



ARTICLE

“Lost” Russian Media Generations in a Changing Social and Digital Environment

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the concept of “digital” media generations, their formation, and the phenomenon of “lost” generations from the perspective of media-focused and anthropological approaches. The restrictions on social media and some media access following the beginning of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine in 2022 has resulted in a turbulent media environment detrimental to the subjective well-being of Russian “digital” media generations, especially young adults. Analysis of the reasons behind the emergence of “lost” generations in the history of Russia and other countries allows us to conclude that geopolitical factors such as wars, economic shocks, and major epidemics can lead to generational “loss”. From the perspective of digital divide theory, it may be said that we are now dealing with a new kind of digital inequality. The discreteness of the media flow, whose continuity is crucial primarily for “digital” media generations and their media identity, has created a unique combination of factors contributing to further exacerbation of the digital divide. To minimize the destructive consequences of emerging media transformations, it is important to ensure comprehensive media and information support for Russian “digital natives”, along with socio-political and psychological assistance.

KEYWORDS

media generation, “digital” media generation, formative years, “lost” generation, digital divide, behavioral patterns, traumatic events

Introduction

The pervasive effects of digitalization and digital technology involve transformations in the practices of information transfer and media content use. In her study of communication processes in the digital age, A. Gureeva (2016) argues that global mediatization and technologization have led to the creation of a unified media social space, allowing society to have a continuous information and communication experience (p. 203).

In 2021, a research team led by the Russian psychologist E. Zeer demonstrated that the digital information field imposes on people a new lifestyle that is uncharacteristic of the previous industrial civilization (Zeer et al., 2021).

The Internet has now become not only one of the main agents of socialization, but has also engendered a new phenomenon—the digital personality or persona. The digital personality, reflecting Internet users' individual traits and habits, has emerged as a result of more and more personal data being found online. Thus, the Internet has acquired the characteristics of a cultural tool used to create new cultural practices, phenomena, and meanings, all of which requires reflection in interdisciplinary research (Ershova, 2019, p. 51).

As digital media are increasingly woven into the fabric of young people's lives, they are laying the foundation for what can be referred to as their digital lifestyle (Delgado, 2016; Dunas & Vartanov, 2020; Third et al., 2019). A digital lifestyle means not only digitalized media behavior, globalized streaming media use, interactive cultural digital practices, and symbols of communication, but also new vulnerabilities, traumatic communication experiences, and exposure to potentially traumatic media content, all of which can affect the subjective well-being of Internet users.

Well-being is considered a significant indicator of mental health and an important factor of individual adaptation to changing external environments. In general, it is one of the key indicators of social stability and progress. The deterioration of well-being caused by the traumatic experiences of "digital natives", such as lifestyle loss in relation to the disruption of sustainable generational media patterns, may result in these generations' becoming "lost" media generations.

Generational media losses, which have both social and value dimensions, acquire new meaning and saliency in situations characterized by limited media access. The example of such a situation is the blocked access to some digital media in Russia following the beginning of the special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. In this regard, it is important to examine the destructive influence of digital media transformation on the well-being of Russian "digital" media generations and to search for means and ways to minimize this influence.

This study meets the priorities of the Program of Fundamental Research in the Russian Federation for the Long-Term Period for 2021–2030; more specifically, it addresses social research reflecting the socio-cultural transformation of Russian society in the digital age and factors shaping the exploration, transformation, (re) production, and symbolization of the spatial and environmental conditions of people's lives in the digital age.

Theoretical Framework

Media Generations in the Digital Age: Conceptualization of “Digital” Media Generations

To describe a media audience in generational terms conceptually, this study relies on a media-focused approach that foregrounds the media–audience relationship and related issues. In this case, a point of departure for conceptualizing media generations is provided by the seminal works of the Canadian philologist and media culture expert Marshall McLuhan, who wrote extensively on the role of media in life, media’s centripetal effect on the development of communications, and their role in civilizational transformations that lead to the emergence of technogenic civilizations.

McLuhan believed that media (or communication media) are technological extensions of human being and that the form of a medium is more important than the content it communicates—or as his famous phrase goes, “the medium is the message”. What McLuhan means is that the form of a medium embeds itself in the message and determines the impact of media exposure on people’s consciousness; the media through which we choose to communicate becomes a message in itself (McLuhan, 1962, 2003, p. 25).

The German media theorist N. Bolz has developed McLuhan’s ideas and points to how generational differences are determined by the impact of media. In his view, the generation a person belongs to is now largely dependent on their belonging to a certain information culture. “There are no ‘common’ media anymore; instead, there are different media corresponding to different value systems. People separated by demographic, political, and cultural boundaries also inhabit different information worlds” [trans. by Ekaterina Purgina—E. P.] (Bolz, 2011, p. 15). The Australian social researcher Mark McCrindle, who developed a theory of generation change caused by rapid technological advances, remarks: “While people of various ages are living through the same events, the age at which one is exposed to a political shift, technological change or social marker determines how embedded it becomes in one’s psyche and worldview ” (McCrindle, 2014, p. 3). These changes during the sensitive period of a person’s adulthood influence the formation of life values, and ultimately their life path.

Events connected with technological advances and the ensuing transformations of people’s lives and worldviews feature prominently in biographical accounts. Media have proven to be a powerful force changing the basic structure of daily life. They enter daily routines and reformat them in accordance with their own agenda (Altheide, 1985, p. 105). This is one of the reasons to consider a media generation as a subject *sui generis*.

