

## THE POLITICAL TOLERANCE OF MASS MEDIA IN A CLIMATE OF THE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** This paper explores a set of criteria and attributes that characterize political tolerance as a crucial component of public discourse in a climate of democratic development. The authors describe the social-psychological and information-communication properties of political tolerance in its theoretical and empirical characteristics. It is proven that in mass media tolerance toward the views of others may incorporate heated public discussions, criticism and counter-criticism between two, or more, opposing parties, including focusing the attention of the audience on destructive social phenomena. The authors identify a set of attributes of tolerant communication in audiovisual mass media. Promoting nonstereotyped thinking and restricting hate speech, while at the same time providing each of the parties with equal and ample opportunity to have their say, are among the major components of public debate in TV and radio broadcasting. Intolerance in such programs is realized at the content and structural levels and may supply the audience with templates for engaging in political discussion in a destructive, and even asocial, manner. Intolerance is conducive to invalidating the principle of the creative activity of mass media within the socially significant process of representing topical issues and designing ways to overcome them.

**Keywords:** Political tolerance, intolerance, hate speech, information war, audiovisual mass media, political correctness

### INTRODUCTION

The term “tolerance” comes from the Latin word ‘tolerantia’, signifying “acquiescence in evil” and “voluntarily enduring suffering”. During the Renaissance era, this definition was extended to incorporate “being reserved” and “permission”. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of “tolerance” gradually acquired a juridical meaning, although it was perceived in a legal sense only with respect to certain religious beliefs (Habermas, 2006).

Today, tolerance is a multi-faceted and broad concept that is employed not only in journalism but in a number of crucial communication areas, like education, politics, public and charitable activity, and other areas engaged in the communication process. From the social-psychological perspective, tolerance is governed by an

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array of personal human factors: one's upbringing, manners, and communication ethics and aesthetics. Tolerance may be viewed as one of the basic qualities of the communicator conducive to the development of his professional skills, which helps form his personality in its professional expression.

Under the current democratic conditions, in the polyphony of political ideologies and diversity of opinions, tolerance in representing and covering reality is taking on special relevance with respect to such areas as politics, religion, ethnic relations and the development of media systems (Georgieva, Danilova, Bykov, Smolyarova, & Labush, 2015). The need to devote attention to them is governed by the fact that it is in these areas of intergroup and interpersonal social communication that contradictoriness and conflict proneness are manifested most acutely.

There could be some relevance for countries which embarked on the path of modern democratic development relatively recently (this includes Russia) in the following observation by scholars G.M. Denisovskii and P.M. Kozyreva: "With the exclusion of certain fragmentary topics, the state of tolerance – political or general cultural, interpersonal or interconfessional – will always remain, across various regions, groups, and strata, as well as nationally as a whole, a terra incognita, with all the self-evident significance of our full idea of it" (Denisovskii & Kozyreva, 2002).

From the political perspective, a lack of experience realizing the principle of information pluralism tends to cause difficulties with effectuating tolerant communication in transitional regimes. This often shows in the specific reaction of subjects of communication to acute, unresolved, and at times decades-old issues in social interaction, *i.e.* gives rise to a quality that is the opposite of respect in dialogues and discussions – intolerance. Political intolerance conveyed through mass media may be construed as the public, rude depreciation of the opinions of one's opponents and attempts to undo other political ideologies and views, calls to political and physical violence, justifying and employing it, discriminating by gender, profession, age, political and partisan preferences, and abasing the human dignity of one's opponents. Political intolerance is verging on, and may now already actually be, trampling on moral principles; manifestations of intolerance in mass media are also testimony to journalists committing a serious violation of the principles of professional ethics and professional conduct.

