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**Construction of public debate on economic issues  
(cases of Russia's accession to the WTO and economic sanctions)**

Abstract of Thesis

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## **Problem Statement**

Over the last years, Russia has faced a number of economic difficulties, including a decrease in real disposable income of the population and a growth in consumer prices<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, public opinion surveys show that the indicators of economic optimism of the population remain high. Overall, this suggests that the views of the people about this topic is formed not only based on personal experience but is also affected by mass communications.

Previous studies of the relationship between public opinion and media coverage of events do not allow drawing of unambiguous conclusion about the force of such influence. Thus, some authors pointed to the minimum role of mass media and the crucial importance of personal experience of the population in the formation of economic expectations<sup>2</sup>. The supporters of this point of view noted that a significant part of the population does not receive any news about the economy<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, the assessment of the current situation and expectations of future changes do not differ in people depending on the consumption of such news content. Individual studies also show that the intensity of coverage of economic topics in the mass media has virtually no influence on search queries in the Internet that can be considered an indicator of public interest in the topic<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, there is a number of works that demonstrates the significant influence of the mass media on the public opinion on economic topics<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Russian population in 2017: incomes, expenses and social well-being. Monitoring NRU HSE / Ed. by N.L. Ovcharova. Moscow: NRU HSE. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Grant D. 2014. What Makes a Good Economy? Evidence from Public Opinion Surveys // *Economic Inquiry*. 52(3): 1120–1136.

<sup>3</sup> Haller B., Norpoth H. 1997. Reality Bites: News Exposure and Economic Opinion // *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 61(4): 555-575.

<sup>4</sup> Lee B., Kim J., Scheufele D.A. 2016. Agenda Setting in the Internet Age: The Reciprocity between Online Searches and Issue Saliency // *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. 28(3): 440–455.

<sup>5</sup> Behr R. L., Iyengar Sh. 1985. Television News, Real-World Cues, and Changes in the Public Agenda // *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 49(1): 38–57. Blood D., Phillips P. 1995. Recession headline news, consumer sentiment, the state of the economy and presidential popularity: A time series analysis 1989–1993 // *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. 7(1): 2–22. Hester J., Gibson R. 2003. The Economy and Second-Level Agenda Setting: A Time-Series Analysis of Economic News and Public Opinion about the Economy // *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 80(1): 73–90.

Anyhow, the discrepancy between different indicators and the level of economic optimism of the population observed in Russia suggests a significant influence of the mass media on public opinion. Therefore, the analysis of the coverage of economic events in the Russian mass media is of interest.

According to previous studies, the mass media exert a significant influence on the shaping of public opinion, especially if the consumer has not personal experience with the problem<sup>6</sup>. The topics, the understanding of which is formed during public discussions and not through personal experience, include, among others, many economic issues. It is fair to assume that public opinion about economic sanctions or Russia's accession to the WTO (World Trade Organization) is influenced by the mass media to a significant extent. Even if personal economic expectations can be formed on the basis of experience, the impression about the situation in the country as a whole will be rather related to public discussions.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the mass media form an understanding of economic topics as a social problem, drawing attention to them and demanding a change of the situation. Consequently, even for those economic topics, regarding which the population has some experience, discussions in mass media influence public opinion, which in turn can be reflected in the economic and political behavior of the population<sup>8</sup>.

At the same time, despite the increased interest in the study of economic discussions in the mass media after the financial crisis of 2008, such studies remain rare<sup>9</sup>. The most popular approaches to the analysis of the effects of mass media are pushing the authors to focusing their research in certain areas. Thus, the sociologists

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<sup>6</sup> McCombs M., Graber D., Weaver D. 1981. *Media Agenda-Setting in the Presidential Election*. N.Y.: Praeger Scientific.

<sup>7</sup> Boomgaarden H., Spanje J. van, Vliegenthart R., Vreese C. de. 2011. *Covering the crisis: Media coverage of the economic crisis and citizens' economic expectations* // *Acta Politica*. 46(4): 353–379. Ju Y. 2014. *Issue obtrusiveness and negative bias: exploring the moderating factors for asymmetric news coverage of the economy* // *Asian Journal of Communication*. 24(5): 441–455. Mutz D. 1992. *Mass media and the depoliticization of personal experience* // *American Journal of Political Science*. 36(2): 483-508.

<sup>8</sup> Lipset S. 1993. *The Significance of the 1992 Election* // *PS: Political Science and Politics*. 26(1): 7-16. Uhl M. 2012. *And action: TV sentiment and the US consumer* // *Applied Economics Letters*. 19(11): 1029–1034.

<sup>9</sup> Blondheim M., Segev E., Cabrera M.-Á. 2015. *The Prominence of Weak Economies: Factors and Trends in Global News Coverage of Economic Crisis, 2009–2012* // *International Journal of Communication*. (9). Carroll C. 2010. *Corporate Reputation and the News Media: Agenda-setting Within Business News Coverage in Developed, Emerging, and Frontier Markets*. Routledge. Schiffrin A. 2015. *The Press and the Financial Crisis: A Review of the Literature* // *Sociology Compass*. 9(8): 639–653. Schiffrin A., Fagan R. 2013. *Are we all Keynesians now? The US press and the American Recovery Act of 2009* // *Journalism*. 14(2): 151–172.

that follow the constructivist approach<sup>10</sup> pay attention to social problems. At the same time, the study of mass media carried out in line with the theory of agenda setting<sup>11</sup> or frame analysis<sup>12</sup> tend to analyze the media coverage of political topics. The studies of the coverage of economic processes in US and European mass media are quite rare while in Russia they are virtually nonexistent. At the same time, it is incorrect to draw conclusions about the specifics of economic discussions on the basis of empirical studies based on the data from other countries, because the degree of freedom of the mass media as well as the dominant economic ideologies can leave a significant mark on such news<sup>13</sup>.

