



REVIEW

From Uncle Sam to Just Trump: A Long Way of Alternating Irony-hate-ambivalence among Russian Users-Students Regarding Politicians

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the role of emotionally significant political images in youth culture. The study covers the period between 2006 and 2017 during which Russia saw not only a political and economic transition but also dramatic changes in communication technology. The 6-stage research included two waves of testing in 2006, 2012, 2017. Respondents were aged 17 to 24 years old. In 2017 the general youth international value agenda can be considered formed, with its essential feature being the further reduction of the influence of advertising and communication of politicians' brands.

1. Introduction

These materials represent a relatively small part of the conclusions of the third wave of the stereotypical, qualitative, long-term study (2006, 2012, 2017) of the young educated people consciousness content aged from 17 to 23. The study is called "Fictional creatures of the mass media era. Russia, 21 century".

38 authors of texts and 19 illustrators took part in the

project 2017. Young people from 19 to 22 years old. Higher education in the Humanities and Social Sciences or being a student of the relevant departments of universities were still an obligatory condition. The very selection procedure implied, as well as in 2012, an objective selection of creatively gifted young people according to the criteria of this project. At the first stage young people themselves, without prompting, recalled fictional beings during several sessions working in groups (not fewer than 4 hours). Next,

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a list of 271 creatures was formed as a result of the remembering stage. At the next stage, the authors chose for themselves specific images to describe or draw them, that is, the selected image was to motivate the author for additional work and personal time spending. The latter means a certain degree of sympathy or interest in these images. It is the emotional significance, the voluntary choice of the image from the list and the formal parameters of the description result that make this format of their presentation extremely rich for the research. This format of their description is close in meaning to 2 the format of media content presentation. Young people described the most popular images for them, which they could independently remember. The choice was made from the entire volume of direct knowledge of humanitarian-oriented young people. The aim of the study was to record the changes that have occurred for over 6 years in the advertising and media markets of the country, through reflection, through subjective recollection/perception of the target audience. The latter correlates with the value picture of the world of youth. As a result, as it follows from the comparative analysis of three waves of research: a set of hardware and software factors have had an impact on the volume of information consumption, the ways of its selection, including traditional explicit forms of advertising, which becoming too deliberate, are reducing their confidence and the ability to attract attention. The method of research was a survey and focused interview to obtain a list of images and a projective technique to obtain the content of consciousness in the form of text, visual descriptions of the future.

Social media demonstrated dramatic growth in Russia since 2006. Internet became faster to the point that it allowed people to watch English-language TV series on their smartphones, exchange links to dynamic content, and create humorous photo collages with various characters. Our study demonstrates that this combination of software and hardware developments made a great impact on viewer content and, consequently, on young peoples' values^[1].

2. Literature Review

A survey of literature relevant for our study yields the following conclusions:

(1) There is an extensive body of research in social media and other ways of digital communication^[6,8,12,17,18,19]. Contemporary media studies devoted to "format" as a mechanism of producing an online media text as part of convergent media production process^[9,13] view format as a way to express social reality. It views an event as "information", separating it from "non-information". However, there is still a need for further research if we are to fully

understand the role of digital media in creating the social myth of imaginary characters.

(2) The study of imaginary characters in politics and political mythology can be found in^[2,3,7]. Formalists Propp V., Jakobson R. laid the foundation for a structural understanding of classical mythology^[10,16]. Later, the formal approach could be applied to modern social mythology communicated via social media.

(3) Bottici C., Esch J., Lieberman S., Gray T. provide a theoretical framework of the imaginary as a combination of historical knowledge, current culture, and political myth-making^[2,5,14]. Persson E. & Petersson B., Danilov M. focus on different aspects media impact in post-soviet countries^[4,15,16].

(4) Advertising and public relations research focuses on the modern social myth aspects of the media. In order to create successful projects in the fields of political PR and public administration, one should be able to integrate political mythology into humanities, media "format", contemporary art and folklore. In relation to characters, this idea means dropping semantic boundaries between the fictional and the real. 3

However, there is a significant difference between the political culture of those who were born in Russia and those who were born in the USSR. The reason is the nature of media (classical electronic media vs digital media) and the context of cultural socialisation.

