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THE ROLE OF BELGOROD MASS-MEDIA IN FORMING
PUBLIC AGENDA

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Abstract. The article reveals the modalities of mass-media's influence on public consciousness. The correlation of political, public and media agendas has also been investigated. For the first time the investigation has been made with consideration for a region, by the example of the Belgorod Region.

Key words: mass-media; communication; informational, political and public agenda; cognitive management.

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РОЛЬ БЕЛГОРОДСКОЙ ПРЕССЫ В ФОРМИРОВАНИИ
ОБЩЕСТВЕННОЙ ПОВЕСТКИ ДНЯ

What criteria does a contemporary man follow, by choosing life principles? Where does he get up-to-date information about current events? What does he rely on when forming the picture of the world? Essential elements of information coming from outside into our minds are evidently to be brought by informational flows formed by various mass-media. Actually, the present, according to professor A. V. Polonsky, is «exceptionally mass-media project» [13: 110], and distance between the producer of information – mass-media – and its user is getting closer. The closer this distance is, the stronger the influence of mass-media on the consciousnesses, both individual and collective [5, p. 74].

In a new millennium, many specialists in the sphere of media researches speak seriously about qualitative transformation of mass-media in the direction of their individualization. There has even emerged the term «mass individual communication», or «mass self communication» – such mass communication that is produced, received and perceived individually [6]. This phenomenon is caused, according to the investigators, by «digital revolution», occurred at the turn of the centuries. Nowadays, due to the development of multi-channel and network communications, the users have gotten ample opportunities for choice of a source of information, and mass-media for its translation and dissemination. Professor A.P. Korochensky in this connection writes: «In these latter days it is possible and widely used the writing mass mailing of different individual messages through the Internet and mobile communication: text messages, photographic, audio and video materials, including

documentary news and journalistic texts. Mobile telephone being no more than the means of bidirectional communication in a verbal form a while ago has acquired the characteristics of convergent means of mass information being able wide spreading of multimedia texts» [9, p. 181].

Moreover: modern communications allow mass audience being in the role of passive user of information before (the reader of a newspaper, the viewer in front of the television screen) to pass on the attitude towards information, opinion its author or an event, even to supplement the message with new facts in the form of commentaries, which, as well as the source publication, are available for the other users to read. The reader of the Internet-mass-media shares the publication drawn his attention for some reasons with the subscribers in blogs and with the friends in social networks taking upon himself thus the function of a disseminator of information. In other words, today's media audience becomes not simply the user of information but the co-author of it, «moves up to the category of full-fledged subjects of mass communications providing the realization of the right to communication» [9, p. 182]. Under such circumstances the role of media as means of forming public awareness is rapidly growing: «Today we begin to be really conscious of the fact that mass media... does not simply exist in social life providing the needed level of communicative interaction of all its subjects, is not simply an obligatory component of social environment forming its communicative infrastructure, but has become the key, status context where all social processes acquire their cultural and ideological forms, where up-to-date models of

identity are developed, where the character of dominant semantic and ideological vectors of social consciousness are determined» [13, p. 110].

It is evident that the mass-media effect on public and individual consciousness is not only in belief and ability to change value and other sets of the recipient. Mass-media can draw attention of the audience to certain topics and events. «Choosing out the events of information event-trigger picture of the day, media, in that way, form information agenda. Any, even an insignificant, event can become noted on the agenda, and, on the contrary, a big event will remain in the background, if it will not have been broadcast» [1].

The term «agenda» is widely used in the literature on politology and business. Contemporary editions of explanatory dictionaries by Ozhegov and Ushakov treat it as «a list of issues which will be discussed at the meeting, session» [12]. But, in our opinion, in politological and media discourse the word combination «agenda» has much more quantity of meanings.

The process of actualization of the term «agenda» has actively begun since the middle of XX century, when many foreign scholars set to investigate mass media effect on social view. In those years the first evidences of that the mass-media could be good manipulator appeared. So, M. McCombs and D. Shaw were the first to find out the interdependence between the topics highlighted in media and public feeling by means of mathematical correlation analysis of social data and content-analysis of newspaper articles and television items. They have expanded the usual notion «agenda», by defining it as «a set of topics and problems being the most urgent within that period of time» [11]. They

have introduced the term «agenda-setting», that is, introduction of this set into the audience's consciousness. The American scholars have defined exactly this activity to be «primary activity of mass-media» [6].

