decree of the Patriarch, all services in churches were to be performed without the participation of the parishioners. The secular media did not stay away the discussion either. In our study, we analyse a number of texts (articles) from three major news portals: Fontanka.ru (regional level, Saint Petersburg), the newspaper "Arguments and Facts" (Federal level) and the newspaper "Moskovsky Komsomo-

Аннотация. В работе «Медиатизация и религия» С. Хьярвард отметил, что становится все труднее контролировать публичные репрезентации религии в СМИ. Сложность заключается в том, что религиозные СМИ, религиозная журналистика и «повседневная религия» говорят на разных языках. Во время пандемии среди верующих и неверующих разгорелись споры о том, закрывать ли церкви и приходы на период карантина. По указу патриарха все службы в храмах должны были совершаться без участия прихожан. Не остались в стороне от обсуждения этого вопроса и светские СМИ. В нашем исследовании мы проанализировали ряд текстов (статей) трех крупных новостных порталов. Это портал «Фонтанка» (региональный уровень, Санкт-Петербург), портал газеты «Аргументы

lets" (regional level, Moscow). Articles were analysed for the period from March 15 to June 15, 2020. The main working hypothesis was the assumption that the image of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the secular media would change depending on the actions of the Church itself during the pandemic, but in general it would be reproduced rather in a negative way. The content analysis of the data confirmed this hypothesis, both for the media and for their audience. The desire of the ROC to perform services during the pandemic was considered in the media as a wrecking activity that threatens the lives of parishioners. Also The Russian Orthodox Church in the pandemic intensified the process of digitalization of interaction with parishioners.

и факты» (федеральный уровень) и портал газеты «Московский комсомолец» (региональный уровень, Москва). Статьи анализировались за период с 15 марта по 15 июня 2020 г. Основной рабочей гипотезой было предположение, что имидж Русской православной церкви (РПЦ) в светских СМИ будет меняться в зависимости от действий самой Церкви во время пандемии, но в целом воспроизводиться скорее в негативном ключе. Данные контент-анализа подтвердили эту гипотезу как для СМИ, так и для их аудитории. Желание РПЦ вести богослужения во время пандемии было расценено в СМИ как вредительство, угрожающее жизни прихожан. РПЦ в период пандемии активизировала процесс цифровизации взаимодействия с паствой.

Keywords: mediatization, Russian Orthodox Church, secular media, digitalization, social stereotypes

Ключевые слова: медиатизация, Русская Православная Церковь, светские медиа, цифровизация, социальные стереотипы

Introduction & Theoretical framework

The modern world has experienced shock caused by the coronavirus pandemic: traditional economic chains, cultural ties have been disrupted and personal communication has become a luxury. Some people lost their jobs and livelihoods, while for others the time of quarantine and self-isolation has become a real psychological "test of strength".

The Church is one of the main social institutions that is supposed to meet the spiritual needs of the population together with science, art as well as spiritual leaders of all kinds, coaches and media influencers. For science as a social institution, pandemic time was rather hard because of incapability of science to answer many questions concerning nature of disease and ways of its treatment.

In times of crisis and ambiguity the Church is supposed to meet the spiritual needs of the population, and the way this social institution acted during the global pandemic when the population was in extreme need for support and comfort (being isolated and in a state of fear for their lives) has become the subject of our studies. In these pandemic times, communications between the Church and the population we consider to be a kind of "moment of truth". But we should not forget, that during the coronavirus pandemic, ordinary people were not able to participate in the life of the Church and

could only get the necessary information about church services and parishes from various media.

During the pandemic, the role of the media has increased significantly, and they have become the only source of information about life outside the apartment, house, room, where ordinary people were isolated.

In such difficult times, one can observe how the interception of the leading role in satisfying spiritual needs took place, and here the media has started to play the leading role, since only through various media channels it is possible to address a person in self-isolation. Thus, if we argue in the frame of S. Hjarvard's logic, the media itself has become "religious" institution, thus, competing with religion for the right to satisfy the spiritual needs of the population [Hjarvard, 2008].

The Church is among those social institutes in our contemporary society that is supposed to meet the spiritual needs of the population. Though we do realize that there are already other institutions that have taken over the function of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), in this very article we will focus on the ROC. It is obvious that trust in the church has been steadily declining even before the outbreak of the pandemic. So, we will consider and put under research such a problem as how an external shock (coronavirus) affected coverage of a church institution that was already in crisis in media. That is, we can surely say that the Russian Orthodox Church, enduring a long-term communicative crisis, in the pandemic times was facing a challenge of fast and adequate communication with authorities, media and parishioners.

It would be fair to note that religious organizations, and, above all, the Russian Orthodox Church, was already in, to put it mildly, in not easy connection with the mass media and thus, its image in public opinion was no longer perfect.

D. Uzlaner, analyzing these processes, concludes that today the "Pro-Orthodox consensus" is being destroyed and new points of contradictions and conflicts are being formed both within the ROC itself and between the ROC and various actors in social life [Uzlaner, 2020].

