

Article

The Promotion of Traditional Values through Films and Television Programmes: The Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Encyclopaedia Project (2005–2022)

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Abstract: On 26 May 2011, the Russian People’s World Council issued a document entitled *The Basic Values: The Fundamentals of National Unity*. The document, prepared by the Synodal Department for Church–Society Cooperation, provided a catalogue of 17 traditional values whose general framework was constituted by a combination of freedom, unity, patriotism, family, and devotion. At that time, the Moscow Patriarchate considered religious faith to be the foundation of traditional values and it continues to do so. The defence and promotion of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values were also central in the *Russian National Security Strategy* (2015); this was the case in the updated version of this document as well, put out in July 2021. Furthermore, they have been the core of the Moscow Patriarchate’s participation in the Council of Europe and of Patriarch Kirill’s speeches about the war in Ukraine. Finally, on 9 November 2022, *The Foundations Of State Policy For The Preservation Of Spiritual And Moral Values* was approved. This framework permits us to understand the strict interplay between the Church and the State in the Russian Federation and to see why it is important to refer to the concept of post-secularism when talking about the role of religion in post-Soviet Russia. Proceeding from the Abstract, the present paper aims to analyse this interplay in a specific sector of visual culture: the cinema and television industries. Manuel Castells highlighted the relevance of cultural values in the age of information and the connection between the values and social mobilization that follows it. He pointed out that the Internet has become a way to render this connection predominant, inevitably leading to the development of social movements and networks that have a religious basis. This is unquestionably true; surveys conducted by the *Russian Public Opinion Research Center* (OJSC «VCIOM») and by *Nevafilm Research* confirm that a high percentage of Russians watch films not only at the cinema or on television (especially the older generations) but also on the Internet (as far as the younger generations are concerned). The importance of this market is also confirmed by the success of the cinema and TV distributor *Orthodox Encyclopaedia* (2005); in the words of the philosopher Sergei Kravets, who, commenting on it during an interview published in 2006 by the website Sedmits.ru, declared that the expression “orthodox cinema” can be understood as a way to express Russian culture. He asserts that “the fact that today Orthodox films have begun to appear on the central TV channels testifies that Russian film producers and viewers have apparently begun to be aware of themselves as Orthodox, to feel that they are bearers of a special Orthodox culture. [...]”. At the same time, consideration should be given to the importance of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Minister of Culture’s condemnation of films such as *Matilda* or *Monastery*. In addition, it is important to consider that, according to a survey conducted in 2022 by the Levada Center, Russian people consider television the most reliable source of information (54%). The long-term implications of this tendency may have very important effects, not only in terms of its objectives but also in terms of the consideration that, after the beginning of the war, many Western film distributors withdrew their licenses from Russia. This paper will analyse “the effect of religion on the institutional system, the regulatory environment of the media and the public sphere” by studying the features of films and TV programs distributed by *Orthodox Encyclopaedia*, their relations with traditional values promoted both by the Kremlin and the Church, how these have contributed to strengthening the interplay between the Minister of Culture and the Moscow Patriarchate, and the impact this process has had



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on Russian society and Russia's relations with the European and Western World in the 2005–2022 period. A list of the films and TV programs being discussed will be provided, and then statements about the project and reviews of the serials and films will be analysed. The analysis will be conducted mainly through the official sites of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin and by browsing the Integrum database.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church; Russian state; post-Soviet Russia; Orthodox Encyclopaedia; digital religion; traditional values; spiritual values; Russian world

1. Introduction¹

According to Heidi A. Campbell, digital religion “does not simply refer to religion as it is performed and articulated online, but points to how digital media and spaces are shaping and being shaped by religious practice” (Campbell 2013). This paper will analyse the relationship between digital media and the Russian Orthodox Church in post-Soviet times. The analysis will be conducted from the perspective of the Moscow Patriarchate and will study the communication strategy adopted by the Russian Orthodox Church (hereafter, also referred to as ROC) in order to preserve its social role and its relations with the Russian state. From Mikhail Suslov's perspective, Russian Orthodoxy's “digital anxiety” has been fuelled by the fear of losing control over the mechanism of defining collective and individual identity. This fear is strictly connected to a series of episodes of moral panic concerning the computer-mediated communication (CMC) culture and the vulnerability that religious identity suffers in this context. CMC has provided instruments for a “limitless missionary activity” and has opened the door to a flow of many possible interpretations and uses of spirituality: the Russian Orthodox Church, conversely, has always claimed the right to establish the religious identity of users. For this reason, it has endeavoured to domesticate the new media in order to maintain control over the spheres of Russian culture and values, which it regained after the fall of the Soviet Union and the break with Soviet atheistic ideology. Therefore, the Russian church's response to digital anxiety was an attempt to “securitize” users' religious identities (Suslov 2016). Hanna Stähle wrote that media theory elucidates the peculiarities of the post-Soviet religious revival and the Russian Orthodox Church's new role in a post-Soviet society. Indeed, the mediatisation of religion in Russia is impacted by the increasing interaction between society and the media but also by the State's growing control over both traditional and digital media. Against the background of the politicization of orthodoxy in post-Soviet times (Mitrofanova 2005), the issue was whether pro-Orthodox consensus would continue to dominate public opinion and Russian society after 1988. Stähle invited us to reflect on the consequences of secularization and the weakening of the Moscow Patriarchate's symbolic capital. In fact, religious change in late modernity has demonstrated that secularization should be understood as an “unlinear process” (Martin 2005 in Stähle) and that the privatization of religion and the decrease in the relevance of religious belief are not necessarily consequences of the modernization process. This means that the Russian Orthodox Church returned to public life with its institutions, values, and beliefs, but in a completely new reality. It follows, according to Stähle, that the term to use in order to describe the “return” of Russian Orthodoxy better is neither “de-privatisation” nor “de-secularisation”, but rather “mediatization”. “[The] mediatization of religion thesis suggests that contemporary communication processes and technology largely affect religion at both the institutional and individual levels. The media have emerged as an arena for communication among various religious and non-religious public actors and transfer a variety of meanings and narratives about religious themes” (Stähle 2022, p. 28). Patriarch Aleksii blessed the World Wide Web's information technology as a tool for conducting missionary work in 1997 when he established his own electronic website (patriarchia.ru), which can be browsed both in Russian and in English. Aside from this, the ROC has established Orthodox search services, such as rubliev.com, social networks,

web-based dating services, and information services, and has official Facebook and Twitter pages ([Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church n.d.a/Mospat.ru n.d.](#)). Patriarch Kirill has his own Facebook page, and Orthodox priests have Twitter profiles and their own blogs where they exchange comments. RuNet, the Internet within Russia, has an Orthodox segment which is the main source of information about religion and Orthodoxy worldwide. Pravoslavie.ru and livejournal.com are two further examples of means of information about Orthodoxy; moreover, the Moscow Patriarchate is the main owner of the federal television channel Spas (Russian: Телеканал «Спас») ([Spastv.ru n.d.](#)).

Mikhail Suslov has pointed out that the Internet has made the distinction between online religion and religion online irrelevant. Indeed, if initially new technologies were intended to provide information about religion (religion online), then later they became a means of interaction by, for example, commenting, spreading doctrines, or performing rituals ([Suslov 2016](#)). His book *Digital Orthodoxy in the Post Soviet World* (Ibidem Verlag 2016) deals with representation of CMC in the Russian Orthodox Church's public discourse, with the role of new media technologies forming a means of facilitating and promoting resistance to hegemonic religious discourse. It reflects upon the relationship among digital technologies and anti-Orthodox criticism but also upon Orthodox believers' self-expression through digital media. Although his book is primarily grounded in a vast number of works devoted to the study of the interrelationship between different aspects of religious belief and the new media, it represents the first comprehensive study on the relation of the Russian Orthodox Church with digital technologies. Together with the study that Hanne Stähle recently published, it has indeed been the main point of reference in developing the scope of such research, and the latter is undoubtedly closer to our own. It focuses on the analysis of how the Russian Orthodox Church has changed since 2009, the year of the enthronement of the present Patriarch, Kirill (born Vladimir Mikhailovich Gundyayev), and of the strengthening of the Church as a social institution whose influence is not restricted to religious questions. In Patriarch Kirill's perspective, in fact, Orthodoxy must not be considered merely one religion among others but the "national religion" of the Russian people. To attain this aim, he increased cooperation with Russian state authorities and strengthened the outreach of religion through the media. Stähle analyses the Russian Orthodox Church's media strategy and its response to the criticism expressed in digital media. In the book *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective*, edited by Manuel Castells, Croteau and Hoynes write that, in the realm of communication, all kinds of cultural expressions are "shaped by this interlinked, electronic hypertext, formed by television, radio, print media, film, video, art, and the Internet communication in the so-called 'multimedia system'," ([Croteau and Hoynes 2000](#) in [Castells 2004](#)); indeed, communication has a "decisive effect on politics" and "media become the public space" ([Volkmer 2003](#) in [Castells 2004](#)). In this new public forum, the ability to exercise control over others depends on (a) the ability to program and reprogram networks in terms of the goal assigned to them; and (b) the ability to connect different networks in order to ensure their cooperation by sharing common goals and increasing resources. It follows that, in Castells' perspective, the notion of an information society or of a knowledge society should be replaced by the concept of network society. The concept of network society "shifts the emphasis to organizational transformation, and to the emergence of a globally interdependent social structure, with its processes of domination and counter-domination. It also helps us to define the terms of the fundamental dilemma of our world: the dominance of the programs of a global network of power without social control or, alternatively, the emergence of a network of interacting cultures, unified by a common belief in the use value of sharing" ([Castells 2004](#), p. 43). This should be understood in connection with S. Hjarvard's theory, according to which "the mediatisation of religion refers to the ways in which religious organisations, practices and beliefs are changing due to the increasing influence of the media both inside and outside the institution of religion" ([Grishaeva and Shumkova 2020](#)). Hjarvard suggested three different forms of mediatised religions, each of which implies a particular way of communicating about religion in the public sphere: (a) religious media that are pri-

marily controlled and performed by religious actors; (b) journalism on religion, which is connected to the media through genres and portrays the religion which offers frameworks for secular society, often involving a critical discourse on religious organizations; (c) banal religion, which means the use of religious symbols and rituals in everyday life, for example in advertisements or in popular comedies (Rodionova and Bayer 2020).

