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**Classical theories of media systems:  
relevance for the contemporary research**

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**Abstract.** The results of a comparative analysis of classifications of media systems developed by foreign researchers in the 20th–21st centuries are presented. Particular attention is paid to the criteria, determinants and comparison parameters that were used in different classifications to identify common characteristics of media systems in different countries. The empirical base of the study includes both popular and little-known authors in the Russian scientific literature, but widely cited in foreign studies, who have formed original classification structures. The basis for the choice of concepts and classifications were the results of the analysis of research and educational programs of Russian and foreign universities, the historical sequence of scientific papers, logical connection with predecessors and followers, contribution to the scientific literature on the theory of journalism and high citation in modern media studies. The main criterion for the selection of the most popular classifications became a citation analysis of foreign researchers' scientific publications on this topic in the scientometric system Google Scholar that accumulates scientific works from different countries, as well as statistics of Yandex. It is concluded that the main characteristics of media systems, as well as the criteria and parameters used in the most famous classifications (the second half of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century), remain relevant and can be adapted to the analysis of the modern media sphere.

**Keywords:** media research, media models, journalism education, media geography, mass media theories, scientometrics

**Conflicts of interest.** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## Классические теории медиасистем: актуальность для современных исследований

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**Аннотация.** Представлены результаты сравнительного анализа классификаций медиасистем, разработанные зарубежными исследователями в XX–XXI вв. Особое внимание уделяется критериям, детерминантам и параметрам сравнения, которые применялись в разных классификациях для выявления общих характеристик медиасистем разных стран. В эмпирическую базу исследования включены как популярные, так и малоизвестные в российской научной литературе, но широко цитируемые в зарубежных исследованиях авторы, сформировавшие оригинальные классификационные структуры. Основанием для выбора концепций и классификаций стали результаты мониторинга научно-исследовательских и образовательных программ российских и зарубежных университетов, историческая последовательность научных работ, логическая связь с предшественниками и последователями, вклад в научную литературу по теории журналистики и высокая цитируемость в современных медиаисследованиях. Основным критерием для отбора наиболее популярных классификаций был анализ цитирования научных публикаций зарубежных исследователей по данной теме в наукометрической системе Google Scholar, аккумулирующей научные работы разных стран мира, а также статистика сервиса Яндекс. Сделан вывод, что основные характеристики медиасистем, а также критерии и параметры, применявшиеся в наиболее известных классификациях (второй половины XX – начала XXI в.), сохраняют свою актуальность и могут быть адаптированы к изучению современной медиасферы.

**Ключевые слова:** медиаисследования, модели СМИ, журналистское образование, медиагеография, теории массмедиа, наукометрия

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### Introduction

In the second half of the 20th – early 21st centuries, Russian and foreign media researchers paid close attention to the study of models of media systems in different countries of the world. A number of classifications have been recognized by the world scientific community and have become guidelines for understanding historical and modern processes in the development of media systems. Works by F. Siebert, W. Schramm, T. Peterson (1956), D. Blumler and M. Gure-

vitch (1981), D. Curran and D. Seaton (1981), D. McQuail (1983), D. Hallin and P. Mancini (2004), K. Nordenstreng (2006) have formed the theoretical basis of scientific research in this area and have become an integral part of the educational programs of many universities and journalism schools. The works of J. Galtung (1999), N. Couldry, A. McCarthy (2004), T. Flew (2007) are referenced by both Russian and foreign media researchers, the classification of media systems by R. Blum (2014) is known in European scientific circles. Today, the evidence of the demand for classical works among the scientific community is the high level of their citation (according to scientometric databases Scopus, Web of Science, RSCI, Google Academy (Google Scholar), etc.) and the application of their methodologies to the analysis of modern media models and media systems. The purpose of the study, the results of which are presented for discussion in this article, was the desire to analyze the conceptual approaches of foreign and Russian scientists to the classifications of media systems and to identify which of them (primarily in terms of methodological foundations of analysis) remain relevant today and are used in the practice of modern media research.

