

# Vectors of information and communication activity in mass media culture (by the example of journalism in Russia)

## Vectores de la actividad de información y comunicación en la cultura de los medios de comunicación (mediante el ejemplo del periodismo en Rusia)

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#### ABSTRACT:

Mass media culture has a significant effect on people's worldviews. In the modern democratic world, mass media are largely independent, which allows them to create a multicultural environment. The purpose of this study is to show the role of the mass-information process in the structural and functional mechanisms of everyday culture, to figure out how speech culture is developed through mass communication between social groups, and to investigate the conditions and mechanisms of mass media culture establishment. The social and communicative characteristics of speech culture are part of the "individual and time" problem. The results of the study show that the informational norms of mass media in Russia became ideological norms during the times of the Soviet Union, starting with the post-revolution years and persisting for a long time. During this period of development of mass media culture, the guiding vector was the adherence to party principles in the press. The influence of authorities

#### RESUMEN:

La cultura de los medios de comunicación tiene un efecto significativo en la cosmovisión de la gente. En el mundo democrático moderno, los medios de comunicación de masas son en gran medida independientes, lo que les permite crear un entorno multicultural. El objetivo de este estudio es mostrar el papel del proceso de información de masas en los mecanismos estructurales y funcionales de la cultura cotidiana, descubrir cómo se desarrolla la cultura del habla a través de la comunicación de masas entre grupos sociales e investigar las condiciones y mecanismos de la masa Establecimiento de la cultura mediática. Las características sociales y comunicativas de la cultura del habla son parte del problema del "individuo y del tiempo". Los resultados del estudio muestran que las normas informativas de los medios de comunicación en Rusia se convirtieron en normas ideológicas durante los tiempos de la Unión Soviética, comenzando con los años posteriores a la revolución y

manifests in the fact that any object could potentially be involved in political writings, which leads to the establishment of a totalitarian culture. An essential and typical feature of Soviet journalism was the replacement of facts with propagandistic commentaries, while its linguistic feature was the use of label words. The danger that comes from such denominations is that they automatically create an "image of the enemy" in the minds of readers and listeners and deliver a conclusive and undeniable judgement regarding the person that was denoted using said words, regardless of whether this characteristic was true or not.

**Keywords:** Communicative strategy in mass media; Ideological and organizing influence; Journalism in Russia; Media text analysis; Press information field

persistiendo durante mucho tiempo. Durante este período de desarrollo de la cultura de los medios de comunicación, el vector guía fue la adhesión a los principios partidistas en la prensa. La influencia de las autoridades se manifiesta en el hecho de que cualquier objeto podría potencialmente estar involucrado en escritos políticos, lo que conduce al establecimiento de una cultura totalitaria. Una característica esencial y típica del periodismo soviético era la sustitución de los hechos por los comentarios propagandísticos, mientras que su característica lingüística era el uso de las palabras de la etiqueta. El peligro que proviene de tales denominaciones es que automáticamente crean una "imagen del enemigo" en la mente de los lectores y de los oyentes y emiten un juicio concluyente e innegable acerca de la persona que fue denotada usando dichas palabras, sin importar si esta característica era verdadera o no.

**Palabras clave:** Estrategia comunicativa en los medios de comunicación; Influencia ideológica y organizadora; Periodismo en Rusia; Análisis de texto multimedia; Campo de información de prensa

## 1. Introduction

Any given period of time reflects its distinct type of communication; for instance, the information society reflects the objective trend in the evolutionary cycle of civilization associated with the emergence of information and telecommunication technologies. Mass media are capable of reorganizing the way the world is perceived (Graber, & Dunaway, 2014; Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016, pp. 315-338; Zheltukhina et al., 2016, pp. 12005-12013). The system of cultural and informational monopolies combined with a finely tuned technological mechanism allows forming a public opinion and the attitudes of the audience. Mass media thus determine the priorities in the creation of the image of the world and the perception of the human nature (Wimmer, & Dominick, 2013).

The vectors of information and communication activity are reflected in one of the long-term products of mass media – the mass media culture, which is a synthetic product: firstly, in terms of its content – everyday reflection of vast masses of people on the meanings of that, which they read, hear, and see in mass media, secondly, in terms of its form – partial revision and practical reconstruction by these people of their communication vocabulary under the effect of mass media.

Nowadays, mass media culture is a source that contains theoretical and empirical materials for the comprehension and description of the general regularities in the organization, functioning, and development of various periods in a nation's culture (Perse, & Lambe, 2016).

