

Network and Traditional Forms of Political Communication in Modern Russia

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Abstract

The article comprises a comparative analysis of network and traditional forms of political communication. It demonstrates that globalization and the Internet have utterly changed political communication *per se*. Today we can witness both the increase in the number of actors in the network and the crisis of traditional political institutions. As a result, the public on its own creates opinion leaders in the network. So political communications have turned into a dialogue, rather than one-way broadcasting, as they used to be. The hypothesis is that as a result of globalization processes, political communication in its traditional sense gives way to network forms of interaction, which are able to provide the public with more personalized relevant information as quickly as possible. In the context of Russian politics, the transformations of political communication have resulted in decline of traditional means, giving way to the new media.

Keywords: political communication, means of political communication, network media

The large-scale transformations taking place in the world over the past few decades are connected with the technological revolution. These processes give impetus to the development of a global information society. The processes of comprehensive globalization have influence political communication means changing. So traditional forms of political communication are being replaced by network ones.

The relevance of the topic depends on the fact that there is a need to analyze the new reality of political processes, comparing new and traditional means of political communication.

The purpose of the work is to conduct a comparative analysis of network and traditional forms of political communication, for their potential, opportunities and main characteristics, as well as to study the practice of using network forms of communication in the context of modern Russian reality.

The research hypothesis is that political communication in its traditional classical sense differs significantly in its characteristics and main features from network political communication, which is forming in the era of universal globalization and digitalization. The change of the models of information transfer and creation is crucial.

A lot of attention was paid previously to the study of various aspects and issues of political communication. Consequently, a number of basic scientific concepts and approaches were created. Among them, the concept of mass communication and political propaganda developed by G. Lasswell, the theory of information society -by M. McLuhan. This work is also based on modern concepts of framing, priming, and agenda setting.

One of the primary problems that occupy the modern scientific community is to determine the role and place of political communication in the political system as a whole. According to the position of classical concepts, political communication is a feature of the political system, its function. However, if we take into account the fact that in the modern a rapid global development of information and communication technologies is observed, the transformation of the political sphere, political communication is understood differently. It is considered as an absolutely independent phenomenon, as a process¹. A follower of this theory is Professor of

¹ Solovyov A. I. political Science: Political theory, political technologies-Moscow: 2000. - 559 p.

Moscow State University A. I. Solovyov. There are many definitions of political communication in the academic community. According to Schwarzenberg, political communication is understood as a way of reaching an agreement between individuals, as well as between those governing and the governed². According to other definitions, it is a way of unfolding a logical sequence of political events³. According to foreign researchers, political communication includes the entire range of informal communication processes taking place in society⁴.

Network political communication is a new form of political communication, the main distinguishing feature of which is the elimination of borders between interpersonal, group and mass communication. Among other features is the fact that online political communication is highly personalized, so the content of messages is individual.

Political communication performs a number of functions, including: public control over the activities of state bodies, articulating public interests, raising the level of political culture and political education, setting agenda and state priorities⁵.

In the modern world the Internet is a special socio-political space. As a result of its development and the crisis of traditional political institutions, modern citizens, mainly young people, prefer new channels of political communication and forms of activity. The political potential of the Internet and mainly social networks provides a large number of opportunities for political activity. The public independently forms opinion leaders in social networks. This phenomenon helps to increase the confidence in leadership⁶.

Old and new tools for political communication.

² Schwarzenberg R.-Zh. Political sociology: in 3 hours-M., 1992

³ Political process: main aspects and methods of analysis. / Ed. Meleshkina E. Yu. - M., - 304s.

⁴ Pye L. Political Communication // The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Institutions. - Oxford; New York, 1987. - p. 442

⁵ Dzyaloshinsky I. M. Civil communications and public policy [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.dzyalosh.ru/comm-stati.shtml>

⁶ Volodenkov S. V. Features of the Internet as a modern space of political communications // Bulletin of the Moscow state regional University. 2017. no. 4. Pp. 1-13.

According to the latest data provided in the annual compilation «Public opinion» by the Levada center, since 2017 there has been a tendency to reduce confidence in traditional means of political communication, in particular in the print media, radio and television. Moreover, public opinion polls demonstrate that an increasing percentage of the population of the Russian Federation believes that the situation in the field of television, radio and print media has changed for the worse over the past year. Notably there is a rapid growth in the number of Internet and social network users on a regular basis among all ages. An increasing percentage of citizens already live in the reality of web 2.0, what means that they receive all information online. Despite the fact that the percentage of citizens who learn about news in the country and in the world on television, in print newspapers and magazines is gradually decreasing in parallel with the growing popularity of Internet publications, information online channels and social networks, television is still the most popular source of information. It is also noteworthy that print Newspapers and magazines have the least confidence in news coverage⁷.

The statistics provided by the Levada center suggest that traditional media are on the verge of a comprehensive crisis. Therefore, the nature of transferring and creating information is changing. The model of transferring information from the journalist, the politician to the audience is used in the traditional media, so political communication is initiated by the media, acting as a source of information. In online media, the situation is different, the media do not have information and does not control it, now it is the prerogative of the audience. Public creates information itself and rapidly distributes it in the network.

A significant difference between old and new media is that traditional media are based on the principle of unidirectional communication. While network media have recently dramatically changed the perception of how audience connect with

⁷ Public opinion – 2019. Moscow: Levada Center, 2020 – 188 p. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.levada.ru/sbornik-obshhestvennoe-mnenie/obshhestvennoe-mnenie-2019/>

the world. New media provide the audience with the opportunity to initiate political communication setting political agenda⁸.

