

PERAET 2021

International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»

POLITICAL RHETORIC AND COMMUNICATIVE SOCIETY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Nikolay A. Kashchey (a)*, Vsevolod O. Shipulin (b), Stanislava A. Bazikyan (c)
*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,
Nikolay.Kashchey@novsu.ru

(b) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,
Vsevolod.Shipulin@novsu.ru

(c) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University (NovSU), Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation,
Stanislava83@yandex.ru

Abstract

This article is devoted to political rhetoric as a mechanism of interaction and a tool for regulating collective consent in modern communicative society in the context of its global digitalization. Using the well-known Habermasian idea of political rhetoric as a necessary tool for finding political reason, which is trying to turn the analysis of political actions in the process of identifying collective will (respectively, decentralized in an open digital space) into a reasonable consensual resource, we strive not so much to ascertain the possibilities of such rhetoric to guarantee the comprehension of universal expression of will, but to determine the extent to which Habermas's communicative society can provide consensus in new digital realities. In this theory of communicative society the term consensus itself is terminologically and theoretically linked with the well-known ancient tradition (the Aristotelian theory of politics and rhetoric), where the persuasive potential of arguments and free discussion are the basis for socio-political interaction, which refers us to the equally rich neo-Aristotelian model of understanding consensus. Our goal is not to reconstruct Habermas's theory of discourse in the light of Aristotelian principles; this does not cause any doubts and can be called the development of political rhetoric in a procedural democracy. We are talking about the search for an intelligible rhetorical methodology that meets the modern requirements of digital society, can operate in a state of vast information with a constant stream of ideologically motivated and often fake news, and is capable of providing the principles of open politics.

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Keywords: Communication society, consensus, digital society, persuasiveness, political rhetoric



1. Introduction

Despite the information boom of recent decades, the research interest of modern humanitarian knowledge in political rhetoric remains insignificant, although, if we recall the historical tradition of Antiquity, political rhetoric, both genetically and systematically, played a special role in philosophy, politics, and in the life of the citizens of the polis. The lack of this interest, according to some authors, is primarily due to the difficulties of the interdisciplinary nature of the problems under study. Although recently interesting works on modern political communication have appeared, related to “changing the format of political practices, rejecting traditional ways of forming political ideas, visualizing and virtualizing the theoretical and practical components of political activity” (Dorofeev & Semenova, 2020, p. 687), it is also worth noting the rhetorical-political analysis of political debates (Shibata, 2020), and, related to this, the analysis of the personalistic depths of the personality of the politician (Karabushenko & Gainutdinova, 2020), its syncretism and "Doublethinking" (Zolyan, 2018), and the role of persuasiveness in achieving the goals of political communication (Zolyan, 2015).

If we talk about the role of persuasiveness in achieving the goals of political communication, then it is undoubtedly necessary to turn to Habermas's theory of communication and the role of political rhetoric in it, especially since recently there have been attempts to adapt this theory, popular in the last quarter of the last century, to the specific modern conditions of the power of digital dominance in all spheres of society. This is not only about the fact that Habermas's theory of society, which, without abandoning its critical ambitions, abandoned the certainty of the philosophy of history, cannot play any other political role than drawing attention through a rather sensitive diagnosis of current events to the essential ambivalences of our historical situation (Rochlitz, 2002, p. 161), rather it is worth mentioning the extensive research devoted to the influence of Habermas on the nature of European integration (Grewal, 2019), as well as the analysis of the problem of correlation in the era of the number of discussion and consensus (Jeziarska, 2019). A separate work is devoted to political rhetoric as a special form of political proceduralism, which focuses on Jurgen Habermas's most complex, sophisticated and ambitious attempt to confront the tension between reason and power (Allen, 2020). And finally, it is worth pointing out the reading under the new conditions of the famous controversy between Habermas and Rawls: “The Habermas-Rawls Debate” (Finlayson, 2019).

For our part, continuing the research related to political rhetoric in its various manifestations (see: Kashchey et al., 2021) in this case, drawing attention to the relationship between politics and rhetoric in the digital age, we want to emphasize the characteristic of these relations consensus problems. We are interested in the belief in the power of arguments and, accordingly, the possibility of persuasiveness as a means of information and its rational potential for public discussion, this will become the object of our close attention.

2. Problem Statement

In the context of the indicated problem, the following issue arises in this work. It is necessary to analyze how, in a modern digital society, the core of which, speaking in Habermas's language, is the internal tension between factuality and reliability, between power and reason, i.e. in the conditions of the

contradiction between factuality and reliability, which underlie the theory of communicative action, open public policy is possible and is it possible at all.