The ways and purposes of media use may differ, and these differences largely stem from differences in the newly emerged media platforms themselves. Therefore, it may be concluded that what distinguishes one media generation from another is the preference people give to this or that medium in a certain historical period. The essential nature of a media generation is manifested in the priority and sustained use of technologically defined media.

A media generation can thus be defined as the entirety of media audiences sharing a similar information communication environment and similar media preferences and practices. The development of a media generation and its behavioral patterns are determined by formative experiences (socialization in adolescence) that result in age cohorts sharing a common generational fate in a specific socio-cultural environment.

It is quite clear that *generation* and *media generation* are not interchangeable concepts. However, they do have a number of significant features in common, including the role of the formative period, generation entelechy, and others. What distinguishes the concept of media generation from that of generation is that at the core of a media generation is people's enduring preferences in media use.

The most famous study of media generations is the large-scale international research project "Global Media Generations 2000", based on qualitative cross-cultural research on media memories in twelve countries. The starting point was the memory of media usage during childhood in the experiment's age cohorts. The researchers were particularly interested in all the media relevant to the respondents' individual media biography. The study identified three media generations: the "print-media generation", the "black-and-white-TV generation", and the "multi-media generation" (Project Global Media Generations, 2000).

Russia, however, was not included in this survey. The project founder Ingrid Volkmer (2003) argues that each generation perceives and constructs its own media world:

Media events are stored away in our brain along with all the other events happening in our lives and years later our memories of them are only selective and merged with personal-life experiences. Apparently, the mass media form mutual worlds of knowledge for generations of people. (p. 302)

This can be explained by the fact that each generation has its own preferences regarding media types and their attributes, and these media determine the consciousness of their audiences by creating the largest emotional appeal (Bolin, 2014, p. 111).

Following McLuhan's logic, we can also conclude that digitalization has again changed communication media, including mass media. In comparison with analogue media, digital media present information in a more compressed form. As a result of digitalization, information can be used in non-linear ways, as everything is always instantly available and data are easy to copy and spread. Digitalization has expanded our opportunities and led to the emergence of a new digital lifestyle, where virtual and real worlds not only co-exist but also interact and impact people's behavioral patterns. L. Manovich (2012) shrewdly observes that there are more differences than similarities between traditional and digital media. From the perspective of technological determinism, it can be said that in the age of digitalization, software determines the communication and content users create and share (Manovich, 2014).

As Volkmer (2003) puts it,

in the youngest generation the media shape “worldviews”, not only locally and globally, but also in terms of “analog” and “digital” knowledge. Whereas the oldest generations revealed “analog” knowledge, defined their worldviews according to national and cultural specifics, and described media-related memories in great details. The youngest generation shares a great variety of superficial media-related knowledge, when asked to describe this in-depth, they hardly know contexts and facts and use a somewhat “universal” code. (p. 16)

In light of the considerable differences between the pre-digital and digital periods in the development of media, it makes sense to conceptualize and identify specific media audience groups, such as the “analogue” and “digital” media generations, as well as a transitional (“digital borderline”) generation sandwiched between them (Sums kaya & Solomeina, 2022). H. Becker (2000) has referred to such transitional generations as “borderline generations”. G. Codrington (2008) proposed another term—*cusp*, “the group of people who fall into the overlap between two generations” (p. 8). He also remarks that “most cuspers tend combine the main characteristics of neighbouring generations, but do not resemble their typical representatives” (p. 8).

Of particular relevance to this study is the concept of a “digital” media generation, as opposed to “analogue” or “digital borderline” generations. The generations of people whose formative period coincided with the development of the Internet and digitalization are commonly referred to as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001).

H. Becker’s “pattern of generational emergence” is pivotal to this study. According to Becker (1992), the specificity of a generation is determined by the events that happened during its formative period, the state of the media, prevailing patterns of socialization, and systemic and biographical characteristics.

According to the international project “Global Digital”, Russia’s Internet penetration rate stood at 85% (124 million people) as of January 2021. The number of social media users in Russia was equivalent to 67.8% of the total population, with young people (under 44) accounting for over 90%. The average Russian had over 7 social media accounts. YouTube¹ ranked at the top of the list of the most popular social media platforms by user number. Young users prefer to consume all their information from the Internet, primarily social media (Kemp, 2021).

All of the above gives us reason to believe that Russia has its own “digital natives” and “digital” media generations. A detailed analysis of digitalization processes in the Russian media industry and people’s media practices has shown that due to the accelerated generation change caused by sweeping technological advances, there have been at least three “digital” media generations so far. The first “digital” media generation consists of people born between 1983 and 1997 (this partially overlaps with Millennials in the American generational conception), the second generation are people born between 1998 and 2006 (partially overlapping with the Zoomers), and representatives of the third Russian “digital” media generation are now pursuing

¹ YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

secondary education and are going through the most active phase in their formative period (Sumskaya, 2023).

One of the characteristic features of modern Russian youth is their self-identification as a digitally-savvy, innovation-oriented generation. For young people who have grown up surrounded by technology, it is natural to live a life immersed in a continuous digital flow; they are living in a fast-paced world where the moment is the main unit of time and events are recorded in the form of short reel chronicles.

“Digital natives” have their own preferred practices, strategies, and channels of communication. One of the distinctive features of communication in the digital age is that subjectivity is tied to the technologies a person uses, i. e., “computer programs transform the forms of communication and perception of any symbolic production, including information about events and news” (Drozdova, 2017, p. 159, trans. by E. P.). Another remarkable feature stems from the network nature of digital media communication, which is profoundly different from traditional mass media (Lavrenchuk, 2010, p. 69). Such communication as a type of social interaction is decentralized, as it has no central point of control. Individual participants use social media platforms to unite and form online communities based on common interests and shared values.

