

MASS MEDIA CULTURE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Aktolkyn Kulsariyeva
Yerkin Massanov
Indira Alibayeva

Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

Abstract. This article studies the importance and the role of the contemporary media culture of Kazakhstan as a social phenomenon. The influence of media culture on the national identity and the value system of the Kazakhstani multiethnic society is a highly discussed issue. So is the role of media culture as an integrating agent of the new media environment. Media environment is considered as a set of conditions which enables the functioning of the media culture; this is an area which connects the person with the surrounding world, informs, entertains, propagandizes moral and aesthetic values, exerts an ideological, economic or organizational influence on people's assessments, opinions and behaviour through intermediary function of mass media.

Keywords: media culture, Kazakhstani society, globalization, political advertising, modernization

Introduction

The modern image of media culture in Kazakhstan is defined firstly by its involvement in the globalized information space of the world community, secondly by the state sovereignty – an achievement of the republic. Media culture is a set of information and communicative means, material and intellectual values elaborated during the cultural and historical development of society, which facilitates the formation of public consciousness and socialization of individuals. It involves the culture of information transfer and the culture of its perception. The media culture of Kazakhstan is shaped, structured and changed in accordance with changes encountered by its agents, i.e. the people who share their economical, family, household, political and spiritual interests with each other.

Media culture includes cultural communication and culture of perception, it can also serve as a system of levels of personal development, ability to read, analyse, evaluate the media text, engage in media arts, and acquire new knowledge through the media (Kirillova, 2006: 8).

We define development of media culture within the following boundaries: from the modern to the postmodern era. Postmodern components (information)

civilization began with the satellite TV, video, computer, Internet, email, mobile, CD – they are all mixed, updated, combined, expanding the social memory of the individual, society and the planet. The process of forming a „global“, „planetary“ thinking is greatly contributed by the media culture (Kirillova, 2006: 9).

The only environment in which our civilization can still expand, our only real frontier is broadcast, in other words is media. The continuously expanding media has become a real environment. This new space is called the *information environment* (Rushkoff, 2003: 2–3).

The communication space does not exist outside the human and covers all the aspects that influence the socialization of the person.

Today under the concept of the President of Kazakhstan N.Nazarbayev in regard to the actions of the media there is a necessity to improve the image of the working person in media culture in the context of the transition from a consumer society to the universal labour society. There are some issues on the agenda: growth of information component in life of Kazakhstani society and as well as expansion of Internet technology opportunities to reinforce „feedback“ between the state and citizens (Nazarbayev, 2012).

Media Landscape in Kazakhstan

Today, modernization in Kazakhstan is dependent on strengthening the role of media culture as an integrative factor of the new media environment. Media environment in Kazakhstan is an essential factor of the country's transition to democracy. The creation of the single information space in Kazakhstan, an intensive development of printed, as well as the electronic media: cable and satellite TV, video, digital cinema and TV, computer channels, the Internet, CD-ROMs, DVD, cellular communications and e-mail have become a catalyst for many social processes which have had an influence on political and economic progress of the society.

According to official sources, there are more than 10 news agencies and over 2,970 registered mass media in Kazakhstan. More than 200 of them are electronic. CaspioNet, the first satellite channel of Kazakhstan, broadcasts in Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Northern Africa. There are more than 80 operators of cable and air-cable television, which supply broadcasting services for domestic and foreign electronic mass media; the largest operators are 'Alma-TV' (broadcasting in 13 cities of the country), 'Kazinformtelecom', 'Secatel' and 'Kazcenter-TV' (in 5 cities), 'KVK' (in 4 cities) in the country.

Mass media activities and information market in Kazakhstan are based on the Constitution of Kazakhstan. It guarantees a freedom of speech and expression, forbids censorship, establishes everyone's right to receive and distribute information in a free manner and accepts the ideological and political variety. Some of the largest media-holdings in Kazakhstan are run by financial and industrial groups or the most influential business people. State mass media ('Arna media' holding with

TV channels 'Khabar', 'El Arna', 'Kazakhstan', 'CaspioNet', radio stations 'The Kazakh Radio', 'Khabar', 'Shalkhar', and newspapers 'Kazakhstanskaya Pravda', 'Yegemen Kazakhstan', news agency 'Kazinform' and others), as well as mass media that are run by the ruling party 'Nur Otan' ('Astana' TV channel, NS and RDV radio stations; 'Liter', 'Aikyn' and 'Turkistan' newspapers) are incorporated in these holdings. Other media-holdings do not belong to state structures.