It should be noted that during the 90-s various sociological studies showed both an increase in the number of believers and a high level of trust in the ROC [Sinelina, 2013; Chesnokova, 2005; Furman, Kaariainen, Karpov, 2007]. D. Furman, V. Karpov and K. Kaariainen believed that there is a Pro-Orthodox consensus in Russian society as one of the most striking manifestations of the so-called "religious revival" in post-Soviet Russia. Using this concept, they expressed the idea that the "good" and "very good" attitude to Orthodoxy becomes a strong and "unconditional" attitude of the vast majority, almost universal [Furman, Kaariainen, Karpov, 2007: 20]. This consensus is nation-wide, "because the proportion of 'positive' and 'very positive' attitude to Orthodoxy is significantly greater than the proportion of believers" [ibid.: 22]. Paradoxically, not only believers but also the vast majority of those who identify themselves as "hesitating", "non-believers" and even "atheists" are "good" about Orthodoxy [ibidem].

The problem of pandemic and its reflections in media is actual too. Among recent publications on COVID-19 and media content analysis there should be noted an article by Ogbodo et al. "Communicating health crisis: a content analysis of global media framing of COVID-19" [Ogbodo et al., 2020]. The study investigates the global media framing of coronavirus. Ogbodo et al. argue that periods of health crisis such as the

outbreak of coronavirus pandemic add to the enormous burden of the media in keeping people constantly informed. The conclusions of this study we took into account in our research and they coincided with the results of studies mentioned above: (1) Global media coverage of COVID-19 was high, but the framing lacks coherence and sufficient self-efficacy which can be associated with **media's obsession for breaking news**; (2) The preponderance of these frames not only shapes public perception and attitudes towards the pandemic but also risks **causing more problems for those with existing health conditions due to fear or panic attack**.

So far, the study by Ogbodo et al. is one of many most related to that of ours and it shows that mass media's as well as general population's reaction to crisis is all similar in whatever country is being taken into the research. Other publications on the subject all seem to be alike in observing, interpreting and extrapolating the situation, as well as its conclusions about media seeking for getting attention, uplifting ratings, thus, earning money and increasing of panic among consumers of this media as a result [Ogbodo et al., 2020].

It should also be taken into account that in recent years there has been no growth in the number of believers, and trust in the ROC is declining, in particular under the influence of the media. Another sign of the new reality is that religion is at the center of constant conflicts that are widely discussed in the media [Filatov, 2014; Rodionova, 2018]. E. Rodionova notes that there are contradictions concerning Orthodox organizations [Rodionova, 2018]. On the one hand, sociological research shows a high level of approval of the Church's activities. She underlines that the mass media in the news series constructed a conflicting image of the public perception of the ROC. According to the sociologist, religious contradictions or events that are somehow related to the sphere of activity of the ROC become conflictual due to dramatization in the media. Conflicts arise only when religious problems and issues are brought into the political and economic field, where there is a struggle for resources.

It should be noted that modern mass media — television, radio, Internet, messengers, and telegram channels have a huge power and influence. If earlier it was usual to consider the media as one of the social institutions in society, which performs certain functions by interacting with other social institutions, then in the last 15-20 years sociologists, philosophers are talking about the mediatization of society. The study of the processes of mediatization of society is developing in two directions:

1. *Institutional,* which is presented in the works of S. Hjarvard [Hjarvard, 2008, 2012], K. Lundby [Lundby, 2011], M. Lövheim [Lövheim, 2011];

2. *Socio-constructivist,* which is developed in the works of A. Hepp [Hepp, 2020] and N. Couldry [Couldry, 2012].

For both of these traditions, the process of mediatization is the basis for research, despite the different logics of building these studies and different theoretical paradigms. It includes research on mediatization of politics, science, and religion [see, for example, Krotz, 2009; Hepp, 2020; Campbell, 2013]. Thus, we can say that the role of both media and mediatization processes is significant and relevant for research.

We should take into account contemporary global trend that all social institutions are forced to change the way they interact with their participants, as there is a technological change and expansion of the possibilities for this interaction, and these technical

capabilities in many ways force social institutions (including religious ones) to obey the logic of the media. It is for this reason that the possibility of online confession is being discussed. The genre of conversations with a priest is being developed and popularized in a real TV studio with elements of such journalistic traits as a provocation, dramatization, infotainment, and others. Spiritual leaders conduct their blogs. This kind of development, digitalization, and computerization of traditional forms of religious interaction are of great interest. However, it is necessary to understand that such genres have their narrow audience which is interested in them and may even know the main issues of religion and faith. For such an audience, modern religious organizations, including the ROC, are actively developing various religious media — TV channels ("SPAS", "Mir"), glossy magazines ("Foma", "Vinograd"), Telegram channels, and social media communities.

But what is significant — how the secular media represent the activities of religious organizations, as they influence the formatting of opinions about them and their image in the eyes of the public. And it is undoubtedly the Russian Orthodox Church that occupies a special place here, as one of the key religious organizations in our country.