Like McCombs and Shaw, the German analyst of public opinion E. Noelle Neumann has proved on the basis of empiric data, that mass media form a supposed «agenda», that is, an individual's idea of «what the others are discussing» [11].

Traditionally, the investigators differentiate the following types of agendas: political, informational and public.

The leading expert of the Center of political technologies (Moscow) G. Kovalyev treats the political agenda as a set of problems being not important simply, but requiring state obligatory interference to be solved [7]. The practitioner N. Ponomaryev from Perm adds to it that the problems put on the political agenda must be solved by the officials on a priority basis [16, p. 10]. To go on the agenda, «the problem must correspond to prevailing political values, have the tested out effective management technology, concern the interests of large groups of citizens (according to official appraisals or in virtue of external circumstances), and also have a variety of the other indicators» (Sheet 1) [16, p. 12]. Among these indications N. Ponomaryev, in particular, differentiates «political expedience and investments of private resources». In other words, not only socially-significant problems, but those, that are considered by the representatives of power structures (or big investors having powerful lobby in near-governmental environment) to be priority at the moment, can move on political stage.

Sheet 1

Media agenda	Political agenda	Public agenda
Editorial policy of mass media (informational occasion)	Statistical demonstration of problem priority	Daily problems of population
News format	Political expedience and investments of private resources	Vis-majors (elemental forces of nature and man-made disasters)
Technological process requirements	Approved technologies	Social cataclysms
Public opinion		

Informational, or media agenda, is defined by G. Kovalyev as «a set of five-seven subjects, suggested to society by news mass media for acquaintance» [7]. This «set» is determined by, first of all, by the existence of informational occasion («What is going on?» «Why are we discussing it today exactly?»). Out of the flow of informational occasions, the editorial board of mass-media selects those that fit the format of the publication and evoke the broadest response among potential audience (Sheet 1). In other words, before going on the informational

agenda, the subjects pass through a filtration which I. Rogozina, for example, understands to be not as mechanical process implying making a list of current events for media-representations but as a mental-cognitive. For designation of this phenomenon, she suggests using the term «media-select» - «verbalized result of mental-cognitive activity of the group of individuals on fathering, selection and processing of the information about social and natural reality, incoming from different informational sources with the view of its further mediation» [17, p. 53].

Concerning the political agenda, according to McCombs and Shaw, it covers those problems that seem to be important for a particular community [11]. Ponomaryev notes that it is influenced by both daily problems which affect most of population (rise in prices) and vis-majors (man-made disasters, natural calamities), and also social cataclysms (Sheet 1). All these factors can cause surges of public interest which are difficult to be predicted and which can run counter to both political and informational agenda. For example, surge in foreign currency in Russia in November-December, 2014 and the resulting growth of primary food prices drew back to one side, undoubtedly, important political and social subjects as recurrent escalation of the situation in the southeast of Ukraine, new west sanctions in relation to Russia and the others for several weeks.

Thus, we believe it to be evident that mass-media play a determining role in forming of the public agenda. At the same time, informational, political and public agendas never coincide completely. Firstly, any mass-media is not able to embrace all the range of socially-significant topics, secondly, some topics concern people irrespective of the fact whether they are highlighted in mass-media or not. Besides, mass-media are not always free to choose news subjects.

N. Ponomaryev in his book «Information Policy of State Authority: Propaganda, Antipropaganda, Contra propaganda» notes: «The more actively the bodies of power interact with the journalists, the closer the content of media agenda to the political agenda is. This correlation reaches the maximum in those mass media which are fully controlled by authorities, but never reaches unity, since any mass media have to respond to public agenda like raged list of issues exiting most inhabitants of the administrative territorial community» [16, p. 7]. O. Koltsova in the article «Who Affects the News-Making in Russia Today and How?» describes the principal types of «agents of effect» on mass-media: state (government, legislative assemblies, government officials of all levels), economic agents (owners of all levels, sponsors and advertisers), information resources (newsmakers), agents of naked violence (staff of enforcement agencies and criminal authorities), producers of news (the directors of mass-media, ordinary journalists) [8, p. 87]. Let us analyze, who is «the agent of effect» on Belgorod mass-media and how do they manage to have an effect on the public agenda?

