

**NININS 2020****International Scientific Forum «National Interest, National Identity and National Security»****INTERNATIONAL IMAGE OF RUSSIA AND INFORMATION  
GLOBALIZATION**

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**Abstract**

The current foreign policy situation is associated with the growing information hostility of the West against Russia. These conditions determine the formation of an attractive international image of the Russian state through modern information technologies that are becoming particularly relevant. Political events of recent years lead to the fact that the world community is predominantly negative about Russia. Recently, the Republic of Crimea became part of Russia, and the “Skripals case” was instituted, the stuffing of unconfirmed information about “interference” in the elections, the appearance of versions of the “white helmets” about the chemical attack in the Syrian city of the Duma and other events covered in the media. The article is devoted to identifying the specifics of the process of forming the international image of Russia in the context of information globalization. The article reveals the concept essence of “international image” and the influence of the image on the foreign policy and economy of the state. Various reasons for the negative attitude of Western countries to Russia and the measures necessary to solve this problem are revealed. The authors of the article offer recommendations of a scientific, theoretical, and practical direction. The proposed general recommendations are due to the need to understand the phenomenon of the international state image and to study the features of its formation in a specific situation. Practical recommendations are proposals that can be taken into account by state authorities in activities aimed at creating a foreign policy image of the Russian Federation.

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## **1. Introduction**

At present, Russia has faced several acute socio-political, informational, economic, and even cultural challenges. These challenges are of both national and international nature. As part of the information challenge, Russia has to assert its right to an independent policy, for the most part, in an unfriendly Western media space. In the period of "post-truth" and the current situation in Russia, the struggle for a positive perception of the international image becomes especially difficult. Technological development and the development of new methods of working with information leading to the emergence of extensive opportunities in the construction of information messages and the compromise of opponent information. A positive image is one of the key elements ensuring the success of the country's foreign policy and economic activity, a useful tool for communication with target groups. However, the international image of Russia is currently experiencing unprecedented information pressure from both the majority of Western media and officials. These circumstances significantly reduce the effectiveness and viability of the image. Image is an essential element of information support, which may affect the effectiveness of ongoing Russian foreign policy projects.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The current foreign policy situation is characterized by increasing information pressure on Russia. In this situation, the formation of a Russian foreign policy image will be more effective if it adapts to the particularities of globalization and the information society. The solution to this problem requires the conditional use of the country's image potential and the availability and consistent implementation of a systemic strategy for the formation of an international state image.

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the research is the international image of Russia in the context of information globalization.

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

The article aimed to identify the specifics of forming of the international image of Russia in the information globalization process.

## **5. Research Methods**

The theoretical basis is the development, ideas and conclusions of domestic and foreign researchers related to understanding the phenomena of globalization and the information society, the transformation of politics, the place and role of the state's international image in politics, and the perceptions of Russia in the world (Aghaei et al., 2012; Arsenault, 2009; Cull, 2011; 2013).

In the process of developing the problem, the positions of various authors on the concepts of "image," "image of the state," and "international image of the state" were compared. Particular attention

was paid to scientific works related to the study of theoretical and practical aspects of the formation of the image of the state in the context of information globalization (Parubochaya & Piskunov, 2018; Simons, 2011; Zhang, 2013; Zelentsov, 2015).

In the interest of obtaining a complete and objective idea of the international image of Russia, the work used such general scientific methods of theoretical and empirical knowledge of political phenomena and processes as analysis, synthesis, analogy, comparison, abstraction, theoretical generalization, description, and other methods. The combination of methods used provided an interdisciplinary view of the international image of Russia as one of the tools to ensure its influence in international relations.

## **6. Findings**

In the modern world, the information sphere has become a system-forming factor in the life of society. Under these conditions, new phenomena appear in politics; its further differentiation occurs. The free dissemination of information makes it impossible to establish a monopoly in building the foreign policy image of the state, which involves a focused policy. In these conditions, there is a specific activity separation related to the formation of the state image, which should cause the target audience to have a given attitude towards it.

The concept of image is often used in modern political studies. This concept is of particular importance in the fields of political sociology and political communications in the broadest sense. Image issues are included in political marketing, political propaganda, that is, what is part of strategic communications, public diplomacy, and national branding (Sinisa, 2015).