We believe that the modern ROC is losing out in information policy to the modern media, which, in fact, carry out this policy for the Church itself, and implements it, of course, in its own interests and by its specific methods. We should understand that media have a great influence on forming stereotype attitudes to the various problems, issues, and themes. That is, if the individual has no individually or within the family formed attitudes on certain problems or issues, he/she is influenced by the media. W. Lippman, in his classic work "Public opinion", described this process as following: "We are told about the world before we see it. We get an idea of most things before we directly encounter them. And if the education we have received does not help us clearly understand the existence of these biases, then they control the process of perception" [Lippman, 2004: 57].

It happens pretty often that the opinion about a particular event is already formed by journalists for us. This, of course, makes it easier to receive and digest information from a large flow of it, but often excludes the possibility of a critical understanding of it for most recipients. In this way, journalists take the role of opinion leaders, promoting their vision of the world, events, and cause-and-effect relationships to a wide audience [Kirsanova, Korotina, 2011].

Thus, we can say that the media can largely determine the image of the ROC, the attitude to its activities in public opinion.

The point here is the fact that the media construct their field of meanings for the actions of the ROC, omitting the religious component, or describing it in completely different concepts and terms [Khroul, 2018].

A. Semenova and M. Korsunskaia emphasize that the cultural power of journalism is rooted in its ability to mobilize faith and consent in the public consciousness through the reporting of stories, facts, etc., which are perceived as the most likely because they are journalistic [Semenova, Korsunskaia, 2010]. Thus, the scholars argue that the producers of journalism are forced to constantly assert and confirm their status by methods that demonstrate "plausibility" to the audience. Journalism, therefore, is an ideological power communication that not only provides facts but also offers a way to understand them and make sense of these facts [ibidem].

That is why the vector of secular media's work with the Russian Orthodox Church is of empirical interest. Can these trends, mentioned by Khroul [Khroul, 2018], Uzlaner [Uzlaner, 2020] and others, be confirmed?

To identify the object of our study correctly, namely secular media, we will rely on the concept of the mediatization of religion by S. Hjarvard [Hjarvard, 2012]. He was sure that mediatization not only affects other social fields or institutions in a variety of ways but also signifies a new social and cultural condition in which the media in general come to serve a different role in culture and society [ibidem].

S. Hjarvard supposes that the mediatization of religion is changing the public representation of religion and is evoking both a decline and a transformation of religious organizations, practices, and beliefs. He suggested *three different forms of mediatized religions* and each of these involves a particular way of communicating about religion in the public sphere: (1) *religious media*, (2) *journalism on religion,* and (3) *banal religion* [ibid.: 24].

Let's give a brief overview of what each of these notions means according to S. Hjarvard. When we speak about the first form — *religious media* we think about media organizations and practices that are primarily controlled and performed by religious actors. This control can be conducted collectively (by a church) or individually [ibid.: 28]. Examples of such religious media in Russia are TV channels "SPAS" and "MIR", radio stations "Maria" or "Grad Petrov".

The second form is connected to media, which through genres, portray religion through the frames of secular society, often involving a critical discourse on religious organizations [ibid.: 31]. The examples of such *journalism on religion* can be found everywhere in secular media. When we watch the TV-reportage about Orthodox Easter, or Islamic Ramadan or read news about Deacon Andrey Kouraev in the newspaper "Arguments and Facts"[1], these are examples of journalism on religion.

The third form of mediatization can be found everywhere in pop culture — it means the use of religious symbols and rituals in everyday life, for example, advertisement, popular situation comedies, TV-series. S. Hjarvard explains that "*banal religion* makes use of a variety of rituals and symbols from institutionalized religions (e. g., crosses, monks and prayers) as well as folk religions (e. g., black cats, witches, and vampires), but mixes and rearticulates them in new contexts relatively independent of their traditional meanings" [ibid.: 35].

Thus, based on the theoretical views of S. Hjarvard, we consider the secular media and the peculiarities of forming the image of the ROC in them during the coronavirus pandemic as the object of our research.

While studying the peculiarities of forming the image of the ROC in the media we assume that the key point is the concept of "meaning", which is the factor of selecting newsworthy events in huge information flow. D. Gavra, for example, also points out the role of journalists in this process. It is the subjective human factor that affects whether a particular event goes into news and whether a particular event is "newsworthy" [Gavra, Dekalov, 2018].

Thus, events that occur in religion are transmitted to us through the prism of the perception of a particular journalist and editor of the publication. If we take into account

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[1] Andrey Kouraev — Russian religious and public figure, writer, theologian, philosopher.

that dramatization of information messages as a way of forming public opinion takes place and this principle is actively used not only by domestic but also by world media, then it becomes obvious which events are being regularly chosen for publication, including in the sphere of religion.

