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**公共外交塑造形象之研究：以俄國為例**  
**IMAGE BUILDING IN TERMS OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY:**  
**The case study of Russia**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the manner in which Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs employs social media in their image building activities. Over the past years, political events dramatically impacted brand “Russia” on world arena. The study also demonstrates that analyzing public diplomacy content enables one to identify the national image being promoted. It aimed to identify the main themes of social media accounts of Russian foreign ministry in Facebook and Twitter. Following that, the paper has made an attempt to answer what images of itself Russia transmits to international audience through social media during a new information “cold war.”

**Key words:** social media, public diplomacy, country image, Facebook, Twitter

# **CHAPTER I.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Motivation and Purpose of the Study**

Modern conditions of global development are such that in the process of making a political decision, more and more are taken into account not only real facts, but also subjective representations and images. The image of the state and its perception in the international arena acquires a significant role, and the formation of the image becomes an important direction of state policy. The rapid development of electronic media and communication has created the opportunity for active and rapid introduction into the mass consciousness of myths and values with the aim of both disorientation of the population and the formation of necessary perceptions. The effectiveness of the policy of forming a positive image of the state is determined by the consideration, in the course of its construction, of information, political, social, cultural, economic and other needs and interests of targeted social groups within and outside the country, their variable (current) and permanent perceptions of the state, archetype images, myths contained in the public minds of audiences.

In the context of globalization, the importance of non-military methods and information technologies in foreign policy and management of modern political processes is increasing, and the state loses its absolute power monopoly in international political processes. Taking into account the increasing role of the image of the state and other actors of international relations in political processes, the scientific interest in the problem of image formation through public diplomacy in the international arena has increased in recent decades due to the fact that it was possible to take a fresh look at the information and communication field of state activity.

The interconnection between the Internet, foreign policy and diplomacy has become an attractive topic in academic circles in recent years. Various studies have evaluated the contradictions of this connection in the context of public diplomacy and civic diplomacy, especially paying attention to the role of social networks as mechanisms of penetration into world public opinion.

The technological revolution that took place in 1990 has completely changed the world and its connectivity, from a few loosely connected millions now we are a thousand billion digitally connected world of networking people without any boundaries. Nowadays people spend more time with their computers, laptops and smartphones. They use it for reading newspapers, booking plane tickets, watching movies, listening to music. They do it whether for entertainment, or to search for new information or to buy some new products. They could be engaged into some popular forums, or just read e-books, e-journals, or they are sharing pictures or videos, chatting with their friends or families, business or government via such popular social networks as Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and etc.

### **1.1.1 Motivation**

In the 21st century, a truly innovative platform of the formation of social ties within the society has become the Internet. The last stage of the Internet history simultaneously became the era of Web 2.0, when the widespread introduction of social networks contributed to the socialization of the Internet. The fact that the Internet has become social is a reality. Society is increasingly penetrating the network, or on the contrary, the network penetrates into society so “e-community” or “virtual community” has being formed (Rukavishnikov, 2004).

In the Internet there is a popular expression - "if Facebook was a country, it would be the third largest country in the world ... ". If even there is an exaggeration in these words, it is not very

significant. The invention of Mark Zuckerberg, launched in 2004, indeed, is the most popular social network in the world. And Facebook perfectly illustrates sociality of the World Wide Web. Currently this network has already about 1.4 billion registered accounts around the world, keeping market leadership. The total amount of users of social networks are approaching 2 billion people now, and, according to forecasts, the audience will only increase (Internet User Forecast by Country, 2017).

With the weakening of old social communications, the tools of the information and communication organization within the Internet community become an increasingly effective channel of communication between parties, society, citizens and power. Social media is a new important platform through which individuals, organizations, governments as well as just citizens are engaged into interaction in this information age. Thus, it seems relevant to talk about the importance of social networks as a political tool. It is no coincidence that there has been a significant increase in the state's attention to social networks in recent years (Lebedenko, 2004). Such websites that represent social networks like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook can overcome the government system, and promote political campaigns, promote the president's victory, hold public protests, organize social demonstrations, mobilize social movements, and communicate and discuss in public forums, disseminate awareness, provide real-time news.

As social media increasingly becomes part of everyday life, more government agencies are carving out a social media presence online. Facebook, Twitter and YouTube not surprisingly, are perhaps the most common outlets for government social media efforts. Initially the governments worldwide were not that supportive of using social media for improving governance but slowly and steadily governments' world are embracing this platform.

The formation of global network information structures made it necessary to take a fresh look at the problem of the formation of the image policy of states. The new information paradigm of politics means that in the 21st century, positive or negative image of the state depends to a large extent on who has information superiority in the global communication space and determines the information agenda. Over the past decade, as Russia recovered from its dark chaotic days of the 1990s, the Russian leadership has been making an increasing effort not only to consolidate social and political order at home, but also to enhance Russia's international status (Tsygankov, 2009).

But the Ukrainian crisis in which Russia is largely involved gave birth to another wave of information war of the West against Russia, which is increasingly called the "new cold war". Never since the beginning of the new century, attacks on the image of Russia were not so frank and aggressive: it is impossible to count the number of accusations of imperialism, militarism and expansion towards Russia. There was an idea formed about "progressive" and "reactionary" political values and traditions, about "democratic" and "totalitarian" countries and people with the help of information technologies. Therefore, it is so important for Russia to establish and protect its positive symbolic capital in the information space in the form of a national image (Kononenko, 2009).

### **1.1.2 Purpose of the Study**

The problem of building a positive image of Russia abroad is very important. For the first time the issue of forming a positive political image of the country was raised on June 28, 2000 in the Foreign Policy Concept. The main objective of the document can be called "bringing to the broad circles of the world public objective and accurate information about its positions on major international issues, on foreign policy initiatives and actions of the Russian Federation, as well as on the achievements of Russian culture, science, intellectual creativity" (Tsygankov, 2009). The

next point of development of the work on creating a positive image of the country can be called July 12, 2005, when V.V. Putin spoke at a plenary session of the meeting of ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia. Putin said that "the ideas about Russia in the world are far from reality, that cases of" planned campaigns to discredit our country "are not uncommon, and set before Russian diplomats the task of forming a favorable image of our country abroad"(Putin, 2005).

The problem of the international perception of Russia is rigidly tied to the hierarchy of states being formed today and the place in it of country. Thus, Rogozin (2010) rightly notes that in the system of the modern world order around the image of Russia there is a somewhat paradoxical situation. The status of a superpower was inherited from the USSR, a powerful nuclear weapon of strategic importance allowed the country to lead the Eastern bloc for many years, competing with the North Atlantic alliance and the United States. The transformation of the world order from a bipolar into a unipolar and cardinal changes in the external and internal political spheres of Russia led to the situation when the "great power", still possessing a powerful nuclear potential, is deeply dependent on the outside and de facto transferred to the category of "third world" countries ", Ranking 70th in the Human Development Index (Carnegie, 2016).

The most important components of modern image policy are public relations, new information technologies, which are used for information support of any image projects. In the context of the "new cold war", public diplomacy is becoming an especially important tool of Russia's image policy - explaining its country's policy to the general public throughout the world. The actions of internet diplomacy are more effective than events conducted through official diplomatic and political channels, since lively dialogue in public forums and in new media attracts

a wider audience, enables open public discussion of opinions expressed in comments and in social networks.

