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Инфодемия как фактор социальной безопасности и антиинфодемийная политика

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Аннотация
Пандемия COVID-19 в кратчайшие сроки изменила современный привычный мир, заставив человечество пересмотреть базовые принципы организации отношений между государством и гражданским обществом, различными субъектами глобальной политики, включая международные правительственные организации, глобальные информационные платформы, экспертно-аналитические структуры. Параллельно самой пандемии активное развитие приобрели процессы экспоненциально возрастающей и зачастую ложной информации по поводу причин, перспектив и последствий COVID-19 (инфодемия) в глобальном, национальном и локальном информационных пространствах. Данная информация изменяет рациональное поведение людей, ухудшает показатели их социального благополучия во всех мировых регионах, подрывает основы социальной безопасности, создавая враждебную окружающую среду вследствие высокой степени неопределенности и невозможности официальных институтов действовать оперативно. Статья посвящена исследованию влияния инфодемии на социальное благополучие общества как фактора социальной безопасности на разных уровнях организации власти и управления, а также обзору мер, предпринимаемых глобальными и национальными структурами для предотвращения инфодемии на основе компаративного анализа. В работе приведены и исследованы антиинфодемийные мероприятия, реализуемые ключевыми межгосударственными структурами (ООН, ВОЗ), оценена их эффективность и влияние на национальные практики реализации противодействия инфодемии; обобщены и систематизированы принципы государственной информационной политики в области противодействия инфодемии на уровне отдельных государств; предложены и рассмотрены основные элементы и универсальные направления борьбы с инфодемией с демонстрацией на примере отдельных стран и мировых регионов. В результате даны рекомендации по повышению эффективности национальных практик антиинфодемийной информационной политики.

Ключевые слова
Инфодемия, социальное благополучие, социальная безопасность, информационная политика, государственная политика.

Infodemic as a Factor of Social Security and Anti-Infodemic Policy

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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic in the shortest possible time has changed the modern familiar world, forcing humanity to reconsider the basic principles of organizing relations between the state and civil society, various subjects of global politics, including international government organizations, global information platforms, and expert and analytical structures. In parallel with the pandemic itself, the processes of exponentially growing and often false information about the causes, prospects and consequences of COVID-19 (infodemic) in the global, national and local information spaces have been actively developed. This information changes the rational behavior of people, worsens their social well-being in all regions of the world, undermines the foundations of social security, creating a hostile environment due to a high degree of uncertainty and the inability of official institutions to act quickly. The article is devoted to the study of the infodemic influence on social well-being as a factor of social security at different levels of the organization of power, as well as to an overview of the measures taken by global and national structures to prevent the infodemic based on a comparative analysis. The article presents and studies anti-infodemic measures implemented by key interstate structures (UN, WHO), assesses their effectiveness and impact on national practices for countering the infodemic. The principles of the state information policy in the field of combating the infodemic at the level of individual states are generalized and systematized, the main elements and universal directions of combating the infodemic are proposed and considered, with a demonstration on the example of individual countries and world regions. The article also provides recommendations for improving the effectiveness of national practices of anti-infodemic information policy for improving the effectiveness of national practices of anti-infodemic information policy.

Keywords
Infodemic, social well-being, social security, information policy, public policy.

Introduction

The venture nature of the modern world, the growth of risks and threats, the uncertainties of the future force us to reconsider the existing theoretical and methodological approaches to social well-being and social security as the basic categories of social policy of states, as well as to adjust the practice of its implementation on a national and global scale. Social well-being is the most important indicator of the socio-economic development of the state, the key goal of social policy [Костина 2015; Попов 2010], which allows us to talk about the achievement by individual countries and world regions of a high level of material well-being, health and security [Facchinetti, Siletti 2022]. These categories are the fundamental basis of social development and they are specified in such comprehensive universal documents as the UN Sustainable Development Goals[1]. The assessment of the social well-being level based on the methodology of International Labor Organization (ILO) includes such criteria as:

— provision of curative or preventive medical care;

— preservation of income in the event of a forced loss of earnings or a significant part of earnings;

— provision of additional income to persons performing family responsibilities.

