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# STATE MEDIA POLICY AS CATALYST OF RUSSIAN MODERNIZATION PROCESS

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## **Abstract**

Problems of social and cultural modernization in post-Soviet Russia are being analyzed in the article. It is a complex evolutionary transformation of society as social and cultural system. Modernization is viewed as a phenomenon with civilizational scope, as a global factor of the global history. According to the author, state media policy in development of a new media environment - the common information space of Russia and the world - plays the most important integrating role in these processes. New electronic media (computer channels, Internet, cable TV, mobile phones, digital photographs and films, etc.) became not only mediator between the authorities and society, personality and state but the factor of the dialog of cultures and civilizations.

*Keywords:* media culture, social and cultural modernization, technological revolution, electronic media, communication

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## **1. Introduction**

Last three decades, from the beginning of ‘glasnost’ and ‘perestroika’, scientists (historians, sociologists, politologists, culturologists, philosophers) have been forecasting the processes of further development of Russia in the third millennium and thinking about the ways of its modernization (transformation) meaning “*complex mainly evolutionary transformation of society as social and cultural system — of its type and with a specific historical form*” [1]. Modernization is viewed at the same time as a shift from ‘closed society to open society’ or its’ greater openness by differentiation of the society structure and making it more complex. This shift significantly widens the freedom of choice and responsibility of subjects in accordance with the complication of personality and growth of its requirements. In short, modernization is viewed as a phenomenon of civilization scope, as global phenomenon of the global history.

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## 2. Research method

Study of modernization processes in Russian history includes such important dimensions as *continuity and gaps* in social and cultural dynamics, specifics of *transitional periods, patterns and accidents* in the course of reformation, their *alternative character*, etc.

The growth of social contradictions, the instable character of country development in certain periods should be accounted for in the analysis of all these problems and it requires constant renewal of methodological approaches to research. One of them is related to *synergetics* — a fundamental concept that is the core of modern scientific world view.

Scientific discoveries of two Nobel winners in Natural science — I. Prigozhin (Belgian physicist and philosopher of Russian origin) and H. Haken, (German physicist specialized in lasers) were important for this approach. It was Haken who proposed the name synergetics (from Greek synergeia — common, agreed action) for the *new sphere of interdisciplinary research* in 1970. The theory of I. Prigozhin is presented in his book ‘Order out of chaos. Man’s new dialog with nature’ (written with I. Stengers) and provides the methodological foundation and analytical tools to research of transitional processes (including social and cultural situation in Russia in the turn of XXI century), alternatives of development in different sciences including History, Culturology, Politology, Sociology and Philosophy. According to I. Prigozhin “we have arrived to the end of the idea of classical rationality by pressing on the scheme of a linear process as the history law” [2]. As a result, different scientists including known culturologists, became to appeal to interdisciplinary research in liberal sciences that prove some the statements of synergetics [3].

Y. Lotman made significant contribution to development of synergetic approach applying it to the methodology of historical and cultural research. He associated the main ideas of this approach with methodological approaches of I. Prigozhin school of thought that shift the focus in researched from the gradual evolution of the processes to the explosive character of development. It was stressed in one of the last monograph of Y. Lotman ‘Culture and explosion’ [4]. This component of Y. Lotman’s works may be linked not only with the problem of ‘the freedom of choice’ but with the organic adoption of spiritual experience accumulated by the Russian culture.

A. Akhiezer’s approach is the most acceptable for the Russian situation on modernization concept. He putted together cultural anthropology with sociology. The problem is that in the Western tradition of Sociology the ‘norm’ concept exists and the concepts of ‘secondary’ modernization are oriented on understanding the transition from ‘traditional’ societies to ‘modern’ societies as bringing of the immature retarded sample to the known ‘norm’ [5].

It is known that these concepts allowed defining the process of modernization itself as ‘globalization’, ‘westernization’, ‘Europeization’, etc.

Akhiezer's theory applied to modernization allows revealing the *cultural content of social processes, transition of culture* (samples, values, norms) *into social action*, in action as realization of cultural senses. In Akhiezer's theory modernization is not only a "process of integral renewal of society, an attempt to travel from Traditional supercivilization to the Liberal one" but also a "response to the challenge of disorganization of mankind as a result of social and cultural split of the world that requires development of pluralistic, dialog, humanistic elements in each culture essential for man's living on Earth" [5].

