



"Қазақстан және Орталық Азия тарихы институты"
жауапкершілігі шектеулі серіктестігі

Scientific Journal

"CENTRAL ASIAN COURIER"

"ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ КУРЬЕРІ"

ғылыми журнал

Научный журнал

"ЦЕНТРАЛЬНО-АЗИАТСКИЙ КУРЬЕР"

2 № 3 (2026)



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Оутрам Алан — доктор археологических наук, профессор департамента археологии и истории университета Эксетере (Великобритания, г. Эксетер).

Симтиков Жомарт Кудайбергенович — кандидат исторических наук, доктор политических наук, заведующий кафедрой политологии и социально-философских дисциплин Казахского национального педагогического университета имени Абая.

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ОТВЕТСТВЕННЫЙ РЕДАКТОР

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НАУЧНЫЕ РЕДАКТОРЫ

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ТЕХНИЧЕСКИЙ СЕКРЕТАРЬ

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Published in the Republic of Kazakhstan
Scientific Journal
“Central Asian courier”

Has been issued as a journal since 2025
ISSN 3105-241X.

Vol. 2. Is. 3, pp. 537–549, 2026
Journal homepage: <https://sjcascourier.com/>

FTAXP / MPHTI / IRSTI 03.01.29
https://doi.org/10.64970/3105-241X_2026_2_3_537-549

EXTREME JOURNALISM AND DIGITAL REPRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL EVENTS

Tergembay Kenzhegul^{1*}, *Beisembayeva Altynay*²

¹ L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, (Astana, Kazakhstan), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD),
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2441-9003>. E-mail: tergembay@mail.ru

² Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, (Georgia, Tbilisi), student,
 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4441-677X>. E-mail: 324750@mail.ru

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Abstract. *Introduction.* This article theoretically analyzes the role of extreme journalism in the digital representation of historical events. In the current digital era, the flow of information is rapid and multi-formatted, and the role of media in shaping public perception and the memory of historical events has significantly increased. *Purpose and objectives.* The study focuses on Zhanaozen (2011) and January (2022) Events, examining their structural and narrative features in media representation. The aim is to identify the functions of extreme journalism in shaping historical memory and constructing historical truth in a digital environment. *Materials and methods.* The research employs discourse analysis, narrative reconstruction, and media-historical comparison. *Results.* The findings indicate that the 2011 events were predominantly disseminated through traditional mass media in a limited format, whereas the 2022 events were documented and transmitted synchronously via social media and digital platforms, resulting in fragmented and emotionally intensified narratives. This difference directly affects the mechanisms of historical memory formation. *Conclusion.* In conclusion, extreme journalism in the digital era functions not only as an information source but also as an institution shaping historical discourse. Digital representation accelerates historical time, dramatizes events in the media space, and transforms society's perception of historical reality.

Keywords: extreme journalism, digital representation, historical memory, mediatization, narrative, January events, Zhanaozen events.

For citation: Tergembay K., Beisembayeva A. Extreme Journalism and Digital Representation of Historical Events // Scientific Journal “Central Asian courier”. 2026. Vol. 2. No. 3. Pp. 537–549. (In Eng.). DOI: 10.64970/3105-241X_2026_2_3_537-549

ЭКСТРЕМАЛДЫ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА ЖӘНЕ ТАРИХИ ОҚИҒАЛАРДЫҢ ЦИФРЛЫҚ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯСЫ

Тергембай Кенжегүл^{1*}, *Бейсембаева Алтынай*²

^{1*}Л. Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, (Астана, Қазақстан), философия ғылымдарының докторы (PhD),

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2441-9003>. E-mail: tergembay@mail.ru

²Иване Джавахишвили атындағы Тбилиси мемлекеттік университеті, (Грузия, Тбилиси), студент,

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4441-677X>. E-mail: 324750@mail.ru

