SOCIETY

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN GERMANY: INFORMATION CAMPAIGN, MEDIA, SOCIETY

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been a serious challenge to the entire global community. Globally, countries were forced to introduce restrictive measures to contain the infection, inevitably causing popular discontent. Germany introduced some of the most painful restrictions. In times of crisis, timely and reliable information is a prerequisite for public motivation to comply with restrictive measures. Thus, it seems essential to retrace how the German leadership tried to contain citizens' dissatisfaction with the restrictions, using information campaigns and strategies. This theoretical work aims to systematise available data on how COVID-awareness was raised in Germany, compare them with data from the Russian Federation, and identify the most successful communication strategies and weaknesses. It is clear from the findings that the channels of communication between the government and society should be diversified using all available means, and experts and opinion leaders, who are more trusted than politicians, should be recruited. In addition, there is a need to combat misinformation and dispel unproven facts. The data obtained can be of value in conducting information campaigns during future global crises.

Keywords:
COVID-19, Germany, information campaigns, media, risk communication, information policy of Russian Federation

Introduction

The novel coronavirus pandemic, which spread around the world within a few months in 2020, poses one of the most serious challenges to the global community in the history of the modern world. The measures taken to contain the spread of the virus had an unprecedented impact on all spheres of life: economy, healthcare, education, politics, media, the social sphere and the psychological well-being of society. Europe's leading economy — Germany — has also experienced the negative effects of the pandemic.

At the end of January 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in Germany, followed by an initially slow and then exponential increase in the number of confirmed cases in mid-March 2020 [1], prompting the government to introduce a series of rules and restrictions to contain the spread of infection. Such measures included, for example, the closure of educational and childcare centres, as well as cultural institutions[1]. The restrictions indicated the start of the first lockdown.

The country's leadership faced a number of challenges, such as uncertainty about the new virus, the fear of infection, and the disruption of the usual way of life. In her address to the nation on March 18, 2020, Angela Merkel prioritized the problems related primarily to the direct consequences of the coronavirus, namely, overload of the healthcare system, and the lack of medicines and vaccines. In addition, the emphasis was also placed on secondary problems (stemming from the first ones) — the effects of isolation and social distancing, the consequences for business, and a threat to the country's economy as a whole. Furthermore, the Chancellor defined the lockdown and isolation as a threat to fundamental democratic values, and as a recommendation, there was an appeal to band society together and adhere to the recommendations and rules of social interaction [2].

In general, during the first lockdown, the vast majority of Germans admitted the negative changes in their lives. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed (73 %) in the study [3] said they supported other people in trouble by providing standard practice medicine; by providing assistance with shopping, childcare, or emotionally during the lockdown. These results suggest that even if the respondents did not suffer from negative consequences, they observed the problems in their social environment.

Since the beginning of April 2020, protesters against restrictive measures proposed by the government took to the streets of Germany. Those were the people who felt their fundamental rights threatened; people who were united by a deep distrust of politics and standard practice of medicine; people who suspected a plot of groups behind the pandemic, as well as those who spread right-wing extremist ideas. Thus, by the summer of 2020, scattered protest movements organized themselves into the national movement "Querdenken" opposing the restrictive policy [4]. The results of the survey of protesters in Constanta on 04.10.2020 revealed that the assessment of the political measures to combat the pandemic and the risk assessment of the virus played a central role in the protest movements. Only one in five respondents believed that experts could be trusted when they

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[1] *Bundesgesundheitsministerium*, 2020, Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2: Chronik der bisherigen Maßnahmen, URL: https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/coronavirus/chronik-coronavirus.html (accessed 07.05.2022).

claimed that the virus was dangerous. At the same time, almost all respondents (93 %) assessed the governmental measures to combat the pandemic as excessive [5]. In addition, the vast majority of participants noted the strong negative impact of the pandemic on work, family life and basic rights. Thus, threats to the existing way of living aroused in people a feeling of distrust and protest.

