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Media through the Prism of Stereotypes

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ABSTRACT

Modern media are responsible for channeling the information to multifarious audience groups. The article presents an attempt to offer a comprehensive vision of media research field, ranging from a big sphere of media communication laws and regulations to cases of political and financial representations in media. The key idea of the article is a new media research paradigm, based on the analysis of modern stereotypes. Stereotypes in media are described, according to the principle of information maximum. Key methods of the research are ethnographical description and omnibus survey. The results of the research highlight expansion and idealization strategies of modern media stereotypes. Expansion strategy is achieved through relatively new stereotypes of Asian people in modern world. Idealization strategy is described within the framework of Russian high income middle-aged respondents of an omnibus survey. Based on the omnibus survey results, the paper testifies to the fact that the poor are reluctant to admit the leading function of the media language in their day-to-day communicative social interaction, while the rich stress the significance of media routine expressions, actualized in verbal social intercourse. This fact alone is a strong signpost to the theory that the rich middle-aged individuals are more agreeable with present social norms, offered by the media, than the poor. High income people follow these verbal signposts and accept them as behavioral models. The paper has a number of theoretical and practical outcomes, relevant to present-day understanding of media genesis.

Keywords: Society, Communication, Media, Stereotype, Income, Age
JEL Classifications: O32, O33, Z13, Z18

1. INTRODUCTION

Researchers often describe media within the framework of richness (Daft et al., 1987), synchronicity (Dennis et al., 2008), social presence (Short et al., 1976), and naturalness (Kock, 2009). Our additional component for this analysis is the domain of stereotypes, reflected mainly in the language of media communication and different perceptions of target groups. Wilson stresses that stereotypes "… have been shown to be remarkably resilient to change" (Wilson, 2006). "The basis for all stereotyping is the differential perception of groups. Without such differentiation between groups, stereotyping cannot occur" (Hamilton and Troiler, 1986). Thus, we may rightfully assume that the theoretical value of the paper lies within the domain of a new paradigm of media research.

Our primary hypothesis is that all types of media research are spellbound to be based on the analysis of language stereotypes, employed to achieve certain goals. "In any discussion of nationalism, identity, or current affairs, language is never 'innocent.' The choice of words reveals the underlying outlook of the speaker. So for example the word 'foreign' in English is much more hostile …than the German ausländer. Latent British xenophobia is revealed in the offensive tabloid expression 'Johnny Foreigner'.… to Welsh is to cheat or renege; to Scotch is to thwart, to squash, to prevent; an Irish lanyard is an untidy rope. In other words the names of the three 'subsidiary' nations in the British Isles have negative connotations in the language of the dominate one. Thus national prejudice is encoded in the English language" (Mike and Peter, 2002).

Traditional manifestations of media concepts are directed to the domain of media and culture, media and society, media and politics. As a powerful tool of shaping public opinion media are ubiquitous. The central idea of our paper is focused around a paradigm approach to media analysis. Thus, we see media research fields in the form of the following taxonomy (Figure 1).

Media communication rules and regulations have been discussed in quite a number of works. Technological shortcomings have made some media, such as email and text, less suitable for covering emotions (Kock, 2004; Sussman and Sproull, 1999). Some scholars highlighted the role of cultural norms and emotional coloring in emails and texts (Byron 2008, Hancock et al. 2007). Emotional responses to media messages is the subject matter of the research by Tailor and Alan, 'despite the widespread use of media for work and personal communication, little is known about how the characteristics of various media lead to emotional responses among users or how they distort communication messages for work and personal tasks' (Wells and Dennis, 2016).

