

Contradictions of the Symbolic Media Landscape of Russia Using the Example of the Republic of Tatarstan

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Abstract: Electronic mass media turn the symbolic media landscape of Russia and the Republic of Tatarstan into a sphere of postideological aspects of expression. The Russian media landscape is an element of the world media landscape, but it is concentrated in the metropolitan areas. Relations between the Tatarstan and Russian media landscapes have a structure similar to that between the Russian and world media landscape. Mass media in Tatarstan cover mainly regional events, or events that concern the whole Islamic world. There is no single area of the symbolic media landscape of Tatarstan. Multiple competing and complementing each other landscapes include values, ideology and cultural codes of various social groups; however, the prevailing symbolic media landscape is the landscape of mass media loyal to the government.

Key words: Ideology • Postideology • Mass media • Media of mass information and communication • Symbolic media landscape of Russia • Symbolic media landscape of Tatarstan

INTRODUCTION

The study of the symbolic media landscape of Russia and the Republic of Tatarstan begins with defining the symbolic media landscape. First of all, symbolic media landscape appears as a result of production and consumption of mass information. It is a form of representation of media reality and a sphere of ideological aspects of expression. Currently, the symbolic landscape of mass media is more of representation of the media reality of electronic media of mass communication. Electronic media of mass communication (hereinafter - MMC) are virtual and their symbolic landscape is the sphere of functioning of postideological aspects of expression [1]. Simply said, the more widely spread Internet communications become, the stronger is idea that we are now living in a "society post ideology", i.e. there is absolute pluralism of ideologies and freedom from ideological dominant ideas. However, we state that the symbolic idea of "postideology" is very ideological. Mass media create it as an ideological product.

Postideology is one of the ideological myths of the contemporary political and media reality. Being a variety of ideology, postideology does not distort the reality, but reflects it. We are living in a state of confusion and

theoretical helplessness when trying to legitimate a certain project of a political regime. The necessity to orient ourselves in the situation of totally virtualized life when even political and media activities only aim exchanging symbols and characters lacks free will. M. Minakov, the author of the article "Ideology - Postideology, Police - Postpolicy", takes up the position that the former forms of ideologies die out, thus enabling intellectuals to "revise the social reality and suggest new socio-political and socio-economic concepts" [2]. Though he described political situation and did not mention media, he presumed mass media to be one of the resources of the postideology existence while talking about such a phenomenon as mediocracy. We keep to the position that the society of entertainment and mediocracy bring forth the postideology. The world media landscape shows tendency of increasing the scope of "neutral" media products, which is explained by the growing entertaining role of media. Nevertheless, we are convinced that TV shows, commercials, or publications in mass media (hereinafter - Mass Media) that pretend to be neutral show a very strong ideological bias. Media landscape of the global information society is a hierarchical system of mass communication media and multimedia technology, which completely transform the symbolic media landscape

[3]. In particular, it is becoming saturated with various forms of cultural expression and going through hard times. Ideologies multiply in the number; the process of simplification of the symbolic media landscape as well as limitation of the audience interests takes place, which directly leads to growing opportunities for manipulations, in the broad sense of the word.

Body of the work. Globalization processes influence the media landscape of Russia greatly. So, what is the specificity of the symbolic media landscape of the Russian reality? The first factor to be highlighted is the seeming deideologization of the mass media landscape. This factor makes the Russian and world media landscapes closer, but the origins of the factor are different. After destruction of the Soviet system, mass media control decreased drastically, pluralism became the main attribute of the media landscape and the freedom of word became a symbolic basis. The second factor, which determines the specificity of the Russian media reality, is directly caused by the former. It is the large scale of media commercialization, which is accompanied by market fundamentalism. The process of politicization of Russian media stands separately. Politicization progresses along with commercialization and they are a large-scale commercial project [4]. Thirdly, the contemporary Russian media landscape is distinguished for its high extent of segmentation: each media product offered in the mass media market meets the interests of a narrow group of the target audience. We can also distinguish the fourth factor, which determines the specificity of the symbolic media landscape of Russia. It is the inclusion of those components into the content of media products, which are typical of certain Russian cultural traditions [5]. We can also add the fifth peculiar feature to the specified peculiarities of the Russian media landscape – the tendency of drastic reduction of the public sphere, which is the result of Internet and multimedia technology development. None of these typical features of the Russian media landscape, except for the fourth one, contributes to the development of a civil society that would be free of dominance of a single ideology. In the meantime, mass media, political circles and other sources of public power hold the status of ideological constructs and their originators [6].