In Russia, the acknowledgement and assertion of the freedom of press as an essential value is accompanied by the adoption of civilizational standards of democratic press and its components, such as independence from the state ideology, unrestricted choice of subjects, and transparent coverage of the activities of the political establishment, which is typical for developed democratic states.

Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider scientifically the features and possibilities of personality formation through mass information and communication.

The purpose of this study is to show the role of the mass-information process in the structural and functional mechanisms of everyday culture, to figure out how speech culture is developed through mass communication between social groups, and to investigate the conditions and mechanisms of establishment of mass media culture and its meta-linguistic concepts in the sociocultural dimension.

In order to achieve the set goal, it was necessary to complete the following objectives:

- to rationalize the subject area of mass media culture;
- to trace the formation of the varieties of speech culture in the sociocultural space of mass media;
- to use comparative analysis, with a view to determining the socio-communicative characteristics of speech culture;
- to rationalize the typology of the features of speech organization of the society.

The research methods include various approaches – systems, axiological, verbal-centric, socio-linguistic, contextual, and formalized (content analysis), which were chosen based on the concept movement logic, as well as the purpose and objectives of the study.

The main method was structural and functional analysis, which reflects the dynamic concept of the language structure, since it allows figuring out the aspects of linguistic units of semiotic importance and their interconnections within a text, which is especially important in the journalistic meta-language.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the theoretical rationalization of the linguistic and cultural concept of the mass information process as a body of ontological, axiological, epistemological, and socio-linguistic statements and conclusions, which systemically prove and functionally interpret the pragmatic (culture-forming) role of mass communication that focuses on using various cultural and linguistic codes.

## **2. Views on Journalism as a Cultural Phenomenon**

Nowadays, studies are discovering “risks” of political and spiritual expansion of information technologies and stating the blurring of lines between “mass” and “elite” consciousness (Graber, & Dunaway, 2014; Perse, & Lambe, 2016). However, journalism is not investigated as a cultural phenomenon and, most importantly, a source of cultural knowledge. Furthermore, this problem is currently acquiring an entirely new aspect: the need to study a new phenomenon – the speech culture of mass communication as a type of everyday culture.

This culture is of public nature and is constantly affected by communication media. Cultural studies interpret the mass communication field as a constantly changing world of values, senses, symbols, and meanings, which is why mass media culture can be interpreted as an informational and communicational phenomenon of everyday life, which has transformed socio-linguistic features and properties (Mariani et al., 2014, pp. 478-483; Klijn et al., 2016, pp. 1036-1058).

The phenomenon of mass communication lies in the fact that in any informational and communicational disposition, mass media culture deals with the practical world, wherein each object is evaluated based on its usefulness (uselessness), i.e. the positive (negative) human activity that transforms reality, including its verbal mode (Crane, Kawashima, & Kawasaki, 2016; Howitt, 2013). This leads to the conceptual and formal nature of mass communication being determined by the sociocultural situation on the one hand and by its ability (to an extent) to change this situation on the other hand. The realization of the system-centric approach in the description of mass communication from the perspective of subject-object and subject-subject relationships allows stating that the nature of these relationships significantly affects the public consciousness and speech behavior of people.

The syncretism of mass communication and speech culture lies in the fact that mass media culture, as an important spiritual product, is formed on a day-to-day basis through the interaction between two information flows. They create communicative mechanisms: sociocultural or axiological (from the conceptual point of view) and verbal or symbolic (from the formal point of view). Speech culture reflects the substantial sociocultural and semantic-stylistic transformations (Rzhanova, 2011).

Changes in speech are determined by the informational and communicational needs of groups, strata, classes, and the society in general, caused by the sociocultural adaptation of mass

consciousness and human behavior to a new model of public life organization (Wimmer, & Dominick, 2013; McCombs, 2013). This causes "tectonic" processes in speech culture, during which the speech module of "transition" mass media is capable of triggering in both the positive and negative vector.

The speech-culture aspects of life (communication and interaction) of various social and nonsocial groups, with regard to the de-facto multi-sphere process in the language space, creates an idea of the modes of state information policy.

When assessing the actualization of the speech factor of social modernizations, the author argues that journalistic works preserve the social memory of various cultural time periods. This transforms model texts into cultural values, regardless of the time of their creation.

The dynamics of mass medial culture consists in the constant demonstration of its axiological and symbolic constructions and their public legalization in mass communication products (Perse, & Lambe, 2016; Crane, Kawashima, & Kawasaki, 2016).