## **METHODS**

The study of tolerance as a principle and quality of the activity of audiovisual mass media in a climate of democracy cannot be carried out without having in place a certain scientific methodological base. This study is grounded in the following general scientific methods:

1. The historical method, which helps analyze the interpretation of a phenomenon under review at different historical stages. The authors' desire to employ this method is based on that tolerance or intolerance in communication has a close association with a specific historical period, a specific spatial-temporal context, and specific historical events.
2. The summarization method is employed to generate a most complete characterization of general trends through the identification of particular facts of reality and concretization of factors determining the state and development of the subject of the study.
3. The analysis method is utilized to establish the formal-logical associations between the elements of the object under study. In particular, the phenomenon of tolerance is considered in the aggregate with the following concepts: information war, political intolerance, and hate speech. The method helps define the relationships and formal-logical links between such categories as forbearance, tolerance, and political correctness.

For the purposes of this study, it appears to be most worthwhile to make the integrated use of the above methods so as to obtain credible results and chart the prospects for further research in the field.

This paper is a continuation of a line of research into the phenomenon of political tolerance in audiovisual mass media, the results of which have been published in leading Russian and international scholarly journals and monographs and tested as part of a number of international conferences.

## **RESULTS**

### **Tolerance in the political culture of society**

Based on the views of I.M. Dzyaloshinskii, tolerance comes down to the following formula: adopting a tolerant attitude toward the opinions of others, attaining one's goals through the balancing of interests, and persuading the cooperating parties of the need to look for a mutually acceptable compromise (Dzyaloshinskii, 2002). "The highest form of tolerance is public discursive speech interaction between social / political subjects / institutions (discussions, meetings, negotiations, etc.) with the civil objective of overcoming dissonance and attaining consensus" (Klyuev, 2010).

Intolerance in society normally shows in the social practice of dividing people within communities and groups into "us" and "them". In everyday life, such polarizing is, in a way, inherent to every member of society. Your family, friends,

and objects of affection are defined by you subconsciously as your loved ones, *i.e.* your “us”, while those toward whom you, for some reason, have harbored an animus are perceived by you as “them”, and you tend to have limited contact with them, with the chances of conflict increasing in the event of frequent contact with them being inevitable.

This, as something quite natural for everyday reality, does not present a serious social danger – not unless and until the “us and them” mindset gets to be actively conveyed through mass media, which often engage in massively building up the drama and conflict around a particular social issue, the emergence of which is typically blamed on someone else: “Explaining all troubles by pointing to the culprit “them” almost inevitably transforms negative emotions into aggression directed outwards” (Dzyloshinskii & Dzyloshinskaya, 2007).

In developing the concept of political culture, scholars G.A. Almond and S. Verba defined political tolerance as one of the major principles of pluralistic democracy (Almond & Verba, 1963). Afterwards, Russian researcher E.P. Prokhorov suggested that pluralism acts as one of the attributes of tolerant communication: “Pluralism and tolerance are mutually complementary when there is a multiplicity of forces, including in the area of mass information. There will be informedness to the maximum extent possible only when “your own” point of view will be seen against the backdrop of that of “others” and you will be willing to take them into consideration, not ignore them” (Prokhorov, 2009). Political tolerance has been viewed from the standpoint of the “us–them” dichotomy by scholars S.M. Eliseev and I.V. Ustinova, who maintain that political tolerance consists in having regard for the views of “political others” (Eliseev and Ustinova, 2010). T.V. Romanova considers this thought in an extended form, suggesting: “Being tolerant means being able to give up not just prejudice and hatred but something more complex – give up the desire to eliminate, destroy the views of “others”, while retaining the notions that have actually brought that desire about” (Romanova, 2015). Thus, radically opposite, extreme public behavior, expressed in being unwilling to engage in respectful dialogue with an opponent, may lead to intolerance and aggression and is capable of deforming a political discussion into an all-out political confrontation, including in forms of an extremist nature as extreme manifestations of direct democracy.

It is worth agreeing with S.V. Khamutovskaya, who draws upon C. Schmitt’s theory of conflictology to come up with the conclusion that a political conflict does not go away after you adopt a model for tolerant behavior – however, the struggle gets to follow an institutionalized course – *i.e.* it is continued and actualized through participation in elections, pickets, mediation, party activity, etc. (Khamutovskaya, 2012).