The question arises as to whether such trends exist, and what is the role of the media in these processes. We need to decide how we understand what the media is and how we are going to explore it. The concept of mass media has a long history, but due to the transformation of information transmission channels, it is very difficult to isolate the media according to the traditional principle — print, television, radio, and the Internet. The vast majority of traditional media now have their electronic duplicates, where they promptly publish the latest news. Radio stations and TV channels also broadcast through their Internet portals, complementing them with constant inter-action with the audience through groups in social networks and various messengers (Telegram, WhatsApp). Such a variety of channels for transmitting information puts the researcher in a difficult position. We consider that it is necessary to choose information platforms and justify this choice in order not to be drown in the flow of analyzed data. In our case, by *media* we mean information portals aimed at a mass audience (more than ten thousand subscribers, listeners, viewers), operating on different platforms, and interacting with the audience through different communication channels (groups in social networks, telegram channels, messengers, forums). The structure of such media can be represented as follows (see figure 1):
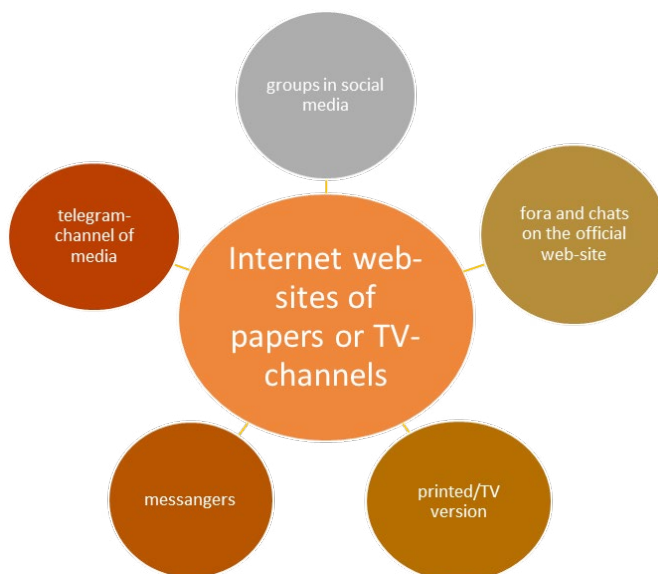

Fig. 1. The structure of contemporary media

Figure 1 shows the structure of modern media and it includes many channels of interaction with the audience, and for media with history, the traditional format (print-

ed edition, TV broadcast) takes a back seat and becomes only a brief repetition of what is published on the website of the information portal. *Media is an information hub that includes a set of information distribution channels and, depending on the goals, objectives, and specific conditions of communication, the core of the media is an Internet website where the main news materials are published. In addition to the site as the core of the media, a specific channel or several channels for transmitting information are selected: a traditional print format (or TV broadcast), groups in social networks, forums and chats for interacting with the audience, and a telegram channel for quickly spreading information among subscribers.*

Research techniques & Results

Thus, the object of our analysis is the core of this media structure, namely the Internet site. The focus of our research is on secular media, for which religion and religious topics are not the key issues for coverage. For the analysis, we selected several news portals. When choosing news portals, we relied on data from "Medialogy" and "Mediascope"[2]. According to data from "Medialogy", "Arguments and Facts" and "Moskovsky Komsomolets" are among the top ten newspapers in terms of citations in Russia (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. ***Summary table for news publications based on the data from "Medialogy"***

News edition, portal	Citation Index	Social media hyperlinks
Arguments and Facts	144.96	587 999
Moskovsky Komsomolets	455.37	360 811
Fontanka.ru	386.53	121 423

* Analyzed period: May 2020.

Additionally, the data from "Medialogy" were compared with the data from "Mediascope"**.**

Table 2. ***Summary table for publications based on the data from "Mediascope"***

News edition, portal	AIR, thousands of people	AIR, %
Arguments and Facts	3996.2	6.5
Moskovsky Komsomolets	504.4	0.8

 * Analyzed period: December 2019 — April 2020.

** AIR (Average Issue Readership) or Audience of a single issue: the average number of readers of a single issue of the publication. It can be expressed in thousands of people or as a percentage of the represented population.

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[2] "Medialogia" is a Russian company that develops an automatic system for monitoring and analyzing media and social networks in real time. "Medialogy" products are used by leading commercial companies, government ministries and departments, as well as regional administrations. "Medialogia" automatically processes 500 thousand media messages and 100 million social media messages per day. For more details see URL: https://www.mlg.ru/ (date of access: 23.12.2020). "Mediascope" is a technological research company, the leader of the Russian market of media research, advertising and media monitoring. For more details see URL: https://mediascope.net/en/ (date of access: 23.12.2020).

Based on the results of data analysis of the two companies, we identified two newspaper portals "Arguments and Facts" and "Moskovsky Komsomolets" at the Federal level, as they were presented in the data of both "Medialogy" and "Mediascope". This was the reason for including them in the sample. The rest of the top media are not included in two ratings at the same time, they are mentioned either in one ("Medialogia") or in the other ("Mediascope"). The Portal "Fontanka.ru" was involved in the study, as it is the only regional news website included in the top ten Federal media[3]. In developing the Protocol for content analysis of the media, we relied on the methodology developed by the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences and described in detail by A. Semenova, and M. Korsunskaia in the book "Content analysis of mass media: problems and practices" [Semenova, Korsunskaia, 2010].

