

Youth Foresight: We Will All Be Media in 2035

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to describe the Media Environment in 2035 Foresight Session held on September 27, 2015 at Artek International Child Center during International Youth Media Forum. The event was attended by 158 schoolchildren - the winners of regional Youth Journalism contests. The researchers were entrusted with the task of identifying the specifics of modern teenagers' vision of the future; predicting of most promising media professions - from the point of view of young people; evaluating the possibilities of the emergence of new types of media and attitude towards the impending digital future. Session moderators used a variety of research methods, such as emotional deep problems study, survey of all participants with both open-end and close-end questions, elements of pedagogically organized team play offering different levels of generalization, joint analysis of the results, and divergent presentations of outcomes. The survey findings were confirmed in the course of the team game, where the schoolchildren acted as experts and provided the prognostic description of 2035 media reality. During visualization of the ideas at a higher abstraction level the obtained images were identical to those that occurred during the game. From the results of Media Environment in 2035 Foresight Session, the moderators concluded that modern teenagers feel neither threatened, nor scared of the impending future and that is significantly different from media behavior of adults.

KEYWORDS

Environment, generation Z, future, forecasts, foresight, media reality

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Introduction

According to N. Howe's & W. Strauss' (1991) Generations Theory, generation is defined as a group of people born in a certain age period, experiencing the influence of identical historical events and features of education, and, as a consequence, having a unified system of values.

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When we talk about Generation Z we refer to the children born after 2000, those who are under fifteen (Wartzman, 2014; Schawbel, 2014; Cole, 2016). The technologies, considered futuristic by previous generations, make up their today. They are digital people both by their way of thinking and by their lifestyles, the first generation of the period of globalization and post modernism (Schlossberg, 2016; Cornish, 2010; Chernenko & Ryklina, 2008; Shamis, 2006).

Modern teenagers were born in the digital era. They learn information technologies before they begin to speak and cannot imagine their lives without the Internet. Their worldview was influenced by the global financial and economic crisis, Web 2.0, and the development of mobile technologies. According to the American child psychologist Sh. Posnick-Goodwin (2015), they would prefer a text message to a conversation. They communicate online with friends whom they have never met in person; they rarely go out, unless their parents stage-manage their leisure. Mobile phones have always been a constituent part of their life. Those children have never seen a world without high-tech or terrorism. They prefer computers to books and seek immediate results in everything. They grew up in the era of economic depression. And being successful is the only thing everyone expects from them. Most of them mature fast, perceiving themselves much older than their actual age (Posnick-Goodwin, 2015; Pechmann, 2004; Dautovic & Novkovic, 2015; Nikolova, 2015; Albrow, 1997; Shamis, 2009a; 2009b).

The formation of Generation Z is affected by vertical power structure strengthening. The state apparatus is gaining greater strength. Small companies are absorbed by the major networks, the weak dies while the strong triumphs (Lernier, 2010; David, 2010; Page, 2008; Eberhard & Patoine, 2004). Society lives in a state of expecting new terrorist attacks, in fact, in a state of a terrorist war. The state apparatus of administration, control, and suppression is gaining momentum (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2007; Girouard, 2010).

At the same time, the life of this generation goes on under the sign of the Internet and other social media, they are experts in technologies (Measuring the Information Society Report, 2014). Their way to interact with their peers is social networks, their way of learning is the global information network. They are flexible by nature and they expect flexibility from social institutions, which are not quite friendly to them.

All their friends are in VKontakte social medium, and they are as easy to break up with them as make new ones. They are not ready to build strong relationships - neither personal nor business.

Materials and Methods

Due to the Internet their world is much wider than others. We think their world is chaotic, and we wonder how easy they navigate in it. To a modern schoolchild the Internet is the main and sometimes the only means of entry into the big world. Generation Z is distinguished by independence and inner freedom; representatives of this generation destroy any hierarchy and do not recognize any authority, they are selfish and lazy, but very talented at the same time (OECD, 2014; 2015).

Under these conditions, while the adults are trying to comprehend what is happening, analyzing and evaluating the degree of danger of the

impending digital tsunami, Generation Z is actively conquering the media space adapting it to their own world order.

They easily construct from the present an image of the future based on their social and personal experience. Such targeted prognostic design of the future was implemented under our guidance by Generation Z members on September 27, 2015 at the International Youth Media Forum in Artek International Child Center. Media Environment in 2035 Foresight Session was attended by 158 schoolchildren – the winners of regional Youth Journalism contests. They were high school students from Arkhangelsk Region (Severodvinsk), the Republic of Bashkortostan (Sterlitamak), Buryatia, Vladimir Region, Dagestan, the cities of Ivanovo, Murom, Kemerovo, Kaliningrad, Kostroma, Kursk, the Regions of Perm, Leningrad, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Tula, Lipetsk, Orenburg, Samara, Sverdlovsk and Kirov, Krasnoyarsk and Stavropol Territories, from Kamchatka, North Ossetia, the Republic of Tatarstan, Udmurtia, Chuvashia, Yakutia, Khanty-Mansiysk Region, and from many other cities and towns of the Russian Federation.

