THE PROBLEM OF LEGITIMIZING THE PRACTICES OF POLITICAL BLACK PR IN RUSSIA

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Abstract. On the basis of the value-institutional approach, we discuss the problem of legitimizing political black PR in Russian society. We show the transformation of black PR content on TV in the period from 1999 to the present. The mass distribution of practices of black PR is explained by the current interpretation of politics as a way of retaining power. We present the results of mass sociological surveys showing the population's rejection of immoral methods of political struggle. This fact is due to the mismatch of "fights without rules" in politics, the dominant system of values of Russian society. It is concluded that there is no legitimation of black PR in the public consciousness. It is expressed an opinion about the dysfunctionality of political black PR. The authors make conclusions in the article based on the results of studies performed with the help of different methods: it is given the data of a discursive analysis of television programs, the data from all-Russian surveys. It is noted that there is a transformation of black PR technologies in the pre-election period - from an unbroken information war in 1999 to indirect methods of defamation of political rivals. In many ways, such changes are associated with a change in the alignment of political forces, as well as distrust of the population towards the media and black PR technologies in general.

Key Words: black PR, Machiavellianism, social institution, institutionalization, legitimation, social justice, symbolic code of Russian civilization, social dysfunction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Black PR has now acquired a wide scale. It is used in a variety of areas where there is competition: politics, science, culture, business, sports, etc. The scientific works are devoted to black PR technologies, the different kinds of agencies "specialize" in this activity. We can talk about the institutionalization of black PR practices in the modern world. At the same time, it remains an open question whether the institution of black PR is integrated into the society, including the public consciousness. This issue acquires special importance in relation to the political sphere, whose goal is to achieve general goals.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

We discuss the problem of legitimizing political black PR on the basis of the value-institutional approach in this article. The empirical base is represented by the data of the All-Russian sociological survey conducted by the Autonomous Non-Profit Organization (ANPO) Independent Research Center (Russia, Samara). The survey was conducted in January 2016, the total number of respondents - 1,400 respondents. The sample is quota, proportional to gender, age, place of residence (city/village, federal district). The survey was conducted at the place of residence of respondents using a routing sheet. We also carried out a secondary analysis of the results of sociological polls of the Public Opinion Foundation (POF) on the frequency of watching, favorite channels and favorite programs of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Science (RAS) "Russian Dream: What Is It and Can It Come True?" The article also presents the results of the discourse analysis of television programs before the elections to the State Duma.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

Black PR technologies presuppose the purposeful dissemination of negative information about an object with the aim of eliminating it. With the development of television, the Internet with its huge audience, black PR practices call into question the possibility of fair competition, i.e. compliance with the conventional agreements on the "rules of the game". It is quite possible to agree with the opinion of Vuyma A. (2005) that there is no serious moral difference in squeezing a competitor through price dumping, legal proceedings or black PR. And in general, the moral assessments are excluded as impractical in cases of black PR. The cleverly given black PR is considered as the "truth in the last resort", unless otherwise provided. The failure to refute false information is an important component of black PR effectiveness. Let us dwell on black PR practices of traditional media, in particular, television in this article.

According to the Public Opinion Foundation, 62% of Russians surveyed almost every day watch television programs, 11% - 3-5 times a week, 12% - 1-2 times a week (as of June 4, 2017). (POF, 2017a) Among those watching television programs, 54% are more likely to stop watching the news, 20% - public and political programs, 16% - author programs. At the same time, the results of another poll carried out by the POF (at the end of 2016) have showed that two-thirds of Russians (66%) are distrustful of television news. (POF, 2017b)

The importance and effectiveness of black PR in political communication increases during the election campaign, because its outcome directly affects the alignment of political forces in government. A vivid example of the use of black PR in the pre-election period of post-Soviet Russia can be an election campaign in the State Duma in 1999. The opposition of two electoral associations - "Edinstvo" (Unity) and "Otechestvo - Vsya Rossiya" (Fatherland - All Russia) - led to an information war between the main TV channels (ORT and RTR, on the one hand, and NTV, on the other hand). The television channels represented compromising evidence on a political competitor; it was created two opposite "pictures of reality" of the electoral process. The mass media, in particular television channels, became a platform for the election campaign and a mean of winning elections.

