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Media Space: Reputation Regulators

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The article presents the results of a theoretical analysis of the social actions of the subjects of mass communication activities in media space. Media space is regarded as a special part of the social space. Shown that the regulatory system of social action, including normative, ideological, discursive and reputational regulators. Reputation regulators include personal narrative and an individual image. The purpose of reputation in media space is to obtain trust the audience to the subject of mass communication activities. Social actions in media space vary according to the reputational regulators.

Keywords: media space, reputation, regulators, social action, trust, narrative, image.

Nowadays regulation of social action of various professional and social groups draws attention of sociologists and related science representatives. At the same time, the studies' focus shifted from the traditional for Russian sociology internal controls (e.g. B.A. Yadov's theory of dispositional regulation of social behavior) to the institutional, contextual, interactive and discursive controls. In particular, N.L. Zakharov, who developed the concept of regulation of public officials' social action, considers the organizational, behavioral and ethical controls of this professional group functioning. (Zakharov, 2009) We proceed from the assumption that different professional groups, due to the peculiarities of their activities and socio-professional context, have specific controls of social action. Our analysis focuses on subjects of mass communication activities, who are understood as socio-professional group

occupying a specific position in the media space structure.

Social activities of the subjects of media space

The concept of "media space" is relatively new, though sufficiently explored by the sociology scholars. E.N. Yudina suggests the following definition of "media space": "...a specific reality, being a part of the social space and organizing social practices and representations of agents included in the system of media production and consumption". (Yudina, 2008) The number of agents (the subjects of social action) exists, operates and interacts in the structure of media space.

In the broad sense, the subject is a source of purposeful activity, i.e. individual or group of individuals who set goals and implement the developed action programs to achieve these

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goals by themselves. The subject is not just an actor or an agent of social action, but an actively acting being capable of reflection and endowed with will, desire and ability to act, i.e. to disclose its hidden potential. (Klimov, 2006) There are different individuals and groups in the media space structure which can be considered as individual actors and subjects of social action. Among them, there are the journalists, newsmakers, media owners, media management, personnel responsible for functioning of media channels, content creators, etc. However, not all of them can be recognized as subjects of mass communication activities. Indeed, if we admit that mass communication falls within the regulatory activities of society, and the essential characteristics and purpose of the means of mass communication is to influence the public conscience, which extends from maintaining an adequate perception of social reality and providing consent (R. Merton and P. Lazarsfeld, G. Lassuel) to “conscience control” and ensuring the hegemony (A. Gramsci, S.G. Karamurza), then only those media space actors, whose social action is directly aimed at achieving this goal, can be recognized as the subjects of mass communication activities. V.I. Gostenina and A. G. Kiselev believe that in the structure of media space there can be distinguished four main subjects of social action.

1. Social interests bearers who realize their goals of influence on public conscience through mass communication.

2. Owners of separate means of mass communication as the subjects of the implementation of business interests (e.g. to make profit).

3. Journalists (communicators) as the subjects of the implementation of creative, professional and private economic interests.

4. Mass audience as a group of individuals united by a common goal of getting information

for orientation in the existence environment. (Gostenina, Kiselev, 2009) Hereby we want to note that in terms of the P. Burdier’s concept of social space the above subjects can be described as positions in the media space, which differ in amount and structure of social capital. In other words, in order to take one or another position in the media space, an individual or social group must have an appropriate amount and types of social capital. Moreover, the subjectivity of the mass-communicative activity is not rigidly assigned to particular media persons, but is determined by the intent and the goal of social action. For example, a journalist who transmits news or written comments cannot be defined as the subject of the mass-communicative activity. However, the same journalist becomes the subject of mass communication activity if he conveys his position on any issue to bring his vision to the audience and change its opinion on some topic. In this case, the manner, in which other media space subjects will react to the changes in the position of a particular journalist, depends on his social capital. If social capital is sufficient, it will be perceived as self-evident. But if it is not, the journalist will be penalized. On the other hand, the journalist evaluates the “strength” of his own capital and, on the basis of this assessment, takes this or that social action. By the way, these transitions from one position to another are easy to notice with the help of media actor’s behavioral patterns change.

The above statement allows us to claim that the social action controls systems are specific with respect to the media space subjects.

The subject of our study is the regulation system of social action of mass communication activity’s subjects. As the result of the analysis we have identified the following groups of regulators:

1. Normative regulators, e.g. legal, moral, religious, corporate norms, customs and so on. In

the field of mass communication activity, these controls include the legal norms of behavior in the public sphere, moral, ethical, axiological and religious norms, as well as corporate (group) norms of the subjects of mass communication activities.

2. Political and ideological regulators that index relation of a specific subject of mass communication activity to a particular system of “conceptually designed views and ideas, in which the attitudes of people to the reality and to each other are evaluated, and either the existing forms of domination in society and government (conservative ideologies) sanctioned or their transformation settled (radical, revolutionary ideology).