Foresight Session was held in two streams, each stream with 80 participants, and in three stages. During the first stage 158 Session participants aged 10 to 15 were surveyed. The questionnaire included questions concerning the possible features and directions of 2035 media environment development, the challenges to be faced by humanity in this period, the role of mass media in society, as well as the new types of media and media professions arising in the era of formation of the new generation – Generation Alpha.

The second and third stages were actually devoted to designing of the image of the future - in small and large expert groups. Notably, in the final third stage, the participants were asked to develop two scenarios - a positive and a negative one. The forecasts were to be visualized and presented as images to all Foresight Session participants.

Plan and timing of Media Environment in 2035 Foresight Session

Warming-up

Warming-up question. *What kind of personality do you see yourself in 2035?* - 5 minutes

Characteristics of Generation Z. *The main features of their media-behavior.* - 3 minutes

Generation Alpha skills. *How will Alpha Generation (2020-2040) behave in the media space?* - 10 minutes

Stage 1. Questionnaire survey

Survey handout - 3 minutes

Answering to the questions - 25 minutes

Stage 2. Work in small expert groups

Introduction to Foresight Session. What is Foresight? - 5 minutes

Dividing into 10 teams of 8-9 members - 5 minutes

Teamwork. Creating a scenario for 2035 mass media environment development, fixing the results - 20 minutes



Stage 3. Work in large expert groups

Combining small groups into 3 teams of 25-30 members - 5 minutes

Problem Statement - 3 minutes

Integration of the scenarios for 2035 media environment which were created in small groups; development of two common scenarios – a positive and a negative one - 15 minutes

Viva voce of the three scenarios - 30 minutes

Combining the three scenarios into one - 10 minutes

Creative break - 10 minutes

The general scenario presentation - 10 minutes

Summing up, reflection - 10 minutes.

Results and Discussion

Here are the main results obtained in the course of questioning teens and collective creative work.

According to the 15-year-olds, in 20 years time, the mankind will face the problems of distrust between people. The mankind will be drawn into the ongoing information wars, people will be finding it difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood. The information will be cheap and of poor quality, its uniqueness will disappear, it will not be perceived by a person, and finally it will completely get out of circulation as unrequired stuff. The media environment will have many opportunities, but little interest, the information will be replaced by the propaganda, "the management of the people's mood" and "boring multimedia life will set in".

The idea of mind-management was explicit in all intermediate and final results of the Foresight Session. "People will be managed with the help of the Internet", "the society will be further divided into those who govern and those who are governed. The governors will be in the minority", "The world will be governed by technical means fixed on a human body", "our future holds total surveillance", etc. The idea of the world and the people handling was broadcast by the schoolchildren as a natural and inevitable one.

In addition, the 15-year-olds talk easily about "digitization of human memory onto electronic data storage devices, about transfer of information directly into the human mind." After 20 years, the future generation will become entirely dependent on the media sphere, which will have a huge impact on everyone's life. "Even as a child the child will be accustomed to working with the media sphere. Information will be introduced straight into babies' brains from their birth day, however it will be done gradually". "People will not have to get up early in the morning to catch a fresh issue of a newspaper in the press-kiosks, instead they will click it in the Internet. There will be no need to turn pages, no need to waste time on doing shopping, because you will be able to use the Internet to meet all your needs". "In the future there will appear virtual assistants who will both be informing us and also helping us about personal issues".

The main directions of 2035 media environment development are seen by the representatives of the digital generation as "entertainment through gossip and intrigue", "maintenance of order among the ordinary people who are dissatisfied with something," "support and praise of the government." 56% of

respondents said that TV would become a set of independent programs that can be watched at any time and in any place; there will be a pocket TV. The majority of respondents (73%) believe that the Internet will replace all other forms of media and become a global media environment, while 51% of respondents believe that humanity will make the Internet most manageable possible and will introduce a lot of new restrictive laws.

The media, according to the schoolchildren who are engaged in the work of the media, will play a leading role in public life, a more meaningful role than it is now, "the media will be life, we will all become media", while "all efforts will be focused on managing human thoughts." A journalist's role will be reduced to the fact that "for a small fee, he will be hunting for reliable information." 41% of adolescents who participated in the survey said that "the profession of a journalist will become extinct, since information will be collected and processed by bloggers or press-robots."