In fact, an important aspect of the mediatisation of religion in post-Soviet Russia is the change in religious authority after decades of atheistic policy and in a context where the majority of people were un-churched². The de-institutionalization of religion that followed the religious revival of 1990 confirmed the presence of secularization in Russia; contextually, at the institutional level, there was a powerful de-secular trend: the significant level of trust in the church and the vision of Orthodoxy as a cornerstone of national identity prompted this process (Karpov 2010). For the scope of the present analysis, it is also important to reflect on Grishaeva and Shumkova's assumption of the Internet as a third space that is different from the private and the public spheres, where it is possible to build hybrid identities. The Internet, with online communication, is a new space where the definition of identity remains outside religious institutions' control and where the interrelation among religious communities and technologies can create new forms of authorities. Grishaeva and Shumkova explain the contradiction between the "fear of media" (digital anxiety) and the active development of a media sphere; this development occurring from a desire to create an alternative media space that may become a meaningful source for an Orthodox public. This placed believers before a choice: either to employ their free time receiving messages spread by secular media or to choose media which are "spiritually useful". It is also for this reason that the Orthodox community has been active in forming its own media sphere (Grishaeva and Shumkova 2018). What should be taken into account here is the special relationship of the Russian Church with post-secularism. This paper will refer to post-secularism according to Kristina Stoeckl's definition, which is based on Jürgen Habermas' critical paradigm. The term "post-secular society" was coined by Jürgen Habermas to describe a society where "the continuity and presence of religion in the public sphere have become accepted normality". This means that a secular citizen is intended as a person with a principled openness to religious argument, while a religious citizen is intended as a person who develops an epistemic attitude towards "other religions and world views that they encounter within a universe of discourse hitherto occupied only by their own religion [...]; the independence of secular from sacred knowledge and the institutionalized monopoly of modern scientific experts [...]; and the priority that secular reasons enjoy in the political arena" (Habermas 2006 in Stoeckl 2011). The term post-secularism recognizes the limit of understanding modernity as sweeping away religion and interprets it as a condition of ambivalence where religion is no longer marginal or privately grounded, but returns to the public sphere and defines a new relationship with politics (Stoeckl 2010). Suslov argues that, although CMC has created vast possibilities for Russian Orthodoxy, the uneasy coexistence with the Internet is the reason for the Russian Orthodox Church's attempt to restore pre-secular conditions. Hence, the Russian Church is attempting to exploit the Internet in order to gain a monopoly over the moral judgement and the relativism of the human rights doctrine. This signifies that, if the Internet offers a horizontal vision of authority and a non-hierarchical conception of power, the ROC is trying to control it in order not to lose control over identities and to securitize traditional values³ (Suslov 2016). Thus, the present paper develops from the idea that, in the post-Soviet period, the role of the Russian Orthodox Church has been largely affected by the spread of digital technologies and that the term "mediatisation" can effectively help grasp its media strategy: the use of the Internet was not an attempt on the part of some of ROC's actors to establish an hegemony within the Church vis à vis other actors. Instead, it was based on the desire (a) first to continue to reach an extensive part of the population that was un-churched and, (b) second, to purify digital space from secular values and to make it proper for religion and religious people in order to recall that spiritual values are the most important values in human life. The scope of this strategy was to securitize religious identity.

2. Use of the Internet in Russia

It is useful to report some data about the use of the Internet: in Russia, 72% of people watch television regularly, 15% are accustomed to listening to the radio, and 12% read printed newspapers (Stähle 2022). According to a survey conducted by ROMIR Monitoring, a Russian market research company, in Q1 of 2005—which covered 3650 online users over the age of 14—87% of the respondents had used the Internet for information and 77% had used the Internet to download files. More than half of the respondents (57%) said that they used special programs like Yahoo Messenger and MSN to communicate online; a third of the users (36%), instead, spent their time in chat rooms, newsrooms, and forums. Fewer than 10% said that they played online games, used the Internet to carry out bank transactions, to keep online diaries, and to follow online communication programs. According to the survey, the youngest users (aged 14–17) were more involved in online gaming, downloading files, and chatting with other age groups. Users aged 18–24 also frequently visited forums, chat rooms, and special communication programs. People over the age of 35 mainly used the Internet as source of information (Sputnik International 2005). It is interesting to note that, in March 2022, the share of daily Internet users had increased in the 25–39 years age group (by up to 91%), in the 40–54 years age group (by up to 76%), and in the 55 years and older age group (by up to 40%). Among respondents aged 18–24, the share of active Internet users turned out to be as high as 89%. However, as sources of information, most of the total number of respondents in the survey conducted in 2022 by the Levada Centre trusted television (54%). It is interesting to note that, compared to January 2021, trust in television increased by 10 percent, while trust in online publications (17%) and in social networks (15%) decreased by 9 percent (Levada-Center 2019; Levada-Center 2022)⁴.

To this, it should be added that, according to a survey conducted by the *Russian Public Opinion Research Center (OJSC «VCIOM»)*, three-quarters of Russians have not been to cinemas since the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted (75% of respondents), and only one in four planned to go to the cinema (23%). The intention to go to the cinema was more common among young Russians aged 18–24 (41%) and 25–34 (35%): the data, however, show that this intention in the younger age group was one and half–two times lower than that before the pandemic. Furthermore, the majority (88%) of people aged 60 did not plan to go to the cinema. According to the survey, half of the Russians using the Internet did not watch films provided by online cinemas (49%), but 31% of Russians are accustomed to watching free films on the Internet. Conversely, the practice of using paid subscriptions was not widespread (only 13% had a subscription—the number was higher in the category of younger people) (Wciom.ru 2020).

The Russian state has made several attempts to place the Internet under its control: since 1996, it has produced a series of political documents regarding information technology and online networks. In 1998, *The Concept of the State Information Policy* introduced the construction of an information society as a strategic goal in order to reach national development. In 1999, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Informatization adopted *The Concept of Building the Information Society in Russia*, which proposed a Russian model for transition to the information society. The document highlighted the need to protect national identity, especially in a world dominated by the media, and to promote national values; this would be enacted by a strong presence of the State in the area of information technology, the subordination of the market to the State, and the liberalization of the Russian telecommunication sector. In 2001, the Russian government approved two federal programs: *Electronic Russia in the Years 2002–2010* and *The Development of the Unified Information and Educational Space in 2001–2005*. These were both aimed at the development of information technology (Vartanova 2004). In 2010, the Russian state began to construct a national segment of the Internet in order to reach information sovereignty, which was considered to be a counterforce to the American hegemony in Internet governance. Events in 2014 marked a turning point in the realization of this strategy: the regime pursued a centralized control under the guise of the so-called “national segment of the Internet”. Between 2015 and 2020, the Russian governments adopted several laws and programmes

that aimed to establish a national segment of the Internet and to protect it from internal and external threats. These strategies were based on a shift in the concept of war that has affected Russian state policies since the early 2000s. Consequently, during the late 2010s, Russia adopted the concept of “critical information infrastructure as an object of national security” (Kukkola 2020)⁵.