According to the data of information base SCAN-Interfax [18] (www.scan-interfax.ru), developed by the specialists of the International information Group «Interfax» as the tool of complex

analysis of media environment, for October 1, 2015, in the Belgorod oblast' there function more than 150 mass-media of various types, subject matters and circulation. Most of them (more than 80) – are the Internet-portals. At the same time, it should be noted that in each district of the Belgorod oblast' there appear no less than one newspaper and some municipal formations (for example, in Valuyki, Starooskol and Gubkin urban districts) – even several ones. It is possible owing to subsidies allotted from municipal budgets for maintenance of the district newspapers.

Besides, in the Starooskol urban district (the largest in terms of population and gross domestic product after Belgorod agglomeration, including the oblast' center - the city of Belgorod and the Belgorod region), four local television channels owned by private investors function there. In the oblast' center, the media holding «Belgorod-Media» works, the sole founder of which is the city administration. It comprises the weekly newspaper «Our Belgorod», the cable television channel «Belgorod 24» and the Internet portal «Belgorod-Media».

And concerning the media covering the whole Belgorod region, the most significant of them, we think, to be the following: the State TV and Radio Company «Belgorod» (the branch of VSTRC), news agency «Bel.Ru» (owned by a private person) and information holding «BelPress» which includes news site «BelPressa.rf», the newspapers «Belgorod Izvestiya», «Change», «Main Recess» and «OnONas» as well as the TV and Radio Company «The World of Belogoriye». The only founder of the media holding «BelPressa» is the Government of the Belgorod oblast'. Undoubtedly, and two new network regional resources stating its work in 2015 deserve also consideration: information portals and Go31 Fonar TV (the founders - individuals). These projects, in our view, have filled the niche of the Internet-mass-media being empty until recently in our region, for interesting young, socially active residents of the area. They occupy an intermediate position between the news media and social networks.

It is also essential to note the activities of regional representatives of such big national periodicals as «Rossiyskaya Gazeta», «Komsomolskaya Pravda», «Arguments and Facts», as well as the largest federal news agencies: the news agency «TASS», RIA «Novosti» (up to April 2014) and non-governmental news agency «Interfax» (the founders are private individuals). The latter opened the regional bureau in February, 2014, in Belgorod, and in June 2014 - the regional press center, which became a popular venue for meetings of Belgorod

journalists with the authorities and representatives of business.

On the basis of the above-stated, it is evident that the main «agent of influence» on the informational agenda of the Belgorod region are public authorities at all levels: from the federal (STRC «Belgorod», «Rossiyskaya Gazeta» (Russian Newspaper), the news agency «TASS») to the regional (the holding «BelPress») and municipal (the holding «Belgorod-Media », regional newspapers). Big business plays an important role in the formation of media agenda. The activity of the so-called «agents of open violence» - the law enforcement agencies, in particular – is unobtrusive in Belgorod region. However, representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, investigative bodies, prosecutor's office and other law enforcement agencies carefully follow up the publications in the local media, and sometimes correctly - often in the form of «recommendations» - try to interfere in the work of local publications. All this leaves noticeable imprint on the editorial policy of the Belgorod media and, as a consequence - on a subject of media information published in the region.

Media-selects of the Belgorod media form the cognitive space in which the Belgorod region is persistently represented as an advanced, economically and socially stable, dynamic; as the place where, nevertheless, one holds sacred spiritual traditions of the Russian people.

