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AGENDA-SETTING IN RUSSIAN MEDIA

The purpose of this study is to test the agenda-setting theory, according to which the media has a significant impact on what people consider to be important events. We compare the results of the Levada Center surveys on the most memorable events of the month with the number of publications on these issues in the press. We focused on the period from January 2014 to December 2016. A total of 884 events were analyzed in the article. The results of the study confirm the impact of discussions in the media on people's attention to the problem. The results also show that the discussions in the media one week before the date of polling are more important than the issues covered over the entire month. People better remember those events which took place shortly before the polling, as well as the events the discussion of which intensified during this period. It is also important to note the role of regional publications in the sensitization of the public to various issues. The issues covered by the national newspapers and news agencies, but ignored by the regional press, are much worse remembered by the population. The results of the study are controlled for background of the discussion: the presence of important events in each relevant month, which monopolized the public attention, is taken into account.

Keywords: agenda-setting, public opinion, media, press

JEL Classification: Z

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Introduction

In the satirical book "Scoop" by Evelyn Waugh, a journalist says to his colleague who is being sent as a special correspondent to Ishmaelia to report on the Civil War there, that the editor-in-chief needs reports on the Patriot victories. In general, the description of the situation in terms of the struggle between "patriots" and "traitors" is not surprising: news is often ideologically colored. However, it is disturbing that warring parties have different opinions about who is who in the conflict. But for a good reporter, it's not a problem, it's a room for maneuver. As under these circumstances, any party that gains the victory can be referred to as Patriots. It is no longer important that in reality there is no civil war in the country and that the imaginary rebel camp is located at the place never visited even by the local people. And it is even less important that until recently hardly anyone knew of the existence of Ishmaelia. The pipeline is running, and the whole world is following the news.

Of course, the description offered by Evelyn Waugh is a little exaggerated. However, the ability of the media to construct problems (Blumer 1971; Spector and Kitsuse 1987) should not be left unnoticed. The facts that are on the news are perceived as important, they are discussed and remembered. Those events which are neglected by the media are real only for the immediate participants and will soon be forgotten. The advocacy potential of the media and its ability to influence the public opinion may be argued at length. It can even be proved that the media do not have enough power to make people change their point of view radically. However, the idea that the media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its (audience) what to think about"(Cohen 2015) does not arouse much distrust of researchers.

Our knowledge of most of the events taking place in the world is mediated by some channels of mass communication. Accordingly, we would not have the chance to get information on many sides of reality if we did not have access to the media. It is logical that in order to perceive an event as meaningful, people have to be at least aware of what happened. On the basis of this logical chain, we assume that there is a correlation between people's perceptions of the importance of certain events and the intensity of their discussion in the media. The purpose of the study is to test this hypothesis.

According to the agenda-setting theory, the maximum correlation between discussions in the media and public opinion can be achieved in the case of totalitarian states, where freedom of the media is virtually non-existent (McCombs et al. 2014). From this point of view, the limited independence of the Russian media emphasized by the researchers (Fredheim 2016; Gehlbach

2010) and World Press Freedom Index² should promote greater overlap of public and individual agendas. The study of the agenda-setting effect in Russia is therefore relevant.

1. Agenda-setting theory

The agenda-setting theory, according to which the intensity of discussions in the media influence people's perceptions of the importance of certain events, emerged a long time ago and has gained considerable popularity among the researchers of mass communications (Dearing and Rogers 1996; McCombs 2014). This concept was first formulated on the basis of data from the presidential election campaign in the United States in 1968, when researchers revealed a correlation between the public's perceptions of the most significant issues in the candidates' programs and the frequency with which these issues were mentioned in the media (McCombs and Shaw 1972). The idea has been further confirmed by numerous and varied empirical examples: the Gulf War (Iyengar and Simon 1993), the Watergate scandal (Weaver, McCombs, and Spellman 1975), environmental pollution (Ader 1995), and even organ donation (Feeley, O'Mally, and Covert 2016).

