

# DISCUSSION PLATFORM

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## New Breath of the “Fourth Estate”\*



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**Abstract.** In rapidly and chaotically developing globalization processes, which are observed in recent years, the media have become increasingly important as factors influencing social consciousness. This phenomenon is associated with the increasing complexity of social structures and psychological relations in the course of natural evolution of mankind, with the development of information technology as well as the tense international situation caused by the deployment of the so-called hybrid warfare. Impact of the media on public knowledge is particularly relevant for the Russian Federation because, first, the “subjective” factor has always been highly important (which was confirmed more than once by the course of historical events) in the mentality of Russian society, and second, Russia plays a major role in the hybrid warfare. The aim of this study is to identify and characterize the specific features of social perception and social well-being prevailing in the public mind under the influence the media. The key question that the present article addresses is how objective the media reflect the existing social reality? Is the purpose of the “fourth estate” to help people see the objective and reliable information about political and economic situation in the country and abroad and thus involve the broad layers of society in the construction of social reality? Or are the modern media to a greater extent a tool of information management, focused on programming a certain type of behavior, forming certain types

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of psychological response to certain events taking place in Russia and in the world? The main sources of information for the preparation of this article were the results of a sociological research conducted in the territory of a particular region – the Vologda Oblast (ISED T RAS) and in the whole country (VTsIOM, Levada-Center, RAS Institute of Sociology). The conclusions and issues raised in the course of the reasoning are fairly debatable, but, in the author's view, they are worthy of discussion, primarily, due to the existence of potential threats to social stability and national security, which can be found in a distorted perception of social reality in public consciousness.

**Key words:** Russian society, mass media, hybrid warfare, public opinion, social reality.

The mass media are becoming more and more important as a tool of influence in shaping public opinion. This process is noted by many experts (G.G. Malinetskii, N.V. Starikov, S.S. Sulakshin, etc.): it is going on not only in Russia but all over the world, so the issue of influence of the media on public consciousness is extremely relevant. "Nowadays, there are new methods of social control: informational control, in which people's behavior is programmed by the information conveyed to them or hidden from them..." [21, p. 153].

In connection with the growing influence of the media on shaping public opinion the goal of the present study becomes especially important: to identify and characterize features of social perception and social well-being in people as a result of the impact of the mass media, to analyze the population's attitude toward the media and to outline possible consequences that arise out of a distorted perception of economic and political processes, which is hypothetically possible if the media sources choose a wrong approach to performing their functions.

It should be noted that for the Russian Federation the urgency of strengthening the role of the mass media as a tool for shaping public sentiment is caused by specific factors. These include, for example, mastering the new forms of social control as a result of the experience of "information warfare" with the United States [33] during the conflict with Ukraine. Today, despite a gradual attenuation of the Ukrainian conflict, the experience of "information control" is still relevant. According to some experts, "the attention of the authorities is focused on propaganda" [6].

In our country, an intangible factor has always held a special place. Suffice it to recall the fact that Russian society for nearly 70 years was living under the total propaganda of the Communist regime. During that time, the Soviet economy experienced different periods: there were times of famine, there was the Great Patriotic War... And not always did an ordinary Soviet resident feel the same way as in the period of decline of the USSR, when it was one of the most powerful countries in the world. In all the periods of Soviet power the standard of living in the country was

much worse than it is now; however, thanks to systematically arranged ideological politics or, in other words, the appeal to the spiritual and moral foundations of Russian society, the sense of national identity was developed stronger than it is today.

Even the social structure of modern Russian society testifies to the exceptional importance of the intangible driver of development. “The prototype of the middle class in Russia, unlike that in the Western world, is not the bourgeoisie, but the intelligentsia, i.e. teachers, doctors, engineers, scientists, rather than the entrepreneurs. Thus, today the Russian middle class is dominated by intellectuals rather than businessmen” [32].

The modern, post-reform Russia, as researchers note, “concentrates a huge socio-psychological resource that acts as a basis for the implementation of modernization breakthrough, which is so much needed in today’s Russian society” [7, p. 6]. The subjective factor “plays a significant and growing role among the factors that determine the content and vector of the changes in our world and in our country” [38, p. 32]. “The complexity and unpredictability of social transformations experienced by Russian society over the past twenty-five years have resulted in the inclusion of socio-psychological mechanisms of adaptation of the population to the existing order of things. Or rather, not so much to the order,

since the latter involves a certain stability and predictability, as to the relationships prevailing in society that are not always predictable and orderly” [29, p. 126].

In the 2010s a series of events (Vladimir Putin’s Munich speech in 2007, his Valdai speech in 2013, the Olympic Games in Sochi, “the Crimean spring”, Russia’s participation in the Syrian conflict) have resulted in the fact that Russian society experienced the surge of patriotic feelings, self-respect and pride for its country and the growth of national identity. Many scientists (G.V. Osipov, S.S. Sulakshin, etc.) talked about this period as a new stage in the country’s life [25, p. 18; 36, p. 103]. In this connection we would like to note that **none of the above events, by and large, was associated with the improvement of the standard of living and quality of life. It is the “spiritual” rather than any other “ties” became the basis of the revival of Russian national identity. This is a telling example of how important the intangible factor is for Russians.**

Thus, we see that there are objective preconditions to the fact that the “fourth estate” is gaining more and more influence on people all over the world and becoming an increasingly important subject of formation of social reality. This process is particularly important for a country like Russia. It has deep, mental foundations rooted in the history of Russian people, as well as specific factors of the present – a “new stage” in Russian history and the key role played by

Russia in the ongoing hybrid warfare. It is not by accident that the National Security Strategy 2015 pays considerable attention to the country's information security<sup>1</sup>.

In the present article, we would like to draw attention to an important but, in our opinion, ambiguous role that the media play today in shaping public opinion. But first, let us make "a lyrical digression" to indicate the two objective facts that do not require proof and that are most relevant to the object of our study.

The first fact is that the mass media at all times had enormous influence on public consciousness and behavior. We all know that the so-called "fourth estate", as the journalists were called back in the 19th century<sup>2</sup>, in fact, has no authority, and this emphasizes their role in shaping social reality. As the society evolves, social structure, social relations and scientific-technological progress become more complex, and new forms and

technical means emerge that ensure the communication of people, which makes globalization inevitable, the role of the media has increasingly intensified. Modern society is called information society, which speaks for itself, and its future is associated solely with the growing influence of information technology.

The second fact that requires no proof is Russia's participation in hybrid warfare. What is hybrid warfare? It is a military strategy that combines conventional war, small war, and information war in a single whole [24]. That is, information warfare is an integral part of hybrid warfare, and the media are one of its main weapons.

It is impossible not to agree with the opinion of Russian President, who believes that "humanity has reached a level of development, when nuclear war becomes meaningless, it could not have a winner" [28]. And while the military industry is developing new technology to prevent nuclear attack, the main resource of hybrid warfare is the society and information is its main tool.