Thus, in the minds of the inhabitants of the region, a steady symbolic interpretation of the region as a *spiritual and educational center*, a place *being spiritually and ecologically clean, free from contamination* is kept. This is facilitated by numerous large-scale, sometimes even ambitious, social and cultural projects, usually accompanied by a strong information support. Among them, there was held, for example, the festival "Patterned round dance: curve tanks of the Graivoron region" in Graivoron in May. The record was recorded by the Russian official representatives of the Guinness World Records. According to organizers, the festival was attended by more than 5,5 thousand people. The first international festival of Belgorod "BelMelFest" (Belgorod, August) and the First National Festival GTO (Belgorod, August) drew also a wide resonance. The mentioned events were mainly given coverage just by the regional press, the messages of the latter served as the basis for being quoted in the media of other regions and the media at the federal level.

Taking into account the fact that the most common and obvious criterion for estimating the results on the formation of cognitive space of the

territory is reference in the media (and, the matter is not only and not how many publications, but also the status of the publication, as well as the context of references), to confirm our assertion, let us conduct a research using the above information database (IDB), «the SCAN-Interfax». The IDB «SCAN» is one of the largest databases in the world, containing archives and current materials of information agencies (including - from the closed tapes), newspapers and magazines, analytical publications, online resources, transcripts of the TV and radio programs. Today the base «SCAN» contains more than 20.0 thousand names of sources, and their number continues to increase.

Let us analyze the published works of our region, released in the federal, regional and international media, being contained in the IDB «SCAN» for the current year. To narrow our search, let us ask the system query: search for the tag «Belgorod region» as a geographical name in all sources, except press-releases and information disclosure, as well as reviews of the markets and announcements, and the calendars.

This request (at 17:00 by Moscow time on August 31, 2015) provides us with 142580 publications, 89037 of which were published in the regional media, 48769 - in the federal and 7443 - in the foreign media. These are the publications on 25 subjects, including - economic («Macroeconomics», «Budget», «Financial Results», «Tariffs» and others.), political («Politics and the State», «The State Regulation», etc.) social («Sport», «Art and Culture», «Religion and Belief», «Social Issues» and so forth.) and criminal («Emergency», «Crime» and «The courts, Conflicts Investigations»).

For getting a more objective picture, let us apply the filter «All, except the same» to the monitoring (in this case, the system "SCAN" will exclude all the publications from the search results, where more than three paragraphs are repeated in succession). After having applied the filter we get 87818 publications.

Note that if the topic «Emergency» (along with the subjects «The Crime and Criminals» and «Courts, Conflicts, Investigation», they generally constitute an absolute majority of publications about most regions) is traditionally in the leads in the monitoring of the other regions, then according to the results of the present monitoring, the theme «Art and Culture» has come to the fore: 11296 publications, or 12.9 percent. The traditional leader - the theme «Disasters, Emergencies» - is the second most frequently mentioned (10697 publications, or 12.2 per cent). In third place - the theme «Sports» (10435 publication, or 11.9 per cent), on the fourth - «Politics and State» (8565 publications, or 9.8 per cent). The last in the top of 5 most frequently

mentioned topics is «The Crime and Criminals» with a result of 8107 publications, or 9.2 percent.

The results of our study, therefore, give us the reasons to argue that cognitive management of socio-cultural orientation successfully works in the Belgorod oblast' (we understand by cognitive management a kind of control system "of production, as well as intellectual, financial and other resources", based on KNOWLEDGE, INTELLIGENCE, possession of technologies of COGNITION, and hence, on the ability to use this latest achievements in various fields of knowledge - innovations - and innovation strategy of the management theories in the information society [13, p. 101]). In other words, in our region there take place enough of events, which can serve as information occasions for the news publications of such subjects. And thanks to the close cooperation of the public authorities and law enforcement agencies with the regional media in the Belgorod region there has emerged, to some extent, a unique media situation, allowing to form an information background with a pronounced positive shade, which certainly has an impact on the public agenda.

The cognitive management of the region, therefore, is based on the philosophy of success, the idea of indissoluble connection with the spiritual traditions of the past - but, at the same time, on the innovation, dynamic development. This helps the inhabitants of the region form a well-defined worldview attitude and system of values in life, which can be formulated as a spiritual unity, social optimism and confidence in the local authorities, which largely contributes to the activities of the regional mass media.

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