Developments in the field of the political image in Russia are carried out by several researchers (Zakharova & Balynskaya, 2019). So, we can highlight some trends. On the one hand, the political image in the political space of our country has been significantly enriched by applied research. There is a large "set" of methods for its formation (both legal and "black" technologies) that demonstrate the political campaigns of different candidates for deputies of different levels. On the other hand, there are attempts to "generalize" the material obtained and to form specific trends in the formation of both the power image and its implementation mechanisms in public consciousness.

We successively characterize the identified trends as understanding the "image" as a kind of "set" of specific tools that a candidate for an elected position should and should not have. In the last decade, at the municipal and regional government levels, a tendency has been shown to introduce a manager – the "Varangian." This was done even during the absence of elections of governors of the subjects of the federation. During this period, the federal government could send a "protégé" who, over time, had to adapt and "fit in" with the image of a successful manager. So many heads of regions were appointed.

Then this technique flowed to a lower level – in the municipalities. As one of the successful projects, one can cite the elections in the municipality "Troitsk city" of the Chelyabinsk region. In this city, it was not the Trojan people who were elected as the Head of the city. It was the Magnitogorean who came there to participate in the elections.

Part of the candidates had to adjust their image under the requests of public opinion. Sometimes candidates are overcoming considerable resistance from both the electorate and their positioning. They

had to change the logic of behavior, which is not always easy, but it pays off with an excellent electoral result.

However, even after the abolition of the direct appointment of regional heads, this trend remained. An example can be the same Chelyabinsk region, wherein 2019 there was a change of governor before the election, and the region was headed by the "Varangian" – Alexei Teksler. Before participating in the elections, A. Teksler had no relation to the region in his professional activities. Moreover, again, the image of political strategists began to be understood as a kind of "set of qualities" that the new governor should meet.

Perhaps some attempts to generalize the political image and present it as a trend, a system of behavior can be seen in the journalistic works of political scientist Mikhail Khazin (Khazin & Scheglov, 2018). Khazin assumes that each subject of politics in Russia must exist (and exist) a particular trajectory of personal progress towards power. Moreover, in his works, one can find a hint that not only the "set of qualities" can and should be understood by the image of not only individual entities, but of the whole country. Khazin notes that the image is associated with a specific path of advancement in the information space, causing a response from the objects of influence.

Thus, in the most general terms, the international image of a state can be understood as a complex of ideas about this state, formed in the external environment.

Historically, the image of Russia was formed in different countries in different ways, but in general, researchers distinguish two images of Russia (Napalkova, 2017):

- European image – Russia is seen through the eyes of European peoples as a country of culture, scale, and art;
- American image – Russia is seen by the eyes of Americans as an aggressive, barbaric, and developing country.

Unfortunately, due to the predominance of the American principle in the modern global communication space, it is this image that dominates the minds of foreigners today. Most polls conducted among foreigners show a significant deterioration in Russia's image in recent times.

Consider the results of an international survey conducted by the American research organization Pew Research Center in 2014. According to the data of this survey, 43 % of respondents reacted negatively to Russia, and only 34 % positively, the remaining 23 % found it difficult to answer. Since 2013, Russia's unfavorable ratings have increased in most of the studied countries of the world. A positive opinion of Russia is observed only in countries such as China, Greece, Vietnam, and Bangladesh.

Such a sharp deterioration in relations with Russia in 2014 can be attributed to the entry of the Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation, which was negatively perceived in the West. Also, the authors of the survey talk about the alleged widespread suppression of civil rights and freedoms of Russians in their own country.

The indicators of the world peace index are of great interest as a comprehensive indicator developed by an international group of experts characterizing the relative peacefulness of countries and measuring the level of domestic violence and the aggressiveness of foreign policy.

The global peace index in 2018 for Russia amounted to 3.160, identifying Russia in 154th place as one of the most "dangerous" states. In total, the rating was calculated for 162 countries (Zakharova & Balynskaya, 2019).

The political image of the Russian Federation is one of the most important means of protecting its interests in the international arena. However, as can be seen from the above survey results, at present, the world community perceives our country exceptionally negatively.

