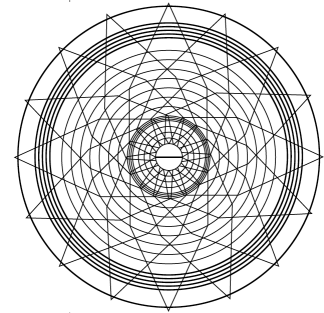


## [Scientific Articles]

Chumakova V.P., Gorshkova D., Popova V., Shibanova A.  
*Information Overload of Journalists in Contemporary Russia:  
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# INFORMATION OVERLOAD OF JOURNALISTS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA: CAUSES, WAYS OF ADAPTATION AND CONSEQUENCES (A PILOT STUDY)

### **Chumakova V.P.**

PhD in Cultural Studies, Associated Professor at Media  
Department of National Research University Higher School of  
Economics (Moscow, Russia)  
[vchumakova@hse.ru](mailto:vchumakova@hse.ru)

### **Gorshkova D.**

BA student at Media Department of National Research  
University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia)

### **Popova V.**

BA student at Media Department of National Research  
University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia)

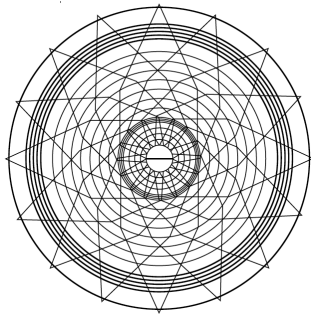
### **Shibanova A.**

BA student at Media Department of National Research  
University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia)

### **Abstract:**

The article is devoted to the problem of information overload of contemporary journalists. The pilot study included 37 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Russian journalists from various fields. Firstly, 9 main reasons for the overload of journalists mentioned by them were identified: the heterogeneity of the media environment; an increase in the distortion of reliable information; the exhaustion of analytical resources; global events; communication overload; compassion fatigue; the specificity of the profession (speed, deadlines); physiological and workflows; focus on the news. Secondly, four levels of overload consequences were identified, which were discussed by informants: physiological (biological), psychological, cognitive and social. The components of these consequences were analyzed in detail. Thirdly, the professional sequences of journalists' overload, which arise from the designated four levels, were analyzed separately. Finally, ways of adapting journalists to information overload were identified.

**Keywords:** information overload, journalists, new media, Internet, media, fact-checking, post-truth



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### **Introduction**

Information overload is one of the vivid problems of the information society. However, an ordinary media user, as shown by previous studies, does not always perceive overload as an acute problem [Hargittai, Neuman, Curry 2012] and can also adapt relatively effectively to information flows through setting filters, prioritizing information flows, refusing to use a particular technology [Chumakova 2018]. But the nowadays journalist, due to the specifics of the profession, can not always afford such a luxury.

In this article, we present the results of a pilot study of information overload of today Russian journalists: if they suffer informational overload, what are its causes, in their opinion, what they do with it and what consequences they see for themselves.

### **Journalist and information overload**

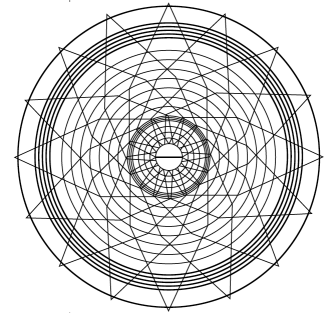
Information overload is one of the essential problems of the contemporary media environment. The point is that since telegraph invention information technologies increased the volumes of transmitted information, but their managers not always thought about quality and social awareness [Postman 2000]. The study of information overload started from media ecology attempts to understand the media environment in the 1980s [Postman 2013: 7-14] and management studies of communication within organizations [Eppler, Mengis 2004]. Currently, information overload is studied within a various number of disciplines from hard sciences such as neurophysiology to soft sciences such as sociology [Chumakova 2016].

Although there is a lot of different understandings of information overload, in this paper information overload is perceived as situation, when person's ability to access, analyze, operate with, evaluate information decreases or is totally lost. It is also connected with the ability to filter information, as our previous empirical studies of Russian students in 2016 shown [Chumakova 2018]. This idea was mentioned before by Clay Shirky in 2008: "It's not information overload. It's filter failure" [Shirky 2008]. Cameron Neylon in 2011 argued with Shirky, that "it's not filter failure, it's a discovery deficit" [Neylon 2011]. So, the discussion about information overload nature, its effects and consequences, is still relevant.

The information overload of different professions is mostly studied in organization sciences, and usually the heroes of such studies are military officers, pilots, physicians or top-managers [Hargittai, Neuman, Curry 2012]. The information overload of journalists, its forms and consequences, is not widely studied, although it is considered one of the professional risks of a journalist [Kasyanov, Nemets, Samygin 2018] and the discussion about the information overload of journalists has been going on since about the 1980s [Whitney 1981]. Today overload could be perceived as a kind of a priori feature of the profession of journalist, but attention is not fully paid to a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon. It is especially noticeable against the background of a vast array of literature on the topic of information overload in organizations, studied from the standpoint of management and internal

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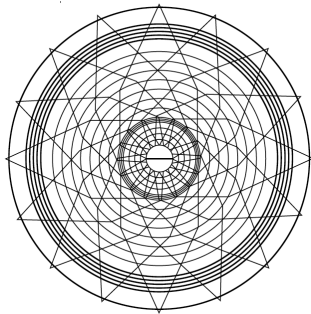
communications [Eppler, Mengis 2004]. However, we believe that the overload of journalists has different forms that change over time, like any other manifestation of information overload in culture [Chumakova 2016].

For example, if in the 1990s the lack of time to process all the information was considered one of the main problems of journalists' congestion [Nicholas, Martin 1997], today the overload is manifested not only in the absence of time. In the 2000s, the researchers draw attention to the fact that journalists have to work in a situation of uncertainty and their practices are associated not only with time management but also with the development of more advanced methods of fact-checking and the strengthening of personal interest [Atfield, Dowell 2003]. But if in the 2000s the use of the Internet for fact-checking and in general obtaining information, for example, by British journalists was assessed by researchers as weak [Nicholas et al. 2000], today a journalist cannot ignore the Internet. And this situation changes the forms of overload, its perception and ways of adaptation.

One of the discussed consequences is that the journalist has more work to do in the filtration and selection of information than in previous periods in the history of journalism [Slutskiy 2008], and the question is how journalist solves this problem.

