

## MAPPING MASS COMMUNICATION THEORIES IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA

### ТЕОРИИ МАССОВОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ РОССИИ

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*The author of this article suggests separating two main ways of classifying mass communication theories – according to the sphere of social/private life and the element of mass communication process as the object of scientific consideration. Moreover, it provides a possibility to indicate the universal way to classify theories.*

**Key words:** *mass communication theories in Russia; media and journalism theory; classification of theories.*

*Автор статьи предлагает выделить два основных способа для классификации теорий массовой коммуникаций – по взаимодействию со сферой общественной / частной жизни или по объекту рассмотрения звена массово-коммуникационного процесса. Также в статье рассматривается возможность универсального способа классификации теорий.*

**Ключевые слова:** *теории массовой коммуникации в России; теория медиа и журналистики; классификация теорий.*

Today is no classification of main theoretic divisions of mass communication research in Russia. On the one hand, we can see a terminological mess in the objects of theoritizing: what we consider communication, media communication, mass communication, media, ICT, means of mass communication, mass media, journalism, journalistic or media text. There is no terminological apparatus in this sphere. Researchers give different definitions to one and the same phenomena and subject matters. Besides, they sometimes use one definition when describing polar opposite things. On the other hand, researchers sometimes do not know what to call theories, concepts, approaches, traditions of analysis, schools and research works, principles, scientific divisions, paradigms, methodologies, methods, etc.

There is an obvious sceptical attitude towards the possibility to define a theory for such practice-oriented spheres as journalism and mass media. If journalism and mass media are professions and not research fields, then can we speak about the science of journalism and mass media? How can it be called then?

We would like to single out several conceptual points, which state the necessity to create the theory of media, not theory of journalism:

- Mass media have become a separate sector of industry, which is closely connected with consumer capitalism, consumer market and serving free time. The formation of mass media industry is closely connected with the formation of contemporary media systems, which are functioning pretty consistently in response to the complex requests of the advertisers to the access both mass and segmented audiences;
- Industrial production of content, which is represented in the process of medium unification, as well as in the standardization of journalistic texts (in such genres as news, report, interview, expert comment). The role of industrial requirements for the selection of news (gate-keeping concept);
- TV stands in the centre of many media systems. Now it is wider than journalistic texts. Besides, TV has turned into a technolog-

ically-dependent branch and the development of the Internet as a part of the media system has strengthened the technological dependence of the industry on ICT;

- The editorial office lays in the basis of mass media system. However, the editorial office is not a purely journalistic group, but an organization uniting various specialists, focused on the mechanical producing of a production mass;
- In developed market democracies a special division is being formed. It is called media politics. It is moulded by a variety of public forces and is focused on performing of special goals at the society.

Thus, a number of processes taking place in the media industry make media scholars formulate a new theory and new conceptions, which would allow us to describe, systemize and distinguish logical links in the existing empiric material, as well as to model and to forecast the processes of the development awaiting the mass media.

A number of researchers point out the impossibility of creating a unique classification system for the existing theoretical mass communication studies. Thus, Bakulev thinks that “it is difficult to present the most significant mass communication theories, and to suggest a way of classifying them and a type of correlation between them, as the spectrum of media functions is very wide, as well as the range of possible perspectives” (Bakulev, 2010). Bakulev agrees with Denis McQuail’s opinion that many existing theories are incompatible, unaccomplished and inadequate. M. Nazarov also highlights the fact that the main divisions of media studies are marked by “a variety of conceptual approaches” (Nazarov, 2003). Besides, “these approaches are not isolated and sometimes cross over with each other” (ibid). I. Kiria describes “many borderline disciplines and research divisions, which are connected with linguistics, psychology, political economy, politics and philosophy as well, that can also be referred to divisions within media studies (Kiria, 2004). A. Chernyh pays attention to the “theoretical syncretism” in this research field, where “the old tested approaches and the ones co-exist supplementing each other” (Chernykh, 2007). I. Fomichyova states that

“any communication should be characterized in a multidimensional way using different criteria. This to a full extent is regarded to the mass media which we are especially interested in” (Fomicheva, 2007). N. Bogomolova takes into account the fact that theoretical studies of mass media “as a rule are identified with the dominating in this or that age theoretic orientation” (Bogomolova, 2008). L. Zemlyanova highlights the width of “multiprofile studies of the capabilities and consequences of the influence of new information technologies on society, culture, and journalism destiny” (Zemlyanova, 2004).