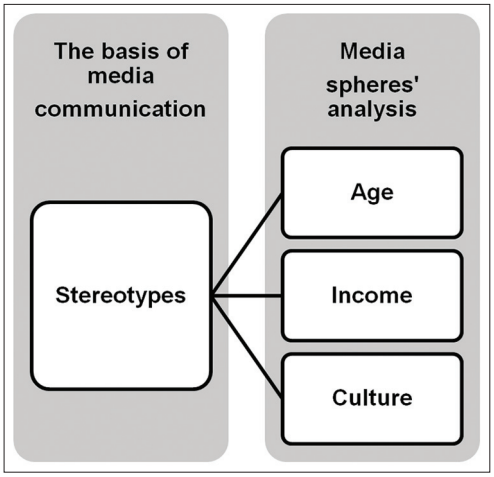
In this paper we enter the field of media grassroots: Communicative stereotypes. Our primary hypothesis is that media communication is based on stereotypic routine expressions. Our secondary hypothesis is that the study of communicative stereotypes is relevant for media description. The primary concern of the paper is the analysis of the core component of media communication - common routine stereotypic expressions.

As any information system the system of language stereotypes can be described in terms of mathematical laws. We argue the axiom, supported by many scholars, that communicative system must be analyzed exclusively in linguistic terms. Our central idea is that communicative stereotypes, should be analyzed within the framework of the principle of information maximum. This idea firstly appeared in the works by Shannon and Weaver (1949) and later it was developed by Soviet and Russian scholars (Golytsin and Petrov, 2005): "The system tries to find such response *y,* which enables the maximum of useful information about the given stimuli *x*'.

$$L(X,Y) = H(Y) - H(Y/X) - ß\,R(X,Y) \rightarrow \max,$$

where H (Y) – the entropy of the system's conditions, H (Y/X) – the entropy of the system's mistakes and its reactions to outer stimuli, R (X,Y) – the average consumption of the system's resource in Y condition within all X environmental conditions, and ß - the indicator of the system's deficit (ß=0, when the system has an unlimited energy resource, и ß=1 when the system has a very big energy deficit)" (Ibid., p.5).

Figure 1: The taxonomy of media research



According to the described above principle, all informational systems develop within 3 main tendencies (Figure 2).

Expansion is realized through new varieties and numbers of environmental conditions, in which the analyzed system can exist. This tendency is sometimes called 'searching behavior' tendency H (Y). While idealization is concentrated on the tendency to minimize the system's mistakes entropy, idealization is sometimes known as the "conservative behavior" tendency H (Y/X). It is achieved mainly through the repetition of the best variants. Why certain stereotypes are more frequent than others? Due to idealization strategy some stereotypes are selected by native speakers and repeated more frequently. Resource saving is realized in two possible ways: (1) minimizing the resource spent R (X,Y); (2) minimizing the indicator of the system's deficit ß by means of resource growth.

Now we proceed to the analysis of all these 3 principles within the framework of media communicative stereotypes.

2. DATA AND METHODS

The expansion strategy of media communicative stereotypes is described with the help of ethnographic descriptive method. Here we analyze new varieties of stereotypical environmental conditions, reflected in popular media jokes and stereotypical portraits.

The idealization strategy analysis is based on the results of the omnibus survey, describing the attitude to communicative stereotypes in Russia. The main idea of analysis at this level is presented with the help of the following original scheme (Figure 3). The results of the omnibus survey have been employed to highlight the attitudes to communicative stereotypes in everyday

Figure 2: The information maximum principle

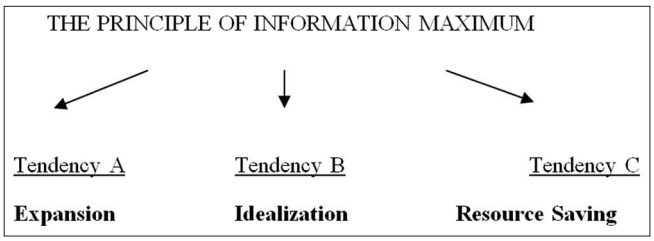
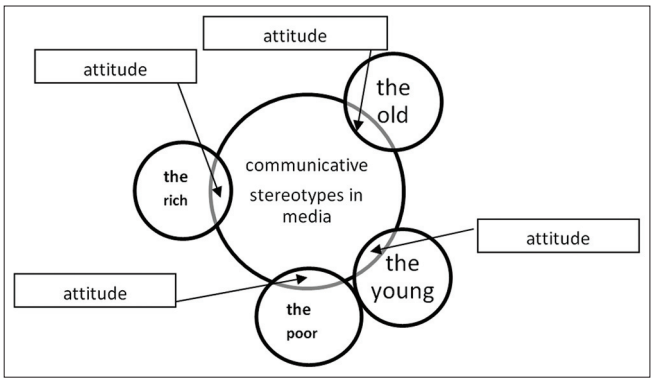