The Western media actively support negative stereotypes about Russia. Western media are strenuously demonstrating to the public the shortcomings of our country's foreign and domestic policies (instability, corruption). At the same time, positive phenomena are often hushed up. Also, even now, in the 21st century, stereotypes about Russia during the Cold War are preserved in foreign media. The interest in the media as a factor in the formation of the international image is because, through the media, the prevailing attitude of citizens of other states and the international community towards Russia is being studied. Today, the media really can be called the "fourth branch of government." The influence of the media on all spheres of human life (including politics) is more significant than ever. The rapid spread of modern information technologies creates fundamentally new tools for influencing the mass consciousness. Media are one of the main factors in the formation of the country's foreign policy image.

It should also be noted that the crucial factor that the media in the modern world have also changed a lot. If earlier, they meant a channel for transmitting information, today the media began to play a completely different role. The media are a full-fledged subject of politics, as many researchers write. Moreover, the media has today switched to a qualitatively new format. Media work in the digital space.

Today, many researchers say that living people do not actively use digital technologies for the introduction of image modules, but by "bots" programs that feed information, inject it, artificially shape public opinion (Vasiliev, 2016). Digital technologies are openly used not only by marketers, but also by political technologists, exclusive services, and terrorists. Due to many factors, our country is just beginning to comprehend this problem. Neither legal and digital literacy of the population nor the level of openness of law enforcement agencies allow talking about the global literacy of the population in this area. Of course, work is underway: channels for transmitting illegal information are blocked. However, these actions are committed by the government, which does not use digital technology to create a politically positive image of Russia in foreign media.

This circumstance is due mainly to existing international treaties on non-interference in the politics (including information) of other countries. However, one should not detract from the fact that today digital media (both in Russia and abroad) have left their pure information space and draw information on the Internet. This fact means that in the digital world, there are laws that allow all its participants acting "on an equal footing."

Thus, the digital space gives an excellent chance for the formation of a country's digital image on the Internet. This channel could become the leading and beneficial source of forming a positive image of any political subject, including the whole state. For this, we believe, political will and a particular image strategy of the state are needed.

Also, on the political image of Russia, sporting achievements have a significant impact. Today, more and more people are convinced that sport (as well as culture and art) must exist separately from

politics. However, in the realities of the modern world in all significant international competitions, there is a specific element of politics. So, for example, in 1980, some Western countries boycotted the Olympic Games held in Moscow. The indicated reason is a sign of protest against the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. The Soviet Union, in response in 1984, boycotted the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. In 2014, many countries also attempted to boycott the Sochi Winter Olympics under various pretexts. The pretexts were called inappropriate for the reality of the violation of the rights of Russian sexual minorities, the situation in Syria, and other reasons. Nevertheless, despite this, the Olympics took place and became a major world sporting event that influenced the international image of Russia (Zakharova & Balynskaya, 2019).

In the modern international image of Russia, harmful components prevail. Negative assessments are related to the fact that Western countries see a powerful state in the Russian Federation and do not want to strengthen its global influence. However, there are also positive assessments of Russia's external image. They are connected, first of all, with the active participation of the country in space exploration, the generally recognized achievements in the field of science and art.

Russia's not-so-good reputation today complicates the implementation of the foreign policy tasks facing the state. The current situation impedes the development of trade and economic relations with foreign powers.

The world community is critical of the political activities of the Russian Federation. Negative consequences affect both domestic and global businesses. World ratings greatly underestimate Russian companies. This fact is mostly explained by the presence of country risk in Russia, the occurrence of which is mainly due to the country's negative reputation. An international image is also capable of influencing political processes within a state. Thus, the negative image of the country can be used by opposition forces to criticize the current government and its policies.

Improving the image of Russia will help increase its attractiveness for tourists, business people, and investors, provide respect for the country and raise the prestige of studying, working, and living in Russia.

The international image of Russia should contribute to the solution of strategic and tactical foreign policy tasks of the state. To do this, the international community must understand Russian domestic political priorities, which will contribute to creating a favorable investment climate for the country.

In modern Russia, several important official guidelines have been formulated for activities aimed at shaping the international image of our country. Attention to the issues of perception of our country and its world politics in doctrinal documents of Russia is constantly growing. A positive perception of Russia in the world is regarded as a condition for successful foreign policy activity.

