

## Russians' mass consciousness: philosophical interpretation

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### Abstract

The purpose of the article is to analyze effective social initiatives introduced in Russia, implementation of which suggests active engagement of citizens. The practical relevance of the philosophical analysis of 'mass consciousness' and its adaptation to the new principles of the society functioning is an indisputable fact for modern philosophers. The study of this sort of challenges is justified by the need to focus on social process management because, under the conditions of crisis, the breakdown of social basics, institutions, and habitual living conditions and norms, the impact of the awareness of the citizens on their activity and participation in national matters dramatically increases. The philosophical issue has been studied through considering and analyzing the basic features of the Russian mindset, which has proved to be a constant element of the mass consciousness in this country. At the present stage, there is a dissonance between the social aspiration of the Russian power elite and the steady and constant Russian mass consciousness, which stems from the intense mass media impact on the basic element of social consciousness and the unwillingness of the ordinary citizens to respond the proposed ideas and considering them very distant and impossible to convert into a reality. The background for the study is connected with the data of sociological research conducted through reviewing scientific literature content, group and in-depth interviews of the Russians belonging to different age groups with different levels of education and income, and different regions. Reflection on the data collected made it possible to present a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the concepts like 'mass consciousness', 'tolerance', consider the mechanisms of influence and determinants for mass consciousness transformation of the Russians. The materials presented in the paper are of practical significance and can be useful in developing and implementing methods and new technologies to create adaption moods and attitudes in modern social ambiance, manage social processes at various levels, implement mass media programs and information-and-communication PR techniques, develop tolerant ideas, prevent and solve national and social conflicts, organize and conduct social and political events.

**Key words:** mass consciousness, tolerance, philosophical analysis, Russians, mass consciousness transformation determinants, value system

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### Introduction

Social development in Russia is closely associated with fundamental and, at the same time, contradictory social, economic and political changes that affect every Russian person, cause 'breakdown' of the previous social-and-psychological stereotypes, value systems, beliefs, worldviews and behaviors. The Russians' mass consciousness is currently undergoing some transformations.

Philosophical consideration of mass consciousness in modern Russia is multifaceted in features and has both theoretical and practical relevance. The essential characteristic of society is its organization on the basis of conscious and purposeful activity of people (Lapkin, Pantin, 2005). Within the framework of any modern society social development, it is the leaders, political elite and artistic aristocracy acting as intellectuals capable of conscious activities who manage to mobilize social activity of people through the use of various social techniques (Solzhenitsyn, 1995). Therefore, in crisis periods and the periods characterized by instability or fundamental

change in the vector of social or political development, the problem of the elite and the public interaction dramatically exacerbates. The central point of this problem is the coincidence of the public and the elite activity interests and aspirations, which involves a transformation of the mass consciousness, its adaptation to changes.

Currently, despite the best efforts made to adapt the new social reality, the peculiarity of modern social life the country demonstrates various degrees of success in it. However, due to existing constant components in mass consciousness (connected with the mentality and mindset), it is to some extent conservative, and this is evident when considering the phenomenon of 'resistance to social transformations'. The resistance to social transformations may both refer to radical rebellion and be a passive tacit resistance in nature, i.e. 'psychology of social inertia and social counteraction,' causing lagging in the transformation process (Novikova, 2011; Zolotukhin et al., 2017).

Reliable philosophical consideration of social mentality and the mass consciousness transformation laws is crucial, as without it management decisions and reformatory 'historical shifts' can only accidentally be successful and attain the organizers' objectives. Analysis of effective large-scale social solutions and initiatives implemented in Russia shows that, as a rule, while implementing them, the great masses of the population have been engaged in social activities. Therefore, the practical relevance of the philosophical analysis of mass consciousness and its adaptation to the new principles of society functioning is unquestionable. The study of this problem is justified by the need to manage and control social processes, because, under the conditions of a crisis, the breakdown of social foundations, institutions, living standards and norms of behavior, the impact of mass consciousness on social processes development dramatically increases.

