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# THE DYNAMICS OF THE STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS OF THE FORMATION OF THE MEDIA IMAGE OF THE COUNTRY IN THE MEDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is devoted to the analysis of the mechanisms of formation of the media image of the country in foreign mass media using the example of the image of Russia. The relevance of the study is due to the key role of the media as an intermediary between reality and its perception by the mass audience, which leads to the creation of media images. The purpose of the work is to identify the most sought-after components of the country's image used by the English-language press to construct it. The empirical base consisted of 358 materials published in the period from 2020 to 2024 in three leading publications: The New York Times, The Washington Post (USA) and The Guardian (UK). The methodology included a comprehensive content analysis of publications, during which the texts were examined for the frequency of references to seven key components of the image of the state: the image of the head of state, the population, the army, politicians, state institutions, the legal status of citizens, the status of the country in the international arena, as well as the image of the national media. The results of the study, presented graphically, allowed us to establish a quantitative distribution of attention to each of these components and determine which ones are dominant among them. The most frequent subject of coverage was the geopolitical status of Russia, which indicates the priority of the foreign policy agenda. The data obtained contribute to understanding the mechanisms of media construction of reality and can be used for further research in the field of international journalism.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Media Image, Policy Agenda, International Journalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The media are powerful means of influencing human consciousness; the media is a source through which one can direct and even change public opinion. How an object or phenomenon is presented in the media affects the way it will be perceived by the audience. The role of the media in this process is indisputable. When the public finds out information about an object, they involuntarily form an opinion about it: it can be either positive or negative, or neutral. This is how an image is formed through the media.

In the context of globalization, not only brands or famous personalities, but also countries are forced to consider the influence of their media image. Thus, the image that the media creates around a country affects the way its citizens, as well as citizens of other countries and potential partners perceive it. Language tools are effective methods of creating a media image. The media uses them to form images of countries, putting political and semantic dominants into these images, depending on the politics of a particular publication.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of media image is considered by many researchers. The term "media image" is a composite one; it includes two parts: "media", which refers to the way information is disseminated (the technical means by which information is processed into the form familiar to the audience and reaches the recipient); and "image", that is the idea of something. For example, the researcher of countries' image in the media space, A.V. Maruschak (2012) defines a media image as a set of emotional and rational representations based on information received from the media.

E. N. Bogdan, Candidate of Philological Sciences (2007), interprets the media image as a special image of reality presented to a mass audience by the media industry. O. F. Rusakova (2010), a researcher of media influence, interprets media images in political communication as part of the resources that can form a virtual political reality, as well as a media model of objective reality accepted in public consciousness.

E. G. Malysheva and N. A. Gridnev (2017) consider the media image as a form of reflection of reality, which is inevitably distorted by the media. They define a media image as follows: it is a fragment of the information (media) picture of the world represented in media texts; a stable, continuously developing virtual model of an object or phenomenon of reality, constructed by the media,

which both reflects and reframes and forms the knowledge and ideas of the addressee. They also note that the media image of an object may differ depending on the type of discourse and the coordinates of the media field. In other words, we can talk about the variability of the media image, as well as its dependence on the coordinate system (both from the media that creates the image and from the audience for which this image is being prepared).

E. Y. Panova (2020) considers the concept of "media image" also in a linguistic way. She emphasizes that in Russian-language discourse, the concept of a media image is genetically linked to the concept of an artistic image as a "created reality" with specific parameters of representation. In other words, it can be created, a vector of perception can be set, an emotional sphere of realization and interpretative models can be assumed.

L. V. Hochunskaya (2013) considers the concept of a media image; she notes that researchers tend to focus on an "intuitive understanding of the term" without realizing it theoretically. Thus, Hochunskaya offers her own definition of a media image – "the author's value representation of a media object encoded in a media text, which has a dialogical (poly logical) character and causes a reaction of the addressee". She identifies a few characteristic features of the media image:

- Two subjects. On the one hand, the presence of the author and the addressee of the media image; on the other hand, the presence of two subjects and the absence of an object in the usual concept for communication studies. That is, the image that the media creates and transmits to the audience itself needs to be interpreted, and the result of the media image's impact will depend on this interpretation.
- Three forms of media image. The part of the world (the initial one) that the author (the media) interprets, the world that exists in a "set of signs" (in discourse) before decoding (in this form the world was presented by the author of the material). And the third form is the image after being "decoded" by the addressee; it depends on how he was able to understand and read it.
- The nature of a media image in puzzle-form, when a fragment of the world requires "ready for it" puzzles. The media image, which turns out to be ideally suited to the recipient's worldview, imperceptibly becomes a part of it. This "puzzle" makes the information recipient's worldview more stable.
- Media stratification. The formation of a media image in an information society is becoming not a

privileged media opportunity, but a fully accessible opportunity for all participants in the media space (including bloggers and influencers). This allows them, along with the media, to form their own media images and unite like-minded people around them.

Yu. N. Dracheva (2019) defines a media image as a reflection of an objectively existing reality in the media. She notes that in the information model developed by T. N. Dobrosklonskaya, the media image is at the stage of data encoding; at this stage a media text is created containing the media image as a fragment of secondary reality. Dracheva writes that "a media image arises at the stage of decoding and stereotype formation as a collective idea about a fragment of reality, which is determined by the content and value." In other words, it shows the existence of two media images. The first one is the original one, the one that the author of the media text encoded. The second one is the one that formed in the mind of the reader (information consumer) after decoding. The researcher also notes that two generalized types of media images can be distinguished: the initial media images that are part of the collective consciousness. That is, the ideas that exist in society about the media object, as well as "post-media textual" ones, which are the result of media communication.

I. A. Balalueva (2014) speaks about the conceptual gap that arises when considering a media image as a connection "from the media to society". For a more precise formulation of the mutual management between the media and society, she introduces the term "socio-image" which she defines as "a set of emotional, rational, archetypal and acquired in the process of social activity representations of the general population, drawn from their own and collective vital practices". Among the signs of the socio-image Balalueva highlights:

- authoritarianism (the indisputability of a socio-image within a social group);
- static (the socio-image is weakly susceptible to changes from within and is based on the collective consciousness and the collective unconscious and dominant traditions);
- stereotypes (constant reproduction of a socio-image leads to its consolidation);
- repeatability;
- spontaneity (a socio-image can be created spontaneously under the influence of events from the outside).

As for the "media image" itself, she notes that it "can be considered as a unit of expressiveness of the media, which is aimed at forming the "emotional

component of the media event". In defining a media image, she emphasizes that the key is the worldview, values, and political views of the journalist (author of the media image) reflected in it.

She also highlights several characteristic features of the media image as an element of the media:

- Reproducibility.
- Mass character.
- Stereotyping.
- Linearity.
- Assignment.

T. N. Galinskaya (2013) mentions two possible angles to consider this concept for a deeper understanding of it: in a broad and in a narrow sense. So, in a narrow sense, a media image is an "image of reality" that is constructed using media texts; media texts created exclusively by professional journalists and containing their worldview and a way of thinking. In a broad sense, a media image is an "image of reality" that is constructed in all texts of the media space in general (including materials from blogs, as well as influencers and ordinary users of the media space). Thus, in the narrow sense, a media image becomes the result of the activity of journalists to construct reality in a certain order and sequence. In the broad sense, it is the result of spontaneous occurrence in the process of media communication; both between the media and another subject, and in the process of communication on the Internet (for example, users' communication on forums or in comments on social networks).

### *The image of the country*

I. S. Semenenko (2008) notes that the image of the state is a symbolic model "mediating the idea of a national and state community and its members through concepts and judgments".

I. S. Palitay (2018), researcher of the role of mass media in shaping the image of the country, identifies several aspects of studying the process of forming the image of the country:

- Political and psychological.
- Political and cultural.
- Political and geographical.
- Political and communicative.

The political-psychological analysis studies the psychology of image perception. In this approach, the structure of the country's image is divided into:

- Image of the territory.
- The image of the people.
- The image of power.
- The image of national heroes.
- Images of "friends" and "enemies".
- Image of a political leader.

E. V. Egorova-Gantman (2002) highlights the structural components of the country's image within the framework of a political and psychological approach. In her understanding, the image of a country contains:

- Image knowledge (a subjective picture of reality and the subject's knowledge of the object of perception).
- Image-meaning (the value of the object of perception for the subject).
- The image of a needed future (expectations and predictions about the object of perception).