As for the Republic of Tatarstan, we can state without exaggeration that its symbolic media landscape is a battlefield for ideologies. Due to obvious causes, the majority of Tatarstan mass media broadcasts and publishes in the Tartar language. As distinguished from Russia, the process of decentralization of the mass media

system in the republic is flowing slower due to the reason that the share of government mass media remains the same and is not going to decrease. However, this factor explains such specificity of the commercial sector of the Tatarstan mass media system as the impelled continuous work on the products quality improvement, which is necessary to keep up with the more powerful subsidized mass media. One of the peculiar features of the republic's media system is the fact that commercial media are not politicized, except for election periods. The reason for that is probably the weakly developed opposition in the republic, which is not ready to invest much money in development of independent mass media. There is a problem of direct ideological dependence of the government mass communication media on the objectives pursued by the political and business elite of the republic. For example, the symbolic media landscape built by these mass media is direct reflection of the government activities [7]. Of course, this "direct" reflection varies depending on the current political situation. Media reality cannot act in this case as a source of critical rethinking of the reality. As for the mass media, which are independent from the regime, they try to rethink the situation in the oppositional manner that is typical of them, through creating various coverage opportunities based on events that involve organizations, which criticize the activities of the regional and federal powers.

Tatarstan mass media, just like the Russian ones, use three strategies of media product creation. Infotainment and socio-political mass media use the strategy of attraction of wide audience in order to stay high in the ratings. Mass media, which break up their audience into social and demographic groups, as well as Tartar language mass media use a strategy, which the majority of target audience finds interesting. For example, the audience can be segmented by family or social status, gender or age status and, of course, by financial position of the intended recipients of information. The economic status of the audience is the determining criterion of the editorial policy of any commercial media: prosperous audience is the determining factor for tangible gains from advertising accounts, who are the key revenue generators for the Tatarstan commercial mass media. And, finally, the third strategy of creating media products, which is successfully implemented in the region, is the attraction of attention of a narrow audience groups: owners of large businesses, representatives of subcultures, sports enthusiasts, etc. It is remarkable that this strategy is mostly implemented in the republic by those specialized mass media, which are oriented to prosperous audience.

We can assume existence of the following tendency in the region: the wider audience a mass medium is oriented to, the lower is the economic status of the target audience.

Let us consider implementation of the latter strategy using the example of business media of Tatarstan. The regional media market, including business periodicals, is developing currently under the influence of the growing segmentation of both consumers of the business information and the media environment itself. The growing share of new types of audio and visual mass media and Internet analogs of printed mass media changes objectives and functions of business periodicals, both the federal and regional ones. However, despite the fact that the rise given to regional mass media by the crisis of 2008 has not reduced the dependence of Tatarstan mass information and communication media on the local elite groups, but since 2011, the tendency of mass media liberalization has begun to take shape. Currently, a complex transformational shift of the authoritarian model of media system to its democratization is taking place in the republic. Nevertheless, the vision of economic and political level of development of the republic is formed under the influence of the informational policy of business periodicals. Abundant natural resources, developed infrastructure, quite high level of investment attractiveness, good economic environment in the region, originality, strong influence of the regional political elite and the unique nature of the political structure of Tatarstan are the factors that cause collision of interests of various groups, which in turn creates newsworthy occurrences covered by mass media. In terms of the problematics of the symbolic media landscape of the Republic of Tatarstan, business periodicals attract our attention with the fact that, if it provides high-quality content, i.e. content containing some message, they become an alternative to the symbolic media landscape of the socio-political periodicals, which are oriented to entertainment of mass audience.