This study is aimed at investigation of the manner in which Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs employs social media in their image building activities. The study also demonstrates that analyzing public diplomacy content enables one to identify the national image being promoted. It aims to identify the main themes of social media accounts of Russian foreign ministry in Facebook and Twitter. The study has attempted to answer following questions:

This study is trying to answer the following questions:

***RQ1:** What are the main themes that can be identified in Russia's official accounts?*

***RQ2:** What images does Russia transmit through blogging and microblogging in Facebook and Twitter for international audience?*

To answer this questions, this thesis is logically divided into two main sections. The first section gives background and information about public diplomacy and engagement of social media into policy practices. It also describes the theoretical framework of the study and the different theories it is based on. The first section should help the reader to get on the map about the trends of public diplomacy in the Internet. Chapter I and Chapter II form this section.

The second section consists of Chapter III and Chapter IV. It describes and concludes the findings of the study, analyses of social accounts of Russian Ministry of foreign Affairs. It also has limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **1.2. Hypothesized Proposition and Framework of the Study**

Changes in the interests of individuals in the modern world, the development of civil society, the improvement of political institutions, and the increasing importance of individual

representations of groups in the era of the information society lead to increased attention to the problem of image in general and the image of countries in particular.

### **1.2.1 Hypothesized proposition**

In modern society, a lot of attention is paid to the democratic development of the country. Thus, countries with developed democracies that share democratic standards and values (freedom of speech, the rule of law, civil rights, election of rulers, etc.) become leaders in the international arena, while countries with a socialist system remain "autistic". Here a good example is Russia, which turned out to be the successor of the USSR and still plays the role of the state in the international community with the "habits" of the empire.

The Russian Federation, being one of the most influential actors of modern world politics, is extremely interested in preserving and strengthening its own positions in the existing system of international relations. In connection with this, the use of public diplomacy programs for the formation of a positive image of Russia in the public consciousness of the population of foreign countries acquires special significance. Based on above discussion, it can be proposed that:

***H1:** In the context of tensions between Russia and Western countries about the events taking place in Ukraine and Syria, Russian government uses social media as a channel for articulating the position of the Russian Federation on a wide range of issues on the current agenda.*

It is believed in this study that Russia's MFA uses social media for portraying country as a powerful democratic country and a main actor on world political arena. To prove the above-mentioned statements, this study is organized into logically consequential chapters and sections. To answer the research questions, the research has following objectives:

- Consider the notion of "image of the country", the main mechanisms and factors of its formation in the international arena
- To analyze what is public diplomacy and how the government uses this strategy in its image building activities
- Analyze the data collected from social media accounts of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Facebook and Twitter and identify the main themes of the accounts and images that Russia transmits to international audience

### **1.2.2 Framework of the Study**

The image associated with countries is less frequently mentioned in the literature than the more widely known image types. According to Martin and Eroglu (1993, p. 193), the image of the country is "the sum total of all descriptive, inference and information beliefs that are relevant to a particular country". Kotler et.al. (1993, p. 141.) suggested that the country's image is "the sum of the beliefs and impressions that people hold in their places".

According to the literature, the area of the image of a country can differ in its focal image of the object: the image of the country can be: 1) the general image of the country; 2) the image of the product of the country (the image of the country of origin) or 3) the image of the product that is associated with the country (in some cases the country of origin image). In the formation of views on the subject, several actors are always involved: from the media to the politically active part of the population. Accordingly, when positioning an object, resources and capabilities of communicative technologies of actors will be used.

The image of the country can be viewed as a special type of image that covers goods, brands, companies and much more. The image of the country is formed on the basis of experience and opinions about the nation or country and, first of all, information received through various channels. It could be politics (domestic affairs and foreign policy), telecommunications, entertainment (films) and rumors.

On the other hand, according to traditional interpretations of images, the image of the country is similar to the corporate image, which has two typical approaches: 1) the so-called spontaneous image is formed in the minds of consumers, and 2) another part that can be strongly influenced by conscious communication. Thus, spontaneous assessment by people of a country can be formed and controlled with the help of the developed concept of the image of the country, accompanied by well-thought-out, purposeful communication efforts.

With respect to its direction, the image of the country can be internal (self-image) and external (mirror) image, similar to the classification of the product. This interpretation is hardly acceptable for the product. Speaking of this, the country's internal image means "what citizens think of their own country", and the country's external image is "what other / foreign people think of another country". (Jenes, 2007, p. 40).

Entman (1993) suggests that the concept of framing is an ambiguous one; it is often defined casually, with too much left to an assumed understanding between researcher and reader. After all, the terms frame, framing and framework are commonly used outside formal scholarly discourse. Entman attempts to define framing and explain its application within the field of communication. According to Entman, to frame is to select certain aspects of a reality and make them especially salient in a communication text. One bit of information is made more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to the audience through techniques such as repetition, placement, inclusion and

omission within a text. Through framing, a communicator aims to construct a persuasive argument, which the listener will readily accept, about a particular problem and its solution. Frames, then, define problems, determine causes, pass moral judgments and suggest solutions. The audience can certainly recall its own facts and forge linkages that are not explicitly made in the text but on most matters of social or political interest, people are not generally so well informed and cognitively active, thus, framing heavily influences their perception.

Edelman (1993) considers the framework in the context of public policy. He argues that the framework is crucial for political maneuvering and persuasion. Using the 1991 Gulf War, Edelman explains that frames are particularly strong in shaping public opinion about public policy, when they seem natural and self-evident, rather than invented as propaganda tools.

While Edelman discusses frames in the context of government policy, Entman and Page (1994) discuss in detail the use of frames by news media, and they also draw on the example of the Gulf War of 1991. Framing research often focuses on the media and their impact on public opinion. Previous studies have identified five typical frameworks that are commonly used in the media: conflict, economic consequences, human interests, morality and attribution of responsibility. The framework of the conflict underscores the differences between nations and groups. The economic impact framework focuses on economic benefits or losses. The framework of human interests puts the "human face" on the event. A frame of morality interprets events from the point of view of moral prescriptions, and attribution of responsibility indicates the causes of problems.

Kosicki and Pan (1993) describe how a researcher can systematically collect evidence of the formation of news media problems by selecting clues in news texts. According to the authors, the public discourse on politics includes three players: sources (politicians, groups with special

interests), journalists and members of the audience. All three work in a common culture with common values. Frames allow journalists, in particular, to quickly and regularly process a large amount of information and pack information in such a way that their audience can easily digest it. Kosicki and Pan believe that we, as an audience, can identify these frames by dividing the news text into four categories: syntactical, scripts, thematic and rhetorical structures. The syntactic structure of news tapes is characterized by an inverted pyramid, which is determined by the idea that the most important information is first presented.

For example, the heading serves as the most important replica used to guide the reader as to how he or she should approach information. This is the most powerful thing of developing a syntactic structure. The structure of scenarios of news stories is characterized by five W and one H: who, what, when, where, why and how. They give the impression that the news story is an objective and complete account of the event with the beginning, the culmination and the conclusion. However, these elements also naturally create a sense of drama, action, conflict and characters who are all weaving together to create a story that shapes our thinking. Thematic structures are seen in stories in which the journalist implies a hypothesis that defines the framework for the news story, and then follows with evidence in the form of his observations or quotations to support the hypothesis.

Framing, however, is not limited to the media. Framing is present in any form of communication, and governments that communicate with their citizens and the world also participate in the creation of external actors and events. Recently, governments and their foreign ministries (MFAs) have gathered on social networking sites (SNS), such as Twitter or Facebook, in a practice that is commonly referred to as public diplomacy. Since SNS is now used by governments to comment on world affairs and actors, these channels have become platforms for

government development. Despite the widespread use of public diplomacy, only a few studies have examined how governments use SNS to create images of themselves. Self-framing is practiced by countries as part of image building in terms of public diplomacy and soft power. This study attempts to address this gap. Investigating self-framing on SNS is going to be achieved by analyzing Russia's self-portrait on its MFA Facebook and Twitter.