As far as the Russian Orthodox Church is concerned, although the use of the Internet started as early as 1997, a real improvement in relationships with the media coincided with the appointment of Kirill as the new Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus'. This was confirmed by the 31 March 2009 (a month after his appointment as Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' on 1 February 2009) creation of the Synodal Information Department (Синодальный информационный отдел—since 2015, the Department for Church Relations with Society and the Media (Синодальный отдел по взаимоотношениям Церкви с обществом и средствами массовой информации). The aim of the Department was to develop “(a) a unified information policy of the Russian Orthodox Church; (b) a coordination of the information service activities of dioceses and synodal institutions; as well as (c) an interaction with Orthodox and secular media”. Therefore, it intended to ensure the Russian Orthodox Church’s communication both with the several entities which constitute it and with the external world (Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church n.d.b). Staehle noted that the appointment of Legoida as head of the department should be considered significant; for the first time, the Moscow Patriarchate assigned a layperson and not a representative of the clergy to a position within the Church hierarchy. Developing proper communication channels in order to “develop and consolidate a truthful, positive image of the Church in the public consciousness” was considered a priority of the diocesan press service and of the regional government’s information strategy (Stähle 2018). The reason for this urgency was expressed by Patriarch Kirill in the speech delivered in the IV Festival of the Orthodox Media *Faith and Words* on 12 October 2010. He stated that “[...] Orthodox media, Orthodox journalists who cooperate with secular media, face the enormous task of re-Christianizing our culture. This does not always mean direct preaching, but it always means looking at the world from the position of Christian values [...]. Only then will the Orthodox media be able to compete with the secular media [...]. The purity of intentions, the power of words, deep personal faith and the experience of Christ’s presence in human history should make our media, using modern terminology, competitive. We must constantly think about the Church being represented in the media by people who are spiritually and intellectually capable of doing so. That is why journalists, leaders of the Church’s media, must constantly live the Church [...]” (Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church 2010). The principles on which the Church’s media policy is based may be well understood by reflecting on the role of the “Safe Internet League”, the result of a public initiative developed by the State, Russian citizens, and entrepreneurs’ efforts. The Russian Orthodox Church joined the project with the aim of making an impact on the idea of “morality” that is spread on the web. Vladimir Legoida, a member of the League, clearly explained that the League was helping to ensure the spiritual and moral security of the country on the Internet and in all areas of life. He declared, “We live in the age of technology, and with the help of technology we reduce the risks of spiritual decadence”. The statement is particularly important because the goal of spiritual security has been a common ground for the State and for the Russian Orthodox Church’s policy since the fall of the Soviet Union. The moral issue was central; this is because, in the Russian Orthodox Church’s perspective, people truly needed to rely on a moral authority that is capable of protecting them and their families from the vulgarity that is widespread in the media: the Russian Orthodox Church seemed to be the only institution capable of filling this role (Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church 2011a). In addition, the “Safe Internet League” has been the starting point for a common policy of the State and the Russian Orthodox Church together with the other recognized “traditional religions”⁶ in Russia, on a discussion of the optimal model of public television. Representatives of these religions were in fact already

members of the League and shared its concern about the moral decay of the country ([Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church 2012a, 2012b](#)).

These initiatives arose from the Russian Orthodox Church's awareness that, in post-Soviet and post-secular time, only a small percentage of people attended church regularly. Communicating through sermons, the most important principles on which human life should be based no longer turned out to be possible. Therefore, in order to carry out this mission, the Church had no choice but to rely on the media. It follows that the task of the Orthodox media, from the point of view of the Russian Orthodox Church, goes beyond the very concept of mission: they must support the re-Christianization of Russian society ([Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church 2010](#)).

Hence, the Russian Orthodox Church felt that it was urgent to create an integral informational space in order to develop the concept of an information ministry throughout the Church. In order to attain this aim, the Church decided to make extensive use of new technologies (digital television and radio, whether Orthodox or not) and to develop the cooperation between central and diocesan publications⁷. This need was linked not only to the urgency of spreading true values among people but also to the need to prevent secular media from deliberately ousting the Orthodox Church's perspective⁸ ([Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church 2006](#)).

3. "Orthodox Encyclopaedia": Foundation and Activities

The Russian Orthodox Church's relation with the Internet and digital media in post-Soviet times will be explored by specifically analysing the case of the company "Orthodox Encyclopaedia"⁹ and, proceeding from this case, by discussing the effect of religion on the institutional system, on the public sphere, and on the regulatory environment of the media. Does the Russian Orthodox Church use Orthodox films as a means of promoting its values? The Church's Scientific Centre "Orthodox Encyclopaedia" was established on the basis of the Publishing House of the Holy Transfiguration Valaam Monastery by a decree of Patriarch Aleksii II, dated 10 September 1996. In the period 1994–1999, it published the "History of the Russian Church" (Russian: *История Русской Церкви*) (9 volumes), the collection "Patriarch Hermogenes" (Russian: *Патриарх Гермоген*), a new translation of the "Life and Miracles of St. Sergius, hegumen of Radonezh" (Russian: *Жития и чудеса прп. Сергия, игумена Радонежского*) and the study "Orthodoxy in Estonia" (Russian: *Православие в Эстонии*), conducted by Patriarch Aleksii. On 10 October 1996, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church approved a project for publishing the "Orthodox Encyclopaedia" (25 volumes) ([Pravenc.ru n.d.](#): pravenc.ru). The project was implemented thanks to the support of the Synodal departments and commissions of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and other leading educational institutions. The project was included in the federal programme of the Russian Federation's Ministry of Culture called "Culture of Russia 2001–2005". Moreover, the Ministry of Education has given the Orthodox Encyclopaedia the status of textbook for universities in the Russian Federation. The Centre established scholarships to support researchers and collaborated with the GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation) in the creation of an electronic archive. The informational and educational activities conducted by the Centre were implemented in the weekly TV programme "Orthodox Encyclopaedia" on the TVZ (ТВЦ) channel and in the work of the Internet portal Sedmitza.ru. In November 2002 and November 2003, the Centre organised advanced training courses for the senior staff of the Russian Orthodox Church in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Public Administration ([Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru n.d.c](#)). From 2003, the "Orthodox Encyclopaedia" program was broadcasted on television. It was hosted by the priest Aleksey Uminsky, rector of the Moscow Church of the Life-Giving Trinity in Khokhla. The program explored Orthodoxy's history from antiquity to the contemporary age ([Vokrug.tv 2003](#)). In the first three and a half years, about 200 weekly TV programs labelled "Orthodox Encyclopaedia" were released on the TVZ channel and 20 documentaries were created ([Pravoslavie.ru 2007](#); [Служба коммуникации ОБЦС—Communication Service of the DECR 2007](#)).

In 2005, a decree of Patriarch Aleksii established the film and television company “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” (Russian: Культурный фонд «Кинотелекомпания Православная энциклопедия») as part of the scientific and creative holding “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”, but financially independent from it ([Russian Orthodox Church 1996](#); [Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru n.d.a](#); [Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate 2007](#)). The television program that was initially an autonomous structure became an integral part of the company in 2005. The head both of the company and of the limited liability company NB Media was Natalia Nikolaevna Gostyushina ([Audit-it.ru 2023](#)). In the period 2008–2015, her daughter, Elizaveta Valerievna Sergeeva, was accepted as a new administrator in the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” film and television company; in 2015–2017, Boriskin Roman Maksimovich became the new administrator of the program “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”. In 2017–2018, Sergey Konstantinovich Baskin was chosen as the new administrator. In the period 2018–2020, Verin Ilya Vladimirovich, was the director and executive producer of the television program of the TV Centre “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”. Verin actively collaborated with his television colleague of several years, Marina Antoshina, who was the chief editor ([Newssky.com 2021b, 2021c](#)). At the beginning of 2020, Verin soon left the company and was replaced by Elena Leonidovna Markina, who still is its director ([Rkm.kiev.ua 2021](#)).

The idea of “Orthodox television” can be dated back to the early ‘90s, when, for the first time, state channels broadcast Christmas and Easter services. Indeed, in that year, the Russian people and the Russian elite began to attend church on major holidays, considering it a way of “going to people” and “going to Orthodoxy” — a way of forming a patriotic ideology on the part of the State. The journalist Derzhavin Nikolai Ivanovich, Patriarch Aleksii’s referent for broadcasting divine services, was the president of the first Orthodox media holding called the “Orthodox Information Television Agency” (in Russian, ПИТА). The first television programme, “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”, in point of fact, developed from an idea of Derzhavin’s, and in the period 2001–2003 he was its presenter. From February 2002, the program was broadcast weekly. “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” was informational–analytical and missionary–apologetic: it examined the Roman Catholic Church’s proselytizing mission in Russia in detail, debated the issue of sects and new religious movements, and raised the question of inter-confessional relations. In 2003, the priest Aleksey Uminsky became the new author of the programme. This decision was taken by S. Kravets, director of the scientific centre “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”, due to Derzhavin’s radical position on issues such as the ecumenical movement and Israel–Palestine relations. More importantly, it seems that, in replacing Derzhavin with Uminsky, Kravetz had the support of Nikita Mikhalkov, a TV director close to the Kremlin. Under the direction of Uminsky, the program “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” was broadcast on the TV Centre channel. On 16 May 2003, “Studio Bakalavr” — which in the years 2003–2004 was headed by the businessman Dmitry Vasiliev — was registered as limited liability company at the office of “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”. In the period 2004–2006, it was then headed by Natalia Gostyushina (founder in 1999 of the Ostrov TV studio). On 4 December 2006, the television Studio Bakalavr was liquidated and replaced by the film and television company foundation “Orthodox Encyclopaedia”. However, before its liquidation, the studio produced some films and documentaries, such as “Русские патриархи” (Russian Patriarchs), of which Sergei Kravets was author, presenter, artistic director, and general producer. The studio “Ostrov” — founded by Gostyushina and directed by Sergey Miroshnichenko — produced, in cooperation with the Orthodox Information Television Agency, the Orthodox documentary series “Земное и небесное” (Earthly and Heavenly) ([Завет.Ру—Zavet.Ru 2004](#)). The television program, which was initially an autonomous structure, became an integral part of the film and television company in 2005.

