Impact of Regional Media on Public Opinion

Elvira R. Mikhailylova  
Faculty of Foreign Languages  
Chuvash State University  
Cheboksary, Russia

Inna B. Getskina  
Faculty of Foreign Languages  
Chuvash State University  
Cheboksary, Russia

Abstract—The article presents a study to determine the methods of influence of the regional press on public opinion in order to identify the technology of managing public life in general, ranging from political and legal to interpersonal impact. The relevance of this study is due to the formation and functioning of a person in a mega-information space created by mass media. The study is based on a system-structural analysis and synthesis of information on the impact of media on public opinion. The authors highlighted the preponderance of single-minded opinions when the audience receives one-sided and often distorted information; the reliance on pluralism of opinions when a quantitative advantage is created on the side of judgments that are beneficial for the customer; the formation of stereotypes, which is one of the most effective and efficient methods of manipulating human consciousness; the repetition of information. Each of the identified methods of influencing consciousness successfully performs its functions on the pages of the regional press. Using various methods of influence on public opinion, the regional press has a significant impact on the perception, understanding, assimilation of the material and, as a result, a stronger impact on the mass consciousness. Knowledge gained through the press compliments a person’s natural life experience. Based on the analysis of the information, the factors on which the position of the regional press depends have been revealed.

Keywords—public opinion; impact; stereotype; pluralism of opinions; regional press; mass consciousness

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, the process of the formation of “mass society” and its essential attribute - “mass consciousness” is actively taking place. At the same time, the role of the media has increased many times because the democratic norms of the society largely depend on the nature and the state of mass consciousness. The mission of journalism today is to spread information about it, and discuss its phenomena, and influence it, based on the most accurate understanding of the essence of mass consciousness and the actual state of its various sectors [1]. In the Republic of Chuvashia today there are state and non-state newspapers. They are far from being equal. The attitude of the authorities to “their” press has changed little compared with the Soviet period - there are various options for financial support for such publications. The commercial press is characterized by such forms of interaction with the government as various forms of social order, contracts for the information services for the authorities, etc. There are 12 publications in the region, the founders of which include the authorities. But there is not a single print publication of information completely independent first of all, due to insufficient financial support. Thus, the power structures continue to remain an influential subject of the regional information space, with great potential to influence public opinion [2]. In newspapers with significant economic dependence more newspaper space is devoted to the activities of the authorities. Publications inform about decisions and decrees of the government, affect the problems that are topical for the population, try to sort out violations of the rights of the population on various issues, regularly publish appeals of the authorities, congratulate the first persons on their anniversaries. Sharp critical attacks are not typical for these newspapers. They often do not motivate their assessment and try to influence the reader through emotions, implicitly. Such publications can rightfully be attributed to the official [3]. The commercial press pays less attention to the coverage of the activities of the authorities. There is also criticism here, however, the object of consideration is mainly the work of officials at the federal level, i.e., those from whom newspapers do not depend. Such newspapers can be described as relatively independent.

One of the most acute problems of the modern society, causing heated debates among representatives of various scientific fields, is the problem of the hidden influence of the media on mass consciousness [4]. Today, the influence on public opinion is the invisible technology of managing public life, which literally permeates all levels of social interaction, ranging from political to interpersonal one. In fact, the man of the modern society is formed and functions in the mega-information space created by mass media. In the practice of the media, methods of influencing public opinion are widely used today, when the attitude of the society to certain phenomena of the world around it is formed with the help of stereotypes or information that is presented in a certain way [5].

II. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The problem of influence of the press on public opinion causes controversy among representatives of various areas of science, and among practicing journalists. Indirect influence on public opinion and behavior begins to prevail over the power methods of influence. You can influence the audience only after the reader’s attention is drawn to what is written in the newspaper. Thus, according to the nature of its activities, the press should strive to attract and retain the attention of the audience by any available means [6]. The use of the identified principles of the preparation and presentation of information by newspapers successfully activates the interest of readers to socially significant information and makes it possible to
become accomplices in the information and communication processes of the society.

The purpose of the research is to find out, analyze and compare the methods of influencing public opinion that are most often used in the regional press.

