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## Post mass media in the modern informational society "Journalistic text in a new technological environment: achievements and problems"

### MODALITY IN TEXTS OF BRITISH MEDIA IN "SCRIPAL'S CASE"

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#### *Abstract*

The article attempts to classify the problem of the formation of the state media image and presents rhetorical and stylistic aspects of the attitude to the media image of the country, in our case of Russia, on the example of the pool of texts of the thematic field "Skripal's case". The official media of Britain, reacting to this news occasion, showed extremely subjective rhetorical strategy in media texts. Analysis of the materials proves that the investigation of the incident was accompanied by a "fierce attack" by British politicians and the media on Russia, expressed in offensive comments, pressure and in the violation of the norms of political and diplomatic rhetoric. Media coverage of the sensational case of the Skripals, in particular, the specifics of language means and ways of expressing modality in the British media in the interpretation of this event and the formation of the image of Russia in world politics has become our main field of research. The empirical base is represented by publications of the "Skripal's case" in daily newspapers `The Guardian`, `The Independent`, in tabloids "The Sun", "Daily Mirror" "Daily Express" from March 2018 to November 2018. As a result of the analysis, we identified the main ways of expressing modality in the printed materials of the British media about this case, structured and classified the language techniques that were used there, found their correlation with the type of media, and also revealed a number of natural characteristics of this process in the print media.

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**Keywords:** Skripals case, media text, media image, political rhetoric, modality, image of Russia.



## 1. Introduction

"The Skripal's case" stirred up the world community in March 2018 and almost immediately became the main news and trend in the media. Everyone found it necessary to put forward their own version of what is happening, which created an information noise of incredible scale. One by one, in the Internet loud statements and "irrefutable evidence" began to appear, which only increased tension in society and between countries. The rhetorical modality of media texts covering this situation in a certain way formed the media image of Russia in the English-language press. Today, the concept of "media image of the state" has become firmly established in modern discourse. However, the phenomenon of media image is still not clearly defined. Despite numerous studies in the field of journalism and communication studies, 1) there is still no comprehensive definition that would fully explain the essence of the phenomenon that causes considerable interest of modern scientists, 2) the concept of the media image at the moment does not have clearly defined parameters, 3) researchers often appeal to the reader's intuitive understanding of this phenomenon.

## 2. Problem Statement

Let us analyze several definitions of the media image of the state. "Media image – a structural visual and emotional component of virtual reality, which is a media model of objective existence, imprinted in information media and public consciousness" (Rusakova, 2012, p. 11). 6). Media image is a media model of a certain element of reality. "Medius" is translated from Latin as "average", located in the middle, and the concept of "media" here carries the idea of mediation. Galinskaya (2013) considers the "media image" in a narrow and broad sense: in the first case, "media image is fragments of reality described in the texts of only professional journalists, reflecting their worldview, value orientations, political preferences, as well as psychological qualities"; in the broad case, "media image" is "an image of reality, constructed in all texts created in the media space (professional journalists, bloggers, etc.) (p. 5). Hochunskaja (2013) provides a concept of the media image as "the author's idea of object media environment with polylogical nature and value provoking the reaction of the reader" (p. 6).

In connection with the increasingly developing process of globalization and the active multifaceted interaction of countries, there was an interest in the media images of individual countries and people. Therefore, this topic is becoming increasingly important in the context of the global space and the development of technologies and strategies for the formation of the media image. A special role is played by the political component of the state image. The concept of the image of the country and its components are often the subject of close study by researchers (Hochman, 2014; Gromova, 2014, 2016), it can be argued that the image of the country – is a kind of symbolic model, "mediating ideas about the national and state community and its members through the available concepts and judgments."

Thus, we will interpret the concept of "media image of the state" as a media-modeled image of the country, expressed in the media space. Media image is a kind of "layer", the information level between the social world and its representation in the minds of the individual and society. And this "layer" does not consist of individual ideas but acts as an expression of public consciousness.