In general, the vector of development of interest of foreign science in the influence of the mass media on public consciousness in the 20th century (the concept of unlimited influence of the media on the audience (1920s–1930s; W. Lippmann, C.E. Shannon, W. Weaver, G. Lasswell); the concepts of mediated influence of the media on the audience (1940s–1950s; K. Hovland,

<sup>1</sup> "National security includes the defense of the country and all kinds of security, provided by the Constitution of the Russian Federation and by the legislation of the Russian Federation, first of all public, informational, environmental, economic, transport, energy security, security of the person... The strengthening of Russia is going on against the background of new threats to national security that are comprehensive and interrelated. The Russian Federation's independent foreign and domestic policy causes counteraction on the part of the United States and their allies, seeking to maintain their dominance in world affairs. The policy of containment of Russia pursued by them provides for exposing it to political, economic, military and informational pressure" [24].

<sup>2</sup> This term was used for the first time by the British writer, essayist, historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). Sometimes the authorship is attributed to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778).

P., Lazarsfeld, J. Clapper); the concepts of mutual influence of the media and audience (1960s–1970s, E. Noelle-Neumann, S. Ball-Rokeach, M. DeFleur)) speaks about the growing relevance of these issues and the understanding that the media and society are two active subjects mutually influencing each other. In the context of our we draw attention to one of the modern theories – the concept of the so-called “soft power”, the author of which is the American researcher J. Nye, who appeals to the idea that the main advantage of “soft power” in comparison to military or financial power of the state lies in the ability to attract anyone thanks to the value content of foreign policy, and not just a simple set of material levers of pressure [41].

Thus, there are two objective conditions that affect the whole global community: a hybrid warfare which directly or indirectly involves most countries and the increasing role of the media as a result of not only this warfare, but also the natural evolution of mankind (technological progress).

In Russia it is impossible to say that the mass media have acquired a “second” breath. In fact, it did not weaken neither in the Soviet period (with its ideological propaganda) nor in the post-Soviet period of the 1990s (with its aggressive advertising of different types of products of Western culture). **We call it “new” in the first place because its quality has changed. In our opinion, today the media is not a “preacher” of ideology and not a “marketing expert”,**

**but primarily a tool of interpretation of internal and external events.** It is important to understand this, because internal and external threats for the country come to the fore. It is not sufficient to explain them with the use of specialized terms and expert estimates; they should be explained with the help of a language that people understand. This very idea puts “the fourth estate” into action. There is no doubt that popular support has tremendous value today – it provides social stability in the country. **But the question is: what is the relationship between Russians and the mass media? Do the media serve the people by telling them about the real trends in the political and economic situation in the country and abroad, thus creating opportunities for participation of the society as a full and active subject of constructing social reality? Or are they just a tool of “information control”, which is entirely in the hands of the “powers that be” and is used at their own discretion? And if it is so, does this “discretion” of the elites correspond to the national interest?**

According to the results of sociological studies, the dynamics of public opinion on the activities of the mass media reflects people’s attitudes toward the trends in domestic and foreign policy. It is appropriate to make another “lyrical digression” to remind the reader of what is happening today in domestic and foreign policy of Russia.

And what happens in it can be figuratively represented as a man who steps in a boat tied



to the pier – after putting his one foot in the boat, he has to put the other one in it, otherwise he will fall. The same can be said about the political life of modern Russia. We see the obvious achievements in our foreign policy mostly due to the actions of the President and his administration. These include conceptual speeches of Vladimir Putin that have united all the strata of Russian society around the idea of “Russian world”; these include the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis, the main result of which was the accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation; these include an uncompromising position of Russia in the Syrian conflict, its growing role in resolving the most important global issues, including those related to combating international terrorism.

If in 2007 the President just talked about the fact that “Russia is a country with more than a thousand-year history, and it virtually always had the privilege to carry out its independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today” [34], then after “full-time” entering into the fight with the Islamic state it became obvious that “Russia no longer has any need to prove its full-fledged partnership with the leading world powers” [16, p. 13], it has become not just an equal player, but one of the key players on the world political arena.

A completely different picture can be observed in the internal life of the country.

Here we see a deep-rooted systemic crisis<sup>3</sup>, which has long gone beyond the real sector of the economy and manifests itself in almost all spheres of social life; ineffectiveness of management, “thanks” to which there is still the domination of the raw material exporting model of economic development that does not meet the realities of the time, making our country uncompetitive against the background of developed countries that shift to neo-industrialization; finally, it is the corruption, the facts of which in recent years have been continuously highlighted in newspapers and on television.

S.S. Gubanov said that “the fact that Russia entered into an autonomous recession is a result of domestic factors, namely the raw material exporting model based on a comprador ownership” [8, p. 21]. Moreover, “autonomous recession shows that Russia is sitting on a volcano of a systemic crisis, which was asleep and now woke up and came into action... The systemic crisis cannot be eliminated by anything except for replacing the old, archaic and inefficient economic system with a historically new one – progressive, capable of providing

<sup>3</sup> “The structural economic crisis in Russia that began formally in 2015 (the first year of the actual drop in GDP) is the structural crisis in various areas and directions: the structural crisis of the real economy, the budget crisis, etc. apparently, one can talk about other manifestations of the structural crisis; however, the ones mentioned above are already enough to complete the analysis of the current economic crisis in Russia, to prove that it is primarily structural in its nature” [22, p. 17].

a qualitatively higher degree of a system combination of economic efficiency and social justice” [9, p. 4].

The official position of the government regarding the economic situation in the country is radically at odds with what the experts say and with the evidence of official statistics<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the point of view of the Government is being spread by the mass media on all federal, regional and local TV channels. As for the opinions of the experts, when they are on air on federal TV channels, it is in programs such as “Politics”, ‘An evening with V. Solov’ev”, “Structure of the moment” and other TV programs that, first, have the status of a talk show, and second, are broadcast on weekdays after 23.00, that is, they are not intended for the general public.

Thus, the situation in the internal political life in the country, to put it mildly, is “lagging

<sup>4</sup> “...It can be argued that in 2014 we experienced only a partial impact of anti-Russian sanctions... In 2014, many indicators deteriorated, for instance, investment; devaluation of the ruble was record-breaking; since the beginning of 2012 inflation has been accelerating. Socio-economic situation has deteriorated in general. Unlike the 2008 crisis, this is not a short-term but a long-term process, so the recovery is impossible to forecast” [1].

