

**KAZAKHSTAN'S NEW  
MEDIA DEVELOPMENT:  
ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
ON SOCIETY**

Kazakhstan has been independent for about 25 years. In that time the media landscape dramatically changed, with traditional media (e.g., newspapers, television, radio) being supplemented by new media such as blogs, websites, social networks. Kazakhstan is a leader among the Central Asian countries and the Commonwealth of Independent States in the level of Internet capability. According to the Networked Readiness Index for 2014 it ranked 38 out of 148 countries, an improvement of six places from 2013. But this new media landscape is not well understood with respect to the impacts on society of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Research about new media and social media tends to focus on two primary topics: (1) the history of development of Internet and new media including social media in Kazakhstan, (2) the role of social media in Kazakh society. Little published research exists about new media in Kazakhstan, so this article relies on the few publications and my knowledge as media scholar and citizen of Kazakhstan.

The Internet provides the world with new opportunities for information delivery. Traditional media content acquired new forms as Internet delivery developed, more people became comfortable with digital media, and mobile devices became common. The change is irreversible. Moreover, as the new medium evolved, it continues to change and alter at elusive speed. One of the most authoritative researchers of online journalism, John Pavlik (2001) suggests the following major transformations are caused by the Web: the nature of news content, the work of journalists, the structure of the newsroom, and the «realignment of the relationships» among news organizations, journalists and their publics [1].

Harper (2005) lists some of the new possibilities Internet provides journalism such additional alterations as an ability of users to research original documents of the story, new ways of storytelling through the technical components of the Web, and new outlets for non-traditional means of news and information. However, the author concludes, «the audience provides the basis for any journalistic enterprise» [2]. Many studies confirm the rapid increase of the online media consumers. Salwen, Garrison, & Driscoll (2005) state that all types of media channels keep transferring online and the number of users reading the news on the Internet «counts millions» [3].

The digitization process is constantly widening. Journalism moved to online platforms and thus established a new phenomenon. The data of internet live statistics displays that the number of users reached three billions by 2015 (see figure 1).

As the number of online news consumers increases, more and more resources are transferring online. Today new media competes with other mass media, and the most successful media are responsive to audience demand and need. The historical background and experience of Kazakhstan created a unique media reality. The number of media in Kazakhstan changes from year to year. According to the last data the of Agency for Communication and Information, as of 2014 there are 2211 media registered in Kazakhstan. Of these, 255 are electronic media, including online media. Since 2009 Kazakhstani legal regulation of the Internet specifies that all web sites in Kazakhstan are considered media. The government has made the development of digital information technologies a national priority resulting in attempts to liberalize the communication sector and promote internet usage (Nichol, 2012). The official language in Kazakhstan is Kazakh, spoken by 65 percent of population, however

Russian is the most popular language used on the Internet (94.1 percent), followed by Kazakh (4.5 percent), and English (1.4 percent) [4]. Another trend in the media market of Kazakhstan is the increased number of Internet users, from 203,000 in 2004 to 1,976,000 in 2013. The rise in the number of Internet users correlates with the growth in the number of online media editors. The media market is growing, the audience is growing too – it means that the market is reaching a new level of development, with new standards. Moreover the new market offers new challenges in managing and organizing all working processes, and to become an owner of the media today become very easy [5] (Abramov, 2009). The fact is that before the Internet media revolution, the State was the main owner of information channels like broadcasting [6], because of the high cost of supporting news making and the broadcasting process. Today, as we said before, it is easy to become a media owner. But in Kazakhstani realities we still have the major participation of the state in the media sphere. The Media Sustainability Index of IREX underlines that the media market in Kazakhstan is still mostly monopolized by the state [7].

