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**MEDIA IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN THE PERCEPTION OF
KAZAKHSTAN**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to identifying the ideas of Kazakh youth about life in Russia, their choice of media sources and evaluation of the obtained information from the viewpoint of reliability. The research material is compared with previous surveys of Kazakhstanis to reveal changes in the dynamics of their attitude towards Russia. The study was conducted in April–May 2021 during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The purpose of the work is to show the communicative, functional and structural-semiotic media resources used in the construction of the media image of Russia in Kazakhstan. New structural components of the image of Russia after the Ukrainian events have been identified. The conclusion is that, despite the external information pressure from the Western media, the Kazakh media form an integral model of a positive image of Russia. The study has revealed a high degree of trust in the information of the official and online media of Kazakhstan and Russia. At the same time, the research has shown the necessity to adjust the media image of Russia as a response to external challenges, threats and the enormous information pressure of the united West and the United States, the reduction of external news channels. The creation of an axiological basis of the media image as a component of the respondents' world model and the formation of a positive image of the country should become a priority task of the Russian foreign policy.

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1. Introduction

The media image of the country is a strategic resource of a state, part of its national policy, as an attractive country image is as important as economic power and military strength (Shestopal & Smulkina, 2018; Yanglyaeva & Yakova, 2019;).

During the last decade, the issue of Russia's image formation due to popular media and major social networks has been actively discussed in the scientific discourse, both at home and abroad. Studies of Western and US media activity over the past decade have consistently revealed a steady trend towards a negative image of the country (Dracheva; 2019; Posternyak & Boeva-Omelechko, 2018; Repina et al., 2018). Sources of negative information about Russia continue to come from leading US print media, such as The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Los Angeles Times.

A different picture and dynamics of attitudes to Russia can be seen in the media of China and a number of CIS countries. Most media resources have been constructing a positive or neutral image of Russia of the past decade (Lebedeva & Kharkevich, 2014; Savelyeva, 2020; Savin, 2018). Surveys of Kazakhstanis in 2015-2020 showed that most of them treated Russia as a comfortable territory, a protector from military threats, a safe shelter, a significant potential partner, a strategic ally, and a friendly state (Misonzhnikov, 2018; Rubtsova & Devdariani, 2019). At the same time, researchers also reveal a certain bias in their coverage of various aspects of the country's life. This is due to the emerging tendencies of derussification of some CIS countries, the strengthening of national-patriotic sentiments among young people, and the search for a new identity. It "depends on political and social conditions in the country, its notions of citizenship, language, territory, history, and cultural community" (Drobizheva, 2020, p. 43). A more critical view of Russia is presented by activists in the blogosphere. A number of researchers point out that Russia's media image becomes a hindrance in intercultural communications with Western Europe and the United States (Elovik, 2021), as the perceived image of the country is seen by the audience as a major threat to peace (Kazarinova, 2018). In this regard, we see the emerging anxiety of information consumers, when the media is subject to systematic analysis of the situation and finding adequate means of prevention, as well as reformation of the relationship with the audience around seen as a meaningful subject.

This explains necessity to search for communicative strategies and new drivers for promoting a positive media image of Russia. A strategic task in this direction becomes the study of information resources, identifying problems and prospects for journalism; and researching the psychological characteristics of different audience segments. It is important to do the following. First, one must formulate a national media strategy for Russia's geopolitical situation. Second, they establish relations with neighbouring states. Third, they create an information-psychological basis for the purposeful construction of a media image of the country and promote the territory brand in neighbouring states. Fourth, they form partnerships and friendly relations with them and create an axiological basis for the media image as a component of the respondents' world model (Erofeeva et al., 2020).

In mass communication theory and practice, the category of notion (image) is well developed, and different approaches to its construction and analysis have been outlined (Balynskaya et al., 2021; Kulibanova & Teor, 2017; Nuortimoa et al., 2018; Rod'kin, 2018).

2. Problem Statement

The category of the media image is considered by most researchers as the result of retranslation of psychological perception through the techniques and methods of journalism. We will also understand the media image as the image of the social world shaped by the media system that contains a value perception of Russia as a media object.

The aim of the article is to identify communicative-functional and structural-semiotic resources of the media. They are used in the construction of the media image of Russia in Kazakhstan and determine if a holistic conception of this image is created in the notion of Kazakh youth.

3. Research Questions

The study showed that the media form a coherent image of Russia. Due to the measurements, rational and emotional conceptions are mainly based on media publications

A study of the conceptions of young Kazakhstan people of Russia during the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic showed that the country is presented mainly in a positive and neutral perspective. And the Russia's notions and its citizens show a predominantly positive attitude towards the country in Kazakhstan. An analysis of the media image of Russia revealed the most important substantive characteristics of the subject through the prism of the media.

Our survey confirmed some of the positions of the research conducted in Kazakhstan in December 2019 on the audience's conceptions of Russia.

The similarity of many indicators is in economic, internal political development, common life values in the promotion of the knowledge society, modernisation of society. All these factors influence the coverage and conception of the neighbouring state as a partner, as a friendly neighbor, as a trade competitor (Melnik et al., 2020, p. 113).

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the work is to identify the ideas of young Kazakhstanis about Russia during the pandemic, compiled based on their acquaintance with publications in the media.

5. Research Methods

The subject of the study was the media image of Russia in Kazakhstan. An Internet survey was used as the research method. The sample type was a snowball survey (the link to the questionnaire was sent by students to their acquaintances via WhatsApp). The sample size was 170 people. The questionnaire contained several questions concerning the sources of key information about Russia and assessing the reliability of the data being broadcast. A structural-functional approach was also used, making it possible to identify the structure of the media image and its axiological and pragmatic potential.

