



The Role of Regional Media in Covering Environmental Issues (on the Example of the Republic of Tatarstan)

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Received: 05/08/2019

Accepted: 20/11/2019

Published: 20/12/2019

Abstract

The mass media play a decisive role in shaping of public opinion, including the environmental issues. This problem is relevant not only due to its extreme aggravation in the system of "nature-society", the need to improve the effectiveness of the state environmental policy, including the information support, but also due to the unprecedented changes in media space. The transition from traditional to new media in the 1990s, the further global spread of the Internet, and the digitization of communication messages have led to fundamental changes in media sphere. The Internet has connected many users - individuals, organizations, media into a single, open communication network, creating the unlimited number of connections, reducing the distance between network participants, eliminating spatial restrictions. The new level of communications has been formed. It has changed not only the access of consumers to information, but also the interaction with it. Mass media became a powerful tool for the purposeful formation of social orders, mainly through the building of necessary public relations, including the ecological issues. They influence a number of processes, from formal environmental policy to informal views of the public on the current state of environment (1-4). In this regard, the study of coverage of environmental problems and the measures of government, aimed for their solving, in mass media is an important task in scientific, practical and political sense. The article presents the research results of the role of regional media in covering the environmental issues, in determining the effectiveness of information support of the government environmental protection policy.

Keywords: Environmental policy, Socio-ecological problems, Media sphere, Mass media.

1 Introduction

Ecological crisis, which has affected the human environment, disrupted the natural balance of the planet. The forecasts about the irreversibility of damage to the biosphere in the coming decades put the existence of civilization on the brink of disaster, that also concerns Russia to the full extent (13-20-21).

The environmental problems have led not only to the contradictions in the system "society-nature", but have influenced on almost all other areas of public life. The environmental crisis also negatively affected the economy, causing difficulties in social sphere, in demographic development, and in solving the national economic tasks. So, the growing incidence of population is directly related to the environmental degradation of the planet. The

interconnection of these processes is obvious. In the world, only greenhouse gas emissions have almost doubled over the past two decades. Carbon dioxide contributes to the increase of ozone holes, that has led to the rise of temperature of the earth's surface and to the change of sea level. In this regard, the need for a significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is becoming increasingly urgent for each country. In recent years, the government and non-profit organizations have been actively developing the programs of reduction of energy costs and carbon emissions, with the aim to decrease the flow of greenhouse gases (4). Other problems are also associated with the environmental degradation: food, contamination of soil cover, land damage, reduction of fresh water resources, pollution of the World Ocean, epidemics, environmental disasters, the emergence of natural disaster areas, etc.

Climate change and environmental degradation forced the international community to reconsider the existing relationship between nature and human beings, not only through the enhancing of participation of national states in ensuring environmental safety, but also through the combining their efforts to compensate for damage, caused

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to nature (12-22-27).

Sustainable and safe development of any state is substantially determined by the effectiveness of environmental policy, which is responsible for the preservation of the environment (24-25-26). The key position, determining the survival of the planet, consists in urgent solving the existing problems in the system "nature - society", through the enhancing of legislative norms in the field of nature management, their rigorous implementation as a mechanism to counter the extinction and death of civilization. In the regulation of human relations with the environment in compliance with laws, protecting nature and ensuring environmental safety, the use of all possible channels for the formation of an individual's civilized approach to the environment, the state environmental policy plays a decisive role (5-11-23).

Its effectiveness is largely determined by timely coverage of environmental problems, bringing to the public the importance of responsibility of each person for preservation the living environment, available natural resources, and consciously limiting of material needs.

2 Materials and Methods

The methodological base of the study was monographic and comprehensive sociological research, which gave the opportunity to form a full picture of the current type of coverage of environmental issues by the media in the Republic of Tatarstan. The investigation was conducted in the period from July 1, 2009 to July 1, 2019. [Fig.1] Its purpose was to identify the environmental problems, covered by the regional media, determining them in key areas. The study used the method of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The total volume of the

analyzed materials for the selected chronological period amounted to 65,910 articles. Among them, 1977 publications were devoted to the environmental issues (3% of the total amount of the studied material). For the analysis, 3 regional newspapers were selected: ("Respublika Tatarstan", "Izvestiya Tatarstana", "Business Online").

According to the results of the content analysis, we can conclude that the regional media do not consider environmental issues as socially significant topics, which form the agenda in the media field of the country and the republic. Only 3% of the entire array of articles is devoted to environmental issues. So, there is an effect of vacuum of ecological information in the field of coverage of problems of environmental development.

Such a low proportion of coverage of environmental topics indicates a certain direction of the current information policy in the republic. Perhaps, the regional media consider it their task to form an opinion among the public about the absence of serious problems in the field of environmental management (28-29-30).