However, many researchers – G. Bakulev, M. Nazarov, I. Kiria, A. Chernykh, J. Dzyaloshinsky, E. Vartanova, I. Fomicheva and others – in their course books and monographs present their own classification of media and mass communication theories. This is reflected first of all on the way the works are structured. It is important to understand that in most cases suggested classifications are made with regard to foreign researchers and their classification techniques, but Russian scientific context and the authors’ view leave a special “Russian” trace, so it would be inappropriate to talk about complete borrowing.

Other research works are held within the framework of certain divisions and media theories. In such papers other divisions in media theory are not always mentioned (E. Prokhorov, S. Korkonosenko, S. Gurevich, G. Lazutina, L. Resnyanskaya, I. Zassoursky).

## **Means of classifying media and mass communication studies № 1**

Sociological theories of the first and middle level (the theory of public spheres, institutional theory, theory of social systems, theory of fields) represent the basis for the existence of a relatively universal classification system of media theories. All existing theories connected with media are based on the perception of media within the frames of these theories.

Most researchers are united by the perception of mass media as a social institute, social system, as a sphere, which coexists along with other

spheres of public life: social sphere, politics, economy, culture and the sphere of private life. As a result, it seems rational to distinguish the following groups of media theories: social, political, economic, cultural and anthropological.

*Table 1*

**Method of combining media studies  
according to the type of classification № 1**

<b>Summand 1</b>	<b>Summand 2</b>	<b>Sum</b>	<b>Russian researchers</b>
Mass media	Spheres of public life		
	Political sphere	Political theory of mass media/ studying media from political perspective	L. Resnyanskaya M. Shkondin A. Kachkaeva I. Zassoursky
	Economic sphere	Economic theory of mass media / studying media from economic perspective	E. Vartanova M. Makeenko S. Smirnov S. Gurevich V. Ivanitsky G. Schepilova
	Social sphere	Social theory of mass media/ studying media from social perspective	E. Prokhorov I. Fomicheva Y. Zassoursky L. Svitich G. Lazutina S. Korkonosenko
	Spiritual sphere	Cultural theory of mass media/ studying media from cultural perspective	M. Kniazeva A. Novikova
	Sphere of private life	Anthropological theory of media / studying media from anthropological perspective	T. Frolova D. Dunas O. Smirnova E. Pronin E. Pronina

Let us analyze the correlation between the stated classification method with other means of classification. E. Vartanova thinks that it is important to examine mass media through the prism of the effects they produce or do not produce on the society or on individual level (Vartanova, 2010). It is connected with the fact that journalism is supposed to satisfy individual, group and social demands for information at the same time. E. Vartanova suggests four main groups of public needs and media effect on society. Thus, the theoretical studies of journalism should be realized in accordance with these four categories.

*Table 2*

**Four groups of needs / effects  
according to the classification of E. Vartanova<sup>6</sup>**

<b>Name of the group of needs / effects</b>	<b>Short description</b>
Political	Society needs information provision for the normal functioning of the political sphere. The mass media serve the political process both from the position of the politicians and of the electorate.
Economic	Satisfying the pragmatic interest of the consumers. The media serve market economy, based on the consumer behaviour.
Cultural	Russian language “lives” in the mass media
Value-oriented	The media mould collective values and national identity

Except the above mentioned categories of the dichotomy “needs-effects” E. Vartanova also distinguishes the effect of media influence on the contemporary human being, which allows us to call him/her “a media human being, as the process of decision making for people and their very being is to a significant extent defined by the media” (Vartanova, 2009).

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Vartanova, E. (2010). P. 15–19.

The researcher Chernykh thinks that it is possible to distinguish three dominating approaches to communicativism and general sociological theory of mass communication on a contemporary stage – starting from 1990s and up to present.