However, the relevance of the study of economic discussions is explained not only by their insufficient coverage and the existence of influence on public opinion. An additional reason for the study of media coverage of economic topics is the active participation in the discussion of such topics of the representatives of different interest groups (politicians, business, expert community). Each of these groups, participating in the communication, pursues its own goals: strives for legitimation of taken decisions, implementation of sectoral lobbying, attraction of attention to themselves, demonstration of loyalty to the chosen policy, etc. Thus, discussions about economic topics are of conflict nature and are accompanied by the collisions of players with different goals and positions, not only influencing the real situation but also reflecting it to some extent.

The economic topics considered in the thesis - accession of Russia to the WTO in 2012 and the exchange of economic sanctions in 2014 - are widely discussed in the mass media and in the society. So, according to a survey of the Levada Center, Russia's accession to the WTO was on the fourth place among the most memorable events for the Russians in August 2012 (according to 18% of respondents), and

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<sup>10</sup> Blumer H. 1971. Social Problems as Collective Behavior // *Social Problems*. 18(3): 298–306. Spector M., Kitsuse J. 1987. *Constructing Social Problems*. Transaction Publishers.

<sup>11</sup> McCombs M., Shaw D. 1972. The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media // *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 36(2): 176–187. McCombs M., Shaw D. 1993. The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas // *Journal of Communication*. 43(2): 58–67.

<sup>12</sup> Entman R. 2007. Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power // *Journal of Communication*. 57(1): 163–173. Scheufele D. 1999. Framing as a theory of media effects // *Journal of Communication*. 49(1): 103–122.

<sup>13</sup> Bjerke P., Fonn B. 2015. A Hidden Theory in Financial Crisis Journalism? // *Nordicom Review*. 36 (2): 113–127.

economic sanctions have been on the list of the most memorable events for several months (up to 28% of respondents named this event in one month or another). Thus, examined cases attracted considerable attention of the population, and the discussion of such topics could affect the public opinion.

Thus, the relevance of this research is related to the insufficient study of economic discussions in the mass media, high importance and visibility in the public space of the cases chosen for the analysis, as well as the possibility to draw conclusions about the positions of interest groups on the basis of analysis of the public discussion of such issues. The study of economic discussions in the mass media may allow us to better understand the process of formation of economic views of the Russians.

### **Degree of problem elaboration**

The study of mass media has a long history. The influence of the discussions in the mass media on public opinion was studied by E. Katz, G. P. Lazarsfeld, Lasswell, K. Levin, W. Lippman. The impact of the mass media on the society was considered by J. Baudrillard and M. McLuhan. The ability of the mass media to influence the willingness of people to express their opinion can be described in terms of the theory of spiral of silence (E. Noelle-Neumann) and preference falsification (T. Kuran). Mass media's limited effects theories should also be highlighted separately - the theory of agenda-setting of M. McCombs and D. Shaw, the theory of media frames, a significant contribution to the development of which was made by D. Scheufele and R. Entman. The development of the understanding of the limits of mass media influence on the opinions of people and the theory of the need for orientation, developed by S. Valenzuela, L. Kamazh, G. Mattes, D. Weaver, G. Chernov.

Economic discussions in the mass media are being investigated significantly less than the discussions about political topics and social problems. However, after the financial crisis of 2008 such topics began to be studied more actively, and individual works dedicated to economic discussions were also carried out at an

earlier date. R. Goidel, R. Langley and B. Fogarty demonstrated that the economic information broadcasted by the mass media may not correspond to the real values of economic indicators. The existence of a negative bias when covering economic topics was shown by T. Amato, M. Blondheim, M.-A. Cabrera, D. Lauri, R. Nadeau, R. Niemi, E. Segev, S. Soroka, D. Harrington. More attention of the population to scandals and catastrophes was explained by J. McManus, and the study of J. Swinnen and N. Francken allowed to assume that scandals in the field of economics are no exception.

The role of economic discussions during the crisis was studied by M. Weber and O. Quiring. Researchers noted that the coverage of economic events during the recession has a number of significant shortcomings and difficulties (C. Vreese, A. Dalen, A. Kalogeropoulos, P. Manning, E. Albæk, H. Svensson): fragmentation of the broadcasted information, media dependence on PR services of large corporations, uneven representation of the interests of different groups (M. Berry, J. Lidberg, S. Knowles, K. Rafter, J. Tett, P. Thompson, G. Phillips). E. Palmer, G. Turner, A. Tenner, E. Fürsich also point to the need to simplify information about economic topics faced by the mass media interested in reaching a wide audience.

The influence of economic discussions on public opinion and personal economic expectations were estimated in the studies of Sh. Iyengar, R. Behr, D. Grant, Yu. Zhu, J. Kim, B. Lee, D. Mutz, H. Norpoth, B. Haller, D. Scheufele. Analysis of the impact of public opinion on the economic behavior of people was conducted by R. Casarin, R. Curtin, J. Lischka, S. Pruitt, F. Squazzoni, J. Hoffer. The influence of the population's perception of the economy on political behavior was studied by K. Anderson, S. Lipset, L. Nord, E.-K. Olson, K. Wlezien. This topic was also developed within the framework of the economic voting theory (B. Gomez, T. Hansford, M. Elinder, H. Jordahl, P. Poutvaara).

In Russia, the research of agenda setting was carried out by E. Dyakova, A. Trakhtenberg, the analysis of the rhetorical deconstruction of problems was carried out by E. Bogomyagkova, E. Nim, I. Yasaveev. The coverage of individual plots by Russian mass media was analyzed by S. Bodrunova, D. Gavra, S. Davydov, I.