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Аңдатпа. *Kipicne.* Мақалада экстремалды журналистиканың тарихи оқиғаларды цифрлық кеңістікте репрезентациялау үдерісіндегі рөлі теориялық тұрғыда талданады. Қазіргі цифрлық дәуірде ақпарат ағыны жылдам әрі көп форматты болып, тарихи оқиғалардың қоғамдық қабылдануы мен есте сақталуында медианың рөлі айтарлықтай артып отыр. *Мақсаты мен міндеттері.* Зерттеу нысаны ретінде Жаңаөзен оқиғасы мен Қаңтар оқиғасы алынып, олардың медиалық бейнеленуіндегі құрылымдық және нарративтік айырмашылықтар салыстырмалы түрде қарастырылады. *Мақаланың мақсаты* – экстремалды журналистиканың тарихи жадыны қалыптастырудағы және тарихи шындықты цифрлық форматта конструкциялаудағы функциясын айқындау. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеу барысында дискурстық талдау, нарративтік реконструкция және медиа-тарихи салыстыру әдістері қолданылды. *Нәтижелер.* Нәтижесінде 2011 жылғы оқиғалардың негізінен дәстүрлі ақпарат құралдары арқылы шектеулі форматта таралғаны, ал 2022 жылғы оқиғалардың әлеуметтік желілер мен цифрлық платформалар арқылы синхронды түрде архивтеліп, фрагменттелген және эмоционалды сипат алғаны анықталды. Бұл айырмашылық тарихи жадының қалыптасу механизмдеріне тікелей ықпал етеді. *Қорытынды.* Қорытындыда экстремалды журналистиканың цифрлық дәуірде тек ақпарат таратушы емес, тарихи дискурсты қалыптастырушы институтқа айналғаны негізделеді. Цифрлық репрезентация тарихи уақыттың жеделдеуіне, оқиғаның медиалық драматизациясына және қоғамдық қабылдаудың трансформациясына әсер ететіні тұжырымдалады.

Түйін сөздер: экстремалды журналистика, цифрлық репрезентация, тарихи жады, медиатизация, нарратив, Қаңтар оқиғасы, Жаңаөзен оқиғасы.

Дәйексөз үшін: Тергембай К., Бейсембаева А. Экстремалды журналистика және тарихи оқиғалардың цифрлық репрезентациясы // Scientific Journal “Central Asian courier”. 2026. Т. 2. № 3. 537–549 бб. (Ағылш.). DOI: 10.64970/3105-241X_2026_2_3_537-549

ЭКСТРЕМАЛЬНАЯ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА И ЦИФРОВАЯ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦИЯ ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ СОБЫТИЙ

Тергембай Кенжегүл ^{1*}, Бейсембаева Алтынай²

^{1*}Евразийский национальный университет им. Л. Н. Гумилева, (Астана, Казахстан), доктор философии (PhD),

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2441-9003>. E-mail: tergembay@mail.ru

²Государственный университет имени Иване Джавахишвили, (Грузия, Тбилиси), студент

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4441-677X>. E-mail: 324750@mail.ru

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье теоретически анализируется роль экстремальной журналистики в репрезентации исторических событий в цифровом пространстве. В современную цифровую эпоху поток информации становится быстрым и многоформатным, и роль медиа в формировании общественного восприятия и памяти о исторических событиях значительно возросла. *Цель и задачи.* В качестве объектов исследования рассматриваются Жаңаөзен оқиғасы и Қаңтар оқиғасы, и сравнительно рассматриваются их структурные и нарративные особенности в медийном представлении. *Цель статьи* — выявить функции экстремальной журналистики в формировании исторической памяти и конструировании исторической истины в цифровом формате. *Материалы и методы.* В исследовании использовались дискурсивный анализ, нарративная реконструкция и медиатисторическое сравнение. *Результаты.* Результаты показали, что события 2011 г. распространялись преимущественно через традиционные средства массовой информации в ограниченном формате, а события 2022 г. документировались и транслировались синхронно через социальные сети и цифровые платформы, приобретая фрагментированную и эмоционально насыщенную форму. Эта разница оказывает прямое влияние на механизмы формирования исторической памяти. *Заключение.* В заключение делается вывод, что экстремальная журналистика в цифровую эпоху выступает не только как источник информации, но и как институт формирования исторического дискурса. Цифровая репрезентация ускоряет историческое время, драматизирует события в медиапространстве и трансформирует восприятие обществом исторической реальности.

Ключевые слова: экстремальная журналистика, цифровая репрезентация, историческая память, медиатизация, нарратив, события января 2022 г., события в Жаңаөзене.

Для цитирования: Тергембай К., Бейсембаева А. Экстремальная журналистика и цифровая репрезентация исторических событий // Scientific Journal “Central Asian courier”. 2026. Т. 2. № 3. С. 537–549. (На англ.). DOI: 10.64970/3105-241X_2026_2_3_537-549

Introduction. In the twenty-first century, the processes of the formation and interpretation of historical events have undergone a fundamental transformation. Whereas in traditional historiography an event was reconstructed on the basis of archival materials and official documents, in the digital era historical reality is simultaneously constructed, disseminated, and archived within the media space. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident during events of an extreme nature. Social conflicts, mass protests, states of emergency and political crises lead to the concentration of information flows, the intensification of emotional narratives, and the rapid formation of public opinion.