*Table 3*

**Three theoretical approaches to communication science in the general sociological theory of mass communication according to A. Chernykh<sup>7</sup>**

Name of the approach	Short description
Socio-organizational approach	Society is stable and highly structured. Special attention is paid to institutes and structures. The research works, devoted to the mass media, have predominantly descriptive character
Political economy approach	Obsession with the economic explanation of mass communication phenomena. Studying media as a production process and as a product
Theory of practices	Theoretical consensus, which is focused on practices of people’s being opposed to the institutes and structures. Practice as a core idea of anthropological research

A. Chernykh thinks that research works of the theory of practices, which is referred to the beginning of the 1980s, have occupied a dominating place in the world. The first two approaches were on top of their popularity in the 1990s and are still being used, comprise the mainstream of the sociological theory of the mass media of the 1960–1970s.

The means of media theories classification suggested by Dzyaloshynsky is also referential to the two previous ones.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: Chernykh, A. (2007). P. 43–45.

Table 4

**Three main complexes of research, which comprise the mass media research environment in Russia, according to J. Dzyaloshinsky<sup>8</sup>**

Name of the research complexes	Short description
Socio-oriented research	The media is a social machine, realizing a number of functions
Media-centric research	Organizational aspects of the media enterprise activity
Anthropo-centric research	Problems of journalistic creative work and audience behaviour

Classification of media theories according to their interaction with the four spheres of public life and one private sphere seems to be an obvious and fairly general way of analyzing the mass media. A comparative analysis of various research classifications proves that. However, most researchers are far from being conscious about the link to a certain public / private sphere when they study the media. E. Vartanova distinguishes this “link” most precisely (refer to table 2). Her classification of the four main groups of “needs-effects” is the most compatible one with the concept of the four spheres.

The aspiration to a multi-aspect analysis of the media is not that obvious among the majority of researchers. As a rule, representatives of the research sphere are inclined towards a particular tradition or school of analysis. Thus, they prolong a certain theoretical paradigm and consequently the theories and concepts formed within its framework. Besides, the adherence to this or that theoretical paradigm is also connected with tradition.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Dzyaloshinsky, J. (2010).



## Russian tradition of media research

Throughout centuries Russian media have had a solid status of a special institute – a political one. Peter the Great who created the first Russian newspaper *Vedomosti* formulated its main goals: it should inform readers about foreign and home developments. Peter was himself engaged in this process of informing. He selected texts for publication, edited them and also monitored the layout. Thus, he demonstrated and implemented the formula of active political participation in the activities of the mass media.

The media and politics still go hand in hand. It is not surprising that a significant number of research works in Russia are devoted to the studying of relations between the political institute and the media institute.

The social theory of the media can be regarded as a type of the political world outlook. The social or normative media theory was initially created on the practices of public media and despite the lack of such media in Russia it is highly popular. The attribution of certain social commitments to the media is adaptable to the political and economic conditions. Normativeness has become not only a principle, but a theory outside the frames of which media analysis seems to be impossible for some researchers. When the book of Peterson, Siebert and Shramm “Four Theories of the Press” was translated into Russian, the representatives of the research field decided that theory of media equals media model. Further attempts of media studies were reduced to the examination of media models, systems and media structures, but not to theory studies. Should we mention that a theory is a complex of conceptions and concepts, which are developed within the framework of a certain scientific paradigm. They describe the reality and help to explain it. Thus, the media theory in Russia is a complex of media conceptions and media concepts, that were developed and that are being developed within the frames of the Russian scientific paradigm. These conceptions and concepts describe and explain the mechanisms of the process of media func-

tioning — from the sender of the message to the impact on the audience, whereas media model is a means of describing the practical functioning of the media in the political and economic concept. That is why the names of media models mostly refer to the forms of political organization (authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility), rather than to the media.

There is no doubt that D. McQuail's social theory without the presence of an analogue of the BBC and U. Habermass "public sphere" under the conditions of a poorly developed civic society and pluralism of views in Russia has its own authentic features, which are not always recognized by the West.

The second significant layer of research is devoted to the studying of media as an industry, the functioning of the media based on economic laws. They have switched from describing ideal business models of media enterprises to interpreting media economy as informal. All the attempts to call media owners "managers" and the editorial office a media enterprise, however, have been successful. Although the obvious link between the authorities and the business prevented the researchers from studying the pure mass media economy, the first Russian school of media economy managed to adapt Western conceptions to the realities of the Russian society and to develop its own methodological and concept apparatus.