Being mainly focused on purely commercial objectives, instead of the interests of society, Kazakhstan business plays a great role in the formation of the media market. The great bulk of publications (more than 85-90%) in Kazakhstan do not belong to state structures. Proprietors of mass media in Kazakhstan are often commercial corporations, financial and industrial groups, in regions - large and average businessmen. The state editions operate in all regions of the country with the assistance of local akimats (executive powers) and maslikhats (representative body). Some state newspapers and magazines are published in Astana and Almaty, state television and radio stations also conduct broadcasting. Mainstream mass media is loyal to the authority given their proximity to mass media owners, public funds and other reasons.

The government of Kazakhstan provides state financial support to mass media; this also includes the state order for coverage of socially meaningful and important issues. In 2009, the Ministry of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan only allocated about 1.1 billion tenge (7.3 million US dollars) to mass media within the state social order.

There is a wide thematic differentiation of mass-media in the country. Today, the share of print media is 50% of the total number of mass media in Kazakhstan; social and political media constitute 16%, while the share of scientific publications is 9%; the advertising literature - 10.5% and print media for children, youth, female readers and religious publications have approximately 2% of share in mass media. 2,392 foreign mass-media, including 2,309 newspapers and magazines, 83 broadcast programmes are distributed in internal Kazakhstan information market.

More than 80 representatives of foreign mass media have been accredited in Kazakhstan.

The largest networks of foreign mass-media diffusions on the territory of Kazakhstan are joint-stock companies, limited liability companies such as 'Kazpost' JSC, joint enterprises 'A and F-Kazakhstan', 'Eurasia-press' JSC, 'Alma-TV' JSC, 'Sekatel' LLC, 'Kazcenter-TV', 'Katelko+'. Total number of mass media extended by these structures is 70% of the total amount.

Not less than a quarter of all mass media published in Kazakhstan are republican media. Overwhelming majority of republican mass media positions itself as socio-political which covers practically all subjects; there are about 20 widely known business papers (newspapers and magazines) in the country.

There are generally no less than 50 state and privately-owned mass media in all regions of Kazakhstan. Regional leaders (according to the rating of mass-media in

Kazakhstan) are Karaganda, Pavlodar, Aktobe, the South Kazakhstan, East Kazakhstan and Atyrau; many of these publications are noted for their professionalism not only in regions, but throughout the country. Mass media in Kyzylorda and the North Kazakhstan are low-rated; significance of mass-media in these regions is lower than in other regions; number of residents is also lower in comparison with other areas.

Less than 10 air channels supply broadcasting services to more than half of the country residents ('Khabar', 'Kazakhstan' and 'El Arna' state channels, KTK, NTK, 'Rakhat', Channel 7, 'Astana' and '31' privately owned channels). Half of them broadcast from Astana city, while the others broadcast from Almaty. According to experts, more than 500 thousand users or about 12% of population and approximately 8% of the operating enterprises pay for TV services monthly. The annual amount of their payments is nearly 60 million US dollars, which is more than 3% of the total income of the telecommunications market in Kazakhstan. There is also a category of users who have chosen a satellite TV without paying a monthly fee. The number of such viewers is about 200 thousand users. Nearly 70% of all users who pay for TV services are cable television subscribers. Today, the principle of an individual approach to clients has also touched the area of TV. With the advent of digital TV, viewers now have an opportunity to form their own individual service package or use feedback in interactive shows and phone-ins. Satellite and cable television have significantly expanded possibilities for presence of Kazakhstani media in the global media culture. „There are nearly one million satellite dishes in Kazakhstan. Most of them are installed in regions and villages rather than in Almaty and major cities. One buys an unpretentious dish for \$50 and has a set of channels at his disposal.