We know that the issues of mass consciousness occupied the minds of thinkers for a long time and they expressed it through discussing the categories of 'national character,' and 'national mentality' (Gumilev, 2008). National character is one of the most difficult and controversial problems in the theory of nations and national relations (Lossky, 1991). In scientific literature one can encounter absolutely contrarian views concerning its essence and value in the peoples' life: from denial of national character as existing reality to the recognition of its crucial, or even fateful, value in the history of nations and the states all over the world (Kara-Murza, 2009).

There are three approaches proposed to define the content of the 'mentality' concept in modern Russian philosophy:

1. as a combination of routine mindful perceptions and representations, symbolic images and values (Ivanov, 1994; Fild, 1996);
2. as a combination of collective unconscious archetypal components (Gurevich, 1989; Bolshakov, 2012);
3. as a combination of conscious and unconscious layers.

The third approach considers the mentality in a broad sense (Mchedlova, 2004; Gorshkova, Krumm, Petuhov, 2009; Orekhovskaya, 2012). In the context of the paper, we use this approach because, according to its purpose, it is mostly focused on the discussion of social factors in the philosophical consideration of mentality in the structure of the Russians' mass consciousness, as well as on the study of the actual elements that make up the content structure of 'mentality'.

### **Hypothesis**

The mass consciousness of the Russians is a subordinated system with elements that perform various social functions. The mass consciousness in Russia is a system exposed to the global and local social determinant impact, which influences both mental peculiarities and inconsistency of its recent transformation. The tendencies of evolution and mass consciousness operation are conditioned by intrinsic derivatives of

its nature and structure, and are distinguished, on the one hand, by continuity and stability of a priori basis for 'Russian', 'Soviet', 'post-Soviet' mentality, and, on the other hand, by its dynamic nature. The basic features of the Russian mentality are considered as a constant element of the mass consciousness of all Russian society (Orekhovskaya et al., 2017). At the present stage, there is a dissonance between the social aspiration of the Russian power elite and the steady Russian *mass*, or '*grass-roots*', *consciousness*, which stems from the intense mass media impact on the basic *element* in *social consciousness* and the unwillingness of the common citizens to respond to the proposed ideas that are considered by them as very distant and impossible to convert into a reality.

Development of tolerance, as the dominant attitude in the mass consciousness of the Russians, manifests itself as the primary factor of social and political stability, as it sets the foundation in their value system. These values will determine the social and moral atmosphere for the Russians' mass consciousness to adapt to the changes underway and will be a surety to prevent social *upheavals* in the country, increase the efficiency of adaptation processes in the modern Russian society, which is associated with the necessity to have a complex purposeful systemic activity of the state.

### **Research Materials and Methods**

Transdisciplinary metaparadigms form the basis of the research discussed. Its underlying methodology is connected with a systematic approach combining structural-and-functional, dialectical, and hermeneutical methods. This approach allows revealing essential aspects of mass consciousness in their dialectical interrelation. It makes it possible to overcome constraints inherent in heuristic capabilities of specific methodologies.

While solving research tasks we used general methods of comparison, analysis and synthesis, as well as comparative-and-typological and direct historical approaches. There have been also social-philosophical, sociological, political science and other research developments, both of domestic and foreign authors reviewed. Moreover, we have studied the sources of empirical character, i.e. representational applied sociological studies carried out by Russian sociological centers (Public Opinion Foundation, All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center, Russian Academy Sociology Institute, Levada Center) conducting public opinion polls in different regions and different social groups.

In the course of philosophical analysis of this extremely complex, contradictory and changeable phenomenon defined as 'mass' consciousness we have used the system analysis of mass intentions. The methodology made it possible, on the one hand, to explore the dialectics of the objective external field of 'mass' concept, and, on the other hand, reveal the subjective-and-active, attributive characteristics and intentions of the mass consciousness.