At the same time, adaptation to the overload of journalists is not only related to the work tasks, but also to the broader context of a work-life balance, which leads to psychological consequences. In her master's thesis, Maltseva analyzed the practice of psychological adaptation of journalists to overload [Maltseva 2018]. Maltseva identified four types of journalists according to the degree of their overload: 1) those who feel chronic fatigue from information; 2) those who periodically feel tired; 3) those who physically feel tired, but do not get tired of information; 4) those who do not feel tired at all [Maltseva 2018: 22]. Journalists who do not feel tired of information redundancy, according to this study, are more focused on creating their own content and are able to clearly separate work and personal life [Maltseva 2018: 41-42]. Those who sometimes feel tired, but do not get tired of excessive information, perceive redundancy as a challenge; they are focused on learning new things, develop skills in working with information (concentration, etc.) and time management [Maltseva 2018: 38-40]. As for journalists who are tired of information, it is interesting that those who experience chronic fatigue, tend to move away from people: they turn to algorithms for working with information, they are emotionally distanced, etc.. [Maltseva 2018: 26-28]. While those journalists who periodically experience information fatigue, on the contrary, are looking for salvation from overload in communicating with people – either by switching to live communication or by turning to other people as sources of information. They do not turn off their emotional involvement, but on the contrary, perceive their profession as a kind of help and tend to emotional empathy [Maltseva 2018: 31-36].

Thus, when we are studying the adaptation of a journalist to overload, it is important to consider the cognitive level (different skills of working with information) and emotional level (journalist is involved or, on the contrary, distances himself from messages).



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### **Data & method**

The study is based on 37 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Russian journalists in the age from 21 years to 65 years. Among the informants were: news editors on TV, authors of articles in online media and newspapers, media managers, department editors, correspondents, reporters, editors of online publications, SMM-editors and media observers. There is a list of informants in the Appendix.

During the interview, we asked questions about whether informants experience information overload, what are its manifestations for them, how they work with it, what consequences of overload they see in their work, personal life, etc.

Most of the informants reported that they experience information overload, but they perceive its manifestations, causes and consequences differently.

Only two informants said that information overload does not affect them and it can be overcome:

- *"Journalism itself is stressful, and Internet journalism in particular. Everything needs to be done quickly, so the stress is constant. But you can get used to everything. Such conditions need to be accepted and experienced" (Informant N° 28).*

Other informants told about different consequences and effects of information overload in their personal and professional life.

### **Causes of information overload of journalists**

According to the results of the interview, we were able to identify 9 leading causes of overload that journalists had:

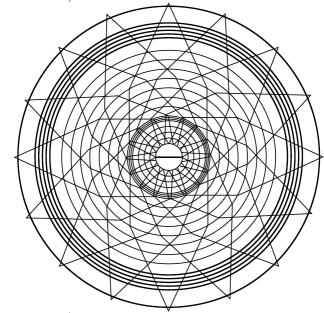
1. the heterogeneity of the media environment;
2. the increase in the distortion of reliable information;
3. exhaustion of analytical resources;
4. global events;
5. communicational overload;
6. compassion fatigue;
7. the specifics of the profession (efficiency, deadlines);
8. physiological and working cycles;
9. specialization: news;

Firstly, a lot of informants believe that the reason for the overload is the heterogeneity of the media environment in which it is necessary for a journalist to be immersed. Journalists are forced to be aware of what is happening, receiving information from sources that are heterogeneous in format, type of communication and other parameters:

- *«Overload is rather felt because of the constant presence in social networking sites, especially in Telegram. Different thematic channels, including some media channels» (Informant N° 22)*

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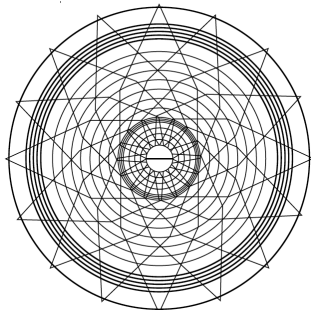
- *«The overload is felt in connection with the development of websites, <...> I was subscribed to all RSS channels, all Twitter and telegram channels, and all this gave an incredible information noise» (Informant N° 32)*
- *«To understand how our reader thinks and acts now I think that I should put myself in the reader's shoes sometimes. And here's what I'll say: it's a tremendous work – to sort out dozens or even hundreds of pages and blogs via Instagram which are devoted to the desired topic, to study the news of gloss (our major competitors), to view the news from fashion shows that are not limited by one Fashion Week. So, answering one of the questions - yes! there is an overload, and I experience it constantly» (Informant N°37)*
- *«In addition to various social networking sites, like Instagram, radio in the car, V Kontakte, Telegram, where there are different channels, and even on Twitter I have two accounts: one only for work, where sports journalists, sports publications, various fans, players and so on; and another with usual news, Meduza<sup>1</sup>, Dozhd<sup>2</sup>, some socio-political journalists, just friends, various bloggers. This all creates the problem of an overabundance of information, because there is one thing, here is another... everything is difficult to put in your head» (Informant No 15)*

Secondly, informants associate information overload with an increase in the number of messages on the same topic. From one hand, there are a lot of sources with different points of view on the news events happening. From other, there is a lot of fake news, and this needs more accurate fact-checking. Thus, the search for reliable information becomes much more complicated, since many distorted alternatives are layered around reliable messages.

- *«Now the problem is that we have a very well developed Internet and a huge number of media that serve the same news in 10 different ways» (Informant No 1)*
- *«Now it is even harder to get intrinsic information than before, for this we have to consume a lot of unnecessary and obviously incorrect information to find the "rational grain" in the Internet manure. Previously, we complained about the scarcity of information on all the subjects of interest to us (for example, the war in Chechnya and some of its events). Or, at least, experienced a shortage of alternative opinions, for a more or less objective description of the processes. Now we are mired in a giant "information trash" - in the Network». (Informant No 13)*
- *«Possible sources are becoming more and more difficult to verify. And, perhaps the overload is compounded by the fear to miss something and not to check the information out» (Informant No 18)*

<sup>1</sup> Russian internet portal Meduza.io and its accounts in social media

<sup>2</sup> Russian TV-channel and mediaholding and its accounts in social media



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Thirdly, for some informants overload is associated with the complexity of information processing. In the context of increasing information flows, the process of analysis, structuring, systematization of information becomes more complicated.

- *«Previously, we had relatively few news agencies, so the journalist processed about 300 receipts per day, a maximum about 500, which is not difficult to process. And now if you collect all the agencies that collect a database in working systems, then in one minute you can see 10-20 messages of different kind» (Informant No 8)*
- *«I am the chief editor of the Internet portal, on average I publish 10-12 news and read three times more than that a day — about 30-50 news articles, plus about a dozen of videos. RSS feed gives the news every ten minutes, and I read all the titles at least. Plus, analytical reports and digests - it is about from five to seven materials per day. And this is without non personal contacts» (Informant No 20)*

Fourthly, informants note that global events are more likely to be a cause of the information overload.