### **Political intolerance as a method for waging information wars**

The intolerant conduct of individuals is directly correlated with such concepts as hostile rhetoric and hate speech. I.M. Dzyaloshinskii equates these, makes the term ‘hate speech’, a new term in Russian science that has been borrowed from the scholarly and human rights discourse of English-speaking nations and has yet to make it into the nation’s legal discourse, a metaphorical equivalent of the term ‘hostile rhetoric’. The scholar construes the term in the following way: “Hostile rhetoric is a specific form of verbal conduct that is motivated by the aggressive state of the speaker” (Dzyaloshinskii & Dzyaloshinskaya, 2007).

According to I.M. Dzyaloshinskii, the concept of ‘hate speech’ appears to be narrower in meaning and is mainly correlated with the activity of mass media. It may be construed as “the entire aggregate of texts (as well as headlines, photographs, and other elements) in mass media that directly or indirectly facilitate the stirring up of national or religious enmity – or, at least, of some resentment” (Dzyaloshinskii & Dzyaloshinskaya, 2007). The use of hate speech in present-day Russian mass media may be due to the fact that, first of all, Russian legislation has yet to capture the concept of “hostile rhetoric” and provide a clear-cut definition of it; second of all, that there is an insufficient degree of public condemnation of intolerant activity in mass media; third of all, that Russian citizens have the constitutionally captured right to freedom of thought and speech and there is the ban against censorship of mass information in Russia. Thus, Russian mass media are provided with the maximum opportunity to independently regulate their activity – above all, in the area of ethics and moral principles. However, in practice these liberties are oftentimes realized in the most painful manifestations, which cannot but draw concern and criticism from the educated portion of the population and members of the scientific community engaged in exploring these processes.

According to scholar S.N. Ilchenko, the trend toward this kind of all-permissiveness, coupled with trying to play political influence on TV, may lead to separation among people and conflict escalation: “The self-positioning of some mass media figures as information demiurges or freedom of speech apostles does not really lead to the pluralism of various points of view in society but may be conducive to the evident dichotomic polarization of opinions drawn tensely into a contentious public discussion between people facing each other across the political ring. One is forced to determine one’s civil stance based on the notorious formula ‘if you’re not with us, you’re against us’” (Ilchenko, 2006).

In its gravest manifestations intolerance is actualized in information wars. Here confrontation is based on casting in disinformation and compromising material, manipulating public opinion, and presenting information in a manner that is profitable to the attacking side (Silkov, 2003). Information wars can be waged not only when two opposing sides are in a state of war but also when the states

are enjoying good foreign relations between each other. Also, information wars can be local – represented by the confrontation of ideologies, political parties and candidates, and worldview mindsets inside the country. This kind of confrontation may involve techniques that are based on intolerance in the area of public political interaction but also those predicated on the conscious violation of ethics of conduct. Such actions allowed by journalists cannot but draw criticism, as there is an exacerbation of a negative trend – the opponents being focused on destroying each other both in word and in action. Thus, mass media are increasingly characterized by “irreconcilable stances, categorical judgments, subjectivism in interpreting facts and events, and other manifestations, which not only do not facilitate fostering social tolerance, but may also help create an aggressive information environment that influences millions of people. The prevalence of such information may have an uncomfortable impact on their state of mind and result in distorted notions of reality” (Strovskii, 2003). However, there arises the question: Does aggressiveness that arises in an intolerant exchange of opinions facilitate the inviolability of the convictions of participants in political communication themselves? L.N. Sinelnikova has suggested that “political tolerance as tolerance toward the views of other people may be testimony to being confident about oneself and one’s views” (Sinelnikova, 2010). Thus, as an attribute of political communication, intolerance is a temporary and unreliable tool used by opponents to pressurize one another, when, of course, those taking part in the communication process are not in a state of open warfare with one another, interstate or intrastate.

### **Political intolerance on TV and on the radio**

The most accessible channels for the use of the various techniques of political intolerance are audiovisual mass media. The TV screen has an integrated effect on the viewers’ subconscious: it keeps their attention focused through the dynamicity of the picture in an audiovisual show, its special effects, tempo, and rhythm. Radio broadcasting remains one of the most efficient types of mass media, as it lets the audience listen to the radio without disrupting their daily routine and can be a powerful means of influencing their consciousness.