III. METHODS OF THE RESEARCH

For the research, a content analysis of 3 publications was carried out in the regional press: the daily socially-political newspaper of the republic “Sovetskaya Chuvashia” (circulation up to 16 thousand copies), the republican socially-political weekly paper “Respublika” (up to 10 thousand copies), and the newspaper “Cheboksarskie vesti”. The sample consisted of 4809 publications over 100 lines from 2015 to 2017.

IV. RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION

In the process of research of the regional press, the following methods that are most actively used by the publications of the Republic of Chuvashia and attract the attention of the society were revealed:

1. The preponderance of single opinions. This technique is based on the fact that some people or groups of individuals believe that some truth can be established by vote or a simple majority. Sometimes this is true, sometimes not. Nevertheless, the media can specifically select the “necessary” judgments and discard the “false”, contradicting the first. As a result, the audience receives one-sided and often distorted information, on the basis of which it becomes impossible to identify the cause of the events and make reliable conclusions [7]. In the studied publications, this technique is used, but unevenly. In the weekly newspaper “Respublika”, in 2015, 20% of publications were found (682 materials were analyzed in total), 22% in 2016 (642 in total), 23% in 2017 (669 in total). On the pages of the daily paper “Sovetskaya Chuvashia”, in 2015, 29% of materials were found (total - 754), in 2016 - 30% (total - 819), in 2017 - 31% (total - 807). The preponderance of single opinion in “Cheboksarskie vesti” was found: in 2015 - 35% of publications (146 materials were studied in total), in 2016 - 38% (total - 138), in 2017 - 38% (total 152). In most cases, the correspondent refers only to one specialist to comment on the problem that leads to one-sided coverage of the issue raised. The use of this method can be especially vividly traced in a more detailed review of the weekly rubric “Issue of the week” in the “Cheboksarskie vesti” newspaper. In general, the publication tries to bring the most diverse opinions, to express the positions of representatives of all social groups, political parties, age groups, etc. But in some cases, when the raised “issue of the week” turns out to be particularly controversial, the publication resorts to the method of single opinion. For example, in No. 15 of April 8, 2015, the newspaper conducted an investigation into the number of migrants from Chuvashia and the number of those who returned afterwards. In the “Issue of the week” “Are you going to leave Chuvashia?” the number of “no” answers had a clear advantage (7: 2).

2. The Reliance on pluralism of opinions. Unlike the previous method of manipulation, based on the credulity, immaturity, conformism of the audience, its unconditional acceptance of conclusions, this method is used to justify the validity of the assessment of the phenomenon [8]. This method of influencing public opinion is designed for an audience with a fairly high level of education and life experience. The psychological basis for relying on pluralism of opinions is the confidence of many people that truth is learned by comparison [8]. The audience is invited to “independently” draw a conclusion based on a set of different opinions given in the material. The reliance on pluralism is used in republican newspapers a little less frequently than the previous method: 19% of publications in the “Respublika” newspaper for the entire investigated period, 24%, 25% and 24% in 2015, 2016 and 2017, respectively, in the daily newsletter “Sovetskaya Chuvashia”, 22% in 2015-2016 and 24% in 2017 - in the newspaper “Cheboksarskie vesti”. This could include more professional articles where the issues raised require the journalist to turn to different sources. It can be officials, specialists in some areas, witnesses and participants in events and incidents, or even passers-by. Their opinions may differ insignificantly or, conversely, constitute completely opposite judgments. The latter can be observed in the article “Barmaley from the Basement”, published in the newspaper “Cheboksarskie vesti” of April 20, 2016. The correspondent cites two completely different opinions of people from the same family: his father, who is forced to live in the basement, because they do not let him into his own apartment, and his son, who claims to be afraid for the life of his family. “In a conversation with the correspondent, both sides claimed that they agreed to change the apartment. But the father at the same time declares that Ivan is categorically against, and he, in turn, says that Aleksey Ivanovich does not agree. A vicious circle?” In this case, it is offered to the reader himself to decide who is right and who is guilty. Also, the statistics of various views on current issues of reality can be found on the website of the “Sovetskaya Chuvashia” newspaper. The results of polls in percentage terms at the end of voting are published in the printed version of the newspaper. It turns out that people who appear in the publication are taken from the forum site. However, regional media, using the method of support for pluralism of opinions, sometimes create a quantitative advantage on the side of judgments that are beneficial for the customer [10]. To achieve these goals, dissent and protests can be used, of course, within reasonable limits (either the protest source is singular, or it seems to the mass audience inadequate and not in possession of the issue under consideration), for their detailed discussion and playing up with the aim of creating a different opinion, to form the installation of the “white crow” [12]. It is quite natural that an audience that perceives information given in this way has a false sense of trust in such a “pluralistic” source. As a result, the audience is under the imperceptible pressure of the majority, which not everyone can resist, especially if his opinion on this matter is not sufficiently formed.