In addition, the social security system must have an appropriate legal framework that gives certain individual rights or imposes certain duties on a state, semi-state or autonomous body. Furthermore, this system should be managed by a state, semi-state or autonomous body.

A broader interpretation of social security and well-being is typical for EU countries and includes voluntary schemes that are not provided for by law. In some countries, the term "social security" is used in a narrower sense. For example, in the United Kingdom, only statutory cash benefits are considered social security. In the United States, the term "social security" is limited to the federal Social Security System (OASDI), as opposed to government benefits and social security which would be called social assistance in Europe.

In general, following the Russian specialists in the field of social well-being and social security research, we adhere to the interpretation according to which social well-being can be interpreted as a person's satisfaction with the material, physical, social, professional, emotional components of one's life activity [Разинский 2014] based on subjective and objective assessments. Social well-being is the characteristic that determines the degree of success, stability and efficiency of the national public administration system in key areas (education, healthcare, economic sphere), which as a result leads to the legitimacy of the political regime, maintaining trusting relationships between the political and administrative elite and civil society. The processes of globalization have largely led to the growth of problems associated with the inability of states to ensure and maintain the social well-being and social security of their citizens [Ардашкин, Корниенко 2014; Костина 2015; Попов 2010].

Additional risks have been given by current challenges and threats to all of humanity. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic that has spread around the world since 2019 has revealed numerous failures and problems in modern public administration systems, primarily in the field of ensuring social well-being and supranational regulation of healthcare. In addition to the threat of at least physical human losses, the pandemic has revealed and caused a whole set of related problems. These are the rigidity of the public administration system, the failure of the social and healthcare sectors in many countries and

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[1] Sustainable Development Goals // UN [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ (accessed: 19.08.2022).

world regions, and significant restrictions on rights and freedoms due to the spread of the pandemic, etc. Another concomitant challenge of COVID-19 was the infodemic, which can be defined as "an excess of information that occurs during an epidemic, which can be either accurate or unreliable"[2].

Impact of infodemic on social well-being

Since the beginning of the pandemic, in the face of a lack of information from government officials and global intergovernmental organizations (IGO), the number of videos with the name COVID-19 has increased exponentially on the YouTube channel in the first month (361 million videos!), the publication activity of authors whose work was devoted to the pandemic increased sharply (19,200 articles were posted on Google Scholar). COVID-19 inquiries increased from 50% to 70% across all age groups[3]. At the same time, the information requested by the population, in most cases, could be defined as unreliable, containing misinformation not only about the essence of the pandemic and the new infection, but also about ways to combat it [Раренко, Воронцова 2021]. The lack of reliable information, and most importantly, of actors capable of curbing the spread of fakes and lies, made it possible to flood the global information space with a variety of messages about both the perpetrators of COVID-19 (China, the USA, Russia, secret societies, etc.), and rather exotic anti-pandemic measures, including treatment with folk home remedies[4]. Various conspiracy theories of population control, conspiracy of governments and individuals against humanity have spread with renewed vigor.

Actions based on false information can provoke victims. According to the latest research, in the first 3 months of 2020, almost 6,000 people around the world were hospitalized due to misinformation about the coronavirus. Researchers say at least 800 people may have died during this period due to misinformation related to COVID-19 [Islam et al. 2020, 1624].

The negative consequences of the infodemic are associated with many risks. Thus, in an environment of diverse and overabundant information, it is difficult for decision makers (including health care workers) to find reliable sources and reliable guidance for action. In this case, scientific organizations can be reliable sources. At the same time, the number of unreliable sources is large: from websites, blogs to individual influencers. The natural reaction of people to crises, epidemics and other challenges is anxiety and depression, which prevent the adoption of relevant effective decisions in the absence of time for a deep analysis of the situation.

Fake news and fake videos are additional powerful catalysts for fueling violence and community divisions, human rights violations. As the production and distribution of content grows, disinformation itself spreads, which no one controls. Thus, the infodemic is accelerating and reinforcing disinformation, creating uncomfortable conditions for the psychological well-being of citizens[5].

