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Информационные привилегии  
политических элит в условиях  
развития социальных медиа

The information privileges of political  
elites in the conditions of social  
media development

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**Аннотация.** В статье представлены результаты исследования влияния социальных медиа на информационные привилегии политических элит. В разделе «Введение» автор обосновывает актуальность темы и проблемы своего исследования. По его мнению, она определяется стремительным развитием социальных медиа, которые стали инструментом различных политических акторов, использующих их для достижения различных целей. С развитием социальных медиа политические элиты сталкиваются с новыми трудностями в реализации информационных привилегий, но при этом получают новые возможности для информационного доминирования. Исследование информационных привилегий политических элит еще больше актуализируется в условиях информационной войны. В разделе «Материалы и методы исследований» автор дает характеристику эмпирической и методологической баз своего исследования. В первую он включают отчеты и доклады различных исследовательских организаций, нормативно-правовые акты и пр. Во вторую – классическую теорию элит, современную теорию политической коммуникации и современную теорию медиатизации политики. В «Обзор литературы» автор систематизирует публикации, имеющие отношение к теме и проблеме их исследования. Он выделяет три группы работ: 1) работы, в которых рассматривается взаимодействие элит со СМК, их коммуникационная активность и стратегии освоения информационного пространства; 2) работы, авторы которых анализируют влияние социальных медиа на политический процесс; 3) работы, в которых социальные медиа соотносятся с такой важной политологической категорией, как политический режим. В разделе «Результаты исследований и их обсуждение» автор формулирует определение информационных привилегий, понимая под ними приоритетный доступ к медиaprостранству, предоставляющий существенные возможности в области информационного доминирования. Он утверждает, что, во-первых, социальные медиа выступают фактором, препятствующим реализации политическими элитами информационных привилегий, т.к. подразумевают практики, противоречащие элитарным моделям управления обществом, а во-вторых, что с целью реализации информационных привилегий и сохранения своего социально-политического статуса в целом политическими элитами в настоящее время применяется две «реактивные» и одна «проактивная» стратегии. Автор подчеркивает, что в условиях политических кризисов посредством социальных медиа оппозиция пытается устранить коммуникационную монополию политических элит. Автор также указывает, что в мире «постправды» политические элиты получают новые возможности реализации своих информационных привилегий. Однако «постправда», циркулирующая в пространстве социальных медиа, также детерминирует формирование оппозиционных центров

информационного притяжения. Используя новейшие данные, он приходит к выводу, что гибридная война, развязанная против России, предполагает привлечение существующих и формирование новых враждебных центров информационного притяжения, ключевая задача которых состоит именно в подрыве информационного доминирования российской элиты, а за ним и в создании и управлении внутригосударственными кризисами, в дестабилизации политического режима в стране. В разделе «Заключение» автор подводит итоги своего исследования, кратко перечисляя полученные результаты.

**Ключевые слова:** политическая элита, политические коммуникации, социальные медиа, постправда, сетевая мобилизация

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**Abstract.** The article presents the results of a study of the influence of social media on the information privileges of political elites. In the “Introduction” section, the author substantiates the relevance of the topic and problem of his research. In his opinion, it is determined by the rapid development of social media, which have become a tool of various political actors who use them to achieve various goals. With the development of social media, political elites face new difficulties in exercising information privileges, but at the same time receive new opportunities for information dominance. The study of the information privileges of political elites is becoming even more relevant in the context of an information war. In the section “Materials and research methods” the author characterizes the empirical and methodological bases of his research. The first includes reports and reports from various research organizations, regulations, etc. The second includes the classical theory of elites, the modern theory of political communication and the modern theory of mediatization of politics. In the “Literature Review,” the author systematizes publications related to the topic and problem of their research. He identifies three groups of works: 1) works that examine the interaction of elites with the mass media, their communication activity and strategies for mastering the information space; 2) works whose authors analyze the influence of social media on the political process; 3) works in which social media are correlated with such an important political science category as the political regime. In the “Research results and their discussion” section, the author formulates a definition of information privileges, understanding them as priority access to the media space, which provides significant opportunities in the field of information dominance. He argues that, firstly, social media acts as a factor preventing political elites from exercising information privileges, because imply practices that contradict elite models of managing society, and secondly, that in order to realize information privileges and maintain their socio-political status in general, political elites are currently using two “reactive” and one “proactive” strategies. The author emphasizes that in conditions of political crises, through social media, the opposition is trying to eliminate the communication monopoly of political elites. The authors also point out that in the “post-truth” world, political elites receive new opportunities to exercise their information privileges. However, “post-truth” circulating in the space of social media also determines the formation of opposition centers of information gravity. Using the latest data, he comes to the conclusion that the hybrid war unleashed against Russia involves the involvement of existing and the formation of new hostile centers of information gravity, the key task of which is precisely to undermine the information dominance of the Russian elite, and then to create and manage internal crises, in destabilizing the political regime in the country. In the “Conclusion” section, the author summarizes his research, briefly listing the results obtained.

