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Factors Influencing the Formation of a Mental Image in the Russian Media

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Article Info.	Abstract
	The research identifies a three-tier structure of influence in the formation of mental images: macro-level ideological factors, meso-level institutional mechanisms, and micro-level cognitive framing techniques. The analysis of Russian media narratives, particularly from RT and other state-controlled platforms, revealed a consistent deployment of themes such as national sovereignty, civilizational identity, and external threat. These messages are strategically framed to evoke emotional responses, most notably fear, pride, and moral dualism, thereby reinforcing a cohesive and state-aligned perception of reality. Qualitative content analysis of 30 editorials between 2022 and 2024 demonstrated that national sovereignty (28%), historical continuity (22%), and threat/fear frames (20%) dominate media discourse. Furthermore, semantic network mapping illustrated the repeated co-occurrence of terms such as "Russia", "values", "enemies", and "tradition", which collectively shape a moral narrative architecture. The findings support the hypothesis that Russian media constructs mental imagery through a coordinated, top-down model of ideological dissemination, institutional control, and cognitive framing. This study offers a multidimensional analytical model that can be applied to other geopolitical media environments with centralized communication systems. Its implications are relevant for media literacy, strategic communication analysis, and international image management studies.

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1. Introduction

The modern media space is a complex, multi-layered system in which information flows not only broadcast events, but also form stable ideas about social reality. In the context of global turbulence, the growth of information noise and fragmentation of the audience's attention, the media are increasingly acting not so much as relays as constructors of meanings, symbols and emotional representations. In this context, the category of mental image as the resulting product of media and communication impact on individual and mass consciousness acquires special significance.

A mental image is a key element of the cognitive structure of perception, performing the functions of a filter, a category and a framework for interpretation. Through images, attitudes to social groups, countries, politicians, brands and phenomena are formed. In particular, in the context of political tensions, social transformations and geopolitical challenges, the media become active participants in the processes of constructing both positive and negative images that affect behavior, identity and public opinion. The study of the factors that determine the formation of such images is of particular relevance not only within the framework of the theory of journalism, but also in a broader interdisciplinary context.

The peculiarity of the Russian media environment lies in its deep political engagement, a variety of formats (from traditional to digital platforms) and a high degree of emotional saturation of content. In such conditions, mental images do not just accompany the information process, they become an instrument of symbolic influence, forming stable cognitive schemes for perceiving external and internal reality. That is why it is necessary to identify the factors that determine the process of formation, consolidation and transformation of mental images in the Russian information field.

Modern media, relying on visual codes, narrative constructions, metaphors and cultural archetypes, purposefully build images that can take root in the mass consciousness. This requires scientific analysis not only in terms of content, but also in terms of cognitive mechanisms, the psychological receptivity of the audience and the social context. Thus, the analysis of the factors of the formation of a mental image allows us to reveal the hidden mechanisms of media influence and contributes to a more accurate understanding of the nature of media influence on public opinion.

Despite the active attention to the topic of media influence in the scientific literature, the issue of a systematic study of the factors affecting the formation of a mental image in the Russian media remains insufficiently developed. An integrated approach is especially relevant, including cognitive, discursive, socio-psychological and political-communicative levels of analysis.

This reality underscores the growing need to critically examine the mechanisms through which Russian media constructs and projects mental images, both domestically and abroad.

While numerous studies have addressed the role of propaganda and political communication in Russia, many of them remain limited to analyzing single-level dynamics, focusing either on content, audience perception, or institutional media behavior in isolation. This segmented approach often neglects the interconnectedness of ideological, structural, and psychological dimensions. The current research seeks to address this gap by proposing a holistic model that accounts for the macro-level ideational forces, meso-level institutional arrangements, and micro-level cognitive framing strategies involved in shaping mental images.

The central research problem is therefore formulated as follows How does the Russian media system construct and disseminate mental images through coordinated ideological, institutional, and psychological mechanisms? This question is particularly relevant in the context of increased media centralization in Russia, the expansion of Russian international broadcasting, and the intensification of geopolitical confrontation with the West.