It is also noted that the process of forming the image of a country is influenced by environmental conditions, which naturally affect the recipient of information about the image. I. S. Palitay (2018) identifies groups of such influencing factors:

- Object factors (two groups: factors of the political context - permanent (traditions, mentality, etc.) and changeable (the position of the state in the international arena), as well as related to the properties and characteristics of the object of perception).
- Subject factors (related to the characteristics of a person who perceives information, including his gender, age, education, etc.).
- Spatial factors (related to the geography of the country).
- Temporal factors (perception of a country in time: its past and the most likely future).
- Communicative factors (information context of perception of the country. It is this factor that determines the image of the country in many ways).

Touching on the theme of the media image of the state, the researchers talk about the special role of the media in constructing these images. It is noted that the media image forms a certain perception of political realities, as well as "gives an image character to political objects". It is also noted that modern political confrontation is becoming part of the media space. A. Crigler (1996), a researcher in the psychology of social communications, also emphasizes the importance of the media in shaping the media image.

In the article, N. A. Andryushkova and A. A. Nevolina (2017) note that the tools for forming the media image of the country in the media can be clearly seen precisely on the example of the image of Russia in European and American media.

When forming the image of a country in the media, a few of its "constituent elements" seem to pass through the media's assessment:

- The country's policy.

- The economic situation of the country.
- Social status of the population, for example, security.
- Cultural level.
- Geographical location.

V. V. Barabash and O. B. Barabash (2008) identify the following components of the image of the state:

- Objective-state aspect (specific actions of the state in the international arena).
- The subjective state aspect (creation of companies to familiarize the public with the activities of the state).
- The subjective and personal aspect ("the formation of the image of the country among specific representatives of another country, which develops during direct communication and trips to this country").

A. O. Kovach (2019) notes that the formation of the media image of the state can move in two directions. Firstly, the maintenance of existing stereotypes, as well as the development of cliches. And secondly, the positioning of the country to form a positive reputation.

Separate attention should be given to the image of the head of state. It depends on many factors: both the strategy of behavior of the politician himself and the political commitment of the newspaper that covers his activities. And it depends on the views on politics of the journalists (since subjectivity always plays an important role in any communication).

The image of the head of state plays a key role in forming an integral media image, since it is the leader who represents the country in international activities and negotiations. The influence of the leader is especially evident in conflict situations, military operations and natural disasters; this is emphasized by V. A. Urakova (2016), the researcher of the image of the political leader.

N.L. Zelyanskaya (2014), a researcher of the media image of a politician, talks about the media image of a politician as a collective image that the public has formed around his activities, views, and effectiveness. According to her opinion everything is a reciprocal communicative reaction to political activity. This image allows us to understand the expectations of the audience, as well as the estimated keys that apply to this politician.

V. A. Urakova (2016) identifies a few components that are included in the media image of a leader:

- The image was created by spin doctors.
- Political context (events in which the leader acts).
- The activity of a political personality.
- The media image of the state's population.

An important aspect when considering the media

image of a country is its image in the international arena. This category is particularly important for several reasons.

Firstly, the positive image of the country in the international arena directly contributes to the establishment of friendly relations with other states.

Secondly, the country's image is the result of a bidirectional influence (on the one hand, it is determined by historical factors, on the other – the perception of the country is influenced by modern events, as well as the latest, relevant actions of politicians).

Thirdly, the image of a country in modern realities directly depends on the media image and image of the head of state (there is a trend now when the image of the head of state is fully identified with the image of the whole country and the whole people).

Fourthly, the importance of considering the international image of a state is due to key events taking place right now in the international arena, when the balance of power and the attitude of states towards each other are changing.

E. A. Galumov (2004) interprets the international image of the state as a complex unity of characteristics of the state system that was formed during the development of the state.

There are several approaches to considering the image of the state. D. I. Zamyatin (2003) examines the country's image from a geopolitical point of view. He emphasizes the importance of the country's geographical location, which determines the basis of the image. The researcher defines the image of the state as "a stable and diversified geographical image, the main feature or feature of which is the desire to complicate the structure and enhance the degree of its main elements". From the point of view of the brand, the image of the state is considered by A. N. Chumikov, Doctor of Political Sciences and M. P. Bocharov, Doctor of Sociology (2006). They talk about the image of the state as a brand that embodies the country's assets.