The company aims to distribute documentary films about the difficulties of the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1950s and 1960s, on the “time of troubles” in the early XVII century, on the role of the Russian Orthodox Church during the Great Patriotic War, and on the history and diversity of Orthodoxy. The documentary “Planet of Orthodoxy”, for instance, was filmed in 40 different countries, among

which Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Lebanon and Romania. All its activities were agreed with the Federal Agency for Culture and Cinematography and with the leading TV channels ([Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru 2006a](#); [2006b](#)). The company was supported by state funding, in particular by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, but it also had the support of Gazprom and of the Group Renova ([Национальная Академия Кинематографических Искусств И Наук России—National Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences of Russia 2009](#); [Bloknot-rostov.ru 2013](#); [Звезда Поволжья \(Казань\)—Zvezda Povolzhye \(Kazan\) 2013](#)); however, during the financial crisis of 2009, its plan of activities changed. As priority areas of activity, the completion of the film “Pop” and of the historical film dedicated to St. Aleksii, Metropolitan of Kyiv, Moscow, and All Rus’, were chosen. The development of a program for the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan of the Holy Equal-to-Apostles Emperor Constantine was scheduled in 2013; as a result, the beginning of work on a documentary of the Moscow Patriarchate’s archive was postponed ([Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru n.d.a](#); [Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru 2011](#)). The following films were selected by the “Board of Trustees of the Federal Fund for Support of National Cinematography” as some among the 13 films that were considered to be projects of social significance: *Horde* (Russian: *Орда*), which was about St. Aleksii’s life; *Pilgrimage to the Eternal City* (Russian: *Паломничество в Вечный город*), which was the first joint project between the ROC and the Vatican; and *Monk And Demon* (Russian: *Монах И Бес*), based on the struggle between good and evil—between the power of spiritual life and that of demonic temptation. However, one should also consider that, in 2016, according to the “Expert Council for Non-Fiction Films”, the project of making a film entitled *Native Nicola and the Giant’s Ode* (Russian: *Обрусевший Никола and Великанская ода*) did not meet the criteria required in order to receive subsidies from the “Ministry of Culture”. ([Гильдия Неигрового Кино И Телевидения—Non-Fiction Film And Television Guild 2016](#))

The subjects covered in the documentary films and television programs produced by the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” company confirm that the media policy pursued by the Russian Orthodox Church has been inspired by the desire to develop and consolidate its role in the public consciousness in a time when sermons can no longer be used as an instrument of communication with the people. Film and television programs produced by the company are not manipulative, but the analysis conducted makes it clear that the contents serve as propaganda for values promoted by the Church.

Therefore, as we have seen above, the first important theme that can be identified concerns the history of the Russian Orthodox Church starting from the baptism of Vladimir, which was followed by the Christianization of Holy Rus’ and the story of the main difficulties that the Church had faced over the centuries. One example for consideration is the events of the 17th century, with the end of the Rurik dynasty and the turmoil that would later lead to the arrival of the Romanovs in Russia. The role of the imperial family is celebrated in the documentary film “Dynasty”; in the film, the director tries to narrate their history as rulers from the perspective of what happened in the 300 years after the end of the empire. According to the director of the film, it was important to reflect on the fact that the decisions taken by the Romanov family were not inspired by ambition but arose out of a sense of duty, which is why the representatives of the imperial family should be considered as a model in modern Russia ([Youtube.com 2015a](#)).

Further examples of this topic can be found in the films about the persecution suffered by the Russian Orthodox Church during the Soviet period, about the use of the church by the Nazis, and about the suffering the Church experienced during the period of the Great Patriotic War. The films *The Angel of the Russian Church Against the Father of All Nations* (Russian: *Ангел Русской Церкви против отцов всех народов*) and *The Cold Thaw of ‘61* (Russian: *Холодная оттепель 61го года*) also recounted the period when the Russian Orthodox Church was subjected to persecution under state policy in order to achieve the goal

of state atheism. In the first film, the main characters are Patriarch Sergius (Stargorodsky) and Stalin: it is interesting to note the film's intention to stimulate the viewer to reflect on the benefit derived from the rapprochement between Church and the State that took place in those years: both the Church and the State benefited from it. In the film "Stalin and the Third Rome", too, the story of Stalin's meeting with the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church is recounted: the film recognizes this meeting as the starting point for making the Russian church the centre of world Orthodoxy ([Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru](https://sedmiza.ru) 2015).

Another theme that runs through this history concerns the spread of faith and the word of Jesus, and the steadfastness with which the apostles and early Christians worked to defend it. This genre includes the film directed by Vladimir Khotinenko, *Pilgrimage to the Eternal City* (Russian: Паломничеств Вечный город), which is the first joint film project of the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Church, and the film about the story of St. Theophanes the Recluse and his teaching, which was the orientation for the Russian spiritual awakening: it sets out to explain why the teaching of St. Theophanes should still be considered relevant even today. The same purpose is pursued by the film about the righteous (праведном) Saint John of Kronstadt; this film was carried out on the basis of unique video materials shot near Arkhangelsk, in his father's homeland, in the village of Sura, and in his apartment in Kronstadt, where he lived for 53 years inspired by his pastoral ministry. Additionally, one can cite the film about the life of St. Sergius of Radonezh and his legacy. The documentary series about the spread of the Russian Orthodox Church in Central Asia, Japan, and the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) in America respond to the same aim. However, an analysis of the themes covered in the produced films reveals that, over the years, the company has attempted to tell not only the history and mission of the Russian Orthodox Church but also that of other Orthodox churches, the challenge of inter-Orthodox relations, and the history of other "world religions" — in particular, Protestantism, Catholicism, and the Ancient Eastern churches.

The third theme concerns social issues and the influence of the church on the solutions to these issues. One example is the episode of the TV programme "Orthodox Encyclopaedia" that was devoted to the problem of drug addiction in Russia. The guest of the episode was the director of the Orthodox rehabilitation centre for people struggling with addiction; they reflected upon the level that the problem was reaching in Russia, and on the reasons that it was becoming a national catastrophe. Indeed, although the issue of testing schoolchildren for drug use was being actively discussed and sometimes the media reported high-profile court cases involving the compulsory treatment of people struggling with addiction, viewers were urgently encouraged to ask themselves how possible and necessary such measures were and whether they might produce results. How could the Church help specific families in the fight against this scourge? The film *There is No Fear in Love* (Russian: В Любви Страх Нет), for instance, reflects on the strength that prayer and faith can offer even to those people who have committed a crime — to people who have lost themselves. This strength is such that people choose to be baptized even late in life, embracing what can be considered the most powerful form of love, as taught by the apostle Paul. This same social purpose underlies the film *Christmas* (Russian: Рождество), the first film in the series *The Twentieth Holidays* (Russian: Дванадцатые праздники), which reflects on how to pass the message of salvation (which holds the true meaning of this holiday) on to modern society — a society that is accustomed to a consumerist view of Christmas, a feast of decorations and gifts.

In 2005, following the formation of the company, the Ekaterinburg diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church also established the Orthodox company Soyuz (Союз) on the basis of its own TV studio and a TV channel acquired by the diocese. Although Orthodox in principle, the channel had not only purely religious content but was also based on the promotion of traditions involving moral values and national history and culture. In the first five years after it opened, the channel became one of the largest in the Urals, second only to Channel 1 and Channel Rossiya. It also has a page on the social networks Vkontakte ([Православная телекомпания "Союз"—Orthodox TV Company "Soyuz"](https://www.vkontakte.ru) 2018), Odnok-

lassniki ([Одноклассники.ру—Odnoklassniki.ru n.d.a](https://odnoklassniki.ru)), and telegram (https://t.me/tv_soyuz (accessed on 16 August 2023), in addition to a YouTube channel ([Tvsoyuz n.d.: https://www.youtube.com/tvsoyuz](https://www.youtube.com/tvsoyuz)) (accessed on 1 November 2023).

To this, it should be added that, in 2011, a project called “Orthodox Encyclopaedia in Ukraine” was launched. Metropolitan Anthony (Pakanich) was its coordinator ([Newssky.com 2021a](https://www.newssky.com)) and it was conceived as a project that was similar to—yet different from—the Russian one, arising first and foremost from the need to bring the Church’s communication in step with the times. There were two reasons behind its foundation: (a) audiovisual media now made it possible to make communication more accessible and quick, while also having the advantage of being able to reach a wider audience; (b) the Internet was monopolizing all the sources of information, relegating the use of television itself to second place. Consequently, in order to prevent the basic principles of the Orthodox Church from being excluded from the formation of the moral and ethical conscience of the public, the only alternative the Church had was to adapt itself to this process and implement the use of the media in its information strategy. The task of the Church was in fact to determine the fundamental components of the Orthodox worldview and to enable the viewer to understand modernity from a Christian perspective; indeed, the moral question remained central. The Ukrainian Church decided to follow this process under the aegis of the research centre ‘Orthodox Encyclopaedia’, which brought together ‘the scientific elite of the countries included in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church, while adapting its content to the needs of the Ukrainian public ([Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church 2011b](https://www.russianorthodoxchurch.com)). The thematic scopes of the company were extended in 2013 when the documentary “Unknown Hollywood Star—Olga Baklanova” ([Неизвестная звезда Голливуда—Ольга Бакланова](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)) was produced.

