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PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AS POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ELEMENT

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Abstract

Political communications in a new information environment have become a basis of both reforming traditional political systems and forming modern social institutions and processes. Political communications change policy and require further reflection and description of these aspects in political theory. Such perception of communication processes not only caused a scientific interest to political communication but also made communication tools use in different political spheres. One can observe attempts in synthesis of different research spheres in publications of political communication research, but from the viewpoint of solution of practical tasks, clear striving for effective interdisciplinary interaction has already been envisaged. However researchers of political communication face new challenges caused by new problems and perspectives of implementation of information and communication technologies. The paper notes that the growth of the number and the quality of communication flow via the use of mobile information technologies can result in rising the competition among communicators and emergence of the new communication spaces. This can be a subject of particular interest from the viewpoint of conflict interaction and tools of its control and regulation. Authors concluded that political communications together with the use of network information technologies can be an effective mean for dialogue establishment between different social groups and communities.

Keywords: Information and communication technologies, political communication, information, power authorities, dialogue.

1. Introduction

Political communication is a process covering all aspects of social life. The process of communication in the political sphere is totally mediated by modern media technologies, as F. Hepp notes (Hepp et al., 2016).

Following the well-known American political scientist L. Pye, one can note that "political communication implies a not one-way direction of the signals from the elite to the mass, but the whole range of informal communication processes in society that have the different impact on policy" (Pye, 1987). Thus, importance of all the information processes, taking place in the field of interaction between government and society, is clear for realization of the possibility of a dialogue between all participants of the political process.

As a rule, reasoning about the role of communication in domestic and foreign policy of modern states, is particularly acute during the political crises and election campaigns. The information society is impossible without communication, and it is no exaggeration to note that it is communication that has become a basis for political development and modernization.

Thus, constructive meetings, aimed at mutually beneficial scientific, cultural, political and economic cooperation should not be closed for discussion of topics about even the most complex and controversial issues. On the contrary, namely the absence of broad scientific discourse can lead to mythologization and marginalization of communication, which clearly does not serve the common good.

2. Problem Statement

An important task of political communication is the creation of evidence-based research materials that do not allow one to use them for political purposes, not focused on the dialogue between society and the state. This does not mean avoiding discussion of debatable issues in favor of political point. It must be a question of establishing procedures aimed at reducing the conflict potential of the political dialogue.

M.A. Chekunova, V.V. Barabash and others emphasize the role of political communication and new information technologies in the process of decision-making (Chekunova et al., 2016).

Another topical issue is the distortion of communication between the society and the state in favour of certain political groups. The analysis of mass media, including social networks, allows one to highlight some mechanisms of public opinion influence. Two types of such mechanisms are the most typical: mechanisms of direct and indirect effects. Both of them are allocated on the basis of one criterion — the presence or absence of a plan to address a key problem, thus prompting the audience to the desired reaction. Different social movements use the Internet to influence the power authorities as D.A. Rohlinger assumes (Rohlinger et al., 2014).

In the epoch of emerging information society, electronic media and the Internet develop the interests of certain political forces. Activity in the information sphere is focused on the actions of subjects of influence, trying to realize their interests. Some authors note that the perception of communication changes under the impact of socio-technological progress factors in modern society (Evseeva et al., 2017).

O.A. Usacheva also emphasizes that information and communication technologies represent an "effective tool of the decentralized networks activity, allowing activists to express their views openly, to organize virtual or physical communication and to mobilize the necessary resources". The Internet "gradually becomes the public platform where recruitment, unification, raising public awareness of different issues, coordination of activities and search for resources take place" (Usacheva, 2012).

Thus, according to F.I. Sharkov, in the minds of recipients, receiving the content from the virtual space, the virtual field starts to be felt as real (Sharkov, 2017).

3. Research Questions

Nowadays, a growing interest in such informal opportunities of self-organization as volunteering, "One requirement" movements, acting on the principles of voluntariness and altruism, can be observed.

Society refuses to be an obedient tool in the hands of politicians as citizens bring their political demands to the attention of authorities, using for it movements separated from the state and political parties, which paves the way to public policy for new social activists. The rapid process of self-organization that takes place outside the institutional forms has become the sign of the times. In this case, the key role belongs to modern information technologies, which is by logic, alternative to traditional political institutions. Some experts believe that the communicative aspect of democracy that is associated with the rapid development of the Internet and social networks in the twenty-first century will be more important than institutional. Others treat new Internet technologies rather skeptically, seeing them as a peculiar manifestation of «new despotism», i.e. sophisticated, refined forms of exclusion from power, manipulating public opinion and imitative forms of participation. Some experts demonstrate devastating impact of the Internet on society and its system of communications (Huhtanen, 2015).