In 2016 the article Social Media Impact on the Transformation of Imaginary Political Characters in Russian Youth Culture^[1] was published, which describes in detail the data of two waves of research conducted by a similar method, on a similar demographic group of respondents. The researches were carried out 13 and 6 years ago. The findings of these studies were intriguing. By 2012, the Internet, memes of the Internet, had almost destroyed such a channel of horizontal communication in Russia as anecdotes. It is possible to state a decrease in level of education in historical and literary disciplines, and a sharp narrowing of the General Outlook of youth; Through the Internet, young people have access to English-language TV series, which are characterized by the image of the anti-hero. In 2006 the descriptions of political creatures detected remains of fundamental pillars of Soviet ideology, such as "Mother-land", "Soviet hero", "the Revolution and the heroic ascetics, revolutionaries". It turns out that, among the many ideologies of the USSR these ones have shown the greatest vitality.

3. Research Methodology

The tradition of obtaining sociologically representative psychographic data of the target audiences (goals, values,

opinions, interests) through instructions to name and describe the characteristics of fictional creatures in connection with a particular object of research is rooted in the practice of brand research. When people talk about individuality (personification) in relation to social mythology, they understand it as “a set of characteristic features of a person’s personality with which this brand is associated”^[20]).

V. Domnin, in his book “Branding: new technologies in Russia”^[21] points out that “the brand as an image in the consumer consciousness does not formally possess any human characteristics, it is a projection of the internal contents and representations of the consumer on the external object. However, it is the only way it can be described. In some cases we can consider this kind of description as a detailed metaphor that transfers the qualities of a person to everything that surrounds us. David Aaker^[20] points out that the brand identity includes human characteristics such as age, stratum, gender, as well as human qualities such as warmth, caring and sentimentality. David Aaker with American pragmatism points to the benefits of using the concept of brand personality as the basis of its existence as in the process of qualitative and quantitative research conducting, subjects are usually asked to give the most characteristic features of the individual to brands, since in this case”, the answers follow quickly, they are usually understandable and logical in their basis, “and the differences in the responses of users, usually endowing brands with individuality, and the answers of non-users, often refusing brands in individuality”, provide the ground for the implementation of useful approaches to the problem»^[20].

That is, by studying in this article the values of young people through the relevant images of characters, we are dealing with a genetic variety of projective research methods: extremely effective, proven and perfected for several decades “on the fields” of branding.

4. Research Data: Emotionally Significant Images

In 2017 the following trends were identified:

(1) The most popular delivery channel for a creature is cinema/television (44% of all creatures).

(2) 79 % of the source of cinema/television make up foreign characters (movies/TV series/cartoons). A small number of characters of Russian origin indicates widespread Americanization of mass consciousness of young people, as well as the lack of interest of young people to the characters with Russian mentality

(3) The characters of the series are sufficiently presented in the list (making up a fifth). As it was mentioned

above, the characters from America overflow Russian space.

(4) The prevalence of the characters of classical literature over the characters of modern literature (by about 3 times) indicates the level of education of young people, as well as their interests. The characters of classical literature, their characters and lifestyles are more attractive to young people.

(5) Characters of classical literature, their characters and comic book Characters (16%), although originally created on paper, have become known thanks to the movies made by the Company of Marvel.

(6) Characters of Russian literature are less popular than characters of foreign literature. If in classical literature the percentage is quite equal (42/58), in children’s literature foreign works clearly prevail (29/71).

(7) In the source “modern folklore/computers/memes” a large share is occupied by Internet memes (64%). Stickers are next in popularity (12%). Some memes are then popularized even more by switching to stickers. In the subcategory “Other Internet bloggers, community for suicide, *the Blue whale*,” have become popular.

(8) There was an interesting group “objects of art”. St Isaac’s Cathedral, a subject of public discussion is perceived as a being due to the constant interest on the part of different groups. His interests are protected and upheld. It was one of the most popular agendas in 2017 in St. Petersburg.

(9) There are extremely versatile characters that are found in different sources in the group “show personas”. Young people paid attention to the most influential politicians of the present time mr. Trump and mr. Putin.

