

Modern Internet Epistolary in Information and Media Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This article is devoted to the basic distinctive features of the use and transformation with regard to the modern realities of epistolary communication in the emerging integrated media and information space. The authors reviewed the denotative and connotative aspects of understanding information and media spaces, and considered the phenomenon of integration, on the background of which the transformation of the epistolary genre took place. Also the authors discussed the basic features of modern types of communication - simplicity, brevity, graphics. The authors conducted an empirical study to find out the respondents' attitudes, who are active users of the integrated space, to understanding and use of the epistolary. The relevance of the article is defined by the fact that modern information and media space has not been considered as a single, integrated space in which there is epistolary genre transformed and adapted to modern technological and communicative realities. Existing forms of indirect communication of people in STD have not been regarded from the point of view of the epistolary genre, therefore, there were no sense to analyze its transformation. This study aims to correct this error. The content of the article will be useful to journalists, researchers of the epistolary genre, and the literary critics.

KEYWORDS

Epistolary, modern information space, modern media space, globalization, convergent journalism, trends in the development of language, foreign elements

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Introduction

Today the structure of world society in general and each community in particular is exposed to globalization, detraditionalization and informatization. With information technologies appearance each corner in the world, each cultural environment became more available than, let's say, two decades ago.

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Generations of the 80-s and the 90-s years of the 20-th century, without not being fully involved in the process of information approximation, are able to touch the abundance of information flows which came upon post-Soviet Russia at the stage of constructing personal and group identity. Today children find themselves in even more difficult situation – they are exposed to the influence of various social (cultural, religious, ethnic, territorial etc.) factors.

We can see the greatest quantity of various social groups to which we may belong or not – religion, ethnicity, political views, cultural preferences, gender, age, occupation – many factors which make any person an active and important individual. Socialization in the modern world implies developed information and communicative competency of each person.

In other words, to be able to orient oneself in the modern world, a person should learn to communicate virtually with every individual including with the help of communication facilities using current features of information space and to learn to obtain and sort the information from the media space.

Today each person is absorbed in integrating unified information space – the Internet networks space developed by modern means of technologic progress to enable mediated communication of two individuals. These are mobile phones, smartphones, PDA, table PC and other devices for communicating via mobile and Internet-providers (Kachkaeva, 2014).

Thus, while there is a great variety of communication means and developing media and information space integrating between themselves, we also face a problem – abandoning from epistolary in the form which is usually interpreted by the majority of researches as classics of this genre, i.e. – writing letters.

However, is it really so? Epistolary as one of the literature genres has been widely covered in research papers of A.A. Elistratov (1996), L. V. Scherba (1974), G. O. Vynokur, G.O. Vinokur (1991), E. M. Halkyna-Fedoruk (1958), and others. In publicism the phenomenon of a letter is studied by E. P. Prokhorov (2011), A.A. Tertychny (2000), V.M. Gorokhov (1989), etc. However we do not know about the studies of modern epistolary publicism in the newest information and media space, consequently there are no works devoted to the tendencies of developing epistolary within the changed structure of non-personal communication and the space for performing it in our reality.

Today researches believe that epistolary is slowly disappearing. To some extent, they are right –we are not going to name modern epistolary a “letter” as this form of communication has its own clear structure including formal title, introduction, etiquette patterns, conclusion, closing, signature and other elements. Modern epistolary message, however, contains only addressing to a person or group of people. There are no other similarities between the letter and modern epistolary (Beshukova, 2014).

Exploring modern types of writing we can consider that the epistolary style has changed in favor of the society, as all things came from the past, it was tailored according to the needs of the modern world. Then, using different communication systems, such as voice chats, or massagers - we can find a strong structure like ordinary greeting, the main part, additions, result and farewelling. Taking into account the facts provided in this article, you can learn a lot about the modern epistolary style (Bray, 1967).

However integration of information and media spaces, creation of unified integrated information and communication space with media elements implies the existence of epistolary adapted to for modern technological and communication realities. It is not correct to say that letters “are dying”, rather we should speak about the “death” of a letter source, i.e. ordinary paper and envelope.

Materials and Methods

Studying the place of epistolary in modern information and media space, we differentiated the terms “information space” and “media space” by analyzing their denotative and connotative discourse.