## **Discussion**

### ***Methodology and stages of the study***

At the first stage, the analysis of research and educational programs of faculties and schools of journalism of Russian and foreign universities in disciplines focused on the study of the theory of journalism was carried out<sup>1</sup>. The results of the analysis made it possible to compile a list of scientific papers on the theory of journalism, the topics of which are related to the concepts and classifications of media systems. At the second stage, 50 of the most frequently mentioned authors and publications were tested in the Yandex Wordstat and Google Trends search engines, the dynamics of Internet audience requests (media geographic studies) was analyzed.<sup>2</sup> Here are some examples of publications that topped the ranking based on the results of the analysis of research and universities' educational programs: "Four Theories of the Press" by F. Siebert, W. Schramm and T. Peterson, "Theory of Mass Communication" by D. McQuail, "Comparing media systems. Three Models of Media and Politics" by D. Hallin and P. Mancini.

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<sup>1</sup> The research and educational programs of 20 higher educational institutions were analyzed, including: Faculty of Journalism, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia; School of Journalism and Mass Communications, St. Petersburg State University, Russia; Graduate School of Journalism and Media Communication, Kazan Federal University, Russia; Faculty of Philology and Journalism, Samara University, Russia; School of International Journalism of MGIMO University, Russia; Medill School of Journalism, Media, Integrated Marketing Communications, Northwestern University, USA; Department of Communication, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany; University of Sheffield, UK; Cologne School of Journalism, Germany; Danish School of Media and Journalism, Denmark; Faculty of Political Science and Communication Sciences, University of Zagreb, Croatia.

<sup>2</sup> Media geographical research is based on the analysis of big data in the space-time coordinate system (see: Yakova, Yanglieva, 2019.)



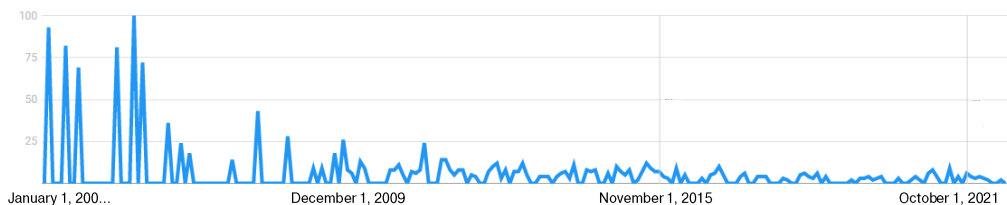
**Figure 1.** The dynamics of queries for the tag “Book – Four theories of the press”, Google Trends, period 2004–2022, number of queries

The dynamics of requests in Figure 1 indicates that the interest of users in this topic (the book “Four Theories of the Press”) remains, but has decreased significantly over the past 15 years. The largest number of queries on the topic is in Africa and Asia (Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Philippines, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, India), as well as in the USA and the Netherlands.



**Figure 2.** The dynamics of queries for the tag “McQuail's theory of mass communication”, Google Trends, period 2004–2022, number of queries

The greatest interest in D. McQuail's work “Theory of Mass Communication” was shown by Internet users in Indonesia, Poland, India, the USA, and the Philippines. The decline in the number of requests has been observed over the past decade.



**Figure 3.** The dynamics of queries for the tag “Book – three models of media and politics”, Google Trends, period 2004–2022, number of queries

The dynamics of inquiries based on the book by D. Hallin and P. Mancini “Three Models of Media and Politics”<sup>3</sup> indicates a high level of interest in the study in the first years after its publication (2004) and a gradual decline in the subse-

<sup>3</sup> Full name of the book “Comparing media systems. Three models of media and politics”.

quent period. Today, the greatest interest in this topic is shown in Nigeria, Australia, South Africa, Germany, Great Britain, USA, Poland (most likely, this is due to the inclusion of the works of these authors in university programs). The analysis of research papers at universities in Germany, the USA, the UK and other countries partially confirmed these data.

The analysis of query statistics in the Yandex search engine (Table 1) for the same publications revealed the continuing interest of Russian Internet users (it is possible to assume that the majority of this audience are university students and teachers).

Table 1

**Statistics of requests in the Yandex system (period 25.01.2023 – 25.02.2023)<sup>4</sup>**

No.	Request name	Number of requests per month
1	Four Theories of the Press + Siebert, Schramm, Peterson	98
2	Denis McQuail + Journalism and Society + Theory of Mass Communication	505
3	Hallin + Mancini	25

Source: compiled by the authors.