Theoretical insights into the lives of “digital natives” in the information stream are supported by the author’s own research. In-depth interviews conducted with a sample of 40 respondents (from November 2021 to January 2022) showed that absolutely all the respondents were registered in various social media. The ranking of the most popular social media platforms is as follows: Instagram² 38 people, VK³ 36 people, Telegram⁴ 32 people, Facebook⁵ eight people, and TikTok⁶ eight people (Sumskaya, 2023). All of the interviewees use messaging services, primarily VK, WhatsApp⁷, Telegram, and Instagram.

The main source of national and international news is the Internet: to get their news, 25 respondents use social media, 12 respondents read online versions of newspapers and information agencies, and three respondents watch YouTube. Meanwhile, all 40 respondents watch videos on YouTube for personal and professional purposes (Sumskaya, 2023).

The youngest representatives of the “digital” media generations (especially the second and third) have influencers of their own, some of whom are barely known

² Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the US and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

³ VK (short for its original name VKontakte) is a Russian online social media and social networking service. <https://vk.com> VK™ is a trademark of VK.com Ltd.

⁴ Telegram™ is a trademark of Telegram Group Inc., its operational center is based in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

⁵ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

⁶ TikTok is a trademark of ByteDance, registered in China and other countries. TikTok has suspended all new posting and live-streaming for users in the Russian Federation.

⁷ WhatsApp is a trademark of WhatsApp Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

outside their online communities. The “digital” media generations are prone to prosumerism: they are ready to create their own media content and share their views in their group, “here and now”: they prioritize values of personalization, self-realization, and the right to self-identification.

“Digital” media generations are accustomed to random, non-linear, and decentralized communication. They use social media for self-expression, as well as to synchronously build multiple horizontal intra- and, if they wish so, intergenerational connections. In other words, social media promote extensive social engagement. The influence of social media, together with the major events and experiences that shape people’s worldviews, form the foundation of generational *entelechy*.

It is important to note that the priority media consumption of “digital” media generations is, of course, media created in the digital age and in HD quality. For example, in 2021, Russia’s own studies of media consumption by Russian “digital” media generations showed a demand for such online media as *RNA Novosti*, *RNA URA.RU*, *Lenta.ru*, *E1.ru*, *Gazeta.Ru*, *Znak.com*, *The Village*⁸, *Meduza*⁹, and others. “Digital” media generations also prefer to consume these media in the personal news feeds of their social networks. Among print media, glossy magazines are the most popular among Russian digital natives.

In terms of television content, foreign TV channels operating in the Russian market in cable and satellite packages (such as *Discovery*, *National Geographic*, *Euronews*, and others) are of interest to “digital natives”. Of Russian TV channels, *Pyatnitsa* [Friday], *TNT*, and the *Dozhd*¹⁰ [Rain] online TV channel were the most popular (Sumskaya, 2023).

The cognitive and sensuous sphere in the life of “digital” media generations also has its own peculiarities. The digital media environment is an extension and development of the electronic environment, which, according to McLuhan, has become yet another technological extension of the human organism, as it gives humans an immersion of the senses and changes our cognitive processes. This strengthens the need for emotional and sensuous experiences and makes people more prone to empathy.

This happens because the digital environment prioritizes our response to the representation of an action rather than the representation itself: it triggers emotional reactions, inducing total involvement in all-inclusive oneness (McLuhan, 1964). R. Williams (1965) argues that each new generation has its own structure of feeling that does not come “from” anywhere: in other words, it does not result from intergenerational transmission, but “the new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting ... feeling its whole life in certain ways differently” (p. 65). Even political content in social media targeted at “digital” media generations is now permeated by sensory imagery (Zavershinskiy & Koryushkin, 2022, p. 50).

⁸ По решению Роскомнадзора, издание «The Village» полностью заблокировано в России.

⁹ По решению Роскомнадзора, издание «Медуза» полностью заблокировано в России как средство массовой информации, выполняющее функции иностранного агента и как нежелательная организация.

¹⁰ По решению Роскомнадзора, телеканал «Дождь» полностью заблокирован в России как средство массовой информации, выполняющее функции иностранного агента.

Russian “digital” media generations are characterized by a high level of impulsivity and the prevalence of visual thinking.

The cognitive sphere of such media generations is shaped by the so-called Google effect, denoting the tendency to forget the information that is readily available online—in other words, what is remembered is largely not the information itself, but the place where it can be found (e.g., online). This might be the reason why Ivan Krastev (2016) describes contemporary young adults as “a generation that ‘google’ history for facts, but it cannot reconnect with the experience of the previous generations” (pp. 58–59). These two media generations have two distinctive characteristics. On the one hand, happiness is higher on the agenda of these generations in comparison with their predecessors. These people grew up in a relatively trouble-free period in Russia’s development, when digital media and technological advances evolved at a rapid pace and became quickly engrained in their daily lives. These generations have not had the need to resort to survival strategies and, in R. Inglehart’s terms, can thus be described as “postmodernist”, with the corresponding goals and values. Their distinctive feature is a high level of life satisfaction and adherence to the motto “live in the moment and be happy”. Before February 2022, Instagram¹¹ was one of the platforms that essentially told an optimistic narrative, portraying the world in the best possible light. Instagram is commonly described as a “happiness platform”, intended to capture and share life’s happy moments—over 90% of the content posted on Instagram is meant to emphasize positive emotions. Instagram users construct their virtual biographies as visual projects of a “happy life”. A. Drozdova (2017) comments: “Such basic anthropological foundations as ‘live beautifully’, ‘live with pleasure’, ‘be happy’ turn into manifestations of the aspiration for aesthetic pleasure as a sensual perception of the world” (p. 194; trans. by E. P.). Instagram gives people ways to pursue this aspiration in their daily lives.

