IRSTI 19.31

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'NEW MEDIA' DEVELOPMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA:
THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOCIAL CHANGE

Global information process strongly influenced development of national mass media. Around the world there is a liberalization and globalization of information markets. Such integration leads to that the information industry extends, erasing rigid borders between sectors of traditional systems of mass communication and creating new media systems. Historically these sectors developed separately, but now due to technological innovations, borders of these sectors were washed away, there is an active process of their integration. Integration process in much more degree covers technologies and information transfer systems.

Social change in the Central Asia is incremental, at the beginning of independent years, it happens slowly with decades passing before, and in the information technologies century, it happens quickly before people aware of the change. However, the continuing social problems, increasing economic crisis, environmental issues, political discourse and a shift towards the democracy right in various member states are only the most outstanding ones. Despite challenging international, regional and domestic conditions Central Asia countries has all developed their strategies, for shaping what they consider their best possible foreign policies given the circumstances.

Key words: Central Asia, new media, social change.

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Орталық Азиядағы жаңа медиа: әлеуметтік өзгерістердегі әлеуметтік медианың рөлі

Жаһандық ақпараттық үдеріс ұлттық БАҚ дамуына айтарлықтай әсер етуде. Бүкіләлемде ақпараттық нарықты реттеу және жаһандану орын алуда. Осындай интеграция ақпараттық саланың дәстүрлі бұқаралық байланыс жүйелерінің салалары арасындағы шекараларды жою және жаңа медиа-жүйелерді құру фактісін кеңейтуде. Тарих тұрғысынан қарағанда бұл салалар жеке дара дамыды, бірақ қазір технологиялық жаңашылдықтың нәтижесінде олар өзара интеграциялануда. Интеграциялық үдеріс технологиялық және ақпарат тарату жүйелерін қамтиды.

Орталық Азиядағы әлеуметтік өзгерістер тәуелсіздік алған алғашқы жылдарға қарағанда қарқынды дамыды және ақпараттық технологиялар дәуірінде бұл өзгерістерге адамдар ілесе алмауда. Яғни, әр түрлі мемлекеттерде жылдар бойы жалғасып келе жатқан экономикалық дағдарыс, экологиялық проблемалар, саяси дискурс және демократия құқығына ауысу секілді маңызды мәселелер бар. Күрделі халықаралық, аймақтық және тұрмыстық жағдайларға қарамастан, Орталық Азия елдерінің ахуалында оңтайлы сыртқы саясатты айқындау үшін арнайы стратегиялар жасалуда.

Түйін сөздер: Орталық Азия, жаңа медиа, әлеуметтік өзгерістер.

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«Новые медиа» в Центральной Азии: роль социальных медиа в социальных изменениях

Глобальный информационный процесс сильно повлиял на развитие национальных средств массовой информации. Во всем мире происходит либерализация и глобализация информационных рынков. Такая интеграция приводит к тому, что информационная индустрия расширяется, стирая жесткие границы между секторами традиционных систем массовой коммуникации и создавая новые медиасистемы. Исторически эти отрасли развивались отдельно, но сейчас, благодаря технологическим инновациям, границы этих секторов размыты, идет активный процесс их интеграции. Процесс интеграции в гораздо большей степени охватывает технологии и системы передачи информации.

Социальные изменения в Центральной Азии являются постепенными, на начальном этапе независимости они происходят медленно, на протяжении десятилетий, в век информационных технологий это происходит быстро, прежде чем люди узнают об этих изменениях. Однако продолжающиеся социальные проблемы, усиливающийся экономический кризис, экологические проблемы, политический дискурс и сдвиг в сторону права на демократию в различных государствах-членах являются только наиболее выдающимися. Несмотря на сложные международные, региональные и внутренние условия, страны Центральной Азии разработали свои стратегии для определения того, что они считают наилучшей возможной внешней политикой с учетом обстоятельств.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, новые медиа, социальные изменения.