However, agenda-setting hypotheses have not only been tested on a variety of empirical objects, but they have also been modified (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver 2014). Thus, as a complement to the idea of the impact of discussions in the media on the perception of the importance of issues, it was suggested to see how the emphasis on certain characteristics of a situation or a public figure would form a public opinion. This development of the theory was named second-level agenda-setting. For example, if a study of the impact of discussions of foreign states in the American media shows that the widely discussed foreign countries are perceived as being important for US interests, we are dealing with the classical theoretical model - first-level agenda-setting. While the observation that a larger number of negative articles correspond to more critical assessments of the country by respondents would refer to the second-level agenda-setting (Wanta, Golan, and Lee 2004). Later, the network agenda-setting model was also developed, allowing for the possibility to "bundle" different agendas (Cheng and Chan 2015; Guo 2012; Guo et al. 2015; Guo and Vargo 2015; Vu, Guo, and McCombs 2014). At this stage, the attention of researchers is not focused on certain individual issues (information on which is considered to be independent), but rather on their interconnections. Thus, the agenda-setting theory evolved, its tools became more complicated, and the researchers are focusing on a variety of new objects.

The change of the media landscape, including an increasing role of the Internet (Johnson 2013), contributed to transformation of the agenda-setting theory. On the one hand, vertical

² World Press Freedom Index. URL: <https://rsf.org/en/russia>

media (McCombs 2014) have lost the monopoly on the agenda-building. This can now be a "bottom-up" process when public attention to certain issues on the Internet stimulates discussion on these issues in the traditional media (Kim, Lee 2006). Numerous studies have shown that journalists use information from social networks and blogs in the preparation of their materials (Parmelee 2014; Verweij 2012). In fact, one person's statement on the global network can be the basis for agenda-setting.

However, this does not mean that the classical agenda-setting theory is no longer applicable to the analysis of shaping public opinion. In Russia, for example, the Internet penetration is still relatively low. According to the Public Opinion Foundation, in the spring of 2016 the daily Internet audience was 59%³. Public opinion polls also show that vertical media remain the primary source of information for most Russians⁴. In addition, much of the communications in the social media focus on the author's personal hobbies and affairs, rather than on various public processes and events (McCombs et al. 2014), which limits the impact of social networks and blogs on the public agenda. It is thus premature to proclaim the death of traditional media.

Empirical studies on the agenda-setting have presented the researchers with the fact that: the impact of the media on people's perceptions of the importance of the issue is not always the same. Moreover, such impact is not always significant. It has become necessary to find the factors that explain the agenda-setting effect. The authors pointed to the role of interpersonal communication (Wanta and Wu 1992) in the emerging of the effect of agenda-setting. It was also noted that the impact of the media was greater in the case of "specific" issues, such as drug abuse, compared to abstract issues (federal deficit), which were difficult for people and could not be visualized (Yagade and Dozier 1990).

Indeed, it is a logical solution to draw attention to the specifics of the issue the opinion on which is being shaped. For example, researchers note that while in respect of some issues the media is the only source of information for the public, personal experience is prevalent for other events (Demers et al. 1989; McCombs, Graber, and Weaver 1981). The latter were identified by researchers as "obtrusive". With regard to such issues, the influence of discussions in the media on people's perceptions of the importance of the event is negligible. An attempt to assess the agenda-setting effect in case of regional and national issues in one of the US cities can be considered one of the most striking studies that test the obsession hypothesis (Palmgreen and Clarke 1977). The study showed that the discussion in the media had a lesser impact on people's perceptions of regional problems, as the assessments of the events in their own city were shaped

³ Internet in Russia: dynamics of penetration. Spring 2016. URL:<http://fom.ru/SMI-i-internet/13012>

⁴ The credibility of the media and willingness to speak out. URL:<http://www.levada.ru/2016/08/12/14111/>

primarily by interpersonal communication and personal experience of certain difficulties. To sum up, we can assume that the public agenda is the result of discussions in the media refracted from a personal experience perspective (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992). For example, public opinion on such an "unobtrusive" issue as Russia's accession to the WTO largely repeated the rhetoric of the media. However, the population also expressed fears that were in direct contradiction to what was written in the newspapers, based on the negative experience of the economic reforms of the 1990s (Kazun 2014).

Nevertheless, the idea of the importance of personal experience was not the only explanation for the fact that in some cases the influence of the media on public opinion was minimal. For example, attempts to answer this question have led to the concept of "need for orientation", which is, in fact, an attempt to take into account the relevance of the issue and some uncertainty associated with it. In a very general sense, the idea behind this approach is that the media cannot make a person think of an issue as important if the issue is not personally relevant to them (Valenzuela and Chernov 2016). The intensity of the discussion, according to this logic, really influences people's perceptions of the importance of the problem, as it is postulated in the agenda-setting theory. However, it is still a matter of relevance. If the problem is not of interest to the individual, he/she can ignore numerous attempts of the media to build its relevance.

