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**MULTICHANNEL SOUTH OSSETIAN POLITICAL  
COMMUNICATION**

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***Abstract***

Modern digital technologies have a huge impact on political communication. The characteristic features of South Ossetian political communication include the active use of the socio-political capabilities of the Internet. The purpose of the study is to verify data on the dynamics of information and communication technologies use in political communication in the Republic of South Ossetia. The basic methods used in the work are methods of observation, statistical calculation, discursive method, semantic-cognitive method and method of component analysis. The article examines the impact of new information technologies on political communication in the Republic of South Ossetia. The characteristic features of creating the image of a political leader in the digital space are identified and described. This problem is also complemented by consideration of the interactive model features of political communication between politicians and citizens of the country. South Ossetian politicians and citizens of the republic are developing new rules for the coexistence of digital technologies in society. Political communication in the Republic of South Ossetia is interactive in modern communicative space with the active use of social networks and online services for communication with citizens. Multi-channel communication in the framework of the seven-institutional discourse as an element of political discourse has a significant impact on the development of South Ossetian society and contributes to the restructuring of the existing communication models, with the result that personal and status self-presentation acquire new ways of expression.

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**Keywords:** Multichannel communication, digital technologies, status self-presentation.



## 1. Introduction

The problems of political communication are reflected in the works of both foreign (T.A. Van Dijk; G. Brown; G. Yule; J. Baudrillard; P. Sériot; M. Stubbs), and domestic linguists (V.N. Bazyleva, E.V. Budaeva, V.Z. Demiankova, O.S. Issers, V.I. Karasik, E.S. Kubriakova, A.P. Chudinov, E.I. Sheigal).

Significant changes are occurring in the field of mass communications under the influence of new information technologies. These changes affect the transformation of modern political communication. The main process underlying the modification of modern political communication is digitalization (from the English term “digitalization”). This implies the translation of political communication content in all its forms - textual, sound - into digital format, understandable to modern computers.

With the advent of the Internet, it became possible to communicate, exchange information not only through direct contact, but also virtually, at a distance using social networks.

According to the explanatory dictionaries, the Internet is a worldwide electronic communications computer network that allows users of personal computers, at any distance, anywhere in the world, to have communication with each other, receive and transmit textual and graphic information.

The Internet is a kind of information base that accumulates, preserves and reproduces an unlimited amount of information and provides quick access to a large audience (Golovin, 2012).

## 2. Problem Statement

Digitization is a description of an object, image or audio-video signal (in analog form) as a set of discrete digital measurements (samples) of this signal/object, using one or another equipment that is transferring it to a digital form suitable for recording on electronic media (Khorovits & Khill, 1993).

As a result of digitalization, content is easily “transported” through any channel of electronic communication. Thus, the Internet turns into a special information and communication environment in which media products, owing to their digital format, are able to overcome any borders. Over the past decades, a revolutionary technological update of the media has been taking place through the introduction of digital technologies in the activities of media organizations and in political communication.

Politics is a public sphere and any process developing in this sphere, is characterized by many distinctive features of communication. Political communication in the republic has been transformed over time, depending on the technological development of communication.

The penetration of web technologies into politics is a complex and controversial process. This is not to say that it completely changed political communication. This is confirmed by the definitions presented in the works of foreign and native authors. For example, political analyst Akopov (2004) underlines that network policy is “a new political technology that allows bringing the political process to a higher level” (para. 10).

The political Internet is a powerful interactive means of communication with the public, which allows leading a regular dialogue of politicians with a part of society having an access to the Network (Morozova, 2011).

Digitalization leads to significant policy changes: the positions of various political subjects and the relations existing between them are revised. The relations “political leader - citizen” are changed with the help of digitalization.

The Internet is not only a new media, but also an interactive model of political communication between a politician and citizens: a citizen can directly ask a question to a political leader (in this case, the President or the Speaker) and, after a short time, get an answer. This means the direct inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process that is, expression of their opinion about certain political decisions.