### 3. Research Questions

#### 3.1. The problem of media image formation

Creation of a media image of the state, as a rule, is carried out in two directions. The first is the maintenance of established concepts, stereotypes, the development of clichés and stamps in the representation of another country. The second direction comes from the country whose image is formed abroad. And here we are talking about "public diplomacy", including the technologies of positioning the country in order to establish its positive reputation, "correct" associations through public relations, used in the context of global PR, as well as local events marketing within a particular city.

Among the main techniques that are used by the international media to form the media image of the state, we can distinguish: 1) the selection of events covered. Media editors carefully filter the information, selecting what the viewer will see in the end. The method of submission of this information also passes a kind of "check"; 2) selection of data when submitting the material, while an important factor will be the ability to present information from the side, from which it will be more advantageous; 3) handling concepts and figures; 4) positioning (creating a favorable information environment for the object); 5) manipulation (shifting attention to another object); 6) mythologizing (the use for the image creation myths); 7) emotionalization (translation of information on the emotional language); 8) verbalization (the amount of detail and emphasis of information, its preparation for the perception of the audience as the speech of any person).

The Institute of propaganda analysis of the United States proposed seven basic methods of creating public opinion that forms the media image. Among them: 1) gluing labels (name-calling). The audience develops a negative attitude towards the state not on the basis of rational evidence, but because of the imposed negative assessment. For example, "third world countries"; 2) glittering uncertainties. The opposite of the previous one. The imposition of the views of beyond a reasonable doubt of the prestige of something, credibility; 3) transfer. The reception is based on the use of the audience's ideas about something that has the status of absolute prestige for it, and the transfer of this relationship to something else. The use of well-known symbols in order to evoke the necessary emotions; 4) testimonial. Transfer of authority to the person voicing a certain point of view; 5) card stacking; 6) band wagon. In a basis – appeal to the "herd instinct".

This also includes opinion leaders, that is, people whose opinions are perceived unquestioningly as the only true, trustworthy, significant: experts, famous politicians, as well as movie stars, pop stars, sports, etc.

Thus, summing up the middle result, among the main technologies of forming the media image of the state can be called as already mentioned clichés, clichés and stereotypes about a particular state, and the newly created concepts, an important role in the formation of which is played by journalists themselves.

In connection with the variety of ways to form a media image of the state, it is necessary to understand how these mechanisms work, what they are aimed at to be able to distinguish an "adequate", unbiased and objective presentation from the imposed label.

The problem is that the mass media today do not meet the information needs of readers, as they construct a ready model of the world through these events, depriving their audience, thus, the opportunity

to independently assess the information situation and build their personal attitude to what is happening. Working there, many publications and journalists are simply forced to follow corporate ethics, to make the reader understand the events described as they are presented by a particular media. In other words, the news is not reported, but interpreted and displayed in a distorted form. In that in which it is beneficial to the publication.

The formation of the image of the state is not free of special manipulative strategies, which more than once became the object of scientific reflection (Ableev & Kuz'minskaja, 2015; Chernikova, 2015). The authors, analyzing the American and British media relevant to our research (Harlamova, 2014; Ozjumenko, 2017), speak of "strengthening the function of informational aggression, which can be viewed in the framework of the manipulative discourse as a manipulative conviction" (Ozjumenko, 2017, p. 203).

### 3.2. The rhetorical modality of media: a stylistic analysis

Political rhetoric retains its current status for researchers, despite the impressive list of works devoted to it. Modernization and transformation of mental processes in society, the sharpening of socio-political problems makes us look for new aspects of this phenomenon. The subject of study and analysis are the genesis of political rhetoric (Shomova, 2014), its mental conditionality (Prigarina, 2015), the relations (as the main way of argumentation in the context of political symbolization) with the technologies of formation of the media image of the state (Musihin, 2016), the strategy of implementation in the Russian and foreign media space (Timohina, 2014; Karpova, 2014).