As it was expected, the main sources of information were publications in the media, TV and radio programs, as well as comments and feedback from people on information materials from the Internet. Judgments about Russia for Kazakhstanis are formed primarily based on watching programs in the media (70 %), reading comments and studying reactions on the Internet (51 %). At the same time, one in five

respondents noted that he or she had direct ties with the Russians in everyday life (through work, family or friendly relations).

6. Findings

Respondents were asked to evaluate the state and development (during the last 10 years) of Russia based on positive/negative statements in the press. A wide range of topics was offered for evaluation (see Table 1).

Table 1. State and development of Russia based on positive/negative statements in the press during the last 10 years according to the respondents

No.		Positive evaluations (agree, rather agree)	Negative ratings (more like agree+disagree)
1	In general the country is developing in the right direction	54 %	37 %
2	The family situation and family values are improving	53 %	34 %
3	Religious organizations bring sanctity to society	50 %	41 %
4	Fundamental rights are increasingly protected and observed	50 %	40 %
5	State institutions are effective	50 %	40 %
6	Law enforcement agencies and armies protect the population and order	50 %	36 %
7	Civil society is developing	71 %	20 %
8	International policy is peaceful	56 %	37 %
9	The economy is sustainable	59 %	34 %
10	Business management is efficient, working conditions are decent	56 %	34 %
11	Inequality is gradually decreasing, people's financial situation is improving	53 %	40 %
12	Vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities are included in social relations	60 %	26 %
13	Science and education are characterised by high culture, professionalism and usefulness	70 %	20 %
14	The showbiz market creates an attractive, interesting content	74 %	20 %
15	Sporting events in the country cultivate sporting principles and are organised in an interesting way	77 %	20 %
16	Art development is reflexive to modernity, interest and beauty	74 %	14 %
17	Large media organisations care about the objectivity of information conveyed	43 %	49 %
18	The environmental situation is sustainable; the natural world is being protected	41 %	43 %
19	Are you close to the Russian way of life (attitudes to work, family, leisure, speech, jokes, etc.)?	67 %	24 %
20	Are you ever going to visit Russia as a tourist?	83 %	14 %

Data processing revealed 7 top themes with statements marked "agree+" and "rather agree" by the respondents (see Table 02).

Table 2. Table 02 Proximity of the way of life

1	The main sources of information have been media publications, television and radio programmes, as well as comments, feedback from people on information materials from the Internet.	83 %
2	Sports events in the country cultivate sports principles and are organised in an interesting way	77 %
3	The showbiz market creates an attractive, interesting content	74 %
4	Art development is reflexive with regard to modernity, interesting, beautiful	74 %
5	Civil society is developing	71 %
6	Science and education are characterised by high culture, professionalism, usefulness and innovation	70 %
7	Are you close to the Russian way of life (attitudes to work, family, leisure, speech, jokes, etc.)?	67 %

Nine main themes with negative ratings were also identified. The statements were labelled as "rather agree+" and "rather disagree" with a negative assessment (see Table 03).

Table 3. Main themes with negative ratings according to respondents

1	Major media organisations are concerned about the objectivity of conveyed information	49 %
2	The environmental situation is sustainable, the natural world is protected	43 %
3	Religious organisations bring sanctity to society	41 %
4	Ecological situation is sustainable, the natural world is being protected	40 %
5	Fundamental human rights are increasingly being protected and observed	40 %
6	Public bodies are effective	40 %
7	International politics is peaceful	37 %
8	In general the country is developing in the right direction	37 %
9	Law enforcement agencies and the army protect the population and order	36 %

Data processing revealed 7 top themes with statements marked "agree+" and "rather agree" by the respondents. The study showed that, overall, the respondents in Kazakhstan gave positive ratings. Typical positive assessments ranged between 50 % and 75 % with negative assessments between 20 % and 37 %. Negative assessments were higher (by a small margin) in questions about the objectivity of major media outlets and environmental sustainability. The key question about the proximity of the way of life lifted it to the top 7 with the most positive answers. About 2/3 of the respondents named the Russian way of life as close. This fact can be explained by personal ties between the respondents and Russians. Sociological data show that more than 50 % of Kazakhstani citizens maintain regular contacts with relatives, friends and colleagues in CIS neighboring countries, primarily in Russia. In terms of the socio-demographic composition of the respondents, the picture was as follows: 47 % were men and 53 % were women. Most of the respondents were under 25 years of age (72 %). 19 % were middle-aged people up to 35 years old. Those aged 45 years were only 4 % of the respondents, and the same percentage for those under 55 years. Marital status of respondents was as follows: single – 72 %, married – 27 % and divorced – 1 %. Kazakhs accounted for 67 % of the respondents by ethnicity. 20 % did not indicate any ethnicity. Other ethnic groups accounted for 13 %.

7. Conclusion

The general conclusions are as follows: "1) Despite external information pressure from the Western media, certain political and economic difficulties, Russia remains a strong economic power for Kazakhstan. 3) The information agenda of a certain period of coverage depends on important interstate events, bilateral cooperation, planned milestone dates of Kazakhstan-Russia relations in different areas of life of states: politics, economy, trade, social and cultural sphere, sports. 4) All this gives an idea of the positive factors in shaping the image of Russia in Kazakhstan's media as a neighboring and friendly country, with which Kazakhstan has a common historical past, a positive present and a progressive future.

At the same time, the study showed the need to adjust the media image of Russia as a response to external challenges and threats. Strengthening the reputational characteristics of the country is possible only by organizing a systematic flow of information, suggesting a clear and objective idea of the national identity, status and role of the country for the foreign audience. The formation of a positive image of the country should become a priority task of its foreign policy, and the main reserve in constructing the image is the spiritual component of the country's life.

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