Another important feature of “digital” media generations is their high levels of anxiety stemming from increased dependence on digitally mediated communication. A large-scale survey of young Russian adults has found that fear is a distinctive characteristic of this generation, threatening its social well-being:

The digital fears of young people reflect the anticipated, perceived threats and anxieties concerning the future of society. Therefore, the fears that drive post-modernist society have a radically different structure determined by growing uncertainty, increase in the number of forces out of human control, and changes in the attitudes to the idea of progress. Fear of the future can transform the socio-cultural foundations of society, even to the point of destroying them. (Abramova et al., 2022, p. 71)

The list of post-modernist fears includes fear of the unknown and an inability to make plans, fear of losing a sense of purpose in life, and fear of the future and

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situations beyond one's control. So-called digital fears include the fear of being offline, the fear of missing out, associated with the desire to stay continually connected, and the fear of being uninformed or the feeling of apprehension that one is not in the know, which causes dependence on digital systems.

Last but not least is the fear of digital discrimination, perceived as inequality of access to information sources and technologies and anxiety about falling behind on technology and thus losing the competitive edge. Such digital inequality is commonly referred to as the "digital divide" or "digital gap" (Norris, 2001; Ragnedda & Ruiu, 2017; Vartanova, 2018). The high level of anxiety among young people "may point to the negative scenario of further social development in which the upcoming generation may turn out to be neurotic and despondent" (Abramova et al., 2022, p. 68; trans. by E. P.). Russian "digital" media generations are heavily influenced by technological change and innovation, which is still largely driven by Western countries. In this regard, A. Pletnev (2020) makes the following observation: "Generation Z, whose online presence led to their socialization under the constant influence of the Western continent, more than any other generation resembles their Western peers" (p. 116; trans. by E. P.). V. Radaev (2019) uses data from population-based studies from 1994 to 2016 to show that young Russian people demonstrate significant similarities in their behavior models with their Western peers: they get married later in comparison with previous generations, they are more interested in sport, they consume less alcohol, and are oriented towards maintaining a good work-life balance (p. 167). They are also more prone to downshifting their careers and exploring the diversity of paths to self-realization. They value their individuality and uniqueness and are oriented at building self-awareness to develop their potential. They are used to being exposed to a continuous flow of digital information and thus feel a lot freer and more flexible than previous generations.

The latest results of the World Values Survey (Haerper et al., 2022) show that young Russian adults (aged 18–29), like their Western peers, value freedom more than equality; the significance of freedom for young people is much higher than for older generations. Young Russian people, like their Western peers, also adhere to such values as environmental awareness, tolerance, and a healthy lifestyle. Interestingly, Russian respondents, comparing their living standards with those of their parents when they were their age, point out that their well-being is much higher than that of their parents in the same period of life. This is yet another sign that Russian youth is an integral part of post-modernist society.

Some of the respondents' values were obviously determined by their culture and their country's economic circumstances. For example, 41% of Russian respondents attach a great significance to having a good job, which is true only of 11.4% of their American peers. 60.6% of young Russian adults reported having a strong fear of job loss, while for their American peers this figure is significantly lower, at 43.3%. As many as 70.1% of young Russian adults are ready to fight for their country, while only 39.6% of their peers in the USA and the Netherlands are ready to do so.

Despite the significant differences between young people across the world, there is one thing that they have in common: their news experience is dominated by digital

media and social media. Until recently, they have all been using transnational media (Haerpfer et al., 2022).

The way “digital” media generations construct their network communications is different from more linear methods of information dissemination in the “pre-digital” age. Another important difference lies in new generations’ attitudes to the cultural values of the older generations. In Russia, members of older generations, especially those living in rural areas, tend to support patriarchal values more strongly: these values include the dominant vertical communication model (the family type, father–son confrontation), which is also adopted by traditional Russian media (Makhovskaya, 2019, p. 108).

Taking this point a bit further, it may be supposed that Russian institutional media, especially those that established their editorial policy in the “linear”, pre-digital period, continue adhering to this vertical communication model, claiming the authority of the father figure to instruct their audiences on what they should or should not do.

These communication principles, means, and values differ quite obviously from those that determine the communications of Russian “digital” media generations, especially the youngest ones, almost entirely integrated into global digital network communications. It can be concluded that the effects of “post-24 February” events in Russia, when viewed from the perspectives of technological determinism and cultural anthropology, first, have dramatically disrupted the Russian digital media environment and, second, brought about some major transformations in the cultural value system.

In the future, these factors may be conducive to the emergence of “lost” generations, as they influence young people’s sense of self, well-being, and media habits and engender a feeling of the loss of normalcy.

Conceptualization and Interpretation of the “Lost” Generation

The anthropological approach to generations defines them not only as “a kinship term referring to discrete stages in the natural line of descent from a common ancestor” (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 25), but also showcases their human-centered characteristics, emphasizes their biography-forming events (which greatly influence generational self-fulfillment in a transitional society), and their ability to achieve their destiny in a situation of large-scale multifarious informational pressure (Izotova et al., 2017, p. 55).

