

# Characteristics of Information Content Coverage in Russian Periodicals: Historical Aspects

Regina V. Patyukova<sup>a\*</sup>, Natalia N. Olomskaya<sup>b</sup>, Evgenya V. Tarasenko<sup>c</sup>,  
Yulia E. Nikolaeva<sup>d</sup>, Aleksandra N. Minskaya<sup>e</sup>,

<sup>a,c,d,e</sup> Faculty of Journalism, Department of Advertisement and Public Relations,  
Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Kuban  
State University”, Krasnodar, Russia.

<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Roman Germanic Philology, Department of English Philology,  
Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Kuban  
State University”, Krasnodar, Russia. Email: <sup>a\*</sup> [regina.patyukova@yandex.ru](mailto:regina.patyukova@yandex.ru)

The article is devoted to the characteristics of information content coverage in the context of volunteerism and asceticism in the Russian Empire from the end of the 19th until the beginning of the 20th century. The authors examine the formation and development of these concepts in this historical period. The researchers focus on a study of the “Charity Bulletin,” especially its Literature Section. The purpose is to characterise the development of volunteerism in the periodicals of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The main research methods are the analysis of Russian periodicals and systematisation of scientific knowledge. The authors presented their conclusions about the publication’s importance for the formation of certain social landmarks and for the popularisation of volunteerism and asceticism in society. The results of the study can be implemented in the formation and development of social institutions and organisations focused on volunteering, as well as in social media activities.

**Key words:** *Social journalism, Charity development in Russia, the Romanovs’ volunteerism, Journal “Charity Bulletin*

## Introduction

The concept of “social” is one of the basic elements of modern discourse. Currently, the social sphere takes a leading position in the state policy of the country. Socially significant phenomena are becoming a sustainable component of the issues covered in the media. Social



problems such as education, healthcare, and support for socially vulnerable categories of the country's civilian population take up a significant part of the media content.

The media, forming the information space, does not only reflect the modern reality and the diverse views of society on significant problems. In addition, they seek to influence society positively and activate their abilities to realise and resolve social problems.

From the moment of birth, and throughout life, a person exists in a certain socio-information space that forms a certain reality. At the beginning of life, we can distinguish the following socio-informational spaces: family, nursery school, school, and society. Eventually, a person becomes more and more immersed in the space of the media and mass communication. Being the subject of information relations that appear in the socio-information space, a person perceives the transmitted information and models the behavioural patterns based on the experience gained (Patyukova, Minskaya, Sergienko, & Tarasenko, 2018).

In Russia, more social problems are observed than twenty years ago, such as terrorism, technological disasters, crime, drug addiction, and unemployment. In this regard, today the media is the most important tool for human socialisation, acting as a transmitter of social roles and norms of behaviour, as well as cultural and moral landmarks.

The subject potential of the social sphere in the media is vast. Thus, it is absolutely impossible to declare that there is a division of journalism into social and non-social since any journalism is socially significant if it helps a person to choose his life project (Makashina, n.d.).

Analysing the term "public journalism", we can say that there is no exact definition. The researchers point out the ambiguity of its interpretation since it can be considered too broadly or too narrowly. In this context, it can be highlighted that terms such as "citizen journalism", "participatory journalism" are close to it in meaning because these expressions are in the same semantic field with the term "social journalism". Nevertheless, these concepts provide the idea of the journalism that we would like to develop: addressed to society and people, reflecting all aspects of daily life. It should form a citizen, actualising positive and creative principle in every person, revealing the diverse relations with the world and creating real citizenship and sociality in society and, of course, using special creative tools.

In the framework of studying participatory journalism, it can be assumed that today, it is quite difficult for the media to draw public attention to social problems. Theorists of social journalism consider the viewers and readers not as the background or passive observers of the information, but as direct participants in solving important social problems.

Thus, it can be concluded that social journalism is a social sphere instrument and is directly related to the regulation and support of its stability at the country level and in certain regions. It provides the balance and combination of the efforts of three sectors for social problems solution, namely: state organisations, commercial organisations and non-commercial organisations.

The first “humanitarian societies” in Russia were created in the 18th century. In the 19th century the first “non-commercial public organisations” appeared. At that time a number of associations were formed, which played a key role and subsequently took a special place in the formation of the main directions of charity and ascetic activity in Russia. Of course, the supporters of this initiative were mainly the members of the royal family and the aristocracy.

