

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS IN SOCIAL POLICY REPRESENTATION

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: In modern conditions, communications play a decisive role. The information has become a “product” not only in the economic and political areas, but also in quite unexpected institutions of the post-industrial society (humanitarian, social or public, and cultural). In the article, the authors present the role of media communications in the representation of social policy and analyze experience gained from the interaction of media communications and social policy.

Methodology: In the study’s practical section based on expert monitoring of articles in the printed media and the Internet, the authors analyze possibilities and prospects of institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation.

Main Findings: Besides, in the study, the authors define a list of priority social topics in the publications under analysis and various aspects of media activities that influence the probability of representation of social policy by media communications. In the study, the authors indicate requirements for the responsible social position of a media professional and present policy and role diversity of media communications in the course of institutionalization.

Keywords: *Media Communications, Institutionalization, Representation, Social Policy, Social Problems.*

INTRODUCTION

In present scenario ideas and strategies of the global information world, on the one hand, have negative components related to both the stereotypization of the behavior of people who are part of a global system and massification, i.e. involvement of a person into a mass of people who are programmed to behave in a specific manner ([Krasnoyarova, O.V. 2011](#)). On the other hand, the availability of the efficient communications system has become a necessary condition for the successful activity of Russian society: communities, families, groups of people and individuals.

Communication is one of the main human activities, the study of which is reflected in many papers related to different socio-humanitarian disciplines that actualize the social ([Tîrziu, A.M., Vrabie, C.I. 2014](#)), information ([Dowerah, B.T. 2012](#)), symbolic ([Gårdenfors, P. 2004](#)), linguistic ([Williams, J.R. 1993](#)), and psychological ([Lunenborg, F.C. 2010](#)) nature of communication. The above theoretical discourse is continuous, diversified and close to the profound perception of public processes and changes. This also influenced communication processes not through emphasized, but conceptual factors of the institutional development of communication processes ([Grandien, C., Johansson, C. 2012](#)).

Communication, which was studied by such representatives of modern sociology as D. Bell ([2004](#)), M. Castells ([2000](#)), N. Luhmann ([1995](#)), H. McLuhan ([2007](#)), and E. Toffler ([2004](#)), shifted from the interpersonal level to the level of social structures. Communication is understood as a structure-forming process of the exchange of knowledge via technologies and is stipulated by the place of communication participants in the social system. An attempt to combine the level of social structures and the level of social action can be observed in the theories presented by P. Bourdieu ([2005](#)), J. Habermas ([2000](#)), and some other modern sociologists. The researchers consider communication as a structure-activity process stipulated, on the one hand, by characteristics of the system, in which interaction occurs, and, on the other hand, by characteristics of subjects of interaction.

Separate communications systems differ primarily by mechanisms of the impact on the audience, ways of achievement and properties of effects, as well as processing and distribution of information. Media communications are organized; the analysis of activities carried out by their institutions (television, press, radio broadcasting, etc.) makes it possible to understand the social consequences of the relevant media activity ([Dzylaloshinsky, I.M. 2012](#)).

Accordingly, 79.9% of Europeans and 66.2% of Russians use daily newspapers as a source of information; 95.6% and 90.1%, respectively, fall to radio and TV news; 53.2% and 37% – to the printed media, 68.3%, and 54.1% – to analytical overviews on the radio and television; 67.4% and 40% – to digital publications ([Media consumption in Russia, 2018](#)).

In accordance with the problem declared in the article’s title, let us review the idea of the concept of social policy, which currently is more and more often mentioned in politicians’ speeches, attracting lots of pledges and expectations, but remaining largely hidden, as if in the background of national policy.

As L.V. Konstantinova states, social policy activities “...constitute straight-forward and organized regulation of social relations that is carried out by public bodies for the formation of a stable and balanced structure of the society” ([Konstantinova, L.V. 2005](#)). Such a definition is not the only one. Accordingly, social policy is viewed as:

A policy that includes social divisions and the system of social security ([Grigorieva, I.A. 2014](#));

A part of the state's internal policy that is executed in social programs and in the practice of regulating relations in the society in the interests of all social groups of the population ([Terziev, V., Dimitrova, P. 2017](#));

An aggregate of measures aimed to ensure the welfare of the public and greater social solidarity in the society ([Bobrov, D.V. 2013](#)).

The mentioned definitions emphasize the ambiguous nature of its interpretation and give an opportunity to state that social policy is presented in both a broad and narrow manner. We can highlight the following characteristics of social policy. Social policy is an activity if considered more generally, and, in a narrow sense, separate measures and programs.

In addition, social policy has its area of application that includes social protection (security), employment, healthcare, household activities, and education. We deal with straightforward actions that are related to separate areas of human activities.

