III Межвузовская научно-практическая конференция для бакалавров, магистрантов и аспирантов: «Исследования медиа и коммуникаций: теории, практики, исследовательские перспективы»

***Representation of Terrorists in Russian Media:***

***Visual Framing as the Reduction of Fear***

*Theses*

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Subjectless figures of terrorist in black masks with guns causes fear among the population. Faced with uncertainty, people are tending to panic, since the absence of the well-established model of interaction with such phenomenon. [Huddy L. et al.] Nevertheless, the cognitive image of terrorism phenomena is constructed in minds of the people through the representation in mass media.

Representation of global issues in media is founded on particular properties of human perception. [Scheufele, Tewksbury] With regard to the significance of audio and textual forms of information in the media coverage, in certain circumstances the effect of visual content is more complex and inflexible. [Rodriguez, Dimitrova] Belief in the visual evidence rather than the authority of journalists, does not preclude favorable conditions for framing, manipulation or propaganda. [Messaris, Abraham, p. 217]

Representation through the visual content, however, does not preclude favorable conditions for framing a particular event or set the agenda. According to terrorism studies, the frame of terrorists as *the others* prevails in national media. [Slone; Fahmy] Nonetheless, these findings are predominantly valid in circumstances of democracy. [Greenwood, Jenkins, p. 224]

Incentives of media groups and framed themes varies with democracies and authoritarian regimes. While media content in democracies is mostly determined to commercial value of media product, per contra the authoritarian media are more forced to constrain content due to the self-censorship of the media. [Becker; McChesney]

In this study, we set the following hypotheses.

$H\_{1}$*: Visual framing of terrorists is used to reduce fear among the people, constructing a particular image of the terrorists in minds of Russian citizens.*

Terrorism as a terrifying, but widespread phenomenon has to be incorporated into popular perception system in order to explain its origins and thus to reduce fear. The terrorist as a figure, purified of the incentives and violent tactics, allow recognizing the phenomenon of terrorism not through the elusive enemy category. Such strategy of fear reduce is the reason we expect to see that the terrorist is not represented as somebody distant to the observer.

$H\_{2}$*. The representation of terrorists does not frame them as the others. Russian media establish an antagonistic logic but terrorists in this case become closer to the audience and seem more understandable.*

An authoritarian regime cannot frame terrorist as an enemy in the full sense of that word. There is a difference here between how terrorism and a terrorist are framed: terrorism can be represented as a threatening phenomenon, but the terrorist herself, as a vacuous figure that does not represent terrorism, cannot be *the other* to the authoritarian regime, since their principles coincide in their inhumanity. Thus to frame this figure as an enemy would mean for an autocracy to abandon its own foundations.

To test hypotheses enumerated above, we use content analysis of the images broadcast by the Russian media ‘Channel One’. We use this source since it has a large enough audience coverage and posts the materials in open access. Moreover, it can be representative of contemporary authoritarian tendencies among Russian media. [Benn] We use all available screenshots of news stories which are referenced on a ‘terrorist’ both visually and in a news title. To collect the data, we used Yandex search of images.

In content analysis we use van Leeuwen and Kress approach to the visuals. [Kress, Van Leeuwen] It enables us to examine the representation of the figure of terrorist itself, leaving aside large-scale connotations of terrorism.

Contribution to the study of media framing is the emphasis on the visual representation of terrorists, rather than text description. Among other things, we study framing in authoritarian regimes considering peculiarities of media coverage there. Our findings correspond with related research projects of terrorism framing in media. [Давыдов, и др.] The key value is the re-orientation to the figure of the terrorist, trying to understand it beyond the frame of *the other*.

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