In the largest measure, tolerance in communication is crucial to public debate in discussion TV and radio shows and talk shows. The attempt to seek a social consensus normally shapes the aims of discussion aimed at realizing the principle of tolerant interaction between the various segments of society. In this regard, promoting nonstereotyped thinking, restricting hate speech, providing each side in the discussion with equal opportunity to have their say, and preventing calls to extremism are among the major components of preparing and airing this kind of shows.

In practice, discussion show presenters are expected to remind the participants of the need not to allow the discussion to transgress the limits of ethical notions. It, however, happens that journalists themselves use elements of hate speech during such shows. Unfortunately, this kind of behavior may grow threateningly in scale and be interpreted as an unprofessional attempt to employ the infotainment method governed by the objective of getting high ratings for the show.

The lack of tolerance in TV and radio communication is exemplified when the presenter journalist precludes an out-of-favor discussion participant from speaking out, disparages a participant who is not present at the show, and deliberately invites an unequal number of participants so as to create numerical superiority in the direction that suits those in charge of the discussion. Extreme manifestations of intolerance on the part of journalists include provoking other participants or personally resorting to physical abuse during the show. Typical political-psychological effects in such shows are exacerbating the problem, giving rise to an atmosphere of social hysteria, sticking a tag on out-of-favor public and political figures, knowingly rejecting reasonable and rational views and opinions, disorganizing the audience's attention toward them, consciously deriding them, and switching over to other, normally false, priorities in public discussions.

This trend poses a threat not only to professional journalist activity. Such programming practices may be perceived by the audience as templates for engaging in political discussion in a destructive, and even asocial, manner, with its social significance and creative goal getting invalidated. "Journalism and mass media form the political media culture of communication space participants and social and political players, as well as they show the patterns of political behavior to the audience, and it all is due to their work and participation of public opinion leaders, political and economic elite's representatives, civil society in their work" (Klyuev, 2016).

Tolerance as a quality of discussion shows is not limited to just the verbal conduct of discussion participants but has many more aspects to it. It may be realized on two different levels. First of all, it is the structural level, *i.e.* the way the show is organized (correctly establishing the topic of the discussion, deciding on the choice of guests, and establishing upfront the extent of audience engagement in the upcoming discussion). Second of all, it is the content level (establishing the extent to which the topic is to be brought to light, the degree of equality or inequality in terms of the amount of time and opportunity the show's participants are provided with, the ethics of verbal communication among debate participants and members of the audience, and whether or not speech aggression techniques will be employed). Being tolerant in political dialogue means being able to properly explain and defend your point of view and convince others using relevant facts, arguments, generalizations, and conclusions.

**Political intolerance techniques and discourse**

A major role in political communication is played not only by analytics but publicistic creativity as well. When an author presents a stance he is trying to defend, opinion journalism provides a greater degree of dynamics and freedom than the broadest pluralism, but within the frame of an analytical program. Other viewpoints by the opinion journalist are normally always taken into consideration but are moved beyond the boundaries of the author's political position that is going to be publicly presented to the audience, his goal being conveying to the audience his own, personified, understanding of the issue and designing his speech in such a way as to have it align with his worldview mindsets specifically.

Professional opinion journalists, including the authors of audiovisual works (documentary films, think-pieces, etc.) do not allow, or allow to a limited degree, going beyond the limits of a tolerant attitude toward the opponent. For instance, it is not recommended that you invade the person's privacy, commingling it with the political side of activity, offend the person's honor and dignity, or slander and insult him – based on legal and moral grounds. Using libelous and offensive information is formally punishable by the law.

However, there are numerous tricks one may employ to duck responsibility. In disseminating defamatory information, mass media can act indirectly by making reference to the circumstance that footage of a political figure's private life appeared on the Internet and journalists just wanted to tell the audience broadly about it or use veiled language (Aesopian language) in pointing out that there are certain people appearing in the footage. Defamation comes not only in the form of statements by journalists but the titles of opinion journalism works as well. Intolerance in communication can also be realized through the editing of an audiovisual work. An imbalance between the amount of text and that of video content may serve as an additional means of influencing the audience, urging it to form a certain judgement and draw certain conclusions that may be out of line with what really is the case in actuality.