The study aimed to identify the main components of the image of the ROC constructed in the media during the pandemic. Following this goal, several tasks were formulated:

— Identification of the ratio of positive and negative publications on the effectiveness of the ROC during the pandemic;
— Highlighting the main parameters that construct a negative image of the ROC;
— Highlighting the main parameters that construct a positive image of the ROC;
— Identification of information priorities of news portals;
— Highlighting the main topics in describing the activities of the ROC during the pandemic in the media.

The empirical base of the research consisted of publications in the media for the period from 15.03.2020 to 15.06.2020, which were dedicated to events and actions of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Covid-19 pandemic. The analyzed period covers the most severe quarantine requirements and contains the largest number of publications on the topic. During the selected period, 94 articles were published on the "Moskovsky Komsomolets" portal, 44 publications on the "Arguments and Facts" website, and 41 articles — on the "Fontanka.ru" portal. Thus, the total number of publications we analyzed, was 179 articles.

The unit of analysis in this study was an article about the ROC, published during the pandemic. The search was performed automatically through the search engine of the analyzed sites. In the search bar, the label "ROC" was formulated and then all the articles, where there is a mention of *the ROC* published during the pandemic, were highlighted.

The account units were article volume (number of lines), the section for publication, type of publication, and main actors of the article. Content analysis was performed in two stages: at the first stage, manifest encoding was performed, data was entered into the "SurveyMonkey database"[4], and at the second stage, additional analysis of data in the database was performed by semantic blocks (latent encoding).

The main working hypothesis of the study was the assumption that the image of the ROC in the media will change depending on its actions, but, in any case, it

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[3] For more information about the rating, see URL: https://www.mlg.ru/ratings/media/federal/7491/ (date of access: 12.06.2020).

[4] For more information about the program, see URL: https://www.surveymonkey.com (date of access: 23.12.2020).

will be more negative than positive. Articles about positive (for example, charitable) activities of the ROC will be presented at a minimum.

The discussion of the results

Let's look at the results of media content analysis. Since the number of articles for each of the sources is less than 100, we use data in percentages when describing the total array, and in absolute values for individual sources. The number of publications varies depending on the period. When compiling the content analysis Protocol, we divided the entire pandemic period into two-week segments, since this is the period during which significant changes could occur both in quarantine measures and in the activities of the ROC.

From the data presented in table 3, we can see that the largest number of publications, almost a third of the total analyzed array, were published between April 16 and April 30. A significant amount of material about the ROC and the pandemic is present and 41 articles on the topic were published in the first two weeks of the quarantine from April 01 to April 15. After April 30, the number of publications goes down and consistently decreases every two weeks.

Table 3. *Distribution of publication materials by a quarantine period*

Quarantine period	Percentage of total articles analyzed (%)	Number of publications
March 15−31	24.0	43
April 01−15	22.9	41
April 16−30	27.9	50
May 1−15	11.8	21
May 16−30	10.1	18
June 01−15	3.3	6
Total	100	179

The fact that the largest number of publications appeared in the media in the period from April 16 to April 30 can be explained by the presence of relevant information occasions: April 12 was Palm Sunday, and on this day many people gathered for the service in different regions of the country, April 19 was Easter, and one of the key issues was the question of holding festive services on this day in churches.

But the second largest number of publications is the pre-quarantine period from March 15 to March 31, 2020, and here we see almost a quarter of the total volume of analyzed articles. Since the population in this period had an extreme need to get information about new living rules and conditions during the pandemic. Hence this time can be described as the most difficult in implementing communication. Still, media, with a large volume of published information on the topic, did not satisfy the needs of the audience. Thus, we can say that the huge *amount* of information was not compensated by its *quality*.

To understand the hottest and most discussed events and topics related to the activities of the ROC, let's look at the results of latent encoding. Let's briefly describe

this procedure. The content analysis Protocol included an open question about the topic of each analyzed publication and a brief description of the topic of the article or publication. After the entire data set was collected, the texts of this open question were analyzed again, and each topic was assigned a tag. During latent encoding, ten such labels were allocated, i. e. ten key events related to the ROC that the media wrote about and which received the greatest public response:

1. Covid-19 Disease.
2. The closure of churches.
3. Financial assistance to parishes and the Russian Orthodox Church.
4. Prayer service from coronavirus.
5. Prayer against coronavirus.
6. Violation of the quarantine ban by ROC representatives.
7. New rules of service in the ROC.
8. ROC assistance to patients with coronavirus.
9. Events in the Ural monastery — Monk Sergius[5].
10. Death from coronavirus.

Table 4 shows the thematic ratio of publications in different periods of quarantine and pandemic.

