

**ISMGE 2020****II International Scientific and Practical Conference "Individual and Society in the  
Modern Geopolitical Environment"****REPRESENTATION OF URBAN IDENTITY IN MEDIA SPACE**

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***Abstract***

The article describes the capacity to analyze the idea of the city in virtual space. The authors consider that in the modern world the image of the city, its authenticity and uniqueness are developed particularly in the virtual world. This process is implemented through description of the city's image in the media area. The scientific tasks were carried out by means of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Taking the example of the city of Volgograd, the authors view the potential of the digital environment for the investigation and development of urban identity. The results show that the image of the city is reflected in the media scene. The analyzed examples depict the contradictory character of Volgograd, especially within emotional component. On the one hand, Volgograd is represented through the images and symbols reflecting its historical past and cultural background in the media area, but on the other hand, its uniqueness involves some negative characteristics. According to the authors, positive image of the city is interlinked with the steady complete urban identity of its residents, that is why further research is important both for clarifying the content and for determining the potential for shaping this image.

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**Keywords:** Cultural background, emotional component, media space, uniqueness, urban identity, virtual space.



## **1. Introduction**

In the modern world, the image of the city is reflected, above all, in media space: magazines, newspapers, radio, TV, the Internet. At the level of society, media space advances the city's image and brand, at a personal level, it influences the elaboration of the individual's vision for its image, understanding of its uniqueness and its positioning in an urban environment (Anisimova et al., 2019; Davis et al., 2017). The relevance of the study of the representation of the city in media space is due to the role of the digital environment in the modern world. The inhabitants receive most of the information about the place they live in from the digital environment. The majority of communications are now done by the Internet. Authenticity and uniqueness of a given urban environment are becoming widespread not only among local residents of a certain city but also among the population of the other regions owing to the media scene. In other words, the image of the city is shaped not only in the real world but in the virtual world as well. People picture the image of this or that city irrespectively of the fact whether they visited it or not. That is, one can observe interrelated processes – “not only we do break into the virtual world, but the virtual world also breaks into us completing and expanding the space of our Self” (Asmolov & Asmolov, 2009).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Urban identity is developed, first of all, on the basis of territorial belonging, i.e., the inhabitant of a particular city has certain ideas of/some insight into the city, feeling toward it, the sense of being a part of this city, etc. These traits depend on the residence. And yet, urban identity is not limited to geographic or topographic factors alone. Understanding oneself as a member of a certain group plays an important role in shaping individual identity which is expressed through the idea “We are the members of a particular community.” For the urban identity, it is “We are residents of a certain city” (for instance, “We are Volgograd residents.”) In the modern world, such self-definition through a particular group is actively used for the representation of one's Self in media space, particularly in social nets (Matova, 2019; Vasil'eva, 2013). The inhabitants of the city show their sense of belonging and attitude to their native city through the membership in various publics and groups in social nets demonstrating their activities and participation in city events in personal accounts. Therefore, we believe that in the course of investigating urban identity, the analysis of its representation in virtual space is essential.

## **3. Research Questions**

As noted above, virtual media space is more than just the place where the core of urban identity manifests itself. Media space is also the place where meanings of the community residents related to their city are formed and at the same time, it contributes to the formation the very image of the city, the image of its main attractions and routs and the symbolism of iconic places and events, etc. (Tarakanov et al., 2019). It means that investigating the representation of urban identity in media space implies building a complicated system of network of relationships.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Taking the example of the city of Volgograd, the authors view the potential of the digital environment for the investigation and development of urban identity.

#### **5. Research Methods**

As a method of collecting data for investigating urban identity, standard ways of survey techniques (questionnaires, interviews) can be used, but a faster and more convenient way is analyzing media resources. In media space, the city is represented on official sites of the city administration (such as the official site of Volgograd <http://www.volgadmin.ru>, <https://www.volgograd.ru>), on the sites and pages of mass media in social nets (<http://www.volgograd-trv.ru>, <https://vpravda.ru>, <https://v102.ru>, <https://v1.ru>), in open personal user accounts on Instagram, VKontakte, Facebook, Twitter and the like. Depending on assigned tasks, a researcher can turn to a certain resource. When analyzing the city's brand and the branding policy, there is a need to look at the official sites and pages of mass media. In examining emotional attachment of residents to their city, the unique components of its image and also urban myths and routs, it is important to take into consideration unofficial opinions, which is done by skimming personal user accounts and groups on social networks. With the help of modern information technologies, not only a sample survey (the sample will be represented by a selection of specific resources, sites and accounts in certain proportions) but also a continuous study can be implemented. For this purpose, the entire open Internet space of the city can be surfed (in this case, predetermined characteristics are taken into account).

The analysis of the data concerning the representation of the city in the media scene can be based on qualitative and quantitative methods or combine them.