The evidence provided by a significant number of studies suggests that risk awareness is the main reason to follow the recommended behaviour pattern aimed at protecting one's health [5—9]. However, the absence of a clear action plan aimed at minimizing those risks can give rise to a feeling of fear, eventually leading to panic, while timely and reliable information about risks is aimed at streamlining fears [10]. In addition to risk awareness, it is also worth noting the level of trust in political institutions and the media that broadcast information. The experience of previous force majeure situations demonstrates that quite often the population holds the government responsible for the tragic consequences of disasters and epidemics [11]. Studies have shown that the population may not understand the dangers of an influenza pandemic, but trust the government in its actions [12]. Distrust during an epidemic (for example, influenza) leads to social tension [13], and opposition to government actions during a pandemic (for example, the H1N1 pandemic) is associated with the values of a "reluctant" society [14].

Data provided by the Snapshot Monitoring (COSMO) project conducted among German residents indicate the role of public trust in institutions in predicting adherence to recommended health-protective behaviour and effective risk perception [9]. The level of trust in politics and science is a key determinant of compliance with health regulations [15]. At the same time, trust in health authorities and searching for information about the virus in public media or on official websites of health authorities are positively associated with perceptions of the virus as a health threat [5]. Public awareness of what precautions to be observed, and from what sources reliable information can be obtained, to a large extent predicted public attitudes towards government actions, emphasizing the importance of communications in the field of healthcare [16].

Thus, given the negative impact of the lockdown on the quality of life of individuals, as well as the emerging protest movements designed to finally undermine the credibility of restrictive measures, it seems that the authorities should have prioritized the actions aimed at consistent and timely dissemination of information about the risks and benefits of restrictive measures, along with increasing confidence in the information broadcasted by politicians and official media. On the other hand, it can also be assumed that the feeling of mistrust was reinforced by large amounts of misinformation, the spread of conspiracy theories, as well as uncertainty due to the lack of research results on a new infection. These two aspects should also have been given attention by the country's leadership.

Taking into account the facts presented above, the relevance of the present study is justified by the following provisions:

— The COVID-19 pandemic is the first large-scale global crisis in modern history. The results of the research reveal weaknesses in the communication channel authorities-society, which led to protest movements and a decrease in the level of trust jeopardizing both the government and society.

— Current events suggest that it is necessary to take into account the identified shortcomings of crisis communication during a pandemic in order to be able to ensure reliable and timely communication via the "authorities -society" channel in the future.

Thus, the article is aimed at systematizing the results of scientific research on the measures taken by the German government in the information space in order to build loyalty to the restrictive policy, identify shortcomings and successful strategies, and compare the data obtained with the information policy of the Russian Federation during the first wave of coronavirus.

The sample of scientific publications for the review was formed using the following keywords: *Germany COVID, Germany pandemic, Germany media COVID, Germany COVID communication, covid media, and pandemic information*. The search was carried out on the official websites of such publishers as *Elsevier, Wiley, Springer, Sage, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press* (access provided by the National Research University Higher School of Economics), as well as *CyberLeninka* and *eLibrary*, and covered the period from February, 2020 to November, 2020.

While analyzing and classifying works, the following logic was applied:

— a review of awareness-building campaigns implemented by the government aimed at increasing the level of loyalty to the restrictions;

— a review of the role of the media, social networks and messengers in building trust between the state and society;

— a review of the results of information campaigns on the example of certain behavioral patterns and public sentiment;

— a comparison of the information policy pursued in Germany and the Russian Federation.

Information Campaigns of the German Government

As noted above, the restrictive policy pursued by the German authorities during the first wave of coronavirus had a significant negative impact on the socio-economic sphere. Thus, actions aimed at improving public compliance with the imposed restrictions should have been intended for articulating the following key

ideas in the institutional discourse: social cohesion against infection, awareness of the consequences of the introduced restrictions (both personal and societal), as well as sufficient argumentation regarding the effectiveness of the measures taken [17]. Thus, a sense of solidarity should encourage people to comply with restrictive measures, while informing about the consequences and benefits of restrictions will make it possible to convince people that they act for the good of society [18]. In addition, emphasizing individual responsibility and vulnerability can also be considered a promising way to increase prosocial behaviour [18].