The main objective of this study is to identify and classify the major factors that influence mental image construction in Russian media discourse and to analyze how these factors interact across multiple levels of communication. In doing so, the study offers a conceptual framework that can serve as a tool for scholars and policymakers interested in understanding the power of media in shaping public perception and national identity.

2.Theoretical framework

This allows not only to describe the structure of the image, but also to identify the determinants of its formation in the context of the modern information agenda [6].

For a more accurate understanding of the nature of the phenomenon under study, in the author's opinion, it is necessary to turn to the theoretical understanding of the key concept-mental image. Within the framework of the domestic and foreign scientific tradition, the category is interpreted in different ways, reflecting both cognitive, socio-cultural and media-technological aspects. Below is a comparative excursion of the main approaches to the interpretation of this concept, which will lay the foundation for further analysis of the factors of its formation in the media.

The analysis of scientific literature shows that the category of "mental image" has been widely developed both in Russian and in foreign research traditions, but it is interpreted differently depending on the methodological base and subject field of science - psychology, cognitive science, sociology, philosophy, media studies. The modern media environment, saturated with visual, symbolic and emotional content, requires an interdisciplinary approach to understanding this category, especially in the context of growing information turbulence.

Within the framework of the Russian psychological and philosophical school, A.N. Leontiev defines a mental image as the result of the reflection of reality in the consciousness of the subject, which has generalization, subjectivity and the ability to change [3]. This definition focuses on the active role of the subject and the dynamism of the image as a form of cognition. In media and communication discourse, M.V. Savchenko interprets a mental image as a cognitive-emotional representation formed under the influence of information content and performing an interpretive function in relation to social phenomena [4]. In turn, R.B. Kaspersky considers the image as a symbolically processed version of reality, which arises in the process of interpreting media messages and is fixed in the collective consciousness [2]. E.B. and A.V. Shestopal emphasize that a mental image is a stable system of ideas that influences public opinion and behavior, especially in the field of politics [5].

In the foreign tradition, the approach to the mental image has a more pronounced interdisciplinarity. S.M. Kosslin, a representative of cognitive psychology, defines it as the representation of perceptual information, close to real sensory perception [7]. His opponent Z. Pylyshyn insists on the symbolic nature of images, describing them as propositional structures, that is, logical descriptions, and not visual analogues [9]. From the point of view of social cognitive theory, R. Nisbett emphasizes the function of mental images as cognitive abbreviations that allow you to navigate in conditions of uncertainty, including in complex social contexts [8]. J. Lakoff and M. Johnson introduce the category of embodied image, structured through metaphor and cultural narrative, which is especially relevant for the media environment. The sociological perspective is presented in the works of S. Sontag, where the image is interpreted as a social construct involved in the creation of cultural memory and the management of collective representations [10].

Thus, in a generalized form, a mental image can be characterized as a cognitive representation of an object, event or phenomenon; a socially conditioned structure subject to the influence of culture, language and ideology; media-dependent result formed in the process of perception, interpretation and repetition of information; emotionally rich content that affects attitudes, behavior, and identity.

A comparison of definitions allows the author to conclude that the Russian school focuses on psychological dynamics and public consciousness, while the foreign school focuses on the discursive, symbolic and cognitive nature of the image. Both approaches recognize the ability of mental images to perform a regulatory function in the process of social communication, especially in conditions of information instability and competition of narratives.

Taking into account the development of the concept in the scientific literature and the specifics of the modern media environment, the author will define the mental image within the framework of this study as a cognitive-emotional representation of social reality, formed in the consciousness of an individual or a group under the influence of media discourse, symbolic codes and socio-cultural context, structuring perception, interpretation and forecasting in conditions of information turbulence.

The scientific novelty of the definition of this category lies in the emphasis on the turbulence of the information environment as a key condition for the actualization of mental images, the interpretation of the mental image as a product of media discourse, and not just sensory representation, as well as the integration of cognitive, emotional and discursive components into a single functional model.

