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Journalism, press freedom and Covid-19

Abstract. 2019 has shocked the world with the disease COVID-19. The fight against the coronavirus, which was granted the status of «pandemic» by the decision of the World Health Organization continues. Kazakhstan has taken timely measures to protect its citizens in connection with the spread of the pandemic. The legitimacy, nature, and proportionality of these measures are reflected in this article.

Kazakhstan declared a state of emergency on March 16, 2020, severely restricting the free movement of citizens and other basic freedoms as a response to the pandemic. Restrictions on quarantine made it difficult to disseminate information openly and unhindered. In particular, the work of journalists was obstructed. The author considers the problem of editorial independence as an important part of the professionalism of journalists in terms of foreign concepts. The author analyzes the contradictions between the normative approach to understanding the reality of the media market during the pandemic of freedom of speech.

Keywords: emergency, pandemic, coronavirus, journalist freedom, freedom of speech, infodemia, fake information.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 coronavirus began spreading in Wuhan (China in late 2019). According to Johns Hopkins University, 248 million people have been infected all around the world [1]. Due to the World Health Organization's declaration of the coronavirus as a «pandemic» on March 11, a state of emergency was declared throughout the Republic of Kazakhstan from March 16, 2020, to May 11, 2020, year in order to protect the lives and health of citizens. Despite the state of emergency,

quarantine measures are still in force. In the meantime, we have studied how the information policy has weakened and violated the freedom of journalists.

Literature Review

McLuhan, who draws attention to the fact that we are living in a global village in his work called «The Tool is the Message», states that everything happens at the same time in this village and the concept of place and time is lost [2, 17]. In

McLuhan's words, emphasizing that humanity is now in the conditions of a «global village»; The new electronic culture gives a tribal basis to our lives. And the dialogue between people has increased again [2, 68].

In addition to all these, McLuhan also states that excessive information has a negative effect on the psychology of individuals. Information overload individuals make him indifferent and lead him to the schizophrenic level.

McLuhan and Powers state that there is a need for a place to hide in people who are faced with information overload in the electronic era [2, 46]. Because, according to McLuhan, technologies will fill all of us, filling every minute we do not sleep and stand up [3, 232].

Especially in the last period, one of the sectors most affected by the changes in technology in the field of informatics, information, and communication in the media. In line with changes, developments, and innovations, the field of communication has entered a new formation with new environments and uses.

Materials and methods

To gain the goal and objectives set in this article there were used such methods as selection, systematization, collection, analysis, and descriptive method. The research materials were based on the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the decrees of the sanitary doctor during the pandemic, and the information published in the media.

Scientific methodology

During the pandemic, the State Commission for Emergency Situations under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan was established and delegated its powers. Although the powers of this commission did not include the legislative service, the decisions and protocols of this commission determined the restrictions and relaxation introduced during the state of emergency in the territory of Kazakhstan.

Although the minutes of the state commission was not given the status of «for official use»,

they were not published anywhere. Only some decisions and protocols of the state commission were presented to the public. As a rule, only individual moments of their content were presented to the media in the form of a press release. It was not possible to get the original documents.

The law on emergency situations provides for the establishment of commandants' offices in addition to the State Commission (Article 11 of the law). However, for unknown reasons, the commandant's office was not established. However, «operational headquarters» have been established at the regional level, although their establishment is provided by law for social emergencies, not for emergencies.

These headquarters at the regional level were engaged in the introduction of mandatory restrictions and benefits on their territory. Both at the national and regional levels, the protocols and decisions of the operational headquarters were not published anywhere, only in some cases, their individual provisions were set out in press releases.

Of course, in the absence of a clear definition of such statements, free interpretations have emerged, the end of which has caused many misunderstandings and exacerbated the problem. The demand for real and official information has increased among the population, which has led to the spread of misinformation or fake information.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that the threat of a coronavirus pandemic is not limited to COVID-19 but should also be avoided. Speaking at a security conference in Munich in February, Tedros Adhan Gebreus, director-general of the World Health Organization, said: «We are fighting not only an epidemic but also an infodemia. False news is faster and easier than a virus, and it is just as dangerous» [4].