The Russian Internet audience is most often interested in the works of D. McQuail (505 requests per month), in second place – F. Siebert, W. Schramm and T. Peterson (98), in the third place – D. Hallin and P. Mancini (25).

The next stage of the study was the statistics' analysis of the aggregator of scientific information Google Scholar. This search engine, focused only on scientific publications indexed in scientometric databases (Web of Science, Scopus, etc.), accumulates scientific works from peer-reviewed sources in different languages. Of the 50 authors tested, 10 of the most frequently mentioned names of researchers and the most cited publications were selected (Tables 2 and 3).

The total number of mentions of authors' names (Table 2) is given by the Google Scholar search engine marked “approximately” (the results are rounded). At this stage of the study, the data obtained were compared with the citation ratings of publications of each author from the above list.

Table 3 shows the results of citation of individual publications: in the first place (by number) is the book by D. Hallin and P. Mancini “Comparing Mmedia Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics” (9396 times); on the second – “Theory of Mass Communication” by D. McQuail (7539), on the third – “Four Theories of the Press” by F. Siebert, W. Schramm and T. Peterson (4173). The table shows one of the most cited publications of each author. Some of them have a large number of publications with a fairly high average citation level, for example, K. Nordenstreng (about 50 publications with an average citation rate of 20–50 times) and J. Galtung (about 100 works with an average citation rate of 80–130 times).

<sup>4</sup> Data compiled by the authors based on the results of queries by Internet users on Yandex: <https://wordstat.yandex.ru>

Table 2

**Frequency of occurrence of names of foreign researchers in scientific publications  
(Google Scholar, accessed 15.02.2023)**

No.	Name and surname of the researcher (request)	Number of results on request (all publications)	Number of results on request (review articles)
1	F. Siebert, T. Peterson, W. Schramm	5410	256
2	McQuail, Denis	21 900	170
3	Galtung, Johan	46 000	561
	Galtung – journalism <sup>5</sup>	21 000	310
4	K. Nordenstreng	7820	134
	Kaarle Nordenstreng – journalism	4020	52
5	Hallin D., Mancini P.	13 800	311
6	Blumler J., Gurevitch M.	15 600	298
7	Blum Roger – journalism	10 400	79
8	Terry Flew – journalism	20 800	107
9	Curran J., Seaton J.	3510	287
10	Christians C.G.	53 000	134

Source: compiled by the authors.

Table 3

**Results of citations of scientific publications of foreign researchers  
(Google Scholar, accessed 15.02.2023)**

No.	Surname of the researcher, title of the publication	Number of citations
1	Siebert F., Schramm W., Peterson T. "Four Theories of the Press"	4173
2	McQuail, D. "Mass Communication Theory"	7539
3	Galtung J. "Peace Journalism"	237
4	Nordenstreng K. "Discipline or Field? Soul-Searching in Communication Research"	103
5	Hallin D., Mancini P. "Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics"	9396
6	Blumler J., Gurevitch M. "The Crisis of Public Communication"	2190
7	Blum R. "Lautsprecher und Widersprecher: Ein Ansatz zum Vergleich der Mediensysteme"	74
8	Flew T. "The Creative Industries: Culture and Policy"	698
9	Curran J., Seaton J. "Power Without Responsibility"	2369
10	Christians C., Glasser T., McQuail D., Nordenstreng K., White R. "Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies"	1491

Source: compiled by the authors.

**Classifications of media systems:  
comparative analysis of the main characteristics**

The citation rating in Google Scholar became the basis for compiling a ranked list of publications and a comparative analysis of conceptual approaches to classifying media systems by their main characteristics (criteria, parameters, determinants). The works were considered taking into account the historical sequence of their publication and meaningful connections with their predecessors.