The term “lost generation” (*Génération perdue*) was coined by the American writer and poet Gertrude Stein to denote the trauma endured by the people who reached adulthood during World War I. This term was later popularized by the American writer and war correspondent Ernest Hemingway in his autobiographical novel *The Sun Also Rises* and the German writer Erich Maria Remarque in his anti-war autobiographical novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* [All Quiet on the Western Front], and other American and European writers. They lived through the shock of the First World War at a young age and reflected this in their writings.

During the war, members of the Lost Generation endured a deep moral and physical suffering for which they had been totally unprepared. Traumatized by war,

disillusioned and bitter, they developed similar life views, sealing their generational fate. They failed to reintegrate into civilian life and identified themselves as the “unaccounted-for victims of war”. Upon their return to civilian life, they found that they had lost their former ideals and understanding of normalcy.

Quite interesting in this regard is the seminal essay by the Austrian sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928/1952) *The Problem of Generations*, written almost a century ago but still remaining a ubiquitous reference in scholarly work on generations. This essay summarized Mannheim’s reflections about the consequences of World War I, including the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This historical context sheds light on Mannheim’s idea that the “early impressions” and experiences one is exposed to in adolescence—the period of maximum social sensitivity—contribute to the crystallization of one’s basic personality structure and coalesce into a “natural view of the world” that remains relatively stable throughout a person’s life, reflecting the “stratified” consciousness of each particular generation (p. 179). Mannheim argued that the formative experience of the adolescence period provides the foundation for each generation’s unique world view, which may become a major driving force in people’s lives and determines generational unity—the “spirit of a generation”. This unity, however, is not monolithic: despite an identical experience and thought patterns shared by representatives of the same generations, these patterns may manifest themselves differently in people’s practical activities and thus form intragenerational fractions.

In other words, each generation has a “layered consciousness”, “subjective centers of life orientation”, or “generational nodes” that circumscribe generational experience and determine the types of actions that are historically relevant. “The spirit of a generation”, or generational “entelechies”, finds its most articulate expression in the generation’s elite, which implies that not everyone who formally belongs to a generation shares in its spiritual dimension (Mannheim, 1928/1952). Mannheim called himself a typical representative of the Lost Generation. In the aftermath of World War II, the problem of lost generations again gained urgency in Western countries for obvious reasons. In different countries, these generations in relation to their world view came to be known under different names: for example, in the UK they were called the “Angry Young Men”, in the USA the “Broken Generation”, and in Germany the “Generation of the Returned” (Gilenson, 1975).

The devastation left by World War II, its enormous human and material costs, led the renowned American political and social scientist Ronald Inglehart (1977) to develop a model of generational change based on the scarcity hypothesis and socialization hypothesis. R. Inglehart highlighted the massive intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist priorities that occurred from 1970 to 1988, distinguishing between the older “materialist” (those born before the end of World War II) and younger “post-materialist” birth cohorts (born at the end of the war or in the post-war years).

The Dutch sociologist Henk Becker (1992), relying on Inglehart’s findings, proposed his own generation typology, which has a supranational character and is applicable to all Western European countries. He defined the generation of people born between 1955 and the 1970s as the Lost Generation, pointing out that the

trauma this generation endured was not connected to the war but to other factors. In his view, the formative period of the Lost Generation coincided with the global economic recession of the seventies and mass youth unemployment, which strongly affected the subjective well-being of its representatives (pp. 221–222).

The aforementioned generations were lost not because of their traumatic war experience but due to a different kind of trauma. As Prager (2003) puts it, “the traumatic moment yields thoughts and actions that continually re-create in mind the experience of danger and helplessness” (p. 177). This feeling of inescapable helplessness can trigger the feeling of being lost. The French anthropologist François Héran (2014) argues that not only wars, but also, for example, epidemics lead to missing births and irreparable losses, creating “depleted cohorts” (pp. 3–4), and are thus significant factors in the emergence of lost generations.

American scholars have demonstrated that the consequences of economic recession, including economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (von Wachter, 2020), include long-term financial uncertainty, reduced job prospects, and lower subjective well-being, thus contributing to the emergence of lost generations (Steuerle et al., 2013). The most vulnerable social groups in this case are thought to include young people who have just entered the labor market and (or) lost their income. There is evidence that in the USA, COVID-19 containment measures led to “staggering increases in unemployment” (von Wachter, 2020, p. 588).

By experts’ estimates, it may take over ten years to overcome the consequences of the world crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which undoubtedly has taken its toll on the mental and physical health of individuals, on their subjective well-being. All the above gives scholars sufficient grounds to identify this generation as a lost one.

The results show that young adults (18–35) have been most severely hit by the pandemic, manifesting deteriorating mental health, increasing pessimism, hostility, and worries about unemployment and the economy (Lampert et al., 2021, p. 4). The British scholars K. Pritchard and R. Whiting (2014) demonstrate that for the lost generation, struggling to find well-paid jobs and facing the risks of unemployment, the notion of being lost translates to an individual and group position of hopelessness with negative consequences.

In Russia, the problem of lost generations has attracted the attention of researchers in different fields, namely, social, culture, political studies, and pedagogy. For instance, Kh. Sadykova (2015) defines a lost generation as a group of individuals who have failed to realize their abilities for a number of objective reasons. The psychosociolinguist E. Shamis believes that the main reason behind the emergence of such lost generations is the “incomprehensibility of the future” (Poletaeva, 2019).

A. N. Petrov (2008) argues that an intense traumatic experience can cause intrusive thoughts, persistent feelings of helplessness and insecurity. Dramatic economic, institutional, social, and cultural changes, the resulting economic downturn, increasing uncertainty about the future, social and economic marginalization, and growing unemployment disrupt social well-being and produce lost generations (pp. 285–287).