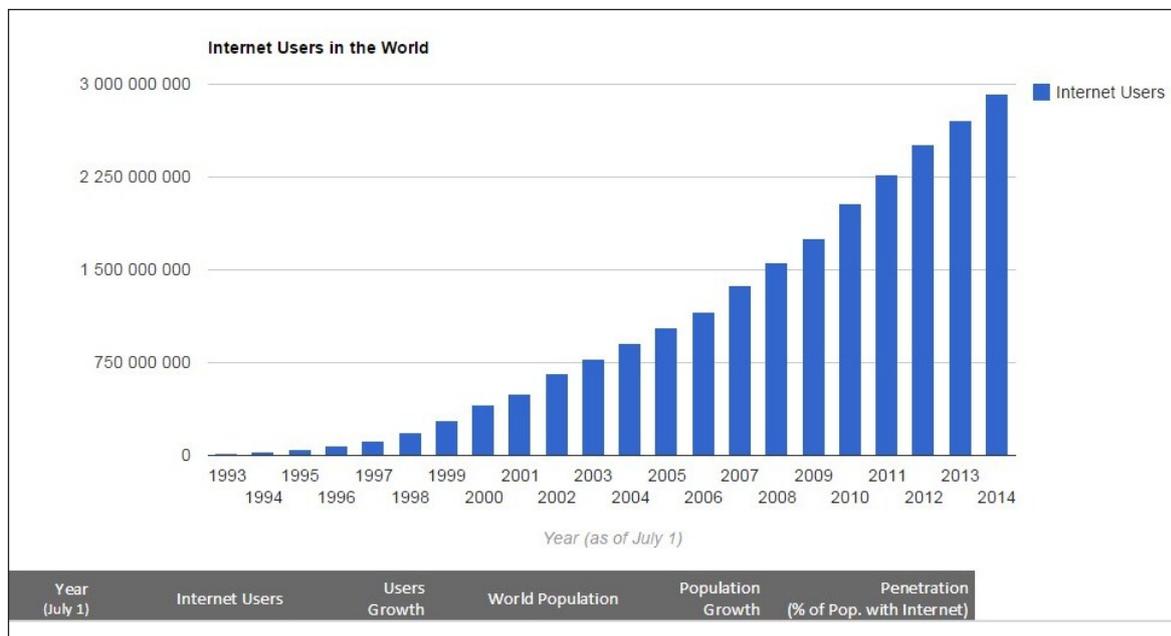


Figure 1 – The number of users of the Internet

The Internet in Kazakhstan began on 19 September 1994 when the first top-level domain .kz was officially registered. The history of development of

Internet in Kazakhstan can be divided into 3 stages. The first stage was purely informational when the website laid out certain information. In the second

stage the internet was used as a method of communication and dialogue. The third is the current period happening now when the World Web Network is transforming into a system of mass communication, including through social networks, blogging systems, and other new platforms.

Over the last fifteen years despite government censorship, internet usage in Kazakhstan has grown rapidly. According to most recent statistics (July, 2015) the number of Internet users in Kazakhstan has reached 3.47 million with 71% of them aged between 12 and 54. And 870 thousand of them are the residents of Almaty city. In general 67.5% of Kazakhstan Internet users are from the big cities, 40% are from country side [8]. The cellular market is actively developing in the country with more than 32 million users of mobile telephony (the population of Kazakhstan-17 million) [9]. A rapidly developing cellular market will further expand the use of new media.

The fact is that today social media is a rapidly changing and continues to greatly broaden our scale of communication. Kazakhstan is not only the largest Internet market in Central Asia, but also the leading user of social media. Social media use is likewise on the rise, with Russia-based networks being the most popular, even if global networks such as Facebook and Twitter also are spreading. The number of Moi Mir users grew by over 90% in Kazakhstan in 2010-2011, exceeding 1.5 million a day [10]. In 2011 Kazakhs spent more hours per month on social media sites than the users of any other nation. Since then Kazakhstan may have lost its title as the most social media-addicted country in the world, yet in Central Asia it remains on top.

Social surveys from a few years ago indicate that governmental mass media had 10% of the city audience while independent media held 40-50% of the audience. One of the main effects of independence was its influence on the content of new media and trust in the social media. Many new media successfully used sociopolitical topics to gain audiences, increase ratings and benefit financially. The «political» discourse was not too critical of government leaders, but focused on scandal news and entertaining issues. Social media took the lead and had more success in this process, leaving traditional media behind.

As the Dean of Journalism Faculty of M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University Professor E.L.Vartanova (2007) marks, «in spite of considerable progress in international cooperation, an information society represented today is more likely a national rather than the international project. And the new media phenomenon is not only, and not so

much, technological but developed through national causes. The concrete practice shows that each state individually approaches the consideration of and decision of a given problem» [11].

What emerged as a central issue in the new media market was competition for audiences and establishment of a Web version of traditional media. It was difficult for traditional media (TV, Radio, newspapers) to compete with new media (Internet journalism). Internet media markets were stronger than traditional media, and the level of efficiency and professionalism in new media products was higher. Nevertheless, traditional media in Kazakhstan emerged with a strong segment of the market. There is rapid growth of Internet users in Kazakhstan. Between 2000 to 2003, their number increased by 200% annually. From 2000 to 2009 the number of Internet users in Kazakhstan increased from 70 thousand to 2.3 million people (an increase of 30 times). By the end of 2007 the number of Internet users reached 1 million 800 thousand people. By 2010, the number of Internet users increased to 3.5 million people [12]. According to the Ministry of Communication & Information of RK at the beginning of 2011 there were 4.3 million Internet users in the country. At the beginning of 2012 there were 8.7 million Internet users in Kazakhstan, at the end 2013 – more 10 million. Audience demand decided what programs would be produced and competition increased as each websites and social media tried to make its content more attractive to audience. The audience played a crucial role because of the financial benefit from advertising. As a result new media were motivated to produce high quality audience centered content.