An example confirming this fact is the activity of the “Central Directorate of Children’s Shelters Department of Institutions of Empress Maria”. This system included all kinds of foster houses and educational institutions, alms-houses and shelters for the disadvantaged.

Nowadays, the press of non-commercial organisations or the “third sector”, which is based on social journalism, is becoming an extremely popular, promising, multi-aspect, creatively specific and grateful sphere of professional self-realisation (Dzyaloshinsky, 2004).

The “third sector” phenomenon is closely related to the direct participation of social journalism in the civil society activities, the ability of non-commercial organisations to form links between social activities and the spiritual needs of society using the media. It is designed to balance the subjects of the three sectors of interaction in the context of the state social policy and social projects’ implementation in any historical period.

The purpose of the study is to characterise the coverage of volunteerism in the periodicals of the 19th – early 20th centuries (on the example of the Literature Section of the “Charity Bulletin”). The goal of the research assumes the solution to the following tasks:

- To analyse the Literature Section of the journal “Charity Bulletin”;
- To reveal the role of this publication in the formation of certain social landmarks and in the popularisation of volunteerism and asceticism in society.

The research hypothesis is the following: the popularisation of volunteerism influences significantly the formation of social landmarks of society.

As the state system developed, more and more forces were involved in solving the problems of those in need. Innovative forms of support were formed: from primitive shelters to a consistent state system of assistance to various categories of people in need (Kononova, 2011).



## Literature Review

Currently, the study of media presentations of Russian charity sources remains a scantily studied issue and needs to be considered.

Russian scientists such as Azernikova, Vlasov, Kononova, Selyutina, Frolova, and others devoted their works to the study of the popularisation of volunteerism in the 19th and early 20th century.

Frolova, studying the informational coverage of charities in the Russian press, notes that, during the reign of the Imperial Family, “a comprehensive system of state charity and an extensive and multi-level network of charity institutions developed in the country. It becomes the most significant link in the domestic charity system” (Frolova, 2005).

Azernikova believes that the concept of “charity” came into use exclusively because of the participation in this activity by the wife of Paul I., Empress Maria Feodorovna (1759-1828). “The most significant tradition that Maria Feodorovna left to her heirs was charity activity, which has reached the status of extensive social work” (Azernikova, 2010).

“Since then, Russian charity activity has been carried out with the direct participation of the Romanovs. Volunteerism develops and introduces religious, moral features into the social system. Supported by the imperial authority, a voluntary initiative to assist those in need is welcomed” (Tarasenko, 2017).

## Methods of Research

The technologies of the formation of social periodicals in the studied period were associated with emerging changes in the state and social structure, where the charity was perceived as a personal moral duty. The authors used the methods of analysis and generalisation in the study.

## Data

The research material consists of the works of Russian scientists in the sphere of social journalism considering the popularisation of charity activities during different time periods.

## Discussion

Among the various charity publications of the 19th century, it is worth highlighting the monthly journal “Charity Bulletin”, published from 1897 to 1902 in St. Petersburg by the Central Directorate of Children’s Shelters Departments of Institutions of the Empress Maria



Feodorovna. As was explained on the cover page, this journal “is devoted to all issues of charity and public assistance” (Shumigorsky, 1897)

The editor of the publication was Evgeny Sevastyanovich Shumigorsky, a teacher of the Russian language, art, history, and geography, special duties official in the Department of the Institutions of Empress Maria. He defined his task as following: “*promoting the conscious transmission of goodness*”, and “*disseminating in Russian society, always compassionate and sensitive to human suffering, clear information about all the needs that require charitable attention, opening on his pages the access to study and a comprehensive discussion of the true situation and the importance of all objects of public charity*” (Shumigorsky, 1897).

The main section of the journal was the *Literature Section*, where the authors placed their thoughts on the informational coverage of charity.

In the context of the goal of the research, the authors considered the Literature Section of the journal “Charity Bulletin” No. 1,2,3,4 of 1897 by means of content analysis.

The first issue published the work of Speransky “On the history of poverty in Russia”. The author described the first information of charity in ancient Russia, citing religious motives as the examples, prompting St. Vladimir for charity.