The mass media discourse of elections to the State Duma in 2003 was radically different. The main federal channels ("Perviy Kanal" (Channel One) (ORT receiver) and "Rossiya" (Russia) (RTR receiver)) used black PR tactics against another party - the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF). It was in relation to it that the image of the "enemy" was formed - the links were attributed to oligarchs, Chechen separatists, desire to approach the church in spite of atheistic ideology. (Nurutdinova, 2007) For four years, the alignment of political forces has changed and,
respectively, the object of black PR and the techniques used have also changed.

After more than ten years, the alignment of political forces in the State Duma has become different, the "party of power" has strengthened its positions, so black PR technologies have been rarely used and become more subtle, sophisticated. The elections to the Russian parliament that took place in 2016 showed that black PR against competitors was not used in the period of active pre-election campaigning, as it had been before, but a little earlier, before the very election campaign began. In particular, the NTV channel had several reports about the leaders of the non-systemic opposition. The photo of blogger V. Maltsev (nominated to the State Duma) was shown in the story about violence against children. It was said nothing about the activist himself, but negative connotations were associated with him. The public figure S. Lada-Rus (nominated for the presidency of Russia in 2012) was presented as the leader of a dangerous organization into whose house the Special Purpose Police Unit (OMON) broke into. These stories had nothing to do with the political activities of social activists, so it was difficult to directly rank these cases for pre-election black PR. But this is the transformation of pre-election black PR on television; it becomes less aware and noticeable. In conditions when the political opponent is unable to answer, express another point of view, the influence of black PR on people's opinions remains.

Black PR practices in politics are based on the Machiavellian interpretation of politics as an artificial means by which the ruler receives and retains power, including cunning and deceit, violence and wars. As B. Sutor observes, the world in the spirit of Machiavellian politics appears as imperialism, dispute suppression. The seizure, retention and multiplication of power become the goal of politics; morality should also be subordinated to this goal. (Sutor, 2001) Morality for a politician acts only as a utilitarian tool; it is used if necessary or pretends to follow it.

The institutionalization of black PR does not mean that it is necessary for a social system. Not all the established objectivities of institutional order are fixed in historical practice. Their preservation occurs when the institution is legitimized by individual and public consciousness. Legitimation has cognitive and normative aspects, "explains" and justifies the existing institutional order. (Berger, 1995) Through the explanation, understanding and justification of social consciousness, institutions are integrated into the social order, can be transferred to the next generations. P. Berger and T. Lukman emphasize that the "integration is not based on institutions, but on their legitimization." (1995) The integration implemented through legitimization is implemented at two levels: horizontal and vertical. At a horizontal level, legitimization means recognition of institutional processes of the established order by all participants. At a vertical level, legitimation involves their subjective recognition.

The participants in the process of institutionalizing black political PR are the media, political technologists, politicians, population of the country, "consuming" the information product produced. The scientists studying modern trends in the development of institutional processes consider PR to be a product of a consumer society. Politics of the decision-making sphere has become a sphere of PR-work. (Olshansky, 2003) Politics is being implemented on the stage of mass media, turning from an applied politics tool into the main mechanism and even into the very essence of politics. The effectiveness of politics began to be determined not by real achievements, but by the opinions of people, in the formation of which the mass media play a key role. The communication researchers repeatedly have noted that the mass media not only transmit information, but also form a "picture of reality"; the mass media create a set of topics that seem to be the most important and worthy of attention of the audience, forming an "agenda". (McCombs & Shaw, 1993; McCombs & Stroud, 2014; Huckins, 1999; Kosicki, 1993; Davie, & Maher, 2006; Druckman, Jacobs, Ostermeir, 2004; Groshek, 2008; Hayes, 2008; Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; Kiousis & McCombs, 2004; Wanta & Wu, 1995; Weaver, 2007)

All these views do not take into account the point of view of the country's population, which is the main target of the impact of black PR technologies. After all, the "black" information, which forms a negative image of active subjects of political life in the long run, is generated for it.

