The State order of the Government of Kazakhstan as a tool for shaping the agenda in the information market (case of documentaries)

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Abstract. The article examines the government's attempts to set the agenda in the information market through the state information order. Documentaries have been selected as media that enjoy high audience confidence. The main idea of the study is to determine what kind of agenda the government sets for the information market in the case of documentaries. The state information order allows the government to be a moderator in the market. Qualitative content analysis as a research method allows us to identify key points of agenda formation that the government uses to represent stakeholders such as citizens and the government itself. A total of 32 documentaries produced by government organizations, state-owned TV channels and state-affiliated media companies were examined. The analysis revealed recurring language patterns in documentaries. The results show that the government's agenda is formulated simply and one-sidedly, which partially led to an ambiguous perception of the audience. The scientific value of the work is expressed in determining the strategy of behavior of the state apparatus as a moderator in the information market. The article provides a basis for further qualitative and quantitative research to determine the effectiveness of this strategy for determining the agenda in the information market.

Keywords: informational security, agenda setting, framing, cherry picking, kazakh government, informational policy.

Introduction

Information security of the country along with technological aspects also includes protection from various destructive and manipulative information flows. Some facts, such as the level of prosperity, growth of GDP and population are mostly undeniable. Nevertheless, the perspective we see facts and lenses we use could dramatically change our perception. Different groups of people see different aspects of the same things and that is the natural way of our life. However, governments in several countries and big tech companies are trying to set the agenda in some sensitive and important areas. First attempts after the 2016 Presidential election in the United States of America to promote conventional agenda through social networks were significantly boosted during the pandemic of COVID-19 in 2020-2021[1].

The USA and Germany as well as other influential countries cooperate with online-platform owners directly to set the agenda in areas important to them. Less influential countries could not operate at this level and have to play by the rules of Meta, Google, ByteDance, etc. It places countries like Kazakhstan on equal level with other players on the information battlefield. A blogger with 200 subscribers has identical rights with the Government of Kazakhstan on Instagram. This paper's main objective is to research how countries promote their inner agenda in this framework.

Object of research is documentaries published by Government-affiliated media companies on social networks and the subject is their attempts to set the agenda on certain topics. Documentaries are an important part of shaping the agenda, gaining a priori advantage in the form of higher people's trust. Agenda is formed by thousands of stakeholders, including external and internal. Although millions of users consume and generate content and public opinion day by day, there are several stakeholders intentionally promoting an agenda uncomfortable at least and embarrassing at most for the Kazakh government [2].

External stakeholders like other countries, non-governmental organizations (NGO), business companies in pursuit of their own profit usually try to manipulate information in an attempt to create a more positive image of themselves. As for documentaries, the documentary series "Reverse Empire" made by russian state company can serve as an excellent example of these attempts. In the episode about Kazakhstan, the authors tell a story about the positive impact of Kazakhstani membership in the Soviet Union. Industrialisation, 100% literacy of population, uplift of virgin and fallow lands, new cities and factories are their reliable arguments to prove the point. However, thousands killed people during repressions, literally millions of dead kazakh people because of artificial hunger created by the Soviet government, radical pressure on Kazakh language and culture and dozens of other horrible facts are not even mentioned in this "Documentary". This cherry picking is part of a complex plan, an intentional effort to retain Kazakhstan in a zone of Russian influence [3].

More radical groups, such as terrorist and extremist organizations use less ethical methods, like establishing a web of false information and setting an agenda of hate, violence and lies. Internal stakeholders could use these methods as well, so the Kazakh government should guard society from these threads, but remain open and free space for other information. By protection, we do not mean complete isolation from sources of information other than those controlled by

the state, but the correct explanation of the news and assistance to citizens in understanding the news as needed by the government.

In other words, the government should not block bad news, but correctly set the agenda by emphasizing actual causes and context of events and incidents. This paper's main goal is to research attempts by the Kazakhstan government to set the agenda in case of January 2022 protests. During the year after the incident, several state-controlled media companies published documentary films on online platforms. We studied 32 documentaries published on YouTube.

Documentary films were chosen due to their perception by regular audiences as a more truthful and fact checked source of information. However, we found that agenda setting and framing are very important parts of these films. Literature review indicates lack of research in the area of online published documentaries as tools of agenda setting.