However, extensive reforms in the telecommunication and broadcasting sectors of the republic have been ongoing for several years, since 1992. These sectors have been reformed on several fronts: the creation of legislative and regulatory framework, restructuring, corporatization and privatization of enterprises. Kazakhstan, to keep pace with the times, aims to follow the path of globalization laid by the world economy through economic diversification and gradual departure from the raw-material orientation. A primary step in this direction was the adoption of the «Strategy of Industrial-Innovation Development of the Republic of 2003-20015.» Its main provisions were developed on the basis of the Strategy «Kazakhstan-2030» and other policy documents.

On December 14, 2012 the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, presented to the people of the country the new Kazakhstan's Development

Strategy «Kazakhstan-2050: a new policy of the established state». The President noted that the previous strategy, «Kazakhstan-2030», had already accomplished many directives. Now the country faces more global issues. «The main goal is to become one of the 30 most developed countries of the world by 2050» [13].

Part of the strategy includes the formation of a national innovation system of national technology parks and several regional ones. The largest project, «Information Technology Park», already has placed 27 domestic and foreign companies into the system. The strategy used to move Kazakhstan toward becoming one of the 50 most competitive countries (designated in the Treatment of President of Kazakhstan from March 1, 2006) included the concept of competitiveness of the information space of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2009. The main trends of the global information space and information market of the country are reflected in the strategy, identified basic principles, strategic goals and objectives of state policy in the information sphere [14].

According to the Agency of the Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in 2014 68.1% of citizens of Kazakhstan at age from 16 to 74 are connected and using Internet. Moreover, the number of children from 6 to 15 years old who are using Internet also is growing and in 2014 43.6% were online.

At this moment there are many Internet media in Kazakhstan and the number is growing, but there is no clear defined research about new standards for a new kind of media. Actually, there is no clear understanding of norms and forms of Kazakhstani media space self-regulation. As mentioned by Abramov (2009), modern media owners poorly understand the specificity of the organization of media management in the new media.

As usual, all trends in journalism in Kazakhstan come from Western journalism practice. Accountability and Transparency (A&T) helps to create and build a constant audience through the Internet. Nevertheless A&T are the basic guarantees of the reputation of online media in the West. In other words it gives public trust to the media. According to TNS Web Index data, the Internet is the only growing media in Kazakhstan with coverage which is almost 2 times traditional media coverage. In July 2015 the number of Internet users in Kazakhstan reached 3.47 million. That is 71% of the population aged 12 to 54 years old who use the Internet at least once a month [15].

In 2014 Kazcontent JSC conducted surveys among populations in 16 regions in Kazakhstan. Ac-

ording to this research over 57% of the respondents in Kazakhstan use Internet on daily basis, 18.7% – often, 12.6% – rarely and 11.7% – never used. The survey identified the most popular internet media and the use Internet of their audience [16].

There are many worldwide social networks users in Kazakhstan. Also there are some domestic networks, like: ct.kz, kiwi.kz, nur.kz, yvision.kz, jnet.kz. But Kazakhstan networks are not popular when compared with others. It is partially explained by the short period of time since their introduction and difficulties encountered in implementation. According to the study of the Яндекс.Новости (news.yandex.ru) the most popular social network sites in Kazakhstan are Russian or from the US (see Figure 2).

According to data listed in the table it is clear that:

- First place in the ranking of popularity is the social network «Classmates» (1,610,086 queries in Yandex for last month), a multilingual project enabling users to find former classmates, acquaintances and communicate with them at any time.

- Second place in the popular ranking is the video sharing site «YouTube» which takes 1,471,227 queries in Yandex, which allows participants to network, to add, annotate, view and share videos with friends.

- The third line of a rating of popularity of social networking resource belongs to the «My World» in Kazakhstan, in which 839,140 queries in the system Yandex for last month was made. This Russian-language service, which combines the user's actions on the main page of the portals Mail.Ru, communicates through SMS messages, post videos and photos, to express emotions in the form of smiles, give virtual gifts, blogging, listening to music, download songs and read the blogs of other users. Outsider's popularity rating among social networking sites in Kazakhstan were:

- «Flickr»,
- «Myspace»,
- «AlterGeo»,
- «Hyde Park»,
- «Friendster».

The fact that mostly young people use social networks showing that 66% of Facebook users in Kazakhstan are 18-34 years old. Kazakhstan leads in terms of Facebook users and in terms of daily unique visits to Facebook.com and youtube.com. Kazakhstan internet users are very active on social media sites covered to generate any figures. Russian social media has a big influence on Kazakhstani social media. VK (Originally VKontakte) is

the largest European Social Media Network; Mail.ru; Odnoklassniki (Одноклассники in Russian, Classmates). According to the study of the Яндекс.Новости (news.yandex.ru) In the Central Asia

countries Facebook Users – Kyrgyzstan-75,380, Kazakhstan-452,200, Uzbekistan-128,780, Tajikistan – 34,600, Turkmenistan – 5,860\* (\*blocked in country) [17].