Along with the dependence of the editorial policy of non-commercial periodicals on the decisions taken by the ruling elite, there is one more regularity typical of the republican media landscape: it is almost impossible to establish a profitable mass medium, which would not contain any advertising or public relations [8]. Generally, the commercial sector of the market is not large against the background of government mass media, which operate at the expense of public funds, but since recently, several business periodicals have simultaneously strengthened their positions: Business Quarter, Time and Money,

Kazan Business Journal and other periodicals. And the Business Online periodical (www.business-gazeta.ru), which positions itself as the first electronic newspaper in the republic and an independent mass medium, which creates business online, caused special interest in view of the problematic nature of the symbolic media landscape of the Tatarstan mass media. Analysis of publications in this Internet newspaper allows forming a portrait of its target audience. They are executives of large companies, representatives of political and cultural elite groups of the republic. The journal invites to share their expert opinions on important issues or become the main characters of articles with their citations placed in headlines. Profit of this mass medium is generated by placing advertising and PR information submitted by advertising accounts or developed by the newspaper's PR specialists. Business Online is an Internet platform for sharing not only journalists' own opinions about the business elite representatives, but also the opinions of big market players about themselves. We assume that the symbolic media landscape of this business medium is confined within itself, which is confirmed by the example of the function to comment publications on the website. You can comment them, but your comments will not be replied by the publication's authors and, particularly, the characters of the article. Only other readers can respond to you. So, the issue of interactivity remains unsolved in this case.

Similarly, the symbolic media landscape is built for other business media, too. The entertaining sector of mass media in the republic is less ideologically biased than the business sector, but expert opinions of the cultural elite appear even in this sector. Generally, the successful mass media in Tatarstan do well due to information received from businesses, which are related to the government and from officials. However, this information is of advertising nature and rarely shows high quality of the journalist's work. Besides, there is the problem of empty niche for small business, which cannot get on the pages of the periodical and so join its symbolical media landscape through its own ideas for obvious reasons. Often, there are no clear borders of responsibility of the editorial staff for the materials provided by experts and analysts, but then the question arises: what is a certain regional mass media responsible for, generally? When no elite groups are concerned, the representatives of business circles shows fear and unwillingness to speak about themselves - this is the specific feature of the regional communication model, highlighted by many journalists and PR specialists who

often face difficulties when trying to obtain some information from their colleagues. Generally, the communication landscape of various life spheres of Tatarstan, from economic to cultural, at the symbolic level is a closed, confined system. The other part of it, which reaches the regional media landscape, concerns either advertising, or the entertaining industry.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the article, we will characterize briefly the extent of inclusion of the Tatarstan media landscape into the Russian one and the Russian media landscape into the world one. The Russian media landscape is an element of the world media landscape, but it is concentrated in the metropolitan areas: for example, international events are covered by both federal channels and foreign mass media, which broadcast internationally. For example, when broadcasting news about Russia, the Euronews channel primarily mentions Moscow [9]. Other regions of Russia come in the view of foreign mass media only when some event of international importance takes place there. For example, the Universiade, which has taken place recently and made Kazan and Tatarstan renowned internationally, but this effect existed only between the beginning and the end of the event. Coverage of the Universiade events was a general rehearsal of media propaganda before the forthcoming Sochi Olympiad. It is worth noting that relations between the regional media landscape and the national one have the same structure as the relations between the Russian media landscape and the world one. Regional news attracts the attention of federal mass media only when the covered events are of the national importance, except when representatives of the ruling elite visit regions. In such cases, federal mass media cannot participate in creation of publications, as the elite representative is himself a coverage opportunity [10]. Regional media landscape is focused mainly on itself. But the Islamic factor in the social life of the republic determines the subject of the Tatarstan media messages: These can be either religious holidays, or cinema festivals, or education forums, or something else.

Summary: Actually, there is no real symbolic media landscape in Tatarstan; it consists of multiple competing and complementing each other, landscapes, which are created by various media of mass information and communication. These various symbolic media landscapes include a variety of values, ideologies and

cultural codes of different social groups. The percentage of federal mass media overrides the regional mass media by the extent of influence. Year after year, entertainment media have been expanding their influence, including media broadcasting in Tartar language. Among regional media of mass communication, the dominant symbolic media landscape remains the landscape of the media loyal to the ruling power. The share of oppositional mass media is still low, but the electronic mass media, which are expanding their influence, are changing the conventional authoritarian relations in the media landscape of the region. Where during the first decade of the XXI century, Russia and the Republic of Tatarstan were making efforts in order to join the global media landscape, now we are presently entering the stage of partial closedness, in terms of both media and policy. This causes increasing interest of the international media community. We can only guess what the symbolic media landscape of Tatarstan will be and to what extent it will be a harmonious part of the Russian media landscape. Therefore, we keep on watching the changes that are taking place currently. As journalists say: "We'll be keeping close watch on developments."

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