- *«I noticed that the overload is when there are global events, a plane crash or some emergency, for example. During such days, there is a lot of news and information noise. On days when there are few events, overload is not felt» (Informant No 35)*
- *«One day the Olympics coincided with the Europa League, and it happened so that in Bilbao the Spartak fans had riots and one of the local police officers was killed. Colleagues sent me transcripts of eyewitnesses, it was necessary to take the comments of experts. At the same time, I had to keep up with the news of the Olympics. Head was torn, all mixed up, because the information changed very quickly». (Informant No 27)*

Fifthly, according to informants, another reason which causes overload in the work of journalists is the overload of communication.

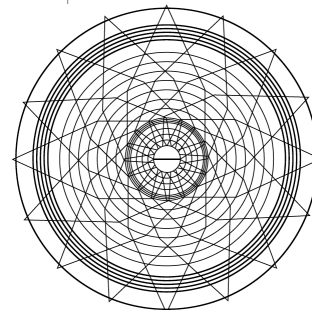
- *«I feel it when collecting materials and communicating with speakers. I make longreads and I have to chat with 5-10 people. It's exhausting» (Informant No 36)*

Sixth, according to informants, informational overload can be associated with «compassion fatigue»:

- *«I get tired when listening to people talking for two hours about how they feel bad and hurt, so I just do not have enough emotions to empathize with them». (Informant N° 1)*
- *«For me, the compassion fatigue is also a consequence of media overload. Personally, I do not have it specifically, but I can see that it is peculiar to people who are constantly loaded with some negative information and write about some incidents, terrorist attacks, social problems so the constant flow of such information can lead to professional deformation and burnout» (Informant N° 25)*

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Seventh, informational overload is associated with the organization of journalistic work – efficiency and availability of strict deadlines contributes to it.

- *«When the deadline comes, the informational overload is particularly noticeable. You need to correct or add some information in your text or boss gives you more urgent work at this time during any kind of operational materials». (Informant N° 6)*
- *«There are situations when you need to understand what is happening urgently, and you fall into a stupor. I had such a situation when the plane of Saratov airlines crashed, and I fell into a stupor. I was still with a new employee, and I began to feel pressure in the working chat because I had to write the news and create online ones simultaneously. At this time you start to panic, and you don't understand what you do». (Informant N° 34)*

Finally, some informants believe that overload is associated with human working and physiological cycles.

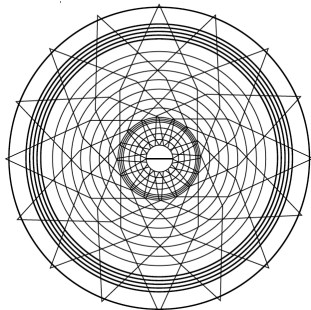
- *«The human body works according to certain algorithms, and it is characterized by such things as fatigue, lack of concentration and other things that can occur after 8-10 hours. The profession of a person associated with the processing of a large amount of information, as a rule, does not consider these factors and at the end of the evening you need to apply super efforts to work out qualitatively this or that informational occasion» (Informant N° 9)*
- *«At the end of the day, the brain is simply overloaded with unnecessary information, which the next day is already eroding from the head: events of dubious significance, unnecessary details» (Informant No 31)*

Although all the journalists we interviewed are experiencing media overload, the most vulnerable to it were those who are directly related to the rapid creation, editing and release of news materials. This opinion is expressed by both journalists who do not work in the news, comparing their congestion with journalists who do and believe that their load is higher, and journalists who work with news themselves speaking about the high overload:

- *«Yes, I feel, and it is certainly connected with my profession because I work in the news and I have to process huge amounts of information all the time. I need to be involved in each message and I need to rethink it, and by the end of the day a resource of processing this information dries up a little» (Informant No 5)*
- *«For my professional life, the topic of information overload is quite relevant. I work with news, various sources of information, it is often very difficult to find information in the flow of extraneous things». (Informant No 19)*

### **Consequences of information overload on journalists**

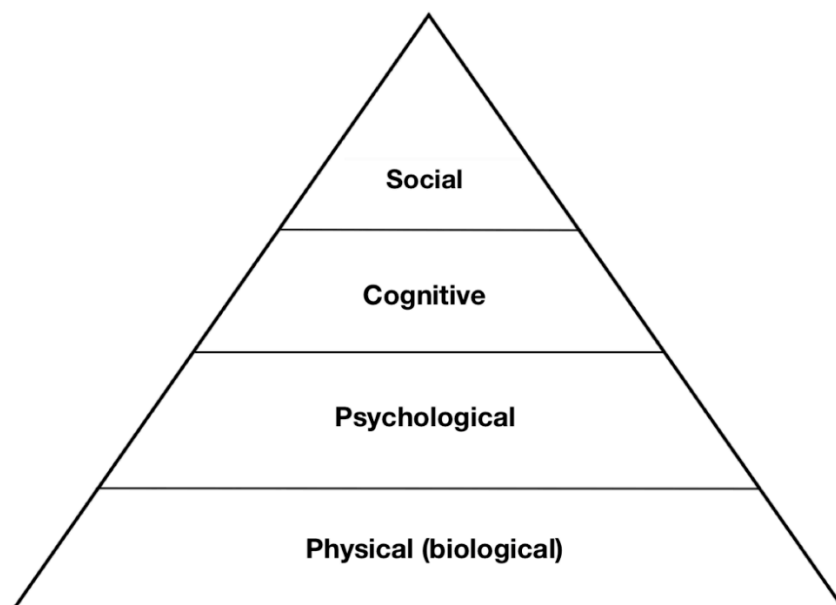
As a result of the classification of the consequences of information overload on journalists, which our informants talked about, we can highlight four levels of consequences: physical, psychological, cognitive and social (presented in Figure 1). As



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a separate part of the research, we distinguish consequences that affect the professional activity of a journalist.



**Figure 1. Levels of consequences of Information Overload**

### **Physical (biological) consequences**

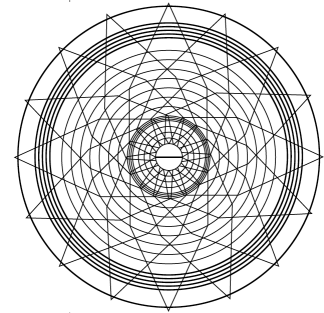
Let us first consider the consequences related to the physical level in detail. As we can see from the interviews, many journalists said that they felt overworked, fatigue and sick:

- «*exhaustion, a decline of concentration and other things that may occur after 8-10 hours of work*» (Informant No. 9),
- «*it may be just common fatigue*» (Informant No. 30),
- «*... just professional fatigue ...*» (Informant No. 11),
- «*after work I felt that the brain could no longer be engaged in anything complicated, but only in drinking beer*» (Informant No. 31),
- «*the same fatigue, headaches and other. It just bothers me, without taking into account the fact that you see news everywhere*» (Informant No. 15),
- «*this is such a cumulative fatigue after the working week*» (Informant No. 5),
- «*Your resources of physical strength, as a result, are exhausted*» (Informant No. 5),
- «*my head starts to ache*» (Informant No. 27),
- «*tiredness, sometimes you have to overload yourself in order to work*» (Informant No. 27),
- «*I get tired of news*» (Informant No. 36),
- «*I just get tired of writing*» (Informant No. 1).