Their idea of the new types of media, which may appear in 2035, is disclosed in such terms as "telepathic communication", "everything will be in our heads, we are going to become media", "golographics" etc. There will emerge new professions, such as an instagram-journalist, a 3D-modeller, a golographer, a media aid man, media policeman, a manager of journalistic robots.

In this connection, it is of special interest to compare the two views on the prospects for the civilization development. The first look is revealed by the results of the global survey of 3 million media texts done in 2015 by "Open Innovations" with the help of ABBYY Compreno technology (Fukolova, 2012). This unique text word-processing technology enables to automatically capture relevant topics in the digital documents, authors' opinions, time and interregional relations of the publications, etc. The total number of 6 billion documents were available for the research group, 3 million texts were selected for semantic analysis. On this basis, there was created a universal representation of the population of our planet, there were extracted the essence, events, links between them, and there were identified the most problematic issues for the humanity.

The other view was observed in the course of schoolchildren's Foresight Session "Media Environment in 2035". Here are a few examples that show significant differences in the assessment of the development of new technologies, done by the bulk of the adult population of our planet and by the group of rather advanced 15-year-olds.

In particular, according to ABBYY Compreno, the intervention of digital technologies in the personal life, the destruction of privacy is the most acute and dynamic problem: no other theme in the global discourse has grown that much in terms of quantity over the last 10 years. Fear of the "digital nudity", insecurity is growing fastest. "Digital Ego", privacy, spying and collection of personal data - all these invade the sphere of fundamental self-awareness. The possible negative impact of digital technologies is related to the concept of fear strongly enough: about 10% of "fears" are in the area of vocabulary that describes the network, computer technologies. Meanwhile, the economy, moral issues, the state and the regulation issues are much less noticeable as a source of fear (all of them are about in the 6% area of frequency, close to the words "fear" and "threat"). Apparently, the humanity finds social problems subservient.



Though, 15-year-olds, as we remember, talk easily about the digitization of human memory and about the embedding of electronic data storage devices in the human body. "Writing will gradually disappear, schools will no longer teach writing, everyone will write in the media devices (phones, tablets, computers)". "Definitely, this will affect eyesight, people will become less literate, mental disorders will be developing. Nevertheless, science is moving forward, and the humanity will manage to cope with these challenges".

"After 20 years, the relationship between consumers and creators of information will be developing in a very peculiar way. Creators will take a certain image of the deity, which can impose their will on the population. The latter are bound to obey and take false information as truth. 10 years have passed since the first chip was introduced into a human body. Information is delivered to the people through such chips. During announcing important messages a person falls into a trance and sees a god bringing information to him. Traditional religion has disappeared, it has been replaced by the technological world religion. The phrase: "The one who owns the information - owns the world" takes on the iconic character. The world is becoming immoral, but controlled by higher powers".

People's attitudes to the themes of robots and artificial intelligence turned out to be a big surprise for the ABBYY Compreno researchers. These issues take up only 1.5% of the total array of publications on technical progress. "Artificial intelligence is one of the science's long-standing promises to the mankind, and people may have just got tired of waiting," - David Ian, one of the authors of the study, comments on the survey results (Open Innovations, 2015). It is also notable that EU countries in particular focus on threats and risks in this area. The main concern, expressed by the authors of the publications under review, is the potential unemployment caused by robots. Linguistic connection "robots-unemployment" appears in 25% of cases, and this figure, according to the analysts, is quite a big amount. This fact suggests that the mankind consider robotics in a very practical way - people dislike the idea of losing their jobs because of them.

Generation Z representatives are more optimistic about this challenge. They believe, for example, "press-robots will be able to instantly process the information and will be assisting journalists to cope with challenges; they will facilitate the work of professional journalists". "Robots will be carrying out most of the human activities. Material things will be reduced: books, magazines, newspapers will be replaced with mobile robotic devices". "There will be a reduction in the number of employees, human workers will be replaced with robots". "There will emerge a new profession - software programmer for robots".

Another significant outcome of Artek-2015 Foresight Session, which directly relates to the aspect of a different perception of the future by Generation Z members. Only 5% of respondents answered in the affirmative that they are scared of the upcoming future, 34% - that they are practically not scared, and 37% - that they are absolutely not scared. Teenagers do not have any fear of new technology breakthrough, they are able and willing to live in uncertain world.

Conclusion

Maybe it's a symptom of the fact that there is a certain shift in the traditional orientation of the Russian man who is usually wary of the future,

and always looks for some support in the past. Russians are ready to sacrifice everything for the past, for the stability and predictability, they are ready to sacrifice everything - their personal and civil liberties, innovations and changes. However, the digital generation, born in the new media environment, practically lives in the future, derives from it their own ideas about what way their life should be organized. And it is not the generation gap problem, it is rather the shift of ideological paradigm.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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