In this context, the foreign state becomes a kind of target, and the state that performs communicative actions acts as the initiator. For communication, the initiating state needs to be included in the already existing information space, as an institution that has certain tools for promoting its interests. J. Mannheim calls this type of communication between the two states public diplomacy, during which the government of a certain country carries out a series of actions to involve people living in the territory of the target country in a dialogue to achieve mutual understanding between the two countries or to create more significant levers of influence on government course of the target country (Iyengar, Reeves, 1997).

The definition of public diplomacy was given in 1965 by Edmund Gullion (as cited in Kononenko, 2009), dean of the School of Law and Diplomacy of the University of Tufts: "programs financed by the government aimed at informing and influencing public opinion in other countries" (Wolf, Rosen, 2015). According to the definition of Konstantin Kosachev (2012), head of Rossotrudnichestvo, public diplomacy is "a system of interaction with foreign societies for political purposes."

In this case, public diplomacy is understood not only as a tool to convey information, but also to build a constructive dialogue with the international audience. Confidential relations with the public are based on reasoned statements and clarification of the domestic and foreign policies of the state, i.e. open dialogue. Accordingly, public diplomacy is means of conveying information

that the state prefers to open to the international community. The difference between traditional diplomacy lies in the fact that it is oriented towards the authorities, and public diplomacy for the public (Rogozin, 2010).

Public diplomacy includes initiatives that are designed to explain the actions of a foreign state in order to artificially create certain representations of the country. Such actions can pursue several goals, for example, to interest the public and not allow foreign policy intervention, or, on the contrary, to force the public to lose interest in the country.

As actors of public diplomacy, we can call such non-governmental organizations as national, public associations, political parties and parliament, as well as other legal and physical persons. Also, in the role of the subject, states can act if it works together with public organizations in the implementation of certain tasks at home or abroad (Shershenev, 2011).

Public diplomacy for the achievement of its goal (i.e. dissemination of positive information about the country) makes up information materials that are distributed through printed media audio and video materials through diplomatic channels or via the Internet.

The sphere of public diplomacy is no exception when the need to draw the attention of the general public and the instant outspread of information is the reason for the widespread use of social networks. Presidents, ministers, ambassadors are actively involved in communicating with users via Twitter. Online conferences on Twitter with politicians are gaining popularity.

A serious understanding of the political culture of the country to which the counterparty's actions are directed is necessary in order for public diplomacy to be successful. That is, information about the country's political processes, political decisions, political communications became an

important knowledge. Also, of course, the interrelations in society, the cultural and social views of society are important (Jarol, Manheim, Albritton, 1984).

So, it can be concluded that public diplomacy is one of the main channels of communication when forming the image of the state. One of the main goals of public diplomacy is the pressure on the country's existing foreign policy. On the other hand, the goal may be a desire to force the foreign public to lose interest in a particular state. In this case, the counterparty state will have the opportunity to pursue the desired course with respect to this country without attracting public attention. Public diplomacy provides an opportunity for a "peaceful" way: by speeches, a constructive dialogue between the heads of state, advertising communications, to form a positive image for a foreign state. It gives additional leverage over those issues where there is a clash of interests between the two countries.

Inseparably with the notion of "public diplomacy" is connected one more a widely spread category - "soft power". Furthermore, in many ways precisely because of the appearance of this term in the early 1990s there was a new increase of interest in public diplomacy, which was going through serious decline after the end of the Cold War, when the issue of "conquering minds" so urgent in the period of confrontation between the Western and Eastern blocs, fell into the background. The emergence of new threats of the XXI century predetermined the need to return to detailed development of this subject with taking into account of the new realities of international relations. In 2004, Nye proposed a detailed study of "soft power" in the monograph " Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics ". According to Nye, if the "hard power" implies the use of various coercive tools, such as economic sanctions, bribery, a threat of military actions or deterrence to achieve foreign policy goals, the soft power is based on the following three basic elements: 1) a culture that can provoke interest in the mass 2) attractive political values

(domestically and externally) and 3) legitimate foreign policy (the actions of a given state must have moral authority among other states). In other words, the use of "soft power" allows the state "to create such a favorable international environment in which the state - the carrier of this force can realize its own interests without resorting to direct, hard power or threats".

The idea that the realization of the state's foreign policy goals is possible without widespread application of traditional hard methods of influence, which, among other things, causes sharp condemnation of the world community, quite deservedly attracted the attention of scientists and politicians. In this regard, there was a legitimate interest in analyzing instruments that would improve the level of "soft power" of the state. Researchers identify two ways of building up "soft power": "natural" and "artificial" (Gass, Seiter, 2009). The natural way supposes carrying out such an external and internal policy, which in itself evokes the approval and sympathy of the world community: it can be improving the quality of life of citizens, creating a promising economic model, actively participating in solving global problems. In this case, the authority of the state on the world arena is steadily rising, its value system and activities are beginning to be perceived as a successful model, the approval and adaptation of which does not cause discontent of other participants in international relations.

It seems that in practice, following the path of a "natural" buildup of "soft power" does not always produce the expected result. First of all, this is because some states have an order of magnitude more opportunities to influence public opinion than others. In modern conditions, such a leading position occupies the US, which allows them to formulate "standards of behavior" based on their own value system, respectively, the actions of other states are estimated on the "scale" of the United States. The US capabilities in the information sphere allow, both to emphasize, and to limit the coverage of certain events or phenomena, which seriously limits the ability of other

countries to form an image of their state independent of American influence. In this situation, the rest of the countries have two options: to adapt to existing standards or to strengthen their power to transform them.

The "artificial" way of building up the "soft power" just involves the purposeful carrying out of activities to inform foreign audiences: detailed explanation of the policy of their country, active involvement in their cultural values, monitoring and responding to negative assessments, carrying out activities to expand information influence on other countries. Consequently, the "artificial" path, unlike the "natural" one, is more active, and allows the state to control the process of building up "soft power", if necessary, directing and correcting it. Public diplomacy is precisely the tool that makes it possible to build up "soft power" in a controlled, thought-out process aimed at achieving specific goals. That's why many researchers call it a key tool for "soft power".

### **1.3. Literature Review and Methodology**

Depending on the structural components, it is possible to identify the subjects that will shape the political image of the country in one direction or another. Conventionally, there are three sectors that can be distinguished in which the image is formed: the state where the main actors are representatives of the government, the business sector and NGOs. The strategic management of the state image as a variety of communication technologies is, first of all, the task of the state.

#### **1.3.1 Literature Review**

The formation of the image of the state takes place through several channels. Building an image very often consists in changing negative perceptions to positive ones. So, for example, if the problem within the country becomes one of the reasons for the formation of a negative attitude

toward the state, then it is worth looking for approaches to changing attitudes to this problem. Countries are trying to turn negative sides into a positive image.

There are the following main reasons why the formation of a positive national brand is one of the main strategic tasks of the state's international policy. First, the importance of the positive image of the country is conditioned by the process of globalization and, accordingly, the expansion of international relations. In such conditions, the negative attitude of the world community entails isolation of the country in the international arena, on the other hand, positive perception allows it to solve global problems using the help and support of other states (Tsygankov, 2010).

Secondly, the foreign policy image is necessary for the formation of constructive relations with other states, since the discrepancy with the political requirements of Western countries headed by the United States becomes an obstacle for integration into the international community and favorable cooperation in economic matters. Observance of democratic principles, political freedoms and human rights is the basic requirement that exists today among developed countries (Tsygankov, 2010).