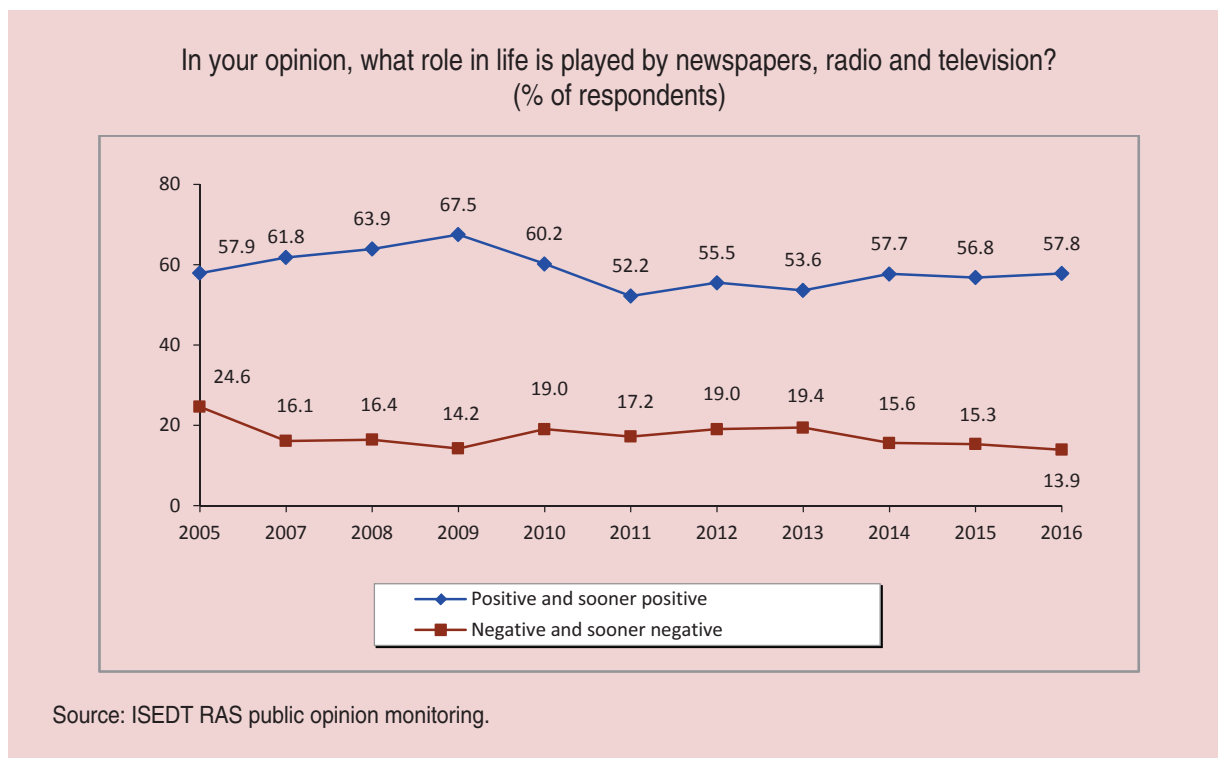
“For the first half of 2015 alone, compared with January – June of 2014, GDP decreased by 3.4%, industrial production index – by 2.7%, investment in fixed capital – by 5.4%, real disposable money income of population – by 3.1%, the consumer price index increased by 8.5%. Despite this, the Medvedev Government and the financial authorities continue to give favorable enough forecasts concerning development prospects for the economic situation in the country: under the baseline scenario, “if consumer demand is low, then in 2016 inflation is expected to slow down almost twice: to 6.5–7.5%. By 2018, alongside the strengthening of the ruble, inflation will fall to 5%. The reduction of inflation and the resumption of economic growth will ensure the growth of real incomes at a rate of 1.1% in 2016 and 2.6%–2.8% in 2017–2018” [15, p. 11].

behind” those achievements that Russia could make to strengthen its international status over the last nine years. It is for a reason that the latest edition of the National Security Strategy points out personal responsibility of the President for implementing all priority directions of national security – and not only external but also internal ones, the focus on which is also one of the key features of the main strategic document of the country<sup>5</sup>.

The results of sociological studies show: **the attitude of Russians toward the activities of the media is contradictory to the extent, to which the system of governance in Russia is imbalanced.** People believe that the media played a positive role in the life of the country. In the past 11 years (2005–2016) this opinion was shared by more than half of Vologda Oblast residents. The opposite view is shared by only 15–25% of the population (*figure*)<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> “The state policy of the Russian Federation in the sphere of ensuring national security is implemented by the concerted action of all the elements of the system that ensures it, **under the leadership of the President of the Russian Federation** and with the coordinating role of the Security Council of the Russian Federation” [24].

<sup>6</sup> Henceforward (*except Tab. 8*) we provide the data derived from ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring. The monitoring is carried out in the Vologda Oblast since 1996 once every two months; 1,500 people 18 years of age and older participate in the survey in the cities of Vologda and Cherepovets, and in Babayevsky, Velikoustyugsky, Vozhegodsky, Gryazovetsky, Kirillovsky, Nikolsky, Tarnogsky and Sheksninsky districts. The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the observance of the proportions between the urban and rural population, the proportions between the inhabitants of settlements of various types (rural communities, small and medium-sized cities), age and sex structure of the oblast’s adult population. The method of the survey is a questionnaire poll by place of residence of respondents. Sampling error does not exceed 3%.



However, the media as one of the institutions participating in the construction of social reality does not enjoy a high level of trust among the people. Over the period 2000 to 2016, not more than 30% of the population trusted the mass media, which is one of the lowest indicators among the major social structures and institutions (*Tab. 1*). If in 2000 the media were on the 9th place according to the level of trust, then in 2015 – on the 16th place.

According to the results of research carried out at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IS RAS), “among all the professions engaged in the field of cultural production, the journalists are the only ones that have a quite substantial negative

trust rating (21% of the population trust the journalists, 36% do not trust them)”<sup>7</sup>.

In fairness it should be mentioned that not only the mass media, but almost all democratic institutions in the country enjoy low trust of Russians. As a result of, putting it mildly, inefficient management decisions of the government in the 1990s<sup>8</sup>, the trust in these institutions has long been at a low level compared to the actors that can be called “traditional” for the Russian mentality – the

<sup>7</sup> The study was conducted in 2012 among Belgorod Oblast residents, the total sample included 962 respondents [29, p. 132].

<sup>8</sup> “Russian reformers of the 1990s essentially deprived their people of any desire to build a democratic country. Discredited democracy and creation of real preconditions for the authoritarianism became the main political result of their activities, and these results carried “the gravest losses of this period” [31, p. 143].



Table 1. Dynamics of the level of trust in Russia's social structures and governmental institutions (in % of the number of respondents)