Introduction

In 1991, after the collapse of the USSR Central Asia countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadzhikistan achieved independence and maintained faces substantial political, economic, social, and cultural challenges. A number of factors underpinned this regionalizing logic: the five states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tadzhikistan were geographically proximate and shared a common material culture, social structure, cultural value-system and historical memory; and, not least, they bound by both the Soviet legacy and the need to find a way of collectively managing the region's transboundary natural resources. It is well known that the image of the country inextricably linked to the cultural and historical characteristics of its population (Kaneshev, 2007).

Social change in the Central Asia is incremental, at the beginning of independent years, it happens slowly with decades passing before, and in the information technologies century, it happens quickly before people aware of the change. However, the continuing social problems, increasing economic crisis, environmental issues, political discourse and a shift towards the democracy right in various member states are only the most outstanding ones. Despite challenging international, regional and domestic conditions Central Asia countries has all developed their strategies, for shaping what they consider their best possible foreign policies given the circumstances (M.Laruelle, 2015). Various articles, case studies, and research projects on the issue exist. However, the majority of these approaches mainly focus the structural role media played in influencing and reflecting public opinion (e.g. Rollberg, Peter, Laruelle Marlene. Questia 2015, Jeff L.Brown 1995). Only a few academic contributions pay attention to online media and their relevance to processes of cultural, political, and social convergence in Central Asia (e.g. N.Imamova, 2014, E.Freedman, R.Shafer 2011).

In fact, no larger empirical study has focused the Social Media and its actual impact on Central Asian social changes and public discourses beyond national frames yet. Social media have gained astounding worldwide growth and popularity, which has led to attracting attention from a variety of researchers globally. It is inevitable to ignore the fact that nowadays social media plays an essential role in Society. Well, social media helps the society with what is happening around the world, help stay connected and interact with each other even if they are many miles apart. Also, social media sites have provided a platform whereby to create groups and pages based on own common discipline and end up building connections and opportunities for their respective careers by updating various topics to discuss. Today social media has become a new lifestyle, and it makes people lives easier and efficient for communicative interaction that theoretically facilitates public debate and social change.

In 2018 the Institute for War and Peace Reporting within the framework of the «Giving Voice, Driving Change – from the Borderland to the Steppes - Cluster III: Central Asia", designed and developed research about "The status of media and the role of social media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan". According this research media in Kazakhstan use social networking sites actively, majority of respondents indicated that their media have account on Facebook followed by Twitter and Instagram (IWPR, 2018).

However media in Kyrgyzstan use social networking sites actively, majority of respondents indicated that their media have account on Facebook followed by Twitter and Instagram (IWPR, 2018).

Media in Tajikistan use social networking sites actively, majority of respondents indicated that their media have account on Facebook followed by Twitter, YouTube and Odnoklassniki.ru. Journalists in Tajikistan also use social networking Press releases are still the major information source for journalists' news reports in the country followed by websites. News conferences are the third most popular source of information for news reports of journalists in Tajikistan followed by people as source of information for journalists. Among social networking sites Facebook is the most frequently used source of information for journalists' news reports in Tajikistan.

Media in Uzbekistan use social networking sites actively, majority of respondents indicated that their media have account on Facebook followed by Instagram and Twitter. Journalists in Uz-Press releases are still the major information source for journalists' news reports in the country followed by websites. People are the third most popular source of information for news reports of journalists in Uzbekistan. Among social networking sites Facebook is the most frequently used source of information for journalists' news reports in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan also use social networking sites actively. They most popular social networking site among journalists in Uzbekistan is Facebook followed by Instagram and Twitter.

According to results of in-depth interviews, most journalists in Kazakhstan get information and ideas for their news reports from government agencies, press services of state bodies and press conferences. They also get information and ideas from social networks such as Facebook and Twitter but they doubt this information and do not see these sources as reliable information source. (IWPR, 2018).