It is clear that the mobilization potential of social networks in Russian society was overestimated, but the role of the Internet was extremely important at least in two aspects. First, it destroyed (to some extent) the monopoly of impact of electronic media, the entertainment industry and mass culture on the minds of people, especially urban youth, and thus aroused their interest in disputes, discussions, exchange of views again. Second, it gave impetus to many non-virtual civil initiatives (e.g., raising funds for victims of natural disasters), allowed "highlighting" the reaction of the authorities to many issues that are of concern to society. Simultaneously, the "internetization" of Russia gave rise to a number of new challenges, including the emergence of new aspects of social differentiation in the area of "young, educated urban dwellers vs. the rest of the country", which can be transformed into an area of political demarcation with time.

The Landscape of Internet Users in Russia in 2015.

Table 01. When did you use the Internet the last time? (Interest in Internet-news, 2015)

	General population (%)	Young people with higher education(%)	Middle-aged people with higher education(%)
During the last 24 hours	49	88	82
During the last week	14	9	14
During the last	3	1	2

month			
During the last 3 months	1	0	1
During the last 6 months	2	1	0
Over a half year ago	2	0	0
Never used	29	1	1
Difficult to answer	1	0	0

Table 02. When did you use the Internet the last time? (Interest in Internet-news, 2015).

	General population (%)	Moscow (%)	Cities (≥ 1 mln.) (%)	Cities (between 250 thousand and 1 mln.) (%)	Towns (between 50 thousand and 250 thousand) (%)	Towns (≤ 50 thousand) (%)	Villages (%)
During the last 24 hours	48.7	54	52	55	57	48	36
During the last week	13.6	18	14	14	10	13	14
During the last month	3.3	1	4	3	3	5	3
Over a month ago	4.6	6.9	2.4	2.1	3.3	5.1	7.1
Never used	29.3	20	26	26	26	29	39
Difficult to answer	0.5	0	1.2	0.7	0	0.4	0.8

The mass protest movements of 2011-2012 have become the appreciable phenomenon on the Russian political scene. These political activities can be attributed to "new" movements, which, unlike the "old" ones focused on material values, aim at post-material values – "education, freedom of speech, respect for human rights", etc. (Yanitsky, 2012).

These public manifestations of disagreement with the authorities actions formally falls within the framework of democracy and pluralism, but in fact, the ruling regime has shown its complete unwillingness to meet the legitimate demands of protesters.

The modern Russian researcher O.N. Yanitsky noted that, dealing with protest movements, the authorities used two tactics. The first tactic: people are promised to investigate all cases of violations of the law during the elections, but do it in a "closed mode" with the predictable result that everything has been conducted strictly in accordance with the electoral law. The second tactic is to implement the old political principle of "divide and rule" by separating the protest movement into a multitude of competing groups (Yanitsky, 2012).

But despite this fact, the network public policy takes place in the public space, integrated with the Internet environment, and serves to develop solutions to problems of social significance and their integration in management practice (Miroshnichenko & Morozova, 2017).

Regarding the fact that political pluralism, as the basis of democracy, means competition of political views and organizations, free participation of citizens in politics. But the power authorities still want to be the only dominant player in the political arena. They "forget" that in a pluralistic way of

organizing power, none of its subjects has a monopoly on it; but, being a participant in the political process, one influences the formation and implementation of policy. The principle of a legal recognition of the multiplicity of interests, positions, opinions of subjects of the political system underlies pluralism. Some experts, e.g. O.D. Shipunova, I.E. Timermanis, and L.I. Evseeva contribute to implementation of a new system of legitimation in modern network society (Shipunova et al., 2014).

If one considers the theory of pluralism, it is possible to note that Western researchers have developed a pluralistic concept of power and control, where democratic societies are open to struggle for influence of various interests. So, one of the theorists of the pluralist approach, the American political scientist, Robert A. Dahl, puts interest groups with different starting points and therefore unequal impact on political decision-making as the basis for the functioning of the political system which he called "polyarchies". He defines "Polyarchy" as "the rule of many, in which the government provides interested parties with arena for discussion and coordination of opinions" (Dahl, 1971). But the state should be more active in the struggle of groups of interested parties for the division and redistribution of spheres of influence.

In the era of the primacy of information, electronic media and the Internet "promote the interests of specific political forces, covering plans and actions, aimed at modernization of society, as well as their effectiveness. Informational influence ... ... comes down to the purposeful activity of the subject of influence, trying to realize one's plans," (Plysch, 2010).

4.   Purpose of the Study

The aim of this paper is to study information and communication technologies as the elements of political communication as they are an effective tool, allowing the most active participants to express openly their views, and as the need arises, to "organize virtual or physical communication of activists and to mobilize the necessary resources" (Usacheva, 2012).