The qualitative method implies an analysis of information (texts, photographs, graphic elements) presented in official sites and also texts obtained through interviewing the inhabitants of the city (oral questioning or written essays). The categories of analysis are meanings and emotional experience which people associate with the city and with the help of which they interpret the developments taking place in the city and themselves as a part of the city. This approach is both labour-intensive and time-consuming; it also requires the researchers to be highly qualified. However, this method makes it possible to reveal the depth of understanding and perception of the urban environment, urban space and their own urban identity by the local residents.

The quantitative method rests on the techniques of mathematical statistics. Categories for analysis here are particular place names, city symbols (such as names of cultural and historic attractions, most popular streets, architectural monuments, most popular products bearing the city symbols) and description of living conditions in the city (light, comfortable, rainy, dynamic). The quantitative method is highly appropriate for the study of the representation of the city in media scene thanks to the wide range of data, the possibility of their accurate counting, structuring and correlating them to particular categories ("popular – unpopular," "positive – negative"). Nevertheless, when analyzing quantity data, it is possible to omit significant details, it is also more difficult to indicate casual connections. For instance, links

between specific features of urban identity and economic situation in the region could be drawn, but in this case, it would be difficult to find the root cause.

As a method of research, content analysis brings together the benefits of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The topic of your analysis can be the visual image of the city and the colour of photographs, the number of details on the photo, the presence of an official symbol, the inscription or hashtag (“my city” or “hero-city”) can be chosen as the units of analysis. It is possible to analyze texts from official sources in order to define which important topics are selected to represent the city (for example, the topic of heroism, war, agriculture, unique natural resources, etc.).

## 6. Findings

It is our assumption that the representation of urban identity on the Internet can be observed through its structural nature. Most modern authors distinguish the following components of urban identity: cognitive, affective (emotional-sensual), value-motivational (value-normative), action-related (Capello, 2018; Cvetkova, 2018; Golovneva, 2016; Gornova, 2018).

In analyzing representations of urban identity on the Internet one can build upon understanding and contents of the given components.

The cognitive component involves the image of the city represented with architectural and visual environment, filled with meanings and values, historical past of the city, visions (probably, stereotyped) of the citizens. Consequently, representations of the cognitive component in virtual space may include mention of city areas, districts; buildings, bridges, tourist attractions, streets, etc. The categories of analysis are frequencies of mention, characteristics and accompanying terms related to the city, visual support (photographs, pictures). Thus, the names of groups in social nets devoted to the city reflect the content of the cognitive component. In VKontakte social network, the most numerous publics are ‘Volgograd Hardcore’ (280 916 followers), ‘Typical Volgograd’ (261 312 followers), ‘Volgograd’ (195 617 followers), ‘Looking for you. Volgograd’ (112 370 followers), ‘Volgograd, Volzhsky. Job’ (101 826 followers), ‘Overheard. Volgograd’ (101 622 followers). Groups aimed at bringing people together for implementing creative and social initiatives within the city limits or with the purpose of uniting people interested in the architectural environment of the city are not numerous or popular on VKontakte platform. Topics of interest in most groups are those focused on negative aspects of life in the city (road accidents, natural and man-made disasters, social conflicts) and their typical and repetitive nature is accentuated. Also, a larger part of groups in social media is used for finding solutions to social and domestic problems or personal ones, such as job search and arranging private life.

On the social media platform Instagram, the most popular hashtags start with the words ‘Volgograd is...’, namely, “Volgograd is a hero-city” (more than 6 000 posts), ‘Volgograd is the city of the world’ (more than 100 posts), ‘Volgograd is the city of life’ (more than 100 posts). When it comes to the hashtags concerning information about the city, the most widespread ones are connected with the symbols of Volgograd – ‘Mamaev Hill’ (136 000) and ‘Motherland’ (134 000). Among other hashtags containing the name of the city and showing considerable popularity of the city with the tourists is ‘Volgograd await’ (more than 500 posts), ‘Volgograd wait for me’ (more than 100 posts) and ‘Volgograd is waiting’ (about 200 posts). These hashtags demonstrate an interest in the city, willingness to visit the

city or to come back here (the latter concerns the local residents who were away from the city for some time). It must be noted that the hashtag ‘Volgograd meet me again’ is found in less than 100 posts (applied by two users). Popular are the hashtags ‘Vlg,’ ‘Vlg34’ where the name of the city is cut to three letters as well as the hashtags ‘Volgograd 34,’ ‘Volgogradcity,’ ‘Volgograd Oblast,’ ‘Volzhsky’ (satellite town) and the hashtag ‘saber’ (related to the Cossack culture of the region).