When analyzing the place of epistolary in modern information and media space, we also carried out brief social survey among the active users of information space to find out their attitude to “classical” for of epistolary and their understanding of epistolary transformation into a fundamentally new phenomenon with qualitatively new characteristics and the degree of using modern means of communication and media space for performing a non-personal dialogue.

It is clear that specifics of the study does not allow the use of extensive methods to obtain information, therefore, most of the studies are based on polls and beliefs of users from information world. They provided information and answers to the questions and gave the opportunity to realize this study thereby confirming whether the style of communication between users in the World Wide Web a completely new style of communication, or modified and corrected epistolary one (Sidorova, 2014).

Results

Currently, information space is interpreted as the space divided by territory for communication and data storage within conglomerate units of Internet network in the context of one certain country.

From the point of view of information space, highly developed information state is economically and culturally rapidly developing state. We should not regard the process of its development outside the modern world and its development tendencies. As any country is a part of a global cultural and economic space, various factors impact its development from all the aspects of human activities.

One of the tendencies is a sharp shift of modern industrial society into information society. Phenomenon of information society has been studied given its gradual development. Let us mention the works by M. Castells (1976), T. Stouner (1986) and many others. However, we should note that they focused on society technocratization, on technical progress of the means for passing the message to mass consciousness, and little attention was paid to the development of the society itself in the context of increasing value of information and its snowballing accumulation.

As modern technologies give almost immediate access to the information which was unavailable before due to physical distance or the absence of adequate resources, today each person is able to find out what are the basic postulates of string theory, for example. Information value of each person who learnt new theory does not increase as this is general information and it will not

increase knowledge in terms of its application in practical non-standard situations. To put it simply, if a middle-level manager has good knowledge in physics and can apply his knowledge in practice when communicating with a client, then his value will be higher the value of a manager who understands physics but his knowledge is only theoretical and he never applies it in his work.

In general, we can distinguish several main principles of information society and its defining characteristics. According to D. Bell (2014) these are the following characteristics:

- Information production is a continuous process unlike industrial production which is discrete by its nature
- Information constantly impacts environment and some spheres of human activity
- All the aspects of human activity become closer and integrated.

Due to this, information, as we have already mentioned, becomes a resource with universal value, and specialists, people with higher education and deep knowledge gain priority in their social position. Moreover, we can describe information society as society in which cognition is based on modelling. In modern science researchers build abstract models to confirm or predict information or this or that fact about the world, its properties and processes. These models confirm or deny hypothesis and assumptions.

Modern stage of human civilization development creates aspiration to achieve new heights, new technologies and new knowledge, and science gives this chance to the people.

Through time we face the factor of gradual amplification and acceleration of all the human life processes. As S.P. Kapitsa (1996) argued, present time is the time close to the phase transition of the humanity into demographic period of qualitatively new historic reality (Online journalism).

Information culture of today computerized and technocratized society has its own unique characteristics. Namely, information culture today is an essential part of common cultural sphere of people. From the point of view of sociology and psychology, we may also speak about such a phenomenon as personal information culture.

Information culture of a modern man is his ability not to get lost in the flow of information with the help of innovative technical means. This ability depends, primarily, on intellectual and social characteristics of an individual: how well he orients himself in current sources of information, how he works with them, his ability to analyze information and apply the results of his work in practice. The skills to work with devices which a person is able to acquire, for example, personal computers, mobile phones, PDA, computer networks etc., are related to technological aspect of this issue (Kur'yanchikov, 2008).

Here we can also relate ability to select and replace spare parts and ability to work with software products as one of the types of virtually exclusively work with information (Vinogradov & Skvortsov, 2014).

The stages of information technologies development can be divided into six main stages (Bachilo, Lopatin & Fedotov, 2013):

1. First stage: development of information and communication technology (ICT) until the second half of the 19th century. Until the second half of the 19th

century the so-called “manual” information and communication technology dominated. Communication was performed with such tools as a pen and ink, and paper. Sending letters via postal services was a method of communication delivery.

2. Second stage: ICT development in the second half of the 19th century up to the beginning of the 20th century. During this period “mechanical” technology dominated – means of reproducing and transferring information were gradually replaced by more convenient and optimized mechanical tools. Typing machine, voice recorder and telephone appeared. At the beginning of the 20th century radio was invented.