3. Research Questions

This research problem finds a solution in the answer to the following question: is our rapidly developing society able, and, on occasion, “how”, in modern conditions of “digital freedom” to solve the problem of the cognitive imbalance between universalism and the private nature of interests? In other words, is Habermas's communicative society and the political rhetoric it procedurally interpreted to be relevant in today's digital society?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to update the Habermas theory of communicative society and the place in it of procedural political rhetoric in the modern context of the formation of a new digital rhetorical culture, and in general is associated with the increasing role and demand for digital space in a modern, networked, multidimensional society with a heterarchical, instead of a hierarchical, structure that has become a completely different open space not only for political struggle, but for "claims to justification" (Montgomery, 2017, p. 619), which give rise to "constructions and distortions in representing political facts" (Temmerman et al., 2019, p. 1).

5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of all our studies on political rhetoric, as well as the present, is neorhetoric as a theory of persuasion and argumentation. Within the framework of this methodology, a non-rhetorical study of a designated topic consists in following a methodological requirement: if non-rhetoric acts as a standardized and representative way of persuading the use of language, then it is possible in this language to reliably express the function of non-rhetoric in seeking a political reason and ensuring collective agreement.

The effectiveness of this methodological requirement in relation to an attempt to conceptually combine the theory of a communicative society and persuasive rhetoric is confirmed by the Aristotelian tradition since Antiquity, where, in its well-known classification of sciences, practical philosophy saw the main theoretical problem as the task of ideologically ensuring the living conditions of the citizens of the polis and its construction on the principles of justice. and not, as it might seem, the strategic and tactical issues of achieving and securing power. Any society and political, in particular, in its democratic understanding, has a number of opportunities for joint discussion of collective problems and has the need to achieve public consensus. Moreover, the ability to do this is not natural, but is the result of cultural development. The loss of this artificially acquired ability and need is possible, if we ignore their rational foundations, a political person cannot be without a Homo sapiens. With this loss, we are primarily rhetoric, like the art of public consultation.

The requirements of this methodological principle are expressed in the fact that a public meeting cannot, only by virtue of its argumentative nature and logically consistent and consistent procedure, reach

an acceptable consensus outside the conditions, which led to the necessary convictions, and the strength of the arguments is such that for the overwhelming majority of citizens all problems standing in the way of achieving social harmony. There is always a larger set of arguments, social guarantees and political promises introduced into the circulation of a public meeting than they can be brought in only by logic and argumentation resource. This is not about Habermas's renewal of politics in the spirit of Aristotelianism and the theoretical support of the well-known concept of deliberative (deliberative) democracy, because, as Habermas emphasizes, this modernization is doomed, and because in them the system of rational conditions from the very beginning links the “democratic process, as he is actually carried out in a specific social-state formation with the need to present it as an instrumentalist distorted policy” (Habermas, 1992, p. 337). This, of course, is a hairpin in the direction of a Rollisian just society, although there are, of course, other addressees from the camp of the well-known and influential, first of all, American non-Aristotelianism and its models of a communicative society, and is directed against the belief in the inviolability of the substantial essence of morality.

6. Findings

The study of the relevance of Habermas's communicative society and the procedurally interpreted political rhetoric by it in a modern digital society must begin with their theoretical origins, with an analysis of the Aristotelian principles of thinking, which are accordingly used to substantiate the consensual nature of the social structure and political expression. We have already pointed out a number of obstacles associated with the definition of personal and collective morality in the conditions of the Aristotelian understanding of the idea of the highest good, it is also worth pointing out the well-known position on the integration of the family into the polis, which, under the pressure of habitual, common opinions, is brought to an adequate meaning and set of these opinions protects them from serious objections, finally, a reference in public discourse to the inviolability of the norms of the common good, virtue and justice. It is clear that in the Habermasian understanding all this smells of mothballs, of unnecessary European metaphysics, but without which, however, neither political neo-Aristotelianism nor the resulting Kammunitarian philosophy of a just society is possible, therefore, a fundamental revision of the old and modern European metaphysics is required, in fact, is undertaken in the theory of Habermas's communicative society. Let us turn to the Aristotelian understanding of the social structure in order to consider the indicated doubts about the need to literally combine the historical and modern models of deliberative democracy in the light of modern digital realities.

The aforementioned customary, common opinions are the cornerstone in the model of deliberative democracy, since they are the methodologically basis for ensuring public consensus. Stagirite, as you know, called them "en-doxa", which can hardly serve as a basis for ensuring in practice public consent in the process of making a significant collective decision, therefore, it is necessary to change the quality of en-doxa, to expand it in relation to doxa: to en-doxa we should include opinions that, although not shared by everyone, still enjoy wide public support. This is not a rhetorical question at all: what are these opinions that are worthy of wide public recognition? A burning question not only for Antiquity, but also for the modern information society, no less. So, in the Aristotelian understanding, the weight of value concepts is directly related to who interprets the meaning of these concepts and what moral authority they

have. A difference of opinion is a difference in the people who express it. Therefore, what is important is what appears to the Greek noble husband as valuable and significant. Consequently, *en-doxa* does not express the universal essence of the *logos* or absolute truth, but only the public position, as it is now customary to call it, of the elite. The height of a position is directly related to the social status of its protector and depends on social respectability.