Unlike numerous researches of social and cultural modernization problems that follows traditions of M. Weber [6] and A. Toynbee [7], A. Akhiezer pays almost no attention to religion and its role. Author put on the top the *dynamic of moral systems and orientations as one on the foundations of mass activity of people*. It is reasonable also for the research on the role of new media as catalyst of social and cultural modernization in Russia at the turn of XXI century, when Orthodoxy became not only abstract high value but real content of 'personality' culture (i.e. the extent of spiritual development, belief, thinking, behaviour, etc.).

A. Akhiezer analyses situations and relations emerging in society from the point of view of subjects participating in them. He is interested in motives that people follows, communication processes themselves that result in *forming of the philosophy of dialog, harmonization of relations between cultures*.

One of the most important methods of social and cultural processes study actively used by A. Akhiezer is '*interpretation as an instrument of integration*'. It means that a "new idea or concept is never being accepted by mass consciousness without its interpretation". According to A. Akhiezer the way out is the *dialog between subjects* [5, p. 210-211], for example between the person and authorities.

Analysis of media environment of Russian modernization, as the author thinks, presupposes also the study of the *dialog of cultures, cultural pluralism at global geopolitical level* because Russia in the turn of XXI century became the structural component of the global information space [8].

In Russian and foreign science, is popular the relatively polemical opinion that Russia has lived through the period of 'post-modern revolution' that was related to the necessity of "making... a leap to a higher technological level, to information and computer technologies" [9].

British scientist Z. Bauman was the first to use in scientific speech the term post-modern revolution. He stressed that "post-modern challenge became extremely effective in speeding up the crash of communism and the triumph of anti-communist revolution..." [9, p. 15].

It should be stressed that 'post-modern revolution' has changed economic foundation of society, the character of social and cultural environment, its spiritual and psychological atmosphere. Stereotypes of the former ideology crashed down and the process of forming new social relations, values and institutions started under the influence of democratization, realization of civil rights and freedoms became possible.

*State's media policy plays the most important integrating role that promotes forming new media environment of Russian modernization.* Forming of the common information space of Russia, intensive development of mass-media (first of all electronic: cable and satellite TV, video, digital films and photographs, computer channels, Internet, multimedia, mobile phones, etc.) became the catalyst of many social processes that affected political and economic development of society, becoming an influential factor of the transition period.

Social, cultural and media environment of man's life have changed. Social and cultural environment is a category that fixed "external reality on the borderline of developed and undeveloped world" [5, p. 488].

*Media environment* is what surrounds us every day. "It is the total of efforts media culture functions in the context of the sphere that link a man with the outer world via mass communication: informs; entertains; popularizes this or that moral and aesthetic values; makes ideological, economical or organizational effect on assessments, opinions and behaviour of people. In short, it affects *social consciousness*." [8, p. 63]

Active effect of media environment in Russia began in the period of 'glasnost and perestroika'. One may wonder the visionary talent of Michail Gorbachev who gave mass-media the leading role as the *instrument of conviction* when he started to realize political, social and economic reformations. The atmosphere of 'glasnost' undoubtedly loosen the bondage of control of the Communist Party and allowed first print media and later electronic media going in the direction of intellectual diversity and free expression. It is not the guilt but a tragedy of Gorbachev that he wanted to keep although 'modernized' old system of Communist Party's management by moving communist ideology gradually to the course of social democracy.

The history had decided by its own. The more society became aware of the truth hid by official propaganda the looser was the unity of the USSR, the lower was the prestige of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and it was impossible to 'reanimate' it. In August 1991, during the days of putsch of conservative forces, Russian society faced the question of Hamlet "To be or not to be?"... *The alternative was to go back to totalitarian system or to move by the course of democracy.*

Media played a decisive role in solving this problem. Although putschists closed all channels 'disloyal' to them, the effect of global space (computer channels, e-mail, Internet) gave its results. Correspondents of leading TV and radio channels (BBC, CNN and others) provided live reporting of events in Moscow. Media had created the image of the new Russian leader Boris Yeltsin who declared his commitment to fight against the regime standing on tank like in the tribune. Muscovites and citizens of the whole country and the whole democratic world joined him.

So mass-media played a decisive role in this turning period for the history of Russia and became a driving force with 'post-modern' and 'information' revolution that has led to dramatic changes in the country.

Media environment has undergone great changes in post-Soviet period. Control for press from the communist party (ideological control) has gone and non-state print press, TV and radio channels started to appear. There is one more important thing — after print boom of the late 1980s — beginning of 1990s, the process of stirring up of electronic media especially Internet began. According to the American sociologist M. Castells, Internet is a “space of free global communication” [10].