3. Third stage: this stage represents several decades of active information technologies development. This was the period from the 40-s to the middle of the 60-s of the 20th century. This period is often called the period of “electric” technology: ECM appeared and gradually were coming into common usage as well as software programs; portable voice recorders appeared, type writer is now electrical, copying machine appeared. Information technologies were becoming the tool for information submission.

4. Fourth stage: since the end of the 60-s to the middle of the 80-s “electronic” technology appeared. Creation of more portable ECM and automated management systems, first information search systems became its basis. ECM was used not only for scientific or technical purposes but became widely recognized for common use in various spheres of the life. Potential of information communication using ECM moves to management spheres, analytical professions and social life.

5. Fifth stage: since the middle of 80-s of the 20th century to the beginning of 2000s “computer” technology appears – personal computer was created. PC was equipped with a wide range of functions for forming, creating and sending information in its numerous forms. Now there was an opportunity to manage information processes and communicate with the help of the newest scientific tools and that became possible for every man. Appearance of microprocessors is related to the same period of ICT development. They radically changed the way people could communicate with each other. Development of microprocessor technology led to appearance of such communication means as mobile phones, notebooks, PDA, tablet PC and devices combining in itself several communication functions etc.

6. Last, sixth stage – the stage of “network” technologies and this is the modern stage. This period is characterized by local global information and communication networks development - Internet network, in particular.

Development of information culture of society as well as information culture of each individual is related to several factors (Bachilo, Lopatin & Fedotov, 2013):

- Person’s education and general level of education in society
- Technical infrastructure for information perception through new technological channels
- Economic characterization of the society, i.e. financial availability of technical tools
- Legal characterization of the society, i.e. information availability from the point of view of law.

Following V.N. Lopatin and I.L. Bachilo (Bachilo, Lopatin & Fedotov, 2013) we understand unified information space of a certain territorial legal entity as “totality of information resources and information infrastructure which uses uniform principles and acting in accordance with universal rules to provide safe information interaction between the State, organizations and citizens having equal accessibility to open information resources as well as to satisfy their information needs on the entire territory of the State, keeping the balance of interests for entering global information space and providing national information sovereignty”.

Information space is regarded from the point of view of information environment - this is the sphere which regards information not only in the context of the totality of information resources but in the context of legal regulation and relationships between people and information.

Now, let us discuss the term “media space”. E.G. Nim writes that interpretation of media space in today’s sociology implies the totality of public channels for obtaining information. To put it simply, the majority of researchers understand media space as a set of mass media, namely television, radio and Internet. However as experience shows it is not as simple as this.

M. Litvinovitch in his article “How Internet changes media space” published in 2010 (Kur'yanovich, 2010) stated that each person who published news about some event in the Internet, upon condition that any number of people have access to the publication, automatically becomes a journalist, a news provider. It means that any person potentially is the part of media space and is able to form its structure. The role of traditional journalism under such understanding of the situation takes a back seat and the notion of convergent journalism arises. The notion of convergent journalism is associated with the tendency in modern mass media to merger everything. Resources of information merger, means of communication are integrated, resources covering the whole media space appear such as online feeds, live radio broadcasting in the Internet and television broadcasting with the help of web-tools (Kapitza, 2014).

The main tendency of today’s media is tendency for multi-resources and integration. Journalists explain current space and multimedia tools as “integration of two or more communication means and channels with computer” (Kapitza, 2014). Thus, today this term is understood as means of information transmission with the help of several techniques of influence on those who absorb this information, i.e. on mass audience. This is the influence of video and sound simultaneously and opportunity to communicate with the audience in the Internet. Due to this, modern mass media and their media space is rather understood as an integrative system which underlies functioning of any mass media today.

Convergent journalism generated the term “convergent editing” the base of which is functioning with the help of all possible means of communication with the audience – through the pages of a printed publication, with the help of online means, radio and television and a new way of communication, namely mobile applications. Convergent editing is a continuous unified flow of information which is integrated into a universal information process and may constantly change and be supplemented by additional information from other resources. Due to this, information itself becomes more qualitative and more focused (Kapitza, 2014).

Thus, we must not limit our understanding of media space to totality of space created by mass media and specialists related to mass media.

As E.G. Nim says, there are at least four possible approaches to understanding phenomenon of media space (Lazutina, 2014):

- In the context of large volume of existing text information. Thus, media space becomes the space for media texts which E.G. Nim named “discourse space”.

- In the context of sociological space. Space created by means of mass media, space institutional by its nature is the most popular approach to understanding media space..