Countering the infodemic: supranational level

The infodemic is a global challenge, as evidenced by the actualization of interest in it from such authoritative international structures as the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO). WHO has identified the essence and main strategies to counter the infodemic at the supranational level through a set of measures. Thus, a special portal dedicated to the fight against the infodemic was launched[6];

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[2] 1st WHO Infodemiology Conference // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2020/06/30/default-calendar/1st-who-infodemiology-conference (accessed: 20.08.2022)
[3] Understanding the infodemic and misinformation in the fight against COVID-19 // РАНО [Electronic resource]. URL: https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52052/Factsheet-infodemic_eng.pdf (accessed: 12.09.2022).
[4] Коронавирус в умах: как пандемия превратилась в информационную эпидемию и как с ней бороться // РСМД [Electronic resource]. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/koronavirus-v-umakh-kak-pandemiya-prevratilas-v-informatsionnuyu-epidemiyu-i-kak-s-ney-borotsya/ (accessed: 14.09.2022).
[5] Understanding the infodemic and misinformation in the fight against COVID-19 // РАНО [Electronic resource]. URL: https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/52052/Factsheet-infodemic_eng.pdf (accessed: 12.09.2022)
[6] Infodemic // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_1 (accessed: 12.09.2022).

13 states representing different world regions, at the initiative of WHO, signed Cross-Regional Statement on "Infodemic" in the Context of COVID-19; The World Bank, with WHO technical leadership, launched the New Fund for Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response on 8–9 September 2022 (PPR)[7].

A major achievement in international cooperation against the infodemic has been the development of infodemiology, "a scientific discipline whose goal is to create sustainable tools that health authorities and communities can use to prevent and overcome the harmful effects caused by the infodemic"[8]. Specific tools of infodemiology are the creation of EARS, an AI-enabled early response and social listening tool that will help health authorities quickly identify growing narratives and "information gaps" preventing people from getting the information they need to make good health decisions. In practice, to solve the latter problem, the UN created the Mythbusters[9], whose employees actively worked with the main search engines, social networks, found false information and took measures to level it[10]. The Verified platform has become another UN tool to combat the infodemic and disinformation.

Through partnerships, WHO is actively working with governments and supranational actors to strengthen digital opportunities and use the principles of "social vaccination" to increase digital and health literacy, build resilience to misinformation and provide innovative ways to disseminate reliable health information in local communities. These include the development of a public health research agenda that provides guidance on what research to invest in to better understand, measure and respond to the infodemic. Other tools are weekly collection of public social and news media, web analytics and online search data to identify and understand infodemic-related online conversation patterns; conducting visual network analysis to better understand the ecosystems where disinformation can thrive; establishment of a repository of approximately 200 active COVID-19 fact-checking groups that verify COVID-19-related claims in over 40 languages; refinement of the infodemic observatory based on artificial intelligence to assess the current state of disinformation and the spread of disinformation.

In practice, these areas are specified in the form of WHO cooperation with analytical structures. The main goal is to study public sentiment in different countries by viewing 1.6 million pieces of information on various electronic platforms every week. The analyzed information is further classified into key categories such as cause, disease, intervention and treatment. Artificial intelligence (AI) allows highlighting the most popular topics of public opinion for the rapid and efficient development of recommendations in the field of healthcare. It is extremely important that AI, based on the analysis of information in social networks, also explores the emotional context of messages — moods, and classifies them into positive, negative and neutral. Such qualitative content analysis is the starting point for measures to "calm down" the public by developing differentiated strategies for working with different segments of society. Practice has shown that some topics appear in the global and regional information space with a certain frequency, which allows WHO to prevent the next wave of discussions.

To advance progress in the field of infodemiology, WHO regularly convenes the global community at conferences to discuss and identify ways forward on the topics of managing the infodemic[11]. The WHO is also working closely with social media and technology companies to help contain the misinformation that is being circulated on their platforms. In February, dignitaries from the health agency met at Facebook

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[7] New fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response formally established // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.who.int/news/item/09-09-2022-new-fund-for-pandemic-prevention--preparedness-and-response_-formally-established (accessed: 22.09.2022).

