

## Psychological features of Russia's media image

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### Abstract

In the recent years in the field of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge the quality aspects of information have been highlighted as having the most influence on the audience. In that regard the most attention is being given to discourse representation; its role in social constructing is being thoroughly analysed. Studies of media discourse are conducted in terms of interdisciplinary approach. The main aim of our research is to identify psychological contents of Russia's representation in Russian federal print mass media. We developed a 3-stage method which is a modification of content analysis method. Our research showed the possibility of psychological analysis of the discourse representation's direction onto reflection/construction. The conducted analysis allowed us to identify structural characteristics of Russia's media image and to describe their dynamics. We outlined the specifics of information presentation which may define the pattern of influence on the audience. The research illustrates the possibilities of conducting comparative analysis of media images of different countries.

**Keywords:** Media Image; Russia; Discourse; Psychological Influence; Representation;

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## 1. Introduction

Communication as a process of broadcasting has become an “acting agent” of the contemporary informational society. Both in the fields of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge the quality aspects of information have been highlighted as influencing the audience the most. We should also point out a very significant change in the status and roles of systems and means of mass media in social and political areas of life. A famous Italian semiotician Umberto Eco wrote in his work ‘Towards a Semiological Guerrilla Warfare’ (1986) that ‘information and communication have become a main production force in the modern society’. Serge Moscovici compared modern means of communication with the nervous system. However, modern systems of mass communication are transformed from ‘production force’ and ‘the forth power’ into a controlling tool for society in all its aspects.

First of all, we should remember that mass media is the key audience that we are connecting with. Establishing a constant informational flow is the foundation for developing relationship with mass media. And even if we talk about foreign audiences, this flow is being established inside the country, since foreign media will use national media as well as their sources of information. Therefore, one of the main target groups for our research is foreign journalists who work with information about internal affairs that they receive and process for their native countries. We should also point out that foreign citizens who speak Russian in their daily lives also comprise a significant community. For example, there are approximately 6 to 8 million ‘rusophones’ in the European Union (Kochko, 2019). It is recommended to systematically find informational causes that will allow to developing constant informational flow and in order for that to work the country should be widely represented. Mass media plays a significant role in shaping the image of the country.

The media serve as a trustworthy source of information and have become not only participants in international affairs, but also influential intermediaries as their opinions reflect a definite outlook on the political situation and human value. Lilleker (2006) argued that traditional media still dominates the communicative field of the society and influence formation of the media images. Nowadays mass communication may effectively influence organization of many processes that happen in different areas of human activities. Means of mass communication may be considered instruments of power and a way of cognitive influence on the formation of the world view. (Luman, 2005).

### 1.1. Related Research

#### 1.1.1. Representation of the state image

Cultural factor plays a key role in the process of researching media images. Culture underpins the development of strategy and tactics of communication, behaviour and mentality. Science as a part of culture carries particular features, e.g., Russian science is perceived as systematic and holistic (Aleksandrov & Aleksandrova, 2009). Those principles lie at the foundation of researches led by Russian scientists in the fields of psychology of creating reality images on different levels: individual and collective, currently developing and completely formed. State image in media communication guide both individuals and society on the whole during the process of adjusting and self-actualization; it is a part of socialization and identity and the most important condition for setting life goals. State image is a part of the general world view of the person. Therefore, researchers’ interests are drawn to the state

image developed by media, its structural and dynamic characteristics. Researching media texts allows to developing the notion how reality is constructed and represented in media.

In the recent years in the field of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge the quality aspects of information have been highlighted as having the most influence on the audience. In the recent years, media researches are developing within the interdisciplinary discursive paradigm (Kubryakova, 2000; Mediatekst: strategii – funktsii – stil..., 2010; Dyke, 2005; Wetherell & Potter, 2015). In that regard the most attention is being given to discourse representation and its role in social constructing is being thoroughly analysed (Galinskaya, 2013; Rogozina, 2003; Harmann, 2008). Media image of the country as a result of discourse representation is both an important strategic resource and a significant competitive advantage. Studies of media discourse are conducted in terms of interdisciplinary approach. Discourse plays the role of a versatile descriptive model of media communication; it helps to reveal media image's content and to describe the dynamics of its development and uncover its perceptive effects. Psychology plays a significant role in current studies of discourse. Application of psychological analysis expands our understanding of mechanisms and effects of media discourse. Political psychology interprets media discourse as a topically directed activity of speech and mind caused by communicative and social culture in media space.