- In the context of territorial aspect as a universal information space, i.e. as a totality of means for providing people in a certain territory (region, area, country) with information. As we can see, such understanding of media space is the same as the aforementioned definition.

- Media space as a universal environment for obtaining information characteristic of all types and all definitions of information as a global media and one of the environments of human existence and activity.

When comparing approaches to understanding information and media space, we came to conclusion that currently we rather need to talk about integrated universal information space, i.e. a union sphere for obtaining information with the help of any channels and technological communication tools anywhere in the world and outside it. In this sense, we want to include understanding of information space as an international institution and a narrow understanding based on a territorial criterion as well as understanding of media space as a totality of information and sociological spaced created by mass media.

Thus, we build an understanding of a universal integrated information space (hereinafter UIIS) as a general information field for obtaining any type of information. To some extent, this is kind of a noosphere in the theory of Vernadsky, the only difference is that noosphere includes both consciousness and unconsciousness, archetypal foundation of understanding as well as all possible superstructures of interaction between human mind and the nature, generating qualitatively new field of interaction between human mind and the nature; UIIS includes only non-material sphere of communication between people (Lukin, 2015).

Resulting from our interpretation of existence of a modern man in UIIS, we formulated a concept of existing epistolary in this information space and information interaction.

The main transformation change of epistolary with regard to the processes of global computerization, globalization and technocratization, is the shift of epistolary into telegraphic and pictographic plane (Kuryanovich, 2013) Epistolary in modern information space with regard to aforementioned tendencies represents rather telegraphic and laconic artefact by its stylistics.

It is an interesting fact that evolution makes another spiral – humanity began its development of writing systems with pictograms and symbolization and now we return to it. Each epistolary message sent to a certain addressee or a group of “conversation partners”, contains emotional implications by introducing into the structure of a message pictographic elements of emotions. (Maidanova & Chepkin, 2011).

Symbolization of emotional and lyrical component of epistolary in modern information space is presented not by verbal means but by emoticons for space saving and simplicity of expressing emotions. Now emotional component of a letter may be presented by means of encrypting: kiss, love, confusion, smile, grin etc. (Vishnyakova & Efimova, 2014).

A move to the latest technologies in the modern world is a process of great interest: emergence of the newest communication channels led to the situation when written text may have a form of a delayed dialogue or immediate dialogue.

After 1991 in speech practice of society some positive tendencies were observed (Litvinovich, 2015):

- Language in expansion in the sphere of economy, politics and law;
- The language of mass media better covered reality;
- The language of articles and interviews became closer to colloquial speech, abandoning officialese in publicistic writing was observed;
- Deideologization of several vocabulary layers;
- Many Soviet newspaperese were out of use;
- Some cities and streets got their historical names.

The change in public interaction has a positive influence on language development: abolition of censorship, opportunity to express one's own personal opinion, opportunity for the listeners to evaluate declamatory skills of leading politics.

On the one hand, this had a positive impact on the character of communication which became more relaxed, natural and live. On the other hand, some native speakers replaced democratization of communication with policy of all-permissiveness. Traditional normalization began to collapse; it loses its rigidity and uniqueness and we can clearly see stylistic illegibility. What is worth is that the level of permissibility also changed if not to say disappeared. Slang and bad words, f-words are now broadly used not only in colloquial speech but also in books and in mass media. Additionally, specialists note with concern that the language is impure with filler words, elements of jail sub-culture, and jargon. Borrowed words, especially, Anglicisms, is one more important characteristics of today's language development. Consequently, all the aforementioned tendencies under the influence of new culture-specific concepts of human civilization are reflected in the language and on the style of communication between people.

Taking into account UIIS changes, change in the language and means of expressiveness, tendencies to graphics and brevity and the use of pictograms instead of language forms of expression, we come to conclusion that language as it is may exist in the context of immediate written dialogue in social media, in the form of SMS, messages in chats, forums and posts in blogs, on the pages of printed publications and other mass media.

In accordance with the given concept of epistolary transformation into a telegraphic, pictographic, and neat way of information exchange with included emotional determinants with the help of UIIS, we conducted a study to find out the level of understanding of epistolary transformation in the minds of ordinary people. We carried out a comparative study of the frequency of use of classical epistolary form (a letter). Then we introduced the respondents to the main

postulates of UIIS and carried out interviews to find out how frequently a new epistolary form is used.