E. A. Galumov (2005) also pursues an approach to the image. He speaks about the existence of two images of the state: external and internal. The external one is the most complex and consists of many aspects; it is based on a political and geographical image, a civilizational and cultural image, a socio-mental image, as well as a national-value image.

V. L. Bozadzhiev (2015), an expert in political psychology, talks about the elements that form the structures of perception of the image of the state by both internal and external audiences. He highlights:

- The image of political institutions.

- The image of the head of state.
- The image of law enforcement agencies and structures.
- The image of the political elite.
- Mass political consciousness and political authority.
- The democratic nature of the political system.
- The nature of the state's internal policy.
- The nature of the state's foreign policy.
- The international status of the state.
- National and interregional policy of the state.
- The geopolitical position of the state, etc.

I. V. Romanova and E. V. Cherenkova (2022) identify a few images – forming categories based on the results of the analysis:

- The image of the head of state.
- The image of the armed forces.
- The country's foreign policy image.
- The image of the country's economy.
- The image of science and sports.

## METHODOLOGY

In our study, we examined the dynamics of how the ratio of structural elements to the media image changed during the period under review. We have examined which structural elements were primarily used to build the media image of Russia in one year or another within the specified period.

The study analyzed 358 materials from three newspapers: The New York Times, The Washington Post (USA) and The Guardian (UK) for the use of seven main elements of the image of the country, from which it is formed:

- The image of the head of state.
- The image of the country's political and social institutions.
- The image of the country's law enforcement agencies and the army.
- The image of the media (which is based on the image of freedom of speech in the country).
- The image of the country in the international arena.
- Images of friends and enemies of the country.
- A generalized image of the country's people.

We conducted an analysis based on these figurative dominants to determine which of them are essential for the publications we selected.

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of the study, in the American edition of The New York Times, the authors of the materials most often refer to the use of the image of the head of state (the country's political

leader), when forming the image of the country. Thus, the frequency of using techniques mentioning the head of the state in the newspaper was slightly

more than 50% (Fig. 1), so every second article mentioning Russia contains linguistic techniques that form the image of the head of the state.

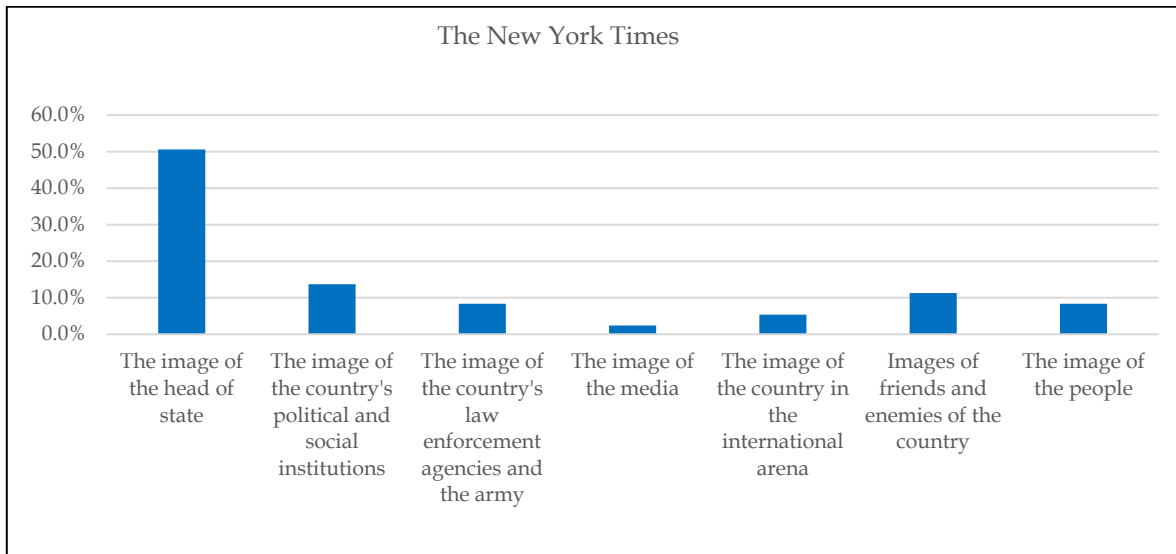


Figure 1. The ratio of elements of the country's image in the American newspaper The New York Times in the period from 2020 to 2024.