Archbishop Smirnov-Platonov in “Moscow Letters” analysed Russian public charity and studied the works of Isakov and Grot. According to the author, these works introduced significant landmarks in the sphere of volunteerism, contributing to the development of the literature on the subject, as well as the history of Russian charity. “*For the editorial office of “Charity Bulletin”, there is no reason to backtrack in their program from their views established by these principles. Publicity and control, registration of the poor, continuity and completeness of charity and assistance, the interaction of institutions and the combination of public and charity activities, the scientific development of new kinds and types of charity institutions, and devotion to Christian principles. What can be more reasonable, more practical and more desirable for the interests of the public good?*” (Shumigorsky, 1897).

In volume 2 (February of 1897), the Literature Section began with the article “Houses of industriousness in Russia” by the assistant editor, public figure Humbert. The article was devoted to the problem of unemployment in the cities. “*A job is not always easy to find. Meanwhile, there is no work - no bread. Thus, poverty is often an involuntary outcome from such a difficult situation. It is an ulcer of big cities*” (Shumigorsky, 1897a). The author offered to solve this problem by establishing workhouses “*for professional beggars, idlers and hobos*” or a house of industriousness, “*wherever a poor person willing to work would find at least a small income*” (Shumigorsky, 1897a).



Workhouses were established for healthy, able-bodied, but lazy and unwilling - to - work people. Work in workhouses was forced. Humbert provided statistics, declaring that there were 9 houses of industriousness in St. Petersburg. In 1887, on behalf of the Minister of the Interior, Baron Buxgevden visited the most significant provincial cities, promoting the benefits of houses of industriousness and their arrangement. Arriving in a city, he would ask the local governor to invite the Bishop, the highest clergy, representatives of all classes, and generally, people, who are known for their charity, to attend their meeting. *“Soft words of a man deeply convinced and devoted to the matter impressed everyone. If there was any doubt about the money, Baron Buxgevden provided an example of the Kronstadt house, which started its activity with 100 rubles and developed into a colony of charity institutions in several years”* (Shumigorsky, 1897a). The author cites an indicative episode when the Baron, in order to convince the listeners of the necessity of houses of industriousness, told the story of a former railway worker. *“The railway boilerman lost his place and had pity for his starving family. He decided to beg and even to thief. He would have definitely died if there had not been the house of industriousness. When he went out with bad intentions, he saw that a crowd of poor people was entering a house. He followed them, worked until the evening and earned 15 kopeks. The next day, he took his wife and the eldest son with him, and they earned 45 kopecks. They worked like this until some kind person found a job for the boilerman on the railway”* (Shumigorsky, 1897a). This episode ended with the fact that the merchant was convinced that the houses of industriousness were the most charitable business and, arriving in Saratov, donated 2,000 rubles to the local home of industriousness. After this story, Baron Buxgevden opened a subscription and began fundraising for a new labour institution.

In the Literature Section No. 2 of 1897, the continuation of Speransky’s “On the history of poverty in Russia” (the beginning is in No. 1, 1897) was published.

Literature Section No. 3 (March) of the Charity Bulletin in 1897 consisted of 5 articles. The author of the first work under the title “Imperial Women’s Patriotic Society (1812-1896)” was Shumigorsky, the editor of the journal. The author described the goals of the Society, highlighting the charity was for poor children from 5 years of age. The Society established public schools for primary education, special schools for teaching various female crafts, and for preparing charity-girls for work as teachers, nannies, or for other similar occupations. It also opened workshops in which girls of the Imperial Women’s Patriotic Society were engaged in handicrafts. *“Such goals of the society introduce the most successful form of charity, namely, the reasonable one, aimed at eliminating extreme poverty at its very root by creating the possibility of honest earnings for thousands of poor girls who perceive in the schools of the society not only everyday useful knowledge, but also good skills and a habitude for work, which is the most important in childhood”* (Shumigorsky, 1897b).





The second article of the Literature Section of the journal No. 3, 1897 correlated to the article from the previous issue (“Houses of industriousness in Russia”, No.2, 1897). Lutkovsky also considered this issue. In the article “On the Purpose and Structure of Workhouses” the author reported on the workhouses’ development. He declared that this activity, with the support of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, was entering a new era. But, also, the author emphasised the main problem, namely, the acceptance of the workhouses by ordinary people. *“Little by little, both the shelters and the canteens began to be replenished with people expelled from the capital by administrative order, convicted by the courts, professional beggars and various idle people, accustomed to drunkenness and parasitism, who were called ‘down-and-out’ in the North. As a result, the workhouses lost their faces. People began to avoid them, no matter how hopeless the labourer’s situation was, not because of his fault, but only by misfortune. When he was offered to enter the workhouse or to get a job from it, he answered with a grin: “I haven’t reached this point yet,” as if being offended by the proposal to stand on the same level with people who have fallen morally”* (Shumigorsky, 1897b).