On the [sedmitza.ru \(Седмица.ру—Sedmitza.ru n.d.b\)](https://www.sedmitza.ru) website, it is possible to find a video of the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” television programme, updated until 12 July 2008. On the website [net-film.ru \(net-film.ru/telecasts\)](https://www.net-film.ru), one can find videos posted between 2005 and 2012 (most of which are only fragments of the programs); additional titles and links, found on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and on the [blagochinie48.ru](https://www.blagochinie48.ru) website (accessed on 1 November 2023), are also reported in Appendix A. However, during the research conducted in preparation for this paper, it was not possible to find a complete list of the films produced by the company. For this reason, Appendix A reports only an initial attempt to compile a list of them. This list was completed thanks to information reported on the website indicated above, on the official site of the company, on the [integrum](https://www.integrum.ru) database, on the websites [proficinema.com](https://www.proficinema.com), [pravfilms.ru](https://www.pravfilms.ru), and [ostrovknig.ru](https://www.ostrovknig.ru), and on the official site of the Moscow Patriarchate ([patriarchia.ru](https://www.patriarchia.ru)). The films are organised in accordance with the date; the titles are given in Russian and in English, and the sources of the information found about them are provided. The table reports only films which were clearly produced by the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” company; therefore, the list does not claim to be complete. Conversely, considering the methodology applied and the difficulties encountered when verifying the information, this list is intended to be a first step towards completing a comprehensive list. From the research conducted, since 2004, the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” company has produced thirty-three films/documentaries (some of which are serials) and several episodes of the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” television programs. The most recent film discovered was produced in 2016 and the most recent documentary broadcast on the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” television program was produced in 2020 (the titles of the last three years are reported in the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) section).

4. Church–State Interplay

The mention of the State’s financial support to the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” film company was not made with the intention of conducting a financial analysis; needless to say, financial decisions were the reasons for the changes that took place in the administrative structure that we described above. However, as also stated above, this paper aims to explore the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and digital media in post-Soviet times through specifically analysing the case of the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” company.

In the early 1990s, political powers already proclaimed the Russian Orthodox Church to be responsible for people's morality. Decree N° 809 of the President of the Russian Federation, approved on 9 November 2022—*On Approving the Fundamentals of State Policy to Preserve and Strengthen Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values* (Russian: Об утверждении Основ государственной политики по сохранению и укреплению традиционных российских духовно-нравственных ценностей)—can be considered the latest example of this policy. Here, it is stated that “traditional values are the moral precepts shaping Russian citizens' worldview, handed down from one generation to another and forming the foundation of Russia's national civic identity and the country's single cultural space, as well as reinforcing civic unity, and they are reflected in the unique and authentic spiritual, historical and cultural development path of Russia's multi-ethnic people [..]” ([Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Senegal and the Republic of Gambia 2022](#)). The need to protect Russian traditional, moral, and spiritual values is also mentioned in the *National Security Strategy* (2021; 2015) (Russian: [Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации. Официальное опубликование—Official Internet Portal of Legal Information Official Publication 2021; Kremlin.ru 2015](#)) and in *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2023* (Russian: [Концепция внешней политики России 2023](#)) ([The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2023](#)). In her most recent book (*The Sense of Mission in Russian Foreign Policy. Destined to Greatness*), Alicja Curanović wrote that one of the most important differences between Putin's, Medvedev's, and Yeltsin's speeches is that, in the latter's, the focus on domestic issues prevailed: Yeltsin emphasized the role of Russia as a great power whose task was to save the homeland, a kind of “auto-mission”. Not one speech in the 1990s included declarations on Russia's identity as a civilisation. According to Curanović's analysis, Putin's first two public addresses shared the concentration on domestic affairs with Yeltsin; in 2002, for the first time, the President referred to the notion of a world order, but there was no mention of any rivalry concerning civilisation. In 2007, the concepts of “russkij mir” and of a Russian national identity appeared. In 2008, in his first address, Medvedev referred to “justice” as the main “Russian value”.

The evolution of this policy should be analysed taking into account the concept of “sovereign democracy”¹⁰, introduced by Surkov in May 2005. Initially, the concept was introduced as a reaction to the events that were taking place in the Caucasus. However, the need for Russia to be a sovereign country was also raised in relation to the activism of human institutions and the risks represented by orange revolutions¹¹. The idea behind this view was that a “system” outside Russia should in no way have the power to influence areas governed by Russian constitutional law. The term “system” should be interpreted as referring to all the nongovernmental organizations and human rights associations which were perceived as groups funded by foreign governments with the aim of destabilizing Russia. The concept turns out to be very useful for the purposes of the present analysis: as noted by A. Salomoni, Surkov's use of the term sovereignty refers not so much to the realm of external politics but to the domestic one. It coincided not so much with the sovereignty in Russian history, with its culture among nations and the culture of a multinational state, but also with the sovereignty of Russian values—regarded as normative—for the whole nation. The true meaning of the concept can be understood as referring to some speeches delivered by Putin in the months before Surkov's talk. In these speeches, he clarified that Russia cannot accept a “democracy sui generis”, but can only accept principles already adopted on a global level, having adapted them to the “actual development of Russian society, history and traditions”. From Putin's perspective, this attempt was not unusual, but common for each country. It was necessary, on the contrary, to prevent the grafting of foreign democratic principles onto Russia, thereby undermining Russian statehood itself, leading to the collapse of the country. Hence, in his speech to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in April 2005, Putin reiterated that the concept of democracy could not be considered foreign to Russian society but that it was necessary to strive to “find one's own way in building a democratic society and state democracy”. These princi-

ples would be summarized in the 2007 election program of the United Russia party, where one can read the following: “Our strategic goal is to build Russia as a great power on the basis of the historical traditions and distinctive cultural values of its peoples, the greatest progress of world civilization”. Over the years, the issue of sovereignty has always remained significant and has been a point of alignment with the Russian Orthodox Church’s policy—particularly as it is tied to the concept of security. This is connected to the issues of the defence and promotion of traditional and spiritual values, of the law on foreign organizations (considered undesirable particularly when their activity concerned human rights), and of the sovereign Internet (Salomoni 2020).

Putin started referring explicitly to the need for “Russia to remain sovereign” in order to “defend its national and spiritual identity” at the beginning of his third presidential term: this need was a clear reference to the concern surrounding a moral crisis in Russian society. Curanović noted that the reference to the moral rebirth of Russia appeared only sporadically in official foreign policy discourses. For the first time, in 2012, Putin referred to a “state–civilisation”, and to Russia’s distinctiveness as such. In this case, too, the events of 2014 and the annexation of Crimea can be considered as a turning point as far as the use of the “mission narrative” in foreign policy speeches is concerned (Curanović 2021). They were characterized by the emphasis on the uncertainty of the new international order, by the need to preserve Russia’s sovereignty, and by the need to protect Russia’s “civilising” mission in defence against the West’s project of globalization and liberalization—with its plan to destroy historical Russian values. In his 2021 Christmas greetings, Putin noted that “it is crucial that the Russian Orthodox Church as well as other Christian denominations constantly focus on the issues of the moral health of society, on strengthening the institution of the family and raising the younger generation [...]” (President of Russia 2021). The emphasis made by the Kremlin on the need to protect traditional and spiritual values and on the importance of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian denominations mentioned in this recent address by President Putin confirms that the Russian Orthodox Church is most notably linked to this idea of morality that defines Russian identity. The Russian state wants to promote and to defend this very idea (as was the case after the fall of the Soviet Union).¹² Indeed, in 1997, under pressure of the Moscow Patriarchate, the law on freedom of conscience and religious organization was revised; in the preamble, the special role of the Orthodox Church in the story of Russia was recognized, thus introducing the so-called concept of traditional religion. The agreement between the Church and the State on the issue of “freedom”, and therefore on the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, was explained very well by Alfons Bruening in the paper *Morality and Patriotism: Continuity and Change in Russian Orthodox Occidentalism since the Soviet Era*, published in 2014 (Bruening 2014). Bruening pointed out that the Russian Orthodox Church’s search for the new principles that would be inspired by its relations with the outside world and the West was what led to the formulation of two different notions of “patriotism” and “morality”; these were generated through suspicion surrounding Western values. In 2000, the Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church approved “The Basis of the Social Teaching” (Russian: Основы социальной концепции Русской Православной Церкви) (Русская Православная Церковь. Отдел внешних церковных связей—Russian Orthodox Church. Department for External Church Relations 2000), which set out the position of the Church on a number of issues, such as the family, society, and Church–State relationships, clarifying that the Russian Orthodox Church considered itself alien to a national legal system defined according to secular liberal principles. In the document, propagating such convictions or actions which might result in “[...] the erosion in personal, family or public morality, any insulting of religious feelings, damage to the cultural and spiritual identity of the people [...]” was declared to be inadmissible. At the beginning of the document, it is written that “the patriotism of the Orthodox Christian should be active. It is manifested when he defends his fatherland against an enemy, [and] works for the good of the motherland [...]”. Indeed, speaking of the assessment of the world after the end of the Soviet Union, Metropolitan Kirill declared that it left Russia two choices: to be isolated and shut itself up