Moreover, we note that over the entire review period, we may notice a rise and decrease in the frequency of using the image of the head of state.

Thus, his image was most often mentioned in 2022 as part of the formation of the country's image, and most rarely in 2020 (Fig. 2).

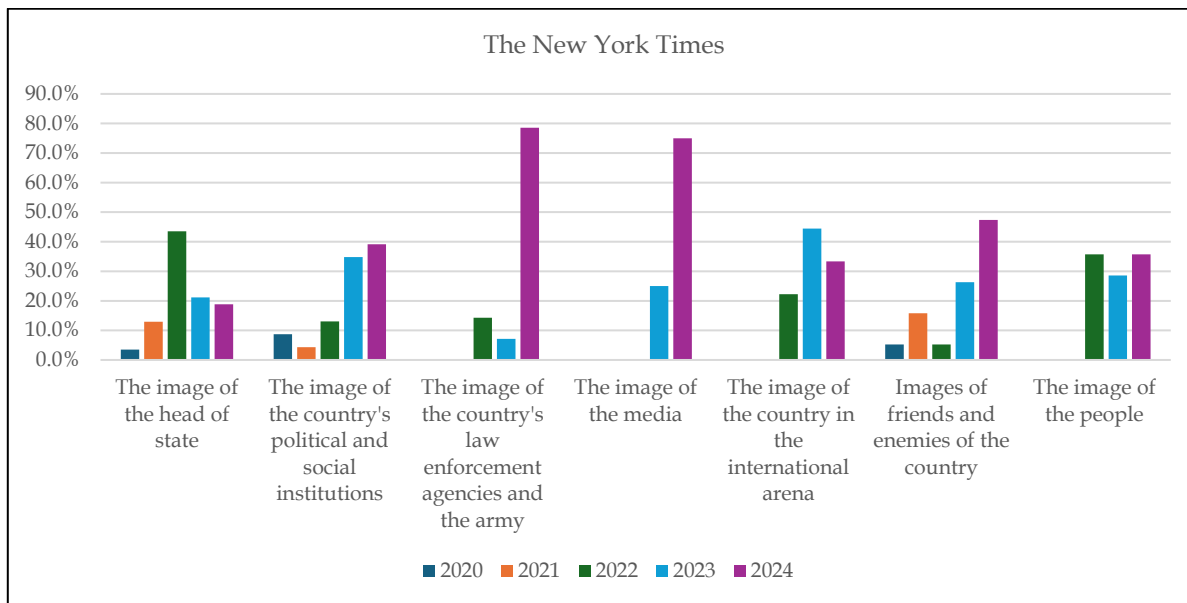


Figure 2. The ratio of elements of the country's image in the American newspaper The New York Times in the period from 2020 to 2024.

In materials of 2024, we can see a decrease in the use of the image of the head of state.

Political and social institutions are in second place (13.7%) (Fig. 1). Thus, the New York Times journalists paid special attention to the rules of functioning of the political system. At the same time, the frequency of using this image increases only by 2024 (39%) (Fig. 2).

Further among the elements of forming the image of the country are the media images of friends and enemies. It is necessary to clarify here that we are referring to cases when the media talk about Russia's allies and opponents in their materials, giving their media images a special connotation to influence the image of Russia. Thus, it can be noted that the media most often touches on images of enemies and friends in 2024 (Fig. 2). Note that the

percentage of emphasis on this element of the media image is also extremely high in 2023.

Media images of the Russian security forces (usually the army) and the people (8% for each) are also of equal importance for The New York Times (Fig. 1). During the study, we noticed that the image of Russian law enforcement agencies appeared in The New York Times only in 2024 (Fig. 2), and before that it was only used slightly in 2022. As for the media image of the people, it is being discussed in the

media in 2022, 2023 and 2024 (Fig. 2). Also, a significant element of the country's media image in the media for The New York Times is the image of the country in the international arena (5.4%) (Fig. 1).

As for the second American edition analyzed in our study, the media image of the head of state in the media is also key for The Washington Post (43%) (Fig. 3); so it becomes especially used in 2022 (Fig. 4), and by 2024 the value of this element is significantly reduced (up to 5.4%).