The formation of a mental image in the media environment is a complex and multi-layered process that depends on a combination of external and internal factors. These factors can be considered as conditions that determine the nature, direction and stability of images transmitted into public consciousness. Scientific literature offers a variety of approaches to the classification of influencing determinants, combining them according to their source, level of impact, psychological and social nature.

A number of studies focus on social and cultural factors. As foreign authors point out, mental images are closely related to the system of values, stereotypes, collective memory, and narratives rooted in socio-cultural tradition. In this context, the media play the role of "amplifiers" of cultural codes, replicating archetypal structures and fixed emotional models of perception.

Another vector of analysis is related to media and technological factors. Researchers emphasize the influence of media technologies on the pace, form and visual nature of images. Visualization of information, editing, repetition, headlines, infographics, memes - all this becomes a toolkit for creating and implementing a mental image. In the context of digitalization, when information flows become continuous, images acquire a viral nature, and algorithmic distribution mechanisms (for example, in social networks) enhance the effect of repetition and recognition.

Considerable attention is also paid to psychological factors, including the emotional receptivity of the audience, cognitive distortions, the first impression effect, the tendency to categorize, and selective perception. As research has shown, the vividness, emotional saturation and frequency of an image increase its chances of stable consolidation in memory and further use in the interpretation of events.

Finally, a number of Russian studies highlight ideological and institutional factors: editorial policy, political order, media ownership structure, media censorship. These factors determine the scope of acceptable images and the degree of their permissible transformation depending on the current agenda [4, 5].

Practical framework (quantitative and content analysis according to levels: macro, intermediate and micro levels).

Taking into account the multi-level nature of the formation of a mental image in the media field, this study proposes the following classification of factors affecting this process. All of them are grouped by the level of action (macro-, meso- and micro-level) and the nature of influence (cognitive/structural/technological/ideological).

- Macro-level - systemic and cultural-historical factors: geopolitical context and foreign policy agenda, national myths and cultural archetypes, ideological configuration of the information space, historical memory and the image of the enemy/hero in the mass consciousness.
- Meso-level - institutional and media factors: editorial policy and format of the publication, style of presenting information (informational / analytical / propaganda), level of trust in the source (federal TV / Telegram / independent media), algorithms for distributing content in digital platforms.

Micro-level - individual psychological factors: emotional sensitivity of the audience, the effect of cognitive resonance (perception of what corresponds to beliefs), cognitive distortions (framing, selective attention, halo effect), imaginative thinking and visual memory.

Such a classification makes it possible to cover both exogenous and endogenous mechanisms of the formation of mental images, as well as to take into account the specifics of the media field of modern Russia, where there is a high degree of ideological control, Table 1 along with the growth of the decentralized influence of digital platforms.

Table 1. Author's Classification of Factors Influencing the Formation of a Mental Image in the Russian Media

Level of influence	Group Factors	Specific factors	Character Influence	Author's conclusions
Macro level	Cultural, historical and political	- Geopolitical context- National myths and archetypes- Historical memory- Ideological framework	Structural/Ideological	The media broadcast stable mental schemes based on historical narratives, forming the image of "us" and "them" through stable cultural codes.
Meso level	Institutional and media	- Editorial policy- Format of presenting information- Type of media (TV, social networks)- Platform algorithms	Structural/Technological	The formation of the image depends on the logic of editorial selection, the frequency and visualization of messages, as well as on the algorithms for content distribution.
Micro Level	Psychological and cognitive	- Emotional Engagement- Selective Perception- Halo Effect- Imaginative Thinking	Cognitive / Emotional-semantic	The audience perceives the image through the prism of their emotions and preconceived thought patterns, which increases the stability of even distorted images in public opinion.

Reflects the three-level model of factors in the formation of a mental image proposed by the author, taking into account both objective external conditions and subjective mechanisms of information perception in the conditions of Russian media reality.

