

**THE PUBLIC COMMUNICATION IN UZBEKISTAN  
IN THE CONDITIONS OF COVID-19**  
(On the example of public communication networks in the country)

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**Abstract** In terms of globalization, no event can match the flow of information on the subject of coronavirus. The most important topic for all mass media around the world (regardless of its form) is the problem of coronavirus.

The journalism, the press and the media in general are not immune to this trend. It is not surprising that state and non-state publications, serious and “yellow” press, social networks, sites, channels, etc., which are officially licensed as media, do not see a more important topic than human life and pandemic protection.

**Keywords:** public communication, social media, Facebook, pandemic, COVID-19, health care, quarantine.

First of all, it should be noted that the first half of 2020 saw the country’s print media face a deep crisis. During the spring quarantine period, which lasted about 3.5 months, the movement of editorial staff on the street (transportation), the crowd of editorial staff members in the same room (contact), as well as the printing and postal services, seriously undermined the stability of the printing of newspapers and magazines. Even so, some regular publications began to spread alarming messages as “The virus can spread through newspaper!” Determining whether this news is reputable or not is becoming one of the most serious and essential problems. After all, it is directly involved not only in Uzbekistan, but also in the world journalism, especially in the print media.

What is the main feature of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In my opinion, this is reflected in the growing need for information in all segments of the population! Audience research in journalism and mass communication is nothing new. But the audience of the pandemic period is absolutely unique, and it poses unprecedented challenges to our experts.

Uzbekistan does not have such a high level of participation and activity of citizens in matters related to the fate of society. But the problems of the pandemic period have intensified the passivity of the people in this regard more than ever. This activation is reflected in the fact that anyone can express their opinion as much as they want through social networks.

One might agree that S.V.Bondarenko, Doctor of Sociological Sciences, Director of the Center for Applied Research in Intellectual Property (Roston-Don) called such activism as “the area of e-democracy.”<sup>i</sup> Coronavirus has revitalized this “electronic field” in Uzbekistan so much that experts have a lot of work to do to systematize the observed changes, to clarify the underlying laws, to draw conclusions.

A little less than a quarter of a century ago, well-known Ukrainian expert, prof. GG Pocheptsov called this phenomenon of activation in social networks a “new communication space.”<sup>ii</sup> The terms “e-democracy space” and the “new communication space” reached their peak in Uzbekistan in the days of COVID-19.

Currently, there are many social networks and news sites in the country. Kun.uz, daryo.uz, gazeta.uz are relatively advanced in terms of popularity and regularity. Naturally, Facebook’s potential in terms of audience size is huge.

The uniqueness of Facebook is that, first of all, its pages are open to all, anyone can share information with them and react to the information disseminated. That is, the level of mass communication - high interactivity.

The quarantine announced in Uzbekistan currently consists of two parts: spring quarantine and summer quarantine. From the point of view of mass communication, the situation of these two quarantine periods differs sharply from each other. The first patient with coronavirus in the country was identified on March 15, 2020. It was an emergency message. However, there were no signs of disease among the population, and even if there were, it was unknown to many. Therefore, information about the coronavirus, measures to prevent it, especially the form and conditions of quarantine, seemed more interesting to social network participants. In particular, there is a growing debate about the need for everyone to stay at home with their families, to spend time with their families. Information about life in quarantine zones and the conditions created there were regularly disseminated. There has been an increase in public speeches about wearing a mask, wearing protective gloves, maintaining social distance in public places, a ban on shaking hands, and the culture and discipline of following these requirements. This flow of information can be considered as a kind of revival in the sense of mass communication, but the mass communication, which began in the second - summer quarantine days, can be compared to a real explosion in the field of information.

On July 13, 2020, in connection with the announced summer quarantine, a real information storm began on social networks. Almost all segments of the population have "moved" to social networks. Informing, posting information, expressing attitudes, criticizing has become sharp for almost all strata of the population, as well as, from the simplest citizen to the mayor's office, ministry officials, from the corps of deputies to doctors. Subjective position, passion, excitement, voice, rumors became the leitmotif of this activity. In other words, the process of crowding in the field of mass communication has intensified. "In reality," - Pocheptsov writes, "the crowd communicates through rumors. It's difficult to apply serious logic here."<sup>iii</sup>

Theoretically, we do not deny such an interpretation, but it is also impossible to turn a blind eye to the emotions and passions inherent in a living soul, when the issue concerns the health of people, the preservation of their lives. Furthermore, we have a duty to accept such a style of communication as natural for emergencies and to study it as analytically as possible.

"Electronic field" reports can be classified as follows:

- reports that the complications of the disease are becoming more serious (such as daily illness, death);
- reports on non-compliance with quarantine conditions;
- reports about recovery from the disease.

It should be noted that in the conditions of spring quarantine there was a high level of respect for doctors, while in the case of summer quarantine such attitude was quite the opposite. That is:

- negligence of doctors;
- lack of conditions in hospitals;
- shortage of medicines;
- lack of initial recommendations for initial treatment.

In short, the main part of the dialogue, which was the dissatisfaction of the population with the situation, and even the fact that the situation is becoming dangerous, shocked the participants.

