Communication Regimes as a New Scientific Category

Gasumyanov V.I., Komleva V.V.

National Research Institute for Communications Development, Moscow, Russia.

Abstract. The article introduces a new category of ‘communication regime’ into discourse, and examines the features of formation and development of country communication regimes. The authors describe some aspects of the methodology of communication regimes research (the need for ‘ideal type’ modeling for comparative analysis). The article contains the results of a study of communication regimes, initiated and first conducted by the National Research Institute for Communications Development (Russia).

Keywords: communication, communication regime, communication order, international communication


Inf. about the authors: Gasumyanov Vladislav Ivanovich – Dr.Sc.(Econ.), director of the National Research Institute for Communications Development; Komleva Valentina Vyacheslavovna – Dr.Sc.(Soc.), head of analytics, National Research Institute for Communications Development. Address: 119034, Russia, Moscow, Korobeynikov lane, 22/1. E-mail address: institute@nicrus.ru, komleva@nicrus.ru.

Received: 08.09.2020. Accepted: 18.09.2020.

Numerous modern Russian studies of topical issues of communications appeal to the categories and concepts of scientific knowledge, that developed mainly in the 1960s-90s of the XX century. Some of them continue to be relevant; some are difficult to apply due to the changing reality. The problem of ordering and institutionalizing communicative practices is studied, as a rule, in the context of the formation of the world communication order or information order. At the same time, in the current international conditions it is extremely difficult to speak about the order, including the communication one. The international space of communication is characterized by disorder and violation of the norms that international documents have tried to establish. The most famous, from this point of view, are the Okinawa Charter1, and the report of the UNESCO Commission, better known as the Sean McBride report ‘Many Voices, One World’ (XXI General Conference of UNESCO in Belgrade, 1980), which tried to lay the foundations of the New World Order of Information and communication (New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO))2.


2 Many voices, one world: towards a new, more just, and more efficient world information and communication order [access mode]: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000040066.
At present, despite the development and availability of global information technologies, the international communication space is fragmented. More often this fragmentation coincides with state borders. State institutions establish their own rules for communication; try to regulate the flow of communication, control communication channels. And even in the conditions of openness and permeability of communication systems within the state borders, it is reasonable to speak not only about the general communication order, but the country communication regimes.

Communication regimes are a phenomenon combining cultural traditions, legal norms, situational circumstances, the interests of decision-making centers and centers of influence, and the communication activity of non-state actors. The communication regimes have an impact on the system and quality of international relations, interstate interaction; are both a factor and an instrument, and a cause and a consequence of international relations. The communication regimes tend to transform, including under the influence of the emergence of new communication technologies. Thus, we are dealing with an interesting phenomenon of intra-country and inter-country communication, that has not been the subject of special scientific research so far.

The National Research Institute for Communications Development (Russia) for the first time outlined the relevance of the study of communication regimes and conducted the first pilot studies. The development of the category ‘communication regime’ is based not only on our research on the practice of external and internal communications in different countries, but also on the basis of the achievements of a number of theories of the information society, the theory of communication, numerous works devoted to the links between politics and communication. In particular, studies of the links between technical innovations in the mass media and the development of society by M. McLuhan [McLuhan], the concept of a post-industrial society [Bell; Brzezinski; Drucker; Castells], the concept of an information society [Katz; Masuda; Porat; Stonier; Toffler], the theory of globalization of world development [Beck; Brzezinski; Robertson; Waters], studies of the influence of information communication technologies for the functioning of political institutions, including international ones [Keane, Noelle-Neumann, Ortega y Gasset; Parenti; Herman; Chomsky; Schiller], the concept of ‘teledemocracy’ by A. Etzioni [Etzioni], the concept of network political communication [Davis; Barber; Tapscota], H. Arendt’s approaches to the public sphere as communicative-activity space; the approaches of J. Habermas, who defined the ‘public sphere’ through the presence (among other criteria) of the opposition and independent media [Habermas 1992; 2016]. Let us note a number of Russian authors researching communication processes [Akopov; Inozemtsev; Smorgunov; Sharkov; Sherstobitov; et al.]. At the same time, the communication regimes have not been the subject of Russian and foreign studies known to us.

The purpose of this article is to present for the readers some of the results of a pilot study of communication regimes initiated and conducted by the National Research Institute for Communications Development (Russia).