3. The formation of stereotypes. Habits effectively manage the entire process of perception of information. The process of perception is merely a mechanical adjustment of a still unknown phenomenon under a stable general formula.
The press standardizes the message, i.e. in a special way "brings" the information under the stereotype, universal opinion. A person must perceive the message without effort and unconditionally, without internal struggle and critical analysis. This method is formed under the influence of two factors: the unconscious collective processing and the individual socio-cultural environment, and also with targeted ideological influence through the media. Using stereotypes, it is easy to manipulate human consciousness. They are closely connected with the life activity of the society in general and of certain groups of people in particular. For example, in the minds of the inhabitants of our country a certain cliché “philosophy of hope” has been preserved as an orientation towards ideal samples. At present, a person oriented toward achievement, counting on his own strength and loving his small homeland is becoming a stereotype (“Viktor Biryukov set the flag of Chuvashia in the South Pole", "Entered the burning hut" “In Chuvashia veterans actively go in for sport and play in the performances ”). In the process of research the application of this method was recorded: the newspaper "Cheboksarskie vesti" - 24% of materials in 2015, 26% in 2016, 27% in 2017, "Sovetskaya Chuvashia" - 23 %, 24%, 23% in 2015, 2016, 2017, respectively, the newspaper "Respublika" - 25% in 2015, 22% in 2016, 24% in 2017. The media teach people to think with standards and reduce intellectual level of messages. This is facilitated by the main method of fixing the necessary stereotypes in the mind - repetition.

4. Repetition of information. When manipulating the public mind by means of modern media, the old rule is used: repetition is the mother of learning. Repeatedly presented message is remembered better if it is presented as the only correct one and will be linked with stimuli that cause positive emotions. Through repetition, the number of people whose attention will be drawn to a fact or event is increased. Thus, repetition due to the phenomenon of attention becomes a way of turning a certain part of a potential audience into a real one [12]. But this is not the only repetition feature. It rather strongly influences the process of memorization. In order to remember the necessary information better the press practiced repetition of this information in various versions. Repetition invariably causes the associative action of the psyche. Regional newspapers use this technique in cases where it is necessary to focus attention on a specific problem or form an established opinion on any issue. In this case, it is possible to cite as an example materials periodically appearing on the pages of republican editions, either explicitly or implicitly campaigning for the population to join the Partnership of Housing Owners (“Horror about Partnerships are groundless”, “Partnerships will be partially financed from the republican budget”, “Authorities of Cheboksary will encourage residents to create Partnerships”). As a rule, in such publications it is spoken about advantages of partnerships, but the negative sides are not mentioned. Also, a vivid example of attracting public attention with the help of the method of repetition of information, are the materials dedicated to boxer Valeriy Sokolov. For a long time, the newspapers Sovetskaya Chuvashia and the Cheboksarskie vesti published various information: the boxer's personal life was touched, his views on various issues were discussed, reports were published after visiting his native places and communicating with the people of Chuvashia after each battle, and finally, advertising information about the battle in Cheboksary was given with additional information about prices and telephone numbers of the box office. Sometimes publications took up a whole newspaper turn or 2-3 materials devoted to Sokolov were placed in one room.