in a kind of cultural–religious ghetto in order to preserve itself, or to unconditionally accept the Western liberal model. The anti-Western and nationalistic viewpoint also emerged in the *Declaration and the rights of men* (Russian: Православная харта за права человека) issued in 2006 by the Russian People’s World Council—a nongovernmental organization, chaired by the Patriarch¹³. In the document, one can read that “there are values that are not inferior to human rights. These are values such as faith, morality, Fatherland” and that the Russian Orthodox Church was “ready to cooperate with the State and with all well-meaning forces in ensuring human rights. Special areas of such cooperation should be the preservation of the rights of nations and ethnic groups concerning their religion, language and culture, upholding freedom of religion and the rights of believers to their way of life [..]” (Pravoslavieto.com 2006). During the presentation held at the conference *The Evolution of Moral Values and Human Rights in Multicultural Society*, held in Strasbourg in October 2006, Kirill—at that time, the chair of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate—affirmed that “the withdrawal of society and the State from supporting the traditional moral norms has resulted in society confronting the offense given to the religious feelings and the advertising of pseudo-religious movements which use the public realm for the propagation of their views. [..]” (OrthodoxeEurope.org 2006). The response of the Russian Orthodox Church to this challenge was the promotion of a model based on the values of the Christian tradition in the field of education, instruction, and personal relationships, and on the promotion of civil and personal freedoms. This standpoint was presented in order to permit the active participation of the Church in secularized life, promoting the application of Christian thought to the problems posed by the liberal, globalized society. It was precisely this ideology that inspired the policy of the Russian Orthodox Church in European and International institutions. The position was fully coherent with the idea of “sovereignty” promoted by the Kremlin and was also confirmed in a recent interview with Patriarch Kirill, published in Italian in the book “Mission of Christians in the World” (Bigazzi 2018). The Patriarch declared that ideologies have the potential to damage fundamental principles, such as freedom, equality, and brotherhood, and that—unexpectedly—this has also occurred in Europe and in the European countries where these principles were born. To his mind, this is one of the main negative consequences of globalization, which has led to cultural depersonalization, the loss of moral orientation, and the imposition of relativism. He recalled that the dominance of a greater amount of persuasive information makes people unable to distinguish between good and evil. Another problem of globalization is considered to be the destruction of the traditional way of life and of the moral consensus connected to it. It follows that, when the moral consensus is destroyed, the law—which is a reflection of it—becomes unfair, and destroys people’s moral values. During the celebration of the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’, President Putin also highlighted the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as the “guardian of Christian values” (Department for External Church Relations 2008). This rhetoric coincides perfectly with the criticism of Western liberalism and the associated Western concept of human rights, and with the need for Russia to propose an alternative to the legalism and individualism of Western society. In the context of the Russian Orthodox Church’s initiatives to promote traditional values in Russia, one should also mention *The Basic Values: the Fundamentals of National Unity* (Russian: Базисные ценности—основа единства народов), issued by the Russian People’s World Council on 26 May 2011. The document was the result of discussions with political parties and with different social groups: it provides a catalogue of seventeen values. As Curanović and Leustean noted, the laws applied in the Russian Federation in the recent years are the symptoms of a process of re-traditionalising society. All these initiatives testify to the State’s efforts to shape public morality and to promote the “russkij mir”, a concept of the homeland based on a cultural idea (Curanović and Leustean 2015).

In order to understand the origins and the features of these values, it is important to reflect not only on the Church–State collaboration in promoting them but also on the participation of non-Russian minorities in the development of this policy. According to the data from the first post-Soviet census, conducted in October 2002, over 20% of Russia’s citizens were not ethnic Russians but representatives of nearly 160 ethnic groups which lived in the country; therefore, according to the census, more than one in five was not an ethnic Russian citizen. Russia’s approach to minority politics and nation-building activities was guided by the *Concept of State Nationalities Policy* (Russian: Об утверждении Концепции государственной национальной политики Российской Федерации) adopted in 1996. According to this document, “Thanks to the unifying role of the Russian people (*russkii narod*), a unique unity and diversity, spiritual communalism and a union of different peoples have been preserved in the territory of Russia”.

In his Millennium Manifesto, posted on the Internet some years later in 1999, Vladimir Putin referred to three key pillars for a successful Russian resurgence: (a) an effective economy; (b) a strong state; (c) a consolidation of the Russian idea. This national idea was understood to be a “multi-ethnic and multi-confessional union of people residing within the borders of the [Russian] state”. This idea of a shared community would represent the foundation “for the spiritual outlook of the Russian people”. However, as already stated above, in the first years of his presidency (2000–2008), Putin’s state policy was focused on consolidating the role of the State and its economy. With Putin’s third term, the main aim became to blur deliberately the boundaries between the civic *rossiskii* and the ethnic *russkii*. The civic identity became more explicitly Russian: the Russian language and cultural and traditional values were intended to be seen as the core of the identity of the Russian state. This policy revealed an openness to including members of other ethnic groups that subscribed to the value-based identity promoted by the Kremlin in the ethnic understanding of “Russian”; however, the cultural core of this civic identity continued to be Russian or “Russian plus”. At the same time, the idea of “civic identity” became more explicitly Russian. This is confirmed by the fact that the Russian language has always been recognized as the State’s language, that the history taught in state schools was that of the Russian state, and the Russian culture provided the civic identity; therefore, the shift in emphasis from *rossiskii* to *russkii* did not challenge the core of the old (Soviet) identity project (Blakkisrud 2016).

To underline this, in 2012, President Putin implemented a move towards a “state civilization” discourse. The shift was evident in the rejection of Western multiculturalism and civic nation building, and in the promotion of Russia’s unique civilizational traditions. The main aim was to maintain civic unity in the context of the country’s ethnic diversity. In order to support the “preservation of diversity”, educational, cultural, and language measures were implemented in the *Strategy for State Ethnic Policy 2014*. Proceeding from this civic patriotism, the narrative of state patriotism developed “on the basis of shared values, of a patriotic consciousness, a civic responsibility and solidarity, the respect for the law, and a sense of responsibility for their homeland’s fate, without losing touch with their ethnic or religious roots” (President of Russia 2013). This state civilization identity, built on cultural unity—understood to be without compulsory Russification or any loss of ethnic or cultural diversity—was provided by the Russian language, culture, and traditional values. This meant that “non-Russian minorities keep their unique cultures and the *russkie* are described as the cement holding the nation together” (Blackburn 2020).

Therefore, beyond the use of the term *russkii* or *rossiskii*, this identity has (and has always had) a Russian core—it is based on Russian people, the Russian language, and Russian culture; it recognises the important role of the Russian Orthodox Church. It follows that the narrative of minority rights and of their cultural development was linked to the strengthening of Russian patriotism and to the promotion of values that can preserve the cohesiveness of the Russian state. Such values were conceived as follows: a love for the mother country, recognition of the worth of the family, and the assertion of Russia’s sovereignty vis à vis the West’s liberal, global project. As confirmed by the analysis conducted in the previous pages, most of these values—bearing in mind the role attributed to

the Russian Orthodox Church—were set within the context of religiosity and spiritual security. One may consider the text *Foundations of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics* (already introduced in the early years of the twenty-first century) as an example of this; here, despite the differences between the modules among which a person can choose, the common principle remained Russian patriotism (Prina 2015).

5. Conclusions

In an interview released in 2019, Aleksander Vladimirovich Bogatyrev, a member of the Orthodox festival *Radonezh* (Russian: Радонеж), reflected on the development and worth of Orthodox films. He noted that the Orthodox cinema was often criticized for being far from professional. However, in recent years, Orthodox cinema has become quite literally “encyclopaedic”. Indeed, if any mention of the Orthodox cinema in the early ‘90s meant showing a person lighting a candle or a priest sitting under an icon on the screen, film directors now show more serious topics. They make films about the story of Vladimir’s baptism, the Russian hagiography, and the major issues related to the life and role of the Russian Orthodox Church throughout the centuries. He declared that the result of these films was the history of the “Russian motherland” and that “while the great minds of historians cannot decide how to teach Russian history at school, Orthodox authors, already a long time ago, created a film textbook in which history is presented in the light of Christ’s truth [...]”. He added that Orthodox films can be considered an important source of information about the life of Russia—an instrument for future generations to see the truth amidst a great number of liberal lies (Новгородская Епархия Русская Православная Церковь Московского Патриархата—Novgorod Diocese Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate 2019).

This paper shows how the Internet has helped religious people (whether members of churches or not) to satisfy one of the three needs that arose in post-Soviet Russia. Although traditional religious organizations consider the Internet to be some kind of threat because it guarantees freedom of expression, it also allows believers (a) to live a “second religious life”; (b) to keep in contact not only with members and representatives of their own religion but also with other religious communities and to discuss religious questions with them; (c) to share information and opinions about Orthodoxy and the meaning of its role in the history of Russia. This analysis has shown that the Internet has permitted both members and non-members of churches to live a “second religious life”. Furthermore, it has allowed the Church to maintain its role as the main point of reference in the formation of post-Soviet identity (not only reaching religious people but also having an influence on people who are more critical of the Church and of religion in general).