Anticipating the doubts of some of our colleagues regarding the use of the term ‘regime’, let us refer to the etymology of the word. From Latin, *regimen* is translated as
management, command, and leadership. This word has acquired a negative context in the framework of Western studies of political regimes, namely authoritarian ones; but, the word ‘regime’ can also be used in the studies of democratic regimes.

We define the communication regime as a controlled (with varying degrees of controllability) system of formal and informal norms, rules, traditions, actors and tools that ensure communication in a certain space. The communication regime sets the conditions for internal and external communication. And we are talking specifically about the regime, since it restricts some communication actors; restricts communication channels (for example, terrorist communication networks) and can limit the content of the messages themselves (for example, calls for religious extremism, terrorism, overthrow of the state system, etc.). In case of violation of the established rules, sanctions are applied in the form of punishments, up to the prohibition of actors and communication channels. External and internal communications are carried out within the framework of the current communication regime; therefore, it is very important for international practice to study the structure and characteristics of such regimes.

The most interesting for us are the communication regimes of individual countries, because we attribute them to the social assets of the state, following the example of those that F. Fukuyama wrote about [Fukuyama]. In part, the country communication regimes are associated with political regimes, but modern practice knows when a fairly closed communication regime operates in the declared open political regimes, in which, for example, the possibility for work of foreign media is limited.

Despite the fact that the role of state institutions in the formation of communication regimes is high and the regime itself is associated with the political regime, acquiring some of its characteristics, we still cannot assert that the communication regime is a direct transfer of the political regime. Under the same political regime, different variants of communication regimes are possible. The communication regimes are associated with country economic systems. They depend on the role of the state, the role of economic actors in the decision-making process, sources of funding for the media.

The communication regime is a dynamic phenomenon. Changes in communication regimes depend not only on the political will of the state, which is legitimized by laws. The communication regimes also depend on processes of a different level, namely, the development of the information society and communication technologies. Such technologies make country communication regimes more vulnerable, ‘open’ them and push them towards greater openness. The communication regimes are formed not only by the states, but also by civil society institutions, economic actors, owners of non-state channels of mass communication. In addition to legislatively enshrined rules, the communication regimes are institutionalized and controlled by the traditions of communication, cultural bonds that have been taking shape in a number of societies for centuries, and in a number – relatively recently emerged, as, for example, in the countries of the former republics of the USSR. This process involves (with varying degrees of influence in different countries) subjects of economic, cultural, religious, ethnic relations, civil society institutions, mass media, subjects of virtual relations in
social networks, etc. Therefore, we use the concept of ‘country communication regimes’, and not ‘state communication regimes’.

In this regard, when analyzing the communication regimes, it is important to understand:

– who, how and under the influence of what forces, resources, circumstances, makes decisions about the rules, norms, tools, content of mass communication;
– by whom and how the media are funded;
– who the founder and owner of the mass media are and how deep the involvement of these persons (organizations) is in the formation of the content and strategy of the mass media;
– who the subject of new communication practices and relationships is; how the structure of communication channels is changing.

The research methodology of country communication regimes, which we use, involves modeling a certain ‘ideal type’ of communication regime with which the communication regimes of different countries are compared. We do not speak about an ideal to strive for, but about the essential characteristics and properties of the communication regime. The severity (or absence) of these essential properties in different regimes is fixed during comparing process.

The method of analyzing the communication regime in order to develop recommendations for inter-country interaction involves: comparison of the formally enshrined legal environment of communication and the actual practice of the functioning of communication media (mass media, social media, civic journalism institutes, etc.); comparison of the degree of declared and real freedom of information channels and the possibility of implementing civil initiatives; declared and real possibility of registration of foreign media and non-profit organizations on the territory of a particular country; the role of informal norms in the regulation of internal and external communications of the country; channels for the population to receive domestic and international information; the share of media financed from the state budget, financed from the foreign sources, in the total number of mass media; the structure of news agencies with which the state media interact (with a share of state participation); the proportion and working conditions of opposition media; the involvement of government institutions in the Internet of communication and other criteria for assessing communication regimes. In other words, first of all, it is advisable to study:

– infrastructure of communication means and information channels (initially we identified three directions of the direction: political communications, business communications, humanitarian communications, but later we added a fourth type - civil communications);
– legal norms on the basis of which they operate;
– informal rules of the communication environment (possibly related to established traditions, with religious, ethnic and other socio-cultural aspects);
– practice of applying the established norms and rules, and the practice of violating the established norms. The presence of deviations and reactions to them (civil and
political) make it possible to determine and predict the degree of stability of the communication regime in a particular country, the degree of its control by internal and external and actors, the degree of its permeability under the influence of external effects, the degree of flexibility and adaptability.