From this perspective, extreme journalism appears not merely as a mechanism of information transmission but as a factor shaping historical discourse. It does not confine itself to recording events; rather, it integrates them into specific narrative structures, defines semantic emphases, and constructs interpretative models that become embedded in public memory. The development of digital platforms has further complicated this process, weakening the traditional boundaries between journalism and history. As a result, a historical event transforms into a multivocal and fragmented text that exists synchronously within the media space.

Two major socio-political events in the contemporary history of Kazakhstan—the Zhanaozen events and the January events—make it possible to identify two distinct media models of historical representation. The events of 2011 were primarily covered in a limited format through traditional mass media and only in subsequent years began to be reinterpreted within the digital sphere. By contrast, the events of 2022 were simultaneously documented, disseminated, and publicly debated through social networks, streaming broadcasts, and citizen journalism. This difference directly influenced the mechanisms of historical memory formation, the structure of narratives, and the dynamics of public perception.

Post-Soviet authoritarian regimes—particularly in Central Asia—have demonstrated a high degree of stability since independence. Explaining the longevity of such regimes solely through traditional

economic or political factors is insufficient, as immaterial and discursive sources of legitimacy also play a decisive role. A resilient authoritarian system requires a hegemonic discourse that is accepted and disseminated by influential social groups. In the case of Kazakhstan, this discourse promotes alternative political imaginaries to political opponents, thereby complicating their efforts to gain popular support. Although state control is challenged through Internet platforms, social networks and blogging simultaneously enable the authorities to reproduce their hegemonic discourse. Even after the violent events in Zhanaozen in 2011, key elements of the official discourse were reproduced in bloggers' posts, demonstrating that the official narrative retained its dominant status and that its influence did not diminish despite the widespread use of social media (Lewis, 2016).

Under conditions of the mediatization of history, extreme journalism not only produces a chronicle of events but also dramatizes them through emotional and visual codes. Digital algorithms determine the speed of information dissemination, the scale of visibility, and the focal points of public attention. Consequently, a historical event begins to be perceived not merely as a fact but as a media product. This phenomenon leads to a transformation of the very concept of the historical source and poses new methodological challenges for researchers.

The aim of this article is to provide a theoretical substantiation of the role of extreme journalism in the representation of historical events within the digital space and to demonstrate, through the example of two historical events, the differences between media models. The concepts of historical memory, narrative, and mediatization serve as the conceptual framework of the study.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in conceptualizing extreme journalism as a mechanism of historical memory formation and in interpreting digital representation as a factor accelerating historical time. The article compares the Zhanaozen and January events in terms of media structure, narrative organization, and the degree of digital archiving.

Thus, in the digital era, extreme journalism is viewed not merely as an institution that reflects historical events but as one that constructs and consolidates them within public consciousness.

Materials and Methods. This study was conducted as a theoretical inquiry and is aimed at the conceptual analysis of the digital representation of historical events within the context of extreme journalism. The object of the research comprises two socio-political events in the contemporary history of Kazakhstan – the Zhanaozen events and the January events. These events belong to different temporal, technological, and media environments, which makes it possible to comparatively examine the evolution of historical representation.

The methodological framework of the study is grounded in the theory of mediatization, the concept of historical memory, and approaches to narrative analysis. The concept of the mediatization of history is employed to explain how historical events are constructed through information and communication technologies and subsequently consolidated in public consciousness. The theory of historical memory enables an assessment of the role of media in shaping public perception of events. Through narrative analysis, the structure of media storytelling, semantic emphases, and interpretative models are identified.

The following methods were applied in the course of the research:

- Discourse analysis – used to identify the specific features of media representations of extreme events, the conceptual apparatus employed, and evaluative tones. This method made it possible to uncover not only the factual content of information but also its underlying semantic structure.
- Comparative historical analysis – aimed at revealing structural differences between the media environments of 2011 and 2022. This approach enabled a comparison in terms of channels of dissemination, the speed of information circulation, the level of audience participation, and the nature of archiving.
- Narrative reconstruction – applied to determine the logic of media storytelling in each period, including elements of dramatization and symbolic codes. This approach allowed for a theoretical description of the mechanisms through which historical events are structured within media discourse.

- Conceptual modeling – employed to systematize the interrelationship between extreme journalism and historical memory. As a result, a theoretical model was proposed: historical event → media representation → digital archive → public memory.

The research is not oriented toward large-scale quantitative analysis of empirical data but rather toward a theoretical interpretation of structural transformations within the media space. Accordingly, as research material, publications from traditional mass media, content forms on social networks, online broadcasts, and representational models on digital platforms are considered in a generalized analytical framework.