For the representatives of the social theory of mass media the answer to the question "What do mass media represent?" is "social institute", while for media economists it is "industry". We can state that the basis of the scientific paradigm of contemporary media research in Russia lies in two axioms — media as a social institute and media as an industry.

Table 4

Structure of media theories in Russia

Characteristics of theories depending on the dominating scientific paradigm	Media theories	Conceptions	Concepts
<i>Alternative theories</i>	Anthropological theory	They are developed within the framework of the theories. Each theory has its own. They may cross over.	
	Cultural mass media theory		
<i>Topical theory</i>	Economic mass media theory		
<i>Theories of mainstream</i>	Social mass media theory		
	Political mass media theory		
<b>Dominating scientific paradigm:</b> The mass media are both a social institute and an industry			

The mainstream theory and topical theory are widely represented. Meanwhile, the gap in the sphere of alternative scientific theories and the lack of alternative dominating scientific paradigm is surprising. The issues of socio-political and economic wellbeing, which have occupied the minds of media researchers, have totally excluded cultural and anthropological aspects of mass media research. While the latter paradigms are if not dominating, but widely represented among other paradigms of Western researchers. From these facts we may conclude, that it is not serious to analyze the media from other point of view rather than political, economic or social institute. The works of many researchers are far from understanding the media as a controversial symbolic structure, which influences a human being not only forming his or her political views and inciting to consume, but also influencing

the intellectual and spiritual life of people in an integral and profound way.

It would be a mistake to say that the cultural and anthropological aspects are not represented in the practices of Russian researchers. The interdisciplinary approach is one of the consciously promoted scientific methods. Elements of non-economic and non-political conceptions are presented even in strictly economic or political works. However, these conceptions, which are developed within the frames of a different alternative scientific angle, lack integrity.

Anyway, Western academic experience proves that cultural and anthropological media researches may be self-sufficient scientific paradigm, based on self-sufficient scientific paradigms. Analyzing mass media only as a subject of political and economic influence would be a demonstration of conservatism and scientific narrow-mindedness. We have to realize that cultural and anthropological approaches can hardly be widely and thoroughly represented bearing in mind the existing traditional character of Russian scientific schools of media studies. Apparently, they should be instigated. Otherwise there is a possibility to lag behind the Western scientific paradigms.

## **Means of classifying media and mass communication research № 2 and universal way of classification**

General understanding of mass communication as a process containing several links lies in the basis of the second means of classification of media theories. Lasswell specified these links most vividly and clearly. Later many mass communication researchers, D. McQuail in particular, structured their course books focusing their attention on each of the links separately. The links of the first researcher are not always compatible with the objects of study of the second researcher. However, we can obviously trace some kind of “symmetry” between the two.

**Links in the chain of communication process  
according to G. Lasswell and objects  
of study according to D. McQuail<sup>9</sup>**

Link in the chain of mass communication process according to G. Lasswell	Object of study according to D. McQuail
–	Structure of mass communication
Who says?	Organization of mass communication production
What?	Studying content
In which channel?	–
To whom?	Studying the audience
With what effect?	Effects of mass communication

A number of researchers considers important to combine both the first and the second means of theory classification. They make attempts to analyze different stages in mass communication, bearing in mind the possibility of interaction with the four spheres of public life.

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<sup>9</sup> Source: Lasswell, H. (1948); McQuail, D. (2010).

**Four components of the mass media as subjects  
of study according to I. Kiria<sup>10</sup>**

Name of the component	Short description
Analysis of mass media materials	Analysis of media texts (radio, TV, movies, advertisements, etc.) using different methods A) Linguistic analysis B) Strategic analysis C) Discourse analysis
Analysis of the media	A) Analysis of the means of delivering information B) Analysis of particularities of the message depending on the means of delivering
Structural analysis of the mass media	Summarizing analysis of media system in all its aspects and social representations. The connection of the mass media with other spheres of public life A) Economic analysis B) Political analysis C) System of the mass media (classification analysis) D) Legal analysis
Analysis of the processes of receiving information	Influence of the media on the audience A) Socio-technical analysis (appropriation of technical objects by the society) B) Analysis of the means of usage of information or the storage medium C) Analysis of meaning distortion

<sup>10</sup> Source: Kiria, I. (2004).