Answer	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics (+ -) 2016 to	
												2015	2000
RF President	57.1	53.1	54.4	62.0	65.2	56.8	45.7	47.0	57.0	60.6	62.0	+1	+5
RF Government	42.7	33.8	35.2	42.1	60.2	52.4	39.6	40.4	48.3	49.4	48.8	-1	+6
Church	42.3	35.4	42.9	42.9	51.9	47.0	41.4	43.9	44.7	43.7	47.1	+3	+5
Army	37.0	28.5	27.1	29.6	37.8	34.5	31.3	37.5	37.8	42.0	43.9	+2	+7
Police	27.2	22.3	23.7	29.0	36.5	32.7	29.3	33.7	35.4	40.2	41.7	+2	+15
Federal Security Service	34.2	25.8	28.4	35.3	43.8	36.0	33.2	37.5	36.4	39.6	40.6	+1	+6
Procuracy	30.9	21.7	28.8	33.3	40.9	36.1	33.9	40.1	38.5	40.9	40.3	-1	+9
Federation Council	28.3	21.7	27.1	34.3	47.6	38.1	32.3	34.6	40.2	40.2	39.3	-1	+11
Court	31.6	24.7	31.0	35.5	41.3	37.4	36.1	39.3	36.9	40.5	39.3		
Vologda Oblast Government	31.3	23.2	30.0	37.7	48.6	41.0	34.6	37.8	37.4	36.9	38.5	+2	+7
Local self-government	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	26.6	40.9	35.6	29.3	32.7	35.1	34.5	33.3	-1	-
State Duma	23.0	18.2	26.0	27.9	42.0	33.5	30.5	31.6	35.2	34.0	33.0	-1	+10
RF Public Chamber	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	27.3	28.1	29.9	32.8	32.5	32.1	0	-
Trade unions	28.4	22.4	26.5	27.4	35.9	29.9	25.6	27.8	26.6	26.5	28.1	+2	0
Vologda Oblast Public Chamber	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	24.8	25.4	29.2	29.4	29.5	28.0	-2	-
<b>Mass media</b>	<b>30.2</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>31.8</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>28.7</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-5</b>
Non-governmental organizations	-	-	-	20.0	32.6	26.7	26.5	26.8	25.5	23.8	24.2	0	-
Directors, Chief executives	19.6	17.4	21.5	26.5	30.5	22.8	25.1	27.5	21.9	20.2	20.5	0	+1
Political parties	20.4	11.6	18.5	16.0	17.6	20.0	22.8	20.9	20.2	17.0	18.1	+1	-2
Banking community, entrepreneurs	12.4	10.7	17.6	22.6	26.6	21.5	21.3	23.4	18.8	16.5	17.2	+1	+5

\* Included in the survey since 2000; ranked according to 2016.  
Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring; ranked according to the value of the indicator for 2016.

authorities and the Church. While speaking about all state and public institutions, especially notable is the level of trust in the President of the Russian Federation – the institution, which is the “tip of the whole pyramid of power in Russia” [36], it is also thanks to the “Russia’s historic longing for autocracy”, carrying a “traditional aspect, some similarity to the monarchical form of government, which is a specific feature of the Russian system different from either Eastern despotism or Western democracy” [14, p. 171].

However, the seemingly paradoxical assessments of the public that show a positive attitude of people toward the modern media and, at the same time, a low level of trust in them, are caused, in our opinion, not only by a crisis of confidence in democratic institutions in principle.

There are certain facts, events, statements that cannot but resonate in the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens (for example, statements about how much Europe is “suffering” because of the anti-Russian sanctions, or a detailed analysis of how

unscrupulous American propaganda is lying when it speaks about Russia). Nevertheless, society retains a feeling of some uncertainty, and numerous questions remain: where is the prime of the Russian economy promised as a result of import substitution? Why is the population of the country that claims to be one of the key centers of the multipolar world, year after year, is living in a situation of economic crisis? How can the country enter the global community in an open and full-fledged cooperation, if the attitude toward Russia is negative (which is how people think: according to a sociological survey by the Levada-Center conducted in October 2015, one in three Russians (33%)

believes that the Europeans treat Russia with “contempt” and “fear” [13, p. 189]. According to a sociological survey conducted by ISED T RAS in February 2016, 45–47% of Vologda Oblast residents believe that the attitude toward Russia in the world is “bad” and “biased”; 53% say that Russia is “feared” (the opposite opinion is expressed by 22% of the population; *Tab. 2*). Why since the launch of the anti-corruption campaign Russians learned about the misappropriation of such amount of funds that the money of the oligarchs and the governors put behind bars could be enough to solve all the problems in the country long ago? People cannot but think about all this every time when they struggling

Table 2. Distribution of answers to the questions characterizing the opinion of the population about the attitude toward Russia in the world (% of the number of respondents)\*

Question	Answer	2016
In your opinion, is the attitude toward Russia in the world in general objective or biased?	Objective	20.4
	Biased	46.5
	It is difficult to answer	33.1
Generally speaking, in your opinion, what is the attitude toward Russia in the world nowadays – good or bad?	Good	22.9
	Bad	45.1
	It is difficult to answer	32.0
In your opinion, is Russia respected or not respected in the world?	It is respected	40.9
	It is not respected	28.5
	It is difficult to answer	30.5
In your opinion, is Russia feared in the world?	It is feared	52.5
	It is not feared	21.6
	It is difficult to answer	25.9
In your opinion, do other countries consider Russia as a free country or as a country that is not free?	Free	41.3
	Not free	27.4
	It is difficult to answer	31.3
In your opinion, has Russia’s influence in the world been increasing, decreasing or remained unchanged in recent years?	Increasing	42.9
	Remains unchanged	17.8
	Decreasing	15.8
	It is difficult to answer	23.5
* The question was asked once – in February 2016. Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.		

Table 3. Distribution of answers to the question “In your opinion, are the mass media objective or not in covering the events in the world, in Russia and in the oblast?” (% of the number of respondents)

Answer		1996	2000	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics (+/-), 2016 to	
															2015	2000
In the world	Objective	34.1	50.6	58.2	59.3	60.1	57.8	53.6	53.1	55.9	46.1	40.9	44.1	48.3	+4	+14
	Not objective	26.8	21.4	24.2	22.4	21.6	22.2	25.2	24.9	22.1	30.8	34.5	30.1	25.0	-5	-2
In the country	Objective	25.5	43.7	53.5	59.0	57.2	58.1	50.3	48.1	52.2	43.0	43.3	43.8	48.7	+5	+23
	Not objective	38.1	33.4	30.5	24.1	26.3	24.2	30.3	31.9	26.4	34.7	32.8	30.9	26.0	-5	-12
In the oblast	Objective	29.5	51.0	51.8	60.4	57.3	58.5	50.2	49.9	52.6	43.5	43.7	43.8	48.2	+4	+19
	Not objective	32.4	24.0	31.4	22.5	26.0	23.5	29.3	29.6	25.9	33.7	32.2	31.6	27.6	-4	-5

Source: ISEDT RAS public opinion monitoring.

from paycheck to paycheck<sup>9</sup>, but the mass media do not give them an answer or give the answer that people are not satisfied with.

The President “does the work for the long term”; the specific actions and management decisions taken by Vladimir Putin as President become genuinely historical for Russia [4], but the media, interacting with people every day, do not have this capability. They reflect the current situation in the country and abroad, they affect the character of public sentiment “here and now”. Therefore, people relate what is said in the media to what they see in their daily life.

From this point of view it is important to know how objective, in the estimates of population, the information provided by the media is. One can evaluate the results of sociological research in different ways in order to answer this question. On the one hand, the proportion of people who believe that the

media accurately reflect the course of events in the country and abroad is higher than the proportion of those who hold the opposite point of view (in 2016 – 48% and 25–26%, respectively; *Tab. 3*). Moreover, if in 1996 this concerned only the evaluation of the coverage of world events, then since 2000, when Vladimir Putin was elected President for the first term, the objectivity of the media began to prevail in the estimates of the population about the situation inside the country, at the level of specific regions.