In Germany, immediately after the detection of the first infected person, on January 27, 2020, the first information campaign was carried out. It was based on recommendations to pay more attention to hand hygiene and assurance that the isolation of the infected helps to contain the spread of the virus [19].

Further, until early March, public discourse was largely shaped by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) — the German federal government agency and research institute responsible for the study and prevention of infectious diseases. At the initial stage, the main recommendations of the RKI included mainly general recommendations for precautionary measures similar to those of any influenza season [20]. The main objectives of risk communication were as follows: reduction of morbidity and mortality; caring for sick people; maintaining the normal functioning of basic services provided to the population; timely informing by political-decision makers, specialists, and the media [21]. In addition, on the main page of the RKI's official website information in German and English was provided, and regular (usually bi-weekly) press conferences on infection, transmission and mortality rates were held.

The public informing strategy did not change until the end of February when the number of confirmed cases of infection began to grow, and, in particular, several local hot spots were formed where the speed of infection was of particular concern. However, closer to mid-March, when a sharp increase in the number of infections was recorded along with the first death (March 12), the government issued recommendations for social distancing, and on March 17, Germany closed its borders.

On March 18, 2020, Angela Merkel delivered a speech defining COVID as a threat. The appeal to the nation was structured in such a way that the public got the impression that the chancellor controlled the spread of the virus and was aware of the implementation of institutional responses to it [22]. In the spring of 2020, following Merkel, numerous other political and public figures in Germany staged performances aimed at demonstrating control over the situation. At the same time, the opposition challenged federal and regional institutional

responses to the pandemic by staging and broadcasting counter-performances in virtual and public spaces to demonstrate their rejection of institutional control and presenting themselves as a controlling party [22]. In general, one can note the ambiguity of the information delivered by the authorities, as well as the uncertainty of government communication, which can explain the general trend towards a decrease in trust and the alleged effectiveness of the restrictions being introduced [23].

Apart from politicians, health authorities are also responsible for raising awareness and dissemination of knowledge about the pandemic among the population, even among those groups who seem to be against all recommended measures. In addition, a key task of health authorities is to identify the prevailing channels through which they can deliver information, as well as to ensure access to information for those groups who use neither state media nor websites of health authorities as a source of information about coronavirus [23].

In Germany, cooperative networks were established in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to provide the public with complete and reliable information. They included existing institutions, such as scientific advisory councils, professional associations (Fachgesellschaften), and formal and informal working groups and committees at universities and research institutes, for example, the Max Planck Institute and the National Institute for Public Health (Robert Koch Institute). In a situation of uncertainty at the initial stage of the crisis, political institutions were dependent on scientific experts, since the lack of reliable scientific knowledge had to be compensated to justify the political decisions and measures taken [24]. Experts who were members of working groups and committees noted that politicians "made use" of advisers to justify political decisions, especially regarding unpopular restrictions. On the other hand, when the scientific community intended to influence policy, experts turned to the media, and as a result, this strategy allowed the public to receive the needed information, and experts — to indirectly influence politicians so that their voice was heard [25]. Thus, academicians and scientists gained nationwide fame, similar to that of media commentators or TV presenters; they became the "face" of the crisis. Their direct communication style helped to calm the agitated public and build trust and understanding of why it was necessary to comply with the measures introduced by the government [26]. For example, a well-known virologist Christian Drosten, director of the Institute of Virology at the Charite hospital in Berlin, daily gave lectures on YouTube that were watched by millions of people, including those outside Germany [27].

In addition, the authorities actively utilized social networks, inviting experts for wider coverage, since experts have a large network of followers and thus, the

audience receives much more information through posts and likes. Furthermore, experts have a greater opportunity to interact with Twitter users directly in contrast to the authorities [28].