We aimed to give evidences that such forms of epistolary as a traditional letter, SMS message, e-mail or a message in a private chat in social media do not have any essential differences and that modern messages refer to epistolary technologies.

250 respondents took part in our study. They are all active users of social media and blogosphere and Internet journalists.

Following the logic of the study, we divided the survey for the respondents into two parts. The questions in the first part were:

- Have you ever written letters? (2 answer options)
- Have you ever received letters? (2 answer options)
- Do you know essential elements of the letter structure? (2 answer options)
- What is the future of epistolary in your opinion? (3 answer options)

After completion of the survey, the respondents were introduced to the understanding of UIIS and modern means of communication in the context of transformation of traditional epistolary into new forms. Then we conducted the second part of the study based on open-end questions:

- Compare traditional letters and examples of modern epistolary (sms, e-mail, messages in social media, posts in blogs). What are the main distinctive features of modern epistolary?
- In which form do you usually send letters?
- What do you think about the future of epistolary considering the information you obtained? (3 answer options)

According to the results of the study, we present the outcome.

Table 1. The first part of the study. Questions 1 and 2

Question	Yes	No
Have you ever written letters?	138 respondents	112 respondents
Have you ever received letters?	169 respondents	81 respondents

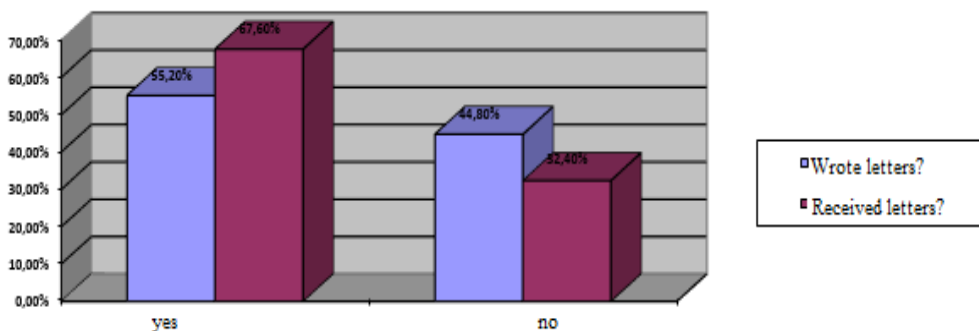


Figure 1. The ratio of respondents who wrote and received letters

After third question, the results were distributed as follows:

Essential parts of a letter: introduction, content, ending. Optional parts are place and date of writing the letter, formal title, greetings, combination of formal title and greetings, closing, signature, post scriptum (post post scriptum, additional phrases).

Table 2. Comprehension of letter structure

<i>Do you know essential elements of the letter</i>	<i>Number of people who checked the option structure? (decide and check)</i>
Introduction	59 people
Place and time	115 people
Formal title	219 people
Greeting	159 people
Combination of formal title and greeting	250 people
Content	250 people
Ending	89 people
Closing	198 people
Signature	211 people
Post scriptum (post post scriptum, additional phrases).	13 people

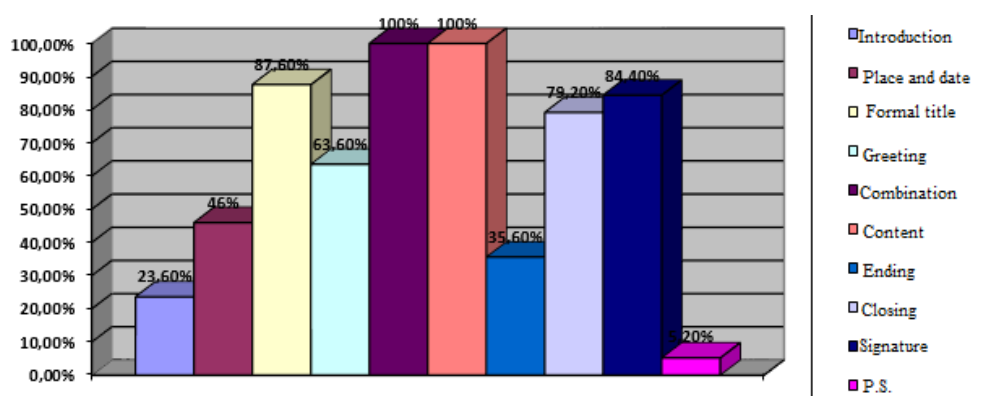


Figure 2. Comprehension of traditional letter structure

We can see that many respondents believe that essential elements in a letter are a combination of formal title and greetings, content and closing and/or signature. Introduction and ending from the point of view of correct compositional structure of a letter are considered as strange, optional elements.