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One of the journalists suggested that *«as a result, in the long run, this could probably lead to some diseases»* (Informant No. 10). Another one described the feeling of being overloaded as *«rather an internal feeling, at the end of the day the brain is simply overloaded with unnecessary information»* (Informant No. 31).

### **Psychological consequences**

Psychological consequences were associated with effects which are connected with various aspects of the person's mental health. There are several subgroups of disorders: emotional, behavioral and motivational.

Informants said that information overload leads to stress:

- *«Journalism is stressful on its own, especially digital journalism. Everything needs to be done operatively, so the stress is constant»* (Informant No. 28),
- *«... stress and overload always lead to failures»* (Informant No. 8),
- *«stress caused by a large number of negative emotions»* (Informant No. 10).

However, we must bear in mind that we are talking about stress precisely in the understanding of informants, which is closer to the vernacular interpretation of this term rather than the medical one.

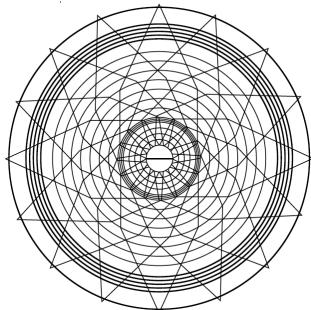
Many journalists noted the influence of information overload on their emotional state: *«I have this emotional overload»* (Informant No. 1). To the different emotional consequences of overload, named by informants, we attributed:

- Depression and panic attacks – *«sometimes overload leads to depression and panic attacks»* (Informant No. 26), *«...certainly it affects the emotional state: from simple indisposition to depression»* (Informant No. 14);
- Irritability – *«information overload makes a person tired, jaundiced and irritable»* (Informant No. 20), *«on the one hand, this is a slight irritation, because 99% are messages in which people want something from me»* (Informant No. 7);
- Professional burnout – *«I experience only one emotion from my professional side — negative»* (Informant No. 19), *«I write on specific topics related to people's suffering, and I pass a lot of things through myself. So here an emotional emptiness appears. I often think that I am tired of everything, I have thoughts about dismissal and leaving the profession.»* (Informant No. 36), *«it causes different negative emotions about incoming messages»* (Informant No. 7).

One informant mentioned the possibility of developing alcoholism, which is rather a behavioral disorder: *«I can say from experience that there are risks in the journalist profession such as burnout and alcoholism»* (Informant No. 36).

Information overload, according to journalists, can also cause information addiction:

- *«It is like any addiction, for example, in use of alcohol or tobacco. There is the same information addiction, when a person has a feeling that, while being with a smartphone in hands, a person feels safe and thinks he or she is able to*



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*control information flows, thereby one gets a certain satisfaction. I think this is the same thing. If, for example, we take into account the experience of other countries, there are about two thousand clinics in China that treat people from information addiction. It is not so common for us, but it seems to me that shortly we will also have such clinics» (Informant No. 23),*

- *«I am wasting time. Instead of doing something useful for myself, I read the news and consume information» (Informant No. 17), «many people complain that they cannot fall asleep until late night, surfing the net» (Informant No. 24).*

If we talk about motivational disorders, mentioned by informants, we can highlight:

- *Apathy to information, unwillingness to absorb it: «... this is both fatigue and unwillingness to continue working with such an amount of information. The aftermath of the constant information overload can be a professional burnout» (Informant No. 19), «..but from such manifestations, I noticed that I could not really read books» (Informant No. 30), «..about manifestation – disgust to information. I do not want to work. You read the written and understand no word. I want nothing related to the information. No books, not even favorite fiction, no films, even music is annoying» (Informant No. 18);*
- *The desire to rake up and put things in order: «provokes reflections on the topic that it is impossible to do everything, you need to form somehow “information hygiene” in order to exist in this information flow» (Informant No. 7), «the desire to rake up everything, restore order» (Informant No. 7);*
- *Unwillingness to do anything: «... can affect the fulfillment of tasks: fatigue will cause unwillingness to work, look for relevant topics, check information, analyze processes, because of that superficial articles and plots, formal replies, even a desire to leave work “for good” may appear» (Informant No. 14);*
- *The desire to escape from the flow of information: «there is a desire just to run away» (Informant No. 5), «I get tired of the news. There is a great desire to hide from all means of communication and just sit in silence for a few days. At the same time, there is a neurosis on my face: I am used to checking the phone to see if anything has happened while another text is being written» (Informant No. 36).*

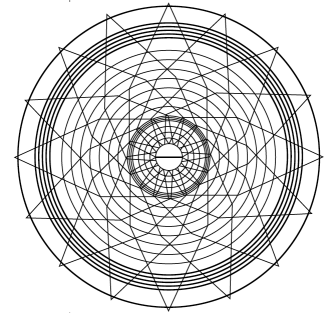
### **Cognitive effects**

In a separate group we attributed the consequences that affect cognitive processes, such as the decline of concentration and inattention:

- *The loss of the ability to perceive information and the loss of interest: «I cease to perceive any news and information» (Informant No. 1), «I cease to understand the meaning of what is happening» (Informant No. 1), «..at some point the brain refuses to process information and requires a time-out» (Informant No. 3), «..interest is lost, and you begin to understand that the agenda that you used to give meaning to is boring and monotonous» (Informant No. 25).*

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- Problems with concentration: *«it became difficult for me to read, it became harder for me to concentrate» (Informant No. 30), «my head was aching, everything was mixed up, because the information was changing very quickly» (Informant No. 27), «it makes it difficult to focus on that task» (Informant No. 7), «difficulties with a focus and diversionary stimuli» (Informant No. 4); «Often the main problem becomes a serious emotional involvement in what is happening - it can distract from the essence of what is happening, switch attention from something really important to someone's impulsive actions, statements and information noise» (Informant No. 3);*
- Reduced ability to work with information: *«I lose some ability to digest information quickly» (Informant No. 5), «the more information, the harder it is to analyze and understand it» (Informant No. 7); «Difficulties in memorizing information» (Informant No. 4), «deterioration of short-term memory is observed — I can forget the details of the verbal instructions that I was given a few hours ago» (Informant No. 24); «This is also mental fatigue» (Informant No. 5).*