Russian scholars have identified the anthropological phenomenon of lost generations either by following participants' subjective self-descriptions or by presenting an interpretation from a detached point of view.

Table 1 presents a summary of the evidence collected through qualitative studies (in-depth interviews) and quantitative studies (large-scale sociological surveys) in Russia. The data comprises generation time spans, the unique factors that affected these generations, and the causes of generational trauma they may have suffered.

Table 1

"Lost" Generations in Russia (Based on Russian Evidence)

Generation (birth years)	Determining factors	Result
In-depth interview		
Elite pre-revolutionary generation (born in the 1900s)	Members of this generation received their "school certificates with the imperial eagle" (Semenova, 2001, p. 264) but were "crippled in the turmoil of the Revolution" after 1917	Unable to adjust to the new social order and interiorize the values of Soviet Russia
Mass generation of the "socialist project" (born in the 1950s)	Their formative years were spent in the Soviet Union while their middle adulthood years coincided with perestroika (Semenova, 2001, p. 264)	Unable to accept materialist values and the "struggle for survival" imperative
Generation of "superfluous people" (born in the 1970s)	Their adolescence coincided with the late Soviet period and the beginning of professionalization, with perestroika (Anipkin, 2018, p. 294)	Struggled to adapt to new social conditions, interiorize the values of a market society, and are facing meager career prospects
Sociological survey		
Cold War generations (born in the 1950–1970s)	The policy of isolationism and censorship of the Soviet period (Levada, 2001, p. 8)	Struggle to adapt to life in an open society, devoid of ideologically charged propaganda
First non-Soviet generation ("generation of fast buttons") (born in the 1980s and 1990s).	An outmoded system of education, which was meant to provide labor for industrialization (Miroshkina, 2017, p. 14)	The system of education inherited from the Soviet period impeded the development of independent learning skills in members of this generation, putting them at a disadvantage in the era of digital technologies and the network society
First post-Soviet generation (born in 1985–2000s)	Members of this generation tend to remain apathetic and unengaged in political and social issues	Members of this generation prefer to conform and go with the flow rather than take an active stand. Even though members of this generation tend to build successful administrative careers, they are often described as the "generation of the infantile and the aggressive" (Pastukhov, 2015)

Generation (birth years)	Determining factors	Result
“Disappointed” generation (born in 1982–2000s)	This generation has difficulties with self-identification, as its formative years coincided with the period of the country’s relative economic prosperity. The introduction of the Unified State Exam discouraged the development of critical thinking skills in children, which is why the search for the answer to the “Who we are” question took longer than for other generations (Radaev, 2019, p. 183)	Diminished resilience and stress resistance, immaturity, difficulties with self-identification

As the cited studies show, at least four Russian generations in the 20th century can qualify as lost. The largest amount of data deal with the youngest generation, whose formative period coincided with the turn of the millennium. This scholarly focus is justified because young people act as the drivers of change in any country.

The Russian sociologist V. V. Semenova (2005) adopts the perspective of cultural anthropology to discuss the self-representations of people from different generations, pointing out that, first, generations associate themselves with a particular social time (historical and individual) and, second, each of them positions themselves in society as “victims of social processes” (p. 90; trans. by E. P.). She found that respondents of all the age groups in question manifest a “state of expressive suffering”: for example, “war victims” among the representatives of older generations, “perestroika victims” and “the abandoned and deceived” in middle-age groups, and those “hung out to dry” and “forgotten by their country” in younger groups. Semenova comes to the conclusion that the willingness to sacrifice oneself appears to be one of the core characteristics of the archetype of Russian people. In this archetype, patience, suffering, and humility are both a means and an outcome of inner ascetism, resulting from “one’s ordering of soul. It is inherent in Russian culture and without it no subjectivity, no respect, and no esteem exist (Semenova, 2005, p. 90; trans. by E. P.). In our previous studies we have demonstrated that the willingness to self-sacrifice and humanist values constitute the core of the “spiritual staples” of Russian people (Sumskey & Sumskey, 2019).

Thus, following Semenova’s findings published almost 20 years ago, the generations that are lost, in fact, reproduce the archetypal qualities of self-sacrifice and appreciation of suffering. Hence, recurrent symbolic stimuli—traumatic events—enable Russian citizens to enjoy viable self-actualization and claim their experience of suffering to be a “unique destiny”.

On the other hand, the American scholar Jeffrey Prager (2003) argues that traumatic experiences may be transmitted from one generation to another. Citing Robert Pynoos’s work, Prager explains that the children of parents who suffered “inassimilable life experiences” may have greater difficulty feeling secure in the world or establishing “an assertive stance or independence” because their parents have transmitted their anxiety and insecurity “verbally, through unusual anxious

behavior, and by means of imposed behavioral avoidance that limits developmental opportunities” (p. 178).

Following this logic, it may be assumed that victimhood is transmitted to each Russian generation through the recreation of negative memories and the feeling of helplessness. From this perspective, victimhood is considered not as an archetypal quality of Russians, but rather as a continuously reproduced tragic twist of events, which turns almost every generation into a lost one. As the reasons behind the emergence of each lost Russian generation are different (see Table 1), the situation is best described with the Russian proverb “you never know whether you will gain or lose”. In any case, the result is fairly similar, at least judging by the results of the cited studies.