Media communications activities relate to social policy and are a core component in the course of representation of those tasks that the social policy system contains. The following functions of social policy are primarily highlighted: management, diagnostic, integration, ideological, educational and innovative. If one looks at the means, which help execute the said functions, there is quite a diversified system of subjects. Here, subjects are social groups, organizations, institutions, and separate individuals. These very subjects are intermediaries between the state and a person. Differences between what the state proclaims, what it should protect (equal opportunities, fairness, and so forth) and real conditions, in which most citizens of the countries live, also concern social policy issues and constitute an area, within which the relevant social relations are formed.

Such social institutions as the family, religion, etc. are not independent formations, but parts of the social system, contributing to the execution of social policy and the society's operation as a whole. Media communications, which are considered as secondary social institutions ([Lipina, S.A. et al. 2017](#)), can also be considered as a subject that is one of the means for the conduct of social policy.

Looking at the international experience of interaction between media communications and social policy in the United States and West European countries, several periods and scenarios can be highlighted ([Hjarvard, S. 2008](#)).

First, the end of the 19th century – the 1930s: this period is characterized by multi-factor efforts, which were initially taken in the newspapers in order to popularize measures for the conduct of humanitarian policies and were later broadened by media communications in terms of the activity of social divisions of various types.

Second, the 1950-60s: this period is characterized by an open intention and multi-vector practical activities designed to form a positive image of a social worker in the public through media communications. It is necessary to pay attention to the conditions of the establishment and the development of professional groups of social workers.

Third, the 1970-80s: this period is characterized by functional managerial means of interaction with the public. Moreover, during this period social workers made active use of radio, television, newspapers, and other media resources to distribute the practice of self-help and mutual aid and to take measures to forestall negative phenomena among vulnerable groups of the population.

Fourth, the end of the 20th century – the beginning of the 21st century: this period is characterized by the multi-option experience of the straightforward practice of balancing out social policy and needs of the population when media communications help to not only communicate with population but also execute diverse preventive and educational programs.

In accordance with the presented periodization, A. Hepp ([Hepp, A. et al. 2015](#)) thinks that the tendency of using media communications in the representation of social policy in the United States and European countries over the past 60-70 years can be considered in the sequence of main scenarios, namely:

1. A scenario that is based on multi-factor efforts taken by social workers and media communications to declare (popularize) positive attitude, reasonableness, and public benefits from the conduct of social policy measures;
2. A scenario that covers pragmatic intentions to form via media communications a positive image of a social worker, social security division, and social work;
3. A scenario that is based on managerial means of interaction between social services and media communications in the conditions of reforms conducted (the main result) to organize a systematic dialogue with the population;
4. A scenario that creates incentives for the formation of multi-option experience in the straightforward policy of balance in the actions taken by social workers and media communications, social policy, and public needs.

Nowadays, key social policy problems are a topic of both scientific and political discussions. The problem is aggravated by the fact that there are no unified theoretical and methodological fundamentals, thus giving a reason and making it more necessary to seek means, with the help of which social policy is conducted.

The study's goal is to analyze the institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation.

The study's hypothesis is as follows: the institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation is determined by the presence of priority social policy topics, the responsible social position of media professionals, and diversity of policies and roles in media communications practices.

In the course of the study, its goal was achieved and the hypothesis was confirmed.

The article consists of an introduction, description of methods, discussion of the study's results, conclusion and a list of references.

METHODS

The study aims to analyze the possibilities and prospects of institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation.

The concept of social policy representation, in our view, can be monitored by analyzing publications in the printed media and on the Internet, defining principles of fixing topical problems of social policy. In our opinion, it makes sense to typologize social problems, which are influenced by social policy, by determining the list of topics in the publications chosen for analysis with the participation of experts.

The top five printed media are, according to the Top 10 newspapers as ranked by Medialogia ([Top 10 Newspapers by Quotations 2018](#)) in 2018, Izvestia, Kommersant, Vedomosti, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, and Komsomolskaya Pravda. These media fully ensure the execution of social functions (informing, influence, feedback, criticism, supervision, etc.). The content of the publications shows that social problems and social policy are among determining factors in the life of Russian society.

Twenty-two experts (social workers, employees of the Social Policy Department, and journalists with professional experience of 10-15 years) took part in the long-distance monitoring of publications and the subsequent discussion of the results of the monitoring.

When monitoring publications, experts mainly focused on the determination of priority social policy problems in the newspapers under analysis and on subsequent expert opinions about the institutionalization of media communications as a whole in the course of social policy representation. When doing so, experts were asked to indicate three topics, which were covered most of all in the media and related to social policy at the federal level.

RESULTS

The monitoring of publications in the printed media and on the Internet confirms that social policy problems are topical and important. According to the experts' estimates, the following list of topics is of priority in the newspapers under analysis (Table 1).