### **Results**

The Russians' mass consciousness has been adapting to the new social reality, as much as it is possible for them, but with varying degrees of success. Therefore, the study of the essence, structure, evolution, transformation and adaptation of mass consciousness in modern Russian society is both of theoretical and practical significance, which has been dictated by the following circumstances.

The first one is associated with the contemporary crisis processes that have engulfed all spheres of life in Russian society. 'Massivization' elements in public life, the mechanisms of their occurrence and changes under the crisis require focused study and scientific justification as the understanding of their roles and functions, as well as an impact on the changes in society are becoming key conditions for successful activity in this important sphere of human existence. The processes emerging in the depths of the contemporary Russian mass consciousness have been expressed through

various public manifestations including social apathy and aggression, socio-political indifference, ethnophobia and xenophobia, 'mass' cults and psychosis disorders.

Second, the humanities and social sciences do not contain an integrated theoretical model developed for mass consciousness. This is because of the fact that the study of the relationships of mass, ethno-national and ethno-religious consciousness is not always a priority for social philosophy (Ivanov, 1994). Insufficient use of systematicity characterizes this field of social-and-philosophical knowledge. We have been witnessing fragmental, inconsistent, one-sided judgments expressed by professionals in their methodological approaches (Lyashenko, 2014). The general theoretical and empirical under investigation of this phenomenon, largely due to its size and comprehensiveness, at each new historical stage of the Russian society development presents a new subject for the humanities-and-social sciences, and social philosophy in particular.

Third, the interdisciplinary nature of the problem is also of significance. Mass consciousness covers the subject areas of various sciences - economics, history, culture, philosophy, sociology, social psychology, and requires the researcher to choose a survey site that would allow generalizing the results of the analysis obtained in adjacent fields of knowledge and integrate them. The social-and-philosophical approach has been considering this perspective, or aspect.

Fourth, manifestation of the contradictory dynamics between the constants and the mobile structural elements of the mass consciousness while it has been transforming due to the objective conditions of life and adapting to modern changes in the Russian society. In addition to the faster-changing components, mass consciousness sometimes contains not only stereotypes, traditions changing slowly and gradually, but also constant, almost invariable ones associated with the characteristics of the underlying qualities of the mentality. Mentality as a key element of the mass consciousness, it is not able to adjust quickly under the influence of external circumstances, as its deep layers are associated with historical memory and archetypes of human behavior, as well as social gene-typology with individual and collective unconscious as a 'repository' of social and cultural experience.

Fifth, the need to determine the tolerant ideas for influencing mass consciousness for the purpose of consolidation of the multinational and multiconfessional Russian society, with the active use of information and communication technologies (Orekhovskaya, 2015). This is the period of embittered morals, spread of aggressive intentions and actions caused by objective social and economic reasons, legal flaws and policy of certain groups (Dubova, 1997). It is essential to ensure in-depth right approach to study the phenomena and, therefore, the key concepts (tolerance and is the antithesis - extremism), their interpretation should be free from the illusions of the mass consciousness, one-sided exaggerated expectations. The real solution to empower the tolerance in modern Russia depends on the social and political, economic, cultural and legal environment, as well as the effectiveness of the methods and resources of informational and communicative influence on mass consciousness to ensure social-political stability in modern Russia.

## **Discussions**

The challenge of studying the mass consciousness is interdisciplinary, and the center of attention for representatives of various specialties: historians, philosophers, sociologists, political scientists and psychologists.

The Rostov-on-Don scientific school conducted a number of studies on related issues, namely: identity in modern society and the problems related to national identity (Batyrev, 2009), identification of the Russian identity, the influence of ideology on its structure (Volkov et al., 2017), and the analysis of ideology role in modern society; the specific nature and problems of modern society in the context of interaction

between social structures and institutions (Malickiy, 2005); as well as transformational processes in different fields of society and influence mechanisms in the multidimensional space of the social system (Gerasimov, Ilyukhina, 1999).