3 Results

The determination of the dynamics of coverage of environmental problems in the Republic of Tatarstan by the regional media became an important task of the study. The dynamics of articles, devoted to environmental issues, in mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan in the period from July 1, 2009 to July 1, 2019 is presented in the fig. 2. Environmental reports in the regional mass media are seasonal in nature.

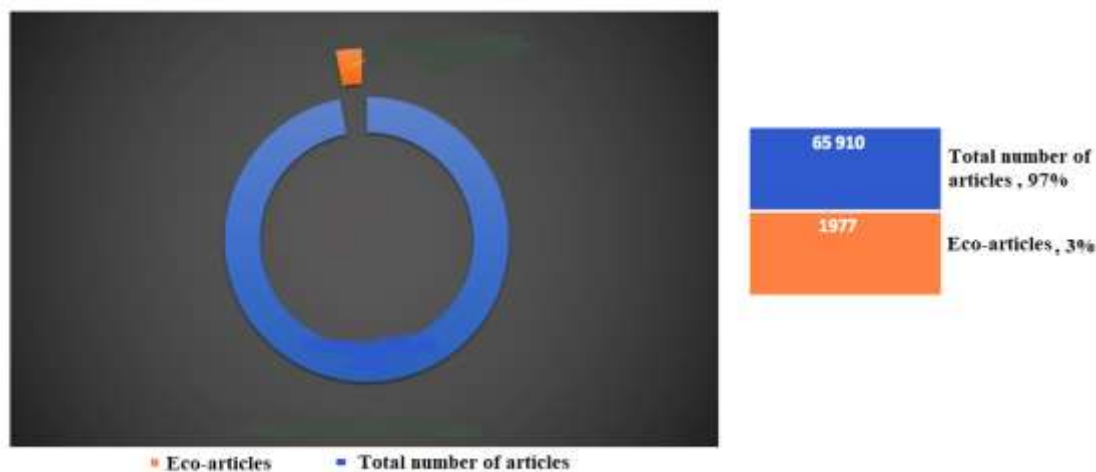


Figure 1: The number of articles, devoted to environmental issues, in mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan in the period from 2009-2019



Figure 2: The dynamics of articles, devoted to environmental issues, in mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan in the period from 2009-2019

As shown in the figure 2, summer months (June, July) and winter months (end of December and January) are the most characteristic periods for the publication of environmental reports. From June to August, there are extremely few environmental publications, despite the fact that the largest number of fires, floods, and other significant natural disasters occur during this period.

The results of the content analysis, carried out by the criterion of the titles of articles, devoted to environmental issues, in the mass media of the Republic of Tatarstan are presented in Table 1.

3% of environmental publications (1977 articles) for the studied chronological period were taken as 100%.

Table 1: The results of the content analysis

Criterion	Percentage
Emotionally colored headlines (exclamation, appeal, question, artistic figure, affirmation, etc.)	27%
Headlines, without emotional expressiveness (official orders, names, geographical names, simple phrases, etc.)	73%
Total	100%

The headlines of articles, devoted to environmental issues, were structured according to the degree of emotional coloring. 27% of headlines were emotionally colored, and 73% of publications belonged to official orders. They were clearly emotionless. The publications in the regional media of the Republic of Tatarstan, considered in this research, cover various environmental problems. According to the results of the content analysis, the key topics in covering environmental issues are the following: (1) the work of public authorities; (2) the practice of implementation of environmental policy; and (3) international programs of environmental cooperation.

4 Discussion

Most mass media do not consider the environmental issues as socially significant, and do not present them as paramount problems. It should be noted, that the regional media of the Republic of Tatarstan are currently on the threshold of a close mix of traditional and new media. The coverage of environmental policy and, in particular,

environmental safety will depend on the further development of this area. In such case, the key role of the regional media will be in timely delivery of environmental information to the public through the effective communication channels; in the formation of environmental communication; in resolution of conflicts between the subjects of environmental policy and stabilization the eco-political order; in the ecologization of public consciousness.

5 Conclusion

The effective use of mass media can play a decisive role in the adoption and implementation of measures, aimed at solving of environmental problems. Most people obtain the information about climate change through the media. These studies confirm the pattern that people primarily rely on the media to get the information on global environmental issues. In this regard, it is important to use the potential impact of mass media on the audience, and their influence on the formation of public opinion in solving environmental problems, in implementing the state programs for the preservation of nature, and in eliminating the damage, caused to it. The overcoming of contradictions between the constantly deteriorating state of the environment and the growing needs on the part of society is impossible without the information coverage of impending catastrophe, the widespread use of mass media for the analytical support of the state environmental policy, and the combined efforts of society, population and government.

The impact of environmental publications from traditional media and the Internet has a positive effect on public attitudes towards the environment through the mechanisms of environmental value, people's orientations and intentions. The effective use of various types of media can positively influence the adoption of timely environmental measures.

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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