

# Impact of Media on Shaping Ethno-Cultural Stereotypes in British and Russian Young People

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The digitization of communication and the mediatization of society transform the forms and types of relationships of parties of the communication process. Social media as a new media environment has a great potential for managing opinions, media consumer's impressions and the formation of certain attitudes and stereotypes. The question arises of formulating distinct criteria for assessing the degree to which media affects certain social groups and society as a whole, as well as the consequences of such an impact. The article analyzes the impact of technical and technological and information-symbolic communication aspects on the shaping ethno-cultural stereotypes. To identify sources of formation and breaking down ethno-cultural stereotypes in 2017-2018, a research was conducted based on the questionnaire online survey method in two stages on the territory of two countries (Russia and the United Kingdom). At the first stage, students from Russia and Great Britain were surveyed (N=454). At the second stage, young people from Russia aged 18-24 were surveyed (N=1200). As a result, the main positive and negative features were identified by representatives of two cultures in each other's perception. The sources of the formation of ethno-cultural auto- and hetero-stereotypes, as well as the tools for their breaking down, were identified.

Keywords: Media, mediatization, youth, new media, ethno-cultural stereotypes

"Mediatization" became a new category of scientific study at the turn of the century; in modern scientific discourse, M. McLuhan's multifaceted formula "The Medium is the Message" can be perceived as a request, an assignment to the sciences that study society and man. Man and his social and communicative practices, specific of the nineteenth century, the time of the institutionalization of sociology as a science, changed significantly by the beginning of the third millennium. And the historical evolution of man is not the last factor. The whole human life environment has undergone changes: in natural, technical and technological, information-symbolic and other aspects; in many cases it has been transformed into a media environment. Society, generating a new environment, in its turn, cannot remain immutable. Media reality began to compete with the objective reality, shaping general world pictures for large groups of people, creating a basis for them for understanding the environment, for control over it, coordination, formation of values and transfer of social experience to succeeding generations. The new digital information and communication platform has brought forth new media and a new type of information practices that satisfies the information and communication needs of the individual and society, which has brought about substantial changes in the traditional established social

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communication patterns. An individual ceases to be a recipient of the transmission model and moves to the center of communication, obtaining new opportunities for freedom, self-expression and self-realization.

Society as a communicative system has become different. The new information and communication platform served as a basis not only for the formation of new types of social communities having no analogues in the pre-digital history of communication, but also had an impact on social practices of the overwhelming majority of existing social groups. Media consumption has become a new form of unifying rituals. Media influence has turned to the object of focused attention in social sciences.

Another factor that sets the direction for the development of modern society is globalization. In socio-communicative terms, its consequence was the expansion and augmentation of communicative spheres and communicative situations, which significantly enhanced the adaptive and cognitive role of stereotypes. In the ethno-cultural context, globalization has jeopardized the traditional concept of "ethnicity". The question "Who am I?" is becoming topical, especially for young generations. And to get an answer to it is quite difficult, for example, in situations where a young man himself speaks only English, his father is an Italian and his mother is a Japanese. Analyzing the processes of urbanization, scientists introduce and discuss a new concept of "metroethnicity" (Maher, 2005). Globalization and the development of mega cities expand the scope of intercultural communication, which inevitably enhances the role of ethno-cultural stereotypes. The main sources of shaping ethno-cultural stereotypes are mass communication, personal experience and interpersonal communication.

The purpose of the proposed study is to reveal the contemporary role of the media in the formation of ethno-cultural stereotypes in young people exemplified with the Russian and British student environment. The following working definitions were taken in the research.

Media are means of communication, technical means of creating, recording, copying, replicating, storing, disseminating, perceiving information and exchanging it between the author and the audience (Fedorov, 2014).

Mediatization is the impartation of basic elements of social and cultural reality with mediologic or media form (Thompson, 1993), saturation of social relations with media technologies and media entities (Kolomic, 2014).

Stereotypes are ordered, schematic worldview elements determined by culture existing in human consciousness that save people's efforts in perceiving complex social objects and protect their values, attitudes and rights (Lippmann, 1922).