According to the first studies of need for orientation, all issues can be divided into four groups: high relevance and uncertainty, high relevance and low certainty, low relevance and high uncertainty, and low relevance and uncertainty⁵ (Weaver 1980). In the first case, there should be a high need for orientation, while in the second and third cases the indicator is moderate, and in the latter case it is low. However, the studies have shown that groups with a moderate need for orientation are not the same and behave in relation to information in different ways (Camaj 2014). By proposing such a classification, D. Weaver supports the idea that the specificity of the media audience and its motives can be taken into account when forecasting and explaining media effects (Blumler 1979).

The studies have shown that need for orientation affects the people's choice of the information channel. For example, the high value of this indicator means that a person will turn to the news to obtain information on an issue that is relevant but unclear to them (Matthes 2008), and they are more likely to prefer traditional media (print media, television) to interpersonal communication (McCombs et al. 2014). As a result, the high need for orientation leads to more attention to messages in the media, thereby increasing the effect of the first-level agenda-setting.

⁵ Later, however, the classification by D. Weaver was criticized. In particular, attention was drawn to the fact that uncertainty was a meaningful parameter only if the issue was highly relevant (Matthes 2006). If the problem is not of great importance to people, the lack of information will not encourage them to seek it actively.

However, with regard to the attention given to certain characteristics of events or public figures (Camaj and Weaver 2013; Chernov, Valenzuela, and McCombs 2011).

Thus, many factors influence public attention to certain issues. However, we can assume that the media play a significant role in drawing public attention to various problems.

2. Methodology of the study

Most of the previous agenda-setting studies have analyzed the impact of the discussion on a given issue on the attention paid to various aspects of the issue. The text suggests that the focus should not be on a specific empirical example but an attempt should be made to assess the cumulative effect of the agenda-setting. In this work, we are comparing the open data of the Levada Center⁶ surveys on the most memorable events of the previous month for the Russians and the number of publications on these events in the Russian press 1 week and 1 month prior to the survey. This is a monthly study by the Levada Centre, which usually takes place on the third Friday of the current month. The question is set out in the following wording: "Which events of the past four weeks were most memorable to you?". The respondents are not given a list of events. The results are presented in a tabular format containing the list of events of the past month and the proportion of respondents who identified them as memorable.

We compare this data with the number of publications on each of the issues in the press, according to the Integrum base, which contains materials of about 500 Russian magazines, over 250 national and more than 1000 regional newspapers. In the study, we use data on the number of articles on the issue which were published within four weeks and one week prior to the date of the survey. Although respondents are asked about the events of the past month, it is logical to assume that the last week's incidents are the most fresh in their memory, so this indicator is also important for the study. For each event mentioned in the survey of the Levada Centre, a request was made to estimate the number of articles in the press which had mentioned it. The analysis uses information on the number of articles published in both federal newspapers, including electronic print media, and regional newspapers.

Thus, this article considers the correlation between the intensity of the discussions in the press and the importance of various issues only with respect to issues that have been remembered by at least a small number of respondents. Those events that were not identified in the Levada Center surveys remain out of the analysis. Such issues might not have been discussed very actively in the press though. If it were possible to include all the events of the month, such as those neglected by the population, it would not probably have changed the results significantly.

⁶ Levada Center website URL: <http://www.levada.ru/>

We focus on the events within a three-year period from January 2014 to December 2016. The collected database includes 884 events, some of which were mentioned just once, while certain issues were identified as the most important for many months in a row. Such issues include ruble fluctuations, rising prices for consumer goods, military activities in Syria, changes in the price of oil, the conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as the situation of economic sanctions and the Russian food embargo⁷. Since those events that are referred to once or those which are referred to as memorable systematically may attract different attention from citizens, this parameter is also taken into account in the analysis.

Public agenda issues compete for the attention of the audience (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; McCombs and Zhu 1995). So it is important not only how much was written about the event in the media and at what point the discussion was the most intense, but also what was reported in the press at the same time. Thus, if there had been a memorable event within a month that attracted everyone's attention, other issues that could have been quite extensively discussed in the media might not have been seen as important or remembered by the population. Following this logic, we create an additional variable, a coefficient of monopolizing public attention, which will allow us to add control for the general background of the discussion in each month.