Kiriya, A. Litvinenko, E. Markov, O. Malinova, S. Shomova. The peculiarities of the Russian media landscape were studied by J. Becker, E. Vartanova, S. Gehlbach, O. Koltsova, A. Kuvshinnikova, M. Lipman, M. McFaul, H. de Smaele.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

Purpose of the study: to identify ways of constructing economic problems in the press on the example of Russia's accession to the WTO and economic sanctions.

The achievement of this goal will be facilitated by the solution of the following tasks:

1. To systematize studies of economic discussions in the press and their influence on public opinion.
2. To analyze the dynamics of the intensity of the discussion about the topics reviewed and explain the observed fluctuations in the number of publications on these topics.
3. To highlight the most popular arguments of the participants in the discussion: in press in general and among the representatives of various fields.
4. To assess changes in the coverage of issues (sentiment, related issues, etc.) over time and describe the main deproblematizing strategies according to the classification of P. Ibarra and J. Kitsuse.
5. To assess the impact of the discussion in press on people's attention to different issues on the agenda.

### **Personal contribution of the author to problem development and data collection**

1. The author of the thesis formed three databases allowing to analyze information reports on the accession of Russia to the WTO and the implementation of economic sanctions, as well as to compare the most memorable problems for the population and the intensity of their coverage by the mass media.
2. The results of the research of coverage of economic issues in mass media were systematized. The results of the analysis of individual cases are described in terms of "obtrusive" and "unobtrusive" questions (M. McCombs), allowing to draw a

conclusion about the different role of the mass media in the formation of personal economic expectations and assessments of the economic situation in the country. An attempt has been made to systematize and compile a model of economic discussions to move away from the analysis of paired associations ("mass media/public opinion", "public opinion/reality", "interest groups/mass media" etc.) and form a complex picture of this phenomenon.

3. Fluctuations in the intensity of the discussion about Russia's accession to the WTO and implementation of economic sanctions were interpreted as the result of actions of interest groups, influence of external factors (peculiarities of the negotiation process, adoption of new sanctions lists, etc.), as well as the presence or absence of the topics competing for the attention of the audience. The positions of the interest groups in the discussion about the Russia's accession to the WTO were analyzed. It was shown that the activity of participation of interest groups in the public discussion might influence its tone.

4. The author for the first time applied the classification of counter-rhetoric strategies of P. Ibarra and J. Kitsuse to describe the public discussion of economic topics. It is proposed to visualize the results of the analysis in the form of a matrix.

5. For the first time the hypothesis of first-level agenda-setting theory, according to which the mass media have a significant impact on the people's attention to different issues, was tested on Russian data. To control the results on the background of the discussion, it is proposed to use the unprecedented methodology for calculating the concentration coefficient of public attention, which avoids the use as a control series of dichotomous variables month-year, replacing them with a single quantitative variable reflecting the availability in the current month of the topics monopolizing the attention of the population.

6. The results of work on the research topic were presented by the author at 26 conferences, served as the basis for the development of the syllabus for "Applied Media Analysis" course, and were used to work on projects of the laboratory of economic and sociological research of Higher School of Economics and the project of the Russian Foundation for Humanities "Integrated

methodological approach to studying the influence of media on public opinion". In 2017, the author's publications on economic discussions in Russian mass media received a prize for the best series of articles (second place) at the International Competition of Media Studies of the National Association of Mass Media Researchers, and in 2018 within the framework of this competition an article of the author on "Concentration Coefficient of Public Attention: Calculation Methodology" received the first prize in the category of "Best Article".

### **Theoretical grounds of research and hypotheses**

The theoretical and methodological basis for the study is the theory of social construction of the problems (J. Best, G. Blumer, M. Spector and J. Kitsuse), as well as the concept of rhetorical deconstruction of the problems by P. Ibarra and J. Kitsuse and the associated empirical work of E. Bogomyagkova, E. Nim, I. Yasaveev. The analysis of the influence of intensity of discussion on the attention of the population to various topics used the theory of agenda-setting proposed by M. McCombs and D. Shaw and developed by K. Ader, Sh. Iyengar, H. T. Wu, L. Guo, E. Dyakova, A. Simon, A. Trakhtenberg, D. Weaver. The use of the control variable when measuring the effect of the agenda, reflecting the concentration of public attention, was based on the idea of communicative complexity, which was developed by Suedfeld P., Tetlock P., J. Kleinnijenhuis, D. Oegema, F. Schultz. The table of indicators and parameters for content analysis was prepared on the basis of the mass communication model proposed by G. Lasswell. When assessing possible consequences of active media coverage of the situation with economic sanctions, the theory of rally 'round the flag was used (M. Baum, R. Brody, P. Dinesen, J. Mueller, T. Nam, N. Hirt, C. Chowanietz, J. Edwards, M. Jæger).

Hypotheses of the study:

1. Previous studies of economic discussions in the mass media and their influence on public opinion demonstrate that the role of mass communication will be higher in the absence of personal experience in relation to the problem.

2. The intensity of the discussion regarding Russia's accession to the WTO and economic sanctions is explained by the external factors (especially the progress of the negotiation process, the adoption of new sanctions lists, etc.), positions of interest groups and the existence of competing topics.
3. Economic discussions are constructed by different interest groups, whose representation in the mass media can influence the sentiment of the discussion.
4. When covering the economic issues, a wide range of strategies of deproblematization was used, dominated by unsympathetic counter-rethorics that denies the existence of problems as such.
5. A more active discussion in the mass media of certain issues leads to the fact that a large share of the population remembers these events and defines them as important.

### **Methods of data collection and analysis**

Research is based on the analysis of two cases of economic discussions in the Russian media (Russia's accession to the WTO and economic sanctions), as well as on the test of the main hypothesis of first-level theory of agenda-setting (on the effect of the intensity of the discussion of any given issue on the public attention to it). The selection of newspaper articles for the content analysis on the cases was formed with due regard to several parameters. The study analyzed information messages in the largest newspapers because they determine the agenda in less influential media to a large extent<sup>14</sup>. The sample includes newspapers with a variety of ideological orientation (both pro-governmental and opposition) and target audience (business and mass newspapers).