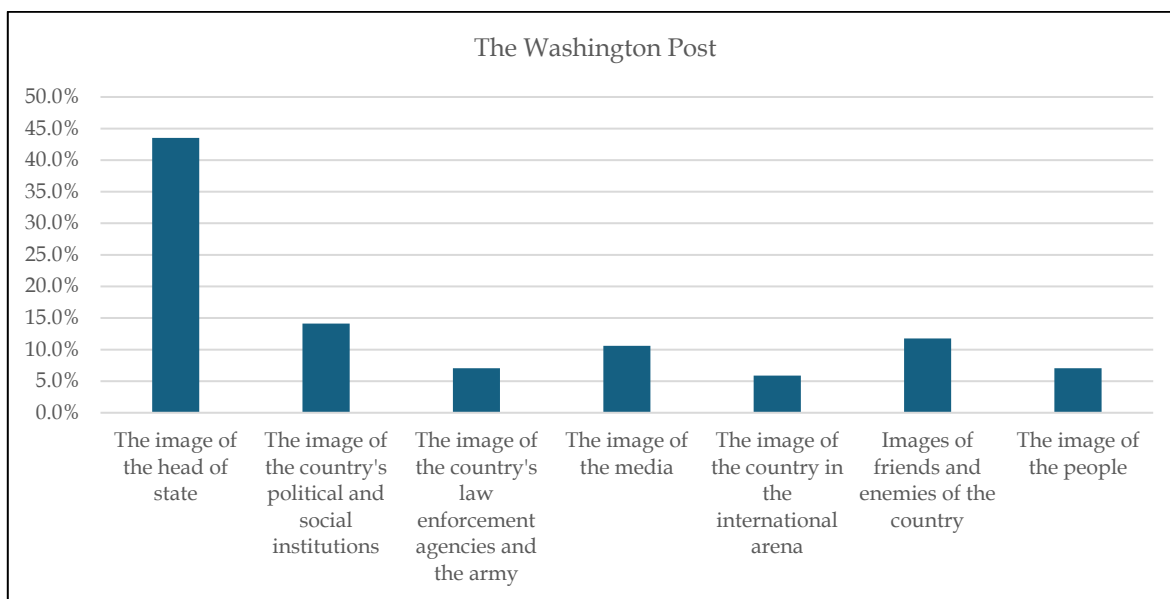


Figure 3. The ratio of elements of the country's image in the American newspaper The Washington Post in the period from 2020 to 2024.