**Keywords:** political elite, political communications, social media, post-truth, network mobilization

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**Introduction.** With the development of social media, political elites face new challenges in exercising information privileges, as new resources have provided the wider population with opportunities to wage large-scale campaigns to delegitimize various players in the political playing field, as well as to effectively inform direct collective action. Previously, only political elites had such opportunities. Recently, the number of accounts focused on creating and

supporting negative images of individual members of the political elite has sharply increased. Many collective actions that threaten to destabilize the regime are organized, coordinated and prolonged using social media, giving researchers the right to talk about “twitter revolutions”. Based on this, a comprehensive study of the threats to the information privileges of political elites associated with the development of social media is required.

At the same time, social media have provided political elites with new opportunities to exercise information privileges. To date, social media has turned out to be a space where individual members of political elites are trying to form an image of the political world that is significantly different from reality, but beneficial in terms of realizing information privileges and receiving political dividends. Previously, before the spread of social media, traditional mass media, which had their limitations in this regard, were used to implement “post-truth” policies and develop populist agendas. Considering the instrumentalization of social media by political elites, it becomes necessary to have a political scientific understanding of all the methods and methods used for this.

With the intensification of the information war against Russia, with the growing number of unfriendly and sometimes downright aggressive actions on the part of foreign information resources, the Russian leadership is faced with the need to tighten control over the social media space. Against the backdrop of ongoing changes, it seems timely to study both the importance of implementing information privileges and ways to simplify control over the social media space, where attempts to destabilize the political situation in the country continue.

**Materials and research methods.** The empirical base of the study consists of reports and reports from various research organizations, regulations, materials of leading Russian and foreign QMS, comments and speeches of Russian and foreign political leaders and officials, as well as official documents.

The author’s understanding of the political elite follows from the provisions of classical elitism (G. Mosca, R. Michels, V. Pareto, C.R. Mills, D.W. Domhoff [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]), implying the inevitability of the existence of elites in modern societies. Considering the theoretical aspects of the problem of information privileges of political elites, as well as their relationship with social media, we relied on the provisions of the modern theory of political communication, in particular the work of G. Wolfsfeld [6], emphasizing that political power inevitably transforms into power over the mass media, and leaders. If they lose control over the political environment, they inevitably lose control over the content of news stories. The work used the theory of mediatization of politics, developed, for example, by J. Stromback and F. Esser [7], which made it possible to show changes in the attitude of elites towards social media.

**Literature review.** Existing publications, one way or another related to the topic of our research, can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of works that examine the interaction of elites with the mass media, their communication activity and strategies for mastering the information space. Among these, for example, are the works of S.V. Anufrienko, A.K. Botasheva [8]; S. Valgrave, A. Zoizner, J. Sevenans, G. Tesena, P. Elst [9, 10, 11, 12].

The second group can include works whose authors analyze the influence of social media on the political process. Among the Russian researchers who addressed relevant issues and topics, one can name E.V. Efanov, D.D. Klyuchnikova, V.A. Kuzmina, T.L. Shestov [13, 14, 15], among foreign ones - M. Burnidge, A. Velazquez, G. Zuniga, E. Rojas, R. Tromble [16, 17, 18, 19].

The third group includes works in which social media are correlated with such an important political science category as the political regime. The correlation between the spread of social media and the characteristics of the political regime is discussed in the publications of domestic researchers A.I. Bardakova, N.I. Krivosheeva, Ya.V. Samarin [20, 21], as well as foreign ones - S. Bradshaw, F. Howard, O. Kodily-Tediki, Ch. Kumara, N. Persili, D. Tucker [22, 23, 24]. In the works of S.D. Gavrilova, A.A. Malkevich, S.I. Morozova, K.A. Novikova, S.A. Pankratova, V.Sh. Surguladze [25, 26, 27, 28]; Y. Benrazek, S. Bulliann, S. Valenzuela, T. Poel [29, 30, 31, 32] explore the destabilizing influence of social media on the political regime.