Combining the importance of opinions with the respectability of the social counterparties expressing them plunges the process of argumentation into social practice, the goals of which are poorly combined by the rational requirements of the argumentation process, and which, as a rule, boil down to an argument to authority. Since this kind of argumentation implements the function of legitimizing an authoritative opinion, it is believed that in the current functionally diverse and multi-sectoral society, the criteria of authority are functionally diverse and multi-sectoral, moreover, due to the prevalence of digital culture, the argument to authority is increasingly being supplanted by the argument to fashion, especially in areas of politics, where they are less and less subject to authority and more and more follow political fashion. In modern conditions of the dominance of digital technologies, the dominance of opinion is always temporary and contextual, therefore, in Habermas's communicative society, its ideal premises are presented instead of dominant opinions.

These arguments should not be considered in the spirit that Habermas's attempt to substantiate the project of deliberative democracy on an Aristotelian basis in order to rationalize modern politics looks dubious. In addition to the common terminology with Aristotelianism, there is little that connects them; political rhetoric in a communicative society is not the development of traditional rhetoric and a philosophical return to the old ancient tradition. Habermas's political rhetoric tries in a new way in modern conditions to solve the problem of cooperation, the need for which is urgently felt by modern society and thus expresses the essence of any model of rhetoric, which is based on the rational foundations of the human mind, interaction in modern society is possible only on the basis of consent, if it looks convincing to the overwhelming majority of members of this society. It is not possible to provide such an agreement only by theoretical means, because “practical problems are always solved or rejected, and the latter depends on value criteria and norms of practice” (Habermas, 1992, p. 267), which do not agree well not only with the requirements of the considered theory and scientific methodology as a whole, but such agreement should not rest on any arbitrary decisions, the German philosopher insists on its rational essence, prudence and persuasiveness. The introduction of rationality is an unconditional requirement not only of the Habermas communication model, but also an urgent need for its implementation in the context of total digitalization.

And a few more words about the relevance of political rhetoric in a communicative society and its possible relevance in the context of the modern big-data cave (Mironov, 2019). Any achievement of agreement, speaking in Copperschmidt's language, presupposes the simultaneous persuasion and persuasion, therefore, it is required to distinguish between actual agreement and true, reasonable. As you know, the classical rhetoric did not solve this problem, only moral prohibitions are known - not to use a public word to the detriment of another. The essence of this disadvantage lies in the fact that the resource of reliability of arguments and means of persuasion is drawn from the consensual foundations of previously made decisions, the stability of which is ensured by the moral principles of society, and not by

the norms of universalism. Traditional rhetoric compensated for their absence by interpreting meaning, thereby distorting the structure of communication and its conditions, depriving the search for agreement of the communicative premises, which in Habermas's communicative society are called the ideal speech situation. The latter guarantees free communication and should contribute to the achievement of universal agreement, it represents a certain regulatory principle that seeks to critically analyze the rationality of legitimizing any consensus. It is clear that this principle is procedural in nature, it does not speak about the truth and rationality of the content of communication, but the rationality of the processes and procedures of communication, these are the formal conditions of practical rationality or, in Habermas's language, the principles of intelligent speech.

7. Conclusion

Habermas's model of a communicative society and political rhetoric is an attempt at a complex combination of the procedural nature of human rationality and the concept of consent, with the help of which he reconstructs the concept of deliberative democracy in his discourse theory, this is an attempt to use the above procedural principles in the field of modern politics in such a way that in institutions democracy, in the procedures of collective expression of will and political decision-making, an ideal speech situation can bring pragmatism into political action. The essence of such a procedural understanding of political rhetoric is, apparently, to ensure the necessary rationality of political decisions with its help only on the basis of “the internal rationality of the unfolding corresponding process of making managerial decisions” (Habermas, 1992, p. 368). To what extent it is possible to fulfill these conditions in the context of increasing digitalization is certainly an open question, but if we want to preserve the value of rationalism, then this is possible, in accordance with the proclaimed theses, only in a similar procedural form.

It becomes obvious to us that the functioning of a democratic society in modern digital conditions of increasingly complex interaction must overcome internal contradictions through rationalization, enriching the procedures of public administration. The combination of private and general interests can be achieved only through an open dialogue, drawing intellectual sources in the education system and spiritual development, in the activities of the intelligentsia, students, socially active individuals who create associations based on their interests and lead a dynamic discussion in order to identify acute problems, formulate and achieving socially significant goals. Society becomes an intellectual source from which democracy draws not only functional mechanisms of management, but also actual ideas of social development, adaptation and transformation in accordance with changes in the external social environment.

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