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<sup>14</sup> Breed W. 1955. Newspaper opinion leaders and processes of standardization // *Journalism Quarterly*. 32: 277-284. Golan G. 2014. Agenda Setting in a 2.0 World: New Agendas in Communication // *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 58(3): 476-77. Sweetser K., Golan G., Wanta W. 2008. Intermedia Agenda Setting in Television, Advertising, and Blogs During the 2004 Election // *Mass Communication and Society*. 11(2): 197-216.

For the WTO case, publications were analyzed in the nine most influential newspapers from three information categories (business, mass and focused on politics and public affairs), according to the Title Popularity Ranking<sup>15</sup>. This ranking is based on the following three parameters: circulation, advertising prices and citation ratios (i.e., the citation of one media outlet in other print-media outlets). Mass information newspapers include *Argumenty i F акты*, *Moskovsky Komsomolets* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. The most popular business press is *Ekspert*, *Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*. In the rating of publications focused on politics and public affairs the leaders are *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya* and *Novaya Gazeta*. The analysis period covers a year and a half before the accession of Russia to the WTO and a year and a half after this event: from December 2010 to December 2013. The analysis of the discussion about economic sanctions is carried out on the basis of the material of four publications: *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Argumenty i F акты* and *Kommersant*. The period of the most intense discussion of this topic in public space is reviewed: from March 2014 to December 2014.

After the completion of the selection, a search of publications for the specified period was performed for the words "WTO" and "sanctions" in the *Integrum* database, which contains materials from about 500 Russian magazines, more than 250 federal and more than 1000 regional newspapers. A total of 2815 articles on WTO and 3173 on economic sanctions were selected. Further, additional selection is performed among the discovered publications to exclude articles that do not correspond to the topic of this study. Articles containing opinions on the topics are considered relevant, which represent about 15% of the original sample. Articles with incidental mentioning of WTO and sanctions, which do not contain value judgments, are excluded.

In addition, to test the hypothesis about the influence of intensity of discussion on the attention of the population to various events, we compare the open data of the Levada Center surveys (Levada Center website) on the most memorable events of

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<sup>15</sup> Russian mass media popularity rating: Title Popularity Ranking (TPR). Access regime: <http://www.exlibris.ru/rejting-izdanij>

the previous month according to Russians and the numbers of publications on these events in the Russian press for 1 week and 1 month prior to the survey. The survey is a monthly study by the Levada Center, and it usually takes place on the third Friday of each month. The question is presented as follows: "Which events of the past four weeks were most memorable to you?" The respondents are not given a list of events. The results are presented in a tabular format containing the list of events of the past month and the proportion of respondents who identified them as memorable. We compare these data with the number of publications in the press on each of the events, according to the Integrum database. For each event mentioned in the Levada Center's survey, a request was made to estimate the number of articles in the press that had mentioned it. The analysis uses information on the number of articles published in both federal newspapers, including electronic print media, and regional newspapers.

Thus, this article considers the correlation between the intensity of the discussions in the press and the importance of various events only with respect to events that have been remembered by at least a small number of respondents. Those events that were not identified in the Levada Center surveys are not included in the analysis. Such events might not have been discussed very actively in the press. Even if it were possible to include all the events of the month, such as those neglected by the population, doing so would probably not have changed the results significantly.

We focus on the events that occurred within a three-year period from January 2014 to December 2016. The collected database includes 884 events, some of which were mentioned just once, while certain events were identified as the most important for many months in a row. Such events include ruble fluctuations, rising prices for consumer goods, military activities in Syria, changes in the price of oil, the conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as economic sanctions and the Russian food embargo. Because those events that are referred to once and those that are systematically referred to as memorable may attract different levels of attention from citizens, this parameter is also taken into account in the analysis.

Public agenda issues compete for the attention of the audience<sup>16</sup>. So, not only is it important how much was written about the event in the media and at what point the discussion was the most intense, what was reported in the press at the same time is also important. Thus, if there was a memorable event within a month that attracted everyone's attention, other events that could have been quite extensively discussed in the media might not have been important or remembered by the population. Following this logic and relying on the theory of communicative complexity<sup>17</sup>, we create an additional variable - concentration of public attention, which will allow us to control results for the general background of the discussion in each month.

The coefficient of monopolizing public attention is calculated by analogy with the Herfindahl-Hirshman index, which is used by economists to determine market concentration. In this study, we calculate this indicator as the sum of the squares of the ratios for respondents who identified the event as memorable. Calculations are made for the 10 events that were named most frequently in each month. Introducing this variable to the analysis – instead of a series of dichotomized ones (month-year) – will allow one quantitative variable to be used to control the background of the discussion (other events of the month). Regression models explaining the population's attention to a certain event are built on both the full sample and the subsample, which excludes obtrusive events in the terminology of M. McCombs<sup>18</sup>, that imply a significant impact of personal experience on public opinion.

One of the main limitations of the thesis research is the focus on information messages in printed publications only. In part, this problem is removed, since numerous researches show a great similarity of agendas in different types of mass

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<sup>16</sup> Hilgartner S., Bosk C. L. 1988. The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model // *American Journal of Sociology*. 94(1): 53–78. McCombs M., Zhu J.-H. 1995. Capacity, diversity, and volatility of the public agenda // *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 59(4): 495–525.

<sup>17</sup> Kleinnijenhuis J., Schultz F., Oegema D. 2015. Frame Complexity and the Financial Crisis: A Comparison of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany in the Period 2007–2012 // *Journal of Communication*. 65(1): 1–23. Suedfeld P., Tetlock P. 1977. Integrative Complexity of Communications in International Crises // *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 21(1): 169–184.