To eradicate poverty, the author proposed to establish special departments at the workhouses, where the authorities or society could bring *“a healthy pauper, a tramp, where he could be detained for a certain period of time, where there would be compulsory but productive and paid work”* (Shumigorsky, 1897b). In addition, Lutkovsky declared that the chaotic distribution of money to the poor, not only did no good, but also caused great harm both to the needy and the society, supporting people who did not want to obey the social conditions. Instead of this, the author proposed to help the poor and really needy by making a voluntary contribution to the local workhouse or a charity institution every year.

The next article under the title “A Century of bovine vaccination” by Humboldt was devoted to medicine and the centennial of the first public smallpox vaccination, made by the English physician Edward Jenner (Shumigorsky, 1897b). The author emphasised the value of the discovery, saying that due to the smallpox vaccination, this disease did not seem so terrible for his contemporaries. *“Jenner has provided the whole world with bovine vaccination. If you recall the horror of the previous smallpox epidemics, you cannot help but recognize this scientist as the greatest benefactor of humankind”* (Shumigorsky, 1897b).

Traditionally, in this volume, the continuation of Speransky’s work “On the history of poverty in Russia” (beginning in No.1, 1897) was also published.

The Literature Section No. 4 (April) of the Charity Bulletin in 1897 comprised 4 articles. The first article, under the title “On the tax in favour of the poor of Moscow” was written by Shumigorsky, the editor of the journal (Shumigorsky, 1897c). The author said that the commission considering the tax in favour of the poor of the city of Moscow on November, 21 and 25 in 1896 adopted a tax in the form of two fees: the main one from the employers and the

additional one from all wealthy residents of the city. *“According to the commission, this tax should be paid by all who use hired labour of any kind, form, and size”* (Shumigorsky, 1897c). Further, the author considered each of these fees separately.

This issue of the “Bulletin” contained the continuation of Selivanov’s article, “Charity institutions in Vyatka”, which described in detail the activity of each charity institution under the auspices of Trepova. *“In addition to the charity institutions listed, in Vyatka, there is a city almshouse for 30 people and an orphanage of the Office of Empress Maria for 25 pensioners and 8 live-out girls. Girls study reading and writing, needlework, lace making, washing, ironing, tablecloth weaving, striped cotton making, cooking, and gardening. The city holds donated capital for the almshouse development, dower for poor girls and benefits for the poor for holidays”* (Shumigorsky, 1897c).

There was also the continuation of Speransky’s article, “On the history of poverty in Russia” (beginning in No.1, 1897).

The next article was entitled “A few words about the purpose of the “Charity Bulletin”. The Department of Children’s Shelters of Empress Maria began publishing the “Charity Bulletin” in early 1897, with full confidence that this press agency would be the main platform for discussing charity issues. *“Straightaway, it became clear that the hope was quite thorough. The idea of publishing the “Charity Bulletin” was met sympathetically not only by the Department of Institutions of the Empress Maria, but also by all the others, who were in charge of the shelters, the Ministries, Departments and charity institutions, as well as public institutions, especially of the zemstvo, city and social category level, as well as private individuals* (Shumigorsky, 1897c).

## **Conclusion**

There can hardly be any doubt that such a journal should have championed new ideas and popularised public assistance in the broad sense of the word. Thus, we can hope that having the widest program on topical issues of informational coverage of charity, the journal managed to meet not only the interests and needs of some individual charity institutions but public assistance in Russia in general. *“ In newspaper charity, they have not yet obtained citizenship, have not constituted a constant concern for charity work for any editorial office, and the “Charity Bulletin” will have complete rational freedom and a wide field of impact on the public consciousness by developing sound common concepts”* (Shumigorsky, 1897c).

Therefore, being the printing body of the Central Directorate of Children’s Shelters Department of Institutions of Empress Maria, the “Charity Bulletin” undoubtedly played a special role in





the development of informational coverage of certain social landmarks and in the popularisation of volunteerism and asceticism in society.



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