Table 3. Epistolary future

<i>What do you think about the future of epistolary?</i>	<i>Number of answers</i>
Will letters disappear forever?	105 people
Will there always be people who write and receive letters?	79 people
Soon letters will be in trend again and the number of people writing letters will increase.	66 people

Thus, we can see that the majority of respondents believe that traditional letter is history now and as a literary artifact it is becoming a matter of the past. Interestingly, that virtually one third of respondents think that a letter being a retro-artifact will re-emerge and another one third of the respondents are sure that people will continue to write letters.

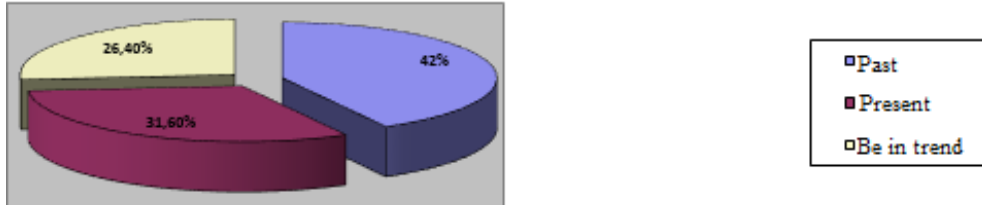


Figure 3. Epistolary future

After the respondents were introduced to the UIIS concept and traditional letter transformation into modern forms of non-personal indirect communication, we conducted the second part of our study. (Jansson, 2006)

The question “Compare traditional letters and examples of modern epistolary (SMS, e-mail, messages in social media, posts in blogs). What are the main distinctive features of modern epistolary” generated considerable debates. The answers were as follows:

In letters and in messages as a rule there is greeting, content and ending. However in messages we often miss this or that element, usually it is greeting and closing.

In letters and in messages we express emotions, but in messages they are usually just emoticons.

In a letter we cannot use colloquial words and jargon, but in a message we can do it.

You cannot erase or correct the text of a letter, but you can change the message as many times as you wish.

The answers to the question “In what form do you usually write letters?” were distributed as follows:

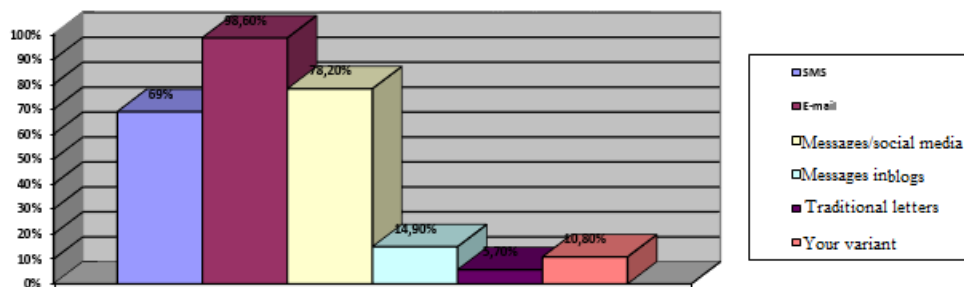


Figure 4. The most popular forms of modern epistolary

E-mail, SMS and messages in social media can be recognized the most popular forms of communication.

Considering the information we obtained from the respondents, we also compared their views on the future of epistolary at the beginning and at the end of the study.

Table 4. Epistolary future

What do you think is the future of epistolary?	Number of answers	What do you think is the future of epistolary considering the information you learnt?	Number of answers
Letters soon will disappear forever	105 people	Letters soon will disappear forever	129 people
There will always be people who write and receive letters	79 people	There will always be people who write and receive letters	79 people
Soon letters will be in trend again and the number of people writing letters will increase	66 people	Soon letters will be in trend again and the number of people writing letters will increase	42 people