Figure 3: The scheme of communication analysis



life. This is our original survey, ordered to this distinguished social analysis centre (Yuri Levada Analytical Center, 2014) in order to obtain the maximum degree of objectivity and transparency.

The survey was conducted across Russia with a total number of respondents of 1603 people. Our central survey question was as follows: "Do you use common routine expressions, quotations from films and public speeches of famous people, bad language set expressions in your day-to-day life?" All these linguistic terms are referred to the domain of idioms in Russian. Parallel to this question Levada-center obtained the information about the financial situation of the respondents. Their second question concerned the respondents' affordability to purchase goods. Thus, the answer of respondents to their attitude to idioms was given against the background of their financial situation.

Yuri Levada center carries out nationwide polls in Russian Federation, which are based on a representative sample of 1600 people over 18 + from 130 sampling points across 45 regions of Russian Federation.

Our sample did not include the Chechen and Ingush Republics, as well as remote and sparsely populated region of the Far North (Nenets, Yamal-Nenets, Taimyr Autonomous Region, the Evenki Autonomous District, Kamchatka, Chukotka, Sakhalin Oblast). There were 9 Russian areas, totally excluded from consideration. The adult population in the excluded areas did not exceed 4%. Residents of small settlements with a population of <50 people (about 0.8% of the adult population of Russia), the military (about 0.8% of the adult population of Russia), the person in custody or detention during the investigation (about 0.8% of the adult population of Russia), as well as homeless people (up to 1.5% of the adult population of Russia) were not included to the survey.

In each federal district independently all the primary sampling units were divided into strata according to their population number:

1. The city of more than 1 million people;
2. The town numbering from 500 thousand to 1 million people;
3. The town numbering from 100 thousand to 500 thousand people;
4. Urban settlements of up to 100 thousand people;
5. Villages.

These 5 categories were further subdivided into smaller groups. Given the characteristics of population distribution in the regions we formed 36 strata. The total sample (1,600 respondents) was distributed proportionally among all strata of the adult population in each stratum. The number of primary sampling units was determined from the restrictions on the average number of respondents in the same town/rural area (7-13 respondents).

3. RESULTS

Now we proceed to summarizing the collected data and the analysis performed on these data. The question of our original omnibus survey, ordered to Yuri Levada Analytical center, is as follows: "Do you use common routine expressions, quotations from films and public speeches of famous people, bad language set expressions in your day-to-day life?" The table also describes the age, level of education and purchasing power of the respondents which is a direct reflection of their income level.

The survey results demonstrate that the balance of "yes/no" answers is fairly equal. 43.1% of respondents admitted the fact that they were using communicative stereotypes in their day-to-day life, while 56.8% answered negatively. Though the number of positive answers is high enough, we assume that every second person in the Russian Federation refuses to admit the importance of communicative stereotypes in his/her social discourse. The margin between "yes/no" answers in the group of respondents with higher education is <10%, while the margin in the group of respondents with the education below secondary is more than 25%. Thus, we consider that the highest degree the respondents have the more they are willing to accept the importance of set communicative units in their everyday life. The second aspect of interest is connected with the focal point of our research - describing income and age groups and their attitude towards communication. In the poorest segment of respondents the prevailing negative opinion has a margin of 45%. While in the richest segment of respondents the prevailing positive opinion has a margin of 21%. The attitudes of rich and poor groups are different and the rich tend to pay more attention to communication than the poor. The rich accept the importance of the leading role of certain communicative units in their day-to-day discourse and they follow the patterns, fixed in languages.