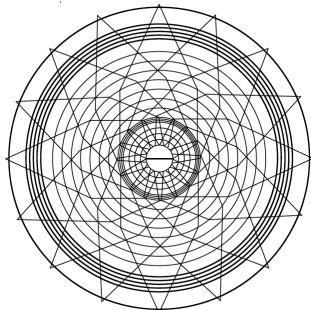
### **Social consequences**

Changes at the social level were one of the most significant interests for us since they have not been described anywhere else before. Two of the respondents said that information overload causes fatigue to have compassion for others, thus dehumanizing a person, depriving of family and friends:

- *«Information overload, firstly, deprives a journalist of a family - there is no time for it. When a child tries to talk about events at school, it is not informative, uninteresting, it takes you a lot of effort to listen to. Relationships with friends are broken because you want to give mouth, but not to listen to» (Informant No. 20),*
- *«I come home and do not want to communicate with anyone, because there have been too many contacts with people at work. I want to sit in silence» (Informant No. 36),*
- *«I am not a psychiatrist and not a psychologist, but in a certain sense, it is [information overload - approx. authors] emotionally coarsening, dehumanizing. There is no time to show "human approach", empathy», «overload can be manifested in a dispute with relatives/friends, when you are sure you know more than others. You try to give more examples, and sometimes thoughts get confused in your head, and if this happens after the working day, it can lead to an unplanned outburst of emotions» (Informant No. 15).*

### **Professional consequences**

We have already said about the impact of information overload on a person as a whole, now let us consider what effects and negative consequences it has directly on journalist's work.



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Informants note that due to overload journalists may begin to make mistakes while working with information:

- *«You may be very attentive, but an overabundance of information comes out. Errors appear, and because of the errors - distress. I didn't have blunders, but sometimes I forget to write down a question or ask the speaker about something. It happens because of haste because there is a lot of information and you need to interview the heroes to the maximum» (Informant No. 35),*
- *«And an overabundance of this information can confuse you, and you will give incorrect information» (Informant No. 6),*
- *«We see examples every day. People who work in the federal media make mistakes, and then they have to apologize. I remember a story when a journalist from «Komsomolskaya Pravda» said that Khvorostovsky died, but it was when he was still alive. Then the journalist apologized and said that he did not have enough time to check the information. It seems to me that it is directly related to the information overload» (Informant No. 23),*
- *«Due to a large amount of information and other things to do you make a small mistake which leads to a scandal» (Informant No. 27),*
- *«... it is possible to analyze the information incompletely, as a result to interpret it wrong and to give a news / report / note / text, in which the essence will differ from reality.» (Informant No. 9),*
- *As a result, a low-quality product is created: «Firstly, the speed of work is reduced. The number of characters that I can write down normally per day decreases dramatically. Secondly, the quality of the texts.» (Informant No.18).*

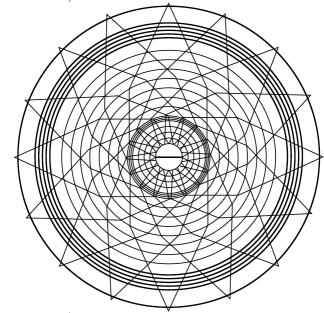
Often journalists have tight deadlines. That is, they should create high-quality material in a short time, selecting it from an enormous amount of different data.

Thus, on the one hand - deadlines, and on the other - a large flow of information that is difficult to verify thoroughly. Often due to this situation, there is not enough time to check the reliability of the material or the release of the content is delayed:

- *«Overload can be different. The reporters have one overload; the correspondents have another one. For example, correspondents thoroughly read the documents, everything which is connected with the topic. They are trying to briefly and concisely describe it. Doubts and clarifications may appear during the process of creating materials, which you have to overcome every time. The journalist solves the problem between professional and official. Deadline is important, but also the material must be high-quality and well-balanced» (Informant No. 26).*
- *«There are different stresses. There are deadlines and responsibility for the essence of the material which will be published in the newspaper. It's on the books, set in stone. So the mistake that you make in the text is multiplied, and the readers see it. In case of an online media, you can correct the blot. It relaxes authors a little bit. Of course, you need to do everything right straight away, but there is a safety net on the Internet.» (Informant No. 28)*

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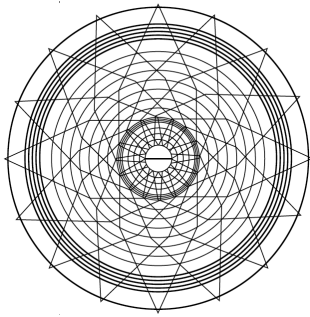
The most common opinion among the interviewed journalists was that information overload leads to the use of unverified information by journalists and insufficient fact-checking:

- *«There is a temptation not to check copywriting texts, not to edit quotes, for example, not to call for verification of information, not to send requests. You are trying to simplify life. <...> It was the last week when the journalists in Pskov region gave false information two days in a row.» (Informant No. 20),*
- *«... a problem of fake news appeared, which is now being actively discussed both in the West and in our country. There is such a thing as a post-truth territory <...> ... you can check everything, but you will never know what you really checked. And practically everyone is engaged in the creation of disinformation <...>... it is difficult to trust the information, and it is also very difficult to check it <...> ... everyone try to be experts in everything, but at the same time the quality of this expertise is average periodically. So now it is fashionable for a journalist to prove to everyone that he knows everything: only the news appeared, and he had already known everything about it, he knows absolutely everything related to this news. And, of course, it cannot be true. <...> ... they (journalists) become a part of this fake news» (Informant No. 2),*
- *«... information overload is the way of spreading incorrect information. There is a certain risk of becoming a victim of offense lies. <...> Often reporters in addition to formal professional activities have their telegram channels and blogs, where they promote a freer approach to the interpretation of events and the choice of their sources of information. Hence, the error appears. We must speak the truth» (Informant No. 13),*
- *«These sources disorient you, although it seems they should orient. I, as a journalist, understand that I cannot always recognize what is true and what is not <...> At that moment you are working and stop realizing why it is so and you get confused in all interconnections and facts <...> and you get lost» (Informant No. 5).*

Due to the overload, a journalist can be affected by emotions, according to informants, and thus does not create really objective material:

*«I read a lot of things in social networks, and it's very difficult to remain independent. When you need to create a material, you start to think differently, since you have read a lot of things. Sometimes you read, you understand that this is really rubbish, but it remains in your head, and you cannot completely ignore this unnecessary information, and this affects the execution of professional tasks» (Informant No. 15),*

