

# Information policy as a factor of stability and sustainable development: risks and threats

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**Abstract.** The article considers the segments of the country's information policy (institutional (state) and non-institutional ones), which are associated with the development of Internet communications. The article demonstrates the dominance of the second segment and highlights its actors. The article assesses the main problems of the modern information space, especially in relation to border regions. It substantiates the constructive or destructive nature of the content produced by the actors of information policies. The authors also consider the need for a balance between the two sectors to promote the sustainable development of the country and the border region as a whole.

**Keywords:** information policy, information space, cross-border region, blogger

## 1. Introduction

Information policy in a cross-border region is an essential part of a country's general policy, as well as of state associations. The goal of the information policy is to create a picture of social reality and public opinion using subjects of all levels, starting with key figures of government, business, cultural figures and ending with a mass audience. A successful information policy contributes to the development of an open dialogue both at the interstate level and at the level of individual contacts; increasing the efficiency of joint programs and stabilizing the geopolitical situation in the region. Therefore, the study of factors shaping information policy in cross-border areas, the main risks and ways to reduce them seems highly relevant.

## 2. Materials and Methods

In researching information policy problems, the authors relied on the work of V. D. Popov, M. M. Kovaleva, E. P. Tavokin, A. V. Manoilo, M. Brüggemann, and others. For the analysis of the problems posed, the following papers on the theory of the agenda are important: D. Graber, B. Cohen, E. G. Dyakova, A. D. Trakhtenberg. The interaction of state and non-state information policy is analyzed in the works of I. M. Dzyaloshinsky, S. G. Korkonosenko, E. P. Prokhorov, B. A. Grushin and others. System-structural and structural-functional *methods* were used to analyze the levels of the information picture of the world, the subjects and participants of the information policy. The content of network communication was assessed using discourse analysis and intent analysis. In addition, the audience's attitude to information sources was assessed through Internet questionnaire and secondary data analysis.

### 3. Results

An analysis of information policy problems, conducted on the example of the Russian information space, led to the following conclusions:

1. As of today, information policy is implemented at the state and non-state, institutional and self-organizing levels. The second level becomes dominant due to the growing role of Internet communication. Social networks, author's channels of "opinion leaders," and the "viral editor" of the Internet are the main elements of Internet communication that are involved in shaping the information picture of society.
2. The content produced by information policy actors is both constructive and destructive. As destructive trends can be identified: one-sided display of negative-critical materials, provoking social tensions and conflicts; one-sidedly positive interpretation of events and the avoidance of acute problems; the prevalence of entertainment and everyday content, contributing to the growth of social indifference; uncontrollable stream fake news; legitimization of manipulative language technologies. The balance of the institutional and self-organizing information policy segments is necessary to neutralize these trends.
3. Information policy aimed at adequately covering the lives of one's own and neighboring states becomes a factor of stability and sustainable development of a cross-border region, contributes to the intensification of interstate interactions. This is especially true for Russia, serving as a link between Europe and Asia.

### 4. Discussion

We agree with V. D. Popov that information policy is the ability of political actors to influence people's minds and activities through information [1]. But at the same time, we will consider this topic only in the aspect of forming the image of the country. Today, such an image (information picture) is formed under the influence of two factors: a purposeful set of measures taken by state structures ("vertical factor") and spontaneously formed public opinion ("horizontal factor"). In the same vein, A. V. Manoilo singles out state and non-state informational policies [2, p. 122].

Speaking about the tasks of the state information policy, many authors emphasize the need to form a single Eurasian information space [3, p. 5]. In addition, experts from a number of countries, including Russia, point out the ill-considered domestic information policy, especially noticeable against the background of the apparent dominance of the "horizontal" factor, due to the development of the Internet. The Global Digital Report 2019 report states, "The global digital growth shows no sign of slowing... 45% of the world's population are now social media users" [4]. The specific socio-communicative structure is taking shape in the information space, as M. Castells wrote about [5, 6]. At this stage, the following main elements of this structure can be identified: (a) social networks, (b) "opinion leaders," (c) "virus editors".

*The social network* embodies the pan-communication theory (N. Luhmann), according to which communication is the main constructive factor of society [7, p. 15]. Today, social networks are becoming matrices of various groups expressing themselves, broadcasting their positions and interests.

*Opinion leaders* act as peculiar "attractors" of the information space, form an "agenda," provoke a mass interest, and set its axiological perspective. The complexity of the situation lies in the fact that individuals with qualitatively different social status, levels of education and culture act as opinion leaders. Those who can reasonably act as experts on important issues occupy the top level. According to S. A. Rios, "In the specific social networks known as communities of practice, where the focus is a specific area of knowledge, influencers are key for the healthy working of the OSN (online social network)" [8, p. 326]. "Mass leaders" are the popular bloggers, among whom the vloggers are on the bottom level. The content produced by them is either not burdened by social meanings, or, on the contrary, is politically and socially sharp, but he is destructive, destabilizing character.

*"Virus editors"* – "... artificial intelligence, people-users are its crucial chips. Accidentally bumping into an interesting, ... a user infects with the interest of those who are in contact with him"

[9]. Numerous studies confirm the weight of the contribution of these structures. Thus, 39% of the Russian audience reads the news from social networks [10].