Figure 4: Omnibus survey results, obtained in February, 2014 in Russian Federation

The number	The survey was conducted in RF. The number of respondents is 1603 (18+ years of age, 21-25 February, 2014)	*Total*	male	female	18-24 years of age	25-39 years of age	40-54 years of age	55 years of age	higher education	secondary special education	secondary education	below secondary education	I can afford to buy only foods	A can afford to buy food and clothes	I can afford to buy durable goods	I can afford to buy a car
1, yes	The num	***1603***	742	861	223	458	438	483	470	498	305	330	211	851	467	75
2, no	Do you use common routine expressions, quotations from films and public speeches of famous people, bad language set expressions in your day-to-day life?															
no answe	1, yes	***43,1***	43,4	42,8	34,5	43,8	45,7	44	46,1	41	43,1	41,9	39,4	42,9	43,5	52,9
	2, no	***56,8***	56,3	57,2	65	56,2	54,1	56	53,9	58,6	56,9	58,1	60,6	56,8	56,5	47,1

Source: The survey was ordered by Zavyalova to Yuri Levada Analytical center in February, 2014

The age differences also present the point of interest. In all age groups negative answers prevail, although the degree of negatives is different. While in the youngest group (18-24 years of age) negative answers have the margin of 30.5%, the same margin of negative answers is only 8.4% in the age group of respondents of 40-54 years of age. First and foremost, this result brings us to the conclusion that middle-aged respondents feel more pressure from communicative stereotypes than youngsters. Finally, we may rightfully assume that rich middle-aged people in Russia see the importance of communicative stereotypes in their life.

4. DISCUSSION

Now we proceed to the discussion of research results. We start from the expansion strategy of communicative stereotypes (Figure 2). Here we are mainly concerned with international stereotypes of actualized in media.

Expansion strategy of media stereotypes is realized here in the form of engaging new nations in stereotypical description. Switching to business of China, we apply ethnographic data, obtained from the most influencial BRICS media journal "BRICS Business Magazine." How are Chinese business tycoons presented here? We start from Wang Jianlin, Dalian Wanda Group, "In 1970, when Wang was 15, his father sent him to the People's Liberation Army where he went on to serve in Ein Lalian, a field training boot camp with long marches and extremely rigorous physical demands … Jianlin believes that his decisiveness and ability to work well under stress come from his experience in the army. He emphasizes that he deliberately chose a military management style for his company. If Jianlin's orders are not carried out immediately, the subordinate at fault is fined. Wang Jianlin's private life also falls into the 'military discipline' category - he goes to bed at 11 p.m. and neither smokes nor drinks" (10 Chinese Dragons, 2015). Li Hejun, head of Hanergy Holding Group Limited, describes his visions of the future with a revolutionary touch, which symbolizes certain power battle field, "Each revolution witnessed the rise of a great power - first the United Kingdom, then the United States, and now the third revolution could be led by China" (Ibid.). Robin Li, Baidu Internet search Engine founder, a young Chinese intellectual person, talks about intellect power field, "Many Chinese people had doubts that knowledge truly meant power in a market economy. I think I managed to change their minds" (Ibid.). Wei Jianjun, President of Great Wall Motors Company, has directly translated military practices into his business style, "The 51-year-old Jianjun is known to maintain strict discipline. He is not on familiar terms with his subordinates, nor does he indulge in any vices. All of Great Wall's managers go through a military-style, boot camp training, which has already become legendary. The newly hired managers, workers, and engineers are forced to perform strenuous physical exercises, march for hours on end, and do menial work in hot weather. Jianjun believes that this approach helps them develop stronger willpower, stamina, and team spirit" (Ibid.). The upshot of these materials testifies to the fact that Chinese business is also in a battle field. Their target is global dominance. The idea of war is deeply rooted in Chinese mindset, expressed in "Sānshíliù jì" (36 war strategemes), where "Shāngchang rú zhànchang" (business is war). The theme of battle is also actualized on Chinese financial agenda. The 36 war strategemes is a mantra to many Chinese businessmen of today.