Thirdly, the political image becomes a certain guarantee against foreign policy or military interference in the domestic policy of the country. Here we are talking about pressure from the leading countries of the West, especially the United States, which are trying to strengthen their influence in all regions. Thus, the main goal of pressure is the "third world" countries with underdeveloped economies and authoritarian regimes. It is difficult for these countries to find major political allies. However, the actions of developed countries are limited by public opinion, which, with the current development of communication, governments cannot ignore. Thus, the positive image of the country on the international arena provides additional levers of influence on the foreign policy of a foreign state, which is the goal of communication efforts.

Nowadays one of the most successful ways of communication between people, organizations et. is use of social media. Social media is a way of describing easy ways to create, publish and engage on the internet. People generally use the term to describe how organizations and individuals share content – text, video and pictures – and create conversations on the web. It is transforming the way that companies do business and individuals interact with each other. It is providing a voice for those who weren't well heard before. Social media will change the way that councilors and councils interact with local people.

The notion of "social media" relatively appeared not long time ago in connection with the emergence of a number of new technologies (RSS, blogs, etc.) and Internet resources (online social networks, video sharing, etc.). The circle of these seemingly different phenomena is united by the fact that they all serve to facilitate the exchange of information between users in comparison with the technologies of the previous generation, when the Internet was mainly consisted of static pages. Social media can gather an audience comparable in size to the audience of traditional media. Thus, the audience of the top 10 most popular Twitter microblogging service accounts have in overall more than 746 million followers regularly following updates of their idols, the leaders of this rating have over 90 million "followers" (Twittercounter).

The important thing to remember about social media is that it is social. It's about communication. It's about turning the transforming power of a printing press into people's hands. Just as the ability to publish political leaflets and talk about them in coffee houses was the foundation of our liberal democracy, social media will have as much impact on how we manage and conduct business. Now anyone can publish and share their views, and, more importantly, can participate in a conversation with others about these views in just a few mouse clicks. Social networks are usually fairly open; which means that very different people can see, comment on, or

collaborate on materials. Tools are usually free or cheap and very often convenient to use, without requiring more skills than adding attachments to an email or creating a word document. And most importantly, social networks are designed for sharing, which means that it is very easy for people to redirect, link or even re-publish content. This means that there are very low barriers to entry for an exchange of views with a potentially very wide audience.

It is no doubt that in recent years there has been a huge increase in the governments' attention to social networks. Attention, first of all, to the dangers that they have in themselves. The latter provide an excellent opportunity to disseminate a wide variety of information, including one that may pose a threat to national security of any state. In this aspect, the events of the so-called "Arab Spring" are very indicative, when social Internet networks played a role in the escalation of mass social meeting in the countries of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It is also worth mentioning the well-known "take Wall Street" actions, when the participants coordinated their actions through chat rooms and social networks. Europe is no less demonstrating to us examples of the relationship between protest and network activity.

So, the riots of 2005 in Paris were associated with the activities of the social network Skyrock, where the Protestants communicated with each other. In March 2007, during the ejection of the "Youth House" in Copenhagen, several thousand anti-globalists from Germany, Norway, France, Sweden joined the Danish street pogrom. Coordination of their actions was carried out through social networks. During the summer riots in 2011 in Great Britain, arrests and prosecution for activities in social Internet networks have already become a typical reaction of the authorities. So in August 2011, British police arrested 20 people for organizing riots through smartphones and social networks.

### 1.3.2 Methodology

To answer research questions, this study analyzes posts and tweets from official pages of Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its social media accounts of Facebook and Twitter over exact period of time. Thematic analysis is employed. This form of analysis seeks to find overlying themes, which stem from the research corpus itself. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. The data analyzed included tweets and Facebook posts published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its English social media accounts between the October 1, and December 31, 2017. This time period is chosen as during this time it is noticed intensive Russian diplomatic efforts on a global scale, participating in negotiations over Ukrainian crisis, promoting a diplomatic solution to Syria's political crisis and war. All gathered tweets and Facebook post are read in purpose to identify main themes in social media accounts and what images of itself Russia tries to deliver to international community.

Braun & Clarke (2006) provided a six-phase guide which is a very useful framework for conducting thematic analysis. This paper was made with the conjunction of worked example.

**Table 1. Braun & Clarke six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis**

Step 1. Become familiar with the data	Step 4. Review themes
Step 2. Generate initial codes	Step 5. Define themes
Step 3. Search for themes	Step 6. Write-up

The data was examined with initial codes and some of them were clearly fitted together into a theme. A theme was categorized by its significance. As the result three major topics were found in social media account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A total of 380 tweets and 356 Facebook posts were published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia during the sampling period. Out of these, 291 Facebook posts and 157 tweets were analyzed and arranged in three overlying themes: Russia’s position on Ukrainian crisis, Russia’s relationship with the Arab world and projection of foreign publics. Facebook posts and tweets that were not part of the analysis had various subject matters that could not be categorized (e.g., pictures without specific news, remarks by President Putin or Sergey Lavrov on internal political events, diplomatic trivia questions, tweets that only have link to Facebook posts). The study is focused on textual analyses of post not including videos and pictures.

The following table presents the number of Facebook posts and tweets comprising each of the three themes identified as part of Russian efforts on public diplomacy.

**Table 2. Shared proportions of themes in social accounts of MFA**

<i>Themes identified in social accounts of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs</i>	<b>Number of Facebook posts</b>	<b>Number of tweets</b>
Russia’s position on Ukrainian crisis	41%	45%
Russia’s relationship with the Arab world	34%	40%

Projection of foreign publics	25%	15%
<b>Total</b>	291	157

In the light of the above, the main thrust of the activity seems to be aimed at raising awareness of Russia's policy, its position, managing its national reputation and changing attitudes toward Russia. The research explored the ways in which the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses its social media accounts. Discussions focused on what themes were identified and what information Russia tries to deliver to audience: how they comment ongoing political events.



## **CHAPTER II.**

### **PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

"Public diplomacy 2.0" is a relatively new direction within the framework of public diplomacy, which is a way of communicative influence on foreign audiences through Web 2.0 technologies (social networks, blogs, video hostings, etc.). Web 2.0 is used as shorthand to describe how social media has changed the content of the internet from being dominated by one-way publishing or e-commerce, to a greater emphasis on words, pictures, music and videos being published, shared and commented on by ordinary people. So it is becoming increasingly important in modern world politics due to the growing number of users of the World Wide Web, the decline in the popularity of traditional media and the rapid spread of new media, and the transformation of the Internet space into a platform for active political interactions.

In addition, the changed world-political landscape (primarily due to globalization, economic interdependence of countries) actualizes the need for more active foreign policy action on the part of the states to strengthen their own "soft power" in conditions when the use of military or economic coercion measures is questionable.

In this regard, "Public diplomacy 2.0", one of the tasks of which is precisely the formation of a positive image of the state abroad, can be considered as an extremely useful tool for foreign policy activity. This direction of public diplomacy can also be used to discredit geopolitical competitors in the international arena or as a means of articulating one's own position on a wide range of issues on the current agenda in the context of "information wars."

## 2.1. Public Diplomacy 2.0: Diplomacy Meets Social Media

The term "Public diplomacy 2.0" was first used by US Assistant Secretary of State John Glassman (2008), thus marking a new approach to public diplomacy, involving the use of social networks, blogs, mobile gaming applications in the implementation of foreign policy tasks of the USA (first of all in the fight against terrorism).

However, the most significant content is revealed by the work of the famous American researcher N. Cull (2011) who proposed to divide all foreign policy activities of the USA on the Internet (digital diplomacy) into "public diplomacy 1.0" and "public diplomacy 2.0" based on technologies used in its implementation (Web 1.0 or Web 2.0).