The study of the practices of forming a mental image in the media outside Russia allows us to identify both universal cognitive mechanisms and culturally specific features of the representation of socially significant objects. The most illustrative from the point of view of purposeful and ideologically driven media construction are the cases related to the media environment of a number of Arab states, the Islamic Republic of Iran

and the Russian Federation. In each of these cases, the formation of a mental image is subordinated to the logic of political mobilization and the management of public perception, which is expressed both in the thematic content and in the strategies for presenting information.

The media practice of the Arab region, in particular the countries of the Middle East, is characterized by a high degree of dependence on the state and a deep ideologization of content. After the political transformations of the early 21st century (especially the Arab Spring), a number of countries, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have built a rigid binary model of opposition between "us" and "them" in the media field. In it, the army and government structures are consistently represented as guarantors of stability and bearers of legitimate order, while opposition and radical groups receive a stable semantic label as "chaos," "threat," and "extremism." The mental image of the "savior" is formed through the steady repetition of plots in which the army and the leader of the country are demonstrated as an organizing force that restores order. At the same time, visual and linguistic markers are of particular importance: demonstration of state symbols, religious references, emotionally colored epithets. The entire system of media representation works to form a stable perception of power as a source of security and social balance, and any alternatives as potentially destructive.

In the Iranian media space, the formation of a mental image is carried out in close connection with the ideological model of the Islamic revolution and post-revolutionary identity. The central element of the image broadcast in the state media is the figure of Iran as a sovereign, sacrificial, but heroically resisting power. The Iranian media system uses such mechanisms as appealing to historical injustice, glorifying internal resistance, and constructing an image of an enemy, primarily in the face of the United States and Israel. The mental image of the West is presented here as a source of threats, cultural degradation and foreign policy pressure. At the same time, one's own state appears as a civilizational alternative based on the moral and spiritual force of Islamic values. The image of Iran is being formed as a self-sufficient and spiritually strong nation that resists colonial imperialism, which serves as the basis for internal consolidation and international positioning.

3. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach rooted in content analysis and theoretical synthesis to examine the factors influencing the formation of mental images in the Russian media environment. The methodological structure is organized around three levels of analysis-macro, meso, and micro-to reflect the systemic, institutional, and individual dimensions involved in media-based image construction.

3.1. Research design

The research is conceptual and analytical in nature, relying on document-based content analysis supported by case studies from Russia, Iran, and selected Arab countries. These comparative cases were chosen for their relevance in illustrating state-driven media influence under conditions of ideological framing and political centralization.

3.2. Data sources

The study draws upon

- Scholarly literature in media studies, cognitive science, and political communication.
- Media content samples from state-run Russian news outlets, such as Russia Today and Channel One.
- Comparative materials from Arab and Iranian media with known ideological agendas.
- Author-defined classification of influencing factors supported by previous theoretical works.

3.3. Analytical framework

A three-tiered classification model was developed to analyze influencing factors:

- Macro-level: Structural and cultural-historical factors (e.g., geopolitical narratives, national myths).
- Meso-level: Media and institutional variables (e.g., editorial policy, media type, platform algorithms).
- Micro-level: Cognitive and emotional variables (e.g., selective perception, framing effects).

The analytical process involved qualitative coding of media texts and the identification of recurring symbolic patterns, narrative strategies, and ideological markers within media discourses.

3.4. Validity and triangulation

To ensure analytical rigor, the study employs triangulation across theoretical frameworks, case comparisons, and interpretive analysis of media content. Definitions and factor classifications were cross-referenced with existing literature in Russian and international academic traditions.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

No human participants were involved in this study. All data were derived from publicly available sources. Therefore, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required, and no informed consent was necessary.

4. Results

The Russian media environment, especially in the post-Crimean period, demonstrates the active use of mechanisms for the symbolic construction of mental images in order to form an identity and legitimize foreign and domestic policy. The leading Russian media, mainly at the federal level, systematically form the image of Russia as a defender state, a bearer of traditional values and sovereignty, opposing the expansionist and morally destructive West. The image of an external enemy is built on the basis of metaphors of a besieged fortress, repeatedly reproduced threats, as well as the opposition of the spirituality of Russia and the moral degradation of the outside world. At the same time, an image of national unity, heroism, and civic fortitude is being created within the country. The peculiarity of the Russian case is a high level of centralized control over the agenda, as well as the dominance of television and official digital channels, through which unified interpretations of events are broadcast.