The coefficient of monopolizing public attention is calculated by analogy with the Herfindahl-Hirshman index used by economists to determine market concentration. In this study, we calculate this indicator as the sum of the squares of the ratios for respondents, who identified the event as memorable. Calculations are made for 10 events that were named most frequently in each month. An introduction of this variable to the analysis will allow one quantitative variable to be used to control the background of the discussion (other events of the month) instead of a series of dichotomized ones (month-year).

Previous studies suggest that the excessive reduction of communicative complexity expressed in prevalence of one issue (or its one often stereotypical interpretation) in the news is an indicator of the crisis (Kleinnijenhuis, Schultz, and Oegema 2015). The agenda-setting theory can be extended because the media tell us not only what issues to think about, but also how many issues we should think about (Tan and Weaver 2013). At the same time, the situation in which one issue clearly dominates the agenda often points to serious economic problems (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2015) or diplomatic conflicts (Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977).

The coefficient of monopolization of public attention calculated on the basis of the Russian data generally confirms these assumptions (see Figure 1). The maximum value of this

⁷ Discussions in the media on many of these issues (the war in Syria (Brown 2014, 2015), economic sanctions against Russia (Kazun 2016), the conflict in eastern Ukraine (Laruelle 2016)) have already been the subject of studies. We will not conduct a meaningful analysis of the press articles on these issues herein. The purpose is to analyze the impact of the intensity of the discussion on various issues on the public's attention to these issues.

indicator in the period under review is reached in February-March 2014, in connection with the hosting the XXII Winter Olympic Games in Russia (Pan and Lawal 2017), as well as the mass protests in Ukraine (Maidan)⁸ and accession of Crimea to Russia (Boyd-Barrett 2015; Hopf 2016; Teper 2015). Of course, the Olympic Games are not a negative event or a reflection of a crisis in society, but two other issues may well be described as such. The war in the east of Ukraine⁹ (Katchanovski 2016; Makhortykh and Lyebedyev 2015) and the devaluation of the ruble¹⁰ which monopolized public attention in January 2015, as well as the terroristic attacks in France¹¹ and in Russia¹² in November 2015 can also be seen as an indicator of the crisis and tension in society. Thus, the model will take into account the presence of crisis events that may influence the agenda-setting effect.

Figure 1



The following hypotheses are intended to be tested in this study:

1. The number of publications in the press on a certain issue one and four weeks prior to the survey affects the proportion of respondents who identified the event as memorable.

⁸ A mass months-long protest action in Kiev and a number of other cities in Ukraine (Zelinska 2015), which began on November 21, 2013 in response to the suspension by the Ukrainian government of preparations for the signing of an association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union.

⁹ It concerns combat actions in the territory of Donetsk and the Lugansk regions of Ukraine, which started in April 2014. The combat operations are between the armed forces of Ukraine and the rebel groups (supporters of self-proclaimed DPR and LPR-the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics). Ukraine accuses the Russian Federation of interfering in the conflict.

¹⁰ The sharp weakening of the Russian ruble in relation to foreign currencies caused by the rapid decline in world oil prices, the export of which is really important for the income of Russia, as well as the imposition of economic sanctions against Russia (Mau 2016).

¹¹ On November 13, 2015, three coordinated terrorist groups carried out a series of attacks in Paris and its nearest suburb Saint Denis. The victims of the terrorist attacks were 130 people, and more than 350 people were injured.

¹² On October 31, 2015, the biggest plane crash in Russia's aviation history occurred. The Airbus 321, a passenger airliner operated by the Russian airline Kogalymavia, was flying from the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh to St Petersburg when it crashed on Egyptian territory. 224 people were killed, almost all of them Russians. The cause of the catastrophe was the terrorist act for which the ISIS claimed responsibility.

2. The discussion in the media immediately preceding the survey (one week before the survey) as compared to the discussion during the whole month will have a greater influence on the attention of respondents to a particular event of the last month.
3. Those events in regard of which the discussion was uneven throughout the month, and intensified shortly before the survey, are better remembered by the respondents.
4. If the event is known as memorable in the previous month's surveys, it will be better remembered by the respondents.