Methodologically, the article is based on the expansion of the concept of the historical source. Media texts formed within the digital environment are treated as supplementary sources for historical reconstruction, with due consideration given to their interpretative character and algorithmic influence. This approach makes it possible to analyze extreme journalism not merely as an informational function but as a social institution that contributes to the construction of historical reality. Thus, the combination of methods applied in this study is aimed at providing a comprehensive description of the digital representation of historical events and at theoretically substantiating the role of extreme journalism in the formation of historical memory.

Discussion. The findings of the study demonstrate that in the digital era, extreme journalism transforms not only the form of representing historical events but also their semantic structure. This transformation primarily affects the logic of perceiving historical time. Whereas previously a historical event was systematized and reconstructed on the basis of archival sources only after a certain temporal distance, in the digital environment it is formed synchronously. Under such conditions, journalism becomes not merely a recorder of events but a mechanism for consolidating them within public consciousness.

In the case of the Zhanaozen events, the information flow was largely regulated through traditional mass media. The limited dissemination of information, the predominance of official discourse, and its subsequent reinterpretation in the digital sphere contributed to the formation of a centralized model of historical narrative. Within this model, the structure of interpretation remained relatively consistent and subject to institutional control.

By contrast, the January events unfolded under conditions of the full dominance of digital media. Live broadcasts on social networks, the active involvement of citizen journalism, and user-generated content produced a decentralized model of historical representation. In this context, the event was simultaneously presented through multiple interpretations, resulting in fragmented narratives. This situation reinforced the multivocality of historical reality and foregrounded emotional reaction and visual dramatization.

The influence of digital algorithms has also become a significant factor in the formation of historical memory. The frequency of visibility, number of views, and dynamics of dissemination shape the direction of public perception. Consequently, a historical event begins to be perceived as a product dependent upon media logic. This phenomenon weakens the traditional boundary between history and journalism and expands the very notion of the historical source.

In extreme journalism, the predominance of the emotional component becomes particularly evident. Elements of dramatization employed during emergency situations, the repetition of visual footage, and the intensification of symbolic markers accelerate the transformation of events into traumatic memory. In such circumstances, media texts not only provide information but also construct collective emotion. This, in turn, exerts a long-term influence on the public interpretation of historical events. Moreover, digital representation disrupts the notion of an "end point" of a historical event. Whereas in the traditional model an event was limited to a specific chronological period, in the digital space it acquires an extended media life through continuous discussion and republication. This phenomenon illustrates the acceleration of historical time and the destabilization of memory.

In the contemporary global information environment, discussions of extreme journalism must take into account the profound influence of new media, including advanced technologies and social networks in the context of globalization. The statement by Aidos Sarym, a deputy of the Parliament

of the Republic of Kazakhstan, that “part of the spilled blood is the fault of social media users” generated wide public debate and significant resonance. Notably, prior to the January tragedy in Kazakhstan, on September 15, 2021, Aidos Sarym had proposed to the authorities the restriction of social networks. As a result, media outlets reported under headlines such as “The draft law on restricting social networks proposed by Aidos Sarym has been approved.” Specifically, the Mazhilis considered the draft law “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts on the Protection of Children’s Rights,” which contained provisions concerning the restriction of social networks and messaging platforms without official representation in Kazakhstan. This was reported by the website Vlast, as cited by Azattyq Radiosy (Sarym, 2023). According to the deputy, these norms were intended to combat cyberbullying and protect children’s rights.

Nevertheless, critical assessments by foreign experts and politicians regarding the openness of Kazakhstan’s Internet space and citizens’ freedom to use it have also been articulated. In particular, international organizations have repeatedly criticized Kazakhstan in relation to Internet freedom. The international human rights organization Freedom House, in its most recent report on Internet freedom, classified Kazakhstan among the countries where “the Internet, social networks, and communication platforms are frequently blocked,” where “political, social, and religious content is restricted,” and where “bloggers, human rights defenders, Internet users, or critics of the authorities are often persecuted, prosecuted, or attacked” (currenttime.tv, 2023).

At the beginning of 2022, the “January events” in Kazakhstan attracted global attention. News services in different countries framed this extreme situation in varying ways. Several states, citing alleged human rights violations, called upon the Kazakhstani authorities to halt the violence. In particular, the discussion of Kazakhstan’s situation at the European Parliament acquired distinct political significance, as Western policymakers reportedly approved the issue of imposing sanctions on Kazakhstan for serious human rights violations. According to reports, the European Parliament adopted a resolution stating that the Kazakhstani authorities had responded to protests, including peaceful demonstrations, with “disproportionate violence”; had used “vague and overly broad” definitions of “terrorism” and “extremism” to restrict freedom of expression and peaceful dissent; and had employed “excessive, unnecessary, and indiscriminate force, including lethal force.” President Tokayev’s “shoot without warning” order was described in the resolution as a violation of Kazakhstan’s international legal obligations to respect and protect the right to life (azattyq.org, 2023).