In order to avoid the risks that—thanks to the freedom guaranteed by the Internet—people who live their faith only virtually, hiding behind pseudonyms, might spread false information about religious faith, in 2005, the Russian Orthodox Church adopted the resolution *On Certain Aspects of the Information Activities of the Church* (Russian: О некоторых аспектах информационной деятельности Русской Православной Церкви) (Luchenko 2008). This resolution states that only official documents, interviews, speeches, and other informational material published by official communication channels can be considered reliable sources of information about the Russian Orthodox Church’s activities (Russian Orthodox Church 2005).

Proceeding from Castells’ idea—according to which, in the age of information, social movements mobilize themselves around cultural values and the Internet becomes a means to connect values and enable mobilisation—this paper argues that the Russian Orthodox Church responded to the post-secular discrepancy between religious affiliation and religious practice through using mass media to spread its mission and reach a more extensive public. The aim of the Church to guarantee its role in post-Soviet Russian society is linked to the view of Russian Orthodoxy, not only as one religion among others, but as the national religion of the Russian people, and, therefore, as the source of their identity. This paper has focused on the use of both traditional and online media. It has analysed the evolu-

tion of the project “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” from the time of its foundations as a scientific church centre to the foundation of a film and television company bearing the same name. The company started its activities producing programmes for television, then expanded to cinema and to the Internet (even today, it is still possible to watch its films on the Internet and to find videos of the programmes on Western platforms such as youtube.com). Moreover, the communication strategy of the Moscow Patriarchate has been strengthened since 2009, when Kirill became the Patriarch (this is confirmed by the formation of the Synodal Information Department—Синодальный информационный отдел; since 2015, the Department for Church Relations with Society and Media—Синодальный отдел по взаимоотношениям Церкви с обществом и средствами массовой информации). However, the main aim of this paper was not to analyse the change in the Russian Orthodox Church’s media strategy but to demonstrate that the Church reacted to post-Soviet digital anxiety by forming channels of communication with people that were also coherent with the change in the instruments of socialization. Being the institution that spreads the values on which the identity of Russia and the “Russian world” must be based in order to avoid the contamination and threat represented by the spread of Western, liberal values has guaranteed its political endorsement. Although the very definition of traditional values is not univocal because the term refers to ideological values, the reference in political discourse and documents to the need to preserve the health (Stepanova 2023) of Russia and its “spiritual security” allows one to understand the principles of the Church–State interplay in post-Soviet Russia and confirms—in this case—that offering a religious framework to the contents of the media has given the religious institution itself the chance to influence the institutional system, the regulatory environment of the media, and the public sphere (Русская Православная Церковь—Russian Orthodox Church n.d.b).

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Appendix A. List of Film and TV Programs Produced by the Cinema and TV Distributor Orthodox Encyclopaedia

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)		
1	2004	Путь к спасению	The Path to Salvation	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/509742.html	(Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru 2008b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
2	2004	Сто дней террора	A hundred Days of Terror	Demchenko (2012) (database Integrum)		(accessed on 2 November 2023)
3	2004	Заступник. Патриарх Тихон	Intercessor. Patriarch Tikhon	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/368325.html	(Седмица.ру—Sedmiza.ru 2007)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)		
4	2004–2008	10-серийный фильм «Земное и Небесное»	10-episode film “Earthly and Heavenly”		(accessed on 2 November 2023)	
5	2004–2008	5-серийный фильм «Паломничество в Вечный город»,	5-episode film “Pilgrimage to the Eternal City”	https://www.pravoslavie.ru/news/071102084410.htm	(Pravoslavie.ru 2007)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
6	2004–2008	2-серийный фильм «Ангел Русской Церкви против отцов всех народов»	2-episode film “Angel of the Russian Church against the Father of All Nations”			(accessed on 2 November 2023)
7	2005	Богоявленский собор	Epiphany Cathedral	https://pravfilms.ru/load/filmy/monastyri_i_khramy/film_quot_bogojavlenskij_sobor_quot_smotret_onlajn/4-1-0-41	(Pravafilm.ru n.d.)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
8	2006	Золотой Витязь	Golden Knight	https://www.profcinema.com/guide/index.php?ID=79312&PROP_NAME=SPRAVMAKER	(Profcinema n.d.b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
9	2006	Святой Георгий	Saint George	https://pravfilms.ru/index/film_quot_svjatoj_georgij_quot_smotret_onlajn_besplatno/0-147	(Pravfilms.ru n.d.b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
10	2006	Светлый Понедельник	Bright Monday	https://ostrovknig.ru/leksi_besedy/dvd_svetlyy_ponedelnik_pravoslavnaya_entsiklopediya/	(Остров кино—Ostrov kino n.d.)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
11	2006	Сталин и Третий Рим	Stalin and the Third Rome	https://smotrim.ru/brand/10313	(Smotrim.ru 2006)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
12	2006	Смутное время	Time of Troubles	http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/158445.html	(Russian Orthodox Church 2006)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
13	2006	Остров	Island	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/408413.html	(Седмица.ру—Sedmitza.ru 2006c)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)	
14	Крест против свастики	Cross against Swasti-ka	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQXo-UMqj00&ab_channel=SetySettik	(Youtube.com 2011b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
15	Холодная оттепель 61-гоода	The Cold Thaw of '61	https://smotrim.ru/brand/10492	(Smotrim.ru 2008)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
16	Средняя Азия	Central Asia	https://pravfilms.ru/load/filmy/dokumentalnoe_kino/film_quot_pravoslavnaia_ehnciklopedija_srednjaja_azija_quot_smotret_besplatno/2-1-0-344	(Pravfilms.ru n.d.a)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
17	Праздник праздников	Feast of Feasts	http://apostolandrey.cerkov.ru/kino	(Храм апостола Андрея Первозванного в Сочи Русская Православная Церковь (Московский Патриархат), Сочинская епархия, Сочинское благочиние— The Church of St. Andrew the Apostle in Sochi Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) 2016)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
18	Планета православия (Сериял---12фильмов)	Planet of Orthodoxy (TV series—12 films)	https://predanie.ru/bez-avtora/planeta-pravoslaviya-smotret/ ; https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2E2F5DD095F1EB91	(Предание.ру. Медиатека [Predanie.ru. Media Library n.d.) (Youtube.com 2008)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
19	Поп	Pop	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/1093638.html	(Седмица.ру— Sedmiza.ru 2010)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
20	Дар Святого Николая	The Gift Of St. Nicholas	https://www.hamburg-hram.de/letopis/dar-svyatitel-yanikolaya-film-o-pravoslavii-v-yaponii/6882.html ; https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/516416.html	(Hamburg-hram.de n.d.) (Седмица.ру— Sedmiza.ru 2008a)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)		
21	2008	ВЛюбви Страха Нет	There Is No Fear In Love	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/516416.html	(Седмица.ру – Sedmiza.ru 2008a)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
22	2009	Кронштадтский пастырь	The Kronstadt Shepherd	https://vk.com/wall-95747989_57315	(Православные аудиокниги – Orthodox Audiobooks 2020)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
23	2009	Религии Мира. Римско-Католическая Церковь (Религии Мира. Католицизм) (4фильма)	Religions of the World. The Roman Catholic Church (Religions of the World. Catholicism) (4 films)	http://www.miradox.ru/FILM/RELIGII-MIRA-RIMSKO-KATOLICHESKAYA-TSERKOV	(Miradox.ru n.d.b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
24	2011	Орда	Horde	https://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/ros/86827/annot/	(Кинотеатр.ру – Cinema.ru 2011)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
25	2012	Православныечудеса	Orthodox miracles	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/368325.html	(Седмица.ру – Sedmiza.ru 2007)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
26	2012	Двунадесятьепраздники	The Twentieth Holi-days	https://ok.ru/video/8461092192	(Одноклассники.ру n.d.b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
27	2013	Надо Проучить Эту Публику	We Need To Teach This Audience A Lesson	http://www.miradox.ru/film/nado-prouchit-etu-publiku	(Miradox.ru n.d.a)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
28	2013	Неизвестная звездаГолливуда	Unknown Hollywood Star	https://www.tritonafilm.ru/%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%8F-tritonafilm	(Tritonafilm.ru 2022)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
29	2013	Династия	Dynasty	https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dVmY5Oli1m4&ab_channel=tvsoyuz	(Youtube.com 2015a)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
30	2014	Патриарх Алексий – перед Богом и людьми	Patriarch Aleksii – before God and People	https://www.sedmitza.ru/text/4511695.html	(Седмица.ру – Sedmiza.ru 2014)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
31	2015	Трудныевопросы истории	Difficult Historical Issues	https://newssky.com.ua/kinoindustriya-rpcz-chast-2-eksklyuziv/	(Newssky.com 2021b)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
32	2015–2023	Наследники (4 сезона)	Heirs (4 Seasons)	https://www.proficinema.com/picture-making/detail.php?ID=180587	(Proficinema n.d.a)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)	
33	Монах И Бес	Monk And Demon	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pryuBdCU9b0&ab_channel=EpicMedia	(Youtube.com 2022)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
	Православная энциклопедия (Телепрограмма):	Orthodox Encyclpadia (Tv program)	(a) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INTnaSOyrTY&ab_channel=[mvelig]TV-%D0%9D%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B6%D0%B8 ; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qutr0pEpZfUI&ab_channel=[mvelig]TV-%D0%9D%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B6%D0%B8	(Youtube.com 2003b); (Youtube.com 2003a); (Youtube.com 2014)	(accessed on 2 November 2023)
	(a) Православная энциклопедия (2003 (1,2); 2014)	(a) Orthodox Encclopaedia (2003 (1,2); 2014)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pt9SkWOMWg4&ab_channel=%D0%9F%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%92%D0%9C%D0%98%D0%A0		
	(b) Апостол Петр (2006)	(b) Apostle Peter (2006)	(b) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgF_PCNPuo4&ab_channel=YogenOm	(Youtube.com 2006)	
	(c) Православие в Америке (2011)	(c) Orthodoxy in America (2011)	(c) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AlN5MhLZNk&ab_channel=russianchurch	(Youtube.com 2011a)	
	(d) Наркомания (2011)	(d) Addiction (2011)	(d) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnnHaszEeTM&ab_channel=russianchurch	(Youtube.com 2011c)	