Journalists in Kazakhstan state that there are two options for them in choosing topics to write about, first topics that they can write about and the topics that are not desirable. In Kazakhstani media the choice of topics do mostly by editorial board. They mostly cover visits of political leaders, internal policy and changes that occur in power structures and state bodies.Press releases are still the major information source for journalists' news reports in the country followed by websites. News conferences are the third most popular source of information for news reports of journalists in Kazakhstan followed by people. Among social networking sites Facebook is the most frequently used source of information for journalists' news reports in Kazakhstan. (IWPR, 2018).

According to the results of in-depth interviews, journalists in Kyrgyzstan mostly get information and ideas for their news or reports from Internet, from their colleagues, from social media, from other media, from state agencies, from NGOs and international organizations, from experts and researchers, from eyewitnesses of events and from friends and acquaintances. The editorial decision on the choice of news topics is made collectively where each journalist offers topics for news reporting to the editor. The choice of the news topics is also made according to the preferences of media outlets' audiences. Media outlets give preference to the news topics that is of greatest interest to their audiences. (IWPR, 2018).

Press releases are still the major information source for journalists' news reports in the country followed by websites. News conferences are the third most popular source of information for news reports of journalists in Kyrgyzstan followed by people as source of information for journalists. Among social networking sites Facebook is the most frequently used source of information for journalists' news reports in Kyrgyzstan. In-depth interview results showed that respondents think that journalists in Tajikistan have no role in solving social, economic and political problems in the country because state do not react to their publications and does not answer their questions. They think that the media have lost their role in society and journalists refrain from covering serious topics and stay on the sideline. (IWPR, 2018).

Experts from Central Asia think that there is a transition of independent journalism to Internet, social media. In the main, there is a transition of independent journalism to the Internet, social networks and online media. Sometimes social media form the agenda for state media. The main part of their audience consists more of youth and middle-aged professionals. Since the print media is regulated more by the state;

the more the online media sector is developing (IWPR, 2018).

This project analyzed participatory online media and their potential for social changes, i.e. social media spheres, in four stages:

I. The development of an elaborated theoretical framework for analyzing and understanding social media spheres in the age of information technology; this includes an in-depth reconsideration and discussion of already existing notions of the public policy (e.g. Altshull, J.Herbert 1995, M.Laruelle, S.Peyrouse 2012). By theoretical approaches from different academic resources, the aim of this study to examine integration theories on social changes, information societies from a pluralistic perspective. There are trends in mass communication of Central Asia countries that sharply increases the flow of information: the emergence of new traditional independent media, communication organizations, digital and social media systems, electronic news outlets, and variations of other new information markets and services in web-based discourses.

II. An extensive, comparative content analysis of Central Asia-related social media and social challenges in both quantitative and qualitative respect; this requires the development of a complementary methodological approach and the compilation of an appropriate text corpus.

III. Interviews with a selection of professional content providers of social media and online journalism in Central Asia -related contexts (e.g. popular bloggers, online journalists), which I will conduct either off- or online (e.g. Skype); this allows me to evaluate the utilization of information technologies to communicate Central Asia.

IV. Based on the findings of the previous steps, the establishment of a detailed social change of Central Asia countries - related online media, a characterization of Central Asian 'civil society', and a map of social networks of public spaces within the content. Finally, I will be able to give confirmed to the question whether the Social Media stimulates the civil society spheres or social changes promote the democracy – an important aspect in regards to the greater challenges and success of the Central Asia countries.

Research Questions To assess the structure, function, and content of social media regarding the social changes of Central Asia countries, approach and answered the following research questions, which divided into three categories:

I. On the Potential of Social challenges in Central Asia Societies: What social media content on the Central Asian countries is available and does it add up to networked, digitalized public spheres across national borders, i.e. does the Social Media facilitate the emergence of Central Asian civil society? Where do they occur, what does their structure look like and what function do they have? What are the differences between the various social media networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Vkontakte, Moi Mir, Odnoklassniki) as regards their potential for civil society in Central Asia contexts?