Messengers were also used to communicate with young citizens. According to the 2019 ARD-ZDF online survey, 63 % of the population uses the WhatsApp messenger on a daily basis, and in the age group from 14 to 29 years, this index has reached 90 %. By collaborating with the government and posting official information, social media platforms and messengers can help restore trust and ensure the exchange of reliable information [29]. Thus, an information channel was created in Telegram "Corona-Infokanal des Bundesministeriums für Gesundheit", through which distribution in the form of push messages was carried out to all Telegram users, including updates about the pandemic, as well as mini-checks for the authenticity of facts [30], thereby providing some countermeasures to disinformation.

Media

The media, being the main intermediaries between the state and society, were actively involved in informing the population about the risks, threats and consequences.

As for information consumption during a pandemic, multidirectional trends are observed. On the one hand, the researchers identify the rise in media consumption in Germany, namely television, which amounted to 75 % in March 2020, and the viewing time increased by 18 minutes. Researchers also note an increased interest in television by young people. This trend is explained by the desire to consume reliable information, along with entertainment content (to distract oneself). As a result, the level of trust in television among the population increased and reached 67 % [31]. Similar trends are observed in relation to online media. Thus, 71.4 % of respondents confirmed an increase in online media consumption during the lockdown. Men were more likely to be interested in games and erotic content, while women were more attracted by social networks, information search and streaming platforms [32]. However, despite growing trust in television, a deep pre-pandemic distrust of respected media defines the choice of sources for obtaining information about COVID. Hence, 90 % of respondents receive information through their own search and research on the Internet, 52 % — from Telegram or WhatsApp groups, as well as from friends or family (52 %). In contrast, newspapers (42 %), television and radio (32 %) play a secondary role. Mobilization for protests is also carried out mainly through Telegram, WhatsApp (62 %), other social networks (42 %) and friends (48 %) [3].

On the other hand, researchers admit a tendency to avoid information. Avoidance predictors include personal attitudes and information overload [33]. So, for example, 56 % of the respondents were unsettled by the information flow [34].

Thus, it seems logical to assume that consumers of media content (both traditional and online) faced certain difficulties while filtering the stream of information, namely, identifying the reliability and usefulness of information received from the media about coronavirus[2]. 20.9 % of respondents found it difficult to decide how to protect themselves from coronavirus infection based on media information. Even more citizens (32.1 %) report that it is difficult to use media information to decide how to act in the case of a coronavirus infection. Surprisingly, 47.8 % of participants say that it is difficult or very difficult for them to judge whether they can trust media information about the coronavirus [34]. Overall, the share of health disinformation in the media reached 47 %, and it was focused on politicians and vaccines [35]. However, when analyzing a sample of fact-checked disinformation, about two-thirds of the cases examined did not contain completely fabricated information, but rather its content was distorted or recontextualized. The most common were false or misrepresented statements about the plans or measures of state or international bodies such as the UN and WHO (39 % of investigated cases). Snippets of celebrity misinformation about COVID-19, while few in number, had a significant impact as they circulated more frequently (as of early May 2020) [36].

In Germany, the print media, television and radio played an important role in communication and information exchange. Both state-owned TV channels ARD and ZDF provided enough time for relevant up-to-date information and discussions for several hours a week. Key supporters were invited, as well as critical voices who opposed the government's main strategies. The presentation of multiple opinions, including virologists and epidemiologists, as well as politicians and other representatives of civil society, economists, political scientists, philosophers and ethicists, allowed the public to acknowledge the complexity of the decision-making process [37]. The researchers note that politicians were the dominant sources of information about the coronavirus in the media, indicating the use of the media by state institutions for information campaigns. In addition, it is noted that scientists and educators were the most mentioned group at the peak of the first and second waves, while civilian sources of information gained popularity during the first wave when the protests began to spill over into organized movements [38].

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[2] Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) — Situation Report 13, 2022, *World Health Organization*, URL: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf (accessed 16.05.2022).

Along with the dissemination of misinformation, citizens' distrust was also reinforced by the spread of conspiracy theories. As an example, here it is worth mentioning the point of view of a member of the organization "Physicians for Education" Heiko Schoening. In his opinion, the causes of the pandemic were purely economic. Large corporations had been planning the economic collapse in 2020 for decades. Therefore, in his opinion, the virus does not carry an increased risk, and the measures taken are exaggerated and even life-threatening for many people [39].