We traced the media coverage of the multifaceted and complex conflict surrounding the poisoning of former GRU officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, Britain. The event, which stirred up the world community, happened on March 4, 2018, the first press reports are dated the same date, then the next key event happened on September 5, 2018, when Scotland Yard published photos of two suspects in the poisoning and on February 10, 2019 there was information about 3 suspects in the Skripal's case. Thus, it can be noted that the course of the investigation stretched from March to February and was not marked by an abundance of urgent news, not counting the "everyday" events of politics related to the case: the expulsion of diplomats, the imposition of sanctions and statements of both countries. However, the British press has actively covered this high-profile case throughout the interim period, however, the methods of the tabloids and the quality press were significantly different. For the analysis we took a sample of articles from March to February, showing the key events of poisoning.

**Table 01.** Chronology of the event

<b>Chronology</b>	<b>The reaction of the quality press (the headlines)</b>	<b>The reaction of the tabloids (the headlines)</b>
March 2018 - poisoning, accusation of Russia, expulsion of diplomats	<p>`Guardian view on the Russian spy attack: Sergei Skripal and the sowing of discord` <b>The Guardian</b></p> <p>`Salisbury, scratchcards and sausage: the quiet life of Sergei Skripal` <b>The Guardian</b></p>	<p>`PUTIN: PRIME SUSPECT                      Spy chiefs say Russia is 'prime suspect' for Sergei Skripal attack – using a poison so rare spy boffins haven't found it` The Sun</p> <p>`BETRAYED BY A WORD                      Was daughter of ex-Russian spy poisoned for one-word Facebook</p>

	<p>‘Who is the Salisbury spy Sergei Skripal? – video explainer’ <b>The Guardian</b></p> <p>‘Novichok: the deadly story behind the nerve agent in Sergei Skripal spy attack’ <b>The Independent</b></p> <p>‘Why is the UK accusing Russia of launching a nerve agent attack on Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, and what is the evidence?’ <b>The Independent</b></p>	<p>comment calling for Putin to be jailed?’ <b>The Sun</b></p> <p>‘KILL LIST</p> <p>From a poisoned umbrella to a helicopter crash and polonium-laced tea — the mysterious deaths of Kremlin enemies in the UK’ <b>The Sun</b></p> <p>‘Brave cop poisoned by nerve agent that left Russian spy Sergei Skripal fighting for life says he’s no hero’ <b>Daily Mirror</b></p> <p>‘Sick troll posts fake Zizzi restaurant TripAdvisor review posing as poisoned Russian spy ‘who ordered Uncle Vlad’s Atomic Sausage pizza’ <b>Daily Mirror</b></p> <p>‘Mystery over death of poisoned Russian spy’s son as journalists find ‘no trace’ he died in St Petersburg’ <b>Daily Mirror</b></p> <p>‘Russia Spy poisoning: Life will never be the same again says hero cop as he goes home’ <b>Daily Express</b></p> <p>‘Salisbury attack: Sergei Skripal’s ex-girlfriend in hiding from Putin’s assassins’ <b>Daily Express</b></p> <p>‘Theresa May promises to ‘DEFEAT RUSSIA’ after ‘attack’ with new CYBER WARFARE initiative’ <b>Daily Express</b></p>
<p>April – June 2018 - calm</p>	<p>‘Nerve agent used to poison Sergei and Yulia Skripal was delivered in ‘liquid form’, says Defra’ <b>The Independent</b></p> <p>‘Picture of Sergei Skripal’s BMW released as police hunting poisoners focus on car’ <b>The Independent</b></p>	<p>‘SHE’S IN DANGER’</p> <p>Yulia Skripal statement sparks crackpot Russian conspiracy theories claiming she is being held hostage by Britain’ <b>The Sun</b></p> <p>‘Poisoned Yulia Skripal is branded a ‘traitor’s rat’ in her homeland as it emerges she has refused to meet Russian diplomats’ <b>Daily Mirror</b></p> <p>Yulia Skripal’s mysterious fiancé ‘hasn’t been in contact with her’ since she was poisoned in nerve agent attack’ <b>Daily Mirror</b></p> <p>‘They were given ANTIDOTES’ Russia expert makes SHOCKING claims over Salisbury poisoning’ <b>Daily Express</b></p> <p>‘Wouldn’t YOU be scared?’ Sergei Skripal’s cousin ‘does NOT trust UK’ over poisoning’ <b>Daily Express</b></p> <p>‘Russia spy SHOCK: Sergei Skripal and daughter ‘might NOT have been</p>