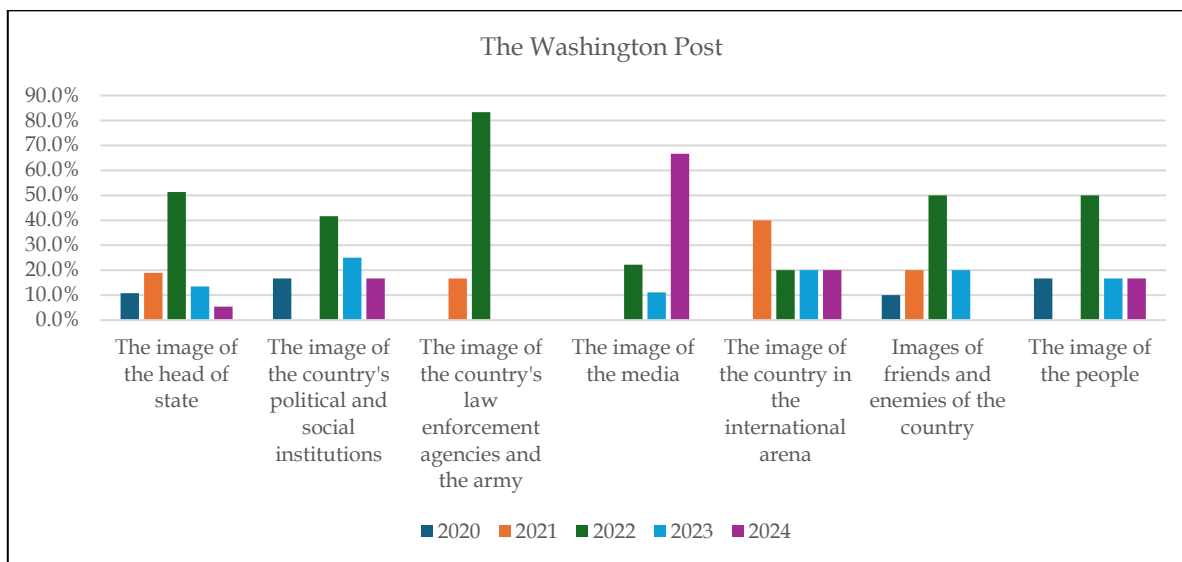


Figure 4. The ratio of elements of the country's image in the American newspaper The Washington Post in the period from 2020 to 2024.

The publication also highly mentions Russia's political and social institutions (14.1%) (Fig 3) in 2022-2023. A lot of attention is paid to images of friends and enemies; the frequency of use is 11.8%

(Fig 3). That is, every 10th article about Russia contains this mention.

The image of the media is important; it receives a lot of attention on the pages of the newspaper, and the

frequency of its mention reaches almost 11% (Fig. 3). Further, for the journalists of the newspaper, the images of the army and the people of the country are important (7.1% each) (Fig. 3), which indicates an almost equal need to form images of both the civilian population and the country's law enforcement agencies. Thus, special importance is attached to the army in 2022 (Fig. 4). The image of the people is important for the media in almost all the periods studied (2020-16,7%, 2022-50%, 2023-16,7%, 2024-16,7%).

Let's address the English edition of The Guardian. In this newspaper, the percentage of references to the image of the head of state as an element of the country's media image is higher than in the previous two editions (52.3%) (Fig. 5), which means that for the UK media, the formation of the country's media image through the image of a political leader is much more important. Moreover, we note that the value of this image does not decrease throughout the periods studied.

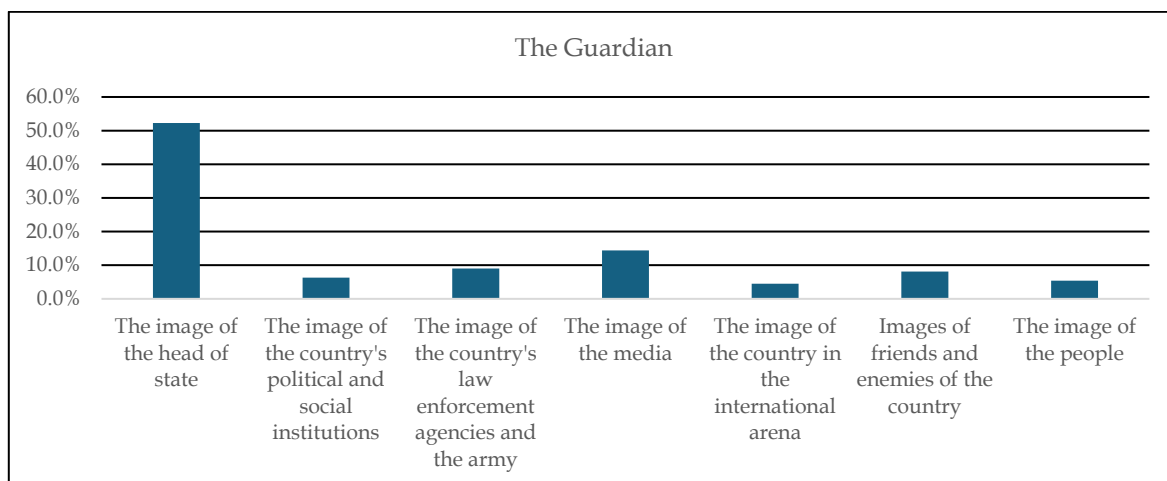


Figure 5. The ratio of elements of the image of the country in the British newspaper The Guardian in the period from 2020 to 2024.

The second important thing for the British press is the image of the country's media (14.4%) (2023 and 2024) (Fig. 6).