[8] Infodemic // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_3 (accessed: 22.08.2022).

[9] Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public: Mythbusters // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters (accessed: 05.09.2022).

[10] UN tackles 'infodemic' of misinformation and cybercrime in COVID-19 crisis // UN [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/un-tackling-%E2%80%98infodemic%E2%80%99-misinformation-and-cybercrime-covid-19 (accessed: 05.09.2022).

[11] Infodemic // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic#tab=tab_3 (accessed: 14.09.2022).

headquarters to agree on how to promote correct medical information about COVID-19. WHO is currently working with over 50 digital companies and social media platforms, including TikTok, Google, Viber, WhatsApp and YouTube. This ensures that evidence-based health information from the organization or other official sources appears first when searching for information related to COVID-19. Even dating app Tinder now has WHO reminders as social distancing is still important to maintain while dating. Global information platforms take action to combat fakes. So, Facebook[12], Google, Microsoft, LinkedIn, Reddit, Twitter and YouTube in March issued a joint statement on the association to combat misinformation about the coronavirus.

Giving an intermediate assessment of the effectiveness of the global anti-infodemic policy, we can state that it is quite high. For example, between March 2020 and April 2021, the Reuters Institute and the University of Oxford conducted a study on how people in eight countries (Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States) accessed news and information about COVID-19 and how their preferences for sources of information have changed over the pandemic year. The following conclusions were made[13].

Firstly, in almost all countries, news outlets were the single most widely used source of information about the coronavirus, and their credibility increased over the course of the year. However, despite their importance and widespread use, news outlets in most countries reached significantly fewer young people aged 18 to 24, and in most countries, they reached significantly fewer people with a low or intermediate level of education than people with a university degree. This fact highlights the problems associated with information inequality.

Further, some of the "rallying around the flag" (in other words, trust in information disseminated by official pro-government sources) that was observed earlier during the crisis is dissipating, but not equally for all state institutions.

Thirdly, in most of the countries covered, national health authorities, global health organizations, and scientists, doctors, or other health experts continue to enjoy high and widespread trust, although that trust has also declined somewhat, especially in Argentina and the United States.

It is surprising that the role of the political and administrative system is extremely ambiguous in the dissemination of rules and standards of behavior in a pandemic. On the one hand, leading politicians act as "guarantors of stability" and must embody the right ways of behavior, as well as be "mouthpieces" of reliable information about everything related to COVID-19, about what measures are being taken by the state as a whole to support citizens and fight the pandemic. At the same time, citizens of 8 countries studied, representing different world regions, noted that public concern is primarily focused on those messages that come from politicians. On average, 35% of respondents in eight countries believe that certain politicians, through their statements or behavior, have caused false or misleading information.

The level of trust in misinformation about coronavirus vaccines is very low in all countries. In most cases, over 90% do not believe any of the five false claims. Overall, just over half of survey respondents said the media helped them understand the pandemic.

Countering the infodemic at the state level

At the level of the nation-state, the recommendations of international structures are becoming clearer and are the basis for anti-infodemic state policy. It itself is only partly unique and new for state structures, since the fight against disinformation and fakes is traditionally considered by modern states as

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[12] Meta Platforms Inc. (owns Facebook and Instagram) — organization is recognized as extremist; its activities are prohibited on the territory of Russia.

[13] An ongoing infodemic: How people in eight countries access news and information about Coronavirus a year into the pandemic // Reuters Institute [Electronic resource]. URL: https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/ongoing-infodemic-how-people-eight-countries-access-news-and-information-about-coronavirus-year (accessed: 04.09.2022).

a key area of activity, and disinformation and information wars as threats to national security. The emphasis is only on content dedicated to the dissemination of information about the pandemic, its consequences, manifestations and methods of treatment.

The main principles of the national anti-infodemic policy are responsiveness, completeness, and protection of confidential information.

Responsiveness is the first key attribute used to evaluate the dissemination of official information. There has been a consensus in the literature for decades that people need fast and accurate information in emergency situations [Norris et al. 2008]. Such information should be transparent and honestly communicate both good and bad news [Heath, O'Hair 2009]. In rapidly developing crises, timely communication is essential, as even small delays can seriously impair the public's right to know and formulate correct answers [Kwon et al. 2013].