II. On the provider's such social media of Public Forums Online: What issues do professional content providers perceive to Central Asian countries? What differences in identifying and evaluating social change issues do exist (e.g. national vs. international interests)? Where do the providers of content allocate themselves within five Central Asia countries and its social media content- based environment? How does the Central Asia country communicate to the populations of its member states online?

III. On the Recipients/Users (and therefore possible Central Asian countries): Who is participating in social media platforms? Do the discussants reflect a certain Central Asia society change-conception? Where do crucial shortcomings regarding openness and inclusion become apparent?

3. Data and Methodology The core of this research project based on the Institute for War and Peace Reporting within the framework of the «Giving Voice, Driving Change – from the Borderland to the Steppes - Cluster III: Central Asia", designed and developed research about "The status of media and the role of social media in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan" (IWPR, 2018).

Conclusion

The results have shown that in general audience use social media for their professional work rather actively. As it was expected, the number of so called "pragmatic conformists" and "enthusiastic activists" is higher among young journalists.

Comprehensive analysis of the development of Mass Media in CA countries allows to make up the following conclusions:

1) In the conditions of world media tendencies, such as: globalization, digitalization, multicultural orientation, questions of preservation of national cultural originality, specifics of spiritual culture, art, valuable norms of social life during a globalization era become actual.

2) Development of society becomes more dynamic, mobile due to inter activity, efficiency, availability of information and communication, and IT play an important role in the process of integration.

3) In CA countries communication technologies which are the engine of development of modern society developed. Informational and technological revolution intensified introduction and development of global mass media, in Kazakhstan the satellite, cable television, a mobile telephony, a digital broadcasting extends quickly, the Internet, social networks actively develops, the number of Web editions, information multimedia of resources grows, fiber-optical communication, paid video gains quickly develops.

4) Social and economic changes of the Kazakhstan society defined the direction of development of the information technologies; new media of the country availability of information and communication play in it an important role.

– Social media contents provided by Russian social networks in the Central Asia (e.g. Vkontakte, Moi Mir, Odnoklassniki);

– Decidedly international, global social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google+);

– A selection of "Russian social media" from popular social media, located in three important member states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz Republic (e.g. Vkontakte, Moi Mir, Odnoklassniki);

– A selection of blogs, Facebook, Twitter accounts, homepages, etc. provided by decidedly Central Asian social media groups and media organizations. The text corpus mainly consist of articles and posts, i.e. discourses, on websites, blogs, forums, and social networking sites.

The analysis aims for two levels: The "content-level," i.e. the social media articles, messages, etc. and the "comment level," i.e. the direct responses from users/readers. The instruments for the data survey are a detailed codebook and data entry forms. The second part of the data collection consists of interviews, which will provide additional information for a deeper understanding of the intentions for utilizing online media to address social changes in the society.

4. Conclusive Remarks Additional, this research project developed an applicable theory to understand and analyze the structure, function, content of social media in contemporary, globalized information societies, and provide a complementary methodological approach to assess such phenomena both qualitatively and empirically. It could become a model to analyze similar phenomena in another web-based context. By establishing detailed social changes in Central Asia - related social media and analyzing its potential for civil society discourse, it gave us highlight aspects in 'communication in Central Asia' that need further improvement on the side of professional online content providers and different perspectives and approaches in regards to new media development research on the civil society, public policy, and communication.

According to the IWPR research project Journalists in all three countries are "Neither optimistic nor pessimistic" about the future of journalism in their countries except for Kyrgyzstan. Journalists in Kyrgyzstan are "Optimistic" about the future of journalism in their country. Journalists in all three countries except for Tajikistan are interested in politics, journalists in Tajikistan answered that they are not interested in politics (IWPR, 2018).

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