3. Discursive regulators. We adhere to the postmodern understanding of the concept “discourse” as a complex communicative phenomenon, which includes in addition to text a number of extralinguistic factors (setting, target recipients’ goals, their opinion, self-assessment and evaluation of each other). In its turn, the phenomenon has a connection, and integrity, and immersed in life as well as in socio-cultural, socio-psychological and other contexts. According to the French philosopher M. Foucault, the purpose of discursive practices is the formation of ideas about the object implied in them. In the context of mass communication activity regulation, discourse, taken as internally coherent communicative phenomenon that includes not only the act of communication and media actors, but also a representation of the recipient, as well as social and cultural context, imposes significant constraints on social action of the subject of mass communication activity. The status and role, the goal of the subject of mass communication activity as well as the prototype characteristics of communicative case and discourse’s genre are included in the list of discursive controls.

4. Reputational regulators. In this case, the reputation implies a social representation (Moscovici, 1995) and stable categorical structure. It represents mass communication subject’s personality on the biological, personal, social and transcendental levels in a group conscience of mass communication means’ audience. (Trubechkoy, 2005) Given the characteristics of communication in the media space, we can define two key reputational controls.

1) The individual narrative, i.e. the sequence of life events of the mass communication activity subject, which is expressed by linguistic means and interpreted for the presentation purposes. (Sheigal, 2007)

2) Individual image, interpreted as purposefully generated image of the mass communication activity subject which exists in the mass conscience of the audience, “designed to provide emotional and psychological impact on someone for promotion, advertising, and reputation forming.” (Panfilova, 2007)

Reputation as a regulator of social actions of subjects in mass communication activity

Let’s give some definitions to the notion “reputation” taken from Russia encyclopedias, dictionaries and scientific literature.

“Reputation (fr.) – the man’s fame, good or bad, how somebody is said, general opinion on smb”. (Dal, 2008)

“Reputation – formed general opinion on the quality, advantages and disadvantages of snb or smth”. (Prohorov, 1990)

“Reputation, reputations (lat. reputatio – count). Formed general opinion about advantages or disadvantages of smb or smth (*Have a good, bad reputation. He has a reputation of a brave man. Destroy smb’s reputation*)”. (Ushakov, 2009)

“Reputation, name, fame, popularity, prestige. Famous name. To have a reputation

means to be reputed to be smb. He is said to be very learned. He has a good reputation, he is spoken well. Value one's own reputation. Good fame is better than wealth".(Abramov, 2008)

In accordance with the definitions given above one can see that one's reputation, firstly, is a fact of social consciousness ("general opinion"), secondly, is a polarized evaluative statement such as "plus-minus" ("The man's fame, good or bad", "Have good or bad reputation") and, thirdly, is a result of social activities of the subject of a reputation ("Destroy one's reputation", "He is said to be very learned"). It's evident the definitions of reputation don't focus on real advantages or disadvantages of a subject, pointing out mainly to evaluative opinion – total opinion. It's supposed that public evaluation de facto is true. However, modern scientific conceptions about social reality building show us that social view and reality won't correspond to each other. Thus, reputation may be considered not only as a true appraisal smb's advantages and disadvantages, but as a result of interpretation of social activities considered in a special way in order to cause this desired interpretation in the social consciousness.

Reputation regulators of social activities are extremely important for the achievement of the purpose to influence the social consciousness from the direction of mass communication subjects. No doubt, good reputation of a media-actor, is an expression of its symbolic asset and necessary resource of efficient communication with the target audience. Therefore, the subject of mass-communication activity during the process of implementation of social activities in the media space carries it out taking into account probable influence on one's reputation; takes into account so called "reputation risks" aspires to minimize "reputation side-effects". For the purpose of efficient functioning of mass-communicative activity subject in media space exceptional

importance of reputation lies in the necessity of trust as a base of communication in media space.

A great number of sociological research works are devoted to the study of the phenomenon of "trust". N. Luhmann points out that today trust becomes indispensable term for the social development for the reason of intensification of uncertainty about future among people. (Lumann, 2001) U. Beck Y. describes modern society as the "society o risk", where the unknown and unpremeditated consequences of activity become the main impulsive force for history and society. (Beck, 2000) A. Giddens states that nowadays "risk profile", i.e. the number of objective and subjective factors uncertainty of vital activity is more than ever. (Giddens, 1994) In this situation trust in people, social groups, institutes, social procedures etc. is the way of dealing with this uncertainty. An important contribution to the research of phenomenon "trust" was made by Polish sociologist P. Sztompka. (Sztompka, 1996) This author defines 3 dimensions or types of trust:

1. Trust as characteristics of relations.
2. Trust as a personal trait.
3. Trust as a culture norm.

Also P. Sztompka singles out several varieties of trust according to the object. There are the following varieties:

1. Personal trust towards individuals who we enter direct or "virtual" communication (with media-persons as well) with.
2. Categorical confidence, relating to gender, nationality, religion and so on.
3. Positional confidence of social roles (doctor, friend, policeman).
4. Confidence of group object (sport team, educational group).
5. Trust to institutions.
6. "Procedure" trust to institutial practices and procedures (to science, democracy, official messages).