<sup>18</sup> McCombs M., Graber D., Weaver D. 1981. *Media Agenda-Setting in the Presidential Election*. NY: Praeger Scientific. Ju Y. 2014. Issue obtrusiveness and negative bias: exploring the moderating factors for asymmetric news coverage of the economy // *Asian Journal of Communication*. 24(5): 441–455.

media<sup>19</sup>. However, a number of works prove the opposite<sup>20</sup>. In Russia it is also difficult to draw conclusions about the differences in the agendas of different types of mass media: in some cases they are significantly similar, whereas on other topics they diverge<sup>21</sup>. Thus, it would be correct to extend the results of this study only to the discussion in press, while comparative studies of economic discussions in different types of mass media can be an important area for the further development of the topic.

### **Main results of the study**

1. Based on the analysis of empirical studies of economic discussions in the media, it can be concluded that personal economic expectations can be influenced by personal experience, whereas the understanding of the economic situation in the country is to a large extent determined by mass media communications. Discussions that form an understanding of the economy play a significant role in ensuring and maintaining social, power and cognitive embeddedness of the economic action<sup>22</sup>. Prevailing economic theories are reflected in the interpretation of problems in the mass media, thus the dominant neoliberal view of the economy can lead to the coverage of the crisis as a short-term problem related to unsecured debts and individual behavior, whereas within the framework of Keynesianism the crisis will

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<sup>19</sup> Belt T. L., Just M. R., Crigler A. N. 2012. The 2008 Media Primary: Handicapping the Candidates in Newspapers, on TV, Cable, and the Internet // *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. 17(3): 341–369. Lee J. K. 2007. The Effect of the Internet on Homogeneity of the Media Agenda: A Test of the Fragmentation Thesis // *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 84(4): 745–760. Shapiro M. A., Hemphill L. 2017. Politicians and the Policy Agenda: Does Use of Twitter by the U.S. Congress Direct New York Times Content? // *Policy & Internet*. 9(1): 109–132. Wallsten K. 2007. Agenda Setting and the Blogosphere: An Analysis of the Relationship between Mainstream Media and Political Blogs // *Review of Policy Research*. 24(6): 567–587.

<sup>20</sup> Billings A., Moscowitz L., Rae C., Brown-Devlin N. 2015. The Art of Coming Out: Traditional and Social Media Frames Surrounding the NBA's Jason Collins // *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 92(1): 142–160. Kim Y., Hur J. 2009. Framing Anti-Americanism and the Media in South Korea: TV vs Newspaper // *Pacific Focus*. 24(3): 341–364. Russell Neuman W., Guggenheim L., Jang S. M., Young Bae S. 2014. The Dynamics of Public Attention: Agenda-Setting Theory Meets Big Data // *Journal of Communication*. 64(2): 193–214.

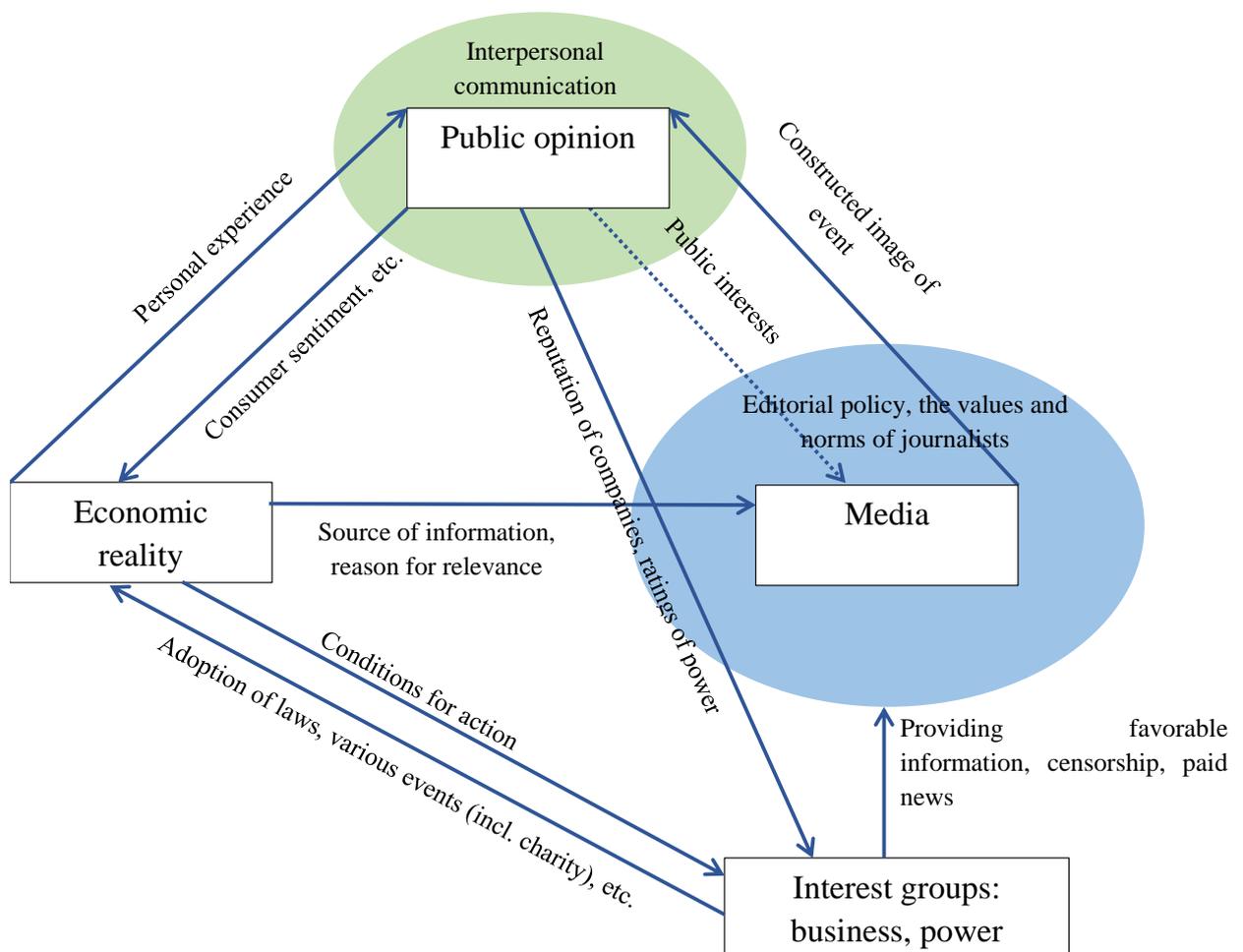
<sup>21</sup> A.D. Kazun. 2018. "Spotlight do not ignore": Alexey Navalny in Russian mass media // *Polity: Analysis. Narrative. Forecast*. 88(1): 47-64. Kazun A. D., Kazun A. 2017. Coverage of Three Tragedies in the Russian Media: Application of the Network Agenda Model / NRU Higher School of Economics. Series PS "Political Science". No. WP BRP 48/PS/2017.