Intolerance in political journalism can have internal and external forms. In early 2016, the BBC aired a documentary called 'Putin's Secret Riches', which told the world about his billions worth of wealth and the poverty of the rest of the Russian people. From the professional perspective, the film has been executed in quite a plain, if not primitive, fashion and it does not provide any real evidence as to the Russian president having compiled vast, ill-gotten riches. This is an absurdly simple information-war-style intolerance technique intended to trigger, by getting them psychologically worked up, a fast reaction from regular Russian viewers (there is a quality Russian dub used in the film). The film features dubious statements by experts and entrepreneurs engaged for the purpose. Thus, for instance, Sergey Kolesnikov tells the viewers that influential Russian businessmen call Putin, for



conspiratorial purposes, 'Mikhail Ivanovich'. Kolesnikov's statement is followed by an audio-recording in which co-owner of the Rossiya bank Nikolay Shamalov speaks about the funds of a Mikhail Ivanovich.

It is impossible to verify the credibility of information mentioned in the film. The style and rhetoric of the "investigation" are in the tradition of a world-class broadcaster, designed to gain the unquestionable trust of the audience. In Russia, government experts and mass media described the film as a political provocation aimed at triggering possible restrictions of the activity of BBC journalists on Russian soil by getting the Russian authorities to take this kind of measures so that these actions could receive wide publicity and be characterized as unlawful.

Domestically, manifestations of intolerance, including on behalf of opposition journalists, activists, and bloggers, take place regardless of political cycles. The spikes in the external manifestations of intolerance are due to the exacerbation of information war and are taking place amid escalating global tensions and global and national political crises or shortly before the elections, when through provocation an attempt is made to test the public opinion for a possible reaction. Internal and external intolerance is ensured by special information actions both inside and outside the state, the objective behind them being bringing pressure to bear on the government to test its fail-safety and the country's protest potential. Provocative intolerance is employed in information-psychological wars in order to trigger an erroneous reaction from the side attacked, one that is not adequate to the actual circumstances.

## DISCUSSION

Tolerance is currently defined differently in different sciences. Here are some of the definitions dealing with social life specifically. In philosophy, tolerance is construed as "a quality that characterizes an attitude toward another person as an equal and is expressed in consciously suppressing the feeling of antagonism caused by everything that is different with the other person (appearance, verbal manners, tastes, lifestyle, beliefs, etc.). Tolerance implies a willingness to come to an understanding and engage in dialogue with another person, while acknowledging and having regard for that person's right to be different" (Valitova, 2001). In sociology, the concept of tolerance incorporates the following characteristics: being tolerant of other people's lifestyle, behavior, customs, feelings, opinions, ideas, and beliefs; being hardy in the face of adverse emotional factors; not reacting or reacting progressively less to some adverse factor as a result of a decline in being sensitive to its impact (Baltsevich & Baltsevich, 2003). In political science, "a tolerant political culture means a respectful attitude toward any political manifestations that do not contravene existing legislation. Tolerance in politics may be considered a result of resolving multiple social tensions on common social grounds and based on the development of democracy in the form of a rule-of-law state" (Korotets, 2001).

D.P. Gavra and E.V. Rodionova have noted that “political tolerance means being prepared to let a political opponent openly voice his views and compete for power and influence. This concept is not synonymous with all-permissiveness – on the contrary, it, above all, is closely associated with being consciously prepared to allow equal rivalry between political opponents in accordance with rules established under the law. In countries where democracy has existed for centuries, political tolerance is one of the most crucial indicators of the democratization of society” (Gavra & Rodionova, 2003).