The first thorough work summarizing the historical experience of the formation and development of media systems in Europe and America was the book

<sup>5</sup> In keyword queries, the word "journalism" was added to some common surnames of researchers in order to exclude namesake authors from other areas of scientific topics and increase the level of reliability of the results.

by F. Siebert, W. Schramm and T. Peterson “Four Theories of the Press” (1956)<sup>6</sup>. The paper describes four main concepts of mass media, which received their historical development by the middle of the 20th century. These concepts can be considered as the basis for the classification of media models, the main determinants in the research of which were society, the state and the individual. The classification is based on the main characteristics inherent in the practice of media functioning in different countries: ownership relations in the media sphere, forms and types of media control, audience characteristics, rights and capabilities of information bodies. Additions and comments to the “Four Theories of the Press” was proposed by the British scientist D. McQuail (1983), who noted that no theory of the press is “pure” in the classical view, but most often includes various elements (signs) from different concepts. For example, he clarifies that the libertarian model described by F. Siebert, W. Schramm and T. Peterson is utopian and does not exist in its purest form, since there is no ideal market economy and complete absence of state intervention in the market. D. McQuail believes that at the turn of the 20th–21st centuries four classical theories cannot cover various media systems of the countries of the world due to objective factors caused by the course of historical development, and offers two more: the theory of media development and the theory of democratic participation (or participatory). Russian media researchers in their works also refer to the book by F. Siebert, W. Schramm, etc. Peterson as a basic classification: “Despite certain shortcomings, the ‘four theories’ are still used to classify national media systems, although in fact media systems are often based on alternative and even incompatible philosophical principles. Therefore, the emergence of new theories is quite justified” (Bakulev, 2005).

British researchers D. Blumler and M. Gurevich in their book “The Crisis of Political Communication” proposed their determinants of the analysis of media systems: the degree of state control over media markets; the degree of politicization/engagement of the media; the degree of integration of media and political elites; social legitimacy of the nature and functions of media organizations (1995). Media researchers analysing media systems have variously looked at media relations with markets, capital, business institutions in terms of political economy (Murdock, Golding, 1973), relations with parties and political organisations (Seymour-Ure, 1974).

At the end of the twentieth century, Norwegian scientist Johan Galtung published a paper in which he presented his approach to the study of media systems (Galtung, 1999). In foreign and Russian scientific literature, a scheme called the “J. Galtung Triangle” is widely known. In this model, an important importance is attached to the role of the media in the processes of interaction with the state, civil society and business: the positions of the media in the triangle can change: from proximity to the state to proximity to capital and business. The strongest position of the media can be in the case of equidistance (respectively, independence) from all the above institutions. J. Galtung's theoretical approaches to the analysis of the role of the media in society were developed in his writings by Finnish media researcher Kaarle Nordenstreng (2006). In its “triangle”, the media interact with the state (and related institutions), the market (with

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<sup>6</sup> The book was published in Russian in 1998.

its economic, commercial, financial and other structures) and civil society (including citizens and public organizations in interaction outside the aforementioned spheres).

British scientists relying on the classifications of previous generations of researchers, drew attention to the role of national factors in the formation of media models, such as national traditions, public attitudes, values and perceptions (Curran, Seaton, 1981, 2018). They investigated the features of media models formed under the influence of humanitarian factors (the history of the formation of the state, the geopolitical situation, the traditions of the country, their impact on society and its institutions, religious characteristics, multilingualism, the influence of cultures of neighboring states, etc.). This approach was also used in their research by other scientists whose works were published later.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the results of a comparative analysis of national models of media systems were presented by media researchers D. Hallin and P. Mancini in the book “Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics” (2004). They expanded the boundaries and scope of the analysis of media systems and proposed a comparison structure that includes four main aspects: 1) the development of media markets, with special attention to the strong or weak development of the mass circulation press; 2) political parallelism (the nature, degree and nature of relations between the media and political parties); 3) the development of journalistic professionalism (the level of development of journalism as a profession); 4) the degree and nature of state interference in the media system. The objects of their research were the media systems of the countries of Western Europe and North America in the historical, political and social context of their development. Hallin and Mancini based their work on earlier research in this area, improved and supplemented the criteria and parameters of comparison, taking into account new factors and realities of the development of media systems. The book by Hallin and Mancini became an important stage in the research of media systems both as a subject for discussion and criticism, and as a platform for the subsequent development of research in this area: after its publication, the foreign scientific literature was replenished with a number of works demonstrating various theoretical approaches to the analysis of modern media systems, and to varying degrees taking into account Hallin's experience and Mancini.