Another important concept in this respect is representation. Representation is a concept widely used in linguistics, psychology and sociology. We should point out that psychological researches of discourse include differences connected with choosing a basic conceptual model, e.g. cognitivism and social constructionism. Modern linguistics distinguishes the concepts of cognitive and discursive representation more clearly within the cognitive discursive paradigm. Discursive paradigm is a relatively new concept. One of the first researches who suggested distinguishing cognitive and discursive representation of reality was Dyke and Kinch. They pointed out that the concept of discursive representation particularly allows to understanding that cognitive representation of the event and its discursive representation, i.e. telling about the event, may not be a 100% match. If they do not match, the recipient is presented only with a speaker's verbalized version of the event (Van Dyke, 1998). In our work, we view discursive representation of reality in media discourse in two varieties: discursive representation of reality as a type of "reflection" and discursive representation of reality as a type of "construction". The concept of discursive representation of reality as a type of "construction", in our opinion, allows to providing linguistic justification to such traditional notions in the analysis of media discourse as point of view, myth, stereotyping, manipulation, deceit, disinformation. Despite many researches on the topic, these concepts are still not explained through discursive construction of reality.

Research of the discourse reveals its crucial feature that every discourse implies psychological influence (Pavlova, 2013). Effects of that influence may be found in peculiar behaviours, affects, cognitive structures. Psychological researches specifically point out the role that media's influence plays in social representations and world view of a person and social groups. Social representations serve as a channel of connection between a person and the world around them, and also have a function of describing, interpreting and explaining the reality, of regulating social life (Gostev, 2007). Social representations are caused by the culture of unity and urgent contexts of social situations. Media images may influence representations both constructively and destructively thus changing a person's attitude to the world around them, to events and people, their understanding of reality and models of behaviour.

## **1.2. The Aim of Study**

The main aim of our research is to identify psychological contents of Russia's representation in Russian federal print mass media. The object of our research is leading Russian print mass media. Izvestia (translated as 'delivered messages') is a Russian newspaper that has been publishing news about society, politics and business since 1917, now it belongs to National Media Group holding. Nowadays Izvestia is the one of most cited publications in Russia and it is considered a reputable publication. It covers current news about politics, economics, international relations, publishes articles about different subjects in the way of life of Russian society. Opinions of leading experts in science, politics, business and finances are also published in the newspaper, as well as analytical materials on main directions of inner and outer politics and interviews with cultural figures.

## **2. Methods and Materials**

We carried out our research in the 6-months period from December 2018 to May 2019. Overall, we analysed 1716 article titles in Izvestia. We considered article titles as units of analysis as initially it is the title that is the main deciding factor whether a person will read the whole article or not. The subject of our research is Russia's media image. Semantic descriptive categories in regard to 'country' (Sveshnikova, 2012) were at the basis of our analysis: Motherland – history of the country, way of life, demographics; Economic power – labour resources, financial system, priority directions of developing industrial production; State – the system of civil-legal and power relations, providing security; Ideology – values and moral ideals, vision of the future and directions of social and personal development. Overall, we analysed 100 articles. In order to carry out our research we developed a 3-stage method which is a modification of content analysis method.

The first stage was evaluation of country's representation features according to four basic categories: cultural and historical space, economics, state and legal space and ideals and values. We described such meaningful components as concept of "Motherland", "Economic power", "Russia in the system of international relations". The second stage was analysis of the meaning behind the articles in given modules and their arrangement into four categories (factual, evaluative, forecasting and prompting certain attitude to events and people). The third stage focused on defining quality features of the contents of the articles according to the specially developed system of analytical units that consists of three modules. We developed our method based on the methodological developments of Russian and foreign experts in the field of texts analysis (Semenov, 2005; Krippendorff, 1980; Mayring, 1994; Leontovich, 2015).

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The analysis of article titles allowed us to distinguish the main problematic topics in informational materials that report on different areas of life in the Russian society. In the research period (December 2018-May 2019) we observed a rise in forecasting publications that speculate about the future of Russia and cultural and historical aspects of society's development. As a result of our research, we found out that Russia is represented in media discourse of Izvestia mostly in the following way: 64% of representations relate to the category of cultural and historical space of the country, while 67% of representations relate to the category of ideals, ideas about the future and declared values (67%). 46% are dedicated to problems in economic development, while 41% is dedicated to Russia's role in the system of international relations. A special emphasis in representation of Russia is given to the development of human capital and strategies of country's development. We compared acquired data with data from researches conducted previously (2007-2010). At that time, the main emphasis was given to governmental building (36%) and interparty discussion, economics and finances (48%),

problems of social politics (18%) and strategic directions the development of Russia (10%). The leading topics discussed national health, protection of motherhood and childhood, urban development, ecology and food supply safety, creating comfortable environment for elder and disabled people.

Also the dominating topics included strategic development of Russia, its safety, international collaboration in the system of providing peace, development of modern technologies for the social fields of health and economic development, international collaborations in science and culture.

It is important to note that Russian informational field shows Russia in the sphere of international relations as a partner ready to develop cooperation with China, the USA, Iran, Turkey and the leading countries of the European Union – Germany, France and Italy, Africa and Latin America. Russian researches on the topic show dynamic character of the Russia's image in the world (Kiselev, Smirnova, 2003). The main newsmakers include the President of Russia V. Putin, head of the foreign office of Russia Lavrov, minister of health Skvortsova, leading experts in the science, education, international relations, culture, and sports. Our analysis has shown the changes in the structure of newsmakers – before there was only one leading newsmaker, Vladimir Putin, while now this list has expanded. Representatives of culture and science started to play an important role along with specialists in the system of international relations. The analysis of articles' titles showed that most of them relate to analytical and prognostic (63%) types of titles; the percentage of materials based on facts became lower (24%); only 13% of articles were evaluative.