Based on the previous, we can say that the formation of a favorable international image of Russia is one of the most critical and urgent problems in the sphere of foreign policy. Among the main tasks that need to be solved to develop an effective image-building strategy for Russia, experts identify the following areas (in decreasing order of importance) (Napalkova, 2017):

1. strengthening the national identity of citizens by activating historical memory, drawing attention to the historical dates, cultural and scientific achievements of the country;
2. the formation of new Russian information resources aimed at a foreign audience;

3. the active expansion of the activities of Russian scientific and cultural centers abroad, drawing attention to the cultural values and scientific achievements of our country through the organization of exhibitions, conferences, and forums;
4. increasing the attractiveness of Russia to investors;
5. an increase in the flow of foreign tourists, the development of new areas of tourism.

Also, for a more effective solution to the problem of Russia's political image, it is necessary to create a unified state system that will control and coordinate all activities for the construction of the country's foreign policy image.

At the moment, such a unified system in Russia does not exist. However, the state is aware of the importance of creating a positive image abroad. Recently, new structures are beginning to form in the Russian Federation that is responsible for establishing social and cultural ties with other countries. Examples include the Office for Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries under the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation. This Office was established in 2005.

Another example is the creation of the Commission of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation on international cooperation and public diplomacy. This Commission was established in 2006. There are also other government agencies working in this area.

However, the construction of a political image can only be useful as a result of real transformation within the state. An external and internal image of the country is interconnected. If the internal political image is positive, then most likely, the country will look favorable in the eyes of the world community. For this reason, a package of measures should cover a wide range of activities of the state. The set of measures should concern not only the information policy but also such domestic spheres as, for example, the fight against corruption, which today makes promising international cooperation difficult.

It is also crucial for Russia to improve the level of education, health care, social support of the population. These areas are not just a set of actions necessary for the authorities to improve the country's image within the information space of both Russia and the world as a whole. As we said above, a positive image of a country is a strategic goal. The achievement of this goal impacts both the country positioning on the world stage and the public opinion formation within the country.

The digitalization trend of the space of both Russian and world media shows Russia's lag in this direction. However, this circumstance should push the authorities to put forward a particular pool of "requirements" for specialists whose professional activity is an international activity, PR or digital technology, information security. The authorities can set tasks for these experts since it is precisely the government that is the main subject of political relations.

Of course, the real situation is complicated by the process of import substitution. The software on which future specialists are trained is primarily Russian-made. The software does not always coincide with its characteristics with Western ones. However, this should be perceived by the modern educational system in the field of IT as a challenge and advantage, and knowledge of a foreign language can and should reinforce the competencies acquired in universities.

Without a doubt, charity, volunteering, and the development of nonprofit organizations can play an important role in image building (Zakharova & Zinovyeva, 2019). All these factors form the country's

social capital. High social capital is useful not only as a way to increase productivity economically but also as a factor in resisting external threats.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can conclude that the international image of the state is one of the critical factors that enable it to realize its national interests at the international level. The image has a significant impact on the socio-economic and political competitiveness of the country. At present, the political image of Russia in the West is mostly negative in color. This circumstance complicates the implementation of the national interests of Russia in the international communication space. To solve this problem, Russia needs to build an effective image policy that will improve the attitude of the world community towards our country. This policy should be based on the promotion of Russian culture, language, scientific and technological achievements abroad, as well as on the implementation of real positive transformations within the state.

These recommendations are due to the need to continue to comprehend the international state image and study the features of its formation in a specific situation.

The study of the following problems seems promising:

- national values and interests as a determinant of the formation of the international image of the state;
- institutionalization of the interaction of the state and civil society institutions in the formation of the country's international image;
- public and public diplomacy as a tool for shaping the country's international image;
- the use of the projective method in the formation of the international image of the country;
- the international image of the state as a factor in the formation of the international strategy of the Russian Federation;
- the formation of the international image of Russia in conditions of exacerbation of the global informational confrontation;
- information needs of reference groups abroad as a factor in the formation of the international image of the Russian Federation;
- sociocultural determinants of the formation of the country's international image.

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