Each of the identified methods of influencing consciousness successfully performs its functions on the pages of the regional press. This situation indicates the desire of the press to control the consciousness and behavior of people. In the modern information society, a print publication can influence public opinion only by taking advantage of the demand from its audience. Demand depends on two factors: 1) readers' confidence in information received from the newspaper; 2) attracting the attention of the audience to what is written in the newspaper in all possible ways. The main sign that speaks about the demand for the reviewed newspapers is such a quantitative indicator as circulation. The degree of audience confidence is the most important factor in terms of the effectiveness of mass media influence on public opinion. Readers trust the newspaper for the following reasons: the publication tells about the events of his native city, district, village, i.e., the proximity of the regional and district press to the reader; reflection of true, reliable facts; lack of unverified, ambiguous information and rumors; coverage of different points of view on the events. However, the form of presenting facts and the ways of drawing the audience attention also have a significant influence on the demand of a newspaper. A large role in preserving and attracting readers is now played by electronic versions that have appeared in almost every regional publication, which are regularly updated and have forms for working with the reader (feedback, forums, polls). Also, newspapers have their offices in social networks, which, undoubtedly, are designed to attract the attention of young people. In addition, newspapers use standard methods of work that have been preserved from the Soviet period: they conduct their own public opinion polls, contests, publish letters and stories, etc. The study showed that “Cheboksarskie vesti”, which allows itself to use rumors, ambiguous, unverified information, nevertheless occupies a leading position in circulation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of newspaper texts, we can draw the following conclusion: the position of the regional press depends on many factors. On the one hand, the use of manipulative techniques, which are based on specific psychological mechanisms, makes them effective, because binding the message to the source provided by the mass media itself and declaring its authenticity is as easy and economical as creating the illusion of impartiality. Using any of the above techniques, it is possible to justify or impose any decision, motivating it with the interests of a certain group of people who are in the minority but who have the right to do so, as they live in a legal and democratic state. In addition, any decision or action of the manipulator may not receive any publicity or be fabricated. On the other hand, modern regional
newspapers are forced to exist and function in conditions of fierce competition, which can often serve as a pretext for using unverified and unreliable information that could mislead the audience about a social and political object.

It is not surprising that in modern society there can be no fully independent journalism - it depends primarily on reality itself, on the processes taking place in society and on the information recipients themselves. Thus, the press in the Republic of Chuvashia implants and fixes in the mass consciousness the terms, concepts, characterizing new social and economic phenomena. And in this process, the newspaper, by no means a weak participant in changes in society; it can actively control the vector of this movement; it is important for journalists only to rely in their work on the audience. Using various methods of influence on public opinion, the regional press, has a significant impact on the perception, understanding, assimilation of the material and, as a result, a stronger impact on the mass consciousness.

References
[1] Ye.L. Vartanova and S.S. Smirnov, “On the relevance and issues of the quantitative studying the Russian media,” Bulletin of Tomsk State University, Philology, No. 54, pp. 206-221, 2018.
[2] K.V. Dementyeva, “Media-meme and its role in developing the multiethnic society,” Bulletin of Tomsk State University, Philology, No. 53, pp. 257-278, 2018.
[3] Ye.L. Zaytseva, N.A. Antonova, and T.S. Ignatyeva, “Young people Internet-commenting in political mass media,” Health and education in 21th century, vol. 19, pp. 167-170, 2017.
[4] N. Desrochers, A. Paul-Hu., S. Haustein, P. Mongeon, V. Larivière, R. Costas., A. Quan-Haase, T.D. Bowman, J. Pecoskie, and A. Tsou, “Authorship, citations, acknowledgments and visibility in social media: symbolic capital in the multifaceted reward system of science,” Social sciences information, vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 223-248, 2018.
[5] N. Hayoz, “Friendship, trust, and politics: shifting meanings of a complex relationship in democracies,” Sociology review, vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 13-29, 2016.
[6] T. Kenyon, “Defining and measuring research impact in the humanities, social sciences and creative arts in the digital age,” Knowledge Organization, vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 249-257, 2014.
[7] R. Popping, “Knowledge graphs and network text analysis,” Social sciences information, vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 91-106, 2003.
[8] A.M. Roudenko and V.V. Kotlyarova, “The impact of mass communication on a modern society,” Media education, vol. 3, pp. 134-142, 2017.
[9] T.L. Sokolova, “The influence of periodicals on the public political life of the region: a case study,” Tomsk State University Journal, vol. 409, pp. 135-138, August 2016.
[10] T. Zerback, T. Koch, and B. Kraemer, “Thinking of others: Effects of implicit and explicit media cues on climate of opinion perceptions”, Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, vol. 92, 2nd ed., pp. 421-443, June 2015.
[11] L. Camaj, “The Media's role in fighting corruption: Media effects on governmental accountability,” International Journal Of Press-Politics, vol. 18, 1st ed., pp. 21-42, January 2013.
[12] L. Leydesdorff, A.M. Peterson, and I. Ivanova, “Social science information”, vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 91-106, 2003.