However, on the other hand, we cannot conclude that people find objective the information provided by the media about the situation in the country and the world, because less than half of Russians share this opinion (since 2013: 43–48%).

Among those people who have a positive attitude toward the activities of the media and believe that they objectively and adequately reflect the political and economic situation in the country, positive characteristics of social mood are more prevalent (*Tab. 4*).

<sup>9</sup> By the way, promotional signs like “Money before payday!” that advertise microfinance organizations, in our opinion, describe the financial situation of modern Russians quite vividly.

Table 4. Proportion of people who experience normal condition and good mood, among... (% of the number of respondents)\*

Answer	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics (+/-), 2016 to	
																2015	2002
The media play a positive role in the life of the country	54.4	60.2	64.8	65.1	68.9	69.7	70.3	61.6	70.0	68.5	75.3	76.3	77.7	74.8	75.0	0	+21
The media play a negative role in the life of the country	35.8	37.7	47.0	39.2	42.3	54.9	50.8	32.7	50.1	55.4	54.8	54.1	54.2	53.3	59.2	+6	+23
The media objectively reflect the course of events in the country	56.0	64.0	66.2	63.1	67.6	70.4	71.5	64.5	70.6	68.4	73.0	75.9	74.2	75.6	74.1	-2	+18
The media do not objectively reflect the course of events in the country	44.5	42.9	53.2	51.6	49.3	57.5	55.0	37.2	56.6	58.6	64.1	63.5	71.1	66.0	64.0	-2	+20
The media provide enough information about the political life in the country	52.4	60.9	63.6	61.3	67.8	69.0	71.6	64.5	69.3	65.5	75.0	76.4	73.3	74.8	73.6	-1	+21
The media do not provide enough information about the political life in the country	43.4	51.1	55.8	54.5	49.0	60.3	55.2	43.3	59.7	63.5	62.1	62.9	68.8	62.2	64.4	+2	+21
The media provide enough information about the economic life in the country	–	61.2	65.1	60.5	69.5	70.1	72.7	64.4	69.1	65.3	74.2	76.8	74.3	76.4	76.9	+1	+16**
The media do not provide enough information about the economic life in the country	–	53.5	54.6	55.8	52.2	59.8	54.2	44.6	60.1	64.5	64.1	64.1	67.4	61.3	63.9	+3	+10**
* Included in the survey since 2002.																	
** 2015 to 2003, because the question is asked since 2003.																	
Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.																	

But an important point, in our opinion, is that positive assessments of social mood are more common among those who receive information about the political and economic situation from newspapers, magazines and the Internet, rather than among those who watch the news on TV –

the most common source of information about events in the country and in the world (Tab. 5).

**As we see it, the reason lies in the fact that people who get their information about economic and political life from TV programs see that it does not match the real life, while**

Table 5. Proportion of people experiencing normal condition and good mood, among those who receive information about the economic and political life from various media sources\* (% of the number of respondents)

Media source	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics (+/-), 2016 to	
								2015	2010
Television	64.3	64.2	68.8	67.8	71.7	69.9	68.7	-1	+4
Newspapers and magazines	65.6	67.0	72.0	71.6	76.0	74.5	75.9	+1	+10
Internet	77.8	73.9	77.8	76.2	78.5	75.5	75.1	0	-3
Radio	69.8	76.3	80.3	77.2	75.9	76.4	74.5	-2	+5

\* Included into the survey since 2010.

Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.

**people who draw information from newspapers, magazines and the Internet, form a more adequate perception of the situation in the country and region.**

This happens largely due to more in-depth analytical information available in the vastness of virtual space and particularly in printed periodicals. Thus, according to the results of a monitoring study of the role of the mass media conducted in 2000–2011, Russian scientists made the following conclusion: “What claims are made for modern television by the respondents that have negative attitude toward it? First and foremost, they are not satisfied with the content of television news. Almost all the respondents believe that the news on TV “does not contain the whole truth”, that the news is censored, one-sided, sterile and officious”<sup>10</sup>.

As for the print media, it is generally accepted that they are a platform for in-depth analytics [2, 3], and in this sense, the experts

<sup>10</sup> These are the results of a monitoring sociological research “Television through the eyes of the viewers” (2000–2011): the survey was conducted once a year among urban residents aged 15 and older, the sample was 3,000 people, the method is formalized interview at the place of residence of the respondents [27, p. 168].

have repeatedly expressed fears that with the spread of the virtual network the periodicals will be in a state of crisis: “The forecast on the situation in the print media market for 2020 is negative with the prospect of almost complete disappearance of this segment in its paper form in the period between 2020 and 2030” [2].

In light of this, special attention is given to the Internet as a source the least subject to censorship and as a platform where printed periodicals move to. According to people’s estimates, since 2010, the proportion of people using the Internet as the primary source for information on political and economic life in the country is increasing annually (over the period from 2010 to 2016 – by 18 p.p., from 24 to 42%; *Tab. 6*). One would assume that this is due to the expansion of virtual networks with the improvement of technology, development of fiber-optic networks, etc., in general – with the increased availability of the Internet to citizens. However, in our opinion, Internet technology has long before 2010 “covered” all parts of the world, all countries and regions. Whether at



Table 6. Proportion of Vologda Oblast residents who receive information on the political and economic life from various media sources\* (% of the number of respondents)

Media source	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics (+/-), 2016 to	
								2015	2010
Television	88.9	82.0	84.2	83.6	86.9	86.8	82.9	-4	-6
Internet	24.0	27.8	29.8	37.2	35.1	43.2	41.6	-2	18
Newspapers and magazines	38.1	36.1	33.8	43.9	40.3	40.6	39.1	-2	1
Radio	21.2	21.2	22.6	22.5	19.1	24.3	22.7	-2	2

\* Included in the survey since 2010.  
Source: ISEDТ RAS public opinion monitoring. Respondents could choose any number of information sources they use for obtaining information on political and economic life.

home or at work, the majority of citizens have access to a virtual network<sup>11</sup>, so the increase in the share of those who use Internet resources to find out information (about the economic and political life, in particular), in our opinion, more likely indicates that the quality of information received from other sources (primarily television, which, according to the results of the public opinion monitoring, is used by 96% of the population), less and less satisfies the needs of citizens.

And if we compare the characteristics of the emotional state, perception of economic and political life in the country, evaluation of the effectiveness of public administration in two categories of people: those who use public resources as the main source of information about politics and the economy, and the rest of the population, it may be noted that in the past five years in the first group there has been a marked increase in the share of positive

<sup>11</sup> As of November 30, 2015 Russia ranks 7th by the number of Internet users (70.5% of the total population) among 182 countries. Above it on the list are: France (83.8%), USA (87.4%), Germany (88.4%), Japan (90.6%), UK (91.6%), Korea (92.3) [40]. According to the survey conducted by ISEDТ RAS, the proportion of residents of the Vologda Oblast who use the Internet amounted to 61–65% in 2012–2014.

opinions on all the above parameters, and in the second group – a reduction. Can it be an indication that the Internet (with all its known faults) forms a more adequate picture of perception of social reality in people? Or rather, does it not confirm the fact that positive information pouring from television screens crashes against the harsh reality, when people are faced with real everyday problems?