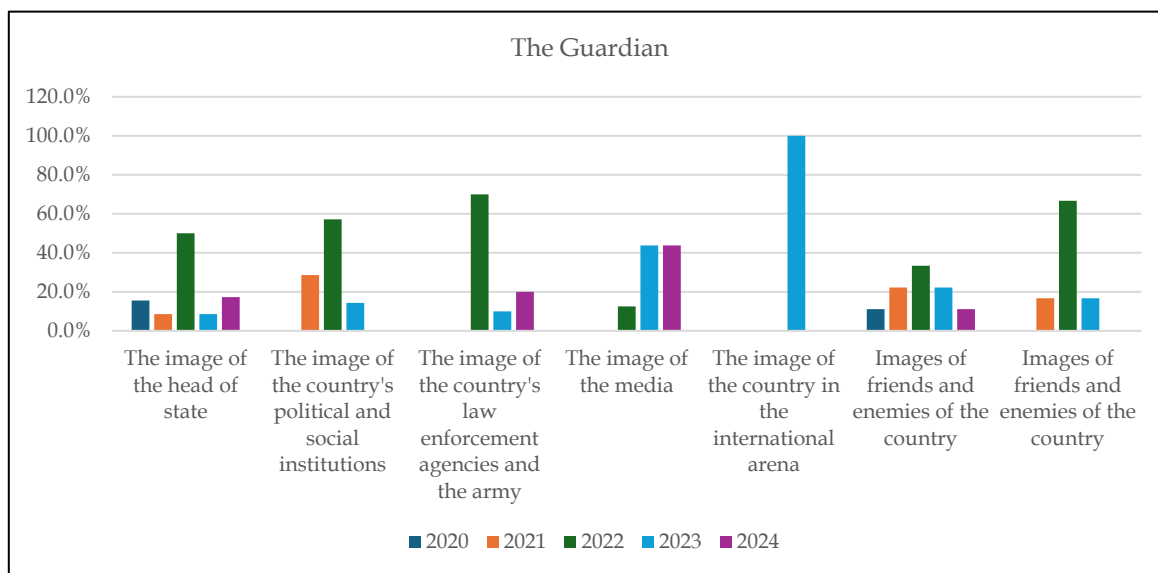


Figure 6. The ratio of elements of the image of the country in the British newspaper The Guardian in the period from 2020 to 2024.

Law enforcement agencies and the army are next in importance for The Guardian (9%) (Fig. 5), the highest frequency of use of this element was in 2022 (70%). Media images of friends and enemies are also important for the British press (8.1%) (Fig. 5). Thus,

the use of images of friends and enemies is important in almost all the periods studied.

The image of political and social institutions is next in importance for The Guardian (6.3%) (Fig. 5). We also need to mention the media image of the

people (5.4%), the appeal to it increased in 2022 (to 66.7%) and is zero in 2024.

Thus, thanks to the statistical information on the graphs, it is clearly possible to consider which dominants of the Russian media image prevail in English-language media. So, for the American press, we can single out the image of the head of state, the political system (political and social institutions), as well as the images of friends and enemies through which the media influence the perception of the image of the country. For the British press, the image of the head of state, the media image of the army, and the media have also become the leading elements of the image of Russia.

## RESULTS

During our research, we analyzed 358 materials published from 2020 to 2024 in three publications: The New York Times, The Washington Post (USA) and The Guardian (UK). The selection was based on the principle of mentioning Russia in the articles. The materials were analyzed for the use of techniques for forming the media image of the country, in particular, it was revealed which components of the country's image the media most often refer to.

The study analyzed materials on seven main elements of the country's image: the image of the head of state, the image of political and social institutions, the image of law enforcement agencies and the army, the image of the media, the image of

the country in the international arena, the image of friends and enemies, the image of the people of Russia. The most used image dominants in the American press were the image of the head of state (political leader), the image of political and social institutions, and media images of friends and enemies. The image of the head of state and the media as well as political and social institutions, is also particularly important for the British press.

## CONCLUSION

During the study, an attempt was made to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the tools used by the English-language media to form the media image of the country using the example of creating the media image of Russia.

The media images in the study are considered a reflection of reality, distorted by the media (as an intermediary) and broadcast by them to a wide mass audience. A comprehensive vision (representation) of the country, which the media form in the consumer of the material due to a certain positioning (using negative or positive connotations) of the components of this image: the image of the head of state, the image of the population, the image of the army and political institutions of the country, the legal status of a citizen in the country, as well as the status of the state in the international arena and the image of the media of this country.

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