*Table 4. **Thematic correlation of materials in different periods of the pandemic (number of articles)***

Label /Period	March	April		May		June	Total for the entire period
	15−31	1−15	16−30	1−15	16−30	1−15	
Disease-coronavirus	2	3	13	1	3	0	22
The closure of churches	12	16	9	0	1	0	38
Financial assistance to parishes and the Russian Orthodox Church	0	0	1	1	2	0	4
Prayer service from coronavirus	6	6	2	0	0	0	14
Prayer against coronavirus	4	0	1	2	1	0	8
Violation of the quarantine ban by ROC representatives	6	6	8	2	2	0	24
New rules of service in the ROC	12	6	4	1	4	4	31
ROC assistance to patients with coronavirus	1	1	5	3	2	0	12
Events in the Ural monastery	0	0	0	0	2	1	3
Death from coronavirus	0	3	7	11	1	1	23

[5] Sredneuralskaya abode was "captured" by the infamous schemer Sergiy (Romanov), who previously publicly denied the existence of the coronavirus and called for a fight against "mass chipization of the population". The Church leadership forbade him to preach, and later to serve, but the rebellious monk decided to act differently. Father Sergius gained popularity among the faithful in the early noughties, when he became the first Abbot of the monastery in Ganina Yama. The monastery is especially revered by many Orthodox Christians as the place of the first burial of the remains of the Royal family.

Out of 43 publications made during this period, 12 discussed the issue of closing churches for the period of quarantine, another 12 articles reported on the new rules for conducting services in churches, 6 articles were devoted to the violation of the quarantine ban in different parishes, as well as 6 publications were devoted to prayers against coronavirus, which were held in different parts of our country. Only 2 articles reported on the disease, representatives of the clergy, 1 article discussed how the ROC will help patients with coronavirus, and 4 articles discussed the prayer from the coronavirus proposed by Patriarch Kirill.

We can see that at the initial stage there was an active discussion of the need to close churches for quarantine, and there was no consensus among the clergy on this issue. In the second stage, from April 01 to April 15, the issue of closing churches also remained the main one, but there were publications about the illness and death of clergy from coronavirus. If at the first stage there were only two publications on the illness of the clergy, then at the second period, the number of articles on the illness and death of the clergy tripled and amounted to 3 notes on the illness of priests and 3 more articles on the death of clergy members from coronavirus.

The largest number of publications occurred during the third phase of the pandemic, from April 16 to April 30. The topic of 20 out of 50 articles during this period is the illness and death of priests from coronavirus. Articles in this period are a summary of the battlefields. In second place in the number of publications during this period is the topic of closing churches (9 articles) and another 8 articles describe how the ROC violates the quarantine ban. Thus, the image of the ROC was constructed as a source danger of infection, as a social institution that does not fulfill its social function of spiritual support, which is especially relevant in the crisis period.

Against the background of the total number of negative publications, 5 articles about the ROC's assistance to believers during the pandemic remained almost unnoticed.

In the next, fourth stage of the pandemic, from May 01 to May 15, the number of publications on the death of priests from coronavirus increases (11 articles), but the number of publications on the disease of priests decreases (only 1) so that the total number of publications on the disease and death from coronavirus among the clergy decreases to only 12 articles.

On the fifth and sixth stages of the pandemic, there is a steady decline of media interest in the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church and a reduced number of publications on the subject, and if in the fifth stage there are 18 articles on the subject, then at the last stage there are just 6. This can be explained by the fact that the quarantine restrictions were canceled, and churches and parishes resumed their work as usual.

One of the main markers of the importance of the topic of the published material is the volume of the article. It should be noted that we are limited by the cognitive and research potential of content-analysis as a method. This method supposes using a number of quantitative indicators. And in classical content-analysis the volume of the article is the marker of its "newsworthy" [see, for example, Semenova, Korsunskaia, 2010]. Surely in the frame of qualitative methods this indicator should be explained and justified relying on the notion of importance. But the limits of quantitative content-analysis do not allow to dig in this almost philosophical problem very deep.

The data presented in table 5 shows that there is a significant interest in the information events that the ROC creates. Small notes up to 10 lines make up only 15 % of the total volume of publications, the most frequent are medium-sized publications from 11 to 30 lines, but there is also a certain number of very large, expanded publications, so-called long reads (14 %). 10 % are articles of volume from 31 to 50 lines.

Table 5. **The volume of published articles on the research topic**

Number of lines	%	Number of publications
Less than 10 lines	15.2	27
From 11 to 30 lines	60.7	108
From 31 to 50 lines	10.1	18
More than 51 lines	14.0	26
Total	100	179

Next, we will consider the main genre features of coverage of the ROC's activities during the pandemic. At the stage of development of the content analysis Protocol, when identifying the main genres, we relied on the work by A. Kolesnichenko "The principles of journalistic activity" [Kolesnichenko, 2018].

And in our case, we mean by an informational note-Informing about the event through answers to the main questions (*Who*? *What*? *Where*? *When*? and others) and in descending order of importance of the information. In some cases, it may be expanded, in some cases, it may be short. An analytical review is the presentation of a thesis and its subsequent proof or clarification based on facts and expert assessments with a detailed description of the situation and an overview of various points of view on the topic of the publication. An interview as a genre is a conversation with a person on a given topic or issue [ibidem].