On the one hand, these tags point to significant symbols of Volgograd, links with the historic past of the city (the Great Patriotic War and the Battle of Stalingrad) and cultural heritage (Cossacks). On the other hand, a low number of posts with positive hashtags reveal certain problems (lack of public awareness or deliberate reluctance to include hashtags of that kind in the texts beneath the photographs). Other hashtags either lack any specific semantic content (except for the reference to the place) or bear a negative connotation (‘city without roads’). Researches undertaken by Vasilieva M.A. confirm that fact. “Firstly, we are talking here about ‘spontaneous’ symbols which are noticed in the process of communication. Secondly, there start to be used as markers some stereotypical images which make it possible to indicate belonging to a group for an outside observer, on the one hand, and on the other hand, they become the victim of jokes within the community itself. Thus, in our social media, there are quite a lot of groups placing emphasis on ‘typical’ style of behaviour in this or that community: Typical tech guy,’ ‘Typical student,’ ‘Typical ...,’ and others. In those groups, the stereotyped image of an average group representative is shown with irony; it is exaggerated and taken to a certain point of absurdity, but at the same time, it appears rather realistic. In this case, the representation may be both visual (pictures, comics, etc.) and verbal (anecdotes). In this, of great interest are possible interpretations of the image, which multiply along with the emergence of communities conveying one of the options of the Other’s position (Vasil’eva, 2013).

Affective component involves emotional attachment to the city, feelings of the city inhabitant towards urban space and culture, as well as to the other citizens and his position in the city. In our opinion, analyzed affective (emotional?) characteristics of urban identity include all forms of emotions and feelings towards the city, its inhabitants and to oneself as a part of the city. Categories of analysis are assessment words and word combinations, emoji language, colour spectrum and stories for photographs and pictures (bright colours and smiling people in the photographs). For example, there are lots of bright, colourful photos of the city in any season marked with the hashtag ‘Vlg\_vkadre.’ However, there are practically no photographs taken in the winter. Almost half of them show the war history and the war monuments of Volgograd. When typing the text “Volgograd is the...” in the search engine <https://www.google.ru> you can see the most popular queries: ‘longest city,’ ‘longest building,’ ‘most criminal city,’ ‘biggest shopping centre,’ ‘most depressive city,’ ‘most deprived city’ ‘hottest city,’ ‘depressive city,’ ‘worst city,’ ‘poorest city.’ Emotional attitude to the city is revealed through the categories ‘depressive’ and ‘worst.’ Positive options are missing. Emotionally neutral is the characterization of the city through the categories ‘long’ and ‘hot.’

Value-motivational component delineates position of the citizen in relation to the events taking place in the urban space, political and economic trends; demonstration of his willingness (or its lack) to live in this city. Value-motivational manifestations of urban identity in media space are evaluation judgments, recommendations and suggestions for the urban organization or events in the city (Cassinger

& Eksell, 2017; Guerrón Montero, 2015). Categories of analysis here are texts and words implying wishes, recommendations and suggestions.

For example, among the hashtags ‘wish to leave...’ the most popular are ‘wish to leave for good,’ ‘wish to leave far away,’ ‘wish to leave for Krasnodar,’ ‘wish to leave for St. Pete.’ At the same time, the hashtag with the opposite message implying the value of the city hardly ever appears. Namely, the hashtag ‘Volgograd beckons’ is found in 13 posts.

Action-related component reflects the style of urban behaviour; the content and form of certain actions towards the city, city facilities, its citizens, etc. The contents of this component are made up of the description of actions and behaviour in regard to the city: implementation of joint initiatives in collaboration with other citizens, donations to urban uses, urban upgrading or, on the contrary, acts of vandalism, etc. (Anisimov, 2019; Lepekhin & Dubko, 2011). Categories of analysis are activity (the number of participants), orientation (social, labour, recreational, etc.), voluntariness. It should be noted that the most popular hashtag related to activities is ‘Volgograd in the mix’ (more than 500 posts on the platform Instagram, but it does not refer to the socio-cultural value of the events in the city. Another popular hashtag related to art and culture is ‘Contest Festival Volgograd’ (public «fest\_time\_of\_victory» has more than 11.3 followers). On the query for ‘Activities’ in the Instagram network, hashtags with the names of the cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar, Ufa, Rostov come first. The announcement of the forthcoming events at the city level is represented with the hashtag ‘Billboard Volgograd’ (more than 500 posts). It is necessary to mention that it is rather difficult for the citizens of Volgograd to find information about activities and initiatives held under the auspices of the city in the media scene. Special mention deserves group ‘Volgogradarena’ (39.4 thousand posts) dealing with activities held at the stadium of Volgograd (mainly, they are sporting events related to sports club ‘Rotor’).

## 7. Conclusion

As one can see, the analyzed examples reveal a contradictory image of Volgograd, especially when it comes to the affective component. The virtual image of the city has an impact on the degree of development of the urban identity of the Volgograd inhabitants. Therefore, promotion of the positive image of Volgograd, especially in social networks, would strengthen emotional attachment to the city and help its citizens realize the uniqueness of their native region.

The model proposed by the authors makes it possible to monitor representations of urban identity in social media through their structural nature. It will also enable to create the programme of the research aimed at identifying the image of any city and, consequently, will help to adjust its contents.

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