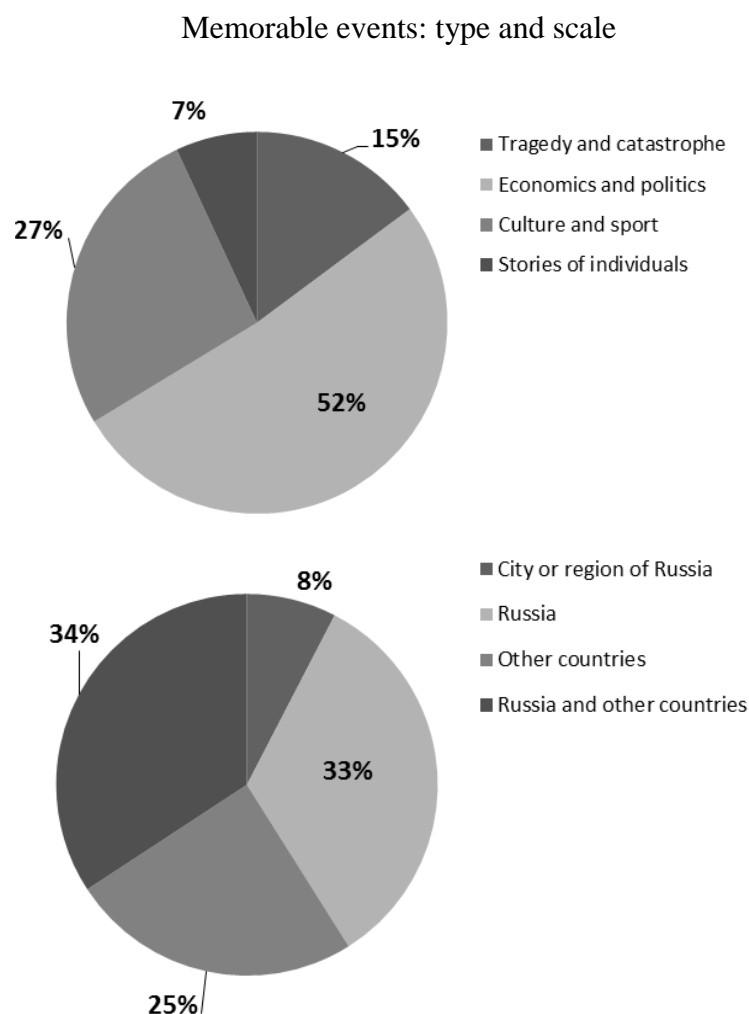
In the study we are following a constructivist approach, according to which problems are the result of construction activities (Spector and Kitsuse 1987). As there are no situations that are automatically problematic (Fuller and Myers 1941), there is no news that is by definition important. There are no criteria that would make it possible to determine what is more important for Russians: ruble fluctuations, the war in the east of Ukraine, or the terrorist attack in Paris. The significance of certain events is subjective.

3. Analysis of the correlation between discussions in the media and public attention to different events

3.1. What events attracted the attention of Russians in 2015?

People best remember those events that aroused interest and attention and were widely discussed in society and provoked debates (Oliver and Meyer 1999). It is not surprising, therefore, that almost half of the events which were memorable to Russians in 2014-2016 fall into the category of economic or political issues (see Figure 2)¹³.

¹³ It is not possible to distinguish between economic and political events, as these two areas have recently been significantly intertwined. Thus, we cannot definitively say whether economic sanctions are related to the economy or more to political decisions. The truth lies somewhere in the middle.



Source: built by the author, based on aggregating the results of the Levada Center surveys for 2014-2016. The graphs reflect the categories of events which were memorable for Russians.

In fact, economic and political developments have been the most discussed issues in the past year: the accession of Crimea, economic sanctions, food embargo, oil prices, and ruble rates have become truly landmark topics in Russia in recent years. However, sports and cultural activities of all kinds (for example, the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi, the Eurovision contest, etc.) also attracted considerable public attention. Tragedies and catastrophes were significantly less remembered by Russians, which does not mean that interest in such incidents is low (Seib and Janbek 2010). For example, the terrorist attacks in Paris (the attack on the office of Charlie Hebdo (Kiwani 2016), the tragedy of November 2015 and attack in Nice (July 2016) were remembered by a significant number of Russians. However, such events are less frequent than football matches, summits of heads of states, etc., so their share in the list of memorable events is relatively small. However, only 7 per cent of the events of 2014-2016 which drew the attention of Russians are stories of individuals, such as the illness and death of the Russian pop singer Jeanna Friske, or the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature to Belarusian writer

Svetlana Alexievich in 2015. Such news was mostly related to famous Russians. However, in some cases, events about ordinary people were remembered, as well as stories about foreign celebrities (for example, Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize in 2016).