Table 6 presents data on the type of publications, and we see that information notes predominate, there is some part of analytical reviews, but it is only 13 % of all materials. Data from tables 5 and 6 correlate with each other, and the analytical review in most cases is a large article with more than 50 lines. If we are talking about such a genre as an informational note, then most of them are not short news, but rather a detailed news item with a volume of 11 to 30 lines.

Table 6. **Distribution of materials by the type of publication**

Type of publication	%	Number of publications
Information note	82.0	146
Interview	5.0	9
Analytical overview	13.0	24
Total	100	179

These data show us that the media has a great interest in the activities of the ROC and events that take place in the bosom of the Church, but all the news touch non-religious topics. Here we see confirmation of S. Hjarvard's thesis that the media

are interested in religion, religious issues, and problems, but represent them with their language tools and techniques, guided primarily by editorial policy and current news agenda [Hjarvard, 2012]. An extremely small share of interviews in the mass of publications about the ROC in the media indicates, on the one hand, that representatives of the ROC are not sources of information about its activities, on the other hand, it may be part of the media's information policy, which seeks to give its vision, thus replacing the function of a religious institution in society.

The significance of the ROC for society is constructed by placing materials in the relevant sections. Consider the thematic distribution of articles by section, which is presented in table 7, more than half of the publications (56.7 %) are presented in the section "Society" and almost forty percent (39.3 %) are presented in a special section called "Chronicles of the Pandemic". This subsection was also on the portal of "Moskovsky Komsomolets" and the portal of "Arguments and Facts". Thus, the ROC as a social institution appears in the media as an important participant in social processes and as an organization that contributes to the spread of the pandemic.

Table 7. **Distribution of materials in sections**

Website section	%	Number of publications
Politics	2.3	5
Society	56.7	101
Culture	1.1	2
Accidents	0.6	1
Other (Pandemic Chronicles)	39.3	70
Total	100	179

It is interesting who is represented as a subject of religious relations in various publications. We hypothesized that the main actor will be the clergy and through various negative events its image will be constructed negatively, but this hypothesis was only partially confirmed (see table 8).

Table 8. **Main actors of publications (more than one response, the total number of responses received is not equal to 100 %)**

Actors	%	Number of publications
Priests, clergy	54.8	98
Officials, administration	11.8	21
Laypeople, parishioners	49.7	89
Other	2.2	4

The data that are introduced in table 8, show that most articles mention clergy and priests (54.8 %), 49.7 % of publications refer to laypeople, parishioners, and only 11.8 % of actors are officials and administration. If we look at the data for each of the portals separately, we will see significant differences. In the case of the portal of the newspaper "Moskovsky Komsomolets", our hypothesis was confirmed and in 91 publications out of 94, the actors were priests and clergy. But on the portal "Fontanka.ru" and

"Arguments and Facts" the main actors of publications were laypeople, parishioners (38 articles on the "Fontanka.ru" from 41, and 40 articles on the portal "Arguments and Facts" from 44).

In all the sources analyzed, Patriarch Kirill was one of the main actors, which seems logical, since he is the head of the Church. But other actors also appeared on the "Moskovsky Komsomolets" portal: deacon Andrey Kuraev, shikumen Sergiy — abbot of the Ural monastery, and priest Dmitry Smirnov[6]. Thus, the media during the pandemic voiced not only the official position of the ROC in the person of Patriarch Kirill but also continued to broadcast internal conflicts and contradictions of the ROC, thereby constructing the image of the ROC as an unstable and contradictory institution, even in a period of acute crisis.

We have already noted that the analysis of the entire data set showed that publications of negative content (illness and death of priests from coronavirus, violation of quarantine by parishes) account for almost 40 % of all publications. The largest number of such negative publications is contained on the portal of the newspaper "Moskovsky Komsomolets": 16 articles are devoted to the violation of quarantine, 16 articles — about death from coronavirus, and 14 more — about coronavirus disease among priests. The portal "Arguments and Facts" is characterized by neutral articles devoted to the new rules of worship (11) and the problem of closing churches (13), while there are only 3 articles about death and coronavirus disease and 3 publications about the violation of quarantine in the ROC.

On the "Fontanka.ru", neutral publications about the new rules of service (10) and the closure of churches (6) also prevail, but there are also articles on negative topics, so about the violation of quarantine — 5 articles, and 9 articles are devoted to disease and death from coronavirus.

It is important not only to analyze the content of articles but also possible comments on them from readers. On the "Fontanka.ru" portal, there is such an opportunity. So readers, subscribers of the portal use it to leave comments under articles. There is also a possibility to comment on the website of the newspaper "Moskovsky Komsomolets", but no comments were found under the analyzed articles. Subscribers and readers cannot comment on the articles on the portal "Arguments and Facts".

Conclusions

Interesting and very symptomatic is the fact that comments on publications about the activities of the ROC on the "Fontanka.ru" portal are 85 % negative; the remaining number of percentages are neutral and very rarely — positive. Although the nature of the publications themselves about the ROC is mostly neutral, this appears to be surprising. It can be explained by the following reasons.