We think that the key negative consequence of such thing as virtual information space entering into our lives was quite clearly described by Russian scientists: “The development and increasing use of Internet technology actually caused the society to split into two classes: online people and offline people, that is, those who use ICT and those who do not. Moreover, the former got great advantages over the latter both at work and in everyday life. The formation of digital split with the division of the representatives of online and offline categories suggests the emergence of a new dichotomous stratification of society, similar to the division between the rich and poor, elite and ordinary citizens, the educated and illiterate” [12, p. 102].

Table 7. Social mood, situation in the country and the work of the authorities as assessed by the people that use the Internet as their primary source of information about political and economic life in the country, and by the rest of the population (in % of each category)\*

Answer	People that use the Internet as their primary source of information about political and economic life in the country							The rest of the population						
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Mood</b>														
Good mood, normal fine condition	77.8	74.1	77.6	76.2	77.9	74.0	75.1	58.9	59.2	63.0	61.8	66.5	65.4	65.0
I feel stress, anger, fear, sadness	18.1	20.8	17.3	18.3	17.2	21.4	21.3	34.9	34.6	29.7	31.9	28.2	27.1	30.0
It is difficult to answer	4.1	5.1	5.2	5.5	4.9	4.7	3.6	6.2	6.2	7.3	6.3	5.2	7.4	5.0
<b>Assessment of economic situation in the country</b>														
Very good and good	12.1	10.1	12.6	9.4	10.6	9.5	8.9	5.0	11.0	11.5	8.4	8.1	6.1	8.7
Average	47.6	51.4	49.7	52.4	57.7	48.4	39.3	47.9	50.5	48.8	43.9	48.2	41.5	41.2
Very bad and bad	27.6	30.2	25.7	26.0	20.7	33.5	39.2	32.1	28.1	27.2	31.4	29.4	40.2	35.3
It is difficult to answer	12.7	8.2	12.0	12.1	11.0	8.6	12.7	15.0	10.4	12.5	16.3	14.3	12.2	15.0
<b>Assessment of political situation in the country</b>														
Safe, peaceful	51.5	44.9	40.1	45.1	38.1	32.0	29.6	47.9	42.4	34.9	39.5	27.5	24.8	25.3
Tense, critical, explosive	30.8	38.6	42.5	38.7	47.1	49.1	55.0	32.8	38.7	44.6	43.1	56.5	59.4	55.7
It is difficult to answer	17.7	16.4	17.4	16.2	14.9	19.0	15.5	19.3	18.9	20.5	17.4	16.0	15.8	19.1
<b>Assessment of the RF President's work</b>														
I approve completely and for the most part	57.3	54.2	53.3	53.4	70.2	71.3	68.3	57.8	58.8	54.3	57.6	63.8	68.0	66.6
I do not approve completely and for the most part	27.2	31.3	30.5	29.9	17.1	15.6	19.7	24.7	27.6	32.5	28.5	23.1	16.5	19.8
I know nothing about the RF President's work	2.4	2.0	2.3	1.9	0.3	2.3	1.6	0.6	2.0	2.9	1.8	0.8	6.6	1.5
It is difficult to answer	13.1	12.5	13.9	14.8	12.4	10.9	10.5	16.9	11.6	10.3	12.1	12.3	9.0	12.2
<b>Assessment of the work of the RF Government</b>														
I approve completely and for the most part	49.6	42.2	39.1	40.6	50.4	54.3	44.4	46.8	42.1	41.0	45.4	47.8	49.6	40.4
I do not approve completely and for the most part	27.8	34.7	34.6	35.3	25.0	22.9	34.6	27.9	33.4	36.3	33.7	28.7	21.9	29.1
I know nothing about the work of the RF Government	5.0	6.1	6.8	4.3	4.9	4.2	6.6	3.5	5.2	6.5	4.7	4.0	9.8	12.0
It is difficult to answer	17.7	17.0	19.5	19.7	19.7	18.5	14.4	21.8	19.3	16.2	16.2	19.4	18.7	18.6
<b>Assessment of the work of the Vologda Oblast Governor</b>														
I approve completely and for the most part	53.0	42.3	43.8	43.6	42.2	43.1	41.3	44.6	45.3	43.5	44.7	36.7	38.1	37.6
I do not approve completely and for the most part	26.3	34.8	32.8	33.8	34.5	35.8	39.9	29.6	31.8	34.1	33.4	41.8	35.1	39.0
I know nothing about the work of the Vologda Oblast Governor	4.7	5.4	5.6	4.6	5.1	4.7	5.2	4.0	4.7	5.3	5.0	3.8	9.5	5.8
It is difficult to answer	15.9	17.5	17.8	18.0	18.2	16.4	13.6	21.8	18.2	17.1	16.9	17.7	17.4	17.6
<b>Assessment of the work of the Head of local administration</b>														
I approve completely and for the most part	44.8	41.4	38.5	40.9	40.7	41.3	41.4	39.3	40.2	37.2	41.6	38.2	35.9	35.4
I do not approve completely and for the most part	30.8	34.8	34.5	34.8	32.9	32.0	37.8	33.9	37.2	40.1	35.6	37.6	33.3	39.5
I know nothing about the work of the Head of local administration	6.0	6.2	7.3	5.3	6.9	6.5	5.8	5.3	4.8	7.1	5.1	4.2	9.3	6.5
It is difficult to answer	18.3	17.6	19.7	19.0	19.6	20.2	15.1	21.5	17.8	15.5	17.7	19.9	21.4	18.7

\* Included in the survey since 2010.

Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.

The data in *Table 7* allows us to draw another conclusion – debatable but, in our opinion, extremely important: **Russians have an objective and sober approach to the mass media. Assessing the media as a source of information about what is happening in the country and the world, they do not miss the fact that the same information can be presented in different ways, and what is presented to the public, may in fact, fail to reflect objective reality, and broadcast only someone’s point of view.**

And if this conclusion is just, then it significantly increases the relevance of the question about how to build an information policy: whether by smoothing the sharp contradictions that exist in the Russian economy and politics, or by giving people the opportunity of forming their own opinions through discussing different perspectives, different experts from different fields (from among the representatives of the authorities, science, business community, etc.).

By and large, this question closely correlates with another question asked in 2011

by the Institute of Sociology: “What does it mean to you to be a patriot?” Judging by the results, the opinion of Russians is quite clear: **“To speak the truth about my country no matter how bitter this truth may be” is much more important than “not to say that my country has flaws” (81% vs. 34%; *Tab. 8*).**

In confirmation of the fact that the people’s mistrust toward the media may be due to how they cover economic issues, we can provide the fact that people value the sufficiency of information about political life (in the country, region, city) higher than that about economic life (as of 2016 – 43–48% vs 36–43%, respectively; *Tab. 9*). In other words, the society states it needs a broader coverage of information about the situation in the Russian economy.