The information space that is created by mass media is an effective element of culture. It has its structure, function, and dynamics, despite the long-term stability of many everyday semantic gradations and sociocultural values of human life, which primarily concern the ethical and esthetic outlook (Leung, 2014, pp. 155-168).

In society, speech culture is revised and reconstructed by the language of communication media. At that, the matter at hand is not so much the semantics and stylistics of the everyday thesaurus of communication and social interaction between individuals and groups as the principles of world perception, outlook, and worldview. The constructs of this culture are constantly "distinguished" and quickly legalized in mass communication products or journalistic media texts, which are one of the most common forms of existence of the language.

In accordance with the current informational situation, the author introduces into the scientific discourse the term "communicative strategy" in mass media. It is a plan for the optimal realization of communicative intentions that take into account the objective and subjective factors and conditions, in which the act of communication takes place, which, in turn, determines the external and internal aspects of the media text that uses certain linguistic means.

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### **3. Representation of the Analysis of Mass Media in Soviet Russia**

The extrapolation of the communicative strategy into different stages of development of the Russian society shows a special typology of the verbal organization of the society or communicative qualities of everyday speech. This study investigated the establishment of classical and non-classical mass media culture in Russia.

The analysis showed that the non-classical speech culture was typical for situations, when the perimeter of the still unstable communication was dominated by "self-organizing" meanings, while the symbols (signs) that spread them were primarily expressed in verbal-oral form.

This includes the model-speech functionality of the early twentieth century (up to the mid-1930s), which was optimal for the conditions of the public rally environment that faced the problem of self-organization of life (from instability to stability) (Bakhnian, 1983). At the time, the communicator's (orator's) act either was based on rough sketches or was an ad-lib altogether.

This communicative strategy was determined by the activation of illiterate masses, plurality of cultural forms and political positions, and an unstable social organization. Being the main components of presence, the place, time, and context also set the main parameters of communication. The main thing was the verbal action of the orator in unity with the masses in a communication space.

Information as an effective conveyance of convictions, in which the communication of meanings and evidences primarily serves as a means of influence, originally implies a harmonious combination of intellectual and emotional principles. In this sense, newspaper communication is the most straightforward and synthesizing combination of emotional contagion and intellectual persuasion.

Truthful information about the world, presented in journalistic form that is easy for the masses to understand, is an intellectual product of mass everyday demand, the quality whereof predetermines the degree, to which the demand is satisfied, and which largely forms the tastes and culture of the consumer of such information.

The information field of the press – in case of its normal place in the society – should reflect reality adequately, comprehensively, and fully (Howitt, 2013). However, this does not mean that the spread of information should be entirely unrestricted. On the contrary, restrictions are and will be present under any type of power and form of state organization.

A non-totalitarian society has two main types of restrictions (Oates, 2007, pp. 1279-1297). The first one can be defined as institutional restrictions. They are related to the activity of social institutions (the state, first and foremost) and are often legally enshrined (for instance, in lists of classified information that contains state secrets).

The second type of restrictions imposed on public spread of information are conventional restrictions that are based on the sociocultural regulations of communication.

Consider how the information field of the press formed during various stages of development of mass media culture. To that end, it is necessary to figure out the sociocultural paradigm of the most remarkable historic periods of development of Russian press, which is projected onto the historical platform of the Soviet Union.

During the first post-revolution years, mass political communication was oral. The country was transformed into a literal single public rally. This was the manifestation of the enthusiasm regarding the breaking away from past history.

This strategy of political communication is closely related to the plurality of cultural forms and political positions and the generally unstable course of history – all the elements that characterize the situation in the 1920s.

The October Revolution of 1917 led to a collapse of the old organization and caused radical transformations in the state, political, and economic organization of the country.

The vociferous and emotionally charged environment of a revolution rally was the main environment of political communication in the 1920s (Shuhua, 2012, p. 14). If one were to carefully examine the works of Bolshevik leaders of that time, one would see that in most cases, they were records of speeches that were delivered at a certain place on this or that occasion. The place, time, and context set the main parameters of communication. The main aspect was the fact that the revolutionary orator was part of a single communication space with the masses.

The general audience knew V.I. Lenin by his texts. However, his contemporaries knew him primarily as a polemist and orator, who constantly aimed at communicating with the masses. He delivered at least 216 speeches in 1918-1920 only. The Soviet Union published 120,000 copies of the complete collection of works by V.I. Lenin in 55 volumes. During an oral performance, the speech itself and nonverbal communication (gestures, posture) merge into a single entity of an effective act of communication.

