

TECHNOLOGIES OF INFLUENCE ON MASS MEDIA IN UKRAINE: THE POST-COMMUNIST CONTEXT

Oleksiy Zahirnyi

Postgraduate Student at the Department of Political Science, Odesa I. I. Mechnikov National University, Ukrainee-mail: alextweetcorm@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-0631-089X

Summary

The article is devoted to transformations of technologies of political influence on mass media in Ukraine. The essence of the post-communist context of transformations of technologies influencing the mass media is determined. It consists in the transition from the Soviet heritage (state and party censorship, administrative pressure on journalists and editors) to the oligarchic model of mass media activity (the use of economic leverage, hidden political advertising, and dependence on the owner). The methodological approach of historical institutionalism is used to determine the transformations of technologies of influence of public power and oligarchic groups on the mass media in the post-communist context. It has been specified that the creation of a democratic model of mass media activity is an integral part of the democratization of the Ukrainian political process. The study of technologies of public power influence on the mass media allows reconstructing creatively some provisions of the theory of democratic transition, determining its essence and directions in Ukraine. Special emphasis is placed on the need to overcome the post-communist legacy and the importance of understanding the democratic transition of Ukraine as the achievement of its ultimate goal – full-fledged European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Despite the long debates in Ukrainian political science regarding the use of such terms as "post-communism" and "democratic transition", the events of recent years, and especially the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (i.e. actions aimed directly against the democratic transition of Ukraine) have convincingly proven the scientific value and the importance of researching the post-communist context of mass media activity.

The essence of certain technologies of influence on the mass media, which characterize the relations between the government, society, and the mass media in the post-communist context, is noted.

Key words: mass media, Soviet censorship, oligarchic model of mass media, institutionalism, democratic transition.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/5527>

1. Introduction

In the process of democratic transition, the technologies of influence on the mass media in Ukraine are changing. The formation of the information society in a global dimension turns information not only into a commodity, but also into one of the main social values. Most researchers, using an interdisciplinary approach, focus on the technologies of mass media influence on society. Examples include the 'spiral of silence' model (*Noelle-Neumann, 1984*) and M. McCombs' agenda-setting theory (*McCombs, 1972*). Instead, insufficient attention is paid to the reverse process, namely the influence of government and society on the mass media in the post-communist context. It is not only about the influence of public power on the mass media. This influence is exerted by various collective and individual actors – the government,

various social groups, classes, global media, civil society institutions, opposition actors, etc. All of them are participants in the institutional interaction that determines the space for both domestic and foreign political choices of Ukraine in modern conditions (*Yakovlev, Amirov & Stoliarova, 2021*). The technologies of political influence on the Ukrainian mass media and their transformation in the post-communist context are still not sufficiently defined. If we use Professor A. Kolodii's evaluation of the process of democratic transition as "...the successive replacement of non-democratic institutions by democratic ones and the consolidation of the latter" (*Kolodii, 2010: 24*), then these are often multi-vector and inconsistent changes. The same characteristic should be given to the technologies of influence of public power on the mass media – from the point of view of compliance with democratic standards, they are multi-vector and inconsistent. In the process of post-communist transformations in Ukraine, revolutionary bursts of freedom of speech alternated with authoritarian reversals of mass media censorship.

All of the above makes the study of transformations of technologies of influence on the mass media extremely relevant in the post-communist context.

2. Post-communist hybridity as a trap for mass media

The movement of the Ukrainian media-political system from an authoritarian political regime to a democracy does not resemble a straight line. On the contrary, the post-authoritarian society carries out reversals, supporting the "strong hand" in the elections, protégés of the oligarchs, or populists. That is why the post-communist state of the mass media is characterized by hybridity.

Hybrid systems arise in those states where there are significant social divisions on the issues of socio-political and economic development. For a long time, Ukrainian society has failed to find a "recipe" for consolidation, and the political class used it to emphasize the lines of division in order to ensure the electoral success of certain candidates and parties and further obtain economic profit. It was for this purpose that communicative technologies of public opinion formation and technologies of political influence on the mass media were used.