Table 1: List of priority social policy topics

Topic	Number of hits	Rank
Self-organization of citizens for the solution of their social problems (the activity of social divisions, public organizations, charity)	22	1
Preservation of the environment and natural resources	18	2
Problems faced by socially vulnerable people (people with disabilities, minors, the elderly, etc.)	15	3
The propaganda of the physical and mental health of the public	14	4
Youth problems (AIDS, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc.)	12	5-6
Problems related to childhood and motherhood, parents and children	12	5-6
The moral education of a person (moral and ethical values, principles of the civil society)	10	7

The above list of topics cannot cover all problems of social policy in the mass media but shows the main conditions and typical criteria for the qualification of actual social policy problems in public life. The main point, above all, is the reaction of the audience: any acute problem turns into social, becomes an object of social policy if it has social feedback, i.e. it causes reaction not only from the public but also from the authorities, it is discussed and relevant publications are quoted in the media and so on.

DISCUSSION

As the study's results showed, on the one hand, media communications reflect a real human life, illustrates value pursued by subjects of the socially pragmatic discourse, particularly fluctuating between points of the dichotomous scale, namely "inequality – justice", "intolerance – tolerance", "discrimination – non-discrimination", "exclusion (or

segregation) – inclusion (or normalization)”, “social alienation – social solidarity”, and others. Accordingly, in any situation, media communications have an opportunity to execute their social functions.

On the other hand, media communications are interesting, high-quality, and active when in the area of social policy, the raise questions worrying people, families or groups of people, the community. The emergence of socially oriented journalism is possibly a niche that media communications (for example, media business) should command in social policy representation.

Consequently, according to Anatoly V. (37 years old, Social Policy Department employee), “media activities in social policy representation should aim to ensure harmonic development of the society, to ease tension and resolve conflicts”. Most experts are of the opinion that social responsibility of the media should be expressed via the provision of high-quality objective information, the development, and integration of main components of social responsibility in the development strategy of media communications.

According to Lyudmila K. (34 years old, journalist), “the media becomes a transmitter of social problems and, as a matter of fact, turns social problems into “a subject”. However, here, it becomes necessary to choose one or another topic or situation to cover because, in reality, it is very difficult to assess which specific topic within the social policy will be in high demand. Under these conditions, trends of labelling, “the principle of selectivity”, and other threats become widespread.

As the experts believe, the biggest danger that arises in the course of social policy representation by means of media communications is that media communications spark short-term and superficial public interest in one problem or another. Being of a mass character, “under the scrutiny of the media” a social problem becomes, in reality, a changing hobby as it is “served” to the public from the relevant perspective. While a social problem is discussed in the newspapers or television for quite a long time, in the course of time it is no longer seen as a newsbreak, it turns into the background, and later it is even taken as something resolved, which is usually true. In this case, the audience suffers more as readers (listeners, viewers) think that the problem has disappeared only because it is no longer reported.

Another aspect influencing the probability of social policy representation by media communications is a period, during which one or another newsbreak occurs, i.e. when a specific social problem as an object of social policy is formalized and turns into a certain event or a quantitative indicator. Usually, the less time the formation of a problem takes, the more likely it is that the problem will be talked about. If one or another social problem is formed gradually but does not arise suddenly (this is typical for an overwhelming majority of social problems), it is quite evident that it will not find its way into the media.

All these conditions, as the experts think, are components of peculiarities of the process of production, e.g. news. The concept of news making can be used both in the meaning of production of another reality and the production of materials, which are created especially for a definite message. In addition, propaganda, which provides for all possible efforts to persuade the audience, is related to the concept of news making.

Speaking about the formation of a responsible social position of a media professional in the course of social policy representation, the experts in journalism impose the following requirements.

First, a media professional should proceed from universal priorities, in separate and situational priorities they should highlight what is in line with the general. A media professional should understand the outside world and have an all-round orientation in the system of public relations.

Second, a media professional should determine their place in the structure of society.

Third, a media professional should understand the main, basic, typical contradictions among people who constitute the society, e.g. between the poor and the rich, orphans and children who live with their families.

When discussing the institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation, the experts paid some attention to the roles they play in these processes.

The experts believe that the development of socio-political roles is institutionalized in media communications. At the same time, the experts highlight two groups of such socio-political roles (structure-forming (or missionary) and form-forming (or technological)).

The experts think that the main structure-forming role is the moderation of social dialogue. This means that media communications create an environment for equal dialogue among various people, groups and communities – no matter how they differ in their ideas, intentions, means of self-organization, in the course of which social contradictions and conflicts are resolved.