Stereotypes of international relations in media jokes. The first joke reflects the idea of hidden hostility. Though on the surface of things the participants of the story seem to be friendly. 'One day, an Asian man, an American man and a French girl were on a train. Along the ride, there was a short but dark tunnel. When they entered the tunnel a kissing sound, then a slapping sound was heard. Once outside, everyone could see a large red mark on the American's face. The French girl thought, "That American probably tried to kiss me, but accidentally kissed Chinese he slapped him." The American thought, "The Asian tried to kiss the French girl and she tried to slap him, but accidentally slapped me." Now, the Asian 'that was great! Me kiss pretty French girl and slap crazy American! Can`t wait for next tunnel!' (Jokes-db.com 2012).

Another example of new expansion strategy of stereotypes, opposing the Jews and the Chinese. "An airplane takes off from airport. The captain is Jewish and the first officer is Chinese. It's the first time they've flown together and it's obvious by the silence that they don't get along. After thirty minutes, the Jewish Captain speaks, 'I don't like Chinese.' The First Officer replies, 'Ooooh, no like Chinese? Why ees that?' The Captain says, 'You bombed Pearl Harbor. That's why I don't like Chinese.' The F.O. says, 'Nooooo, noooo. Chinese not bomb Pearl Harbah. That Japanese, not Chinese.' And the Captain answers, 'Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese. it doesn't matter, they're all alike.' Another thirty minutes of silence. Finally the in F.O. says, 'No like Jew.' The Captain replies, 'Why not? Why don't you like Jews?' F.O. says, 'Jews sink Titanic.' The Captain tries to correct him, 'No, no. The Jews didn't sink the Titanic. It was an iceberg.' The F.O. replies,' Iceberg, Goldberg, Rosenberg, no mattah. All same." (Jokes4us.com 2012).

The next joke is about Japanese cultural stereotypes we see in modern world everywhere. Japanese words in the joke do not need translation, because in modern global society people in most parts of the world hear these words at every corner. Here expansion strategy is realized in the form of blending of English and Japanese. Recent reports indicate the Japanese banking crisis shows no signs of improving. If anything, it's getting worse. Following last week's news that Origami Bank had folded, it was today learned that Sumo Bank has gone belly up. Bonsai Bank plans to cut back some of its branches. Shares in Kamikaze Bank have nose-dived and 500 jobs at Karate Bank will be chopped. Analysts report that there is something fishy going on at Sushi Bank and staff there fears they may get a raw deal (Asianjoke.com 2012).

The results of the ethnographic analysis testify to the fact that international stereotyping involves relatively new players - Asians, who will appear more and more frequently in media scenarios (Zavyalova, 2014). Asians are given through the stereotypical images of battles and hypocritical behavior, although many of them smart and intelligent. The results of our omnibus survey analysis describe media as something which influence middle-aged group of people through the channel of communicative stereotypes.

5. CONCLUSION

The main conclusion we arrive at may be formulated as follows: Stereotypes are the core component of all media. Stereotypes have to analyzed, according to the strategies of expansions and idealization. Expansion of stereotyping process is actualized in creating and exploiting stereotypes of Asians, Chinese mainly. Idealization is mainly achieved at the level of middle-aged rich people. This conclusion may be treated as an important real-life social and psychological phenomenon.

Our study of idealization is limited to Russian Federation and the domain of Russian communicative stereotypes. We find it promising to analyze the attitude to stereotypes in communication in English within English-speaking communities with different financial background. Cross-cultural analysis may lead us to a new vision of global social communication.

We have demonstrated that contemporary media need a multifarious set of methods in order to describe the subject area to its highest potential. Theoretical and practical outcomes of our research are relevant for media experts.

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