The use of technical means in public life has led to the creation of a specific type of political communication, namely mass political communication (MPC), arising between the subjects of political relations in the broad sense of the word in order to influence public consciousness and induce a certain type of political behavior (Skovikov, 2012).

“Live” communication through blogs and microblogs, forums and portals that support the feedback function creates a qualitatively new interpersonal communication, allowing us to communicate freely with any person, regardless of his territorial location, national and state identity, including the person in the global information society (Krainova, 2013).

According to Dahlgren (2006), the Internet can have a positive effect on democracy and can help eradicate problems that exist in a democratic society.

The term “social network” was introduced by the British sociologist Barnes (1954). He designated the study field as follows:

*By studying the social organization of a simple society, we see our aim in understanding various ways in which members of this society systematically interact with each other. For the purposes of our analysis, we consider the political system, the patterns of village life, the system of kinship and other similar areas of interaction as parts of the same discursive universe, analyzing them as single-order phenomena, and we try to show how the same external factors, principles of organization and values affect the various manifestations of social life. (Barnes, 1954, p. 45)*

According to the definition of Makliuen (2003), the world has become a global village owing to social networks, whose inhabitants know each other well, although they can physically be located on different continents.

As van Deik (2000) fairly stated, in order for communication to be complete, consideration of the views and awareness of all its participants is necessary: “<...>real communication unquestionably includes real knowledge, opinions and desires. There is even a general condition, namely the condition of sincerity, which requires a direct connection between the content of thought and the content of the statement” (p. 267).

### **3. Research Questions**

Modern digital technologies have a huge impact on political communication. The characteristic features of modern political communication include the active use of the socio-political possibilities of the Internet, in particular, information in a digital format and various social networks; allowing candidates to

announce their political position and their ideas to a wide audience. This article explores the impact of new information technologies on political communication in the Republic of South Ossetia. The authors single out and describe the characteristic features of creating the image of a political leader in digital space. This problem is also complemented by consideration of the interactive model features of political communication between politicians and citizens of the country.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to reveal the distinctive features of political communication in the era of globalization in the Republic of South Ossetia; show ways of transforming communication depending on the technological development of communication and consider technologies for creating the image of a politician in digital space.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Research methods used in this work: methods of observation, statistical calculation, discursive method, semantic-cognitive method and method of component analysis.

#### **6. Findings**

The introduction of information technology into political communication resulted in the emergence of political leaders of the Republic, in particular, Babilov (2019), pages in social networks, such as Instagram, VKontakte, Facebook, Odnoklassniki, etc., which allowed the voters to engage in direct interaction with the politician, thus providing a “feedback” effect.

The use of ICT in South Ossetian political communication provides RSO citizens with an opportunity to take an active part in online discussions, thus expressing a variety of points of view.

The possibilities of network communications even more blur the line between real and virtual. At the same time, the role of public information in political decision making has increased, with the result that the policy sphere has become more public and less controlled (Krainova, 2013).

According to Morozova (2011) classification, forms of political Internet communication, presented on the Internet, can be divided into two main classes: informational (news feeds, informational and analytical websites, presentation state and legislative websites, government and administrative programs and documents, bulletins, etc.), and interactive (by e-mail, various forums, conferences, chat rooms, online surveys, online voting) depending on the pursued goals.

Information of a political nature can be studied not only in a single-channel format – look through in the form of a text (interviews with politicians, election programs, materials of party newspapers), listen to audio and video formats (press conferences with politicians, interviews, talk shows, meetings with voters, election debates), view or record video clips, but also take advantage of the opportunity for multi-channel communication with politicians, in particular, presidential candidates (live television, discussion on social networking forums).

Computer technologies offer the possibility of multi-channel communication. Each network user can act as both a recipient and a sender, namely, an information creator (Artiukhina, 2008).

A political communication channel is a means of transmitting an informational message from a communicator to a recipient. The technology of political activity is a complex system of methods for influencing the recipient of political communication in order to achieve certain aims (Anokhin, 2000).