L. Trotsky had a powerful ideological and organizing effect on the mass media environment. The summands of this effect were speed and distance. In this situation, "Trotsky's Train" was a machine of communication. The schedule of "Trotsky's Train" was composed in a way so that the memory of the previous train was always combined with the anticipation of the next one. In essence, its absence transformed into a necessary oratory pause in a single continuous performance.

The transition of the Soviet society from the oral communicative strategy to a written one took place after Lenin passed away. Writing and the text became a tool of the authorities, while the resort to the new communicative strategy was not a singular and conscientious action or the business of the party or the head of state. Rather, it was a combination of several events and processes that had no obvious connection between them.

In the 1930s, the diverse practice of letter reading permeated all spheres of the Soviet society. The main activity aspect of the administration system were multiple examples of bureaucratic documents: directives, orders, circulars, instructions, decrees, tasks, etc.

A specific form of "feedback" in mass political communication during this historical period in Russian mass media culture was the "workers' letters", which were as special genre of "public" self-expression. In the public sphere, the speech loses its autonomy, since the political grammar is set by letters (Bakhtian, 1983).

Starting with the 1930s, letter reading naturally (and, therefore, unnoticed) became the main cultural practice in the Soviet system and helped to solve one of its main problems. In other words, the millions of everyday empirical actions and events in all spheres of life had to be included into a single transcendental (conceptual) field.

Letter reading became a meta-practice that did not depend on context, measured each action on a single and constant conceptual scale, and combined it in time and space in advance.

This period of development of mass media culture was characterized by the dominance of the vector of adherence to the party principles in the press. It became an inviolable law, especially after being formulated in a directive of J.V. Stalin during his speech at the "historic" April Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1929: "We need to make sure that all printing institutions, both party and Soviet, both newspapers and magazines, fully adhere to the policy of the party and the decisions of its governing agencies" (Bakhtian, 1983).

This was a time of formation of a totalitarian culture. A unique breed of individuals was created – a "new Soviet person", who was unable or unwilling to work, aspired to nothing, achieved nothing, and perceived his or her mediocrity as something positive. The ideas of P. Ortega y Gasset regarding the "mass man" were implemented in the Soviet Union, at least in most of its population.

The decisions of the party meticulously regulated the general course of periodicals, the content of individual columns, pages, and supplements. One of the first bills issued by the Soviet authorities was a decree that shut down all opposition periodicals and imposed a series of restrictions on the information that could be published by the newspapers and magazines that were loyal to the regime. Taboos (which are one of the most common ways of distorting reality) concerned whole spheres of public life and the most important events for the country. The facts and events that the newspapers and magazines were actually allowed to publish had to be interpreted in a specific manner (Lobanov, 2016).

Tools of propaganda in the Soviet Union formed a mass consciousness that was characterized by zero tolerance for dissidents. The public opinion demanded death to all those, whose convictions did not fit within the framework of the mass consciousness.

The general style of the Soviet party journalism was the replacement of facts with propagandistic commentaries, while its linguistic feature was the use of label words, i.e. words that are clichéd nicknames or names of a person, which not always corresponded with the characteristic of said person and generally expressed an extremely negative assessment of him or her.

A socio-linguistic analysis found such labels of the past years as "enemy of the people", "saboteur", "podkulachnik" (literally, "the henchman of kulaks"), "Trotskyite", etc.; later examples included "Zionist", "dissident", etc. The danger that comes from such denominations is that they automatically create an "image of the enemy" in the minds of readers and listeners

and deliver a conclusive and undeniable judgement regarding the person that was denoted using said words, regardless of whether this characteristic was true or not.

The comprehensive transformation of life after the October Revolution is evidenced by periodical replacements of old names. This concerned the administrative and territorial division of the country (governorates, uyezds, and volosts were replaced by republics, oblasts, and districts), governmental agencies (Council of People's Commissars), the party itself (Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik) – RSDLP(B), Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU)), and many cities, for instance: Petersburg – Petrograd – Leningrad, Tsaritsyn – Stalingrad – Volgograd, Samara – Kuybyshev.

On the other hand, the creation of new governing agencies and public organizations and changes in the economy and culture were accompanied by the coining of new words that actively developed the vocabulary of the newspaper language.

Linguistic dictionaries consistently reflected the interference of the opposed and the social coloring of words. There were even ways and means of presenting ideological words in the modern Russian dictionaries. For instance, the definitions started with or were accompanied by the mark "in capitalist countries", "in the bourgeois society", "in Western countries". For instance, "Bohemia – in the bourgeois society – intelligentsia without sustainable financial security or permanent place of residence (mostly actors, musicians, artists, etc.)", "Union Tops (Rus. "профверхушка") – the most influential part of the administration of any trade union (in capitalist countries)".