One informant mentioned that a journalist could begin to write according to the principle *«at least to write something» (Informant No. 22)*. Another journalist said that a person overloaded with information may not finish working on the news at all: *«Another mistake is to forget about one, not to «screw up» or redoing, this is important» (Informant No. 15)*



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Also, due to fatigue from overload, the journalist may want to solve the available, not the necessary tasks, or to approach the work formally:

- «... *fatigue will cause unwillingness to work, search for topical issues, check information, analyze processes, this may cause superficial articles and stories, formal replies, even a desire to give up the job. The journalist gets tired of chasing new data, and in the end, relies on the facts that are represented by colleagues from other media.*» (Informant number 14),
- «*By the evening, during such shifts, you may become tired and may not notice something. For example, there is a news, it is released at 9 pm, and before that you have been working from 8:30, and it seems that the news is garbage, but in fact it is not. You do not call the speakers at 9 pm, as it is too late already, and you think you can work on it starting from the next day. The news may turn out to be good, it is necessary to take comment for it, somehow develop it, but you don't do it because you are already tired*» (Informant No. 15).

Information overload can lead to surfing social networks and increase the time wasted on information portals, which affects the focus on attention:

- «... *when you track some events in Instagram, sooner or later you catch yourself on the fact that you left your goal a long time ago and you have been watching friend's stories. I often get distracted by irritants, whether it's a letter in WhatsApp or a notification about the new picture of a favorite blogger*» (Informant No. 37),

Also the overload cascade is noted: «*the more information falls on me, the harder it is to plan what information I want to know myself*» (Informant No. 4).

There is another feature of the information overload – the complication of the professional reality in which the journalist works:

- «*The fact is that projects in various branches are becoming very multidisciplinary, that is why some team members may not completely understand what others are engaged in. An example from the developing trend of data journalism: the editor doesn't have to understand any algorithms used by the programmer. The latter could have made a mistake that led to incorrectly interpreted data*» (Informant No. 4)

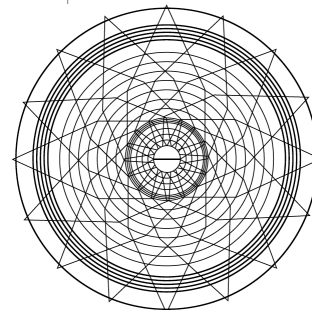
Sometimes journalists, who specialize in a narrow subject, may experience such a phenomenon as the satiation of monotonous information:

- «... *there may be an information overload in one particular topic. I really call it a "crisis of perception" for myself. It is difficult to work on information on the topic, when it is simply on the same topic, and it is not related to the novelty of this information. It just keeps flowing and flowing. In my practice, it infuriates me when it's all on one small topic. So, there is a satiation of monotonous information and the ability to critically evaluate it is lost*» (Informant No. 10).

Due to a large number of errors caused by information overload, journalists sometimes have to redo work because of inattention:

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- *«It's just working hard and fatigue appears, which has already been mentioned. Once, a funny case happened: I was so overworked, that I forgot to press the record button on the recorder for an interview. Then I persuaded the speaker to answer the questions again» (Informant No. 36).*

Another consequence of information impact of overload is the difficulty in isolating the primary information and structuring it.

- *«... mental activity is slowing down, it is very difficult to create a good and structured text», «... it is difficult to emphasize the most important thing and create the right structure», (Informant No. 26),*
- *«Overload interferes with the concentration of information and some orderliness» (Informant No. 7).*

As for the reasons that we have mentioned earlier (lack of concentration, fatigue, etc.), the speed of work of a journalist decreases.

- *«The task execution time increases due to the fact that you are constantly distracted» (Informant No. 24).*
- *«Overloading can cause information delay, as some facts need to be rechecked, due to tons of garbage that goes with the information. It takes a long time to find a needle in a haystack, and this also will cause a delay, nevertheless a professional cannot release unverified information» (Informant No. 19).*

Two journalists said that information overload does not affect the professional activities of a highly qualified journalist:

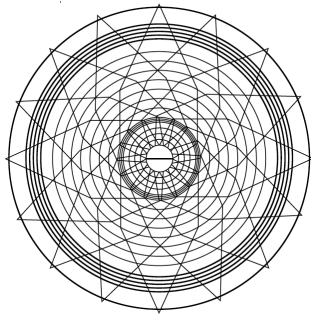
- *«Due to a large amount of information, you get distracted a lot, instead of being engaged in some work for example. However, information overload can cause some fails, only if the journalist is not a professional. A professional, despite the overload, in any case does his job with high quality, and if any fails happen, they are definitely not connected with the information overload» (Informant No. 17),*
- *«It is often difficult to find the information in the flow of waste. But, in my opinion, the information overload should not affect the performance of executing professional tasks, unless accompanied by any other things. Professional may not handle the information overload if he experiences fatigue, illness, some kind of emotional stress, though, he is professional to work just with information» (Informant No. 19).*

### **Adaptation of journalists to the information overload**

Our past research has shown that ways of adapting to information overload can be divided into three main types: the development of one's abilities to work with information, filtering information, and disconnection from information flows<sup>3</sup>. According

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<sup>3</sup> Чумакова В. П. «Фильтруй или проиграешь»: практики фильтрации информации в перегруженной цифровой среде (результаты пилотного исследования) // В кн.: Интернет по ту сторону цифр : Сборник статей конференции. Издательские решения. Ридеро, 2018. С. 99-104



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to this pilot study, we can say that all these three types are practiced among journalists. In particular, information filtering practices are also used by journalists, as well as media users:

- *“My method is very simple. I just delete the extra messages, even incoming calls. If something appears, I immediately clean it after the end of the conversation. It's like taking out the trash” (Informant No 7)*

However, it can be assumed that there are differences in the treatment of these types.

Firstly, we assume that journalists, more than ordinary users, use disconnection from information flows in order to adapt to overload.

In particular, almost half of our informants considered the temporary abandonment of electronic resources (social networks, applications and websites) as the most effective way to combat an oversupply of information. Also, many interviewees called rest an excellent cure for information redundancy. At the same time, the concept of “rest” for different people has significant differences: for some people it is reading books, listening to music and watching movies, for others - hanging out with the loved ones, and for others - sleeping.

- *“The most effective method to combat information overload, in my opinion, is to remove all sources from your life. I have no TV at home, no radio, and no internet. I live in an information vacuum. I have a great rest, sleep well, walk with my animals, communicate with my child as much as I can, I also do some handicraft and hobbies. This method is effective. No source of information - no information.”(Informant No 19)*
- *“I leave somewhere on a day off and refuse any sources of media. I declare to myself a detox”. (Informant No 5)*
- *“I want to sit in silence.” (Informant No 36)*
- *“Another good method is to go aimlessly on an electric train and look out the window (for example, riding the “Swallow” on the MSC): it pacifies”. (Informant number 24)*

At the same time, in the journalistic environment, one can observe the phenomenon of extreme disconnection from the flow of information when using various substances that affect perception: the use of antidepressants or, conversely, alcohol intoxication.