For example, a group of researchers in Bangladesh, Australia, Thailand, and Japan analyzed false information about the coronavirus and found that at least 800 people had died as a result. Many of them died as a result of poisoning using methanol or alcohol-based disinfectants

as an anti-COVID-19 treatment. This is stated in a study published in the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. The study covered 2,276 messages from 2,576 languages from 87 countries. Of these, 1856 (82%) turned out to be false. Most of them contained false information about the nature of coronavirus disease, ways of its transmission, preventive measures, as well as treatment methods. Researchers say that as a result of this false information, about 800 people died, about 6,000 were hospitalized, and another 60 lost their sight. In addition to alcohol, cow urine and large amounts of garlic were used to treat coronavirus. According to the study, all this is based on false messages in the media and social networks [5].

During a pandemic, professional journalists, as well as writers, should be given the opportunity to express themselves openly, to write freely what they have seen and heard, - told US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [6]. According to him, instead of protecting independent media, some countries deliberately disseminate false information, censor accurate and useful information, and limit the useful work of journalists for the benefit of society.

Kazakhstan has amended its laws on freedom of information and digital confidentiality during pandemics. On June 25, the President amended the legislation on digital security [7, 8]. The amendments were not discussed among the population but were adopted during the pandemic [9].

During the period of strengthening the emergency response measures, when the activities of all enterprises and organizations were suspended and the movement of the population was limited to the nearest shops and pharmacies, only the work of the media and their representatives was allowed. This is stated in the resolution of the Chief State Sanitary Doctor of Almaty dated March 26, 2020 «On strengthening the quarantine regime in Almaty», as well as in other regional decrees [10].

However, permission for the movement of media representatives was granted only in the presence of an editorial assignment and only

by a representative of the official media. Other bloggers, unofficial media representatives, and independent journalists were not given such an opportunity.

According to the International Fund for the Protection of Freedom of Speech «Adil Soz» during the quarantine period, from January to June 2020, 21 facts of detention of journalists, bloggers, and civil activists were recorded [11].

Table 1 - Violations of freedom of speech during quarantine

Title	Quantity
During the enlightenment of the event	7
Attacks on journalists	6
Arrest, deprivation of liberty, and restriction of freedom	17
Accusation in criminal order	35
Recognition of the legal professional activity of journalists	27
Persecution in an administrative order	18
Violation of the right to access and dissemination of information	181
Press release media release	33
Unreasonable blocking and restriction of access to network publications	9
Civil law requirements for the media and journalists	44

According to Resolution №26 of Aizhan Esmagambetova, newly appointed to the post of Chief State Sanitary Doctor of 22 March (Chapter 2, Paragraph 4), «audio, photo and video recording is prohibited» [12].

These rules have severely limited journalists' ability to provide audiovisual information about the coronavirus. As a result, there was a lack of trust in the Covid-19 virus among the population, violations of the rules, increased public disorder, and public outcry.

In addition, the complexity of the rules for disinfection of editorial offices, as well as the requirement to transfer up to 80% of employees to remote work, further complicated the work of the media. During the pandemic, all media outlets went online.

Results and discussion

The most vulnerable category of journalists in the period of PE became bloggers. Dozens of bloggers were fined and arrested for «actions that provoked a violation of law and order under the conditions of emergency».

Ignoring the announced president and very moderately carried out reforms in the socio-political sphere, in 2020 the situation with free speech in Kazakhstan did not improve.

With the deterioration of the economic situation, the civic activity of the population has increased, and the computerization of the whole country has dramatically expanded the possibilities for public expression of their views. The authorities were not ready for an open dialogue with the public. At the level of practical interaction with journalists and civil society activists, they used the old methods of repression, intimidation, ignoring information inquiries, various types of censorship, attempts, including non-judicial information, including judicial proceedings. At the level of public administration, there is a clear fear of the growing activity of society and the desire to manage free expression, unimpeded receipt, and dissemination of information through the strengthening of regulatory functions.

Conclusion

In general, we can say that freedom of speech, access to information, and dissemination are unreasonably restricted during emergencies. Authorities used several coronavirus-related restrictions to prosecute journalists, health workers, and activists seeking to spread the word from medical organizations, as well as civilians. This trend indicates that there is a serious threat to freedom of expression and that this situation may persist after quarantine. However, the question of the duration of the restrictive measures remains open.