Russian science has accumulated a sizable theoretical capacity concerning the public consciousness as a whole. The phenomenon of public conscience, the mechanism of its formation and the changes in its content-related elements - all these issues have always been in the focus of such Russian thinkers as S. Soloviev, K. Leont'ev, N.A. Berdyaev (2016), S.N. Bulgakov (1993), I. Ilyin, and many others.

In theoretical papers of foreign authors, based on a fundamentally different methodological positions, such as R. Aron (1992), D. Bell (1973), M. Weber (2017), A. Tocqueville (1992) and others, the ideas of an economic basis and the value core of social evolution, determinism and spontaneity in social change processes have been presented in a variety of historical ratios.

In the framework of social-and-philosophical concepts, there is quite a robust layer of ideas about the dialectic development of the social consciousness in Russia, discussed in the works of A.A. Bogdanov (1994), N.Y. Danilevsky (2002), M.M. Kovalevsky (2015) and others. This topic occupied a prominent place in the works of G.V. Plekhanov (1977) and V.I. Lenin (1913) concerning the social revolution reasoning, justification for revolution and class struggle. Other famous scientists proposed alternative scientific positions: N.A. Berdyaev (2016), S.N. Bulgakov (1993), P.A. Sorokin (2006), etc. Due to historical circumstances and for a certain period of time, Marxism became a dominant ideology, a social-and-philosophical doctrine, both for problems concerning social consciousness and social-and-economic development in general.

Domestic scientists developed issues related to social consciousness on the basis on the methodological attitude of Marxism to allocate its two levels, the social ideology and social psychology that differ according to their functions, forms of manifestation, systematization, cognitive capabilities, etc. Social psychology was understood and interpreted as consciousness involving its rational and irrational layers. The dialectical interaction of these levels was considered in the sense of continuing increase in the trend of social psychology rationalization, introducing theoretical knowledge (scientific and ideological as well) and expanding its volume.

Foreign science was associated with a different tradition considering social processes as the result of collective moods and attitudes, negative effects of the negative mass, crowd, and energy on social development. This negative energy was generated as a result of massivization of the community (as a result of the production standardization and consumption) and displacement of people from real politics and culture. Therefore, 'mass consciousness' concept inception in western countries involved both doctrine propositions (ideological views), and emotion-and-value systems, moods, attitudes, feelings, and elements of the collective unconscious (Chernyshev, 2008).

The problem of the mass consciousness and ideology interrelation has become a relevant contemporary challenge. A significant contribution to this scientific topic was made by such scientists as M.K. Gorshkov (1997), N.N. Kozlova (1989), Yu.G. Volkov et al. (2017), S.G. Kara-Murza (2009).

The conceptual development of the problems of mass consciousness demanded that Russian scientists should borrow some categories from western science, the concept of 'mentality' in particular. This concept was developed by representatives of the *Annales school*, a group of French historians. The national mentality is one of the features of any nation. Mentality ensures the connection of times and the continuity of generations. Russia's millennial history is rich in various mental values that worth being remembered as the part of our history but also considered in the future, i.e. future in the past. This topic was developed by P.A. Sorokin (2006) in his work "Social and Cultural Dynamics" (Sorokin, 2006). The issue of mentality as a stable element of mass consciousness is analyzed by N.A. Berdyaev (2016) in his work "The

Origins and Meaning of Russian Communism" (2016), which showed the specific features of the Russian mentality rooted in the original culture of the people, create a theoretical basis for the study of the mentality role in the structure of the modern Russian mass consciousness. The development of this approach is largely facilitated by the modern study of ethnic and cultural characteristics of the Russians at the current stage of social and historical development of Russia (Sikevich, 1996).