It can be argued that we are only now witnessing the end of the post-communist stage. After all, the post-communist stage is characterized by hybridity – the combination of incompatible elements in state administration and social relations (Soviet bureaucracy and post-Soviet oligarchy, a mixed form of government, a mixed electoral system, a combination of elements of democracy with remnants of authoritarianism, etc.). Most importantly, the post-communist system is characterized by the ambivalence of domestic and foreign policy, a combination of elements of Soviet discourse and institutional design, and a democratic political system and market economy. Until this political ambivalence is overcome, it is too early to talk about the end of the post-communist stage.

One of the fundamental factors of political choice is the state of the mass media and the essence of technologies of political influence on the mass media. Mass media activities can contribute to the consolidation of Ukrainian society around democratic values. The attempts by the political class of Ukraine to overcome the post-Soviet uncertainty (the search for an answer to the sacramental question: "What are we building?") against the background of exploitation in the oligarchic mass media of the regional, linguistic, cultural, and political division of the country formed a hybrid political regime. It has become a part of the national democratic transition. Its continuation consists in the consolidation of society and the political class in the process of a political choice between alternatives for the development of this hybrid political regime.

The main achievement of the democratic transition of Ukraine is a clear definition of the criteria for the completion of the post-communist stage and the ultimate goal of the Ukrainian transition – European and Euro-Atlantic integration in the political and mass media discourse. At the same time, it was not only and not so much about formal integration, legally established, but also about European values, democratic rules of political and economic interaction in the triangle "power – society – media", and market economy. Therefore, it can be argued that the criterion for the success of democratic transition is the implementation of democratic values, norms, and rules of interaction between the mass media, society, and the government, and most importantly, strict adherence to the principles of freedom of speech and freedom of choice. That is, if in the mid-90s of the 20th century the post-communist stage began with a hybrid media-political system built on the interaction between the bureaucracy and the oligarchy, its completion is associated with the introduction of European standards and democratic rules into the activities of the media system and its interaction with the political system.

All the technologies of the political influence of the oligarchy and bureaucracy, which have proven their effectiveness against the traditional mass media, have turned out to be powerless against social networks. Neither administrative means of control and economic pressure, nor the artificial construction of a political agenda can be applied to Internet communications. These advantages of mass media activities on the Internet were fully manifested during the "Revolution of Dignity", after another authoritarian spasm.

3. Latent and public technologies of mass media influence in the post-communist context

The technologies of influence on the mass media in the post-communist context are divided into latent and public. This is due to the specifics of historical development in the post-Soviet space. The sources of the formation of the media political system go back to the traditions of Soviet censorship – state and party dictatorship regarding media materials.

At the same time, public technologies of mass media influence in the process of democratization are combined with latent ones – administrative hidden pressure, the use of economic levers, etc.

The latent technologies of government influence on the mass media in the post-communist context have become part of state policy. The division of technologies of influence on the mass media into public and latent is clear and fundamental not only for theoreticians, but also for practitioners. Representatives of the government and the mass media institute (owners, editors, journalists, experts, and opinion leaders) in the process of interaction create and reproduce in everyday (routine) activities the norms and rules of behaviour regarding the achievement of private, corporate and public goals. Censorship, administrative and economic pressure on the mass media is no secret to them. At the same time, consumers of mass information, who are not familiar with the editorial policy and ultimate beneficiaries of individual mass media, cannot always identify latent technologies of influence and critically consider them in order to observe "information hygiene". This is the danger of latent technologies influencing the mass media. Their transfer to the public plane will mean, if not neutralization, then at least a reduction in the influence on mass consciousness.

For Ukraine, since the beginning of independence, the authoritarian model of mass media activity has become a reality. This is due to the Soviet heritage in the interaction between the power and the mass media. The process of democratic transition in Ukraine has a starting point – the Soviet legacy, the Communist Party institutional matrix that determined the lives

of several generations of journalists. The starting conditions to a certain extent retain their influence, which is expressed in the term "post-communism". At the same time, we state that in the process of democratic transition in Ukraine, there is a gradual but consistent transfer of influence technologies to the public sphere. In particular, thanks to media scandals, some facts of influence and frank pressure become the property of public discourse. This contributes not only to the democratization of the activities of individual institutions (public power and mass media), but also to increasing the effectiveness of their institutional interaction (*Yakovleva, Yakovlev, 2020*).