		poisoned', claims niece` <b>Daily Express</b>
July 2018 - another poisoning in Amesbury	<p>`Amesbury poisoning latest: Linking novichok incident to Moscow is 'absurd', says Kremlin` <b>The Independent</b></p> <p>`Amesbury poisoning: Russia 'categorically denies' any involvement in latest novichok incident` <b>The Independent</b></p>	<p>`What does Novichok look like? Horrifying truth behind deadly nerve agent as Amesbury victims fight for life` <b>Daily Mirror</b></p> <p>`I loved you, Mum...girl's eulogy to novichok victim` <b>Daily Express</b></p>
September 2018 – official first suspects	<p>`Planes, trains and fake names: the trail left by Skripal suspects` <b>The Guardian</b></p> <p>`Skripal suspects display impressive command of Wikipedia` <b>The Guardian</b></p> <p>`Salisbury attack: Furious Kremlin accuses UK of 'manipulation' after Russian agents named as novichok suspects` <b>The Independent</b></p> <p>`Now we know it was the Russian state that poisoned the Skripals, the question is what can we do about it?` <b>The Independent</b></p> <p>`The theories which might be true about the novichok poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal – and the ones which definitely aren't` <b>The Independent</b></p>	<p>`PUTIN'S HIT SQUAD Four MORE Russian suspects 'were part of Salisbury Novichok assassination squad known as The Cleaners` <b>The Sun</b></p> <p>`TOURIST, EH? Sergei Skripal hitman unmasked as elite soldier given Russia's highest award by Vladimir Putin himself` <b>The Sun</b></p> <p>`Putin's army of 80,000 spies EXPOSED as four Russian agents caught hacking novichok probe` <b>Daily Express</b></p> <p>`Putin's hitmen UNMASKED: Salisbury poisoner is top spy honoured by Russia President` <b>Daily Express</b></p>
November – December 2018 - calm	<p>`Russian state media sends chocolate models of Salisbury Cathedral as 'sick' gift referencing novichok attack` <b>The Independent</b></p> <p>`Kremlin quietly happy about British reactions to Skripal affair and 'dirty money` <b>The Independent</b></p>	<p>`NAMED AND SHAMED Who is Salisbury Novichok poisoning suspect Ruslan Boshirov and is his real name Anatoliy Chepiga?` <b>The Sun</b></p> <p>`Half of Russians in London are SPIES: Shock report shows Russia still has Cold War mindset` <b>Daily Express</b></p>

The following conclusions can be drawn from the table 01:

1) During the key moments of the incident (March, September) the number of articles in the national press has increased dramatically, at least a third of the issue was devoted to the incident, and articles were published in different sections, such as "politics", "crime", "voice", "opinion". If the articles in the quality press mainly covered the details of the incident, revealed the identity of the victims, based on official data, the articles in the tabloids were "fake breaking news", revealed the personal data of the victims, referring to unverified sources, and also played on the feelings of readers, coming up with conspiracy theories necessarily with the words "secret or terrifying".

2) During calm periods, the event continued to be covered, but not as actively: the tabloids finally focused on "shocking details", interviews with relatives of the victims and their secret connections, while the quality press revealed additional details of the investigation or resorted to analytics.

3) Journalists used a large number of lexical and stylistic features expressed in the headlines, which created a special tone of the news and formed a certain reading position.