Literature review

Agenda setting theory is a concept in communication about how media impacts on people's minds. It does not mean that people just accept ideas and points provided by the media, nevertheless the media could emphasize some issues as more important while others could be barely mentioned. Accordingly, the audience thinks about one thing much more than about the other. It is called issue salience [4]. In the ancient era of television and radio setting the agenda had much more clear results and simple structure, especially in a totalitarian state, such as the Soviet Union. Even after more than 30 years former citizens of the collapsed country remember things emphasized by soviet TV and newspapers. Whole system of mass media of the USSR was designated to declare the achievements of communism. Honoring the fair job of workers in agriculture, but not a word about how unprofitable agriculture in the USSR is. Emphasizing efforts to make life in the countryside better without the mention of the fact that the villagers could not freely move to the city [5]. Nowadays the Internet and social networks make agenda setting a much more intricate task. People are divided by hundreds of echo chambers created by algorithms. State should set one general agenda, but each group of people (or at least each important group of people) needs its own agenda set for that group of people. Clear example of this situation is the referendum about building a nuclear power plant in Kazakhstan. For people who worries about ecology, promoting focused on clear energy without burning coal or oil. For patriotic people attention is set to energetic independence. General agenda is about how safe this technology became since Chornobyl and Fukushima catastrophes.

Further development of the agenda setting theory adds a second level to issue salience, named attribute salience. While on a first level media just select issues and problems to cover, on second level we study what aspects of issues are highlighted and what framing is used [6]. Second-level agenda setting is even more connected to the object of the research. Obviously, it is hard to find any positive sides in civil unrest which the government officially called "January tragedy" or people called "Bloody January" [7]. Therefore, we decided to use it as the main theoretical framework and research the attempt of the Kazakhstan government to spotlight details beneficial to the official version of the incident.

Documentary films have more credibility in the eyes of the audience, due to providing some facts, expert opinions, and real people's evidence. Reputation and name itself make viewers expect that stories told in documentaries are true and unbiased. However, according to a fully unbiased and objectively true documentary is impossible, no matter how hard the authors will try. Nichols [8] argues that "Were documentary a reproduction of reality, these problems would be far less acute. We would then simply have a replica or copy of something that already existed. But a documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a representation of the world we already occupy. It stands for a particular view of the world; one we may never have encountered before even if the aspects of the world that is represented are familiar to us."

Nevertheless, documentary films are perceived as opposite to fictional films and that helps to gain trust from the audience. Base of documentaries usually are real-live photo and video, testimonies of eyewitnesses. Scripted scenes are used only to reconstruct events based on documents and other evidence [9].

Viewers also suggest that the ethical responsibility is on authors. Creators must be very careful about the impact that their documentary film could make on people in the film and on the audience.

Even just video recording without comments and giving context will be slightly biased. In our case, documentaries created by state-controlled media have a higher chance of engaging point of view. According to Syzdykbekova [10] independent by law but de facto financially funded by the government, traditional media in Kazakhstan has often biased coverage of news.

The system of governmental support of old media (TV, newspaper, radio) in Kazakhstan has some unique features. While in the democratic countries state policy helps the entire industry, Kazakhstan state policy aims to help certain media. State information order as it is called in the republic combines two policies: support of the traditional media and informing the public about state policies. In other words, the government selects some media and funds them, but in exchange these media have to publish materials about what governments do to make citizens' lives better. This policy led to the death of the majority of medium and small independent media without any aid from the government. Others made financial aid from the state their main source of income, hence dependent on the government. Only a very thin share of the media market remains truly financially independent. Another downside of this policy is the disappearance of any motivation among state funded media. Only what matters is the technical details (length in minutes, keywords, number of words). No matter how good or bad is written or recorded, the government does not care. So the media does not care as well.

Syzdykbekova [9] quotes the words of the interviewee: "The government wants to explain to us, that is, to the people, what it does, what is being done in the country and for what. In principle, this desire is correct and understandable. Only instead of a competent and accessible explanation of politics and the situation, we have so far obtained a large-scale embellishment of reality, PR of the authorities for big budget money. As a result, people have no interest in propaganda, children's programs and publications, as they do not reflect our real life and do not help solve the problems of the audience, and the goal remains unachieved". Besides the state information order, we should mention that the two biggest media corporations, Khabar and Qazaqstan, are directly state owned.

Therefore, this kind of relation between the government and media gives us enough confidence to declare that documentaries made by TV channels are an extension of governmental position about civil unrest of January 2022. Along with that, we can additionally evaluate the quality of their work and how effectively they do the job.