**Research results and their discussion.** Political elites have a number of privileges, among which information privileges stand out. The analysis carried out allows us to conclude that information privileges should be understood as priority access to the media space, which provides significant opportunities in the field of information dominance. Political elites use the media not only as a source of disseminating information regarding social problems, public opinion and political opponents, but also as a means of influencing the masses, whose support is extremely important for maintaining positions of power. Persons with a lower institutional status cannot count on the instrumental use of the media space, being content only with information consumption. As a result, of such information inequality, political elites secure a dominant presence in the media space, which gives them a great advantage in the struggle for political power.

Social media is a factor that creates new obstacles in the implementation of information privileges by political elites, because imply practices that contradict elitist models of managing society. Social media creates additional opportunities, firstly, for the expression of political opinions, secondly, increasing the level of political education and, thirdly, actual political participation in political life, including opposition actors. Each of these processes changes the rules of the game in the information space: new actors, new topics of political discussions, as well as new formats for the articulation of interests and civic activity, which together pose a threat to the information dominance of political elites, appear.

In order to realize information privileges and maintain their socio-political status in general, political elites are currently using two “reactive” and one “proactive” strategies. “Reactive” ones include: the strategy of deactivating social media and the strategy of censoring individual posts. “Proactive” refers to the strategy of elites co-opting the capabilities of social media, which involves using these resources to implement and protect their own political interests. “Reactive” strategies are a response to information activity that threatens the legitimacy of elites and the stability of the political regime, while a “proactive” strategy is the actual information activity of the political elite, aimed at increasing the level of its legitimacy and regime stability.

In conditions of political crises, counter-elites and opposition groups eliminate the communication monopoly of political elites through social media. In order to achieve this result, opposition forces resort to the tactics of “network” mobilization of protest participation, which refers to activities related to preparation for protests using social media. Such mobilization includes three components: cognitive, distributive and applied. It involves the active use by opposition forces of a certain part of the media space, namely the space of social media. As a result of these actions, the ability of political elites to hide politically “sensitive” facts, control the circle of potential protest participants and the organizational efforts of opposition leaders and coordinators is limited.

In modern conditions, social media is the main platform for the circulation of “post-truth” - information about the world of politics, separated from the factual base and thereby preventing the public from adequately responding to political events. “Post-truth,” which misleads the public and continues to exist even after repeated denials, provides political elites with an additional opportunity to exercise information privileges. At the same time, “post-truth” circulating in the space of social media determines the formation of opposition centers of information gravity, used by various representatives of the counter-elite and threatening the information dominance of the political elite.

In the context of the recent aggravation of the information war against Russia, the importance of the Russian elite exercising information privileges has increased significantly. This is explained by the fact that a hybrid war, including the information component, unleashed against Russia involves the attraction of existing and the formation of new hostile centers of information gravity, the key task of which is precisely to undermine the information dominance of the Russian political elite, and then to create and manage internal crises, in destabilizing the political regime in the country. In these conditions, it is necessary to completely consolidate the

information space of Russia, including social media, in order to organize and conduct effective counter-information activities. This legitimizes the improvement and widespread use of the entire range of strategies for implementing information privileges in the social media space: deactivation of resources, censorship of posts and co-optation of social media capabilities.

**Conclusion.** The study did the following:

- the author's concept of "information privileges of political elites" has been developed, covering many aspects of the mutual influence of the political and media spaces, and the possibility of its use to analyze the potential of the latest information and communication technologies in political life has been justified;
- it has been established that social media is a factor that creates new difficulties in the exercise of information privileges by political elites, since they open up new opportunities for expressing political opinions, increasing the level of political education and the actual participation in the political life of various actors, including those of the opposition, that collectively undermines the information superiority of political elites;
- three main strategies are identified for the implementation by political elites of information privileges when interacting with social media: blocking (deactivation) of social media, censorship of individual posts and co-optation of the opportunities provided by social media;
- it is substantiated that social media are an effective tool for destabilizing political life in conditions of political crises, giving rise to the phenomenon of "network" mobilization of protest participation, which, in turn, allows opposition forces to partially overcome the information superiority of political elites;
- it was found that "post-truth" circulating in the space of social media is dualistic in nature: on the one hand, it is used by political elites to realize information privileges, and on the other hand, it creates oppositional centers of information attraction for various representatives of the counter-elite;
- the importance of the Russian elite realizing their information privileges in the context of a large-scale information war against Russia has been proven, since many hostile efforts are aimed precisely at discrediting the country's leadership with the aim of subsequently destabilizing the entire Russian socio-political space.

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