The results of this conclusion are presented below.

### 3.3. Lexical and stylistic features of headlines

**Table 02.** Text features in media

Text features	Examples
Stylistic devices	<p>In many of the titles we have analyzed there are turns and techniques that create a certain effect, for example, in the article in the Guardian `Guardian view on the Russian spy attack: Sergei Skripal and the sowing of discord` the epithet `sowing of discord` is used, creating a literary effect: the title of the article sounds like the name of an adventure book, the Sun uses the metaphorical construction `BETRAYED BY A WORD`, written in capital letters, again with its dramatic appeal to literature; The epithets `horrifying truth`, `mysterious fiancé`, `dirty money`, `furious Kremlin` are used to attract the reader's attention with their emotional assessment – the reader feels complicity with the opinion of the journalist. It is noticed that devices are used more often in tabloids.</p> <p>Both the tabloids and the quality press are characterized by rhetorical questions: `Who is the Salisbury spy Sergei Skripal?` The Guardian, `Why is the UK accusing Russia of launching a nerve agent attack on Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, and what is the evidence?` The Independent, `How did Sergei Skripal's son and wife die, was there a car crash and what's disseminated endometrial carcinoma?` The Sun, `Who is Salisbury Novichok poisoning suspect Ruslan Boshirov and is his real name Anatoliy Chepiga?` Daily Mirror, `What is Novichok? How Russia developed deadliest nerve agent ever` Daily Mirror, `Is this the Salisbury poisonings hitman?` Daily Mirror, etc. Rhetorical questions are caused either by an analytical genre (for the qualitative press), or by a disguise of provocative opinions (for tabloids)</p>
Color highlighting of text and writing words in capital letters	<p>It is typical only for tabloids, in particular for the publications in The Sun and Daily Express. The first uses color differentiation: part of the title, usually the beginning, is highlighted in a different color and is written in capital letters, then there is its decoding: `Putin'S POWERS`</p> <p>After Theresa May accents Russia of being behind the poisoning of an ex-spy, der President Putin actually have the power to order targeted kills?</p> <p>Each title of the articles we analyze is made in this style. Another edition of the Daily Express often uses the caption of some important, key words of the title: `Protect us from RUSSIA: Three Baltic nations' plea to Trump to bolster defences`, `Sergei</p>

	Skripal's cousin 'does NOT trust UK' over poisoning`, 'You are AGGRESSIVE' Putin hits out as EU and Britain expel Russian diplomats`. This feature emphasizes the value of judgment and forms the reader's "right" mood for the perception of the article.
Provocation and evaluation	<p>This feature is connected with the incident itself – the largest international scandal affected not only the complication of relations, but also the tone of British media articles. Only some publications, more often quality media, adhered to neutral vocabulary, although they sometimes violated diplomatic norms of rhetoric, using provocative and evaluative headlines: The Guardian ironically says after an interview with the suspects `Skripal suspects display impressive command of Wikipedia`, `The new Skripal revelations have made the Kremlin look flat-footed`, or in another headline out of context uses the quote Putin's `Vladimir Putin calls Sergei Skripal a scumbag and a traitor`, also titled `Planes, trains and fake names: the trail left by Skripal suspects` The Guardian uses a reference to the American Comedy `Planes, Trains and Automobiles` to create an ironic effect. The Independent also ironically describes Russia's statement using the epithet: `Salisbury attack: Furious Kremlin accuses UK of 'manipulation' after Russian agents named as novichok suspects.`</p> <p>In the tabloids this feature is used especially widely, it sounds very provocatively: The Sun strongly increasing tension in society: `PUTIN'S HITMEN: Salisbury suspects ARE Kremlin spies as pair seen smiling after Novichok hit`, `World War 3: Russia SHOCK warning – expulsion of diplomats could lead to WAR`, Daily Express use the same techniques: `Protect us from RUSSIA: the Three Baltic nations' plea to Trump to bolster defences`, `Russia spy SHOCK: Sergei Skripal and daughter 'might NOT have been poisoned', claims niece`.</p> <p>We noted that during calm periods, the press artificially maintained interest in the conflict, using more provocative headlines.</p>
Key words	<p>It was found that 90% of all analyzed articles contain one of the key words in the title: Putin, Russia, Russia in conjunction with the topic of the article: poisoning, attack, Skripal.</p> <p>This feature forms a stable connection between poisoning and Russia.</p>