In this context, the study on issues of effectiveness of information and communication technologies in the process of public discourse and political communication, as well as various forms and types of communication, becomes one of the key points of modern politics.

5.   Research Methods

The methodological basis of the study can be subdivided into the following key approaches: systemic, functional and sociological.

The representatives of the systemic approach consider the theory of mass communication and its various aspects, such as political organizations, NGOs, noninstitutional actors, etc., exploit mass media for their own benefit (McNair, 2003).

Theorists of the functional approach, N. Luhmann, R. Debre, etc., focus their attention on the problems of organizing society and a political system, with communication processes underlying it (Luhmann, 2005; Debra, 2010).

In the sociological approach, representatives P. Lazarsfeld, E. Katz, etc. study the ways of political communication, electoral communication, PR, media effects, etc. (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Within the framework of the paper, authors examined primary and secondary sources, conducted literature review and carried out synthesis of the literature.

6. Findings

Thus, one can note that political communication can be applied to the whole sphere of interaction between society and the state. It includes the pluralism of political parties and interest groups, as well as the pluralism of the mass media; that is why, pluralism is often identified with democracy and is regarded as its integral part.

Pluralism presupposes a free competition of various agents of the political sphere. At that, political communication includes the building of adequate mechanisms of interaction among individuals, groups and authorities. Under conditions of political pluralism, society exists in the form of an "organizationally open" society – that is, such society, in which there is a possibility of expressing public opinion at all levels and provision of solutions, accepted by the majority, using necessary means.

A pluralist structure of society will be maintained by those groups that are interested in their own existence. According to P. Ricoeur, the idea of pluralism "describes a desire to live together, inherent in ... one or another community of people". The power in this case acts as a "total force, the result of the desire to live together, which exists as long as the desire is valid; ... the experience of destruction, in which the links are broken, proves their significance in a negative way» (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 47).

The power as a partnership, in contrast to power as a hegemony, involves the cooperation of political actors having different interests and building their relationship by the principle of subsidiarity or exchange. In this situation, the power is a strategic game of partners, where each of them has one's interests and one's will. Having provided the political agents with the channels of expression and defense of their political views, the system can avoid a situation of chaos. The understanding of power as a partnership, originating in traditions of liberalism, helps to form the definition of the "common interest" as the balance of the individual interests of participants of political interaction. To implement the strategy, aimed at the progressive development of the entire social system, a process of enhancing common interests, finding common grounds, and constructing a unified social space is very important. Political actors of this common social space agree to follow the common rules and norms, despite the differences of their interests.

Participants of the political communication process are to be able to see that their opposite positions mask common interests acceptable to all parties. These interests can serve as the basis for building up a constructive dialogue, using capabilities of modern networks.

However, the lack of common semantic fields and reasonable evidences of the declared theses gives rise to a situation, serving as catalysts of conflicts and confrontations, which requires a certain impact on the current situation (Adamiants, 2016, p.124**)**.

7. Conclusion

On the one hand, the mechanism of influence on the political situation with the purpose of group mobilization via communication context includes several elements:

- mainstreaming the negative stereotypes of the ideological "outsiders", thereby creating a negative image of social groups;

- an exaggeration (an understatement) of the scale of the problem, i.e. the real problem passes through the communication channels with significant scale changes. The experience shows that, if the problem exists for a number of social groups, mass media make it common for the whole society;

- increase of the scale of the problem by conveying to society the shocking figures, for example, the number of victims;

-increase of the emotional level of the problem, accentuated anxiety of the titles and texts, which is achieved through making associations with historical events, key dates and words-symbols.

While implementing this mechanism of action, ultimately, the deprivation and marginalization of the majority, as an extreme option, is supplemented by the division into in - and out-groups, which forms a negative image of the opposite party.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the conflict potential of public moods can be stabilized and reduced in the information space.

Thus, one can use:

- political consultations with participation of representatives of public and scientific circles on controversial points of political practice;

- analytical materials, initiated in the media and devoted to certain events on the basis of documentary materials and with comments of experts on the subject under consideration;

- official comments of authorities, officials and experts about current events in mass media.

The request for manifestations of joint activity of various social groups and layers is relevant more than ever before in modern society. Yu.G. Volkov assumes this fact, saying that "nowadays, a demand for social solidarity, which is not connected to solidarity of equality and compassion, but to mutual responsibility of the elites and society, community groups and the state, is formed" (Volkov, 2017, p. 41).

Finally, the authors of this research can conclude that the joint efforts of all participants of the process of political communication will allow using information and communication technologies for establishing dialogue between different social groups and communities.

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