Now, we will look at the functioning of the “horizontal” and “vertical” segments of information policy in Russia using concrete examples.

In the first segment, the tone is set by the most famous bloggers and vloggers (video bloggers): Maxim Shevchenko, Alexander Nevzorov, Leonid Parfyonov, Yury Dud, and others. Maxim Shevchenko focuses on political issues, as can be seen from the headlines: “Who and why is trying to give up the Kurils” (01/25/19), “Urgent! Putin is crazy!” (03/03/19). His speeches are often acutely critical. However, in general, they are weighted. Alexander Nevzorov also addresses political issues, but in a provocative and even offensive tone: “Russia is painfully lacking ideology ... This is a way to make millions of stupid like-minded people ...” (“Nevzorovskie Wednesdays”, 03/06/19). Yuri Khovansky often appears as an alcoholic; his performances are accompanied by obscene vocabulary. Leonid Parfyonov was one of the most prominent journalists on YouTube. He opened the channel “Parthenon” and talks with the audience on the themes of culture, art, and politics. As already mentioned, the difference in subject and quality of content is obvious here. As for social networks, according to the analytical review of 2019, they become less social [11]. Their thematic focus is reflected in the review of *Brand Analytics 2018*. Entertaining content makes up the lion’s share, which is easy to see even from the names of top groups: “Laugh to tears”, “Jokes / dares”; themes of cosmetics, cooking, etc. are still popular [12].

Problems of the state aspect of information policy were raised as early as 2000. Later, V.V. Putin declared that “ideas about Russia in the world are far from reality” [13, p. 161]. As the most famous projects here, we can name, first of all, the Russia Today. According to a 2017 Ipsos study, 100 million people watch RT every week. Another example is the Russia Beyond international multimedia project. But in general, researchers note the limited resources intended to represent the country in the international arena. In the internal Russian information space, either official materials or those creating an “enemy image” (external or internal) prevail. These materials are identified as propaganda or an element of information warfare.

We will try to evaluate the contribution of various actors in promoting sustainable development. In other words, their constructive or destructive role is in focus. First of all, we note the groundlessness of the opinion that the positive image of the country excludes criticism, including of the authorities and its decisions. “Bringing in” acute problems cause a negative reaction in the majority of the country’s population and, especially, in other countries. Destructive in nature is the installation on the opposition of “their” and “alien” tags. In this regard, the state segment of the Russian information policy, as well as part of the non-state segment, evoke reasonable reproaches (although these trends are also characteristic of other countries). The survey, which the authors of the article conducted among 134 respondents aged from 16 to 20 years, showed that they put the blog with low-quality content on the same level as the propaganda TV channel. But criticism must be distinguished from unreasonable attacks and insults, which is typical, for example, of such vloggers as A. Nevzorov. In addition, even valid criticism can play a destabilizing role. The dominance of critical materials creates a one-sidedly negative image of the country and increases the risk of conflict.

The key question is about evaluating the content that seems to be neutral: everyday issues, entertainment information, secular news, etc. In our opinion, its volume should not go beyond certain limits (which are the subject of separate research). One of the best examples is the project “Russia Beyond.” Along with interesting materials, the portal publishes many notes and articles with a clearly “yellow” shade. There are some examples: “Top 7 Russian gangsters in cinema”, “Why were the Bolsheviks so hellbent on burning the dead”. These notes hardly form an adequate understanding of life in Russia, the opinions and problems prevailing in society, the values and interests of modern Russians. In general, the predominance of consumer / entertainment content indicates not only a declining interest in “high culture” or science, but also a decrease in civic activity of the population and social indifference. This is a destabilizing factor for the sustainable development of the country and the region as a whole.

In addition to the above, we need to note two more negative trends in the modern information space. One problem is the distribution of fake news. Its use has already become or is becoming for some countries (Great Britain, France, China, Russia) a part of the state information policy. In addition, we should note the problems associated with the language of the modern media text: the use of methods of speech influence on the consciousness of the recipient; violation of the maxim of politeness, including in official speeches of the authorities; massive use of obscene vocabulary (as, for example, in the videos of Yuri Dud). First, all this indicates a decline in the general culture of not only the majority of the population, but also the leaders of the country and those who should support and transmit the culture. Second, these trends mark the legitimization of manipulative technologies that turn citizens into a controlled mass. In such a situation, we can hardly speak about the formation of an adequate image of the country.

## 5. Conclusion

Summarizing what has been said, it can be noted that the tasks of the state information policy imply not only informing the population, but also creating mechanisms for obtaining feedback. Also, a well thought-out system of interaction between the state and non-state, institutional, and self-organizing sectors of the information space is necessary. The “overregulation” of the information space should be excluded. M. V. Zelentsov rightly notes that in order to form a positive image of the country, a correct newsframing is necessary. Positive results cannot not be achieved through propaganda of the attractiveness of the Russian lifestyle. There are a number of Russian brands: cultural and historical values, advances in science and technology. They should be central to the media agenda. At the same time, information policy is becoming a factor of stability and sustainable development of a cross-border region.

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