Thus, it is obvious that the rhetorical strategy was based on the use of the semantic potential of the strong positions of the text (table 02).

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the specifics of lexical and stylistic devices of expressing the rhetorical modality of media texts of the British media in the context of the problem of the formation of the media image of the state.

## 5. Research Methods

We analyzed 60 articles from such "quality" newspapers as `The Guardian` (<https://www.theguardian.com>), `The Independent` (<https://www.independent.co.uk>), as well as from tabloids `Daily Mirror` (<http://www.dailymirror.lk>), `The Sun` (<https://www.thesun.co.uk>), `Daily Express` (<https://www.express.co.uk>). The choice of publications is due to the high ratings of these media, as well as historically due to the differences between the elite and the mass media in the UK.

Before proceeding to the analysis, to understand the style features of each publication, it is necessary to understand the historical context of the development and formation of each of the Newspapers. All five editions belong to the "national" newspapers and are published every day for more than a century, but since its inception at the turn of 19/20 centuries have their own characteristics. In connection with the successive laws on compulsory primary education, also known as the Forster act in 1870, additional amendments in the form of compulsory school attendance in 1893, followed by the Fischer act of 1918 on compulsory secondary education, contributed to the improvement of literacy among the population, in connection with which the circulation of national newspapers increased and by 1920 amounted to about 5.5 million copies of newspapers. At the same time, mass media giants such as the Daily Mirror, The Sun, the Daily Express are becoming the best-selling national newspapers and finally determined with positioning among competitors: for example, the Daily Mirror defines its target audience as a working class and becomes a quick and easy reading that does not require analytics and reflection. While The Times by the middle of the century acquires a controversial slogan `Top People Read The Times`, and finds a response from the highly educated intelligent people. During the 20th century and up to the present time, publications adhere to the chosen course: tabloids use huge headlines, a large number of photos and small articles with a pronounced opinion of the journalist, and the quality press covers international news of politics, economics in the analytical genre and confirmed information from reliable sources.

## 6. Findings

- 6.1. It was found that the official media were not always worried about the choice of words and expressions, thereby violating the linguistic norm and the norms of political rhetoric, which indicates a provocative motive on their part, while the British tabloids, not stingy on the means of artistic expression, escalated the already tense atmosphere in society.
- 6.2. In the analysis of both public and private media in Britain, covering this high-profile case, it was determined that journalists used language devices of emotional impact, such as devices and stylistic figures, puns, lexical and grammatical features of the text in the headlines and lead paragraphs, to increase tension, create a certain "mythological view" around poisoning, as well as for exclusivity.
- 6.3. Also, a significant conclusion was the identification of patterns between the strengthening of the modality of the text and the fall of the news rating on the example of several wave-like jumps of text for 10 months from the date of poisoning. It is noted that the rhetoric of the media has changed due to the appearance of the first specific suspects: the emphasis in the materials was

shifted from the victims to discuss the details, building theories and putting forward versions. The tabloids of Britain generated increasingly absurd versions, without providing arguments and referring to their own and unknown sources, using manipulative tactics and techniques. The official media mostly used the same speech tactics, with only a **few preferring the neutral style and moderate tone of the articles.**

## 7. Conclusion

Since the case has not received its logical conclusion yet, the British publications temporarily stopped competing in the skill of provocative headlines and "exclusive" materials, which gave us as researchers in this temporary calm period to see the main patterns and strategies in the journalistic work of the British print media, which is reflected in this study.

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