The next principle is the completeness of information disclosed by official sources. In crises with a high degree of uncertainty, it is desirable to disseminate "what is known" comprehensively in order to build public confidence [Moon 2020]. Lack of comprehensive disclosure spawns gaps filling rumors causing public concern [Kwon et al. 2013]. Comprehensive coverage of information about the epidemic can provide a sense of control that maintains the psychological safety of the population [Gómez-Salgado et al. 2020], and disclosing details of confirmed cases can provide recipients with what matters most to them, which can lead to behavioral changes that keep residents safe [Gupta et al. 2020].

While completeness is a key attribute of the quality of government's identification of an epidemic, public demands for more detailed information must be balanced against privacy safeguards [Fahey, Hino 2020], and this protection is another key attribute of such disclosure. For example, in many cities, detailed information about people with confirmed infections (such as their region of residence, travel and treatment history) has been published and made available to the general public in order to identify high-risk areas and prevent new infections [Hu et al. 2020]. However, disclosure of such information may create privacy concerns. In China, for example, there have been at least 22 cases where the disclosure of overly detailed information, such as travel history, allowed the individuals involved to be identified, leading to bullying, attacks and public controversy. In this sense, issues related to ensuring the confidentiality of information are the most problematic areas of anti-pandemic policy and are solved by different states in accordance with the special line and priorities of the national political and administrative elites.

In general, the anti-crisis state information policy for countering the infodemic combines both regulatory and legal measures (adoption of anti-fake laws, establishing criminal liability for the dissemination of false information about COVID-19, tracking and work of special bodies with unreliable websites), educational and informational nature (creation of official state resources to disseminate information about the pandemic), as well as additional measures to protect confidential information, attempts to limit the work of social networks and instant messengers.

As a part of the first direction, many states have tightened the responsibility for the dissemination of false information. The countries of Southeast Asia have more coordinated and quickly reorganized to respond to the spread of COVID-19 and the infodemic, expanding the responsibility in the form of prison terms for the dissemination of false information (Indonesia, Malaysia), fines for false and knowingly false information (Vietnam). However, some countries from this region did not take such tough measures, for example, Singapore ordered the "culprits" who posted unverified information to delete it. Immediately with the spread of the pandemic itself in 2019, the Asia-Pacific countries made efforts to regulate the media space in parallel with the tightening of legislation (the adoption of the "Lie and Manipulation Law" in Singapore,

the "Cyber Security Law" in Vietnam, Malaysia). China passed anti-fake laws long before the outbreak of the pandemic in 2015, but spreading any false information (including fakes about COVID-19) can lead to imprisonment for up to seven years.

Western European states, when implementing anti-infodemic campaigns, also work with online platforms, blocking false and labeling reliable information. Individual EU states, each in its own way, have changed the legislation in the field of combating disinformation. For example, after the adoption of the law on network practices in 2017, the German authorities oblige Internet platforms to remove fakes within 24 hours, failure to comply with this requirement entails large fines. The British government believes that it is more important to inform citizens about the facts than simply to refute false information. In Spain, fake news has been included in the national security strategy as one of the threats, along with the coronavirus and climate change.

In Russia, a package of laws prohibiting the creation and distribution of fake news was adopted in March 2019. On April 1, 2020, the President of the Russian Federation signed a law on criminal punishment for fakes that entailed grave consequences.

As a part of the second group of measures, following a global initiative to create portals aimed at disseminating reliable information about the sources, nature and methods of combating the pandemic, nation states are also launching government information resources containing up-to-date evidence-based information about COVID-19, monkeypox, etc. Information from these sources should be the basis for the behavior of any social groups in conditions of uncertainty and crisis. For example, the universal portal Стопкоронавирус.рф was launched in the Russian Federation, containing both the official position of WHO, incidence statistics from key expert international structures (Johns Hopkins University), and information on the spread of the pandemic in the country, measures to combat infection, support for non-governmental organizations (NGO) and businesses, information on liability for violation of anti-COVID measures, etc.