A characteristic feature common in the 90's 20th century Web 1.0 was the lack of interactivity (Aghaei, Nematbakhsh, Farsani 2012). Users of Internet sites that time could only view the information laid out on them, not being able to express their attitude to the contents of the content. To some extent, the Internet was for diplomats another tool (along with traditional media) for posting press releases. Activities in the field of "public diplomacy 1.0" rather closely resembled propaganda work through television and radio broadcasting during the Cold War, as it was also built on a monologue form of information transfer (excluding feedback from the foreign audience).

Since 2004, a new era in the development of ICT has begun, connected with the invention of Web 2.0 technologies. For the first time, the user of the Network has the opportunity not only to read the information posted on the sites, but also to express their attitude to its content (for example, as comments or using special buttons like "I like" or "recommend"). In addition, ordinary citizens could now create and post information on the Internet, which in the era of Web 1.0 was the prerogative of professionals. Since that time, social networks, blogs, photo and videohostings, wiki websites began to develop rapidly, and in the end "public diplomacy 2.0" has appeared as a

part of public diplomacy in the US.

It should be noted that often in the modern socio-political discourse, terms such as "digital diplomacy", "e-diplomacy", "Internet-diplomacy" are used to describe the mechanism of influencing public opinion abroad with the help of social media (Tsvetkova, 2011). Such terms are applied at the governmental level by the majority of states working in this area of public diplomacy (the USA, Great Britain, the Russian Federation, etc.), and also meet in the works of many specialists in the field of international relations. Meanwhile, the term "digital diplomacy" itself began to be used in science even before the emergence of social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

So, the American researcher W. Dizard (2001) wrote a whole book about this phenomenon, understanding under the digital diplomacy the foreign policy activity of the American government in the Internet space. A new impetus to the use of this term was given by the development of a document in the US Department of State in 2010 entitled "Strategic plan for the development of information technologies in 2011-2013: digital diplomacy," where digital diplomacy was understood primarily as the use of social media in diplomatic practice (IT Strategic Plan, 2011-2013). Despite the breadth of the terms "digital diplomacy", "e-diplomacy", "Internet diplomacy" (Hanson, 2012), they still have a broader meaning than the term "public diplomacy 2.0", as they imply not just the foreign policy activity of the state through Web 2.0 technologies, and the use of all possible resources of the World Wide Web (as well as new ICTs) in diplomatic practice. In other words, any foreign policy activity on the Internet will be "digital diplomacy", but not everyone can be called "public diplomacy 2.0" (but the only one that is connected with the use of Web 2.0 technologies).

From my point of view, the American researcher N. Cull made a serious contribution to the theoretical comprehension of public diplomacy in the Internet space, offering more accurate

and capacious term than "digital diplomacy". Unlike the latter, the term "public diplomacy 2.0" most accurately identifies the means by which foreign policy activities are carried out (exclusively Web 2.0 programs), indicates the interactivity of communication (using Web 2.0 programs implies feedback).

Investigating "public diplomacy 2.0", N. Cull (2011, p.125) highlights several inherent features of it. First, it is built on the ability of ICTs to facilitate the establishment of relationships within social networks and Internet communities. Secondly, it is dependent on user-generated content (from comments on social networks and blogs to uploaded videos and mashup applications). And finally, the third feature of "public diplomacy 2.0" is its functioning within the horizontal networks built on the exchange of information, rather than the transfer of information messages from the top down, as is typical for vertical networks in the era of traditional public diplomacy.

In the structure of "diplomacy 2.0" a number of key components are identified that can be found in traditional public diplomacy (Cull, 2011). First, it is the counting of public opinion (listening), which manifests itself in monitoring the feedback reaction of the audience to the information transmitted (the number of comments, tweets, likes, retweets, etc.) is tracked. Secondly, these are information campaigns to form a positive opinion in foreign countries (advocacy). (This component is actively used by virtually every state involved in this type of activity in order to justify its actions in the international arena.) The third important component is cultural diplomacy, which uses social media to convey information about cultural heritage of particular nation. For example, it is the activity of the Russian branch of the British Council in Facebook, which introduces the domestic audience not only to the specifics of learning English, but also to the cultural originality of British painting, literature, cinema, etc.

For modern politics, the fact that foreign ministries of different countries create their own accounts in social networks, microblogging services, in photo and video hosting has become the norm. Not only states seeking to play an important role in the international arena, but also countries with a rather modest economic and military potential, now resort to such a step. For example, Foreign Ministry of Ethiopia, Mongolia, Afghanistan have their own accounts in "Facebook". The number of subscribers to an account of a foreign ministry is also not always the same as their position in the existing system of international relations. For example, in the Facebook network, the audience of the Israeli Foreign Ministry account (437 thousand people) exceeds the amount of followers of official page of French Foreign Ministry (360 thousand people). As for the participation of individuals in the programs of "public diplomacy 2.0.", the most visible, as a rule, is the activity of representatives of the highest political leadership of various states. As a rule, they manage to collect a fairly large number of users in their accounts.

One of the most important subjects of "public diplomacy 2.0" (and in some countries, the key one) is mass media oriented to foreign audiences: TV channels, broadcasting companies, news agencies, print media, having accounts in social networks, microblogs, video hosting. Their work is especially noticeable during times of aggravation of the international situation, when they represent not only a tool for articulating the position of the state on a number of issues on the current agenda, but also the main means in "ideological" confrontation with competitors.

Analysis of the foreign policy efforts of different countries in the implementation of the programs of "public diplomacy 2.0" allows us to distinguish conventionally in this area of activity three areas: the placement of content on various hosting services (photohostings "Flickr", "Instagram", videohosting "YouTube", slideshosting "Slideshare" and Etc.); use of microblogging services ("Twitter", "Tumblr", "Sina Weibo"); placing information in social networks (Facebook,

Google+, Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, Tuenti, Second Life). Undoubtedly, among them the most popular foreign policy instruments are created in the US "YouTube", "Twitter" and "Facebook". Nevertheless, a number of countries are also trying to use other Web 2.0 programs to influence foreign audiences.

From the point of view of the American scientist D. Nye (2014), non-state actors, often possessing a higher level of confidence from the foreign audience, make an important contribution to the formation of the "soft power" of a country. This is because government-funded organizations are generally dependent on them politically and financially, which gives reason to doubt their impartiality to certain political events. Unfortunately, many countries underestimate the ability of non-governmental organizations to implement "public diplomacy 2.0" programs; still relying on the state's capabilities in this type of activity.

It should be noted that "public diplomacy 2.0" is a very promising direction within the framework of public diplomacy, whose significance in the foreign policy activity of states will only grow with time. The development of ICT and the growing popularity in the world of social media have actualized the need to use Web 2.0 technologies in diplomatic practice.

## **2.2. The Practice of Countries on Public Diplomacy 2.0**

The United States was one of the first countries to realize the importance of the Internet for promoting their own national interests abroad. Already since the 90's 20th century the US government seeks to directly appeal to a foreign Internet audience. So, in 1994 the radio station "Voice of America" has launched its own website, on which audio clips of programs broadcast on the air in 15 foreign languages, available to download for all people, were uploaded. In 1995, the US Information Agency followed its example, also creating an official Internet page whose content

was aimed at clarifying the foreign policy of the US government, understanding global problems of world politics, assessing economic changes in the world, familiarizing with the specifics of American society (including information on its political values and ideals).

Despite the potential of the Internet, its role in the implementation of foreign policy objectives of the United States until the early 2000s was very limited. Although this period of time is characterized by rather high growth rates of the number of users of the World Wide Web, nevertheless their number in some regions of the world (primarily in Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe) was significantly inferior to the US audience (the share of American citizens in 1995 was 62, 3%, and in 2000 - 31.3% of the total number of Internet users in the world).