According to the results of our survey (30 respondents from 18 to 50 years old and 30 respondents aged 50 and over), all respondents (100%) admit that Internet resources, in particular, the websites of leading politicians, are the most effective means of conveying ideas to voters, as well as keeping their attention. And this is quite natural, since recently there has been a steady increase in the number of Internet users and today they make up a significant number of voters. Speaking of South Ossetia, it should be noted that the number of Internet users, according to information data of ZAO “Ostelekom” is 27.537 people in South Ossetia in 2019. Considering that according to the summary results of the 2015 General Census of the Republic of South Ossetia, RSO population is 53.532 people, the number of active Internet users is 51.4 of the total population of South Ossetia (Dahlgren, 2006).

The political discourse of Babilov (2019) is interactive in nature with the active use of social networks and online services for communication with citizens. For example, this fact is confirmed in the President’s comments on the issue of housing distribution. 86 FB users took part in the discussion. Post-appeal of the President received 586 likes, 89 subscribers made a repost. All comments are listed further are referred to post (Babilov, 2019) in the facebook blog.

*... I am leafing through news feed and I don't believe my eyes ... The Page of Ossetia's leader Anatoly Babilov, where distribution of free apartments to people who are in special need and for special services to society is discussed... all sectors of society are involved, many state and public structures, in general, maximum openness and transparency... And I say to myself, God, do we really have places on our earth where still “...” social justice is observed — the dream of all mankind, to which we must strive, or it and only it moves people towards creation, construction, study ... HUMANITY (para. 12)*

This commentary expresses the general point of view of subscribers who approve of the president’s openness, his readiness for multi-channel communication in order to get an idea of the opinion diversity.

*Returning to the distribution of apartments!!! What is wrong again, let's ask!?*

The rhetorical question asked by the President is intended to attract representatives of different layers of South Ossetian society to the discussion.

*... The Commission has worked, what is more, very fundamentally, scrupulously examining everybody! They published for transparency, for public participation ... Wrong again!?! Then tell me how it should have been done? What do we want, justice!?!*

In this example, the fundamental strategic principles of the policy are objectified - openness and identification with the people (fundamentally, scrupulously examining, transparency, for the participation of the people, tell me, justice). All quotes are from (Babilov, 2019).

*What became of us, what happened to us, if we stand up for justice and at the same time, we despise this justice!!! Let's be more tolerant to each other and solve our problems together "...”!!!It is very important for us!!! IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE, FOR PEOPLE!! (para. 8)*

The President's discourse is characterized by specific punctuation - three exclamation marks, graphic highlighting of important semantic accents by means of capital letters.

Feedback has multidirectional vectors: thanks and goodwill, criticism, questions on the topic of the post.

Thanks and wishes make up more than 30% of the total discussion text.

*I cannot help expressing my gratitude and great appreciation to Anatolii Ilich!!! Me, who almost lost faith in justice and law "...”*

*THANK YOU VERY MUCH, ANATOLII ILICH!!!*

*100% you are right, Anatolii Ilich! We need to respect each other!*

*WE HAVE THE PRESIDENT, ELDER BROTHER, AND THANKS TO HIM THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH OSSETIA WANT FOR NOTHING.*

**Elena Bekoeva.** Dear Anatolii Ilich, we both had a commission and submitted it for discussion more than once, but our family is not on the lists.

**Anatolii Bibilov**→ Elena Bekoeva, *provide surnames, please!*

This fragment, which we transmit while retaining the peculiarities of addressing in FB communication, shows how the President enters into an online dialogue with one of the subscribers.

**User** *Good afternoon, Anatolii Ilich! Why we cannot arrange a mortgage or at least increase the limit on a loan without collateral.*

**Anatolii Bibilov** →**User**, *mortgage is impossible, because Banks do not have such a large share capital to provide mortgage lending! Of course, it would be very good if we managed to do it, but unfortunately!*

Internet communication in a social network assumes deviation from the borders of purely institutional communication. In addition, participation in multi-channel communication of a large number of users of the social network, as shown by the study results, contributes to the implementation of various communication combinations:

President - social network users,

1. social network users, RSO citizens - social network users, citizens of other states.
2. social network users united by family and other relations.