The insufficient development level of Russia’s political culture and democratic traditions has led a number of researchers to bring up the issue of the need to construe the state of tolerance within certain boundaries. G.M. Denisovskii and P.M. Kozyreva have suggested that promoting and employing the ideas of tolerance in Russian reality without having marked off relevant boundaries may cause an effect opposite from the expected one, as, apart from its theoretical significance, it has a vital direct practical significance in relation to the organization of interethnic and religious diversity and prevention of extremism (Denisovskii & Kozyreva, 2002). At the same time, other scholars, like S.B. Nikonov (Nikonov, 2013; Nikonov, Baichik, Zaprudina, Labush, & Smolyarova, 2015; Labush, Nikonov, Puiy, Georgieva, & Bekurov, 2015; Nikonov, Achkasova, Labush, Baichik, & Puiy, 2016) and N.S. Labush (Labush et al., 2015), have maintained that democratic cultures are just a cover that needs to be taken into consideration in implementing an information strategy.

When it comes to the social sciences and mass communications theory as applied to Russia, there remains the need to further bring to light the concepts ‘forbearance’ and ‘political correctness’. According to L.N. Sinel’nikova, these concepts correlate with the concept of “tolerance” through the ethical component, but, still, they are not fully equivalent to it (Sinel’nikova, 2010). In 1995, the UNESCO General Conference adopted the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, which defined both concepts (tolerance and forbearance) as equivalent. However, as has been pointed out by I.N. Blokhin, the Declaration does not contain a formulation that would construe tolerance as forbearance and features respect as its main characteristic, for which reason it appears that these concepts should not be equated (Blokhin, 2008). Scholar V.A. Sidorov, who considers the concept of ‘tolerance’ in the categories of what is acceptable and unacceptable, is convinced that “the discourse on tolerance should be focused not on the antonyms ‘forbearance – non-forbearance’ but on a totally different pair of measuring instruments, *e.g.* the ‘acceptable – non-acceptable” (Sidorov, 2003).

L.N. Sinelnikova has explored the linking meanings of the categories ‘political tolerance’ and ‘political correctness’ and ventured the assertion that the ethical component of the concept of political correctness is amorphous, and this, often

times, is artificial reconciliation of tensions (diplomatic politeness), but, if political correctness is intended to help preserve common morals during the process of communication, in that case it is functionally similar to tolerance (Sinelnikova, 2010). T.V. Romanova has formulated the differences between tolerance and political correctness in a more definite fashion: “Tolerance is the content, principle, and basis of a certain social regulator (tolerance presupposes there being an idea or views that ought to be followed), while political correctness is a (verbal) form of its manifestation and existence; political correctness may be considered one of the communicative characteristics of conflict-free verbal behavior, alongside politeness and tactfulness. Tolerance tells you WHAT to do but gives you no instructions on how to do it. Political correctness, on the contrary, is, above all, a “manual” on HOW to attain the realization of a particular idea in practice. It is the principle of tolerance that is the ideological basis of political correctness and politically correct language. Tolerance and political correctness may also be considered as linguo-culturological phenomenon and as social regulators. Intolerant and politically incorrect statements are always judgemental” (Romanova, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

The practice of the democratic development of mass media gives relevance to the significance of tolerant communication in ensuring an open public policy that is expressed, among other things, in journalist activity furthering the unimpeded and independent development of the major social and state institutions. An issue that has retained its relevance is the need to realize the social value of the process of facilitating the tolerant and politically correct expression of views and exchange of opinions and ensuring, through the instrumentality of mass media, many-sided political communication and consolidated social dialogue.

The principle of realizing political communication in its tolerant expression acquires a special significance in proprietary TV and radio programs of a discussional nature, since it is audiovisual channels that have the most substantial information-communication and political-psychological effect on the audience. Based on the specificity of reflection of political issues on TV and various forms of conveyance of journalist views, the audience is given daily knowledge on the latest political state of society and exposed to the transmission of patterns of behavior followed by political actors within the public space.

The study of the characteristics of tolerant communication in mass media has yet to be regarded as definitive and needs further theoretical and practical development, including at the international scholarly level. Further research may help broaden knowledge in the field and gain a deeper insight into the processes of synthesis

and reciprocal influence of the global and national characteristics of the category 'political tolerance'. Research in the field is currently gaining a special significance and value by reference to the social practices of the real development of present-day societies and common global democratic trends in the operation of mass media.

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