Another "weak link" in information policy is the lack of verified information. When the facts are unclear, policymakers and health experts prefer to avoid reporting scientific uncertainty for fear that uncertainty will breed mistrust. However, presenting uncertain aspects of the pandemic as certain can negatively affect citizens' confidence and compliance with containment measures if these reports are subsequently found to be invalid [40]. The data demonstrate that a majority of respondents prioritized publicly available information about scientific uncertainty in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For those currently sceptical of government containment measures, messages expressing uncertainty proved to be especially effective in motivating compliance with the measures. Thus, it can be said that acknowledging scientific uncertainty and informing the public about it contributes to building trust [40]. With regard to the quality of information broadcasted in the media, it can be concluded that straightforward and understandable information about uncertain knowledge in the media formed trust in science, while some live performances by researchers created a certain risk of misinterpretation. Some newspapers and social networks misused authentic scientific processes to create an image of non-professional scientists, where personal conflicts were brought to the fore [41].

As regards broadcasting risks and threats in order to encourage the population to comply with restrictive measures, it is worth noting that the German media acted quite aggressively. Thus, the share of the "covid" topic in the news in the period from January 2020 to November 2020 constituted 23.3 %, while the total volume of broadcasted negative information was 87.9 %. So, the media hardly gave any hope for the best, continuing to broadcast as intensely and negatively as possible [42]. In general, the information agenda of the media met the defining criteria for containing the pandemic. However, a recent study in Germany found that alarming media coverage is being criticized by both moderate opponents and supporters of COVID-19 containment measures [23].

Society

Considering public perception of the risks and threats to health and life associated with the coronavirus at the beginning of the pandemic, it is worth noting the direct relation between government campaigns and the restrictions imposed. For example, a public opinion survey conducted during a critical period at the start of the pandemic in Germany (March 10 to 24) [43] reveal that from day one onwards, fear associated with COVID-19, as well as precautionary behaviour, demonstrate a clear rise with a peak one day after the announcement of government restrictions and curtailment of individual freedoms. Fear related to COVID-19 peaks for the second time one day after the chancellor's speech. Along with this, the credibility of government measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 increased from the day they were implemented. Thus, it is obvious that the subjectively perceived risk is overestimated compared to incidence rates, which may be the result of a feeling of threat, which, in turn, entails an increase in trust in public policy broadcasted through not only social networks and the media, but through public speeches as well.

However, while threat perception and individual risk of infection steadily declined over time, subjective risk scores for severe disease in case of infection, as well as feelings of infection control, remained more stable over time. Thus, the steady decline in the sense of threat and perceived risk may be one of the reasons why the lockdown gradually lost public support over time, since the more people felt threatened, the more support they gave to the lockdown policy and the more positive their overall assessment of advantages of lockdown was [19].

In general, there is high confidence in the effectiveness of government containment measures at the start of the pandemic while a complete lockdown was supported by 77 % of respondents, and the introduction of such measures as a ban on meetings, closing of certain establishments, washing hands and masks — from 94 to 98 % of respondents [44]. At the peak of the first wave and shortly after the introduction of strict quarantine measures, the public was quite positive about the policy and generally supported the view that the social benefits of quarantine outweigh its economic costs [19]. However, by May, about 50 % of the German population believed that the lockdown had more negative than positive consequences [19].

In addition, there is a direct relation between public confidence in authorities and a sense of satisfaction with life. Thus, people with a low pre-crisis level of confidence in government institutions (government, courts, media) report a sharp decrease in satisfaction compared to people with a higher level of trust. This trend

may relate to the justification of the role of state institutions during the crisis and can serve as a basis for actions aimed at building trust and increasing overall satisfaction [45].