- *“I, of course, drink vodka.” (Informant number 30)*
- *“I drink cognac, ride a bike, work on weekends at another job, and spend time with my wife.” (Informant number 29)*

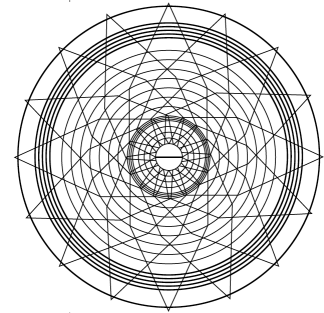
We also assume that journalists, more than ordinary media users, develop their abilities to work with information. In particular, some respondents noted that they use special applications: Feedly, TweetDeck, Trello, Pocket, to-do-lists, notes in the phone and notepad, reminders.

- *“«Trello» helps me. Initially, it is not quite for this, but I adapted it for myself - in order not to keep all the information in my head I write down ideas, plans,*



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*important news, and topics. I mark what has already been done, what needs to be realized or thought out first and what can wait. In principle, it seems to me that any planner can help". (Informant number 22)*

Some informants believe that a well-designed work schedule, the ability to work in short but focused working intervals or in shifts can also help solve the problem of overload.

- *"There is a normal work organization when a journalist is not an SMM specialist, writer, interviewer, vlogger and photo correspondent at the same time. Here either the work intensity should be reduced, or the functionality should be cut. But only central editions can afford it. In the regions, the load only increases from year to year". (Informant number 20)*

Also, some informants noted that in a situation of the inevitability of interaction with redundant information, they adapt to overload not only through rational actions (filtering, developing cognitive abilities) but also through irrational practices. For example, one informant says that the ability to filter information comes with experience when a journalist begins to feel which information is appropriate and which is not:

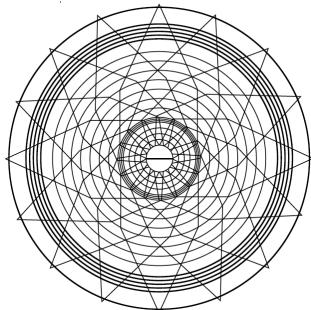
- *"It comes with experience, you begin to feel what is really important. Not only for you, but for the viewer. We need to know a lot in order not to make a mistake in the concentrated minimum that we give out. Such a paradox. Overloading can lead to an error, but with the right approach, it will save from an error". (Informant number 16)*

In our opinion, this is one of the essential points of our research: information overload leads to the fact that journalists, when selecting information, can act not only rationally, but also based on feelings and emotions, as we discussed in previous parts of the paper.

### **Conclusion**

In this article we looked at the main reasons for the overload of journalists:

1. The contemporary media environment is heterogeneous, consists of heterogeneous sources of information, formats of its presentation, etc.
2. Today the number and variety of forms of distortion of reliable information are increasing.
3. Journalists may lack their own analytical resources to cover all the incoming information.
4. Global events and information occasions cause overload with their scale.
5. The journalistic profession involves a lot of communication with other people, which also causes overload.
6. Negative, sad news leads to the tiredness from compassion.
7. The specifics of the journalistic profession (operativeness, deadlines) is also one of the reasons for overloading.
8. Physiological and work cycles can also affect overload.



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9. Journalists who are working in the news experience more overload than others.

As for the consequences of overloading journalists, the following can be highlighted:

1. We can talk about four areas in which journalists observe the impact of information overload: physical, psychological, cognitive and social.
2. The main physical consequences include overwork and fatigue.
3. Psychological changes include emotional, behavioral, and motivational features, including emotional burnout and reduced motivation to work.
4. Cognitive changes are expressed in a decrease in concentration and the ability to analyze information.
5. One of the main consequences of information overload in social life is a decrease in emotional responsiveness to other people and motivation to interact with them.
6. Among the negative consequences for professional life, journalists most often point out a decline in the quality of work, which is expressed in the following: a) making mistakes and incorrect analysis of information; b) the use of unverified information and insufficient checking of the facts; c) the influence of emotions on the objectivity of the created material; d) shift of attention to available, but not relevant information; e) reduced control over the time spent on social networks and information portals; e) difficulties with the allocation of the main thought and structuring of information.

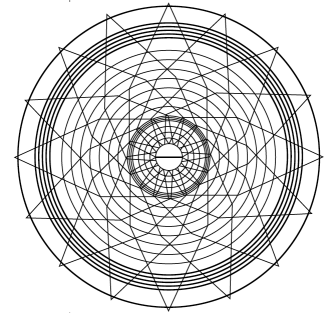
As for the adaptation of journalists to overload, they also, like other people, adapt through the filtering of information, disconnection from information flows and the development of skills in working with information. However, we assume that journalists more often practice disconnecting from information flows, including by radical means (for example, alcohol intoxication), than ordinary media users, and also increasingly use various technologies for working with information (applications, etc.). We also found that some journalists adapt to overload in the situation when they need to filter information by connecting practices that are not based on rational thinking, but feelings.

Our study is pilot, and we cannot say that we studied all the causes, consequences and practices of adapting journalists to information overload. Also, our research was carried out within the framework of the qualitative paradigm, and we cannot draw quantitative conclusions based on it, nor can we extrapolate our findings to all journalists in Moscow, Russia or the world. Nevertheless, we believe that we were able to outline the contour of this phenomenon, to provide further depth to various forms of overload, which is manifested in the work of a journalist.

We believe that in future studies, attention should be paid to the differences between genres and formats with which journalists work. What impact has TV, radio, press, or Internet on degree of information overload of journalists? What difference in perceiving information overload occurs between journalists who work with texts, photography, sound, video etc?

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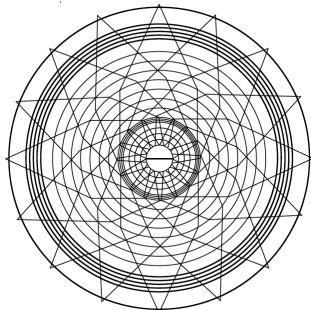
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We also believe that in future studies, attention should be paid to the emotional side of overloading journalists. On the one hand, overload, according to the opinion of our informants, can cause tiredness of compassion, and emotional estrangement from what is happening. On the other hand, we noticed that, due to overload, when filtering information, a “sensual” irrational approach may be included. This is related to the “post-truth” problem that is being discussed today, but not for the electorate, but for the journalists themselves, whose function in society, according to its original logic, contradicts the idea of “post-truth”. The main question regarding how journalists cope with information overload continues to be the question of how a journalist selects, filters out the information that then is offered to the audience. Does he or she do it rationally or emotionally, does he or she use algorithms and technologies for this, thereby shifting responsibility from person to machine?