An ethno-cultural stereotype is a generalized idea of the typical features that characterize a nationality (Maslova, 2010).

In the sociological literature there is no single definition of the concept of "young people". As a rule, this socio-demographic group of society is singled out on the basis of age characteristics (rather blurred and mobile – usually this is the age bracket of 14-30 years). Among other important parameters of the definition of young people, the onset of a certain phase of the life cycle associated with the formation of social and psycho-physiological maturity is mentioned, as well as parameters such as young people's status, their place and functions in society, interests and values other than those in other age

groups. As the Russian sociologist V.I. Chuprov (2003) states, the definition of the notion of young people changed meaningfully during the 20th century, which allowed us to identify several approaches. Young people are characterized not only as a certain age group, but also as a social status determined by age, implying the performance of particular and socially useful activities (study, acquiring general or professional education – the group of “students”). Singling out of a special group in society enabled speaking of the existence of a special type of culture. The youth subculture reflects young people’s desire to shape their own worldview, often opposed to the older generation.

Young people demonstrate manners, values, etc., different from people of other ages. It is worth noting that the development of this social group ensures the implementation of one of the most important social functions of society, namely, ensuring the continuity of generations and the reproduction of the social structure. Additionally, the realization of such important functions as reproductive, innovative, and broadcasting is also taking place. Thus, it can be stated that the choice of young people as a research object results from the prospects of their role in social and communicative interaction.

### Literature Review

The investigated problems are interdisciplinary. They are included in the object of research in sociology, communicology, psychology, journalism, philology, political science and culturology. The following media research schools have emerged: Chicago, Toronto, Annenberg, Frankfurt, Birmingham (The Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies), the Glasgow University Media Group, the French postmodernism philosophy, etc. Theoretical and methodological basis for our research was grounded on the works of scientists in the following areas.

The definition of the essence and main social functions of the media is laid down in the works by M. McLuhan (1964), N. Bolts (2011), D. McQuaiL (2010), N. Luman (2005), A. Fedorov (2014), M. Nazarov (2010), J. Jackson et al. (2011), and M. O’Shaughnessy et al. (2016). The evolution of media is compared in these works with changes in society. Thus, N. Bolts following McLuhan’s tradition, identifies six historical stages of media development: oral speech, writing, a book, mass media, digitization and networking. M. Nazarov (2010) offers to consider media functions on two levels: personal and social, featuring their mismatch and the possibility of subsequent conflicts. N. Luman (2005) puts forward the idea of two realities of the mass media.

Global socio-cultural changes caused by the rapid development and expansion of computer networks and Internet technologies in the late 20th and early 21st centuries are deeply intertwined to the emergence of the phenomenon of new media or new social media. According to A. Gruzd et al. (2017), there were more than 19,000 academic articles including the term “social media” in Web of Science data in 2017. Let us note in this series the works by V. Nightingale and T. Dwyer (2011), T. Flew (2014), and A. Gruzd et al. (2017). The influence of social media on individual and social changes is analyzed in the work by J. Schmidt (2013). S. Livingstone (2015) expresses her negative attitude to the consideration of mass media as unidirectional and passively consumed. She describes the current state of society as being mediatized and having a globalized peer-to-peer social media network. R. Schroeder (2017) argues that digital media cannot be strictly divided into interpersonal and mass media and media theories are also suggested to be revised from the point of view of how media transform and keep social order.

The issue of comparing media and power is raised in major works by H. Innis (1950), M. Castells (2009) and T. Dijk (2015). Noting the strength of the institutional influence

of media on other social institutions and society as a whole, researchers analyze the notion of “mediatization”, reincarnated, as explained by S. Livingstone, at the turn of the century. Along with significant works-collections *Mediatization: Concept, Changes, Consequences* (2009), *Mediatization of Communication* (2014), *Mediatized Worlds* (2014), we mention works by J. Thompson (1993), V. Kolomic (2014), N. Kirillova (2005), O. Sergeeva (2011), R. Grusin (2015), M. Ampuja et al. (2014), S. Hjarvard (2013), D. Deacon and J. Stanyer (2014), M. Ekström et al. (2016), A. Hepp et al. (2015), and N. Couldry, and A. Hepp (2016). Discussions about the essence of the phenomenon of mediatization are regularly held in scientific periodicals, for instance, on the pages of the *Media, Culture & Society* journal. We consider it appropriate to choose a comprehensive definition of mediatization based on the works of J. Thompson and V. Kolomic, contained in the Introduction section.