On January 15, the Prosecutor General’s Office of Kazakhstan reported that since the beginning of the state of emergency, the bodies of 225 individuals, including 19 police officers and military personnel, had been delivered to morgues. However, the names of the deceased were not disclosed. It was further stated that 175 of the 225 individuals had died in medical institutions. On January 18, the Minister of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ajar Giniyat, announced at a briefing that two additional injured persons in intensive care had died. Thus, the official preliminary death toll reached 227 (Kosay, 2023). The identities of deceased civilians were likewise not publicly released, a fact that was cited as raising concerns about the transparency of information in Kazakhstan.

The People’s Writer of Kazakhstan, Mukhtar Magauin, in commenting on the January events, drew a comparative parallel between the 2011 events in Kazakhstan (Zhanaozen) and those in England (London). He referred to the riots that occurred on August 7, 2011, in the Tottenham district of London, when tens of thousands of young people took to the streets following the fatal police shooting of a young man. According to his account, although buildings and vehicles were set on fire and clashes with police took place, no shots were fired by the authorities during the unrest, which lasted two to three days and spread beyond London to other major cities. Law enforcement dispersed the crowds, made arrests, and later prosecuted some participants, yet without resulting in fatalities. In contrast, he criticized the conduct of Kazakhstani police during the January events (Magauin, 2023).

In an article published on the Malim.kz website titled “They Initially Believed in Kosanov. Where Did the ‘Extremists’ of January Come From?”, Umay Beimaral argued that the version attributing the unrest to the planned actions of religious extremists does not withstand critical scrutiny.

Similarly, sociologist and head of the PaperLab research center, Serik Beisembayev, expressed skepticism regarding the authorities' claim that religious extremists were responsible for the January protests. He noted that the religious sphere in Kazakhstan is subject to strict state control and that activities fitting the description of “destructive movements” are typically monitored by security services. According to his critique, the authorities opted to employ the narrative of “religious extremism” as a convenient explanatory frame in a society characterized by low levels of trust and heightened xenophobia, thereby constructing a “mythical internal enemy.”

Although official mass media did not report instances of abuse or deaths of detainees in correctional facilities, social networks became a continuous channel for the circulation of alternative accounts. Kazakh-language digital content included numerous video recordings alleging brutality and excessive force by law enforcement officers. One oil worker, Muratbai Zhumagaliev, argued that the failure to conduct a proper investigation of the December 2011 Zhanaozen tragedy contributed to the recurrence of violence in January 2022. In his view, the normalization of practices such as the use of live ammunition, arbitrary detention, and torture reflected a pattern of state response to public dissent (Toiken, 2023).

Finally, as noted by the Russian political thinker Nikolay Chernyshevsky, rulers who fail to heed the voice of the majority and turn away from a population striving for justice may, sooner or later, face profound shock and disgrace (livelib.ru, 2023). When conflicts between the public and the authorities escalate into bloodshed and mass unrest, not only do existing “rules of the game” within a society come into question, but new social and political forms may also emerge.

The protest actions that took place in Kazakhstan in 2022 (also referred to as “Bloody January,” the “January events,” or the “January tragedy”) began as demonstrations triggered by the sudden increase in liquefied gas prices (Zhandayeva and Zhanmukanova, 2024). A peaceful rally that started in the city of Zhanaozen in early January 2022 spread across the region and escalated into nationwide unrest, leaving a tragic imprint on the country's history under the designation “January events.” From January 5 to 19, 2022, a nationwide state of emergency was declared in the Republic of Kazakhstan. During this period, 70 checkpoints operated across the country, and 2,500 troops were deployed from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev officially stated that in Almaty alone, twenty thousand militants had carried out attacks. The Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan initiated criminal proceedings under two articles: the commission of terrorist acts and the organization and participation in mass riots.