<sup>22</sup> M. Granovetter 2002. Economic action and social structure: problem of enrooting // *Economic Sociology*. 3(3): 44-58. R. Svedberg 2004. New economic sociology: what is done and what lies ahead? // *Economic Sociology*. 5(4): 37-55. Dequech D. 2003. Cognitive and Cultural Embeddedness: Combining Institutional Economics and Economic Sociology // *Journal of Economic Issues*. 37(2): 461–470. Zukin S., DiMaggio P. (eds.). 1990. *Structures of Capital: The Social Organization of the Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

be presented as a systemic problem<sup>23</sup>. A similar focus of the discussion in its turn affects the views and behavior of the people. Thus, it is possible to talk about the performativity of economic knowledge and high role of mass media in economic life. Schematically, economic news can be inscribed in a triangle, where the peaks are the real situation, the mass media and the public opinion, and between almost all the peaks there will be bilateral connections (see Figure 1). Thus, economic discussions in the mass media are an element of a complex system of relationships.

Figure 1

Scheme of interaction between discussions in the mass media, public opinion and economic reality



2. The intensity of the discussion on the issues of Russia's accession to the WTO and the implementation of economic sanctions depended on external factors (the negotiation process, the adoption of sanctions lists), positions of interest groups

<sup>23</sup> Bjerke P., Fonn B. 2015. A Hidden Theory in Financial Crisis Journalism? Nordicom Review. 36 (2): 113–127.

(including declarations by government officials) and the existence of competing issues. The nature of coverage of these economic events was partly determined by the focus on the audience: guided by market logic mass media simplified the broadcasted information. For example, more than 50% of articles on the WTO did not contain any justification of the opinions expressed, including links to statistical data, research results, historical experience and similar processes in other countries. Publications in the mass media also avoided weak arguments such as "the WTO will allow joining the OECD" or "the risks of complaints against Russia to the WTO dispute settlement." Most often specific arguments that could be easily illustrated by examples were used. Such communication strategy allowed to reach a wider audience, as bright images simplify the understanding of economic processes and solutions by the population.

3. The nature of coverage of events in the mass media varied significantly in dynamics. The study of publications in the press about economic sanctions showed that, initially, the discussion on this issue started from the annexation of the Crimea. Thus, in March 2014, more than 50% of articles on this topic contained the name of the peninsula. However, later the share of such texts began to decline and by December 2014 it did not exceed 12%. At the same time, more and more often the sanctions are mentioned in the context of fluctuations in the ruble exchange rate and changes in oil prices. In this way, discussion begins to focus more on the consequences of sanctions rather than on their causes. Perhaps this partly explains the low effectiveness of economic sanctions as a way to change state policy. In case of discussion about the WTO, after joining the organization this topic began to be covered by the Russian mass media in a more negative sense. If prior to Russia's accession to the WTO the space of print media was slightly dominated by the supporters of this decision, after August 2012 the critical position became more popular. Thus, for a year and a half immediately preceding the accession of Russia to the WTO, 47% of articles assessed this action positively, and 37% - negatively. In the next year and a half, the situation changed notably: only 24% of the articles remained positive, while 54% contained a criticism of the conditions, in which the

Russian economy found itself due to WTO membership. In part, this may be due to new difficulties that at this stage arose both for the businessmen and for the officials. Another possible explanation is the change in the composition of the participants in the discussion.

4. The discussion on Russia's accession to the WTO was constructed by various interest groups. The tone of the discussion was largely determined by the representation of the positions of these groups in the public space. After Russia's accession to the WTO, the most active supporters of this measure - politicians and officials - began to comment less on this topic in the mass media, which contributed to the coverage of this event in a more negative manner. Business representatives expressed doubts about the desirability of membership in the WTO on the terms that Russia accepted before accessing the organization. After Russia became a member of the WTO, this interest group continued to actively criticize the decision, turning the accession to the trade organization into a new legitimate framework of lobbying, thus justifying the requests for state aid and preferences. Economic sanctions were also used by business as an argument for the need to increase the scale of state support. Thus, both the measures aimed at increasing competition in the Russian market (accession to the WTO) and decisions contributing to its reduction (food embargo), serve as the basis for requesting state aid. Such communicative strategy of the business allows politicians and officials to deproblematize these issues, underlining that negative statements concerning WTO, economic sanctions and food embargo pursue not public but individual interests. Thus, the arguments of the opponents of these measures are shown in a negative light as distorting the information about their real consequences for personal purposes and, therefore, untrustworthy for the population.