Table 1

Relationship between the nature of the memorable event and its scale

			Scale of the Event			
			<i>City or region of Russia</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>Other countries</i>	<i>Russia and other countries</i>
Nature of the News	<i>Tragedies and catastrophes</i>	N	32	14	76	9
		%	24%	11%	58%	7%
	<i>Economy and politics</i>	N	9	132	114	208
		%	2%	28%	25%	45%
	<i>Culture and sport</i>	N	15	122	22	80
		%	6%	51%	9%	34%
	<i>Stories of individuals</i>	N	12	31	9	9
		%	19%	51%	15%	15%

Source: built by the author, based on aggregating the results of the Levada Center surveys for 2014-2016. The statistically significant (5% level) positive correlations between a particular row and a specific column in the table are in bold, and gray background highlights significant negative correlations.

It should also be noted that most of the public attention was naturally attracted by incidents of all-Russia scale and international events with the direct participation of Russia. While international events affecting only foreign countries and incidents in certain cities or regions of Russia are less common in the list of the most memorable events. Thus, the attention of the audience is focused on the news of the macroscale level which are directly relevant to the country. At the all-Russia level, people best remembered cultural and sports events, as well as news related to individuals (see Table 1). While most of the memorable events from the economic and political spheres are international. In fact, such patterns can in many ways be explained by the specific nature of Russia's relations with Western countries in recent years. The problems of geopolitics and the world economy were prominent on the agenda in 2014, and this situation maintained and enhanced in 2015 and 2016. As far as events outside Russia are concerned, the greatest public attention was drawn to tragedies and catastrophes (terroristic attacks, accidents, earthquakes, etc.).

The analysis of the most memorable events also confirms the idea that people remember both "unobtrusive" and "obtrusive" issues (McCombs et al. 1981). On the one hand, economic sanctions, the conflict in the east of Ukraine, the military actions in Syria, the terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, Nice etc. were cited as the most memorable events of the month during the period under review that is, the unobtrusive issues in regard to which people have no personal experience and their assessments of these events are guided by the media. On the other hand, no

less attention was given to the "obtrusive" issues, such as holidays (New Year, Easter, school graduation parties) and the premieres of films, television series and talk shows. Of course, these events were mostly remembered due to personal experience rather than discussions in the media. However, the proportion of "obtrusive" issues among the most memorable events of the last month is relatively low: it was about 10 per cent during the period under review. Accordingly, most of the issues identified as the most memorable have attracted public attention as a result of their discussion in the media, rather than through personal experience.

3.2. Memorable events and the discussion in the media

However, all of the foregoing does not prove the influence of the media on public opinion. Most of the information that we receive is mediated by the media, but the hypothesis of the correlation between the intensity of discussions in the media and the attention that the event attracts, needs further verification. First of all, this is due to the fact that public opinion is influenced by many other factors unrelated to mass communication. Thus, personal convictions and interests, interpersonal communication and the circle of communication, the very history of the discussion on the subject, etc., influence public opinion. Sometimes these factors influence the public opinion in different ways. For example, an event that has taken a significant place on the agenda for a long time, on the one hand, is better remembered by people (and thus may be called memorable in a public opinion poll), and on the other hand, such an event may bore people and stop attracting attention.

Thus, the discussion in the media cannot fully explain the people's perception of certain events. However, the correlation between the number of publications on the issue in the media and the proportion of people who identified the issue as important is quite large. If the analysis uses the number of publications for one week before the survey, the correlation is stronger (0.54) compared to that four weeks before the survey (0.50)¹⁴. Thus, we can assume that despite the wording of the question to remember the most significant events of the past month, the respondent will name as the most relevant issue the one that was actively discussed immediately before the survey.

However, intensity is not the only characteristic of discussion that influences the "memorableness" of the event. Regression analysis confirms our hypothesis that the number of articles in the press has an impact on the event (see Table 2) while demonstrating the impact of other factors. Thus, the models suggest that respondents are more likely to remember the news that emerged (or intensified) immediately before the survey. Accordingly, the larger the proportion of articles on the issue that occurred in the last week before the study (in relation to

¹⁴ The Pearson correlation coefficient is relevant at 0.001.

the total number of articles per month), the more memorable the event. Thus, the events, which were actively discussed at the beginning of the month and were subsequently displaced from the media agenda by more recent news, were much less frequently remembered at the time of the survey than were the events that might have been discussed less actively, but had not yet been forgotten. Consequently, while the media draw attention to certain issues, the effect is very precarious, and what seemed to be important and interesting yesterday has been superseded from public discussions and memory today. This pattern can be traced to the results of a previous study showing that issue volatility is increasing over time (McCombs and Zhu 1995).