Technologies of political influence on the mass media in the process of democratic transition are applied by the bureaucracy and financial and industrial groups (oligarchic clans) in order to use the media resource for acquiring and increasing political weight. They distort the media market and contribute to the formation of post-communist mass media.

At the same time, Internet communications are actively developing in Ukraine. They became real centres of freedom of speech and the absence of censorship during the media scandals of the early 2000s, the revolutionary events of 2004 and 2013–2014.

The post-communist political system has distorted the media system, not allowing democratic processes and democratically oriented players of the media market to independently determine the directions of development not only of the media, but also of the entire society. It is worth agreeing with the following: "... two meanings of the term "post-communist mass media" should be distinguished. Firstly, post-communism is perceived (and this is natural, although not entirely accurate) as something that is "after communism". But, speaking more precisely, secondly, "after communism" the destruction of the communist regime, totalitarianism, comes first, that is, its criticism, denial, ideological persecution of old forms of consciousness and psychology, and "deformation of the model" by means of mass information comes first. In the so-called "day of glasnost", there was a lot of noise about freedom of information, pluralism, etc. In fact, everyone had only one thing in mind – the possibility of deforming the "communist model". But together with the realization of this great goal, the deformation of the still half-born, "new" old mass media originates from the same place. Critical persecution of "communism" or "nationalism" as a way of constitution of the newest mass media, as a condition of their "post-communist" existence is nothing but a continuation of the totalitarian type of understanding and practising of the information machinery. This is how numerous newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV programs appeared in Ukraine at the time, and are now flourishing in Ukraine, which, once again, try to turn information into a means of forming new political and ideological stereotypes in people, and therefore, impose the desired understanding of human relations according to the nature of the political regime" (*Polokhalo, Bystrytskyi, 1995*).

Ukrainian society faces the problem of overcoming the Soviet experience. In Ukraine, the ideological transformations of the mass media, which caused the transition of state censorship to the media, the search for an alternative model of media activity, etc. to new technologies of technological influence, are connected with the presidential election campaigns.

In this context, the question of determining the stages of democratic transition and the technologies of political influence, both of the media on society and the government, and of the latter on the media, inherent in each stage, is brought up to date.

The Ukrainian experience, without exaggeration, is unique. Before and after each election, according to the results of the election campaigns, the media field changed. New technologies of influence were applied: from post-Soviet censorship and oligarchic financial pressure to sanctions by the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (NSDC).

In the process of two revolutionary "surges" of civic activism (2004 and 2013–2014), TV channels and Internet media appeared, and new constellations of talented journalists, creative editors, and owners gained power. The state of the field of mass media and the technology of political influence on Ukrainian mass media after 2019 is characterized by novels. The "technology of sanctions", implemented by the NSDC in relation to some TV channels, is beginning to play an important role. This leads to redistributing the audience and, accordingly, the field of media and advertising market. At the same time, this technology needs further scientific understanding from the point of view of legality, expediency, and efficiency.

4. Public media as an alternative to post-communist hybridity

Mass media can play the role of a catalyst for democratic transformations; representatives of the media shop have repeatedly proved this. That is why the fundamental role of mass media in democratic transition should be noted. Their influence becomes especially noticeable in the election process when citizens make a democratic political choice. At the same time, the basis of democratic transformations should be non-oligarchic media (such traditional media as television, radio, and press), which naturally defend narrow-group or selfish interests of the owners. World experience shows the need to implement the public media model.

One of the effective technologies of democratic political influence on oligarchic and state media and an alternative to the Soviet model of interaction between the power and the mass media is the creation of public media. One of the important steps in this direction was taken in 2013 when the online publication "Hromadske" was founded. Among its founders were such well-known journalists as D. Hnap, R. Skrypin, M. Nayyem, V. Andrushko, etc. The peak of their popularity came at the events of the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) when "Hromadske" broadcast live from Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) over the Internet. It is a public organization that works through charitable contributions, crowdfunding, and grants ("Hromadske TV").

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of foreign partners and public institutions in Ukraine, public mass media still cannot boast of a high rating.