Our research has shown that the country communication regimes can be characterized by communication gaps and communication splits that appear due to the limited access of certain groups and territories to information, means of communication, and the benefits of the information society. An analysis of the reasons for such gaps and splits is important for understanding the essence of the regime itself, the degree of its need, ability and desire to eliminate or conserve such gaps and splits. The most controllable, but the most unstable, is the communication regime in its peripheral part, in which the information flow is the least dynamic and diverse, the exchange of information is less intensive and the means of communication are the least diverse. Any new, meaningful for people, communication actor in the peripheral part of the communication regime is capable of destabilizing the established rules and norms.

The communication regimes are characterized by the problem of controllability, the presence of several control centers (even with one control center). Communication, in essence, presupposes some feedback between the communicator and the recipient and cannot be completely controlled from only one center. There is always some kind of 'lateral pressure' on the communication regime associated with actors outside the control center of the communication system. In the overwhelming majority of sovereign states, communications control centers are controlled by the state institutions. At a minimum, they create conditions for the development of communication, the right field for the functioning of the media and other channels of information. But new communication technologies allow other actors to influence the process and result of communication (social media, bloggers, citizen journalism, etc.). The processes of globalization and increasing availability of communication technologies make the communication regimes more and more discerning. Therefore, today it is difficult to find regimes fully controlled from one center. As open systems, the communication regimes are highly vulnerable from the outside and can be subject to external influences more than, for example, political or economic regimes.

Unlike political or economic regimes, new practices appear much more often in communication regimes claiming new institutionalization. Several decades ago, we still did not consider bloggers to be full-fledged actors of communication, and in the modern conditions they, like the traditional media, can influence the information agenda, declare new rules of communication. And, the reputable international agencies cite social networks on a par with the statements of the presidents of the countries.

The research has shown that the communication regimes have some systemic effects. For example, we observed the emergence effect, when the communication regime had properties greater than the sum of its individual elements. For example, this is typical for the Russian Federation. We have observed that open and semi-open communication regimes have the property of self-organization by ordering a variety of
elements through coordinated actions not only among state but also non-state actors. The recent events in the Republic of Belarus are an example of this.

Our research has shown that possible structural changes in the communication regimes occur within the ‘reserve of diversity’ that the communication regimes possess. Both destabilization and the chances of survival of communication regimes depend on this ‘reserve of diversity’.

Thus, the country communication regimes are an interesting socio-cultural, political-legal, socio-economic phenomenon, previously not studied by scientists, but actually existing and determining the communication system in the country. Institutionalization of communication practice occurs within the boundaries of the particular state.

The country communication regimes set the framework, determine the conditions, norms and rules of communication not only within the country, but for the inter-country relations. The country communication regimes legitimize the relations of communication participants, create the image of countries, allow or do not allow foreign actors to communicate. In essence, all communication regimes are open (or semi-open) even in the closed political systems, have a number of properties of systems and can be investigated, at least, using systemic and institutional approaches. Due to openness, the communication regimes are very vulnerable under the influence of external effects, up to their complete transformation. The analysis of the peculiarities of country communication regimes in the modern conditions is becoming the most important direction of communication logic and practice of intrastate and interstate interactions.

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Коммуникационные режимы как новая научная категория

Гасумянов В.И., Комлева В.В.

Национальный исследовательский институт развития коммуникаций, Москва, Российская Федерация.

Аннотация. В статье вводится в научный оборот новая категория «коммуникационный режим», рассматриваются особенности формирования и развития страновых коммуникационных режимов. Авторы рассказывают о некоторых аспектах методологии исследования коммуникационных режимов (необходимость моделирования «идеального типа» для сравнительного анализа). Статья содержит результаты исследования коммуникационных режимов, инициированного и впервые проведенного Национальным исследовательским институтом развития коммуникации (Россия).

Ключевые слова: коммуникация, коммуникационный режим, коммуникационный порядок, международная коммуникация


Сведения об авторах: Гасумянов Владислав Иванович – доктор экономических наук, директор Национального исследовательского института развития коммуникации; Комлева Валентина Вячеславовна – доктор социологических наук, руководитель отдела аналитики, Национальный исследовательский институт развития коммуникации. Адрес: 119034, Россия, г. Москва, Коробейников пер., 22/1. E-mail addresses: institute@nicrus.ru, komleva@nicrus.ru.