On the one hand, television has always attracted criticism for being an adverse force in people's lives - sapping their energies, substituting for imagination and sociability. On the other, it is claimed that it offers stimuli far exceeding any leisure activity that has ever existed before (Stewart & Lavelle, 2001: 234).

Approximately 14% of the population in Kazakhstan uses the Internet. The number of online publications increased with the growth of Internet-users. Majority of them position themselves as infotainment media, rather than social and political editions. Online versions of print media (for example, 'The Time', 'Liter' newspapers) are also popular. The popularity of Internet-resources which were active over five and more years has considerably increased; these resources contributed to collection and distribution of Kazakhstan and the world news, analytical materials.

Furthermore, the number of bloggers, the authors of online diaries, also increased over the last two years. Today, new blogs are being started both on popular resources, such as Livejournal.com (its popularity has fallen in connection with constant blocking in Kazakhstan since October 2008) or LiveInternet, and on recently started local resources. Majority of online blogs cover daily news and events, rarely bloggers express their attitude towards politics and economy. Most

of the web-resources in Kazakhstan have the entertaining content which could be explained by the fact that most of the users are young people. Another reason is that it is rather difficult for existing socio-political resources to compete with entertaining resources. The value system of modern Kazakhstan youth differs from the traditional concepts; they are the frequent users of web space and journalists expect the growth of online projects that will meet demands of the society and will not have an all-entertaining character.

Study of social and cultural situation in Kazakhstan shows that the intensive development of media culture, particularly audiovisual (cable and satellite TV, video, film, computer channels, etc.) are increasingly affecting the public consciousness as a powerful tool of information, cultural and educational contacts, as a factor in the development of creative abilities of the individual. Computer, CD-ROMs, DVD and Internet provide a person with the opportunity to communicate with an individual screen in interactive mode, both to realize their creative ideas, taking advantage of the „virtual“ world and the purpose of understanding the „other“. The role of media culture in society is growing very fast, being a complex means of human exploration of the world in its social, intellectual, moral, artistic and psychological aspects (Kirillova, 2006: 9).

The Influence of Mass Media in Kazakhstan

Mass media in the different countries act as the observer or the active player on a political and public field, supervising politicians and public figures and making comments on their actions. Not only in Kazakhstan, but also in the Central Asia, the role of mass media is more likely to inform population about the events and phenomena, journalists extremely rare act as analysts and experts predicting development of events.

Functions of mass-media in respect of ‘Authority-Mass media–Society’ scheme can be characterized as follows:

- Provision of information for the population;
- Supporting the legitimacy of authority;
- Manipulation over public opinion to achieve political aims (prolongation or reduction of the powers of political subjects).

At the same time, the majority of experts consider that the audience of mass media will remain passive enough in the following years and will not demand the improvement of the quality of analytical information, having a limited interest in current events.

TV is the primary source of information for people in Kazakhstan. According to the results of the sociological research entitled ‘Main trends and dynamics in the political modernization of Kazakhstan’ conducted in 2007 by ‘Central Asia’ Business Information, Social and Marketing Research Centre by the order of the Kazakhstani Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan, the

majority of the population uses TV as a main reliable source of information (63%), while radio is cited as a basic source of information by 56% of respondents; social and political newspapers and magazines are considered as providers of accurate information by 53% of the population. Accordingly, the audience is less confident about the accuracy and reliability of information on the Internet (46%).

A sociological research was conducted in 2009 by Media Net International Centre for Journalism with the support of Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan to study the modern situation in mass media. Survey results indicated those tendencies which reduce the potential of journalism as 'the fourth estate'. The survey covered 10 regions of Kazakhstan (Almaty city, Astana city, and Akmola, Aktobe, Almaty, Atyrau, East Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Karaganda, Kostanai, the North-Kazakhstan, South-Kazakhstan regions). The main objective of the research was to determine key requirements for progress of mass-media in the country, identify main risks for mass-media, and develop recommendations for media and donor communities, state bodies and media-structures. The research has practically presented the collective picture of mass-media in the country. Nearly 350 journalists, editors, mass-media owners, publishers, representatives of state bodies, non-governmental organizations, state and private educational institutions training journalists participated in the survey.