Here are a few examples:

Muhabbat Pardaeva, Facebook, Public Relations Group (Xalq bilan muloqot):

- The Ministry of Health has brought the system to the brink of collapse! It was claimed that 64-32 million soums were spent on patients with coronavirus, but it did not stop the spread of the virus. However, those who are treated at home with this disease are cured for only 200,000 soums. The difference between the prices is high. In the system, "free medical care" is only on paper. In my opinion, the ministry should be completely abolished without wasting the state budget, and the task should be given to the private sector, which should be obliged to maintain benefits for the poor. Only then will those who have studied for their father's money and are truly talented be selected, and the quality of staff will change!

Dilafroz Yunusova Zoirova, Facebook, Public Relations Group:

- Assalamu alaykum. I would like my letter to be placed in a group. Currently, my family is infected with COVID-19 and we are being treated in the Cardiology Department of the 1st hospital. But unfortunately we have 1 doctor and 1 nurse working in the department, who were responsible for the entire 5th floor floor. When I asked why there were 2 of them, the answer was that most of the nurses and doctors refused to come to work. The reason is that they were told if they got the disease, they themselves would be responsible for that. Everyone's life is important for himself. But they don't have enough time. Many are sick and some are dying. So I would ask for us to be given doctors, nurses and paramedics. Of course, if they want to. So understand me correctly. My opinion is to tear up such an explanatory letters and increase their salaries. Compensation should be paid if they get an infection. (Because it's not easy for them to wear their protective clothing in 40 C° either) Only then will the system start.

As mentioned above, any comments posted to Facebook will immediately become a public discussion. The report has so far been approved by 120 citizens, with 56 commenting. Here are some of them:

Lola Rakhimova: - Shodmonov has resigned.

Shokir Umedov: - Our President has seen and learned, al will answer for that.

Yamin Samatov: - Decisions and decrees are well-written on paper. But in practice we can see the opposite. Who controls and responds.

Abbos Panjiev: - Let the President see these things

Azamat Islamov: - Everything is corrupt

Feruza Mirjalilova: - Yesterday the mayor came, but did not enter, if he did, he would see. They come to well-prepared places and report to their bosses that everything is OK.

Nigankhodja Rustamov: - The government has been thinking for several years. How to calculate the consumer basket (average) And I have my own opinion. It is necessary to take as a basis the price that is indicated in the report as how much was spent in one day in quarantine. They feed there. For a person to live normally with all medical norms! What is your opinion?

Zuhra Ismailova: - They can't comprehend such things. Don't hold your breath.

Bahodir Abdullayev: - Unfortunately, the collapse of the medical system is obvious. So many people are not able to take the test.

From the site Kun.uz:

The author of the films "Sehrli qalpoqcha", "Sarvqomat dilbarim", the director Sarvar Karimov wrote on his Twitter page that his father had to be treated at home after contracting coronavirus, he could not call an ambulance for a week, and his father died on July 17. This death was not recorded in the statistics of the Ministry of Health - the patient was not diagnosed with coronavirus infection. He said he and his family had contracted Covid-19 and were being treated at home.

"My father died of a coronavirus today. But no diagnosis was made. We were treated at home for a week. When we called 103, they said that they couldn't come if the patient had a fever. I understand them too; there is no medicine, no means of protection.

Do not trust official statistics. Take care of yourself and your loved ones!

Do not trust the state. All the officials say is a lie. You can't call the hotline numbers. It will send you another number even if you drop it. We didn't call an ambulance for a week to our dad. Eventually it passed into his lungs and he died. He was 63 years old. He was healthy 10 days ago.

The point of writing this is to say you to not to rely on government support. Do not go outside; be especially careful of elderly people! (18.07.2020)

Until now, such distrust of the situation, the most important and sensitive system such as health care, as well as the state, has not appeared in the open media, including social networks. Some posts even include the appearance of blatant insults. GP Bakulev, a scientist who has studied the theory of active audiences in the context of mass communication, draws attention to the fact that in the process of interaction, participants benefit from more rest and relaxation. In the context of a

pandemic, it is clear from the examples we have given that the problems of human life come to the fore, and there can be no question of rest and relaxation.<sup>iv</sup>

It should be noted that the authors of the network noted with gratitude the gravity of the situation, the willingness of health care workers to help the population, as a result of which many patients are recovering in a short time.

#### Conclusions:

- In the days of COVID-19 in Uzbekistan, social networks have become a real platform for mass and convenient communication;

- The fact that appeals to social networks were written with spelling and stylistic errors, most of them were written out of passion, and even insulting expressions, allowed to draw objective conclusions about the general situation in the country;

- Appeals to doctors in the spirit of gratitude were also posted on social networks;

- COVID-19 united a large part of the population in one goal, turned it into a force;

- The interactive nature of the social network has led to mass communication, i.e. the exchange of ideas;

- Social network participants had the opportunity to express their principled PERSONAL views;

- Most importantly, mass communication in the electronic field has become a demonstration of the seriousness of the force. This opinion is confirmed by the following instructions of the Prime Minister on the need to pay attention to appeals on social networks, not to leave them unanswered:

Nodirbek Jumaev, Public Relation:

The Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulla Aripov, has instructed all members of the government to take a “prompt” response to the complaints and appeals of citizens published on social networks, Telegram Messenger.

#### References

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<sup>2</sup> Pocheptsov G.G. Teoriya i praktika massovoy kommunikatsi. M.: SENTR. 1998. P.7.

<sup>3</sup> That source. P. 200.

<sup>4</sup> Bakulev G.P. Massovaya kommunikatsiya. M.: ASPEKT PRESS. 2010.P.70.