п/п	Популярная социальная сеть в Казахстане	Оценка частотности слов для Яндекс.Директа, за месяц		Изменения (+/-)	Количество упоминаний в Яндекс.Новости, за месяц		Изменения (+/-)	Количество зарегистрированных пользователей в сети
		январь, 2015	декабрь, 2014		январь, 2015	декабрь, 2014		
1	Одноклассники, odnoklassniki.ru	1610086 (1552619+57467)	1416114 (1349105+67009)	193972	38 (37+1)	48 (47+1)	-10	148 000 000
2	Ютуб, youtube.com	1471227 (1349433+121794)	1401696 (1284755+116941)	69531	9 (3+6)	8 (1+7)	1	4 000 000 000 просмотров/в сутки
3	Мой мир, my.mail.ru	839140 (825730+13410)	849088 (831654+17434)	-9948	2	0	2	40 000 000
4	ВКонтакте, vkontakte.ru	770565 (754329+16236)	734417 (717552+16865)	36148	76	40	36	190 000 000
5	Фейсбук, facebook.com	48027 (42988+5039)	45943 (39799+6144)	2084	35 (31+4)	23 (21+2)	12	1 000 000 000
6	Твиттер, twitter.com	12051 (11175+876)	12304 (11230+1074)	-253	138 (129+9)	119 (110+9)	19	200 000 000
7	Мамба, mamba.ru	7624 (6709+915)	6668 (5874+794)	956	0	0	0	11 500 000
8	ЛайвДжурнал, livejournal.com, ЖЖ, Живой журнал	5751 (1+2241+3222+287)	7460 (3+2242+4974+241)	-1709	3 (1+1+1)	0	3	40 076 177
9	Блоггер, blogger.com	1602 (1498+104)	1213 (1117+96)	389	32	32	0	-
10	Badoo, badoo.com	1406 (980+426)	2280 (1609+671)	-874	0	0	0	125 000 000
11	Blog.ru	1193	1450	-257	0	0	0	-
12	Мир тесен, mirtesen.ru	929 (707+222)	890 (668+222)	39	0	0	0	-
13	LinkedIn, linkedin.com	883 (741+142)	922 (754+168)	-39	0	0	0	150 000 000
14	Мой круг, moikrug.ru	679 (562+117)	690 (653+37)	-11	0	0	0	-
15	Беон, beon.ru	631 (399+232)	669 (539+130)	-38	0	0	0	1 203 240
16	Я.ру	548	616	-68	0	0	0	2 844 908
17	Травиян, travian.ru	444 (399+45)	495 (434+61)	-51	0	0	0	-
18	Дайри, diary.ru	218 (61+157)	217 (89+128)	1	0	0	0	-
19	Лавпланет, loveplanet.ru	208 (114+94)	227 (110+117)	-19	0	0	0	-
20	Хабрахабр, habrahabr.ru	178 (70+108)	270 (131+139)	-92	0	0	0	-
21	Фликр, flickr.com	94 (22+72)	98 (34+64)	-4	0	0	0	51 000 000
22	Майспейс, myspace.com	44 (21+23)	46 (13+33)	-2	0	0	0	25 100 000
23	AlterGeo, altergeo.ru	34	72 (69+3)	-38	0	0	0	900 000
24	Гайдпарк, maxpark.com	24 (5+19)	11 (2+9)	13	0	0	0	3 000 000
25	Friendster, friendster.com	9 (8+1)	16 (13+3)	-7	0	0	0	115 000 000

Figure 2 – List of Popular Websites

Low Facebook penetration suggests that there is still room for social media growth in all Central Asian countries, especially since there are just as many daily visits to VKontakte.ru (Russian keep-in-touch website) as Facebook in Kazakhstan. Although many of the social media figures appear low it has been reported anecdotally that more and more

Central Asian Internet users are turning to Facebook because of the flexibility and the way it can connect like-minded people. As with many other countries, political issues have begun to encourage the use of social media sites like Facebook in Central Asia and increasing numbers are expected in the coming months and years.

New media in Kazakhstan shows trends that are manifested in a sharp increase of information flows, the emergence of new independent media, media organizations, new members of the information process, the emergence of electronic newspapers, and Web-publications in the formation of new information markets and services. The information market in Kazakhstan is experiencing rapid growth in the development of communication technology. The

rate of growth of a new communication mass media shows the great demand for information services.

Although new media in Kazakhstan are successful, the social media market in Kazakhstan is dominated by Russian or foreign media. The significant challenge for Kazakh new media is to develop a uniquely Kazakh character that can promote Kazakh language and culture, and successfully attract a Kazakh audience.

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