By the mid-2000's the ability of the Internet to influence the foreign audience has increased dramatically, which was due to both serious transformations in the framework of public diplomacy and the rapid development of information and communication technologies (here and after - ICT). After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, traditional approaches to public diplomacy were rethought. Increasingly, experts were beginning to talk about the need to analyze public opinion abroad when conducting foreign policy of the state.

Xin Zhonga, Jiayi Lua (2013) investigated the practices of U.S. embassy public diplomatic communication via social media, blogging sites using Tencent for a case study. Results have shown that "American politics and society" such as human right, freedom and peace are the most discussed topics in the blogs and micro-blogs of the embassy. Foreign embassies in China are authoritative sources of information and, obviously, are primary envoys in traditional public diplomatic communication. However, a more personalized expression has acquired great importance in the new information environment; Now, Chinese-Americans and US diplomats in China are the most common sources of information about social networking platforms.

Experienced in writing in Chinese and keen on personal communication, these writers can avoid misunderstandings caused by linguistic differences, and their works resonate with the target audience, reflecting people's point of view of people. The authors suppose that the embassy manages blogs and micro-blog sites both in Tencent and Sina to cover the diversity of Chinese audiences, because Tencent is focused primarily on young people, and Sina is focused on the elite amore group. The embassy also created outreach blogs to reach audiences from second- and third tier- cities in China. In particular, the embassy suggests that the leaders of public opinion and public figures in the blogosphere will be the main target audiences.

China possesses a number of mass media assets that promote and express their point of view on policy and events (Simons, 2014). The People's Daily Online is one of those assets. It is available in Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, English, Arabic, Japanese and Korean. In addition to business and financial news, a number of topics appear at the top of the homepage including news, opinions, China military, foreign affairs, learn Chinese, China study and forum. A glance over the news offered tends to agree with the style of topics of Chinese PD that was described by Yang Jiechi (Yang, 2011, as cited in Simons, 2014). The format, content and purpose of the above are very similar. All seek to explain China's policy position and to promote Chinese language and culture. Web-based TV media have also been developed and provide another format for foreign audiences. Simons says that the Chinese efforts seem to be directed at the tasks of increasing foreign public awareness of China and its viewpoints, managing China's international reputation and altering foreign public attitudes towards China. During South China Sea, China tried to portray itself as a peaceful, constructive and progressive power. Instead of being presented as the aggressor in the South China Sea dispute, China is presented as taking a level-headed approach and defending its legitimate national interests. Specific mention is made of the US 'Pivot towards Asia' as

evidence of hidden geopolitical interests (People's Daily Online, 2014, as cited in Simons, 2014). The Chinese narrative and message follow the conceptual basis of China's strategic narratives in projecting itself as a country with peaceful intentions, seeking harmony, peace and mutually beneficial interactions, but still emphasizing its right to defend its interests, if necessary.

Steffen Rasmussen (2009) made an attempt to research a self- image of EU and what kind of images EU deliver to its citizens and foreign audience. The messages identified in the EU external policy communications strategy are therefore aimed to legitimize EU external policy, arguing for the value and the efficiency of its activities. A first group of messages responds to the question of 'why' the EU has a foreign policy in the first place. A second group of messages responds to the question of what the EU external policy is about. The argument is that the EU is effective in promoting stability, prosperity, democracy and human rights, and that it delivers concrete results in the fight to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development. The third cluster of messages seeks to explain how the EU acts externally through the support of regional integration and a rule-based international order, and works for multilateralism as a way of solving global problems. The theme of climate change is a good example of how internal haggling in the EU over emissions quotas and binding obligations does not necessarily hinder the EU and its member states from together transmitting the core EU messages on the topic: that climate change is a serious problem, that the EU is doing something about it, and that a multilateral approach is the only way forward.

# **CHAPTER III.**

## **RUSSIA'S MFA SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES AND ANALYSES**

Online communication within the sphere of public diplomacy provides an opportunity for Russia to try to offset its disadvantage in traditional global mass media assets and the ability to project its culture and message. Russia has placed itself within the global public diplomacy 'market' as being in opposition to the US-dominated West. This is especially relevant when it comes to trying to counter core nations' characterization of Russia through their production of news and information, and through attempts to counter those values and attitudes that are exported through core nation cultural and informational products.

There are a number of advantages of using online forms of communication to attract foreign citizens; this may include five elements of public diplomacy that were identified by Cull: listening, propaganda, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy (ideas in a virtual sense that can lead to real interactions) and international news broadcasts. Active audience participation allows to listen to the function, and to collect opinions and other data from the target audience. The propaganda function is obvious, whether in the field of politics or business, for example, investment in the Russian economy. Much of the effort is directed towards cultural diplomacy, propaganda and raising awareness of Russia's cultural heritage and resources. It is also perfectly suited to New Public Diplomacy, which includes aspects such as unofficial actors, an active and participatory public, and exchange- and dialogue-oriented, two-way symmetric communications.

Public perception and public opinion are key areas to cultivate in diplomacy, especially when it comes to the issue of contentious foreign policy. The following is a brief example of how Russian online public diplomacy assets are used to project coverage of world political events.

During analyses of social accounts of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of sampling period that there are three significant topics that are most frequently mentioned there: these are news coverage of Ukrainian crisis, Middle East and foreign public policies.

### **3.1. Russian's Positive Role in Ukrainian Crisis**

Russia has been subjected to much criticism concerning its actual and alleged actions and conduct in Ukraine, following the overthrow of the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and the civil war that is raging in Eastern Ukraine. Online platforms, such as news sites and social media, provide the means to engage foreign publics and put forward their message into the information sphere.

According to the Constitution of Russia (Article 86a), the direction of foreign policy is exercised by the President of the Russian Federation. For Vladimir Putin, politics in the post-Soviet space has always been of particular importance - and not only because the situation in countries in the immediate vicinity of Russia cannot be ignored. Back in 1994, the future president noted that in the process of the collapse of the USSR, "Russia in the interests of general security and peace in Europe voluntarily gave the former Soviet republics huge territories," including those that historically always belonged to it. As a result, 25 million Russians "suddenly" found themselves behind the Russian borders, and Russia, according to V. Putin, "simply cannot afford, even in the interests of security in Europe, that these people are left to their fate." (Polegkyi, 2011)

Later, already at the presidential post, Putin called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." He noted that for the Russian people, it has become a real drama. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and compatriots were outside the Russian territory. The epidemic of disintegration has also spread to Russia itself. In fact, the president views

the post-Soviet space as a fragmented "Russian world", which Russia has no right to forget about. (Polegkie, 2011)

Facebook posts dealing with Ukraine accounted for 45% of all posts analyzed. As was the case with its twitter account, the Ukrainian crisis was also the most frequently mentioned region on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Facebook page. One of the messages posted in social accounts is that Russia is part of the solution, rather than the problem, in Ukraine. For example, in the link that was posted along a new post, it was noted that 'Moscow is the only force calling for Donbass to remain part of Ukraine in resolving the crisis, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in an interview with Interfax' (Russia Beyond the Headlines, 2017). As it is known, the situation on the contact line in the Donbass continues to be very difficult. Two posts published during the sampling period capture an important facet of the new image Russia is promoting via its social media channels. Official rhetoric of Moscow on this occasion is distinguished by an increased level of rigidity, in places passing into a very ambiguous irony. The first post, published on the 8th of December included a remark by Russian president's spokesman that the Kremlin is not engaged in "counting ammunition" from the militia, but only hopes that "they will have enough ammunition to respond to the aggressive actions of the Ukrainian armed forces." The key points of the voiced position of the Russian Foreign Minister that were mentioned are the following:

- First, the imposition of full responsibility for the current military exacerbation on the Ukrainian side. At the same time, it is stressed that to a large extent, the volunteer battalions provoked an escalation, which, in fact, are not subject to the armed forces of Ukraine.
- Secondly, it is not just a distanced, but rather contemptuous attitude towards the Kiev authorities, which was expressed in the comment about the lack of intentions of Sergei

Lavrov to appeal to the conscience of his Ukrainian colleague Pavel Klimkin (and other representatives of the Ukrainian authorities).