The theories structuring and interpreting mass communication are represented in a consistent manner in the works by D. McQuail (2010), J. Bryant and S. Thompson (2002), and M. Mooij (2014). It is important for us that M. de Mooij considers the meaningful peculiarities of the theories from the perspective of cause-effect relations with particular qualities of the philosophy and mentality of certain countries and regions.

The problem of media influence is one of the core issues in media research. Due to the wide variety of its perspectives, a large number of publications have been devoted to it. The most relevant for our research was the work of J. Bryant and S. Thompson (2002), especially its excerpts to address the degree of the force of media impact. The diverse aspects of social and personal media influence, in particular, subjectivity of media consumption as an aspect of media influence, are presented in the works by S. Sibert et al. (1998), M. Horkkhajmer, T. Adorno (1997), G. Gerbner et al. (1994), T. Wilson (2009), D. Freedman (2015), L. Jeffres et al. (2008), T. Chalklev et al. (2011), S. Turkle (2015), A. Sibiriakova et al. (2015), and Ke Xue et al. (2018).

Description of the essence and social functions of stereotypes and, especially, ethno-cultural stereotypes, is grounded in the classical works by W. Lippmann (1922), E. Bogardus and H. Tajfel (1978). In modern works on this subject, generally, the following functions of ethno-cultural stereotypes are investigated: the function of socio-ethnic integration to maintain the internal cohesion of the community and its contraposition to other communities; protective function contributing to the preservation of the traditional system of values with regard to its community (auto-stereotypes) and in relation to “alien” ones (hetero-stereotypes); cognitive function, shaping the image of one’s own and external worldviews; communicative function; manipulative function, when ethno-cultural stereotypes serve as a medium of mental impact on people for ideological and political purposes. O. Belova (2005), V. Maslova (2010), C. Macrae and G. Bodenhausen (2000), and O. Zhernovaya (2010). A particular emphasis is put on ethno-cultural stereotypes in cross-cultural communication in A. Sadohin (2009) and S. Ter-Minasova (2008).

## Methods

The findings of sociological survey: *The Impact of Cultural Stereotypes on Students’ Communication Practices and Students’ Life Strategies and Values in Modern Russian Society* held within the framework of the research *Culture and Education as a Modernization Potential Development of Russia* were used to study the media influence on the formation of ethno-cultural stereotypes. Participants in the survey were young people from Great Britain and Russia aged 18-25.

The research was conducted in several stages. The first stage of the research, the study of ethno-cultural stereotypes of students in Russia and Britain, was held in March

2017. The total number of respondents is N=454 persons. The applied method was the snowball sampling. A.A. Valovatook an active participation in holding interviews. In early March, a survey was conducted in Moscow (Russia). The number of respondents was 241 persons (including 46% of young men (130 persons) and 54% of young women (111 persons)). Respondents were students of non-linguistic specialties at Moscow universities of humanitarian fields of education (Faculty of Sociology, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Journalism).

In the second half of March 2017, the survey was conducted in the educational institutions of London (Great Britain) and the city of Leicester. The total number of respondents was 213 persons (51% of young men (104 persons) and 49% of young women (105 persons)). The respondents were students of non-linguistic specialties studying according to the programs of training specialists in the field of social sciences.

In the second stage, which took place in April 2018, young people aged 18 to 25 years old, living in Russia and being its citizens were interviewed. The survey was held online. The sample amounted to 1200 respondents (including 50.4% of young men (605 persons) and 49.6% of young women (595 persons)).