Transformation of media environment in Russia started with reformation of media policy. The architect of this reformation was The Print Press and Other Mass Media Law passed in June 1990. Even before, The Mass Media Law of Russian Federation which passed in 1991, declared the freedom of print press and the abolition of film censorship. It also provided the possibility to found mass-media not by different state authorities, political parties, social organizations, religious and other organizations, and individual citizens of the USSR older than 18.

Effectiveness of The Law of RF passed in 1991, compared with the first one in the questions of media activity, was reinforced by the action of economic (move to market relations and pluralism of the form of property), scientific and technical (deployment of information technologies), international (integration of Russian media market into the global one) and other factors.

The importance of media culture as “complex tool for development of surrounding world in its social, intellectual, moral, artistic, psychological dimensions of a man” [11] in society boosted up at the end of 1990s. Growth of media culture influence was caused by media policy of the President of Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin. The process of informatization of Russian society had started. Non occasionally, the high priority social and cultural modernization of post-Soviet Russia tasks were: deployment of computer technologies in libraries, archives, museums; development of public databases and data banks in Liberal and Social science; forming of a wide net of cultural, information and entertainment centres in regions; forming and development of Russian Internet sector; provisioning the information safety of the person, society and state [12]. Yeltsin’s media policy has proved the idea of A. Toffler of ‘media authority’ in information era [13].

The level of mass communications means development and the specifics of its comprehensive effect on personality, prove that today media are the factor of practical realization of ‘the dialog of cultures’ theory initiated by M. Bakhtin and further developed by Y. Lotman, V. Bibler, Y. Kristeva and other scientists. M. Bakhtin arrived to the idea of ‘the dialog of cultures’ via analysis of the problem of ‘the other’ [14]. For Y. Lotman who was one of the founders of Russian semiotics reality cognition process as the process of cognition of ‘the other’ presupposed raising of media text up to the level of ‘abstract language’ [15]. V. Bibler is the author of popular now thesis that on the turn of XXI century distinct “shift of epicentre of human being to cultural pole” has become evident [16]. Following the ideas of M. Bakhtin, V. Bibler stated that “the sense of culture actualizes as the sense of the intercourse (dialog) of logics, intercourse

(dialog) of cultures” [16, p. 8]. Following M. Bakhtin polyphony, Y. Kristeva introduced the term ‘polylogue’ in the structure of scientific analysis [17].

All these ideas are cornerstones of the problem of revealing media culture’s role as a sort of catalyst of the dialog between the authority and society, society and person.

In each political and legal variant the state is a mouthpiece of social interest. But the extent of expression of this interest in different societies is definitely different. There are frontier groups in each society that are not capable to express their needs, problems and aims due to existing relations and institutions. The lower the development of civil institutions the greater is the number of these groups.

It is not surprising that in the situation of forming of new media environment and new democratic relations, political and economic groups had led fierce information fights for authority and property. Mass-media get into the sphere of their interests and were actively used as a weapon in the fight for influence in society. Topics of social injustice, economic disparity, ecologic catastrophe and many others, due to their huge emotional potential, were used by all fighting groups and interpreted on their ‘own’ interests.

Perspectives of a more weighted ‘constructive’ approach to discussion of social, interethnic, ecological problems, i.e. dialog with authority, appeared in Russia in 2000s in the situation of post-revolutionary stabilization of Russian society.

Despite sometimes dramatic course of events, bodies of Russian state authority demonstrated the trend to information openness. Not only traditional mass-media were used to achieve this aim, but the possibilities of the Internet. In the end of 1990s State Duma server was launched the website [www.duma.gov.ru](http://www.duma.gov.ru) that contains information about the deputies, their managers, members of committees and commissions, parliamentary factions and unions. The list of bills and materials of discussions may be also found there.

The server [www.government.ru](http://www.government.ru) covers the work of Russian Government. In June 2002 site of the President of Russian Federation was modernized ([www.president.kremlin.ru](http://www.president.kremlin.ru)) and any citizen of Russia may visit it.

“Electronic form of communications of state bodies and citizens make the authority closer to an individual person, promote satisfaction of public interest”, said journalist A. Grabelnikov. “TV watcher and Internet user may turn from passive consumers of information into an interlocutor of a politician or state person, to become a participant of ‘video democracy’ due to the networks. Openness of a state may reduce social tensions», he added [8, p. 55].

### **3. Conclusion**

Having analyzed the processes of social and cultural modernization of post-Soviet Russia one may see the tremendous role of new media. Technological revolution made available different manners of information missives, have transformed electronic and print press in a powerful media

institution that influences almost all the society in connection with democratic structures. This allows the state to lead a new media policy — the policy of glasnost and thus satisfy the widest demands of citizens that enter in open dialog with the authority, with different social groups, with other countries and even continents.

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