35.5% of respondents denied the role of mass media stating that 'mass media does not play any special role'; 46.5% responded that 'the role of mass media is insignificant; while 18% provided the opinion that 'the mass-media plays a serious role in society' (Abramov, 2009: 16). Thus, according to assessments provided by the majority of respondents, mass-media in the Kazakhstan society did not play the role which they could play.

The Role of Media on Formation of A New National Identity

The Kazakh society is not solely concerned about the pervasive influence of media; it also is in the pursuit of a new cultural identity in the context of cultural varieties represented on TV screens, computers and cinemas. New TV technologies expand borders of the world and give more possibilities for learning different cultures. Opportunities for the Kazakh culture to interact with various cultures of other civilizations are now open. At the same time, politicians, scientists and experts fairly specify the danger of the 'by-products' of globalization, such as the threat of losing the cultural originality under the pressure of commercialized and neutralized mass culture. The audience receives the stream of information which is not related to their homeland. They live with events from other countries; watch their films, their educational, entertainment and comic programmes. The theorist of information technologies, the author of 'The Society of the Spectacle', Guy Debord, claims that the spectacle or mass media is becoming the central forming phenomenon of the modern society, 'All that was once lived has become mere representation' (Debord, 2000: 184). According to the author, people in this society

lose their ability to perceive a reality on the basis of public and personal relations, knowledge and experience; reality is formed on the basis of 'TV pictures'.

Media culture in Kazakhstan can be characterized by an increase of the interest in issues of daily occurrence: everyday life, ordinary knowledge, everyday awareness, daily speeches, daily behaviour of the person, and the culture of ordinary life. It means that now the social reality is not understood as objectively existing structures and processes carried out irrespective of consciousness, but as a subjective experience of these events, their daily understanding.

The role of media education is increasing in the context of globalization, as the country integrates with the Western European community. A media education accelerates this process, helping to create a new identity of the XXI century (Kirillova, 2006: 9).

The information field of Kazakhstan can be compared to a reservoir with various information streams pouring in at the same time. The most powerful of them is the Russian media with its highly professional TV broadcasts, radio stations, newspapers having stable readers, and rather developed Russian-language Internet sources. The Russian TV provides the viewer with more choice than the domestic TV. 'Eurasia' has become the basic channel with its highly-rated programmes. The Russian TV programmes are more interesting, spectacular and inventive compared to TV programmes made in Kazakhstan.

Kazakh-language TV faces no competition from TV broadcasts in Russian or other languages. It has its stable Kazakh-speaking audience. Poor quality of programmes does not influence the level of popularity of the Kazakh-language TV. The Kazakh rural settlement with its orientation to 'Khabar' and 'Kazakhstan' state-run channels traditionally supports the authority, whereas the urban viewer with its cable and satellite TV, on the contrary, demonstrates relatively critical attitude to the government. It may be predicted that given this tendency, a bipolar thinking might develop in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh media is almost equal to the Russian by the number of its audience and is represented by various local radio stations and television broadcasting, newspapers and the growing scale of web-space in the Kazakh language. Language is a sensitive issue in Kazakhstan. Although the state language of Kazakhstan is Kazakh, Russian is considered the official language and is used more widely than Kazakh. According to web-portal Nur.kz, only 10% of broadcasting was conducted in the state language in Kazakhstan in February 2011. The government of Kazakhstan is stimulating the increase of broadcasting volume in the Kazakh language. 'Kazakhstan' state TV channel has already stopped broadcasting TV programmes in Russian from September 1, 2011. In May, 2011, the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, advised that starting from the autumn, the channel will broadcast only in the Kazakh language. Considerably large number of newspapers is published in the Kazakh language in southern and western regions of the country, whereas northern, central and eastern regions have more publications in the Russian language. Thus, some regions (for

example, Kyzylorda area) have TV broadcasting mainly in the state language as this is the demand of residents, generally ethnic Kazakhs.