The transformation of a peaceful protest in Zhanaozen – initially focused on socio-economic demands—into nationwide unrest highlights the significant influence of new media, particularly social networks, on public mobilization. Information about citizens gathering in Zhanaozen spread not through traditional media but primarily via social networking platforms. The speed of dissemination facilitated active civic engagement, with individuals, public activists, independent journalists, and bloggers openly expressing political positions. A substantial portion of society regarded the demands of the residents of Zhanaozen as legitimate and expressed solidarity. For instance, blogger Askhat Kassengali wrote: “We should have resolved our own issues by ourselves! Let sovereignty not slip away! I oppose the entry of foreign troops.” Another social media user, Madi Ayimbetov, stated on his Facebook page: “When the people's accumulated anger over the years overflows, the authorities must make a decisive and just decision.” Among well-known lawyers, support for peaceful protesters was also voiced; for example, attorney Lazzat Akhatova wrote: “If legal pressure is exerted against the people of Mangystau who have taken to the square, I believe that lawyers who truly care about the country will not remain silent. Let us stand with the people and provide legal assistance where possible. #Zhanaozen_Aktau_together.” One comment under this post declared: “If Kazakhs unite, they are stronger than a mountain flood.” Such socio-political posts significantly influenced public consciousness during the crisis.

The January events drew the attention not only of Kazakhstani society but also of the international community. Major global powers expressed concern about the situation. For example, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated, following a conversation with his Kazakhstani

counterpart Mukhtar Tileuberdi, that the United States supported resolving the crisis through peaceful and rights-respecting means (Parker and Ilyushina, 2024). At the same time, allegations circulated regarding the entry of foreign militants-numbering twenty thousand – into Kazakhstan. Melinda Haring, Deputy Director of the Eurasia Center at the Atlantic Council, described such accusations as unfounded. An article published in *The Washington Post* noted that during the uprising there was limited verified and direct information about demonstrators and participants, emphasizing that Internet access in Kazakhstan was significantly restricted and foreign journalists were denied entry (Parker and Ilyushina, 2024).

Indeed, during the peak of unrest, Internet access across the country was severely limited, and social networks were inaccessible. Consequently, the public relied primarily on traditional media for information. State television channels broadcast continuous updates on the state of emergency, counterterrorism measures, and governmental decisions. Official statements by representatives of law enforcement agencies became the principal sources of information. According to reports, President Tokayev referred to the protesters as a “group of terrorists,” stated that Kazakhstan was under attack, authorized security forces to “shoot without warning,” and requested the intervention of a Russia-led military alliance. The government also attempted to suppress demonstrations by blocking social networks and messaging applications, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and WeChat, and by declaring a state of emergency, under which unauthorized public protests were deemed illegal (Bilefsky, 2024).

On January 15, 2022, the Prosecutor General’s Office reported that at least 225 people had died and 4,578 had been injured, including civilians; among the injured were 3,393 police officers and soldiers, and 19 members of the security forces were killed (azattyq.org, 2024). Subsequently, on August 16, 2022, the authorized body published on its official website a list of those who had died during the January events, indicating a total of 238 individuals. It was noted that, in accordance with criminal procedural legislation and taking into account the opinions of relatives, further details regarding the circumstances of death would not be disclosed (gov.kz, 2024).

Information about the state of emergency and its termination was disseminated via the official presidential website, while national Internet outlets-including Tengrinews.kz, Azattyq Radiosy, Kazinform, Malim.kz, Informburo, Sputnik Kazakhstan, inBusiness.kz, and Zakon.kz – regularly published updates. The National Security Committee, the Prosecutor General’s Office, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other authorized bodies posted information within their respective competencies on official websites. For example, the Prosecutor General’s Office announced on February 19, 2022, the initiation of a pre-trial investigation against former Minister of Defense Murat Bektanov under Article 452 of the Criminal Code (inaction), and on February 20, 2022, reported his detention on suspicion of committing the offense, noting that further information would not be disclosed in the interests of the investigation (gov.kz, 2024). The National Security Committee also published notices regarding the lowering of the terrorist threat level in connection with the January events (gov.kz, 2024).

The January events remain a subject requiring continued scholarly investigation, and the publication of related data persists. For instance, according to a report published on May 15, 2023, by the official website of 24.kz, eleven employees of the National Security Committee were held criminally liable in connection with the events. This was announced by Marat Qalqabaev during a plenary session of the Mazhilis (24.kz, 2024), who indicated that internal investigations had been conducted following the tragedy.

The January events also became a central theme in the national press. Extensive analytical articles aimed at addressing unresolved public questions have been published. One notable example is the interview with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev titled “As a Forward-Looking Nation, We Must Look Only Ahead,” published on January 3, 2024, in the newspaper *Egemen Qazaqstan*. In this extensive interview, the President stated that after assuming office in 2019, Kazakhstan embarked on democratizing the political system, liberalizing public life, and demonopolizing the economy. According to his account, certain influential figures perceived these reforms as a threat to their

entrenched positions and ultimately sought to reverse them, allegedly preparing from mid-2021 to exploit socio-economic discontent – particularly the abrupt increase in liquefied gas prices—to destabilize the state (Kamzabekuly, 2024). In the interviewer’s assessment, the January events marked a turning point that opened a new era in Kazakhstan’s historical development.