The second post published a week later included Sergey Lavrov's opening remarks during his interview with Russia Today. Lavrov stated that although contacts with the new US administration have already begun, officials of the State Department, with whom it will be possible to discuss the situation in Ukraine, have not yet been appointed. Kremlin openly criticize the current situation over Ukraine as the project suggested by EU and the USA, which has shown in recent years its futility, which only draws finance, but does not bring any benefits. Moscow will solve the Ukrainian problem at its discretion. Decentralization will be the instrument of decision.

In the other posts and tweets there were references to the need for the Ukrainian authorities to respect differences in culture and identity. Official representatives of Russia invariably insisted on a ceasefire in the conflict zone and the transition to negotiations, turning these appeals precisely to Kiev. Thus, Russia's new image is committed to dialogue with its partners on the basis of shared respect. This new image of Russia was best demonstrated by Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov, who was quoted in a post from the 12th November saying that Russia is a constructive actor in Ukrainian conflict and that diplomacy should be a first transformational tool for all participants during next negotiations.

### **3.2. Russia as a Peacemaker in the Arab World**

The second theme that identified in social media accounts is Russian policy in the Middle East. Arab and Muslim countries mentioned on Facebook included Syria, Iran. The most frequent country was Syria as Russia actively participates in a conflict. Russia's military intervention in the

Syrian conflict strengthened Moscow's position in the world arena. From the very beginning of the Syrian conflict, Russia has formed a multi-level political, diplomatic and military network to protect the regime, and has also tried to impose its own vision of the conflict.

Moscow officially acts on the side of the government of Syria led by President Bashar Assad. Russia supplies arms to government troops, supports them with air strikes and renders diplomatic assistance to the Syrian government at the UN and at international peace talks. In October 2015, the Russian Air Force created first strikes against targets in Syria after the Federation Council approved the use of Russian aviation abroad. The Kremlin claims that in Syria, Russia is fighting a "Islamic state" and other terrorist Islamist groups. US officials have repeatedly refuted this claim, arguing that Russian air strikes are directed mainly against insurgent groups not associated with the IG, but with the belligerents of Assad. Moscow wants to preserve the power of Bashar Assad, his closest ally in the Middle East, and to strengthen his military influence in the region. In Syria, Russia has two military bases: an airbase in the western province of Latakia near the country's main port and a naval base in the Syrian port city of Tartus.

The Russian government supports a peace agreement between the Syrian moderate factions in Syria that would allow Assad to remain in power. Russia also showed its readiness to support the limited autonomy of the opposition forces in some regions of Syria. Russia supports the Geneva talks on Syria and is one of the organizers of negotiations between the Syrian government and the opposition, which started in Astana in January 2017. This theme includes posts and tweets in October that mentions that Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the Russian Federation would be the organizer of another round of talks in Sochi, scheduled for November 18. The main topic of this meeting was the discussion of the new constitution of Syria.

On November 15<sup>th</sup>, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs tweeted that Russia reiterates its firm commitment to Russia-US agreements regarding the cessation of hostilities in Syria, and is ready to work with its partners with a view to reinforcing the truce, providing humanitarian access to the Syrian population that needs it, holding sustainable negotiations in Geneva for shaping a new, single, sovereign and secular Syria and providing for a peaceful and legal transition.

Once again, Russian call for international and regional forces was posted on December 20<sup>th</sup> that can influence the parties to the Syrian conflict to use this influence to reach a settlement in Syria, and help the Syrians achieve concrete results based on mutual respect.



Russian government portrays itself as a peacemaker in this region. On October 18<sup>th</sup>, there was a post about meeting with ambassadors from Qatar and Fatah Central Committee Secretary General. It is mentioned that Russia is highly interested in Palestinian-Israel conflict settlement. The Russian representative also discussed the current issues in the Middle East with Qatar Ambassador, focusing on the evolving situation with Syria, Iraq and the Persian Gulf.

### 3.3. Projection of Foreign Publics

Russia views itself as a rising power and portrays the Western reaction to its assertive actions abroad as a strategy to contain Russia's rise. There are some different messages, in addition to the positive role played by Russia, to project to foreign publics. Tweets dealing with foreign governments diplomacy accounted for 15% of all tweets analyzed while Facebook posts dealing with such issues accounted for 25% of all posts analyzed. One of them was that the United States is the 'puppet master', controlling other countries and blocks (such as the EU) in order to do its bidding. The message of "evil" America was posted on 4<sup>th</sup> of October. It is stated that the USA has attempted to impose sanctions on Russia more than fifty times. Having failed to achieve any result in the previous 50 sanctions rounds, Washington continues to frighten rejections of American visas, threatens Russian business with freezing property and financial assets. "We are witnessing the re-birth of America: in the United States, more and more, they renounce what they themselves have been extolling as the fundamental "American values." Even the seizure of diplomatic objects belonging to Russia not only became a gross violation of international norms, but also showed that once sacred property for Americans became an empty phrase. The post is written with sarcasm calling all these actions degradation of American diplomacy. Another post that posted one month later is up to current tendency of projecting America and its diplomacy with criticism. Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned that no pressure measures will curtail Russia from the chosen course. They only demonstrate the inability of the United States to achieve its goals and consolidate Russian society.

American democracy is obviously in decline. The US simply hopes to maintain its global hegemony by all means, in particular, by exerting pressure on countries that pursue independent policies and express opinions that are at odds with those of Washington's NATO allies.

As we have noted repeatedly, no pressure will divert Russia from its course. It merely reveals the inability of the US to achieve its goals and helps to rally Russian society.

They have no intention to abandon the current and any new anti-Russian attack without a hard response. However, they would like to advise Washington to get rid of illusions that Russia can be spoken with the language of sanctions.

Russian projection of the United States as an “evil master” was the most frequent among all foreign governments mentions. It includes comments on various political steps made by American diplomacy. For example, the post from 7<sup>th</sup> of September includes statement by speaker of Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mariia Zakharova on raiders by FBI to diplomatic consulates on the territory of America. She said that representatives of US law enforcement agencies conduct unknown works on the territory of the Consulate General of Russia in San Francisco, spoil expensive parquet, and run without permission and “most importantly, who are these people who behave like raiders, nobody knows”.

The constructive role of Russia versus the destructive effect of the West is emphasized in many posts through these three months. For example, some of them urges the West not to wait for Russia to resolve the Ukraine crisis single-handed. The news also emphasized the positive role of Russia and the negative role of the West in Ukraine. This message is likely to appeal to publics that would like to see US and Western global hegemony challenged. Simultaneously, there is a projection of unstable nature of the Kyiv regime, by emphasizing the radical statements of

individuals. One example used was a former ‘volunteer battalion’ leader who became a Member of Parliament in Ukraine, who threatened to carry out acts of terrorism in Russia. The message was likely intended to create the effect of alarming civic- and liberal-minded publics, and to affect the perceptions of legitimacy and therefore support for the Kyiv authorities. (taking public diplomacy online). The other post that was posted on 5<sup>th</sup> of November includes citations of official representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mariia Zakharova. During her briefing with foreign media she stated that Kiev “kills” Minsk agreements. The Parliament of Ukraine adopted the presidential bill on the reintegration of Donbass, in which the Russian Federation is called an "aggressor." According to the law, the territories of Donbass that are not controlled by Kiev are recognized as "occupied". The document excluded the item on the priority significance of the implementation of the Minsk agreements for the settlement of the conflict. She noted the paradox of the situation in which the Russian side is constantly being reproached for not fulfilling the Minsk agreements, and "at the same time, Kiev is killing Minsk agreements, doing everything so that there will be no stone left on them.”