In conclusion, fake information, false information based on theories of stigma and conspiracy, leads to public health, as well

as distrust of the authorities. According to preliminary research, people often visit the websites of international health agencies and the Ministry of Health to get reliable information. We recommend that governments and international health agencies continue to publish accurate and contextual information about COVID-19 on their websites, as evidenced by scientific evidence.

It is also necessary to provide 100% transparency of information without infringing on the rights and freedoms of journalists and without hindering their work. National and international agencies, including fact-checking agencies, should not only identify and refute theories of rumors and conspiracies but also involve social media companies in disseminating accurate information.

Follows the activation of work on a new bill on freedom of expression, receipt, and dissemination of information in the digital age. The new law must be based on genuinely democratic principles. It is impossible to allow it - thanks to the conservatism of officials of various power and law enforcement agencies - there was a reshuffle of old norms, supplemented by state regulation of social networks.

The digital age has given birth to a new generation of professional, as well as civilian journalists. They need to be enlightened so that they do not fight with them later. Ethical standards of public relations, general restrictions on the freedom of speech, the word should be removed from the university and other educational cabinets in the public space and to acquaint them with the methods of universal education.

Ensuring full observance of the right to freedom of expression and information, in addition to the restrictions specified in international standards and constitutional norms. Ensuring comprehensive protection of the rights of journalists based on a unified approach of the republican and regional authorities. It must ensure the uninterrupted operation, publication, and distribution of traditional publications. Failure to comply with the above requirements can have a negative impact on the information space of the country, public life, human health, psychology and lead to irreversible processes.

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Covid-19 кезіндегі баспасөз бостандығы мәселелері

Аңдатпа. 2019 жыл дүниежүзін COVID-19 ауруымен дүрліктірді. Дүниежүзілік денсаулық сақтау ұйымының шешімімен «пандемия» статусы берілген бұл аурумен күресу әлі күнге дейін жалғасуда. Қазақстан азаматтарды қорғау үшін пандемияның тез таралуына байланысты шаралар қабылдады. Бұл шаралардың заңдылығы, сипаты және пропорционалдығы туралы аталған мақалада көрініс табады.

Қазақстан пандемияға жауап ретінде 2020 жылы 16 наурызда төтенше жағдай жариялап, азаматтардың еркін жүріп-тұруына және басқа да негізгі бостандықтарына қатаң шектеулер қойды. Карантин кезіндегі шектеулер ақпараттың ашық әрі кедергісіз таралуына бірқатар қиындықтар туғызды. Әсіресе,

журналисттердің жұмысына кедергі келтірілді. Автор редакциялық тәуелсіздік проблемасын журналистердің кәсіби шеберлігінің маңызды бөлігі ретінде шетелдік тұжырымдамалар тұрғысынан қарастырады. Автор сөз бостандығын пандемия кезіндегі медиа нарықтың шындығын түсінуге деген нормативтік тәсіл арасындағы қайшылықтарды талдайды.

Түйін сөздер: төтенше жағдай, пандемия, коронавирус, журналист бостандығы, сөз бостандығы, инфодемия, фейк ақпарат.

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Covid-19 и проблемы свободы прессы

Аннотация. 2019 год потряс весь мир вирусом COVID-19. Всемирная организация здравоохранения присвоила коронавирусу статус «пандемия», и борьба с ней продолжается по сей день. В связи с быстрым распространением пандемии Казахстан принял меры по защите своих граждан. Законность, характер и соразмерность этих мер отражены в данной статье.

В ответ на пандемию Казахстан 16 марта 2020 года объявил чрезвычайное положение, жестко ограничив свободу передвижения и другие основные свободы граждан. Ограничения во время карантина затрудняли распространение точной и правдивой информации. В частности, была затруднена работа журналистов. Автор рассматривает проблему редакционной независимости как важную составляющую профессионализма журналистов с точки зрения зарубежных концепций. Анализируются конфликты между нормативным подходом к пониманию независимости журналистов, редакции и медиарынка в период пандемии.

Ключевые слова: чрезвычайное положение, пандемия, коронавирус, независимость журналиста, свобода слова, инфодемия, фейковые новости.

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