Comparison of the dynamics of approval of and trust in the mass media in different socio-demographic groups shows that there are no significant changes in the proportion of people who believe that the media play a positive role in the life of the country (*Tab. 10*).

Table 8. What does it mean to you to be a patriot of Russia?\*(2016, in % of the number of respondents, excluding those who hesitated to answer)

Answer	I agree	I do not agree
To love my country	97.5	2.5
Seek to improve life in the country, in order to provide it with a decent future	96.0	4.0
To defend my country against any attacks and accusations	91.8	8.2
To be proud of my country	95.3	4.7
To speak the truth about my country, no matter how bitter it is	80.7	19.3
Not to say that my country has flaws	33.5	66.5

\* Data of the study “20 years of reforms in the eyes of Russians” conducted in April 2011 by RAS Institute of Sociology. Available at: [http://sophist.hse.ru/db/oprview.shtml?ID\\_S=2971](http://sophist.hse.ru/db/oprview.shtml?ID_S=2971)

Table 9. In your opinion, do the media today have enough or not enough information? (% of the number of respondents)

Answer		2007	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics +/- 2016 to	
									2015	2007
<b>About political life</b>										
In the country	Enough	50.8	45.6	52.1	42.2	42.5	45.2	48.0	+3	-3
	Not enough	25.0	29.8	24.5	29.4	26.5	25.4	24.1	-1	-1
In the oblast	Enough	49.7	43.9	49.6	40.5	39.9	40.2	42.9	+3	-7
	Not enough	28.4	32.3	27.7	31.8	29.2	31.8	30.8	-1	+2
In your city, town/district	Enough	47.7	41.9	48.8	39.4	37.9	40.3	42.5	+2	-5
	Not enough	30.3	33.5	28.4	33.9	31.7	32.3	33.4	+1	+3
<b>About economic life</b>										
In the country	Enough	47.0	43.0	47.1	40.0	41.3	38.1	39.8	+2	-7
	Not enough	28.5	31.7	28.7	32.5	28.5	32.3	31.6	-1	+3
In the oblast	Enough	46.4	39.9	44.0	37.8	37.9	34.5	36.7	+2	-10
	Not enough	30.4	36.3	32.8	35.4	31.8	36.4	35.7	-1	+5
In your city, town/district	Enough	45.7	38.8	42.3	36.3	37.1	35.1	35.8	+1	-10
	Not enough	31.5	35.8	34.2	37.2	33.7	36.5	39.1	+3	+8

Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.

Table 10. Proportion of respondents who believe that the mass media play a positive role in the life of the country, in different socio-demographic groups (% of the number of respondents)\*

Population group	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics +/- 2016 to	
																2015	2002
<b>Sex</b>																	
Men	59.0	63.1	60.3	58.8	60.1	62.1	66.0	68.2	60.6	50.5	52.7	52.8	58.0	56.9	56.5	0	-3
Women	54.7	60.6	59.8	57.1	65.0	61.5	62.1	66.9	59.8	53.6	57.6	54.2	57.4	56.7	58.8	+2	+4
<b>Age</b>																	
Under 30	67.4	71.3	66.8	63.2	70.6	64.4	68.2	68.7	64.7	55.7	56.7	53.2	56.2	58.0	54.7	-3	-13
30-55	51.9	60.2	60.8	57.3	61.0	61.2	63.4	67.8	59.3	51.7	56.4	55.5	58.5	57.7	57.8	0	+6
Over 55	54.2	54.7	52.2	54.6	59.2	60.3	60.6	66.0	57.6	50.0	52.7	51.0	57.4	54.7	59.4	+5	+5
<b>Education</b>																	
Secondary and incomplete secondary	55.9	63.7	58.3	55.7	61.4	60.6	60.8	63.1	57.8	47.9	50.0	49.7	51.9	51.5	55.3	+4	-1
Secondary vocational	57.6	63.0	61.6	57.1	59.7	61.2	65.6	70.3	59.2	52.9	57.6	54.4	58.4	56.6	60.1	+4	+3
Higher and incomplete higher	55.9	57.7	60.0	61.3	67.5	63.9	65.5	69.7	63.4	55.5	58.2	57.3	63.3	62.3	58.3	-4	+2
<b>Income groups</b>																	
20% of the poorest people	47.9	61.6	57.5	48.5	48.5	48.3	54.9	57.1	52.9	44.1	45.4	45.1	43.9	33.1	49.2	+16	+1
60% of the people with median income	55.6	61.5	61.9	58.8	63.8	59.8	65.6	69.8	59.9	53.7	57.4	56.1	60.7	60.5	57.7	-3	+2
20% of the most prosperous people	63.2	63.0	63.1	74.1	74.7	80.0	67.7	76.3	69.4	59.6	63.6	64.0	72.3	73.6	70.2	-3	+7
<b>Territories</b>																	
Vologda	57.9	73.9	62.6	58.2	74.5	63.5	62.0	69.6	68.3	54.1	63.1	53.9	61.9	67.2	55.0	-12	-3
Cherepovets	51.6	52.0	72.6	71.0	73.4	75.4	70.8	79.4	72.9	62.4	64.8	69.3	69.7	71.4	68.9	-3	+17
Districts	58.4	60.6	52.8	51.5	52.3	54.3	61.2	60.6	49.9	46.2	47.1	44.7	48.7	42.5	52.9	+10	-6
Oblast	56.5	61.6	60.0	57.9	62.8	61.8	63.8	67.5	60.1	52.2	55.4	53.6	57.7	56.8	57.8	+1	+1

\* Included in the survey since 2002.

Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.

However, the trust in the mass media is declining, and this is particularly noticeable in the group of people over 55 years of age (in 2000–2016 – by 9 p.p., from 32 to 23%), among people with secondary and incomplete secondary education (by

14 p.p., from 34 to 20%), among 20% of the poorest (by 12 p.p., from 29 to 17%), among the residents of districts (by 18 p.p., from 35 to 17%) – in short, among the socially vulnerable categories of the population (*Tab. 11*).