4. When covering the WTO accession and economic sanctions by the press a wide range of counter-rhetoric strategies was used. However, the discussion was dominated by a non-sympathetic counter-rhetoric, which denies the existence of problems related to sanctions. In part, the lack of population's anxiety about the current situation can be explained namely by the conducted information campaign.

The topics related to international relations and the world economy are quite difficult for the population, therefore the mass media play an important role in the shaping of the public opinion on these topics. Initially, a significant number of information communications about sanctions contained references to the annexation of the Crimea as the cause of this problem. However, over time, the consequences of economic sanctions began to be discussed. And the active use of strategies of deproblematization of the situation led to the fact that the press also outlined the potential positive effects of the sanctions, including the probability that they will become an impetus for development in Russia.

5. The intensity of discussion in the mass media influences the attention of people to various topics. In this case, the discussion a week before the date of the survey influences public opinion stronger than media communications for a longer period. The population better remembers events that happened shortly before the beginning of the survey, as well as those events, which in this period enjoyed a more intense discussion. Thus, the influence of news on public opinion is unstable: people perceive as the most important the events happening just now, with the exception of individual incidents that have attracted a high attention of the population. Regional print media play an important role in attracting public attention to various topics. The problems covered by federal newspapers but ignored by the regional press are remembered by the population to a much lesser extent. Problems that remain in the information agenda for a long time attract more attention. The concentration of public attention used in the model as a control variable is positively associated with the memorability of various events.

### **General conclusions of the research**

The cases of economic sanctions and Russia's accession to the WTO were perceived by the population differently. In the case of Russia's accession to the WTO opinion polls showed low awareness of the population regarding the activities of the organization and the prospects of the accession for the country, while the level of

apprehension associated with this decision was very high<sup>24</sup>. In case of economic sanctions, the opposite situation is observed: given a sufficiently high level of awareness about the event, most respondents are not concerned by its consequences<sup>25</sup>. These issues also have significant substantial differences: if in the first case it is a question of opening of the domestic market and implementation of free trade policies, the introduction of economic sanctions leads to a reduction in the number of international economic operations and, in a sense, protectionism reflected in the reduction of the number of competitors for the domestic producer. In addition, accession to the WTO was an internal decision formed on the basis of a long negotiation process, while the situation of sanctions exchange was rather imposed from outside and is a reaction to circumstances rather than a meaningful economic policy of the state.

However, these cases are brought together by the political component in their coverage. In the case of economic sanctions, their political significance seems obvious: in addition to direct economic restrictions, a number of image sanctions were introduced, measures directed against specific individuals. The ideological tone of the coverage of WTO accession is less visible, but the fact of use by the parties to the discussion of such arguments as "threat to the sovereignty of the country" or "opportunity to increase the prestige of Russia on the world stage" confirms that economic consequences are not the only relevant topic. In part, some departure from economic arguments in the coverage of the cases in question resulted from a broad representation of positions of politicians and officials, as well as in the case of economic sanctions - of opinions of non-expert groups (writers, artists etc.), which could be disinterested in focusing only on economy or were not competent enough to comment in a competent manner on such consequences.

It can be assumed that in Russia the role of representatives of large corporations in the building of public economic discussions is less important than in

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<sup>24</sup> For example, "FOMnibus". At the door of the WTO. About positive and negative consequences of accession of Russia to the WTO. Access regime: <http://fom.ru/Ekonomika/10580#>

<sup>25</sup> For example, Levada Center survey. Access regime: <http://www.levada.ru/28-08-2014/sanktsii-otsenki-i-ozhidaniya>

the Western countries. Studies conducted in the US and EU demonstrate the high role of business representatives in the coverage of economic events. However, based on the analyzed Russian cases we can conclude about a significant contribution to the discussion of other interest groups that use different arguments. In addition, contrary to the results of individual studies<sup>26</sup>, the positions of experts do not coincide with the position of the business.

According to the agenda-setting theory, the maximum correlation between the discussion in the mass media and the public opinion can be achieved in the case of totalitarian states, where freedom of mass media is virtually inexistent<sup>27</sup>. From this point of view, the limited independence of Russian media emphasized by researchers<sup>28</sup> and the World Press Freedom Index should contribute to a greater intersection of the public and individual agenda. However, the rate of correlation between the number of articles in the press on a particular topic and the share of Russians that considered this topic as important is comparable to similar indicators obtained by the researchers in the United States<sup>29</sup>. Probably, this can be explained by the gradually increasing role of the Internet as a source of information<sup>30</sup>, as well as the existence in Russia of independent or opposition printed publications.

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<sup>26</sup> Berry M. 2013. The Today programme and the banking crisis // *Journalism* 14 (2): 253–270.

<sup>27</sup> McCombs M., Shaw D., Weaver D. H. 2014. New Directions in Agenda-Setting Theory and Research // *Mass Communication and Society*. 17(6): 781–802.