Efforts aimed at building social solidarity during the pandemic eventually produced the following results. Research shows that group solidarity in society was based on individual solidarity, and was promoted through the recognition of a common goal, common values, or other common activities, including group efforts to fight the pandemic. However, several factors were identified that undermine the basis of solidarity in society. The first factor is significant disagreements between those who comply with the measures and restrictions and wish to follow them and those who refuse to promote the common goal. In addition, solidarity can be influenced by the fact that group solidarity contradicts the interests of a close circle [46].

With regard to global solidarity, it was revealed that those who trust the government support global measures. However, when the level of personal anxiety rises and at the same time the level of confidence in the government decreases, then public support for global solidarity may weaken [47].

In terms of local solidarity, the data reveals that one in two Germans provided some assistance to others in the midst of the first wave of lockdowns. Remarkably, about a quarter of the assistance mechanisms did not exist before the pandemic. However, here, similar to the case of the economic consequences, apparent social inequality was revealed. Thus, people with higher education more often helped others. At the same time, people with higher incomes were more likely to help their relatives than other people [48].

Some differences were observed not only in the amount of assistance provided to others, but also in risk perception, the level of trust and preventive behaviour. Risk and benefits communication during the pandemic should be adapted to the needs of different social groups in order to overcome educational inequality [49]. Regarding ethnic inequalities in risk perception, the data show that, overall, the pandemic did not exacerbate ethnic inequalities. However, respondents of Turkish and former Yugoslav origin demonstrate higher levels of health and financial risk perception than Germans. Asians, on the other hand, are more concerned about high risks for health, but not financial well-being [50].

Against the backdrop of information campaigns, COVID-associated discrimination, which increased significantly since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, could not be avoided. As in some other countries, in Germany, people of Asian origin experienced discrimination more frequently. Researchers also established a link between the number of cases of COVID infection and increasing discrim-

ination against ethnic groups. For example, respondents (North or South American, former USSR, and Asian) were more likely to report COVID-associated discrimination when the number of infections in their neighbourhood grew [51].

Information policy and society in the Russian Federation

The Russian Federation and Germany adopted similar approaches to the fight against the coronavirus infection: it was decided to wait until the number of coronavirus cases reached a certain level, and then proceed with the implementation of measures to contain the spread of the infection [52].

In Russia, communication of the nation's chief executive with the people of the country was more intense than in Germany. While Merkel addressed the nation once at the start of the pandemic, the President of Russia delivered seven speeches, including both direct addresses to the nation and broadcasts of working meetings.

The first cases of infection in the Russian Federation were recorded at the end of January, and major news portals were the first to provide objective information, referring to political leaders. For instance, Vedomosti published a list of actions taken by the government, and Lenta.ru presented a detailed description of the condition of the sick [53].

Unlike in Germany, where the infodemic, although present, but not in such unprecedented proportions, in the Russian Federation, about 2 million reposts of various kinds of unreliable messages regarding the coronavirus were recorded since January 2020. Most of these messages were rumours and conspiracy theories. As a result, in April, amendments were introduced to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, Art. 207.1 "Public dissemination of deliberately false information about circumstances that pose a threat to the life and safety of citizens." Western researchers note that partly the responsibility for the spread of disinformation lies with the authorities [54], and is explained by the need to spread propaganda against Western countries.

While the level of trust in the media in Germany rose at the beginning of the pandemic, Russia faced a significant decline. According to the Levada Center*, the level of distrust in the media, according to some data, reached 59 % [55], and there was also a decline in confidence in television. At the same time, in the Russian Federation, as in Germany, trust in social networks and messengers as alternative sources of information was growing. In order to increase the level of trust, the Russian media resorted to the use of information from Internet sources in their materials [55].

The information provided by the Russian media was often contradictory (especially at the start of the pandemic, when the level of uncertainty was unusu-

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* NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION PERFORMING THE FUNCTIONS OF A FOREIGN AGENT.

ally high). For instance, on Channel One the attitudes presented often changed, increasing the feeling of uncertainty in the audience and ultimately leading to a decrease in the level of confidence in the media and in the authorities. On the other hand, there was no direct opposition to the policy pursued by the authorities, and only indirect and moderate criticism of the authorities was expressed [56], forcing sophisticated people, who disagree, to turn to alternative sources of information. In Germany, as noted above, the official media were a platform for discussion and criticism.