## Results and Discussion

- The main sources of shaping stereotypes are mass media, interpersonal communication with the nearest environment and personal experience. The most sustainable generators of shaping stereotypes in the youth environment are the mass media.
- New media (social networks) are among the highest ranked as regards the sources, which indicates an increase in the level of subjectivity of media consumers.
- The role of social networks in the formation of stereotypes has surpassed the role of the family and the immediate environment. This trend is observed in the youth environment in both countries.
- Among the media, films are ranked high after the new social media. In addition, in the Russian-speaking segment, their status somewhat prevails over the role of social networks, and in the English-speaking segment, on the contrary, they are ranked by two positions lower in comparison with social networks.
- The role of the family and the immediate environment in shaping stereotypes is completely comparable to the role of films in the British youth. As for the Russian young people, rates characterizing the role of films is 2.5 times higher than those related to the role of the family.
- Great differences are observed in the generating role of literature. In the rating characterizing Russian students, it is almost 2 times higher than the rates related to the family and it occupies the fourth line of the rating. In British students, on the contrary, the rates as regards literature are 3.5 times weaker than the status of the family and it is on the penultimate line of the rating.
- The result of the analysis of the media's content impact is presented by quite benevolent mutual ethno-cultural hetero-stereotype assessments given by respondents to representatives of another culture during the survey at the first stage of the study.
- Despite the existing ethno-cultural stereotypes referred to Russian citizens and their prevalence in Russian and foreign media, Russian auto-stereotypes are dominated by positive characteristics, some of which coincide with the hetero-stereotypes raised in connection to Russia given by British youth.

In H. Lasswell's model, which is effective for theoretical and practical application, revealing the structure of communication, the unit "Effect" is matched with the units "Who?", "Says What?", "To Whom?", "In Which Channel?" (or "Medium"). In this study, we analyzed the relationship between the blocks "Effect" and "Medium" in terms of shaping ethno-cultural stereotypes as a result of different types of communication. We proceeded from the assumption that communication differs from providing mere informing by the procuring of feedback. The better is the feedback established, the less uncertainty remains for communicants. Therefore, if recipients are interested in obtaining a more complete worldview, they will focus to a greater extent on the channels for obtaining information, which have more opportunities for establishing feedback. Modern information technologies allow, first of all, for better organization of feedback and, secondly, feedback in the form of a polylogue, which enables simultaneous expression of points of view by many communicants, which helps reduce the degree of information uncertainty. However, such work with information is associated with the recipients' activity and with the increase of their subjectivity in media consumption.

The most important category related to the effectiveness of communication is trust. The availability of feedback a priori causes more trust to the source of information, and since trust reduces the boundary of the critical attitude to information and its source, new media have great opportunities to manipulate communicants' consciousness and influence their values. An important factor in creating trust is the style of providing information. The following trend has emerged: media from the perspective of mass communication with its generalized communicative style are heading over to the position of interpersonal communication, which, as a rule, is trusted more. In new social media, the style of interpersonal communication is broadly presented. Thus, the construction of reality by new media has a great potential impact on the target audience. It is evidenced with figures.

According to VCIOM data (VCIOM, 2018) in the first quarter of 2018, the share of Internet users in Russia was 80%, while the daily share of Internet surfers aged 18-24 years exceeds 95%. Most often, the Internet (including information sites, social networks and blogs) is used to be up to date with the latest news about events in the country and the world (62% of users aged 18-24 look for similar information). There is a decrease more than ever in the consumption of printed periodicals and there is a growing popularity of online versions of publications (in 2014, 54% of Russians used online sources, in 2017 it was 58%). Young people are the most active online media users (80% of young people aged 18-24 years) (Mediapotreblenie, 2017).

According to the survey conducted online by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center in 2014 (VCIOM, 2014) 81% of respondents believe that the Internet contributes to the expansion of their area of thought. Access to various media resources such as: music, films, books (80%), e-mail (77%), social networking with friends (74%), search for new acquaintances similar in values (54%), work and study (70%) were mentioned by the respondents among the popular Internet features.