Firstly, the Church (as well as state authorities) failed to respond quickly to the rapidly changing stressful external conditions. The content analysis of the articles allows us to conclude that the actions of the Church during the pandemic were reactive, and not

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[6] Dmitry Smirnov — the Chairman of the Synodal department for interaction with the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, Dean of the Faculty of Orthodox culture of the Academy of strategic missile forces named after Peter the Great, co-Chairman of the Church-public Council for biomedical ethics of the Moscow Patriarchate. His public speeches and sermons have always been widely discussed. He died October 21, 2020.

always adequate to the increased demands of society. In this situation, the initiative was seized by the media and, as S. Hjarvard said [Hjarvard, 2012], they constructed actions and events in the ROC during the pandemic based on their interests and means of pop culture.

Secondly, we can say that the ROC did not have a ready-made strategic plan for crisis communications, so we obviously cannot define it as a planned information policy. Unfortunately, the pandemic crisis revealed the Church's lack of readiness for operational, proactive information policy, and revealed its certain helplessness in the modern information field, namely in the sphere of secular media. Since it should be noted that the ROC is rapidly developing the most relevant communication trends. Content analysis of the media showed that when describing events in the ROC, one of the main sources of information for them was the official telegram channels of the ROC.

The selection and interpretation of events were left to the secular media, and they presented it in their way. We can make this conclusion freely and base it on the pure statistics that shows that major part of publications about ROC in pandemic times we made not by church representatives but by journalists doing their job. In their articles they were expressing their opinions, very rarely referring to the opinion of the priests or any other ROC officials. It seems logical and somehow reasonable for us, since the ROC and the media are somehow competitors in influencing humans' mind and believes.

The fact of the digitalization and development of electronic communications was recorded in several studies of sociologists, for example, E. Ostrovskaya in her article analyzed women's groups and rabbinical blogs on Instagram and Facebook [Ostrovskaya, 2020] and O. Bogdanova [Bogdanova, 2020] explored the practices of media pastoralism of Orthodox priests based on various websites.

Based on D. Uzlaner's [Uzlaner, 2020] thoughts about the violation of the Pro-Orthodox consensus in society, it can be concluded that this consensus, which has existed for the past 30 years, led the ROC to a state of "communicative insularity". Communicative insularity means that all the actions of its representatives are *a priori* approved and supported by public opinion and the media and do not require neither explanations, nor justifications.

Now we are watching a violation of the "Pro-Orthodox consensus" in society, in public opinion and in the media, the number of critical publications is increasing, and the ROC is not ready for this. Thus, the ROC needs to take the initiative of media communication in the information field to form the desired image itself, and not allow other participants in the media market to do so.

In the media, the image of the ROC as a source of danger of infection was constructed. ROC also appeared as a social institution that does not fulfill its social function of spiritual support, which was especially in demand in the crisis period.

Against the background of the total number of negative publications, 5 articles about the ROC's assistance to believers during the pandemic remained almost unnoticed. Here we see confirmation of S. Hjarvard's thesis that the media are interested in religion, religious issues, and problems, but represent their language means and techniques, guided primarily by editorial policy and current news agenda [Hjarvard, 2012].

An extremely small share of interviews in the mass of publications about the ROC in the media indicates, on one hand, that representatives of the ROC are not sources of information about its activities, on the other hand, it may be part of the media's information policy, which aims to give its vision, thus replacing the function of a religious institution in society. The analysis of the main topics for publications shows that the selection of an informational occasion or event for the publication of an article depends mainly on the information policy of the media.

The results of our content analysis also confirm the conclusions of A. Khroul that "secular media, overcoming the difficulties of communicating with religions that have long been closed, 'hermetic', gradually acquire the necessary skills in dialogue with them and in extracting information that corresponds to the interests and needs of the audience. However, this process is still not easy, because there is a large 'gap' between what the media want to edify and tell the audience about religions, and how religions want to position themselves and what they are trying to put on the national and local media 'agenda'" [Khroul, 2018: 367].

We can freely draw the conclusion that, due to the results of our content analysis, the ROC and the media are somehow competitors in getting the power over the population's mind, weather its it is a crisis or not. It only seems that media got more advantage in getting the attention and their ratings high, because it has been "playing on its own field". ROC, on the contrary, being in communicative long-term crisis before, could not cope with the new global challenge. Its informational policy was reactive and rarely pro-active, their leaders were available only through special communication channels and as a result the population did not get expected moral support from the ROC.

We can conclude that there could be pessimistic as well as optimistic scenarios of the situation unfolding:

1. The tendency of ROC declining both in real as well as in virtual space, will increase, initiative of mass media, covering the events, conducting by ROC, will be kept on. This will put ROC in the field of constant social conflicts and contradictions. Religious and spiritual aspects which make the essence of ROC would be diminished.

2. ROC will change its informational policy, activating communicational channels and will cover the spiritual needs as well as helping people to overcome difficult times. This will help this social institution to gain part of its power back and will be appreciated by those who were disappointed in ROC during the "first wave" of COVID-19.

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