The classification of the Swiss media researcher Roger Blum is the least known in the Russian scientific literature (in recent years he has been working in Germany). His differential pragmatic approach to the study of media system models (Blum, 2014) is widely cited in foreign scientific literature. Having analyzed theoretical works in the field of media systems research for half a century, Blum developed 11 comparison criteria: the political system, the historical development and political culture of the country, media freedom, state control, ownership and financing of the media, political parallelism and media orientation, as well as media culture and professionalism. This approach is characterized by several basic theses: media systems are determined by political systems, the degree of social modernization (the process of democratization and literacy) and political culture; political systems are more important as determinants than economic systems; the more media systems are disconnected from politics, the more professional and critical they are. The empirical base of R. Blum's research includes 23 countries in Europe, North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, Asia,



Africa, and the Middle East. The result of the analysis was a classification in which 6 main and several intermediate models were identified, combining characteristics of several types. The work of R. Blum covers a broader empirical base and a range of criteria than the previous ones, but the approach proposed by the Swiss scientist to classify media systems is unable to take into account the dynamics of the development of modern media markets, digital technologies and innovations in the media sphere and requires further development.

### **Modern approaches to classifications of media systems**

It is possible to continue the review of approaches to the classifications of media systems with a number of collective works that overlap with each other to one degree or another and develop the ideas of their predecessors. For example, let's highlight one of them. Clifford Christians, Theodore Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Robert White (2009) published a study in which democratic views on freedom of speech became a basic component in approaches to the analysis of media systems. The classification presented in this book develops and complements the already well-known four theories of the press by F. Sibert, W. Schramm, and T. Peterson and their corresponding classifications of media systems. In the 2000–2010s, a number of works devoted to the research of national media systems in the conditions of glocalization (interaction of global and local trends) appeared in foreign scientific literature. Among them are the works of N. Couldry and A. McCarthy (2004): their approach involves the study of the global and local in their relationship. D. Folkheimer and A. Jansson (2006) proposed an epistemological model of media research at three levels: regional, institutional and global, which examines the processes of convergence of the public and private spheres, global and local. T. Flew (2007, 2018) and S. Waisbord (2013) focused on the national specifics of media institutions and the role of media systems in the nation state in the context of globalization.

Modern approaches of Russian scientists to the research of media systems are based on the systematic study of structural components in their interrelations, taking into account the national context, historical traditions and socio-cultural characteristics of the nation. As noted by E.L. Vartanova, “modern media systems, becoming an increasingly complex technological and industrial phenomenon, increasingly integrating the consequences of global digital transformation, still remain an important national institution, preserving, and even possibly strengthening ties with the nation, the nation state, the country” (Vartanova, 2018, p. 11).

The approach of Russian researchers considering modern media systems in their continuous development under the influence of socio-social factors deserves attention: “It can be stated that media studies are experiencing their own ‘identity crisis’ today. This crisis can be described as the inability of journalistic science to respond to changes with adequate efficiency, to grasp their kaleidoscopic picture. Today, trends existing within the media systems of the world are being transformed faster than the ability of researchers to identify and fix them” (Nikolaichuk et al., 2016, p. 15).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the conceptual approaches of foreign and Russian scientists to the classifications of media systems and taking into account the realities of the development of the modern world, it can be noted that many of the parameters

and criteria used in the above classifications remain relevant. National media systems are integrated into the economic, political and social systems of states and develop in close relationship with all spheres of society. Media systems change depending on the processes in the system-forming spheres and, in turn, influence them. Political and economic factors that determine the essence and nature of media systems remain in the foreground. Social factors that are formed under the influence of politics and economics can influence intra-system processes, but do not change their essence, having a corrective effect. The main criteria by which media systems can be classified remain the same: politics (the nature of political institutions, the legislative framework for regulating mass media, the degree of freedom and censorship), economics (the volume and nature of capital in the media sphere, the level of market development, the degree of concentration), technology (the level of development of digital technologies that determine the speed, scale and volume of production and dissemination of information), professionalism (the level of competence of professionals with technology and knowledge). Schematically, according to these criteria, it is possible to modernize the classifications of predecessors by “embedding” their experience in a modern context. In this case, authoritarian, democratic and socially responsible media systems will differ only in shades of “authoritarianism, democracy and responsibility”, which, in turn, can be classified by tones and semitones. The essence remains the same.

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