Second level agenda setting is closely related with framing theory in media and communication. Rooted to sociology and psychology, framing theory assumes that audience perception of some issues could be formed by characterization of those issues in media (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). It does not mean spreading fake news about anything, but putting weight on only some dimensions of the issues. A great example of this is the division of the media in the United States onto Republican (conservative) and Democratic (liberal). If MSNBC will talk about tax cuts, the main theme will be how it makes rich people wealthier and impoverished people poorer. On the other hand Fox news will celebrate it as new benefits for the free market and business. Both points of view have solid scientific and practical foundations, just different outcomes of certain policies.

Scheufele1 & Tewksbury [6] researched priming as the third concept of forming audience opinion about political issues. According to Iyengar & Kinder [11] priming "changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations". However all of these theories boil down to one idea - choice of words in media coverage is essential.

Post-truth age, where one-to-many traditional media is overwhelmed by social networks and other online platforms, transforms each media consumer into content creator and retranslator of certain worldviews. So now governments should deal not with hundreds of newspapers, radio and TV channels, but with millions of users, bloggers, influencers and so on. Therefore, the Kazakhstan government will use their traditional way of dealing with media and indirectly controlled traditional media creating a lot of content and publishing it online. Mostly this content has comparatively poor statistics of views, but due to high importance and relevance to the audience, content about the unrest is quite popular.

Methodology

To conduct this study we researched documentary films, created by government agencies, state-controlled organizations, directly and indirectly controlled media outlets. Altogether 32 films and series were analyzed, published on YouTube video hosting. Searches were conducted based on keywords "documentary film", "January 2022" "unrest" in both Kazakh and Russian languages.

The research method is qualitative content analysis. All documentaries were transcribed into text files, then the text were analyzed in nvivo software version 15. All findings is about only verbal part of the films, with only a brief analysis of video language used in the documentaries where it connected to verbal framing or attribute setting.

The main research questions is "What are the key points of agenda setting in case of the unrest?"

Findings

During content analysis, we found next key points of the government's agenda setting:

1. Putting responsibility on "external" and criminal groups for violent part of protests.

This point is divided for two parts:

a) There were some external and internal forces that planned to take power in Kazakhstan or at least weaken the current regime. They manipulated protesters to attack police and government officials.

The most common word in researched films is "provocateurs" – 163 times. "planned", "pre-planned", "according to plan" and other "plan"-related words' count as 187. "Coordinators" were mentioned 46 times. The word "terrorists" has been said 155 times. Afghanistan and Syria were pointed as possible sources of reinforcements, however nobody pronounced the names of terrorist organizations. "External forces" have been spoken 26 times, once again without announcing any names. Unknown terrorists, unknown external forces, unknown as the word itself appears 66 times and always in a negative way. In this context "coup" were used 58 times, "revolt" – 122 times.

"Peaceful rallies lead to unrest. It was revealed that this was planned to be done on January 4 (by an unknown enemy). At the same time, thousands of people gathered in several cities in the central squares. Among them were unknown people. They carried out their tasks (provocations) without being noticed or revealed.|" These words were followed by the video of protesters, chanting the national motto "Alga Qazaqstan!" (analogy to "U-S-A!").

Internal forces also do not have clear shapes, however we are provided by one name - Karim Masimov, former head of the National Security Committee. "Revolt" was spoken 126 times. We counted the word "treason" 50 times and most of the time it was related to nameless government officials. "Conspirators" is also a popular word in the researched documentaries – 43 times.

b) Many criminals used the protests and riots as a cover for robbing shopping malls and internal strife.

Another part of the agenda is highlighting criminal activity during unrest. 105 times authors of documentaries used words "robbed", "robbery" and "robbers". Even 2 episodes in 2 different documentary series called "Looters" (88 times). "Thugs" – 72 times, "criminals" – 58 times, "gangs" – 94 times, "armed groups" – 61 times," bandits" – 85 times. In comparison with "peaceful marcher" – 114 times and "protester" – 78 times, we can clearly see what was in the focus of the authors.