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)
	(e) Телепрограмма «Православная энциклопедия в Украине» (2011)	(e) TV program "Orthodox Encyclopaedia in Ukraine" (2011)	(e) https://risu.ua/ru/v-efire-pervogonacionalnogostartovala-programma-pravoslavnaia-enciklopediya-v-ukraine-s-vedushchim-episkopom-irc_n50843	(Risu.ua. Религиозно-НОВОСТИ ПУБЛИКАИнформационная службаУкраины— Religious News PUBLIC Information Service of Ukraine 2011)
	(f) Паломничество (2012)	(f) Pilgrimage (2012)	(f) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajqfXGogZ3Y&ab_channel=tsoyuz	(Youtube.com 2012b)
	(g) Женщины Библии (2012)	(g) Women of the Bible (2012)	(g) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4l_yD-5Tio&ab_channel=russianchurch	(Youtube.com 2012a)
	(h) Миланский эдикт» (2013)	(h) The "Edict of Milan" (2013)	(h) http://blagochinie48.ru/index.php/videokanal-new/52-2014-05-03-20-17-53/1367-2013-11-30-16-25-49	(Blagochinie48.ru n.d.)
	(i) Пророки и пророчества (2013)	(i) Prophets and Prophecies (2013)	(i) http://blagochinie48.ru/index.php/videokanal-new/52-2014-05-03-20-17-53/1040-2013-06-13-22-17-53l	(Blagochinie48.ru 2013a) (Blagochinie48.ru 2013b)
	(l) Гонение на христиан (2013)	(l) Persecution of Christians (2013)	(l) http://blagochinie48.ru/index.php/videokanal-new/52-2014-05-03-20-17-53/1039-2013-06-13-22-15-59	(Blagochinie48.ru 2013b)
	(m) Святые равноапостольные Кирилл и Мефодий (2014)	(m) Saints Cyril and Methodius (2014)	(m) http://blagochinie48.ru/index.php/videokanal-new/85-videokanal-raznoe/3624-svyaty-e-ravnoapostolnye-kirill-i-mefodij-pravoslavnaia-entsiklopediya	(Blagochinie48.ru 2016)
	(n) Паломничество в Грецию (2015a)	(n) Pilgrimage to Greece	(n) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgPB70B0Ew&ab_channel=tsoyuz	(Youtube.com 2015b)

(accessed on 2 November 2023)

Year	Title in Russian	Title in English	Source (Link)	Source (Reference Web-Sites)
	(o) Православная энциклопедия. От 2 марта. Император Константин и Миланский эдикт (2015b)	(o) <i>Encyclopaedia. From March 2. Emperor Constantine and the Edict of Milan</i> (2015b)	(o) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPuEkots95c&ab_channel=tsoyuz	(Youtube.com 2015c)
	(p) Образы святости (2016)	(p) <i>Images of Holiness</i> (2016)	(p) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPbMM_1sSkE&ab_channel=%D0%A5%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%A1%D0%B2%D1%8F%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%96%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B9%D0%A2%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B8%D1%86%D1%8B%D0%B2%D0%A5%D0%BE%D1%85%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%85	(Youtube.com 2016)
	(q) Таинство священства (2016)	(q) <i>Sacrament of the Priest-wood</i> (2016)	(q) http://blagochinie48.ru/index.php/video kanal-new/85-video kanal-raznoe/5730-tainstvo-svyashchenstva	(Blagochinie48.ru 2018)
	(r) Православная Энциклопедия—Свобода (2018)	(r) <i>Orthodox Encyclopaedia Liberty</i> (2018)	(r) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgynYrIE3bk&ab_channel=eZopzop	(Youtube.com 2018)
	(s) Православная Энциклопедия	(s) <i>Orthodox Encyclopaedia</i>	(s) https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMRdHN3Ftrd-mZcKyzdKk-w ; https://www.net-film.ru/telecasts-pravoslavnaya-encyclopediaEncyclopaedia-page-3/	(Youtube.com n.d.); (Net-film.ru n.d.)

(accessed on 2 November 2023)

Notes

- The indication of “2022” as the final year of this analysis refers to the date of the documents and surveys considered here. The analysis conducted does not take into account changes in the communication strategy of the Russian Orthodox Church after the outset of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022. There are several reasons for this: the survey conducted on the production of films by the “Orthodox Encyclopaedia” film company shows that the last film produced was in 2018; furthermore, the topic deserves a separate treatment focussing more on the so-called “information war” which is related to the topic of this research but is certainly beyond the scope of this paper, which aims instead to analyse the relationship between the media and the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-Soviet period by focusing in particular on the effect of religion on the institutional system, the regulatory environment of the media and the public sphere”. To know more about this topic, read, among others: (Brusylovska and Maksymenko 2023; Chen and Ferrara 2023; Horbyk 2022; Kilp 2022; Kostruba and Fishchuk 2023; Makhortyk and Bastian 2022; Nosova 2023; Pavlik 2022; Zasiiekin et al. 2022; Selvarajah and Fiorito 2023).
- Viktor Khroul noted that after the fall of the Soviet Union, even though 80% of ethnic Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, less 10% of them attend church services more than once a month and only 2–4% are considered to be truly integrated into church life. A survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2013–2014 showed that although 73% of respondents painted eggs, only 6% of them attended the Eastern liturgy and a mere 3% of them observed Lent (Khroul 2016).
- Kristina Stoeck’s theory, which defines the Russian Orthodox Church as moral norm entrepreneur, is also connected to the concepts of traditional values. See: Stoeckl (2016).

- 4 The data reported are from 2005, the year of the beginning of the analysis, which then shows how they had changed in 2022, two years after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
- 5 For additional details on the topic see: [Sherstoboeva \(2019\)](#).
- 6 See Section 4.
- 7 Since his appointment as Patriarch, Kirill has decided that books and periodicals distributed through the Church system must have the stamp of the *Publishing Council of the Russian Orthodox Church* and of the *Synodal Information Department*, respectively. Since 1 September 2011, only those products (printed, film, video, audio, etc.) to which the *Synodal Information Department* has assigned the seal of approval can be found in the Church's distribution system.
- 8 The issue is connected, for instance, to the debate on the introduction of the course on the "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture" in school educational programs.
- 9 Other important television programs based on the promotion of Orthodoxy were: the weekly television program "The Word of a Pastor" (Russian: Словопастыря) broadcast on a regular basis since 1994 on state-owned Channel One; the program "Bible Story" (Russian: Библейский сюжет) aired on Culture Channel, the Russian Orthodox Church's official youtube channel ([Russianchurch n.d.](#)) (<https://www.youtube.com/user/russianchurch>); programs on the channel "My joy" (Russian: Радость моя; *Радость моя—My Joy n.d.*): <https://radostmoya.ru/about/>). (accessed on 2 November 2023). See also: ([Православные телеканалы и телепередачи. Православный телеканал "Союз"—Orthodox TV Channels and TV Programs. Orthodox TV channel "Soyuz" n.d.](#))
- 10 Find more details about the concept of sovereign democracy and similarities with the concept of managed democracy here: [Petrov \(2005\)](#).
- 11 The strategy of sovereign democracy was also linked to the need to manage the economic involvement while maintaining domestic control and great autonomy of power (in this case we talk of "sovereign globalization", a term that can be understood as analogous to the project of "sovereign democracy").
- 12 With this statement the author does not mean that the relation among the Russian Orthodox Church and the Kremlin maintained the same features as it had in the early 1990s. In her PhD dissertation which will be published with the editor Brill, the author analyses the interplay of the ROC and the State during Metropolitan Kirill's presidency at the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate: the study shows that there was a kind of "balance" in church-state relations until 2009. Analysing how this balance changed after 2009 is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 13 The organization was founded in 1993 by means of the cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church. The present head of the organization is Patriarch, Kirill. Its mission involves hosting discussions in order to establish priorities for Russia's present and future. The organization holds events that bring together peoples from throughout Russia, from the former Soviet Union and from the globe to advance causes that benefit the Russian people. These ideas are frequently tinged with a great deal of Russian chauvinism and the defence of "traditional values" ([Lassin 2022](#)).

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