Among other roles of this group, the experts noted the following:

1. The role of the commentator (the review of social policy without any attempts to cause pity or mockery);

2. The role of the propagandist of social values and knowledge (the formation of tolerance towards people in need, the elimination of myths and stereotypes, the lack of any biased attitude);
3. The role of the public helper (financial, information and moral assistance to the socially vulnerable groups of people);
4. The role of the generator of social ideas (the search for methods, alternative approaches to the assistance and improvement of life of socially vulnerable groups of the population);
5. The role of the public lawyer when supporting a social situation.

As form-forming (technological) political roles, the experts classify the following: 1) prevention (avoidance); 2) assistance if there are signs of a social problem; 3) assistance in overcoming a problem; 4) struggle against reasons of social disasters.

The experts are of the opinion that socio-political roles of media communications are determined by the processes in the field of the solution of social problems and the development of socially important communication. At the same time, the replacement of political roles by practical reasonableness makes media communications activities sporadic, isolated from the reality of people by word forms, e.g. “this program aimed to prevent social orphanage”, etc. For this reason, it is necessary to introduce (define, correct) policy and role diversity of media communications practice, for example:

1. To prove positive usefulness of effects from the execution of social programs and events for most people and to inform the society that it is reasonable to bear costs in order to solve social problems when executing social policy;
2. To provide systematically the fullest possible information about the course of social programs;
3. To open new social topics for discussion, to track changes, and to help people make decisions on various issues independently;
4. To explain to a person/people (that it is necessary to differentiate) intentions, peculiarities of social policy, social work, social service, and socially responsible businesses. Furthermore, to explain the needs of the poor and vulnerable groups of the population to potential benefactors, social workers, and volunteers;
5. To provide helpful information to people who are in a stress and conflict situation on what can help families, neighbors, and other assistants in an open social environment find constructive answers to social requests made by relatives, acquaintances, and friends;
6. To create opportunities for the expression of new ideas, to propose scenarios of behavior and assessment in the conditions of solving social issues;
7. To hold a social dialogue, to support the balance of interests while presenting positions of various people or groups of people, to ease social tension, and to contribute to achieving mutual understanding;
8. To participate in the formation and the implementation of social policy (general, regional, local), to inform of facts, local positive experience of assistance, support, and to prioritize ideas of social justice, equality, humanism, and good over situational interests;
9. To create incentives for the formation and activities carried out by groups of self-help, mutual assistance, schools or clubs of social knowledge.

Such policy-role diversity is necessary, on the one hand, for people – readers/listeners/viewers – to mobilize their own socio-communicative potential. On the other hand, the media itself needs this because the differentiation of roles is an indicator of ideological and political identification of media communications. In other words, political roles are transformed into a tool of activity directly by a subject of media communications, which, in the value system of media institutions, discloses and adjusts operating components independently and pursuant to a mission, goals, and terms of professional activities.

Overall, the experts think that the institutional establishment of media communications in social policy representation makes it possible to model their development, to forecast consequences of activities, and to highlight differentiated groups of practices, which have a unified cultural environment (values, standards) of professional activities. Consequently, media communications, while representing the social policy, develop a system of the society’s values and expectations, legitimize intentions of social policy, thus making media actions expedient, useful, and directed to an expected public result.

CONCLUSION

Media communications present themselves as a valuable institution of culture, social training, solution of social problems, and popularization of social knowledge when the consumer or the user of media products is a determining subject of communication. In these conditions, it is not only essential to re-establish the feeling of social significance in modern media communications. The institutionalization of communicative activities aimed to establish and maintain public interaction, as well as the representation of the state’s social policy is underway.

Prerequisites for the institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation are determined by appropriate possibilities of media communications and social work practices in the joint solution of social policy objectives. The completeness of the information provided and efficient representation of the social policy, as well as the quality of social analysis, are conditions for the existence of modern media communications, which also provides for public participation in the exchange of information.

The study's results show that social policy problems are key on the agenda of the Russian mass media. Journalists write about social policy problems because the audience represented by a person is always the key figure that plays an important role in the formation, creation, promotion, and the conduct of social practice.

The monitoring of publications in the printed and digital editions of daily Russian newspapers confirmed that social policy problems are relevant and important. It also made it possible to highlight the most typical topics:

1. Self-organization of people in order to solve their social problems (activities carried out by social divisions, public organizations, charity);
2. The moral upbringing of a person (moral and ethical values, principles of the civil society);
3. The propaganda of physical and mental health of the public; problems faced by socially unprotected people (people with disabilities, migrants, minors, the elderly, etc.);
4. Problems related to the preservation of the environment and natural resources; problems of childhood and motherhood, parents and children;
5. Problems faced by the youth (AIDS, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc.).

The institutionalization of media communications in social policy representation constitutes the formation of standards and special differentiated policy. This policy legitimizes the co-participation of media professionals in the representation of a social policy, resolution of social issues, interaction with people and communities, search and statement of a positive and principal position not to construct any pessimistic media scenarios.

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