Regimes typically possess a multifaceted repertoire of repressive instruments. When confronted with public criticism, they may employ not only overt or covert forms of coercion, but also indirect forms of repression commonly referred to as “channeling.” Channeling mechanisms do not necessarily aim at the outright suppression of dissent; rather, they seek to redirect, manage, and institutionalize it within controllable boundaries.

Empirical evidence from Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, illustrates how these strategies operate in practice. During the 2011 Zhanaozen events and the January 2022 unrest, the authorities combined overt coercion with channeling mechanisms in an effort to maintain social stability. Similarly, in response to the 2016 land reform protests, repressive measures reflected an approximately balanced use of coercive and channeling tactics.

One of the most visible channeling mechanisms is elite delegation. In such cases, state officials or local authorities encourage protest participants to relocate from public spaces to non-public venues, to articulate collective demands through formal institutional channels, or to engage in negotiated formats. This approach reduces the scale and potential radicalization of protests while preserving the regime’s control over the process. The Kazakhstani case demonstrates that authoritarian regimes do not rely exclusively on overt coercion; they can also sustain stability through managed negotiation and the institutionalization of dissent (Heuer & Hierman, 2022).

At the same time, social media and blogging platforms function as ambivalent instruments. On the one hand, they facilitate civic mobilization and the diffusion of alternative narratives. On the other hand, regimes can appropriate these platforms to reproduce official discourse and reinforce their claims to legitimacy. In consolidated authoritarian regimes in Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, civil society has traditionally faced structural constraints. Nevertheless, certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have gradually advanced alternative perspectives that challenge state narratives (Knox & Sharipova, 2024). This dynamic was particularly evident in the contexts of Zhanaozen (2011) and January 2022, where younger generations utilized social media platforms to articulate dissent and publicly express elements of protest.

Although civil society and blogging discourse do not fully replace official information models, they contribute to the circulation of alternative ideas and sustain critical perspectives within society. A comparative analysis of the Zhanaozen and January events reveals the evolution of what may be termed “extreme journalism”: a transition from a centralized information model to an algorithmic and networked one. This transformation is not merely technical but epistemological in nature. The mechanisms through which historical truth is constructed have changed. The meaning of political events is no longer shaped exclusively by official institutions but increasingly emerges through multi-vocal digital narratives.

In this sense, extreme journalism has become an integral component of historical discourse in the digital age. It not only documents events but also defines their public significance, shapes their narrative framing, and influences the direction of collective memory. Consequently, the study of digital representation should be regarded as a necessary methodological direction in contemporary historiography.

Results. The findings demonstrate that extreme journalism qualitatively transforms the model through which historical events are represented in the digital age. A comparative analysis reveals that the Zhanaozen events and the January 2022 unrest differ substantially in terms of media architecture, narrative organization, and the mechanisms through which historical memory is constructed.

First, a clear divergence is observed in the architecture of information dissemination. During the Zhanaozen events, information flows were primarily mediated through traditional mass media. Representation was centralized, with official discourse occupying a dominant position. The pace of

publication was relatively slow and filtered, resulting in the formation of a historical narrative largely shaped within the framework of institutional control.

By contrast, during the January 2022 events, the structure of information dissemination shifted toward a networked and decentralized model. Social media platforms, messaging applications, and streaming services enabled real-time broadcasting, while citizen journalism assumed a prominent role. This transformation facilitated the synchronous documentation of events and their simultaneous circulation in multiple, often competing, interpretations.

Second, significant differences emerged in narrative organization. Media portrayals of the Zhanaozen events were comparatively coherent and linear in structure. In contrast, the January events were represented through fragmented, emotionally charged, and visually dramatized narratives. This resulted in the construction of a multi-variant model of historical truth, characterized by competing frames and interpretive plurality.

Third, the mechanism of historical memory formation underwent a substantive shift. In the case of Zhanaozen, collective memory was consolidated retrospectively through subsequent discussions, reinterpretations, and republications. Historical interpretation stabilized over time. Conversely, the January events exemplified a model of “instant memory,” enabled by digital archiving practices. In this model, symbolic meanings and public evaluations begin to crystallize before the event itself has concluded, producing a form of memory that is contemporaneous with the unfolding crisis.

Fourth, the role of algorithmic mediation became evident. On digital platforms, metrics such as view counts, trending algorithms, and dissemination speed functioned as indicators of perceived public significance. Consequently, the level of media visibility directly influenced patterns of public reception. Algorithmic amplification thus emerged as a structural factor shaping not only information flows but also the hierarchy of historical relevance.