The suggested classification according to the subject of mass media study corresponds with the whole chain of elements in media functioning – from the sender to the influence on the receiver of information. Should we consider structural analysis, which I. Kiria distinguishes along with the subjects of the communication chain, using different foundations for the differentiation of the classifying system? Structural analysis is a complex analysis of the media as a system and not only a detailed analysis of elements realizing the communication process by means of the media. When considering media as a system, the researcher inevitably works within the frames of a certain theory, most likely political or economic one. And this would be his reference to the analysis according to spheres of public life and not according to the links in the communication chain. The attempt to correlate the stages of mass communication process with the economic and political realities is obvious.

Is it possible to create a full-scale scheme of media analysis, combining two means of theory classification – using both spheres of public life and links of the communication process. Let us try to present one.

Universal analysis of the media, taking into account both means of classification of media and mass communication studies

Links of mass communication					
	Source (sender of the message)	Content of the message (content-analysis, discourse analysis)	Channel of message delivery	Audience of the message and ways to study it	Effect of the message
Mass media theory based on the principle of belonging to a sphere of public / private life					
<b>Political theory of mass media</b>	Structure of mass media ownership – political leader, parties, oligarch	Politically evaluative content	Consideration of different channels, but first of all to the federal TV channels as dominating means of forming political agenda	Mass audience as electorate. Data from sociological surveys: opinion polls, measuring media consumption, focus groups and other quantitative research works	Unlimited influence of the media
<b>Social theory of media</b>	Journalist and his/her social commitments	Social problematics of the media, social values in media materials	New media, blogosphere and other media	Active, protest audience. Audience as citizens, Data from sociological surveys: opinion polls, measuring media consumption, focus groups and other quantitative research works	Interpreting media messages; Protest activity



Mass media theory based on the principle of belonging to a sphere of public / private life	Links of mass communication				Effect of the message
	Source (sender of the message)	Content of the message (content-analysis, discourse analysis)	Channel of message delivery	Audience of the message and ways to study it	
<b>Economic theory of mass media</b>	Structure of mass media ownership – media outlet as an enterprise, top-management of the media outlet; journalist as a wage worker	Media materials stimulating consumption (advertisements), business press as a type of journalism	Advertising and business publications	Heterogeneous. Audience as consumers. Data from sociological surveys: opinion polls, measuring media consumption, focus groups and other quantitative research works	Limited influence of the media;

Links of mass communication					
	Source (sender of the message)	Content of the message (content-analysis, discourse analysis)	Channel of message delivery	Audience of the message and ways to study it	Effect of the message
Mass media theory based on the principle of belonging to a sphere of public / private life	Social, historic and cultural determination of society, in which the journalist is immersed; journalist's mentality, as well as media managers strategies in the promotion of global media product	Global content and the system of values in the local culture: content of the mass media as a myth; interpretation of the meanings of a special reality	TV and other media	Mass. Audience as a national. Data from sociological surveys: opinion polls, measuring media consumption, focus groups and other quantitative research works	Unlimited influence of the media
<b>Cultural theory of mass media</b>					
<b>Anthropological theory of mass media</b>	Journalist's personality	Representation of the human being in the media	TV, the Internet and other mass media	“Hyperindividualistic”. Audience as a complex of persons. Ethnographic studies of the audience. The focus is placed not on a household/ family, but on individuals.	Critical interpretation of media messages

The suggested scheme allows us to indicate the coordinates of any researcher in the sphere of media. The first type of classification is an interdisciplinary one and inclines toward a rapprochement with such disciplines as political sciences, sociology, economics, cultural studies and anthropology. The second approach is an inner disciplinary one and concentrates on the subject of study, characteristic only for the media. Combining the two means schematically (refer to the table 6) we can convince ourselves that the nature and the structure of media theories is complex. Not all researchers unanimously draw a demarcation line between theory of journalism and theory of the mass media. This is obvious as a number of researchers still consider the concepts “journalism” and “mass media” to be synonyms. Besides, some think that the mass media are included in journalism.

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