In sum, long-lasting uncertainty and the unpredictability of events, drastic negative change, and traumatic experiences are detrimental to people’s subjective well-being because the latter implies independence, confidence, and self-actualization, i.e., the realization of a person’s full potential (Pushina, 2012, p. 184). R. Inglehart highlights that subjective well-being starts to prevail among other components in the value system due to increased economic and physical security and the sense of order, stability, and predictability (Inglehart, 1997, p. 9). In this case, the key markers of subjective well-being are satisfaction with life and work, pay satisfaction, economic optimism, and happiness (Radaev, 2019, p. 110) and a sense of purpose and meaning to life (Steptoe et al., 2015). Consequently, a long period of ill-being leads to resentment, a feeling of inadequacy and of being deprived of any prospects in life (Karapetyan & Glotova, 2018; Zotova & Karapetyan, 2018), social and political alienation, and the feeling of not fitting in.

The digital age has added one more factor to this list the level of perceived knowledge. The uncertainty and lack of reliable information has a negative impact on people’s well-being: lower perceived knowledge is associated with a weaker sense of control, which means that people start seeing the situation as more dangerous (Yang & Ma, 2020).

Thus, geopolitical factors such as wars, economic upheavals, and major epidemics can lead to generational loss, as they adversely affect people included in these events with negative consequences. In today’s developed media society, a factor such as abrupt and prolonged restriction of audience groups in media use, subject to their previously stable media patterns, can lead to lost media generations. This is true at least for the elite part of the media generation, i.e., the most advanced users in the digital media environment.

Discussion and Conclusions

Russian “digital” media generations have thrived in virtual environments. This abandonment of traditional mass media of the pre-digital age in favor of the digital media environment once again confirms McLuhan’s famous aphorism that “a new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them” (2003, p. 197).

One of the key features shared by representatives of “digital” media generations in this context is that they give clear preference to horizontal over vertical communication, as well as prioritizing freedom of choice in selecting sources of information and freedom of communication over restrictions and censorship.

In the spring of 2022, after the start of the special military operation in Ukraine some social networks were blocked for Russian users. Afterwards, information began to emerge that many of the glossy magazines (Cosmopolitan, Elle, Harper’s Bazaar, Men’s Health, Vogue, GQ, Glamour, Esquire, Tatler and others) so important to the postmodern “digital” media generations were leaving the Russian market. This was followed by the blocking of the Russian TV channel *Dozhd* [Rain], the radio station *Ekho Moskvy* [Echo of Moscow], and significant changes to the program content of the popular Russian “digital” media generation TV channel *Pyatnitsa* [Friday]. Some online digital media, including *The Village*, *Meduza*, etc., were blocked. *Colta.ru*¹² and *Znak.com*, popular with “digital” media generations, along with Yuri Dud¹³, Alexey Pivovarov, and a number of other generationally significant opinion leaders were put on the list of foreign agents. At present, the European and American rights holders of Discovery, Animal Planet, National Geographic, Viasat History, Viasat Nature, Disney, Euronews, and other TV channels have ended cooperation with Russian cable and satellite TV operators. The departure of Western media from the Russian media market can be seen as a result of propaganda. However, it is important to note that these media have been evaluated by the “digital” media generations as being in demand.

So, these measures have had a traumatic effect on “digital natives”, who are accustomed to the integrity and continuity of information flow, which is in a certain sense the symbolic capital of these generations. The negative emotions regarding the social media crackdown were frequently expressed online by the representatives of “digital” media generations. Many of the people troubled by the social media bans were employed in the Internet sphere.

Moreover, the content propagated by the Western media (Simons, 2022a, 2022b) has influenced the value-based meaning-making process and subjective well-being of younger Russian “digital” media generations. Quite illustrative in this respect are the creative manifestos issued after 24 February, 2022 that show very strong, varied, and often contradictory responses to these events. For example, Little Big¹⁴, a self-described Russian “punk-pop-rave band”, released a video called “Generation Cancellation”. The Russian rock band *Nogu Svelo*¹⁵ made the video “Generation Z”.

The opposing view was expressed by Russian composer and singer Oleg Shaumarov, who released the patriotic songs *Ia russkii* [I am Russian] and *Moia strana* [My Country] about the world of Russian people. The singer-songwriter Shaman (Jaroslav Dronov) launched a video challenge on social media with his patriotic

¹² По решению Роскомнадзора, издание «Colta.ru» полностью заблокировано в России.

¹³ Признан иностранным агентом Министерством Юстиции РФ.

¹⁴ Основатель группы Little Big Илья Прусикин Министерством юстиции РФ признан иностранным агентом.

¹⁵ Основатель группы "Ногу свело" Максим Покровский Министерством юстиции РФ признан иностранным агентом.

hit *la russkii* [I am Russian]. This video appealed to the target audience (young adults included) with a tempo-rhythmic structure and expressivity (in Stanislavski's system) that has come to represent national identity, thus epitomizing the current aspirations of the Russian people, connecting projections of the past and future, and fitting successfully into the ideological campaign built around the heroic narrative (Zavershinskiy & Koryushkin, 2022, p. 51).

It should be noted that as the World Values Survey showed, 72.1% of Russians in the 18–29 age group reported the possibility of war involving Russia among their biggest fears. A similar attitude was expressed in relation to terrorist attacks and the possibility of a civil war (Haerpfer et al., 2022). The above-described digital fears and anxiety about the possibility of war came true in the spring of 2022.

The results of the first mass interview-based survey encompassing a nationwide representative sample give us some idea about Russian people's attitudes to the blockage of some social media platforms and news outlets. The results have shown that most respondents from the 18–24 age group reported having regular trouble with accessing digital media content (Internet, Sotsial'nye Seti i VPN, 2022), in relation to which they express not nostalgic reminiscences about their past media experience or bitter sweet memories of their past media habits (Bolin, 2014, p. 109), but distinct anger and indignation at being unable to pursue their old life style (enjoying free access to social media platforms and online communication) and at the loss of normalcy.