<sup>28</sup> Fredheim R. 2017. The loyal editor effect: Russian online journalism after independence // *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 33(1): 34–48. Gehlbach S. 2010. Reflections on Putin and the Media // *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 26(1): 77–87. Vartanova, E. 2012. The Russian Media Model in the Context of Post-Soviet Dynamics. In *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World* (pp. 119–142). New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Benoit W. L., Hansen G. J., Verser R. M. 2003. A meta-analysis of the effects of viewing U.S. presidential debates // *Communication Monographs*. 70(4): 335–350. Swanson L., Swanson D. 1978. The agenda-setting function of the first Ford-Carter debate // *Communication Monographs*. 45(4): 347–353. Wanta W., Golan G., Lee C. 2004. Agenda Setting and International News: Media Influence on Public Perceptions of Foreign Nations // *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. 81(2): 364–377. Wanta W., Ghanem S. 2007. Effects of agenda setting. In R. W. Preiss, B. M. Gayle, N. Burrell, M. Allen & J. Bryant (Eds.) *Mass media effects research: Advances through meta-analysis* (pp. 37–51). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<sup>30</sup> Hollander B. 2008. Tuning out or tuning elsewhere? Partisanship, polarization, and media migration from 1998 to 2006 // *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*. 85: 23–40. Meraz S. 2011. Using time series analysis to measure intermedia agenda-setting influence in traditional media and political blog networks // *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 88(1): 176–194. Stroud N. 2011. *Niche news: The politics of news choice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Vargo C., Guo L. 2017. Networks, Big Data, and Intermedia Agenda Setting: An Analysis of Traditional, Partisan, and Emerging Online U.S. News // *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 94(4): 1031–1055.

The retention of high public attention to events that were actively covered by the mass media in the previous periods but were gradually forced out of public discussion, which happened in some cases, can be explained in the logic of the two-stage communications model. Perhaps, the event, about which the newspapers cease to write, remains a subject of interpersonal communication, which contributes to its preservation in the personal agenda of the population. Thus, events can be recalled by the people not only as a result of media discussions in the current period but also under the influence of a certain "echo" of their previous popularity.

The concentration of public attention used in the model as a control variable is also significant and positively associated with the memorability of various events. Greater attention to news in crisis periods may be due to people's desire to monitor existing threats and the function of the mass media to keep social order in crisis situations. In conditions of uncertainty the mass media become the main source of information, and the news is attracting more attention. It is possible that as a result the population pays more attention to the news not directly related to those topics that trouble them.

### **List of publications, which reflects the main scientific results of the thesis.**

#### **Articles for defense of PhD thesis**

1. Kazun A. D. Framing Sanctions in the Russian Media: The Rally Effect and Putin's Enduring Popularity // *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*. 2016. Vol. 24. No. 3. P. 327-350. Scopus Q2. (1,6 а.л.)
2. Kazun A. D., Barsukova S. Russia's Accession to the WTO. The Debate in the Russian Mass Media // *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*. 2016. Vol. 47. No. 4. P. 149-177. Scopus Q4. (1,5 а.л., авторский вклад – 0,75 а.л.)
3. Kazun A. Kak ekonomika v novostyakh vliyaet na novosti v ekonomike? Obzor teoriy o spetsifike i roli ekonomicheskikh diskussiy v SMI (How Does Economy in News Affects News in Economy? A Review of Theories on the Specific Features and Role of Economic Discussions in the Media) // *Journal of Economic Sociology*. 2017. Vol. 18. № 3. P. 97-129. (2,5 а.л.)

4. Kazun A. Otkuda beretsya povestka dnya? Rol' SMI v konstruirovanii znachimosti sobytiy (Where does agenda come from? The role of the media in setting the importance of events) // The Russian Public Opinion Herald. Data. Analysis. Discussions. 2017. Vol. 124. № 1-2. P. 182-189. (0,75 a.л.)

### **Other Publications**

#### ***In international databases of scientific citation (Scopus)***

5. Kazun A. Effekt "rally around the flag". Kak i pochemu rastet podderzhka vlasti vo vremya tragediy i mezhdunarodnykh konfliktov? ("Rally around the Flag" Effect. How and Why Support of the Authorities Grows During International Conflicts and Tragedies?) // Polis. Political Studies. 2017. No. 1. P. 136-146. (0,9 a.л.)
6. Kazun A. Konstruirovaniye sotsial'nykh problem v SMI i teoriya formirovaniya povestki dnya: predely sovместimosti kontseptsiy (Construction of social problems in the media and agenda-setting theory: the limits of concepts' compatibility) // Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes. 2016. T. 133. № 3. P. 159-172. (1 a.л.)
7. Kazun A. Pochemu rossiyane ne boyatsya sanktsiy? Strategii deproblematizatsii situatsii v pechatnykh SMI (Why Russians Are Not Afraid of the Economic Sanctions? The Counterrhetoric Strategies of the Print Media) // Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes. 2016. № 1. P. 256-271. (1 a.л.)

#### ***In Russian journals recommended by the Higher School of Economics:***

8. Kazun A. Konstruirovaniye publichnoy diskussii i strategii deproblematizatsii vstupleniya Rossii v VTO (Construction of public debate and strategies of deproblematization of Russia's accession to the WTO) // Journal of Institutional Studies. 2015. № 1. С. 95-111. (1,3 a.л.)
9. Kazun A. D., Kazun A. P. Neravnye sredi ravnykh: pochemu razvivayushchiesya strany rezhe vyigryvayut spory v VTO? (Unequal among equals: Why are developing countries less likely to win WTO disputes?)//

Voprosy Ekonomiki. 2016. № 7. P. 106-122. (1,15 а.л., авторский вклад – 0,5 а.л.)

***In Russian databases of scientific citation:***

10. Kazun A. Koeffitsient kontsentratsii obshchestvennogo vnimaniya: metodologiya rascheta (Concentration Coefficient of Public Attention: Calculation Methodology) // Communication. Media. Design. 2017. Vol. 2. № 3. P. 103-119. (0,9 а.л.)
11. Kazun A. Otnoshenie naseleniya k vstupleniyu Rossii v VTO (Public attitude towards Russia's accession to the WTO) // Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes. 2014. № 6 (124). P. 98-111. (1 а.л.)
12. Kazun A. Ustanovlenie informatsionnoy povestki dnya v presse (na primere vstupleniya Rossii v VTO) (Agenda-setting in the press (case of Russia's accession to the WTO)) // Vestnik NSU. Series: History. Philology. 2015. № 6. P. 91-98. (0,7 а.л.)