We identified the following basic values: personal freedom, national sovereignty, national interests, interethnic consent, safety and health. By analyzing lexical, structural, semantic and topical units and evaluations we found out that social processes in the society are considered in the context of development. There is also analysis of existing problematic aspects and risks in demographics, family and childhood issues, quality of life of seniors and people with special needs (examples: "increase of welfare", "accessible environment", "quality of life", "maternal capital", "building kindergartens", "help for young families", etc.). The articles focus on critical evaluation and discussion of suggested solutions to social and economical problems. The main obstacles to social and economic development are represented by such urgent socially important issues as corruption and bureaucracy. The primary focus is made on perfecting management processes ("quality of management", "preparing top managers") and the quality of laws and law enforcement practice. The key strategy is «cooperation» which includes social life, culture, international relations, business, finance, industrial production and ecology.

We compared acquired data with previous researches (from 2007-2011). In that researches main attention was given to state construction (36%) and interparty discussion, to economics and finance (48%) while social political issues (18%) and strategic development of Russia (10%) were not at the center of the discussion. Structural characteristics of Russia's media image (in 2007-2011) included: dominating financial and economic issues in Russia and its image on the international arena, development of a system of civil-legal relations. Comparison of Russia's representation in 2007-2011 and in 2019 showed the following common topics: national health, demographics, safety and international security, industrial development, finance, quality of life and problems in the legal system. However, we should point out that semantic accents in representation of society and state problems shifted. Media image in 2007-2011 dwelled on the urgency of "today", prognoses in regard to economical and political development were made only for present and there was a lot of negative judgment. 54% of the articles were evaluative, while 26% were based on fact. The lack of time perspective, negativization and non-analytical critical approach work towards forming emotional perception of processes and events that happen in the country.

We should also note the contents of lexical, conceptual, referential and evaluative units in analyzed media texts. The informational field mainly included the following words: “fight” (“fighting poverty”, “fighting corruption”, “fighting crime”, “political fight”), “decline” (“industrial decline”, “agricultural decline”, “decline in birth rate”, etc.), “arbitrariness” (“bureaucratic arbitrariness”, “judicial arbitrariness”, “arbitrariness of banks”, etc.). The issue of “trust” to political and financial institutions, election system, “freedom of speech” and “political reforms” were also a part of heated discussions. Informational field included generic and mythologized references such as “the West”, “liberals”, “communists”, “deep state”, etc. Present problems of the Russian society are viewed through the image of the future, analysis of the country's and society's direction of development and ways of solving urgent problems. Our analysis allowed us to identify regularities in information presentation in the Russian media which may define the character of influence on the audience.

Foreign publications represent Russia as the “enemy”, “aggressive state” with expansionist aspirations, while the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin is shown as the embodiment of the “world evil” and a politician with unbelievable influence on the world processes (Vinogradova & Melnik, 2009). This approach of representing Russia (Cottam & McCoy, 1998) maintains in western media to this day and recent research of International Information Agency “Russia Today” confirms this idea. The research analyzed materials from Top-10 world leading print and electronic media in the USA, the UK, Germany, France, Italy and Japan. During the research 81.5 thousands of articles and news alerts were analyzed and only 2% of the materials were positive, 49.81% were negative and 48.12% were neutral. The USA was named the leader in creating negative media image of Russia: 90.8% of all materials were negative, 8.9% were neutral, while only 0.2% were positive. Italian's press present Russia in the most positive way (13.2% positive publications; 23.3% of negative publications). This research showed tendencies and political engagement of many foreign media outlets that prevent creation of the positive interaction in international relations. The actively aggressive character of influence on the masses and creation of negative media image of Russia in international media serves as an example of information dictate and it forms a representation of the country that is highly accentuated and fragmented. Results of the comparative analysis show that media's image of the country is defined by social-political and economic situation in the country. The media may play the role of a “guide” to the political life of the country and its different political and economical groups, but also maintain being a place for public discussion of urgent issues and the image of the future.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Such deep analysis allowed us to identify a structure of Russia's media image and describe characteristics of the concept of «country» in the Russian mass media. Our research showed the possibility of psychological analysis of the discourse representation's direction onto reflection/construction. It allowed us to identify various types of print mass media according to the nature of their impact, define their concept on the basis of their meaningful content and the degree to which they participate in construction of meaning for the audience. Our method gives an opportunity to describe dynamic characteristics of media image, identify its dominants and lacunas, harmony/disharmony. The research illustrates the possibilities of conducting comparative analysis of media images of different countries. The results of our research may be applied in practice in journalism, political consulting and political imageology.

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