On a country level, the leadership among printed editions belongs to Russian-language publications; their number exceeds the quantity of newspapers and magazines published in the Kazakh language. Only 453 of total 2,700 periodical editions in Kazakhstan are published in Kazakh and 2,303 are in the Russian language. Moreover, 5.2 thousand Russian newspapers and magazines are distributed on the territory of the country; only 2.7 thousand of them have been registered by the Ministry of Culture of Kazakhstan. Thus, the total amount of Kazakh-language print media is only 5.99%¹⁾.

As for online publications, only 5.6% of websites hosted in the country are in the Kazakh language; these are the websites of mass media belonging to state structures. A steady growth of publications in Kazakh and reduction of publications in Russian is being observed since 2000; this has brought to a growing number of citizens speaking the national language. The state is now providing more support to the Kazakh-language media. Generally, this support is carried out by state orders. Due to governmental support, the content of Kazakh-language state mass-media now exceeds 70%.

Thus, by developing the media production of Kazakhstan and supporting the Kazakh-language media sources, the government is promoting a national identity in the context of cultural varieties presented via media.

Conclusion

Media landscape in Kazakhstan is witnessing the rapid development of both printed and electronic media, which in turn demonstrates a clear division into pro-government and oppositional media. There are practically no neutral mass media in the country – support of some political or financial group is notable and it can be seen in publications and their tonality.

Mass media culture in Kazakhstan can be characterized by the diversity of information resources, wide variety of thematic differences, and the steady development of local media in the context of globalized media space. The role of mass media and popular culture is profound in terms of its impact on society yet Kazakhstani media experts assume that the role of media is insignificant in the country.

It is the state policy to develop the local media, as well as to form a national identity and support the status of the state language through eliminating the gap between Kazakh and Russian-speaking media.

NOTES

1. 5.9 percent of mass-media is in a state language in Kazakhstan // [http:// www.internews.kz/newsitem/09--03-2011/14416](http://www.internews.kz/newsitem/09--03-2011/14416).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abramov, B. (2009). *Results of research „Mass-media of Kazakhstan: key players, possibilities, demands and risks“*. Almaty.
- Debord, G. (2000). *The Society of Spectacle*. M.: LOGOS (Edition).
- Stewart, C. & Lavelle, M. (2001). *Media and Meaning*. L.: BFI Publishing.
- Rushkoff, D. (2003). *Mediavirus*. Ultra, Kultura.
- Kirillova, N.B. (2006). *Mediaculture: from the modern to the postmodern era*. 2-nd edn. Moscow: Academicheskii Proekt.
- Nazarbayev, N.A. *Social modernization of Kazakhstan: Twenty Steps to the Community of universal labour*// <http://www.akorda.kz>. 10.07.2012

МЕДИЙНАТА КУЛТУРА В КАЗАХСТАН

Резюме. Тази статия е посветена на състоянието на медийната култура в Казахстан, която в съвременния свят обхваща всички сфери на човешкия живот. Медията е средство на човека за познаване на заобикалящия го свят, за формирането на неговите социологически, интелектуални, нравствени, творчески и психологически умения. Много е важна ролята на медиите за възпитаване на младото поколение и за формиране на национално самосъзнание. Следователно за развитието на масовата медия трябва да се отделя голямо внимание. В тази статия се поставя въпросът за развитието на масовата медия, за влиянието ѝ върху социологическото развитие на човека по примера на казахстанската медийна култура.

Prof. Aktolkyn Kulsariyeva

✉ Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
School of Philosophy and Political Science
71, Al-Farabi Av.
050040, Almaty, Kazakhstan
E-mail: aktolkyn777@mail.ru

Yerkin Massanov, PhD

✉ Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
School of Philosophy and Political Science
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
71, Al-Farabi Ave.
050040, Almaty, Kazakhstan
E-mail: Massanovezh@mail.ru

Indira Alibayeva

✉ Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
School of Philosophy and Political Science
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
71, Al-Farabi Av.
050040, Almaty, Kazakhstan
E-mail: indi_qi@mail.ru