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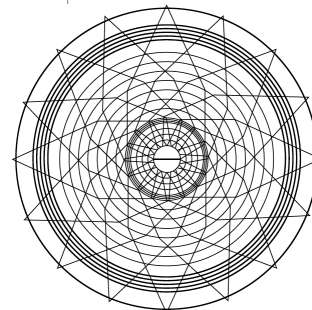
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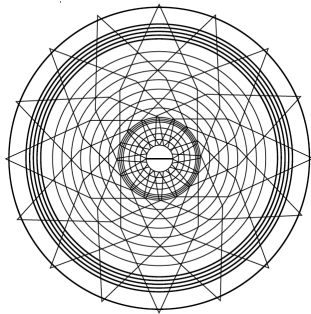
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### APPENDIX

List of the informants

No.	Sex	Age	Kind of mass media
1	female	21	<i>Internet portal/ private media</i>
2	male	35	<i>Media holding/ state media</i>
3	female	34	<i>Business newspaper and magazine/ private media</i>
4	female	31	<i>IT-company and Internet portal/ private media</i>
5	female	30	<i>TV/ public service broadcaster</i>
6	male	21	<i>Online media/ private media</i>
7	male	32	<i>TV/ state media</i>
8	male	62	<i>Radio/ private media</i>
9	male	34	<i>Internet-newspaper, social networks/ private media</i>
10	male	34	<i>Internet portal/ state media</i>
11	female	33	<i>Print and online media/ private media</i>
12	male	32	<i>Radio, Internet portal/ private media</i>
13	male	52	<i>Media holding/ state media</i>
14	female	25	<i>TV/ state media</i>
15	male	21	<i>News agency/ state media</i>
16	female	25	<i>TV/ state local media</i>
17	male	20	<i>Internet-newspaper/ state media</i>
18	female	26	<i>Print/ private media</i>
19	female	44	<i>Print/ municipal media</i>
20	female	28	<i>Internet portal/ private media</i>
21	male	35	<i>Print, online media/ private media</i>
22	female	26	<i>Internet portal/ state local media</i>



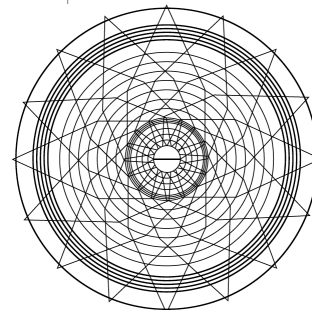
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No.	Sex	Age	Kind of mass media
23	female	25	<i>State media</i>
24	male	30	<i>Print, online media/ private media</i>
25	male	21	<i>online media/ private media</i>
26	female	21	<i>Internet portal/ private media</i>
27	female	21	<i>Internet portal/ private media</i>
28	male	32	<i>Internet portal/ private media</i>
29	male	28	<i>Print and online media/ private media</i>
30	male	22	<i>Online media/ private media</i>
31	male	24	<i>TV/ private media</i>
32	male	24	<i>Online media/ private media</i>
33	female	20	<i>Online media/ private media</i>
34	female	24	<i>Online media/ private media</i>
35	female	21	<i>Print and online media/ private media</i>
36	female	27	<i>Print and online media/ private media</i>
37	female	26	<i>Online media/ private media</i>

## [Scientific Articles]

Chumakova V.P., Gorshkova D., Popova V., Shibanova A.  
*Information Overload of Journalists in Contemporary Russia:  
Causes, Ways of Adaptation and Consequences  
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# ИНФОРМАЦИОННАЯ ПЕРЕГРУЗКА ЖУРНАЛИСТОВ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РОССИИ: ПРИЧИНЫ, ПУТИ АДАПТАЦИИ И ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ (ПИЛОТНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ)

### **Чумакова В. П.**

Кандидат наук (культурология), Доцент  
департамента медиа, Национальный  
Исследовательский Университет "Высшая Школа  
Экономики" (Москва, Россия)  
[vchumakova@hse.ru](mailto:vchumakova@hse.ru)

### **Горшкова Д.**

студент-бакалавр департамента медиа,  
Национальный Исследовательский Университет  
"Высшая Школа Экономики" (Москва, Россия)

### **Попова В.**

студент-бакалавр департамента медиа,  
Национальный Исследовательский Университет  
"Высшая Школа Экономики" (Москва, Россия)

### **Шибанова А.**

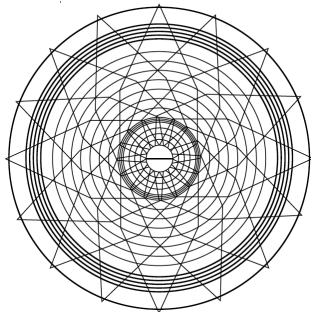
студент-бакалавр департамента медиа,  
Национальный Исследовательский Университет  
"Высшая Школа Экономики" (Москва, Россия)

### **Аннотация:**

Данная статья посвящена проблеме информационной перегрузки современных журналистов. Пилотное исследование включало в себя 37 глубоких полуструктурированных интервью с российскими журналистами из разных сфер.

Во-первых, по результатам интервью было выявлено 9 причин, на которые указывали информанты: гетерогенность медиасреды, растущие искажения достоверной информации, усталость аналитических ресурсов, глобальные события, коммуникационная перегрузка, усталость от сочувствия, специфика профессии (скорости, дедлайны), психологические и рабочие нюансы, фокус на новостях.

Во-вторых, были выведены четыре уровня информационной перегрузки, которые обсуждались с информантами: физиологическая (биологическая), психологическая, когнитивная и социальная. Компоненты этих уровней были детально проанализированы.



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В-третьих, профессиональные последствия информационной перегрузки, которые могут быть поделены на эти четыре уровня, были проанализированы отдельно.

В финальной части исследования выявлены способы адаптации журналистов к перегрузке.

**Ключевые слова:** информационная перегрузка, журналисты, новые медиа, Интернет, медиа, проверка фактов, пост-правда

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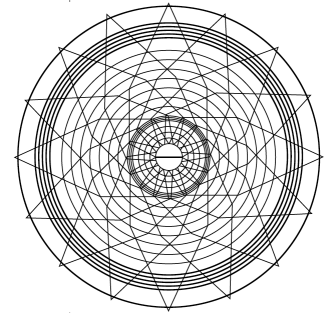
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