## **Conclusions**

The main historical premises for mass consciousness identity formation in Russia determined by its internal derivatives are associated with the interethnic mixing to form the Russian people. It belongs to super-ethnoses, that is, ethnic groups formed on a multi-ethnic basis. Mass consciousness is a unique form of consciousness functioning in specific historical conditions and formed under the influence of the environment, living conditions of individuals, and mass media; it is a repository of social and cultural experience. Mass consciousness can play both a creative role, acting as a stabilizing factor, and a destructive role, aggravating contradictions of society and possessing a certain degree of independence. The structure of mass consciousness consists of three levels, where the first one is a deep level consisting of constant, virtually unchanging, a priori, elements that are present in the unconscious layers of mass consciousness and associated with the characteristics of the deep mentality qualities; the second level is the basic one including stable elements with possible but slow and gradual changes (stereotypes, traditions); the third is the upper level including elements formed and developed currently.

Mentality as a way of people's awareness of their natural and social environment is the foundation for the whole system of mass consciousness. The function of mentality in the mass consciousness is to provide mechanisms of stability, not mechanisms of change. In the context of social change, political mentality is of particular importance, as the part most prone to changes, since the content of the political mentality has always been determined by the dominant idea in society, which impacts the directives of human activity and behavior in the social world.

Geopolitical determinants of the formation of the mentality of the Russians are caused by the geographical length of the country, the severity of climatic conditions, private wars due to a large number of border zones. These geopolitical determinants predestined both the essential features of the Russian mentality and the modern forms of their manifestation: egalitarian-and-collective freedom and social justice, partial transfer of personal freedom to the community; love of freedom manifested in such forms as spiritual open-heartedness, contemplation, creative ease; courage, fortitude, self-sacrifice, as a manifestation of the qualities of a brave defender of the Fatherland. The dynamics of the social changes impact on the mass consciousness involves the changes in the hierarchy of norms; the negative norms zone is actively expanded through narrowing the positive zone: a) the slogan to work better is replaced by consume better; b) mutual assistance by egocentrism; c) confidence in the future by social and national tensions.

The impact mechanism of PR techniques is determined by a system of influenced object features including life experience, level of education and upbringing, genetic and social-and-cultural components (Volkov et al, 2017). The impact of information and communication PR techniques on the mass consciousness is ambiguous, because it is always an integral part of social processes, as PR tools and techniques consider the content and methods of introducing information and may be aimed at contributing both positively and negatively to the mass consciousness of the population. Methods and resources of PR techniques used to impact the mass consciousness of the Russians in contemporary Russia is continually improving; a special methodological approach has been created determined by hermeneutics and synergetic as they suggest that a

complex influence should be exerted on mass consciousness by experts using special software for mass media, the Internet, film industry, literature, art, etc. Tolerant ideas are used to adapt the mass consciousness, create the atmosphere of social-and-political stability in the society and, thus, perform a stabilizing function.

The paper materials have practical application and can be useful for the development and implementation of methods and new technologies used to create and develop adaption moods and attitudes in the modern social environment, manage social processes at various levels, introduce mass media programs and new *ICT* solutions for PR techniques, form tolerant ideas, prevent and resolve national and social conflicts, organize and conduct social and political events.

The materials of the philosophical study carried out in the paper can be used in research and development projects to cover the transformation processes in Russia in the late XX-early XXI centuries, carry out development and further application of one's own methods in this field, new technologies to create adaption moods and attitudes in the modern social *ambience* in Russia.

In addition, philosophical conclusions can serve as the basis for adopting practical decisions in the field of social processes management at various levels, implementing mass media programs and new *ICT* solutions for PR techniques, creating new tolerant ideas, preventing and resolving national and social conflicts, organizing and conducting social and political events (elections, referendums, state and national historical events, festivals, advertising, cultural and sports events, etc.).

The information of the paper presented can be used by researchers and state bodies and public organizations as a subject for further more detailed investigation.

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