"When the turmoil took over Almaty and other cities, marauders started to rob around. These destroyed once beautiful city and citizens property they have been earning all their lives"

2. Portraying unrest as a tragic or at least neutral event.

Analysis showed several patterns in creating plots of documentaries. Prologues in all researched documentaries portray the event as a great tragedy for the people of Kazakhstan. The most used adjectives in pairs with January are "tragic" - 40 times, "grief" - 49 times, "bloody" - 30 times, "mourning" - 15 times. Moreover, "bloodshed" was used 17 times. Neutral term "event" was spoken 29 times. It puts the veil of negative image on the whole event, peaceful rallies and followed riots altogether. "Never again" pops up 34 times and also covers both peaceful and violent parts.

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ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА СЕРИЯСЫ
ISSN: 2616-7174. eISSN: 2663-2500

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Even names of the documentaries are good examples of this point: six called "January grief", eight called "January tragedy", five called "Mourning of January", anthers called "January's turmoil" and even "January carnage".

3. Emphasizing violence and law violation during unrest.

Despite clear declaration of a peaceful beginning, every researched documentary put equal weight on the negative sides of unrest. Equally, with "peaceful marcher" (114 times), "protester" (78 times) authors use as well "militants" (60 times), "hooligans" (45 times) and rabble (53 times).

Bright example of framing is found in Documentary film from Qazaqstan TV channel: "It is known that the militants captured three ambulance carriages to transport wounded robbers". This statement is not proved by any photos or video recordings. There are three words used for framing "militants", "captured", and "robbers". It could be easily rephrased to protesters took three ambulance carriages to save wounded people.

4. The section on the peacekeeping forces of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has been mitigated and their protective functions have been emphasized.

Despite the importance of inviting external military forces into the country, none of the documentaries mentioned it more than 4 times. 12 of 32 documentaries did not even refer to this fact. Another 10 documentaries did not spend more than two sentences on peacekeeper forces. However, in the case of this theme, the main point is always that peacekeepers only protected some strategic objects and did not enroll to direct confrontation with Kazakhstan citizens.

Clear example of these we could see in the documentary "The January tragedy" of Astana TV: "CSTO forces took only limited participation, they did not contact with our citizens, did not walk the streets, did not use their country flags, only peacekeepers tags. They took only auxiliary function to protect state objects"

5. Positive image of the President, the officials and the police.

There are 132 times when the President Tokayev was mentioned in the documentaries, and he is portrayed only in a positive or neutral way. 71 times authors and speakers addressed praises to the president's actions and declarations. 19 times authors have spoken about his posts on Twitter about how he was ordered to solve issues. Negative mentioning of the president was not found. Promoted ideas: President tried to solve conflict peacefully, but stood his ground, and ordered to start shooting terrorists only as a last resort.

Local officials and police were mentioned in positive way 26 and 82 times respectively. Negatively colored sentences about the government and the police were found 5 and 11 times. Promoted same idea that they were peaceful and did not use violence as long as possible.

Discussion

Making nameless external and internal forces responsible for unrest is a very common and easy move for the government. From one side it shifts the blame from the government and citizens; from the other side it gives free space to some actions. However, without distinctive and deep dive analysis of the situation, reasons that led to the unrest would not be solved. Which increases the possibility of repeating the event.

Emphasizing criminal activity looks like another try to framing unrest as carnaval of violence. Hushing the passiveness of local authorities, who could channel crowd energy into constructive dialog and prevent further escalation, is not an effective way to communicate with the audience.

Main idea of the first key point in the government's agenda setting: making the image that the government, country and people of Kazakhstan are united and together while some external and internal enemies try to weaken them.

Portraying unrest mostly as a tragedy that should not happen again is only partially correct. Civil protest is a common part of life in democratic countries. Each protest trains people to be more correct and polite during protests. Putting it under one negative umbrella is an attempt to deny this experience and standing at one place instead of moving forward. This also applies to government officials, who showed passiveness during unrest and without proper analysis will do the same next time [12].

Logical continuation of this idea is emphasizing negative actions and violence happened throughout unrest. Obviously, this is not a good thing; however it is common for unrest. Detailed describing violence of protesters and silencing and mitigating tortures police made this key point of agenda very toxic. Further research needs to be done, probably focus groups or in-depth interviews, but we suppose that this idea is the reason why combined views of all 32 researched documentaries reached 2.1 million. In comparison, only one Kazakh-language independent documentary made by Luqpan Ahmedyarov and Raul Uporov has 587 thousand views, while 20 researched Kazakh-language documentaries have 606 thousand views. Relatively equal quality of the films gives us confidence to say that audiences are more into independent point of view than the agenda set by the government.