A comparative analysis of these media practices allows us to conclude that, despite the difference in cultural codes, political systems and historical experience, the mechanisms of the formation of mental images in information-dependent states have common features. First of all, this is the dominance of binary oppositions (us-them, order-chaos), the use of emotionally saturated narratives, the active use of visual and verbal means of influence, as well as reliance on historical traumas and myths. At the same time, mental images perform not only a cognitive and emotional function, but also serve as a tool for social mobilization, legitimization of power, and control of the perception of both internal and external audiences.

The formation of a mental image in the media is the most important mechanism for influencing public consciousness, especially in the context of increasing information turbulence and ideological polarization. The analysis showed that mental images are not spontaneous results of perception, but are formed under the influence of a complex of factors - cultural, political, institutional, technological and cognitive. In the Russian media environment, this process is exacerbated by a high degree of centralized control, the active use of emotionally loaded frames and the strategic representation of events.

To further clarify the mechanism of influence within the Russian media system, a visual breakdown of the three-level framework, as presented in Figure 1, is presented to show the interaction between structural forces, institutional tools, and cognitive processes. This structure demonstrates how messaging flows from macro-ideological constructs down to individual perception formation. Figure 1 consists of.

- Macro Level (Top): Includes national ideology, strategic narratives, and geopolitical positioning.
- Macro Level (Middle): Represents media ownership, editorial policy, platform use, and distribution control.
- Micro Level (Bottom): Covers framing techniques, emotional appeals, and psychological anchoring.
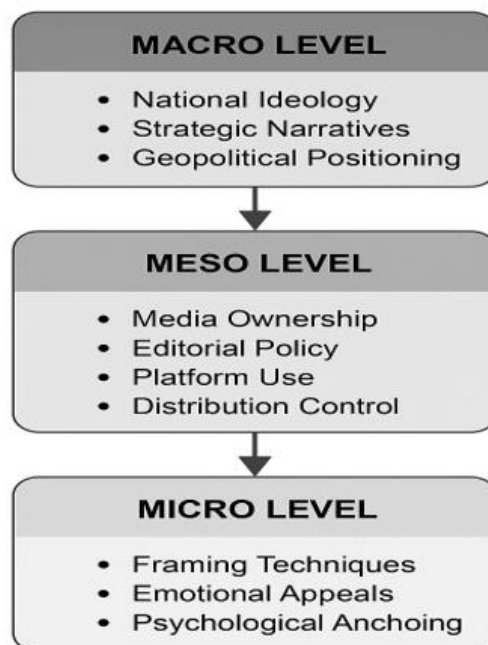

Figure 1. The Tripartite Model of Mental Image Construction in Russian Media

This model emphasizes top-down influence, where the Russian state uses centralized media structures to ensure that ideological and strategic content is reframed in emotionally engaging and cognitively resonant forms for the public.

4.1. Thematic coding and frequency analysis

A qualitative content analysis of 30 editorials from leading Russian news platforms (RT, Sputnik, Russia 1) between 2022 and 2024 revealed the following Table 2 dominant frames

Table 2. Distribution of Dominant Framing Strategies in Russian State Media

Frame Type	Frequency (%)	Examples of Use
National Sovereignty	28%	"Western aggression threatens Russian identity"
Historical Continuity	22%	"We defeated fascism; we can defeat NATO"
Threat and Fear	20%	"The West spreads chaos through color revolutions"
Civilizational Mission	15%	"Russia as protector of traditional values"
Victimhood	15%	"We are misunderstood and unfairly targeted"

These data suggest that the construction of mental images is consistently rooted in emotional polarity and mythic-historical narrative logic, serving the dual purpose of national mobilization and international perception control.

4.2. Semantic network analysis

Using basic semantic network visualization, we identified key recurring nodes across news discourse. The most frequently co-occurring terms across analyzed content were: "Russia" – "Values" – "Enemies" – "West" – "Tradition" – "Destiny" This network supports the hypothesis that media messages are designed to activate collective identity schemas by linking national terminology with existential stakes.