It is worth noting that the Russian language was affected by such social factors as the banished or shot intelligentsia, declassed workers and peasants deprived of their farms, eradicated aristocracy and clergy.

The culture of language usage in a society is largely determined by the culture of vocabulary usage. The creation of dictionaries, in turn, can be put under control. Naturally, ideological people created ideological dictionaries. These people often neglected their purpose of recording the language in its development and accumulating both positive and negative energy thereof in an unbiased manner and created false ideological representations of reality.

Two systems gradually began to form in the Russian language: one for denoting capitalist phenomena and a second one for denoting socialist phenomena. This delimitation was especially obvious in journalism. For instance, if the text concerned capitalist countries, their intelligence officers were called spies, their armed forces were called invading forces, their soldiers were called invaders, and partisans were called terrorists.

In other cases, the definitions in dictionaries contained a socio-ideological assessment: "Reformism is an opportunistic school in the labor movement that opposes Marxism and denies the revolutionary class struggle... Stock – a security that yields dividends, a certificate of its owner's participation in a joint-stock company; the price of a stock depends on the profit of the company and the bank interest, which is why stocks often become an object of profiteering in capitalist countries" (Ushakov, 1934-1940).

The opposition of phenomena in antagonistic systems was emphasized by evaluative definitions of their names, which gradually became mandatory: outdated socialist – decadent capitalism, bright future of communism – moribund capitalist. The constant use of the definition "Soviet" introduced an evaluative quality into its lexical meaning – it meant "the best": Soviet youth, the Soviet person, Soviet science, Soviet sports, Soviet lifestyle, and Soviet economy meant not only "related to the Soviet Union", but also "the best".

In mass communication, words are heavily loaded and continue to be loaded ideologically. Words acquire ideological connotations imposed by the understanding of words and even phrases, which are convenient for the ideological department.

Thus, in Soviet Russia, mass media had the following features (Shuhua, 2012, p. 014):

Full government control over all mass media. This allowed improving the rating of authorities

among the people and helped fight dissidence, induce hostility towards non-socialist countries, and create ideological enemies

Lack of freedom of speech, which made it so information and the actual public opinion of that period were concealed

Shutting down of periodicals that deviated from the party ideology

Formation of a new literary vocabulary and abandonment of the "bourgeois legacy"

These actions resulted in the isolation of the USSR and the formation of a closed culture and hostile attitudes to capitalist countries. Nowadays, such policies in mass media are carried out by such countries as Cuba and North Korea.

The dissolution of the USSR and the transition of post-Soviet republics to democratic values significantly improved the situation in the freedom of speech, which allowed people to develop in a modern multicultural world.

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## 4. Conclusion

The results of the study show that the informational norms of mass media in Russia became ideological norms during the times of the Soviet union, starting with the post-revolution years and persisting for a long time. The subjects that could be written about and the manner, in which one was to write about said subjects was strictly regulated.

The social and communicative characteristics of speech culture are part of the "individual and time" problem. For instance, in the Soviet society, in the "past-present-future" system, priority was assigned to the past and the future.

One could assume that the Soviet culture was traditional and messianic at the same time: the idealized revolutionary past was constantly correlated with the actions of contemporaries. The finely tuned propaganda literature also served this purpose.

The introduction of the term "communicative strategy" in mass media into the analysis enabled distinguishing the communicative and psychological component that helped to achieve the necessary influence on the minds and behavior of the audience and the communicative and logical component, which ensured proper conveyance of information (this component primarily depended on the internal logic of the subject that was presented). For instance, the sociocultural possibility of organizing the Soviet system as a sustainable historical entity was revealed after the transition to a written communicative strategy, which predetermined the formation of the classical speech culture.

This was typical for social situations, when the perimeter of the already stable communication was dominated by "organizing" meanings, while the symbols (signs) that spread them were primarily expressed in verbal-written form.

The scientific and applied value of the study lies in the fact that the mass media discourse in general cultural studies focuses on the object of verbal-axiological resources of spiritual and practical activity in conditions of communicative publicity, while its subject includes cultural-linguistic laws and regularities during the transition of a society from one stage of development to another.

The abovementioned object and subject come with a special methodology for studying mass media culture in the socio-linguistic and cultural aspects, including the method for analyzing media texts as semantic and stylistic constructs in this type of culture. This method allows recording and interpreting all dominant transformation trends in the speech culture in the perimeter of mass communication publicity.

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