Conclusion

Research identified key points of the governmental agenda setting in the documentaries. All of them boil down to highlighting the broad government as positive and responsible as possible. Citizens of Kazakhstan are portrayed as victims and deceived by outsiders' manipulations. The guilty ones according to the government's agenda are some unknown external and internal forces. Alternatively, maybe known but nobody is going to speak it out officially. Results of this research could be foundation to further studies, whether it will be qualitative or quantitative research. In-depth interview, focus groups could be applied to study audience response to the government's agenda, content analysis in other media products to study consistency of the agenda across. Results could be a foundation to make a survey to acquire some generalizable knowledge about audience perception of the agenda.

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ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА СЕРИЯСЫ
ISSN: 2616-7174. eISSN: 2663-2500

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ҚР мемлекеттік тапсырысы ақпараттық нарықта күн тәртібін қалыптастыру құралы ретінде (документалистика мысалында)

Аңдатпа. Мақалада үкіметтің мемлекеттік ақпараттық тапсыры арқылы ақпараттық нарық-тағы күн тәртібін анықтау әрекеттері қарастырылады. Деректі фильмдер көрермендердің жоғары сеніміне ие бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары ретінде таңдалды. Зерттеудің негізгі идеясы-деректі фильмдер жағдайында Үкімет ақпараттық нарық үшін қандай күн тәртібін анықтайтынын анықтау. Мемлекеттік ақпараттық тапсырыс нарықта модератор болуға мүмкіндік береді. Зерттеу әдісі ретінде сапалы мазмұнды талдау Үкіметтің азаматтар мен үкіметтің өзі сияқты мүдделі тараптарды ұсыну үшін қолданатын күн тәртібін қалыптастырудың негізгі нүктелерін анықтауға мүмкіндік береді. Барлығы мемлекеттік ұйымдар, мемлекеттік телеарналар және мемлекетпен байланысты медиа-компаниялар жасаған 32 деректі фильм зерттелді. Талдау барысында деректі фильмдерде қайталанатын тілдік заңдылықтар анықталды. Нәтижелер үкіметтің күн тәртібі қарапайым және біржақты түрде тұжырымдалғанын көрсетеді, бұл ішінара

аудиторияны екіұшты қабылдауға әкелді. Жұмыстың ғылыми құндылығы ақпараттық нарықта модератор ретінде мемлекеттік аппараттың мінез-құлық стратегиясын анықтауда көрінеді. Мақала ақпараттық нарықта күн тәртібін анықтаудың осы стратегиясының тиімділігін анықтау бойынша одан әрі сапалы және сандық зерттеулерге негіз жасайды.

Түйін сөздер: ақпараттық қауіпсіздік, күн тәртібін белгілеу, фрейминг, cherry picking, қазақстан үкіметі, ақпараттық саясат.

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Государственный заказ правительства РК как инструмент формирования повестки дня на информационном рынке (на примере документалистики)

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются попытки правительства определить повестку дня на информационном рынке через государственный информационный заказ. Документальные фильмы были выбраны как средства массовой информации, пользующиеся высоким доверием аудитории. Основная идея исследования заключается в том, чтобы определить, какую повестку дня правительство определяет для информационного рынка в случае документальных фильмов. Государственный информационный заказ позволяет государству быть модератором на рынке. Качественный контент-анализ как метод исследования позволяет нам определить ключевые моменты формирования повестки дня, которые правительство использует для представления заинтересованных сторон, таких как граждане и само правительство. Всего было исследовано 32 документальных фильма, созданных государственными организациями, государственными телеканалами и аффилированными с государством медиакомпаниями. В процессе анализа выявлялись повторяющиеся языковые паттерны в документальных фильмах. Полученные результаты показывают, что правительственная повестка дня сформулирована просто и односторонне, что частично привело к неоднозначному восприятию аудитории. Научная ценность работы выражается в определении стратегии поведения государственного аппарата в качестве модератора на информационном рынке. Статья создает основу для дальнейших качественных и количественных исследований по определению эффективности данной стратегии определения повестки на информационном рынке.

Ключевые слова: информационная безопасность, формирование повестки дня, фрейминг, cherry picking, правительство Казахстана, информационная политика.

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ЖУРНАЛИСТИКА СЕРИЯСЫ
ISSN: 2616-7174. eISSN: 2663-2500

№3(148)/ 2024   **83**

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