The same tendencies are also traced in the results of the survey related to Russian and British student youth (The Influence of Cultural Stereotypes on Students' Communicative Practices), which named various news resources presented in the Internet space (72.6% and 81.2%, respectively), as well as social networks, forums, blogs (48.5% of Russians and 71.8% of British people answered this way) as sources of information about the surrounding world. The indicated sources were singled out by young people as the main tools for shaping ethno-cultural stereotypes. Along with this, taking into account the growing role of media resources in the storage and distribution of books, films, music, these are films (51.4%) and books (40.2%) which play a significant role in the construction of stereotypes

in the Russian students' opinion, whereas the share of this content as regards British students is only 35.2% and 9.3%, respectively. In the British students' opinion, the nearest environment (34.2%) or personal experience of interaction with another culture (24.4%) may have a significant impact on the opinion of representatives of other cultures. As for the Russians, this figure is significantly lower: 21.9% and 17.8%, respectively.

There is an inverse relationship when it comes to the destruction of ethno-cultural stereotypes. Only personal experience of interaction (75.5%) and such form of it as international internships (59.3%), according to young Russians, will provide accurate and objective information about another culture and its representatives. Internet media and social networks, blogs and forums can lead to the destruction of stereotypes, but somewhat less than personal interaction – 31.1% and 29.4%, respectively. British respondents also pay attention to personal experience (72.3%) and student mobility (international internships) (47.8%) as an important source of obtaining truthful information about others. However, British students show greater confidence in receiving information from the Internet media (41.3%), social networks (30.9%), films and books (30.9%), while the Russians rated the last two sources as less reliable (12%).

Our data correlate with the data of analytical centers in 2018. According to the analytical agency We Are Social and the largest SMM platform Hootsuite (Internet 2017-2018 v mire, 2018), the main feature of the media environment development is the Internet development. In 2018 the number of Internet users reached 4.021 billion people, which is 7% more compared to the same period last year. The audience of social networks in 2018 amounts to 3.196 billion people, this is by 13% more in relation to the last year's indicator. In the last 12 months, the number of people on the most popular social sites has increased daily by almost 1 million new users.

According to the POF data obtained in May 2018 (SMI: *vostrebovannost'*, 2018), television remains the most popular source of information in Russian society. News sites are considerably lagging behind. The third place, again with a large margin, is taken by social networks. However, the information consumption varies greatly in groups by age and education. Young people are much more likely to give preference to the Internet as compared to TV. With a general decrease in trust in information sources with respect to 2015, there is an evident increase in trust in forums, blogs, social networking sites.

The significance of the influence of social networks, forums and blogs on the audience is also indicated by the relatively new phenomenon of astroturfing, when persons concerned, for selfish purposes, knowing about the trust in certain new media, use modern software or pay specially employed users for the artificial management of public opinion, crowding real people's opinion.

It is obvious that such a development of the situation with social networks aggravates the issue of media literacy development and media education. In a certain perspective of the problem of information security, the shaping of ethno-cultural stereotypes can also be considered.

By the end of the 20th century the following thesis was accepted in the scientific discourse of journalism, communicology, sociology and philosophy: the main essential function of mass media is to influence broad social strata through the content of transmitted information. The issue of the degree of this impact and the criteria for determining it remains contentious. The history of mass media functioning was contingently divided into several stages in terms of their impact effectiveness. In J. Bryant and S. Thompson (2002) historical stages that characterize the scientific attitude to the mass communication impact on the audience is presented as a very strong impact (20-40ies of the 20th century), a

limited impact (40-60ies of the 20th century), a moderate impact (60-80ies of the 20th century) and a strong impact (after the 80ies of the 20th century). Presumably, at present we continue to observe the growth of media influence. Media-sociology identifies at least two aspects in this process: the technological impact (following the Toronto School) and the meaningful one. The technological impact is connected with the practice of media consumption and is considered by us above. Digitization makes big changes in the established views on the correlation of media and their content. Now the content is not connected to a specific type of media; access to it can be obtained through other information and communication platforms. The existing confusion of information and communication platforms leads some scientists to the hypothesis about the future mono-medical world. This state of affairs causes certain difficulties in the empirical analysis of certain media impact, for example, television or cinema, and also imposes a number of requirements on the choice of research methods. For example, traditional methods of content analysis should be complemented with the techniques to study audience.