In the international scientific community, it is generally accepted that new and traditional communication technologies are two media realities to which two fundamentally different concepts are applied⁹. A liberal logic is applied to the old media, which implies a certain level of social responsibility. As for the new media, the libertarian concept is more logical here. The main difference is that traditional media are more tend to self-regulation or self-censorship, while online media are more free and independent. In the last few decades, we can observe the tendance of television and print media to commercialize that is explained by state support and investment funds. For example, a certain print publication, being part of a media group, is obliged to take into account t its sponsors' opinion. Therefore, it is quite logical to assume that new media are beyond the control comparing with the traditional media. However, such freedom and lack of control can serve as a significant reason for special attention from the state. For example, in China there is the most developed system of Internet censorship in the world and in many Arab countries there are bans on social networks. In Russia, control is also being strengthened. On 19.02.2020, amendments to the Federal Communications law and the Federal Information law were adopted, restricting activities in the Internet. The Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications has the authority to independently manage public networks, blocking any resources when threats are made¹⁰.

Despite the new media are widespread they are not still accessible to everyone equally. Though modern society is developing rapidly, the Internet communication network is becoming more widespread, covering a huge number of people.

⁸ Paligorova L. Old Media vs New Media in political communication. Collection: Business. Society. Power. 2010. no. 4. Pp. 113-126 [Electronic resource]. URL: (Microsoft Word - \317\340\370\350\343\356\360\356\342\340_Old_Media_new_Media.doc) (hse.ru)

⁹ New Media: The Press Freedom Dimension. Challenges and Opportunities of New Media for Press Freedom " – Paris, February 14-16, 2007 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001520/152017e.pdf>

¹⁰ Federal Communication Law [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/608767-7>

According to VTSIOM statistics, regions of Russia differ significantly in the number of people who regularly use the Internet. State project promotes the elimination of the digital inequality in the Russian society, but there are still many unsolved problems. Few citizens have the skills to use a computer and have unlimited Internet access. Thus, except for special cases, new media cover a huge territory in terms of population removing territorial and national borders¹¹.

The role of traditional and network media in the modern Russian political communication.

According to present Russian social surveys, television is still the most significant source of information. While newspapers and political magazines are less popular. The main problem of modern political communication is that the traditional media mostly depend on the government, so independent media are virtually non-existent. This is proved by the fact that the state authorities are the founders of most newspapers. As for television, it isn't also politically independent. Since the state fully owns the federal TV channel Russia 2 and has a controlling stake in the 1 channel. Also, Gazprom possesses a controlling stake in NTV, radio Mayak, the ITAR-TASS news Agency and RIA Novosti. While a controlling stake in Gazprom is also owned by the state. Thus, the state has a monopoly on information. Moreover, according to the rating of freedom of speech compiled by "Reporters without borders", the Russian Federation ranks 149th in 2020, after countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, and Pakistan¹². Taking into account the facts presented, it is hardly possible to say that political communication in the country functions in accordance with the norms of democracy.

In a situation of high level of control over old media, according to polls presented by the Levada center, the ratings of major television channels are falling, while the rating of network political communication is gradually growing, especially of the

¹¹ Federal Communication Law [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/608767-7>

¹² 2020 World Press Freedom Index [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (Дата обращения 01.12.2020).

Internet and social networks¹³. According to VTSIOM polls, more than 70% of people use Internet on daily basis¹⁴. The integration of government and politics in the information environment is observed nowadays in Russia. Moreover, the political elite speaks about the importance of Internet communication. For example, until recently, Dmitry Medvedev kept his own blog¹⁵. As well as, many politicians and political parties are actively engaged in blogging, YouTube channels, and social media communities¹⁶. However, still a small percentage of the population compared to the United States follows these blogs, channels, and social media communities.

As for political discussions and debates in social networks, they are also not widespread. So they are unable to act as bargaining chip and as a platform for communicating with the authorities. Thus network political communication in Russia is only at the stage of development.

Conclusion

Taking into account the variety of definitions existing in the academic community, political communication is defined as a way to achieve consensus between individuals, as well as between governing and governed. In the last few decades, its characteristics have largely changed. As well as online forms of political communication have become widespread, which provide public with more personalized and up-to-date information. The article reveals that network forms of political communication tend to eliminate all possible boundaries what contributes to its widespread functioning.

The comparative analysis of network and traditional forms of political communication has found that, first of all, comparing with the traditional ones,

¹³ Public opinion – 2019. Moscow: Levada Center, 2020 – 188 p. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.levada.ru/sbornik-obshhestvennoe-mnenie/obshhestvennoe-mnenie-2019/>

¹⁴ Official website of the all-Russian Center for Public opinion Polls [Electronic resource]. URL: https://wciom.ru/news/ratings/polzovanie_internetom/

¹⁵ Dmitry Medvedev's video blog [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://blog.kremlin.ru>

¹⁶ Community of the Communist party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://vk.com/kprf> (accessed 01.12.2020); community of the LDPR [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://vk.com/ldpr> (date of appeal 07.12.2020); page of the head of Tatarstan Rustam Minnikhanov in Instagram) [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/rusminnikhanov/>

new media have special characteristics. Particularly, the model of political communication has changed, and now the audience can act as the source setting the agenda. While traditional media restrict significantly the process of creating and distributing information to the public. Referring to public opinion polls, it was confirmed that traditional means of political communication are in decline being replaced by the network media. Although the study showed that in Russia, television still plays an important role in the process of political communication. It was revealed that many politicians and political parties are actively engaged in blogging, YouTube channels, and social media communities. Compared to the United States, such phenomena as debates and mass political discussions in social networks are quite rare in Russian political communication.

Thus, it is logical to conclude that in Russia to date new media have comprehensive outreach and power, but they have not yet received a large-scale distribution. However, the practice of direct communication between the authorities and voters in social networks is developing and gaining some ground. New communication technologies in Russia have great potential, but they need a little more time and civic engagement to develop more extensively.

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