Public media in Ukraine include the above-mentioned "Hromadske TV", which distributes its broadcasts via the Internet and satellite communications, as well as "Suspilne Movlennia" (National Public Television and Radio Company of Ukraine), which was created based on the state television and radio company. Derzhkomteletadio became the sole shareholder of the latter. It is not public broadcasting, but state broadcasting. "Suspilne UA" has the largest signal broadcast coverage among all Ukrainian television companies.

The difficult and ambiguous process of transformation of state television into public broadcasting, which is taking place under public pressure in the process of the democratic transition of Ukraine, is a marker of the complexity of the reforms. The state does not want to give up control over the only television channel that remains in state ownership.

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the following procedural features of post-communist hybridity, which determined the specifics of the application of latent and public technologies of political influence on the mass media, should be noted. Firstly, in the post-communist stage of the democratic transition, there was a gradual abandonment of Soviet-style political censorship. Secondly, during the post-communist stage of Ukraine's democratic transition, there was no radical change

in the ruling elites. This applies to both the political elite and the mediocracy. State ownership of the mass media contributed to the preservation of personnel who made a career in Soviet times. Oligarchic media holdings began to form in the second half of the 90s. The oligarchic media played an active political role in the election campaigns, starting in 1999, when, together with the post-communist "party of power", they supported L. Kuchma and contributed to the ousting of the counter-elite, the national-democratic forces, from the political field. Since then, a hybrid media-political system that used administrative pressure and "dungeons" has begun to form in Ukraine. Thirdly, the weakness of the opposition forces and the lack of formation of the civil society contributed to the strengthening of the oligarchic media. Until 2013, we should talk about the oligarchic model of mass media activity in Ukraine. Economic leverage, the use of financial pressure, and investments in mass media by oligarchs for getting political benefit dominated among the technologies of influence. Fourthly, in the course of the revolutionary events of 2013–2014, a social model of mass media activity emerged. Initially, public media used only the Internet, but later Ukraine took steps to form a democratic model of a public broadcaster based on state television and radio broadcasting.

References

1. *Dyskurs polityky u masovii komunikatsii [Discourse of politics in mass communication] / V. Vovk ta inshi. Politolohiia postkomunizmu: Politychnyi analiz postkomunistychnykh suspilstv / V. Polokhalo (kerivnyk avt. kolektyvu); Zah. red-tsiia.: Ye. Bystrytskyi (rozd. 1), V. Polokhalo (rozd. 2), S. Makeiev (rozd. 3), O. Derhachov (rozd. 4). Kyiv: Politychna dumka, 1995. 368 s. URL: <http://litopys.org.ua/polpost/r1a3.htm> [in Ukrainian]*
2. "Hromadske TB" pochalo suputnykove movlennia bez litsenzii. Roman Skrypin poiasnyv, yak ["Hromadske TV" started satellite broadcasting without a license. Roman Skrypin explained how]. *Detektor media Suspilnoho*. 2015. 8 travnia. URL: <https://stv.detektor.media/digital/read/1637/2015-05-08-gromadske-tb-pochalo-suputnykove-movlennya-bez-litsenzii-roman-skrypin-poyasnyv-yak/> [in Ukrainian]
3. Kolodii, A. (2010). *Traiektoriia demokratychnoho perekhodu v Ukraini [The trajectory of the democratic transition in Ukraine]*. *Politychna transformatsiia v Polshchi ta Ukraini: 1989–2009. Vybrani aspekty*. Vroslav. Rozd. 2. S. 23–38. *Avtorskyi sait Antoniny Kolodii*. URL: <http://political-studies.com/?p=570> [in Ukrainian]
4. McCombs, M. (1972) *The agenda-setting function of mass media*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 36, 176–187.
5. Noelle-Neumann? E. (1984) *The Spiral of Silence*. *Public Opinion – Our Social Skin*. Chicago University Press, Chicago. 277 p.
6. Yakovlev D., Amirov A., & Stoliarova, A. (2021). *Debate on Foreign Policy Choice in the Media Landscape of Ukraine*. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. Vol. 617. P. 81-87. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211218.014>
7. Yakovleva L., Yakovlev D. (2020). *Institutional interaction and political choice in a transitional society. What role for the social sciences? Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*. 2(4), 582–608.