However, according to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), only 11% of their respondents are ready to advocate for a free and open Internet (without censorship or content blocking), while 82% believe that Internet censorship is necessary to block violent content or content that incites hate. Every second Russian believes that it is necessary to develop a digital environment connecting different countries of the world (Internet: Vozmozhnosti ili Ugrozy, 2021). The same survey conducted in 2022 showed that 79% of young people report feeling stressed—this figure is much higher than for older age groups (Stress— I Kak s Nim Borot'sia, 2022).

A month after the launch of the special military operation in February 2022, political experts on Russian federal TV channels described the situation unfolding in the global media space as the First World Information War. Four months later, this topic was picked up by many Western leaders, who started speaking of a global media war. There is some truth to this. The cognitive skills of Russian “digital” media generations make them unable to fully and objectively reflect upon these events, especially since, as was discussed above, their socialization involved close interaction with their Western peers within an integrated digital environment.

From the perspective of digital divide theory, it may be said that we are now dealing with a new kind of digital inequality. The discreteness of the media flow, whose continuity is crucial primarily for “digital” media generations and their media identity, has created a unique combination of factors contributing to further exacerbation of the digital divide. Digital communication requires a high degree of computer competence; the absence of access to generationally familiar social media and digital media

provokes anxiety and a feeling of vulnerability in members of media generations. Restrictions on social media and digital media access produce a perceived inequality of opportunity, as none of the previous generations were so fully integrated into the digital media environment as young Russian “digital natives”.

Moreover, it should be noted that previous media generations had already gained some experience of responding to major stress-inducing events. For instance, people from the “analogue” media generation, born in the Soviet period, still adhere to the “ordinary Soviet person” anthropological model: they choose TV news or other TV programs as their main news sources. The “digital borderline” media generation, which lived through the reforms of the 1990s and the early “naïve” period of the publicly available Internet, can use both traditional and digital media, which is why they slide easily into the established behavior model of looking for ways around the restrictions. “Digital” media generations do not yet have ready-made strategies or models for responding to such situations. For them, the Soviet era and *perestroika* belong to an imaginary past, which puts them in the most vulnerable position.

This complex process was described by R. Inglehart (1997), who pointed out that

normally, culture changes slowly; but it does eventually respond to a changing environment. Changes in the socioeconomic environment help reshape individual-level beliefs, attitudes, and values through their impact on the life experience of individuals. Cultures do not change overnight. Once they have matured, people tend to retain whatever worldview they have learned. Consequently, the impact of major changes in the environment tends to be the most significant on those generations that spent their formative years under the new conditions. (p. 16)

It is now crucial to support the “digital” media generations by compensating for shrinking opportunities of generational media communication and creating alternative digital media platforms, which can be used for self-fulfillment and to help these people strengthen their civilizational identity in the ongoing ideological global confrontation.

The events of recent months show that attempts to create Russian clones of popular platforms such as Instagram¹⁶—*Rossggram*, *Now*, *Grustnogram*, *Musicgram*—though interesting, have so far remained rather unconvincing. Another actively promoted project is the social media platform *ЯRUS*, which is supposed to become an alternative to the banned platforms and YouTube. This application has been downloaded from the Google Play Store over 1 million times.

During 2022, the Telegram messenger’s audience almost doubled from 2021 to around 40 million Russian users (Keffer, 2023). However, it is important to note that Telegram still lacks the sought-after visualization features that Instagram had. Although many Instabloggers and TikTokers continue to move their audience to Telegram, they have not been able to replenish previous audience volumes.

¹⁶ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the US and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

The top Russian media platform VK provides a viable alternative to Facebook and other banned social media: in March 2022, 300,000 new e-commerce entrepreneurs moved to VK and started experimenting with the platform's tools for relaunching their business. Throughout the spring and summer of 2022, VK has been working on expanding the platform's capabilities and functionality. In March, the company launched a VK video app for smart TV. In April 2022, the number of daily active users of VK was 47.2 million in Russia alone and over 100 million across the world (VKontakte podvela itogi, 2022).

In the summer of 2022, some replacement for foreign glossy magazines appeared on the Russian media market. This is how the Russian glossy magazines *VOICE*, *Symbol*, *Men Today*, and several others came into being. Russian *Traveler TV* channel has been launched. Perhaps soon we will hear about new initiatives in these areas.

The government has launched several large-scale state initiatives such as the Federal Law No. 261-FZ *O rossiiskom dvizhenii detei i molodezh* [On the Russian Movement of Children and Youth] (approved by the Federation Council on 8 July 2022) aimed at propagating patriotic values among the youth. It is, however, still unclear how these initiatives will be perceived by the oldest "digital" media generations, whose behavioral models may be less flexible.

These measures are expected to provide the necessary support for Russian "digital natives", help them preserve their right to personal sovereignty, and restore generational daily media rituals. They also have the potential to mitigate the negative effects of the already visible cultural intra- and intergenerational value gap, contribute to these people's self-actualization and self-realization, and ensure these generations' capacity to live in a comfortable, sustainable, and contiguous digital environment.

It can be supposed that the absence or inefficiency of such measures, along with the continued ban on news sources and media platforms that leave "digital natives" without any viable alternatives or objective conditions for self-fulfillment may result in the emergence of a new lost media generation. But there is still a chance to prevent this.

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