7. Commercial trust (to brands, manufacturing countries).
8. System trust referred to social systems, orders and regimes.

N.V. Freik singles out that “finally in any of these cases confidence is shown towards individuals and their actions (products or activities)”. (Freik, 2006) Besides, P.Sztompka marks out so called “secondary objects”, confidence in which is based not on the evaluation of the individual’s own interaction with it, but on faith to different instances and persons; what man has learned from the “reliable source” – expert, sage, social institution.

Concept of trust is extremely important for better understanding of social activity regulation subject’s peculiarities. It’s clear that the lack of confidence in media means the lack of confidence in content created by this subject of media space. In the situation of media-channels abundance the audience will break off the communication with lack of confidence. So reputation regulators era pointed at control of social sense of activity in order to maximize confidence. Trust can be regarded as a characteristic of social relations between mass-communication activity subject and audience.

In this connection it’s important to consider procedural characteristics of forming and maintenance satisfactory level of confidence. A.Y.Panasuk has formulated psychological principles of persuasive influence.

1. Understanding doesn’t mean acceptance.
2. To prove doesn’t mean to convince.
3. It’s easier to people to take the position that doesn’t contradict their other views.
4. *Ceteris paribus*, it’s easier for people to accept the position of person who they treat positively. (Panasuk, 2001)

These principles demonstrate 2 levels of communication: rational (thinking, logics,

reasoning) and irrational (emotional interaction, attitudes, values, assessments). At the same time the irrational communication, as more ancient biologically, is a basic one for changing the position of a partner of communication. Actually we may understand the position of the other individual improperly, but accept it without any logical arguments because of high degree of confidence and positive attitude to the source of information. It absolutely corresponds to the communicative aim to influence mass consciousness.

It’s important to take in to account that the peculiarities of media channels restrict the media-actor’s possibilities for social activity targeted on creating trust to itself as an information source that is capable to change audience’s opinions, views, judgments. Among 5 organs of sense at best 2 of them are used vision and hearing, and very often communication is possible in the form of texts. Also it’s possible to control the audience’s psycho-emotional condition. In most of cases actual feedback is impossible or severely limited, i.e. reaction to the message is unknown or slowed. Besides, communicative integration is highly restricted by time bounds and media format. Thus the usage of famous psycho-technologies, which provide irrational confidence in the source of information become inaccessible (e.g., basic trance techniques invented by Mettle Ericsson: calibrating – connection – directing – mind manipulation – hypnosis – withdrawal from trance). (Bendler, Greender, 2000)

It’s supposed that reputation becomes the most accessible mean of forming confidence in media space. Reputation from the point of view of subject of social activity can be described as a reputation regulator. We have defined 2 reputation regulators above: individual narrative as the history of person’s life interpreted to make a self-presentation; and an individual image –

specially organized person's image, which includes attributes necessary for providing sense of confidence of the target audience (appearance, para-verbal or non-verbal behavior patterns, etc.). the definition of reputation as a social activity regulation is based on the fact the subject of mass communication activities hasn't got a possibility to make a self-presentation as a separate social activity in the majority of cases. This self-presentation is likely to be an exception. Presentation narration and image building activities may appear as separate acts joined in the texture of other social activities in the form of small inclusion: parenthetic words, mentioning achievements or acquaintance with the famous persons, belonging to high status group, connections with certain institutions, expression of values, para-verbal accompaniment and so on. Nevertheless, while realizing any social activities in media space subjects corresponds them with its present or wishful reputation. In that way, social actions of subject of mass-communication is transformed according to reputation regulators.

Conclusions

1. In the media space structure some elements may be highlighted. However one can admit subjects of mass communication in condition that their social functions are directly pointed at the achievements of the essential goal of social communication means – influence on the mass mind.

2. The systems of social activity regulators are specific concerning media space subjects.

3. Reputation in the media space can be defined as stable social idea, which illustrates the person of mass communication activity subject in the group mind on the biological, personal, social and transcendental levels. The aim of forming positive reputation in the media space is the providing of confidence in the audience towards the mass communication activity subject.

4. In media space reputation is a regulator of social actions provided by the subject of mass communication. In media space social actions of subject are formed according to such reputation regulator as an individual narrative and individual image.

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Медиапространство: репутационные регуляторы

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В статье представлены результаты теоретического анализа характеристик социального действия субъектов массово-коммуникативной деятельности в медиапространстве. Медиапространство рассматривается как особая часть социального пространства. Показано, что система регуляторов социального действия этих субъектов медиапространства включает нормативные, политико-идеологические, дискурсивные и репутационные регуляторы. Основными репутационными регуляторами являются индивидуальной нарратив и индивидуальный имидж. Целью репутации в медиапространстве является обеспечение доверия аудитории к субъекту массово-коммуникативной деятельности. Социальные действия субъекта в медиапространстве трансформируются в соответствии с репутационными регуляторами.

Ключевые слова: медиапространство, репутация, регуляторы, социальное действие, доверие, нарратив, имидж.