Table 11. Proportion of respondents who trust the mass media, in various socio-demographic groups (% of the number of respondents)

Population group	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics +/- 2016 to	
																		2015	2000
<b>Sex</b>																			
Men	33.4	31.0	22.1	31.6	27.5	32.1	30.0	25.6	34.3	27.8	27.6	25.4	28.9	27.7	24.4	25.4	23.7	-2	-10
Women	33.4	28.6	21.3	32.0	27.2	29.0	31.8	29.1	36.0	29.4	30.5	31.2	30.0	32.1	30.8	27.5	27.3	0	-6
<b>Age</b>																			
Under 30	36.6	31.5	26.5	37.2	30.0	36.9	35.7	28.2	36.1	30.5	28.5	31.4	31.4	30.5	25.9	27.2	28.2	+1	-8
30-55	32.6	29.3	18.8	28.9	27.1	30.4	28.9	29.4	34.8	28.7	28.1	27.6	28.2	29.2	26.9	26.5	26.4	0	-6
Over 55	31.9	28.0	22.8	33.1	25.0	24.9	30.5	23.6	34.9	27.0	31.5	28.0	30.0	31.3	30.9	26.3	23.3	-3	-9
<b>Education</b>																			
Secondary and incomplete secondary	34.2	28.8	18.9	29.0	24.6	29.6	25.4	24.5	29.5	25.9	23.9	26.6	24.7	24.5	25.7	20.3	20.3	0	-14
Secondary vocational	33.0	29.1	21.2	34.0	27.8	28.6	29.8	27.4	37.5	28.3	31.2	27.6	30.6	32.8	26.7	27.7	27.1	-1	-6
Higher and incomplete higher	33.8	31.5	25.0	32.4	30.0	33.6	38.6	31.2	39.9	32.0	32.5	32.2	32.9	33.7	32.0	32.7	29.9	-3	-4
<b>Income groups</b>																			
20% of the poorest people	29.0	30.7	15.1	28.5	19.9	30.2	18.8	23.6	27.2	21.0	18.9	23.5	19.6	20.3	17.8	12.2	17.0	+5	-12
60% of the people with median income	35.1	28.3	22.5	36.1	29.9	30.7	31.3	29.3	38.5	29.6	30.9	29.9	31.4	33.7	28.9	28.0	26.4	-2	-9
20% of the most prosperous people	35.1	34.2	26.2	32.3	33.1	34.2	45.9	34.0	40.6	35.8	34.7	34.4	32.2	32.3	33.0	40.1	32.0	-8	-3
<b>Territories</b>																			
Vologda	41.0	31.0	27.8	42.5	26.7	33.0	42.6	24.5	35.4	31.9	34.7	33.8	32.2	27.8	28.6	26.9	30.9	+4	-10
Cherepovets	24.3	18.9	21.8	27.2	25.5	30.1	33.7	38.7	42.6	41.0	35.6	35.2	34.2	37.2	36.9	43.6	36.5	-7	+12
Districts	34.5	34.5	18.7	29.3	28.5	29.3	24.4	23.3	31.4	21.2	23.4	22.9	26.0	27.4	22.7	16.9	16.5	0	-18
Oblast	33.4	29.6	21.6	31.8	27.3	30.4	31.0	27.5	35.2	28.7	29.2	28.7	29.5	30.1	28.0	26.6	25.7	-1	-8
Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.																			



Thus, according to the results of the analysis of assessments of public opinion (noted by ISED T RAS and IS RAS) not only at the level of the Vologda Oblast, but also nationwide: “not positive but real” – this should be the motto of modern mass media. And this is especially relevant at the regional level, which (on the background of erratically developing world events) was somehow forgotten. Nevertheless, before and after the events connected with the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts, people have lived and are living in a specific region and specific municipality. Their main concern is not war, or Meldonium, which, perhaps, are the number one topic for discussion, but only during the “kitchen table talk”. In reality, people care about how to take their children to kindergarten, how long the prices in stores will be increasing, etc. **“There is one constant key driver of public opinion: it is not the events in the Kremlin, or a political campaign, or a war in Syria, Libya, or the Fukushima nuclear disaster, or the events in neighboring countries – all this is secondary. The key driver is called “prices”, since each person not only depends on them, but deals with it in everyday life” [19].** And one should bear this in mind when embarking on the task of consolidating the society and government.

Consistently low level of social tension (according to ISED T RAS data, it was 19–21% in 2007–2016) largely resulting from the

effects of the mass media on the public consciousness is a good cause. But its reverse side is the decline of trust in the media, one of the main means of communication between the state and society.

No matter how strong the ideological “nutrition” of society has been after the events of the “Crimean spring”, economic issues start to prevail. What was the unifying basis of the Russian society in 2014 and what was theoretically supposed to serve as the basis for its further development for many years, is coming to naught. This is noted by experts [18], and this is indicated by the results of sociological studies. So, after an upsurge of consolidation sentiment in the society in 2014, in 2016 there was a decrease in the proportion of people who believe that “today there is more harmony and unity than dissent and disunity in the country” (by 7 p.p., from 29 to 22%); there was a decrease in the proportion of those who are “willing to unite for the implementation of common ideas and interests” (by 12 p.p., from 55 to 38%; *Tab. 12*).

Just as ignorance of the law is no excuse, “peaceful ignorance” does not exempt from the hardships of life. And, given the downward trend of trust in the “fourth estate” among the population, one should think: what next? Of course, we are not talking about the need to escalate the psychological situation and regularly report the failures of the Russian economy. The idea is to cover the situation

Table 12. Indicators characterizing the dynamics of social consolidation in society (% of the number of respondents)\*

Answer	2011	2013	2014	2015	2016	Dynamics +/- 2015 to	
						2015	2011
Proportion of people who believe that “today there is more harmony and unity than dissent and disunity in the country”	14.2	14.1	28.9	22.0	21.6	0	+8
Proportion of people who are “willing to unite for the common actions if their ideas and interests coincide”	47.1	43	54.6	50.6	38.3	-12	+4
* Included in the survey since 2011. Source: ISED T RAS public opinion monitoring.							

in the country and the regions objectively, reliably and comprehensively, giving people a choice of different points of view, including those connected with the recovery from the economic crisis (especially since there are suggestions from the experts in this regard [5, 8, 25]). The idea is to pay attention not only to long-term economic projects that bring millions of US dollars to Russia (or, to be more specific, to domestic corporations), but also to highlight the real problems in those areas with which people come into contact in everyday life – health, education, etc.

In June 2016 at the New Era of Journalism: Farewell to Mainstream international media forum Russian President Vladimir Putin clearly stated the purpose of modern mass media: “In the modern world, with information technologies developing so rapidly, your most important job remains to achieve information integrity and truthfulness, and as I said earlier, unbiased reporting. These are the most important things.... Information should be objective in every respect and not be subjected to any repressive action or tampered

with” [35]. We cannot doubt the strategic vision of the head of state, and, perhaps, the mission of the “fourth estate” outlined by the President is the main condition for the prevention of social shocks and provision of national security.

Thus, at present, when events at the global level are developing with turbulence and fluctuation of the spiritual and moral foundations of civilizations, in order to ensure national security it is vital to maintain adequate social perception of reality among the general public. It is especially important to do in Russia, as it is one of the main participants of geopolitical competition and the hybrid warfare, which involves most countries of the world. In implementing this task, the key role belongs to the media, because, in our opinion, is the main mechanism of interaction between authorities and society. Here we speak not only about communicating to the public the objective information about the development of political and economic events, but also about maintaining spiritual, moral, and

ideological core – the foundation of our national identity and a strategic advantage of Russia in the geopolitical struggle. The distortion of the objective social reality, as shown by the results of the study, carries comprehensive consequences including those

in the economic sphere. And while the ruling elites do not see or just ignore this aspect of modern life, it is difficult to talk about positive strategic plans of Russia (primarily in ensuring effective interaction between government and society).

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