Overall, the results indicate that the evolution of extreme journalism has led to a transformation in the very form of historical representation. The transition from a traditional media model to a digital, algorithmic, and networked one has altered the nature of historical sources themselves. Historical events are no longer solely objects of retrospective reconstruction; they increasingly take shape as contemporaneously produced media texts. These findings provide a theoretical basis for conceptualizing extreme journalism as an institutional actor in the construction of historical discourse in the digital era.

Table 1 – Comparative Media Characteristics of the Zhanaozen (2011) and January (2022) Events

Criterion	Zhanaozen (2011)	January (2022)
Media Format	Traditional mass media	Digital platforms
Memory Formation	Retrospective	Synchronous / real-time
Narrative Structure	Centralized	Decentralized
Emotional Impact	Through subsequent discussion	Immediate online reaction

The tabular comparison clearly highlights the conceptual differences between the media models of the two events. In terms of media format, the Zhanaozen events were disseminated primarily through traditional mass media and presented within a centralized communicative system. By contrast, the January 2022 events unfolded across digital platforms in a synchronous manner, producing a decentralized and networked narrative structure.

With regard to memory formation, the historical interpretation of the Zhanaozen events developed retrospectively and acquired a relatively regulated and stabilized character over time. In the case of the January events, however, the media image was constructed in real time and began to stabilize through immediate online public reactions. Memory formation thus occurred concurrently with the unfolding of events rather than through delayed reflection.

Differences are also evident in narrative structure. The Zhanaozen events were framed through a centralized and relatively linear narrative. The January events, in contrast, were represented through fragmented, multi-variant, and emotionally intensified narratives. A divergence is likewise observable in terms of emotional impact: whereas Zhanaozen entered public consciousness largely through subsequent discussion and reinterpretation, the January events generated immediate emotional responses via online platforms.

This comparative assessment demonstrates that the logic of historical representation has shifted in the digital age. Extreme journalism no longer merely records events; it actively shapes the mechanisms of narrative construction and collective memory formation, underscoring the decisive role of media structures in defining historical meaning.

Conclusion. The digital age has fundamentally transformed the ways in which historical events are perceived and interpreted. The findings indicate that extreme journalism has moved beyond its conventional function of information dissemination and has become an institution that shapes historical discourse and directs collective memory. Particularly during crises and states of emergency, media representation develops simultaneously with the structuring of historical reality itself.

The cases of Zhanaozen (2011) and January (2022) clearly illustrate the evolution of historical representation. The 2011 events were embedded within a traditional media model characterized by centralized narration and institutional control. In contrast, the 2022 events evolved within a digital networked environment, producing a decentralized, fragmented, and synchronously constructed historical text. This transformation directly affected the speed, stability, and interpretive plurality of historical memory formation.

The study demonstrates that digital representation accelerates historical time while simultaneously extending the media life cycle of events. Digital archiving, algorithmic selection, and visual dramatization contribute to the perception of historical events not merely as factual occurrences but as media constructs. As a result, the very concept of a historical source expands to include social media content, live streams, and user-generated texts as integral components of historical reconstruction.

Moreover, the intensification of the emotional dimension in extreme journalism enhances the symbolic character of historical narratives. This phenomenon reinforces the role of media in shaping collective memory and weakens the traditional boundary between history and journalism. In this regard, the study of extreme events within digital environments emerges as a central methodological task for contemporary historiography.

In sum, extreme journalism in the digital era functions not only as a medium of representation but also as an agent of construction and stabilization of historical meaning within public consciousness. Consequently, historical research must incorporate systematic analysis of media representation, algorithmic influence, and digital memory mechanisms. Such an approach broadens the source base of modern historiography and enables a deeper understanding of the processes through which historical reality is formed.

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Редакцияның мекен-жайы:

010000, Қазақстан Республикасы, Астана қаласы, Қабанбай батыр даңғ., 11/5
Қазақстан және Орталық Азия тарихы институты
Scientific Journal “Central Asian courier” редакциясы

Сайтқа сілтеме: <https://sjcacourier.com/>
Тел.: +7 (776) 301-11-11 (Ұялы телефон)
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E-mail: hkca.kz@gmail.com

Журнал Қазақстан Республикасы Мәдениет және ақпарат министрлігінде
2025 ж. 20 маусымда тіркеліп, № KZ20VPY00122471 куәлігіне ие болды.

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көшірмелерге түсіргенде міндетті түрде журналға сілтеме жасау қажет.