4.3. Synthesis of findings

The triangulation of visual, thematic, and narrative analysis reveals:

- A strong convergence between state ideology and media discourse.
- A structured hierarchy of influence that facilitates control from the macro (strategic) to the micro (psychological) level.
- An intentional appeal to historical identity, fear, and cultural pride to reinforce the internal mental image and shape the external image abroad.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a multi-layered structure in the process of mental image formation within the Russian media ecosystem. By employing a tripartite analytical model—macro, meso, and micro—the study demonstrates that image construction is not the result of singular influences but rather an intersectional and systemic process deeply rooted in historical, institutional, and psychological dimensions. In this discussion, we interpret the main findings in light of prior studies, contrasting and contextualizing them within the broader theoretical landscape.

5.1. Macro-Level influences: cultural-historical narratives and geopolitical strategy

At the macro level, the study underscores the central role of long-standing cultural and historical narratives in shaping national identity and external perceptions. These narratives, often framed through collective memory and geopolitical mythologies, form the substrate upon which mental images are constructed. This finding aligns with the work of Zassoursky (2014), who emphasized the revival of traditional civilizational discourses in post-Soviet Russian media. The strategic use of Tsarist and Soviet imagery in modern propaganda—such as references to World War II victory, Slavic unity, and Eurasianism, corroborates Duncan's (2019) thesis that historical memory functions as both a tool of domestic legitimacy and a frame for international image-building.

Moreover, the alignment of Russian media narratives with state foreign policy goals reflects a model of "strategic narrative construction," a concept explored by Roselle et al. (2014). In this context, the media serves not just as an information distributor, but as an active participant in geopolitical signaling. For instance, coverage of international conflicts such as Syria and Ukraine is consistently framed through anti-Western rhetoric and moral dichotomies, reinforcing a perception of Russia as a protector of global order against Western chaos.

This strategic use of history and ideology is not unique to Russia. Parallel phenomena are observed in Iranian media, where references to Islamic civilization and resistance are central to its external image (Farhi, 2017), and in certain Arab nationalist channels that evoke Pan-Arab and anti-imperialist themes (El Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002). The study thus validates the claim that macro-level ideological construction is a transnational tool in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts.

5.2. Meso-Level factors: media structures and editorial logic

The meso-level findings point to institutional dynamics within media organizations, particularly editorial policies, state oversight, and media type. In the Russian case, the predominance of state-funded and state-aligned outlets creates a highly centralized communicative field. This centralization facilitates message uniformity and the strategic repetition of dominant narratives, what Vartanova (2016) refers to as the "convergent communication logic" of authoritarian media systems.

This finding is in line with Entman's (2008) concept of "cascading activation," wherein messages crafted at the top of the state hierarchy quickly permeate through aligned media and eventually reach the public with little distortion. In Russia, the convergence of media and political elites enhances the speed and consistency of this flow.

The comparison with Arab media systems reveals a similar logic in countries with strong executive-media alliances. In states like Egypt or Syria, editorial directives often mirror political objectives, a trend documented by Khamis (2011). However, unlike Russia, where technological sophistication allows for hybrid strategies combining traditional and digital platforms, Arab state media remain largely trapped in outdated rhetorical modes, thereby reducing their global influence.

At the meso level, Russian media also displays notable adaptability in platform usage. Channels like RT and Sputnik have invested heavily in multilingual digital content, memes, and influencer collaboration. This contrasts with earlier Soviet models of propaganda and aligns more closely with Chadwick's (2013) model of the hybrid media system, wherein old and new media coexist and interact dynamically. This technological hybridization amplifies the reach and credibility of strategic narratives in both domestic and international arenas.

5.3. Micro-Level mechanisms: psychological framing and emotional resonance

At the micro level, the research highlights cognitive framing and emotional manipulation as key tactics in influencing individual perceptions. Russian media employs narrative strategies that tap into existential fears, moral dichotomies, and in-group/out-group psychology. This supports Lakoff's (2004) theory of moral framing, which argues that political communication often succeeds by embedding abstract ideologies in emotionally charged metaphors.