The official website of the White House has been constantly updated with information on key areas in the fight against the pandemic, including "COVID-19 protection and treatment, preparing for new variants/strains, preventing economic and educational disruptions, and continuing the U.S. leadership in vaccinating the world and saving lives"[14].

Along with the above two areas of combating the infodemic, social anti-crisis technologies used by the state are beginning to acquire special significance. They are aimed at maintaining constant communications between the state and, above all, representatives of the leadership subsystem and the population. In this context, the information policy of the state should be especially carefully implemented and focused on the following elements. Firstly, the disclosure of information about the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 is one of the most effective measures to dissuade crowds and motivate people to stay at home [Gupta et al. 2020]. Secondly, the timely release of key information can help contain the spread of the virus by improving contact tracing. For example, disclosing details of individual confirmed cases, such as their travel history, actions taken, and visible symptoms can alert people in close contact and encourage them to get tested and self-isolate [Smith et al. 2021]. Thirdly, sharing such information helps dispel rumors and misinformation that could undermine public confidence during a pandemic [Shaw et al. 2020]. The effective dissemination of such information can increase public trust, which is critical in combating the infodemic.

Conclusion

Infodemic as an overabundance or inaccurate information is a powerful challenge that accelerates the destruction of the social well-being and social security of people around the world. In the fight against the infodemic as the main source of social ill-being, psychological discomfort of people in the context of COVID-19, the decisive influence belongs to the dissemination of reliable official information from trusted sources in the form of, as a rule, authoritative international global and regional organizations, state media. However, practice has shown that the distribution of epidemic information varies significantly in different countries. A review of the national portals of 193 United Nations member states found that as of 25 March 2020, with 438,747 confirmed cases in 208 countries/territories/areas, 110 countries (57%) have publicly disclosed some information about COVID-19, while 83 countries (43%) have not provided any information. The types of information provided by governments also vary. Some countries provide only basic information such as outbreak data, travel restrictions, practical protection advice, and government responses, while others publish more detailed epidemic statistics. These discrepancies exist despite recommendations from the WHO that states should disseminate information in well-structured and understandable formats to quickly reach the people who need it[15].

In a crisis, the presence of the political leadership of the state in the national information space is necessary to demonstrate that citizens are not "abandoned" by the authorities, they overcome challenges together through constant direct communications. Representatives of the political and administrative elite, especially the head of state, systematically inform the population about the current situation, rules of conduct, including personal example (wearing masks and gloves during a pandemic, maintaining social distance, etc.). Thus, the state, represented by the political leader/leaders, completes the structure of trustworthy, official sources of information.

Russian practices are characterized by several messages from the President of the Russian Federation to the Russians regarding non-working days in connection with the pandemic, the self-isolation regime in March 2020. In the United States, it is worth mentioning President Biden's official address to the nation regarding clarification of the situation in the fight against the pandemic, in which Biden focused on statistics incidence, the rules of safe behavior (the need to wear masks and gloves), the need for mass vaccination for Americans, the losses from the pandemic, and most importantly, this message was key in the fight against the infodemic.

Summing up, it can be noted that the infodemic has become a powerful independent challenge to both national states and their populations, and global interstate structures. The infodemic directly worsened the objective and subjective indicators of social well-being. Despite the fact that the efforts of intergovernmental organizations and countries in the fight against infodemic were made in a timely manner and the mechanisms for developing strategic global measures to counter it were developed, cooperation between IGOs, national governments, non-state actors of the global information space was established, COVID-19 led to a sharp increase in the number of political instruments used to fight the pandemic at different levels of government around the world. While there has been a lot of focus on combating the pandemic itself (travel bans, lockdowns, social distancing and economic stimulus packages), there has been less focus on publicizing the epidemic by the government as a policy tool.

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[15] WHO Strategic Communications Framework for Effective Communications — Caribbean Policy Development Centre // WHO [Electronic resource]. URL: https://cpdcngo.org/download/who-strategic-communications-framework-for-effective-communications/ (accessed: 20.08.2022).

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