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[Television of the future: How video bloggers are changing the media landscape](#)



The recent presentation in the State Duma by [videoblogger Sasha Spilberg](#) marked a new stage in the “maturation” of political blogging in Russia. In the past, video services were entertainment for a technologically advanced minority, serving as an escape from the drudgery of politics. Today it’s not just politicians like Alexei Navalny and Vyacheslav Maltsev who use YouTube; previously apolitical bloggers are increasingly engaging in public discussions on pressing issues.

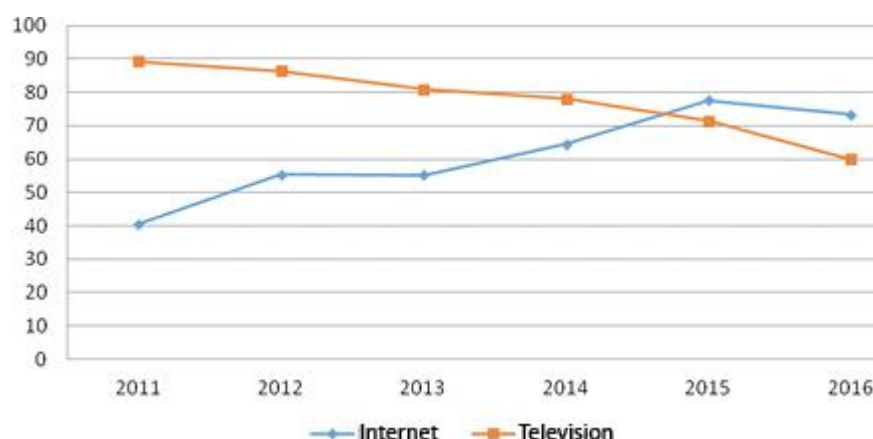
Attempts to promote this format of political show were obviously made long ago. However, until now it didn’t fit the Russian social context, and consumers were not ready for mass politicization. Even a year ago, Navalny’s videos, with millions of views, didn’t attract so much attention from other bloggers, or cause such

public outcry. At the same time, some popular authors' support for the March 26 protest actions have made politics (albeit in its most primitive form) interesting for those who had gotten away from the influence of television and were avoiding any public activity. Navalny's project is now clearly becoming a model of interaction with audiences for other public figures: Dmitry Gudkov is also trying to create his own political "show;" Alisher Usmanov has recorded a video statement and put it on his YouTube channel.

According to the data from Levada Centre surveys from December 2016 and June 2017, 20-25% of Russian adults watch videobloggers' channels. Because the survey covered Russians aged 18 and older, there could be some inconsistencies with YouTube channels' statistics. About half of respondents aged between 18 and 24 watch videoblogs, also known as 'Vlogs'. Recently, bloggers' influence on young people has been discussed at all levels - from journalists to State Duma deputies. This topic gained such popularity thanks to just one federal politician penetrating the YouTube space, but doing it very successfully: Alexei Navalny.

If we compare the quantitative figures for the audience reach of top entertainment channels and Navalny's Vlog, they all have a very small number of viewers on a nationwide scale. According to Levada's June survey, Maksim Golopolosov's entertainment Vlog *+100500* is watched by 5% of Russians, and Navalny's by 3%. Nevertheless, Navalny offers a unique product. In the last couple of years, very few politicians dared to actively target young people in their campaigns, let alone work in a new, unfamiliar format. At the same time, it is completely obvious that young Russians are completely indifferent to TV as a medium to receive news. Practically all young people use the Internet every day (92%).

What is your main source of news about what is happening in our country? (Russians aged 18-24)



Alexei Navalny's videoblog operates in an area where the state has not yet established a monopoly. In the last half year it became one of the most popular Russian blogs with the number of subscribers [growing](#) from 310,000 to 1,200,000, overtaking the popular political analyst Dmitry Ivanov ([@kamikadzedead](#)). In terms of monthly views, in March and April Navalny's channel overtook even Golopolosov's *+100500*, the leader of YouTube's entertainment segment.

Not only has Navalny advanced his channel to leading positions, he also started to develop a media environment that provides an alternative to television. Other members of his team and politicians started appearing on his channel. In the end, a personal project expanded to an entire "TV channel," with its own morning shows, and programs on information technology and finance. Discussions of the political agenda expanded outside of the relatively narrow circle of the politician's supporters: he is [interviewed](#) by the chief editor of Sports.ru portal Yury Dud; his ideas and actions are discussed by famous bloggers Ruslan Usachyov and Nikolay Sobolev. While we can only talk about "the Russia of the future" with a dreamy smile, "the television of the future" already exists.

We should understand that for most people, watching YouTube or using the Internet is not a way of receiving "objective" information, but a lifestyle characterized by consumption of diverse information and rapid change of subjects of interest. Videos can become popular in a very short period of time thanks to the [multiplier effect](#) of trendsetters and recommendations from friends on social networks, and interest in them will only decline afterwards. This also has a positive side. The constantly updating list of "Internet-star" candidates brings

heavy competition and the possibility of alternatives, which is virtually absent from modern Russian TV. A survey of the audience of Channel One (watched by two thirds of Russians) found that 42% noted the lack of diversity of opinions on Russia's main information resource.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement “there are not enough different opinions in news coverage by...”? (% of the channel's viewers), April 2017.



The editors of leading state media certainly sense the need to create at least the impression of willingness to accommodate the desires of the unsatisfied part of their audiences, and, incidentally, Channel One has been somewhat more successful in this than others: The organizers of the Videofest bloggers festival were invited to take part in the “Evening Urgant” show, and the resurrected “Spotlightparishilton” show uses different language than “Vremya” when covering political topics. But this is hardly enough. As television becomes interactive and personalized, the boundary that separates it from online services erodes. This can assume amusing forms when, for example, TV channels show selected Internet-memes.

The desire to listen to different opinions does not always mean that people will actually take them into account. Viewers' curiosity goes hand in hand with the desire to [limit access](#) to information. Which side of the public consciousness will take over depends on the specific situation and consumers' moods. People are always curious to look behind the curtain of censorship, but when faced with a contradictory opinion, they can easily disregard it if it doesn't fit with their stereotypes. Information that contradicts their beliefs will be either discounted or distorted by the selective mind. As a result, people might only find confirmation for the version of reality they want to believe in. The abundance of opinions creates certain difficulties: the inability to absorb large amounts of information, and the desire to find simple solutions for complicated problems. Complex content is unlikely to become popular.

Apart from ratings, media owners are also concerned about political correctness. However, at some point political viability starts to be so much at odds with the needs of the audience that it begins to threaten an information channel's future. Fifty-six percent of Russians know the name Alexei Navalny, although it is almost never mentioned on federal TV channels. Among those respondents who know him, 16% (9% of all respondents) would like to see him as a participant on political talk shows. The growing popularity of blogging has considerably lowered the administrative barrier to access to the information space, and sparked competition among opinion leaders. When the media space is shared between TV programs and Internet blogs, all its participants are subjected to similar rules. It becomes harder and harder to separate political content from entertainment: Everyone is trying to keep their audience, using the most spectacular tricks. On the one hand, it is more difficult for politicians and political bloggers, who have to fight for attention in the new show format. On the other hand, this “light” format gives access to a wider audience, helps content to go viral and makes it easier to balance on the edge of populism when arguments and facts are replaced by concise and contagious ideas.

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