While in Germany during the protest movements, people took to the streets, in the Russian Federation, a new model of protest activity was recorded — virtual protests, along with a few offline protests. In both countries, the grounds for protest movements were similar — the negative impact of restrictive measures on the economic sector and, as a result, a decrease in the standard of living of the population. Despite differences in approaches to covering the need to follow restrictive measures, in both countries the population perceives the restrictions as excessive and inadequate [57].

It is also worth noting that as an alternative to the pro-government media in Russia, as in Germany, authorial channels representing expert opinion or the views of opinion leaders were especially popular, for instance, Dr Protsenko, the chief physician of City Clinical Hospital № 40 in Moscow.

In general, it can be concluded that the information campaigns in Russia and Germany were shaped by state policy and, accordingly, had more differences than similarities. However, after analyzing the available data, one key trend that contributed if not to maintaining the level of trust and unquestioning compliance with restrictive measures, then at least allowed them to be maintained at an acceptable level was identified. Communication channels should be diversified with an emphasis not on direct authority-society channels, but indirect ones, involving opinion leaders and experts who broadcast information through the media, available social networks and instant messengers.

Conclusion

Taking into account the growing relevance of crisis communication in the global information space, in this article an attempt was made to analyze the possibilities of the state-society information channel in order to identify successful strategies and weaknesses.

The study was based on the following provisions. Commitment to risk communication strategies at the start of the pandemic was a top priority for the government. The key elements of communication are generating the confidence of the audience in the source of information and the reliability of content.

Based on the results of the analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn.

As the subjectively perceived risk was clearly overestimated and did not depend on objective statistical information on the number of infections and deaths, it can be concluded that in Germany, thanks to an integrated approach to informing, it was possible to develop a sense of threat and risks in the discourse sufficient to form loyalty to imposed restrictions, as well as maintain a sufficient level of trust in the government during the first lockdown. This was achieved, mainly, through indirect communication channels involving experts and opinion leaders, since in a situation of uncertainty and a lack of reliable data, specialists directly involved in the process are perceived as trustworthy sources. In addition, mediated communication through social networks and instant messengers, which have similar disadvantages in presenting information, enjoyed great prestige. Pre-pandemic trends played a certain role here. Thus, the strategy of "intimidation" had some success in the first wave of the pandemic, as the feeling of fear forms certain public attitudes and behavioural patterns. In the case of COVID-19, the lockdown and related containment policies were put in place fairly quickly, before public opinion had formed on the issue. As a result, this fact allowed the authorities to impose certain attitudes and beliefs on the public in a very aggressive way.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that direct communication authorities-society in Germany was not successful due to pre-pandemic distrust of official channels and the widely represented opinion of the opposition.

It is also worth noting that disinformation is, perhaps, the main factor that undermines the confidence of citizens in restrictive measures. Therefore, at the beginning of the pandemic, when there was a minimum amount of information, the level of trust was defined as high, but as the volume of misinformation and subjective opinions increased, the media quickly lost public trust as a reliable source of information and were perceived more as a source of entertainment content.

In general, it seems necessary in crisis communication to make use of all available means of bringing information to the public, since the preferences and availability of information differ significantly by social groups (age, education, certain beliefs, political views).

The question of broadcasting uncertain and unproven (for objective reasons) facts remains open since the data collected so far are rather contradictory. Here, I would rather agree with the opinion of [10] that missing data and uncertainties about a certain problem should be repeatedly and explicitly indicated in the statistics.

It is obvious that the pandemic of a new coronavirus infection as the first global crisis of this magnitude in modern history caught both world institutions

and civil society by surprise. On the other hand, the pandemic can be seen as a platform for the introduction of certain technologies and strategies that regulate the relationship between government and society. As research results show, the media in all their diversity are the most effective tools for crisis communication. Thus, it is necessary to deepen research aimed at triangulating power, media and society in order to get out of subsequent potential world crises with the least losses for all parties.

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