In our opinion, a promising situation develops when some of the new social media is a platform for discussion, as a result of which the media impact actually reflects active communicants' influence, i.e. in the strict sense, we can talk about the zero impact of the media. In other words, if in the context of mediatization media are considered as communication environment, then new social media have a very large impact potential, but if we treat media only as a communication channel, then unlike the other media impact, the technological impact of new social media is essentially close to the interpersonal communication effects.

In our study, a questionnaire survey was applied to determine ethno-cultural stereotypes. Subsequently, the following specific features of ethno-cultural hetero-stereotypes were identified. Russian students can observe such positive characteristics in the British (data are given according to the frequency of references), like politeness (135), aristocracy (134), education (132), good manners (121), punctuality (96), patriotism (65), self-confidence (65), sociability (35), diligence (25), hospitality (17), modesty (14), sincerity (10), courage (7) and beauty (7). However, among the qualities of the British, there are a number of characteristics having a negative evaluation: arrogance (149), haughtiness (138), duplicity (48), alcoholism (44), hostility (29), quick temper (22), avarice (19), vulgarity (18), rudeness (14), uncertainty (10), lack of self-trust (7), bad manners (6) and lack of education (5).

In turn, British students, in their view of Russia, represented primarily under the media influence, singled out such positive traits as diligence (143), self-confidence (138), patriotism (119), beauty (101), courage (92), education (76), hospitality (35), politeness (32), sincerity (28), good manners (24), modesty (17), aristocratism (16), sociability (9) and punctuality (4). The negative characteristics mentioned by the British are alcoholism (115), hostility (92), quick temper (77), rudeness (68), haughtiness (52), bad manners (51), vulgarity (26), avarice (25), uncertainty (21), lack of education (20), duplicity (14), arrogance (10) and lack of self-trust (3).

In April 2018, in the second stage of the study, we obtained the results of an online survey of young Russians aged 18-25 (N=1200) in the framework of the sociological survey—Life Strategies and Values of Students in Modern Russian Society. Respondents have identified in themselves such qualities, which, in their opinion, they possess. The following characteristics were named: good manners (80.5%), activity (64.5%), diligence (60.8%), ability to adapt to the situation and to maneuver (60.8%), adroitness (59.9%), general culture (59.2%), sociability (52.4%), will (51.8%), ambitiousness (49.7%), self-confidence

(49.3%), entrepreneurial attitude (46.4%), professionalism (45.9%), proactivity, assertiveness (41.9%), leadership qualities (35.7%), artfulness (33.9%) and pragmatism (26.8%). It should be noted that some of the auto-stereotypes (for example, good manners, diligence) coincided with the hetero-stereotyped assessments given by the British youth about the Russians.

Media act on the one hand as sense generators, on the other hand, as their translators, as reflected, for instance, in the communicative model by Westley and Maclean. This means that in terms of the senses obtained at the end of the information transmission chain, it is possible to draw certain conclusions about communicators' social characteristics, their objectives, motives and attitudes and their values. The results obtained as regards ethno-cultural hetero-stereotypes lead to a conclusion about the acceptable level of mutual ethno-cultural tolerance among Russian and British students, manifested in their media perception.

## Conclusion

Digitization as a new information and communication technology platform leads to the transformation of media consumption practices and ways of building interpersonal communication. The role of subjectivity in the communication processes is increasing, but a serious problem of trust in information sources still remains, on the basis of which certain ideas and attitudes to social phenomena and behavior patterns are shaped. The Internet space is able to act as a significant other, supplying reliable information and shaping the individual and entire groups' worldview. Internet media, social networks, forums, blogs are suppliers of news, opinions and platforms for self-expression, search for like-minded people, contribute to the shaping a notion of the surrounding world, the emergence of new or consolidation of existing images, stereotypes about other cultures. Cross-cultural communication in the current conditions of globalization and mediatization expands its scope, changing the old ethno-cultural stereotypes and, consequently, transforming friend/foe relations. New media with their new possibilities represent, on the one hand, a challenge to researchers in terms of developing new clear criteria and methods for investigating media effects, on the other hand, a challenge to media users in terms of their media literacy and media education.

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