*Here I am watching from afar, from Chisinau itself, and honestly rejoice, sincerely rejoice and do not even believe it, is it possible that somewhere else in this world social justice and care for the poor are observed....*

*Ossetian brothers are lucky with the President!!!*

*Hang on)))*

*There is no such president in any state and republic who is personally involved in everything, stands next to the people!*

*Anatolii, accept me for permanent residence, I will come to you with pleasure)!*

As these fragments show, users of a social network - citizens of other states join the conversation.

**Zita Kochieva Anatolii Ilich!** *Thank you very much! I am infinitely grateful to you for seeing my sister-in-law, Beteeva Liudmila Pavlovna, on this list!*

**Madina Margieva Zita Kochieva** *I'm glad Luda got an apartment ... thanks to everyone who helped!!! Ludushkin, congratulations!*

A discussion participant thanked the president for the fact that her relative received an apartment. She, in turn, is answered by her friend, expressing joy in this regard. Diminutive forms of appeal (Luda, Ludushkin), give a family character to the communication of citizens with the President. The president is associated with a family member, close friend. All quotes are from (Babilov, 2019).

*Anatolii Ilich, do everything in your power for the good of the people! Give the rest into the hands of God! There will always be dissatisfied, such is life. Forces and success to you! Good luck!*

*South Ossetia has never met such an unprecedented openness. We must be grateful for creating such an important precedent not only to prevent possible violations in our day, but also in the future: neither tomorrow nor the day after ....*

*Anatolii Ilich! The people grew out of a habit of justice. They do not trust. You need to revive the trust relationship of the people in a new way. Teach people to trust the authorities, no other way*

*How good it is to have access to the President, and not to wait for appointment for months. Is it? Thank him very much for this, forces and patience!*

*True national President! We trust you!*

In this discussion, the current model of political communication is blurred, in which the object is opposed to the subject. All communicants act as subjects of communication. It forms a kind of friend-zone where there is an exchange of opinions, wishes for the country leader in a friendly (typical for social networks) manner, with punctuation characteristic for the Internet communication and the use of so-called emoticons. All quotes are from (Babilov, 2019).

**User 1:** *Actually, Anatolii Ilich is on vacation!!! The conclusion is yours!!!)*

**User 1:** *I meant that Anatolii Ilich uses his vacation time to communicate with people and solve problems! And I wrote from the office!!!*

**User 3:** *That's for sure. But the people are satisfied... Does not stand in queue for one answer... Ilich knows the character of his people, knows what they need.... The President should also be a psychologist....*

## 7. Conclusion

Information technologies contribute to the emergence of new models of political governance, where power practices will invariably be accompanied by the use of political influence and manipulation as a means of achieving the desired results.

Being a unique social phenomenon, the Internet forms a new cognitive environment between the participants of communication, in which self-organization of a new type of cognitive thinking, a new view of reality takes place.

Internet communications contribute to the development of civil society, publicity and openness of political processes. In a short time, they provide an effective dialogue between the government and society and make it possible to interact directly with the target audience.

The advantages of the Internet as one of the most effective channels for distributing a candidate political advertising are that access to the Internet is provided 24 hours a day, that is, anyone interested can get information about a candidate at any convenient time. The Internet also provides the possibility of direct and indirect campaigning for a candidate, as well as the publication of detailed information of any nature about him. Candidate information is constantly updated as needed.

The characteristic features of the South Ossetian political communication in its election aspect include: quite active and effective use of the socio-political capabilities of the Internet, in particular, social networks; maximum involvement of all social and age groups of the electorate through communication in the network and, as a result, creating an image of an open politician through establishing direct contact with potential voters.

The activity of multi-channel communication through ICT and the feedback of the target audience with politicians do not depend on the age category of voters.

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