Table 2

Regression models (dependent variable - the proportion of respondents identifying the event as the most memorable)¹⁵

Variable	All Events		Only "unobtrusive" events	
	<i>Model</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Constant	1.948 * [1.083]	3.269 * [1.061]	1.502 [1.141]	2.793 * [1.128]
Number of articles 4 weeks before the survey	0.002 * [0.000]		0.002 * [0.000]	
Number of articles 1 week before the survey		0.008 * [0.001]		0.009 * [0.001]
The proportion of news on the issue during the last week before the survey	0.098 * [0.015]	0.060 * [0.014]	0.091 * [0.015]	0.057 * [0.015]
Predominance of national newspapers over regional ones	-3.653 * [0.703]	-3.565 * [0.692]	-3.589 * [0.721]	-3.529 * [1.229]
Event mentioned as important in previous surveys	5.136 * [0.697]	5.038 * [0.686]	4.910 * [0.752]	5.176 * [0.736]
Control for the coefficient of monopolization of public attention	0.001 * [0.000]	0.001 * [0.000]	0.001 * [0.000]	0.001 * [0.000]
Number of observations	884	884	790	790
R²	0.344	0.362	0.358	0.371

Note: Standard errors are given in square brackets.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The fact that this event has been mentioned as an important in the surveys conducted in previous months has a significant impact on the public attention to certain issues. If the event

¹⁵ To test the results for sustainability, we build regression models not only on a complete sample, but also on a sample that excludes "obtrusive" events, in which, theoretically, the influence of media on public opinion should be absent. In this case, we divide the events into "obtrusive" and "unobtrusive" disregarding existing assumptions that the parameter is more of a continuum than a dichotomy (Ju 2014). As we do not have the opportunity to assess the relevance of the role of experience and the role of the media in shaping perceptions of each of the issues (i.e., to assess the obtrusiveness of the issue), we impute the issues in question to those where personal experience or, respectively, discussion in the media is a priority. Exclusion of obtrusive events from the sample does not change the results of the analysis.

was extensively discussed and considered important in previous periods, even though the intensity of the discussions on the issue was decreasing, the public attention to it could be still maintained. Thus, events can be remembered not only as a result of their discussion in the media in the current period, but also due to a certain "echo" of their previous popularity. For example, the tragedy of 14 schoolchildren who died during a boat trip on Lake Syamozero in Karelia (Russia), which took place in mid-June 2016 and attracted considerable public attention¹⁶, was mentioned among the most memorable events of the month in July, August and September. It is noteworthy that, although the media hardly wrote about this tragedy in August and September¹⁷, the event was cited as the most memorable by 11-12% of the respondents. This "echo" effect can also be significant, including the fact that it is difficult for respondents to accurately correlate events to the date when they occurred and to limit their response to the events of the past four weeks, as indicated in the question.

It should also be noted that respondents better remember those events where the number of publications in the regional media exceeds the number of articles in the national press. At first glance, this conclusion seems unexpected, as we are dealing with the all-Russia survey of public opinion. In that case, it would be logical to assume that the discussion in the national press was a priority. It should be recalled, however, that the number of regional publications included in the study's Integrum base is considerably higher than the number of all-Russia publications. Accordingly, it is quite logical to expect the predominance of discussions on the relevant issue in the regional media. The greater number of articles in the national press, in this case, means that there is no "viral effect". This is the case when the issue, which was covered by the major newspapers and news agencies, has not attracted the attention of smaller newspapers. This is generally the case with respect to issues that have no direct impact on the lives of citizens. An example could be the International Economic Forum in Davos or the Russian delegation's denial of the right to vote in PACE. While important for the country as a whole, the news is not relevant to most citizens and, consequently, is not covered by regional newspapers that prefer to focus on more urgent issues.