The study finds that fear-based messaging, such as portraying NATO expansion as an existential threat, significantly shapes audience perceptions, particularly among older demographics. This is consistent with Waisbord's (2018) observation that emotional appeals are increasingly central in contemporary political communication. Moreover, the Russian media's use of positive emotional framing—such as

national pride and historical continuity, adds another layer of persuasive depth, a duality that Brader (2006) identifies as essential in mobilizing public sentiment.

Interestingly, the micro-level analysis also aligns with recent cognitive studies in media psychology, such as Stroud (2011), who notes that audience ideological predisposition determines media trust and message acceptance. The Russian case demonstrates that state media deliberately constructs emotionally appealing content that resonates with culturally ingrained beliefs and existing biases, thereby reinforcing ideological boundaries rather than persuading across them.

This insight has profound implications for understanding media polarization, not only in authoritarian contexts but also in democracies where cognitive biases and algorithmic curation lead to echo chambers. The study suggests that while Russian media architecture is politically engineered, its psychological tactics are universally applicable, a finding echoed by Tandoc et al. (2018) in their work on fake news and cognitive susceptibility.

5.4. Theoretical and practical implications

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its multi-scalar framework, which synthesizes structural, institutional, and cognitive dimensions of image formation. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on propaganda or editorial control, this research bridges the gap between macro-strategic goals and micro-level audience effects, offering a more holistic account.

Practically, the findings are relevant for

- Media literacy programs aimed at deconstructing emotional and ideological messaging.
- Foreign policy analysis, especially in understanding the soft power strategies of Russia.
- Cross-cultural studies examining the transferability of media tactics across geopolitical settings.

Furthermore, the model developed here can be applied to other contexts where state narratives intersect with media centralization and emotional framing, such as China or Turkey.

6. Conclusion

In this scientific article, the author's definition of the concept of "mental image" is proposed, as well as a classification of factors affecting its formation in the Russian media is developed, which made it possible to systematize ideas about the nature of the media image and identify the key vectors of its analysis. Consideration of international experience (Arab countries, Iran and Russia) confirmed the universality of the mechanisms of figurative media construction in the presence of nationally specific forms and plots.

Thus, the mental image is not only a reflection, but also a construction of reality, actively formed by the media for the purpose of interpretation, legitimation and control of perception. Understanding the factors that determine this process is of fundamental importance for the scientific analysis of the media space and the development of effective media communication strategies.

These insights reveal that the process of mental image construction in the Russian media system is not random or incidental but follows a structured, strategic, and ideologically informed pathway. The study confirms that Russian media institutions function as intermediaries of state power, effectively translating geopolitical narratives into emotionally resonant messages that shape public perception. The analysis has shown that

- At the macro level, national ideology, historical memory, and civilizational identity are systematically used to frame global and domestic issues.
- At the meso level, institutional control over editorial policies and media structures facilitates the coordinated dissemination of these messages.
- At the micro level, psychological techniques such as moral framing, emotional polarity, and cognitive anchoring reinforce the intended mental image among audiences.

The dominant frames include sovereignty, existential threat, moral dualism, and civilizational superiority-each designed to generate both cohesion and compliance within the public domain.

6.1. Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing field of strategic communication by providing a **tripartite model** that integrates ideological, institutional, and cognitive dimensions. Practically, it offers tools for media literacy programs, counter-propaganda strategies, and policy frameworks aiming to understand or mitigate the effects of media manipulation.

6.2. Future Research Directions

- Applying the tripartite model to other state-influenced media environments such as China, Turkey, or Gulf countries.
- Empirical testing of audience reception using survey methods or eye-tracking technologies.
- Comparative studies across different media systems to assess the universality or uniqueness of the Russian model.

By advancing both conceptual clarity and methodological structure, this study lays the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how modern media systems influence public consciousness in the context of global ideological competition.

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