According to the All-Russian sociological poll conducted by the ANPO Independent Research Center, 92.4% of respondents believe that a false image of a public figure or a public organization can be imposed to a society through manipulation. Among the ways of spreading the "black PR", the
leading place is given by the respondents to "ordered" articles in newspapers (92.1%) and "customized" TV and radio programs (80.9%), followed by rumors (47.6%), posters and cartoons (36.3%), "scientific" reports (26.4%), interviews with employees of enterprises (29%) and relatives (20.9%).

Almost three quarters of the respondents (73.3%) agree with the opinion that the government is afraid of progressive people who make a competition in the society, therefore deliberately forms negative public opinion about its activities in order to isolate it from society.

78.9% of respondents believe that the government can use the mass media in order to discredit the activities of opposition parties and their leaders. 6.3% - believe otherwise, 13.4% - found it difficult to answer.

Russians are outraged by the spread of false information in the mass media about people seeking to establish social justice in the country. 83.2% of respondents gave such an answer, 3.7% answered that they were not disturbed by that, one in ten (11.3%) found it difficult to answer. (Nurutdinova & Rus, 2016)

The survey results show that the population is aware of black PR practices and explains their presence by the weakness of power structures that are trying to prevent political competition. The respondents do not recognize the "fights without rules" in politics, do not find justifications for them like experts and scientists. Why? In our opinion, the explanation of this fact is the system of values of Russian society. As modern studies of Russian sociologists show, one can speak about the existence of a nationwide development project, a model of the future to which Russians lean. The justice and social altruism dominate in this project. This is a purely Russian civilizational project. (Konstantinovich, 2013)

The statements made by the political technologists that PR communications are a kind of "public speaker" of intergroup interaction, which influences perceptions about what is truth, good, justice, which imparts a matrix of understanding and evaluation of social phenomena (Korolko, 2002), do not work under Russian conditions. Also, it is not confirmed the theses of Western researchers that the justice is reduced to recognizing the uniqueness and autonomy of an individual in the modern society; as well as the admissions of the existence of all possible life practices and discourses and giving the opportunities for presentation and implementation of life projects to all participants in social action. (Elster, 2007; Walzer, 1983; O'Neil, 1997)

In Russia, the share of supporters of social equality has consistently amounted to about two-thirds of the population, while the society of individual freedom has been supported only by a third part in the past 15 years. The pursuit of equality means equality of opportunity for most Russians, and not equality of incomes; and this choice is fairly stable in time. The choice of society whose institutional arrangement provides equal opportunities is a stable norm of the cultural model of Russians, and talking about a more justly organized society, two-thirds of the population implies this particular model. The state is called to solve social problems associated with the achievement of social equality and social justice. (Mareeva, 2015) In the Russian mentality, the authority of the authorities is strong, but it is not based on the authority of reason, but on other grounds. The insufficient (in comparison with the West) development of rational thinking leads to the extremes of perception of information coming from the state: from blind obedience, unconditional faith to the same unrestrained rejection, complete disbelief. (Argunova, 2004) Therefore, the use by the authorities of some measures "forbidden" by the public consciousness in political struggle may entail a lack of confidence in the activities of power structures.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Due to the marked socio-cultural features, it can be said that black PR practices do not correspond to the symbolic code of Russian civilization. In addition, the information society generates a new form of resistance in the form of a "hidden" revolution in the brains and hearts demanding the return to politics of the moral imperative. (Chernyshov, 2017). Black PR as a method of eliminating dangerous political competitors does not cause approval of the Russian population. The citizens do not recognize and do not justify lies and slander as norms of political interaction. This gives grounds to say that black PR is not legitimized by public consciousness.

5. SUMMARY

In our opinion, the use of black PR in politics poses a serious danger not only for the existing political system, but also for the society
reproduction as a whole. Politics should be "clean", not "dirty", because it solves not the issues of the matter, but the destinies of the people, country, specific people and their future. The unfair competition practiced in the political sphere is dysfunctional. It weakens the credibility of existing power structures and thereby limits the ability of the political system to integrate society with the goal of achieving general goals.

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