In 2006 respondents mentioned seven nationality-related characters or groups (an Englishman, an American, Germans, a Russian, a Finn, a Frenchman, and a Chukchi), eight political images (Big Brother, Paper Tiger, Stormy Petrel, Dove of Peace, Motherland, Soviet Hero, Democracy, and Freedom), three images associated with United States politics (Uncle Sam, Democratic Donkey, and Republican Elephant), five and seven historical persons (Vasily Ivanovich Chapaev, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Rasputin, Grandpa Lenin, Vovochka (Lenin as a teenager), and Che Guevara).

In 2012, respondents mentioned just nine imaginary political characters. They include seven political images (Big Brother, MedvePut (formed by combination of the two family names: MEDVEdev and PUTin), P is a mushroom, Tandem, Powerful People of the World, Friendship of Nations, Great Chief), one historical person (Stalin), and one politician (Zhirinovskiy).

Among the creatures of 2017 the following can be at-

tributed to politics Bronze Horseman (see Figure 1), Captain America (see Figure 2), Mycroft Holmes, Mr. Putin, Mr. Trump (see Figure 3).



Figure 1. Bronze Horseman



Figure 2. Captain America

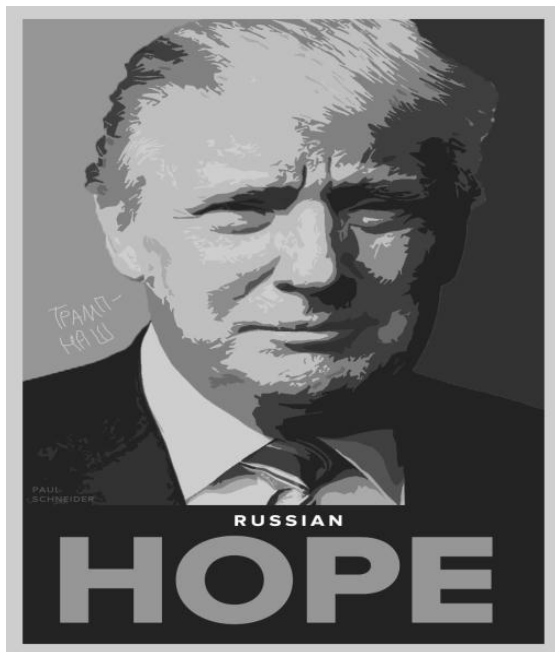


Figure3. Mr. Trump

5. Conclusions

Several conclusions follow from the study.

The images related to American politics have been replaced by the American heroes of the series. There is no ideology, no political myths of self-identification.

There is an increased tolerance to violence for the sake of logical and reasonable ideas;

Both in 2012 and 2017 an indifferent attitude to politics and power was shown, it is not interesting for young educated humanitarian people in its bulk.

The study has shown that the younger generation is not losing touch with reality: fictional characters coexist with real images of media personalities and objects of the socio-cultural reality.

A completely unexpected facet and an amazing feature of this connection is the blurring of the boundary between the objects of fiction and reality. At the same time, and it is shown by the research data of 2017, such a “borderline” phenomenon between fiction and reality as “classical folklore” by “word of mouth” has almost disappeared. The spread of humor, anecdotes and popular stories is now happening through the Internet, not talks.

Respondents perceive socially significant images through the prism of social networks, but many characters are perceived by respondents as an image that came from 7 different sources and young people are not alien to complex and contradictory characters from classical literary works.

The images of Putin and Trump are conveyed in a deliberately classical, restrained manner. You may notice a handwritten postscript of the author on the poster of Trump: *Trump is Ours*.

6. Further Research Avenues

The current study analyses data collected before the dramatic change of power in Ukraine and the subsequent changes in Russian foreign and domestic policy.

A third wave of our research in 2018 could give us unique empirical data for further studies of young people’s attitudes to Russia’s transition from a traditional free market economy and a western-type democratic political system to a new political model as reflected in the world of fictional characters.

We need to verify the statement that the current political authorities had lost an exalted status in the eyes of Russian youth and now look monstrous. Also, we need to verify empirical data about youth’s acceptance of war as an ideology and its esthetisation.

A more advanced research methodology is required to assess the role of social media in the perception change

and to assign the change to social media.

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