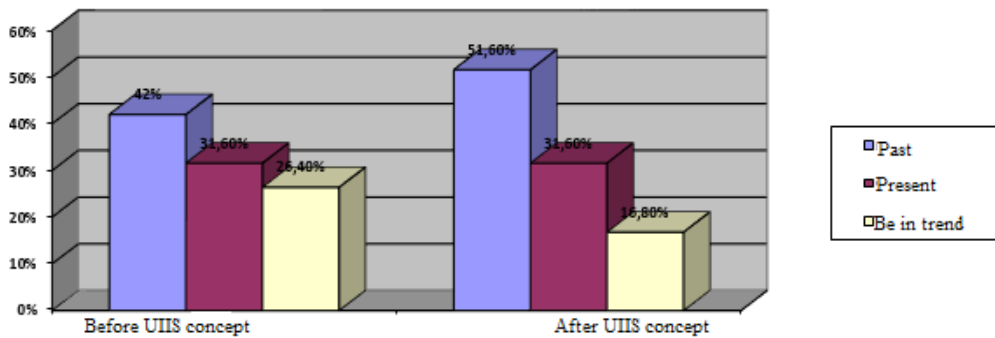


Figure 5. Epistolary future considering the information the respondents learnt

We can say that UIIS concept and changes in epistolary brought to the situation that respondents changed their opinion about epistolary future. Some of the respondents who stated epistolary would be in trend again, changed their mind and later said that we are going away from the traditional epistolary form.

Discussions

Thus, summarizing results of the study, we form an understanding of a Unified Integrated Information Space (hereinafter, UIIS) as the field of getting any kind and nature information. It's like the Vernadsky's noosphere, with the difference that the understanding of the noosphere as the area includes the conscious and the unconscious, and the archetypal layer of understanding, as well as all possible add-ons of the interaction of the human mind and nature, generating qualitatively new field of interaction between man and nature, and the understanding of UIIS applies only to the immaterial sphere of communication between people indirectly addressed and unaddressed.

On the basis of the found understanding of the existence of modern man in UIIS we have formed the concept of the epistolary existence in this space, information and interactions.

Evaluating the results of the study, we conclude that a major transformational change of the epistolary genre, taking into account the universal processes of Informatization, globalization and technocratization, was the transition of the epistolary genre in telegrafico and pictographical plane (Kuryanovich, 2013; Senichkina, 2015). Epistolary in the modern information space looks like rather Telegraph and concise style of the artifact.

If we consider the results in lights of research by A. Kur'yanovich, E.G. Nim, A. Jansson (2006), we can say that the concept of UIIS in one form or another has already been observed in various studies devoted to the evolution of the information space in General and the evolution epistolary as a kind of communication process in particular.

The closest advanced the concept of observations A. Jansson (2006), who speaks directly about the "vagueness" of media space and information sphere.

Interesting that evolution makes the next turn of the spiral is humanity which initiated the development of a writing system with pictographs and symbolization now come to the same place in each message epistolary character, as sent to a specific recipient, and a wide circle of "buddies", invested emotional implications by introducing the structure of pictorial message elements of emotions.

The symbolization of emotional lyrical component of the epistolary genre in the modern information space is increasingly represented not expressive language, and emojis for the sake of space and simplicity of expression emotions. Now the emotional component of the letter can be expressed by means of symbolic coding: kiss, love, embarrassment, smile, smirk, etc. (Vishnyakova & Efimova, 2014)

The transition to the latest technologies in the modern world is a very interesting process: the emergence of latest communication channels has led to the development of the written text in the form of delayed dialogue, and in the form of instant dialogue, but in written form.

The results of the study should be further mapped to existing concepts of media space and concepts of the information space in the context of their rapprochement and merger that will allow us to conclude about the viability of the concept of UIIS. We believe that the adoption of this concept will take place at the intersection of journalism, information theory, linguistics, and anthropology. (Adams, 2009)

So, coming from understanding change, UIIS, trends, language and forms of expression, tendencies to graphic quality, simplicity and the use of icons instead of language means of expression, we come to the understanding that a letter as such is possible within the instant written dialogue in social networks, in the form of sms-messages, correspondence, chat rooms, forums, and publish public blog posts, pages printed, and other types of media.

Conclusion

The results of our study show that modern epistolary is considered not only from the position of complete lack of its integration into information and media space, i.e. for whatever reasons, epistolary future is regarded only from the point of view of language and literary culture development, but also without regard to its transformation and adaptation to modern conditions.

Many scientists note with regret that letters are becoming a history, however they do not realize that maybe, these are not the letters that are becoming a matter of the past but just their external cover – paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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