The coefficient of monopolization of public attention used in the model as a reference variable is also significant and positively correlated to memorizing various events. A greater focus on the news during times of crisis can be related to people's desire to monitor existing threats (Shoemaker 1996) and the role of the media in maintaining social order in crisis situations (Lasswell 1948). Indeed, in case of uncertainty, the media is becoming a major source

¹⁶ <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2016/06/19/8316935.shtml>

¹⁷ In August and September, newspapers at the federal and regional level published about 50-60 articles per month on this issue. Whereas several thousand articles were published on some other issues identified during this period as being memorable and important.

of information for the population (Wu et al. 2002) and news is beginning to attract more attention (Quiring and Weber 2012). It is logical that when confronted with information on the devaluation of the national currency or news on terrorist attacks, people try to assess the risks associated with these events. It is possible that, as a result, the population is also paying more attention to that news which is not directly related to the issues of concern to them.

Conclusion and discussion

Much of our knowledge of today's world is mediated by mass communication. Most of the events ignored by the media do not really exist for us. In this regard, it is logical to assume that the intensity of the media debate influences the public attention to certain issues, as claimed by supporters of the agenda-setting theory. Our analysis confirms this assumption. Even if respondents are asked about the most memorable events of the past month, the number of press articles published a week before the study is more important. Thus, the news has a low resilience: people perceive the events that are taking place right now as being the most important, with the exception of some incidents that attract a high level of public attention. We can also argue that the prolonged retention of the issue in the information agenda draws public attention to it, and the intensity of the discussion on this issue immediately prior to the survey is also significant.

According to the agenda-setting theory, the maximum correlation between discussions in the media and public opinion can be achieved in the case of totalitarian states, where freedom of the media is virtually non-existent (McCombs et al. 2014). From this point of view, the limited independence of the Russian media, pointed out by researchers (Fredheim 2016; Gehlbach 2010) and the World Press Freedom Index¹⁸, should have contributed to the greater overlap of public and individual agendas. However, the value of the correlation coefficient between the number of articles in the press on the issue and the proportion of Russians considering the issue to be important is comparable to similar figures obtained by researchers in the United States (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003; Swanson and Swanson 1978; Wanta et al. 2004; Wanta, Ghanem 2007). Perhaps this can be explained by the gradually increasing role of the Internet as a source of information, as well as by the presence of independent or opposition print media in Russia.

This study has some limitations. First of all, only the agenda in the print media was analyzed. It is possible that the coverage of the events on the TV news, as well as in social networks and blogs, was different from the discussion in the newspapers. At the same time, some studies show similarities in the agenda of the press, television and the Internet (Belt, Just, and Crigler 2012; Hester and Gibson 2003; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000; Shapiro and Hemphill

¹⁸ World Press Freedom Index. URL: <https://rsf.org/en/russia>

2017; Wallsten 2007). In this case, focusing on the analysis of articles in the press does not significantly affect the results obtained. Nevertheless a further quantitative study comparing the agenda of different types of media in Russia seems promising, especially in view of the greater independence of the press over television.

However, not only the peculiarities of the media consumption can explain the differences between the individual agendas. It should also be borne in mind that the process of obtaining information could have multiple stages (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1966; Robinson 1976). Some Russians do receive information directly from the media, but rather from "opinion leaders" through interpersonal communication. This channel of information is particularly important when the information of traditional media appears to be incomplete and inaccurate. In such a situation, more than 30 per cent of Russians prefer to check the information received, addressing their relatives and acquaintances¹⁹. Accordingly, the social environment is no less important than the media flow. In addition, people may first pay attention to the information that is most relevant or related to their views (DeFleur, Ball-Rokeach 1989; Festinger 1962). For example, the annual rock festival "Nashestvie" most likely drew the attention of a certain group of people rather than the entire population of the country. Thus, the attention to one or another issue is distributed unevenly in different social groups, as noted by the authors of the agenda melding concept (Ragas and Roberts 2009; Shaw et al. 1999). In this study, we do not account for the individual characteristics of respondents and the particulars of their social environment, as the purpose of the study is to identify general trends. However, since we are dealing with data from a representative survey at the level of Russia and talking about the problem at the level of society as a whole, there should be no significant shifts.

The article assessed the impact on public opinion of only one factor, the intensity of the discussions of certain issues in the media. The correlation between these indicators was about 0.5, and the regression models explained approximately 35% of the spread in values of the variable "proportion of people who identified the event as memorable". As for the rest of the variations in remembering certain issues, they are probably related to the individual characteristics of people, their social environment and their media consumption, etc.

¹⁹ <https://www.slideshare.net/ZirconResearchGroup/ss-58699665>

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