The idea of an OSCE policing mission armed with heavy weapons is obviously Mr Poroshenko's latest “know-how.” Such a mission does not exist, not even in UN peacekeeping practice. We hope that by “heavy weapons,” this “president of peace,” as he has referred to himself, does not mean nuclear missiles or other weapons of mass destruction.

Other satiric mentions of Kiev policies towards Russia include the post in which speaker of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Maria Zakharova compared the expulsion of a correspondent of NTV television channel Vyacheslav Nemyshev from Ukraine with witch-hunting. She said that it is like a medieval witch hunt, taken from the street simply by a call and at the request of some

citizen, whom he did not like. She stressed that from the Ukrainian side it is undiplomatic. Another mention of Ukrainian policy includes remarks by Russian representative about the president of Ukraine Petr Poroshenko's remarks to arm OSCE with heavy weapons. Poroshenko is satirically addressed as a "president of peace" and his idea as "know-how".



## **CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION**

The importance of a positive image of the state for the effective upholding of its interests, progressive development and building mutually beneficial partnership relations in the international arena at the moment can hardly cause anyone to doubt. At the same time, the importance of the image as an effective and even necessary instrument for the realization of state interests in today's increasingly complex world continues to grow steadily.

### **4.1. Findings of the Study**

For more than two decades, national branding has attracted researchers from various fields, such as marketing, communications, public relations and international research. Nations have its own images. From time to time, nations can even have competing images, as Russia may be an “aggressor” and a “peacekeeper”. However, when a certain image of the nation prevails, it becomes more difficult to change (Kotler & Gertner 2002; Gudjonsson 2005). Using branding technologies to change the image and reputation of a nation is the very essence of national branding.

One of the tasks of public diplomacy is precisely the formation of a positive image of the state abroad, can be considered as an extremely useful tool for foreign policy activity. This direction of public diplomacy can also be used to discredit geopolitical competitors in the international arena or as a means of articulating one's own position on a wide range of issues on the current agenda in the context of "information wars." For modern politics, the fact that foreign ministries of different countries create their own accounts in social networks, microblogging services, in photo and video hosting has become the norm. Not only states seeking to play an

important role in the international arena, but also countries with a rather modest economic and military potential, now resort to such a step.

In this thesis it was attempted to investigate what images are promoted by Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in contrast to foreign media. In this work it is tried to fill the gap and extend nation branding to SNS. Moreover, it is believed that nation branding delivered through social media can alter the image of country.

It was chosen to focus on Russia because of continuing criticism worldwide about Russian foreign policies. The Ukrainian crisis in which Russia is largely involved gave birth to a huge wave of information war of the West against Russia, which is increasingly called the "new cold war". Attacks on the image of Russia are very frank and aggressive: it is impossible to count the number of accusations of imperialism, militarism and expansion towards Russia.

The problem of building a positive image of Russia abroad is very important. For the first time the issue of forming a positive political image of the country was raised on June 28, 2000 in the Foreign Policy Concept. Given his negative image, it is assumed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would be absorbed in an attempt to change the image of Russia around the world. Moreover, given the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia has quite active accounts in social media, it is assumed that tweets and reports published within three months will provide sufficient data for the analysis of images promoted by Russia.

This study was aimed to investigate the manner in which Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs employs social media in their image building activities. The study also demonstrates that analyzing public diplomacy content enables one to identify the national image being promoted. It aimed to identify the main themes of social media accounts of Russian foreign ministry in Facebook and Twitter. This analysis was qualitative, and thematic analysis was used to identify

significant themes in all Facebook publications and tweets published during sampling period on the English Facebook and Twitter accounts of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The analysis of social media accounts of Russian MFA has revealed three main themes. The first was Russia's attempt to tell the audience about its positive role in Ukrainian crisis. During the sampling period, Ukraine was the most frequently mentioned region in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Facebook and Twitter accounts. The high visibility of this region and the frequent mentioning of Minsk agreements and situation over Donbass serves to demonstrate that settlement of this crisis has been important for Russian government and its foreign policy goal.

The second theme was also frequently seen in through the posts in Facebook and Twitter account along with Ukrainian crisis. Second theme includes instances in which Russia attempted to regain its reputation as a world peacemaker. An important component of this theme was the attempt by Russian government to rebrand itself as a beacon of democracy by settling Syrian conflict and other issues in the Middle East.

The third theme that was identified in social media account by Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is its attempt to project other countries' policy versus Russian one. Russian government tries to deliver to the world a portrait of America as a "puppet master" in contrast to "peacekeeper" itself. America's and Ukrainian's foreign policies were the most frequently mentioned in this topic. Moreover, posts that include criticism about foreign countries and its policy towards Russia, such as imposing new sanctions, blocking Russia's initiatives on the world arena were satirically written. For example, the president of Ukraine Petr Poroshenko was called "president of peace". FBI agents were accused of spoiling an expensive parquet during its unexpected raiders to Russian consulate in San Francisco.

In summary, it is found out that Russia tries to rebrand itself as a peacemaker that plays a very constructive role in world conflict settlements. Moreover, in attempting to rebrand itself, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia projects other countries' foreign policies in contrast to itself. Russia' image is delivered as to be committed to democracy and building meaningful relationships with other countries. Interestingly, there was one element that can be seen across all themes and that is Russia as a part of global community. It is believed that Russia is currently attempting to take its place in the international community regardless its disputable policy decisions. This was made evidence by Russian involvement in Syrian war.

These elements are undoubtedly not new as Russia has always tried to take its place on the world arena. But with developing of Internet and digital diplomacy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia has a chance to reach a larger audience. By engaging with its global audiences, and listening to their comments and criticism, Russia can further evaluate whether its nation branding campaigns are effective and if not, identify which elements have been rejected by followers. Further research can be aimed to investigate account audiences' reaction and their interactivity to consider Russian digital diplomacy's effectiveness in social networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

## **4.2. Limitations & Suggestions**

As noted by Johansen within the political marketing context, the product is only the facilitator of value – the real value is found in the relationship and interactions created. The products in this sense are websites and social media content, and the real value is found when a relationship is formed between the viewer/user and the communicator, especially when the

viewer/user comments on, likes or shares content. The number of people ‘following’ and ‘liking’ the various sites noted demonstrates significant growth in many cases. This study interest is focused on what images Russia itself tries to promote. As it seems very difficult to identify Facebook and Twitter interactions as positive and negative reactions because of specific nature of news that are posted in social media accounts, a new research system should be developed for further research. Future studies can be focused on examining the extent to which engagement takes place between ministries and their followers as well as their interactivity and how they are tailored and understood by local audiences.

This study is also limited by time period. That period of time was chosen because it is noticed that Russian diplomatic efforts have been intensified on a global scale due information confrontation with the United States of America, escalation of Syrian conflict and continuous negotiations over Minsk agreements and Ukrainian crisis.

While public diplomacy may represent a conceptual shift in the practice of nation branding, its effectiveness remains unknown. Future studies should examine the extent to which local and international audiences accept nations' branding. Barriers to such acceptance may be the belief that social media content published by foreign ministries is nothing more than propaganda. Likewise, studies should evaluate the effectiveness of nation branding campaigns delivered through SNS as opposed to those delivered through traditional media (e.g., print, television). It is also of paramount importance to examine whether engagement and listening do indeed challenge people's stereotypes regarding certain countries, and whether engagement on SNS with a foreign diplomat is tantamount to a personal encounter with someone from a foreign country. Finally, nation branding research should evaluate whether countries have been able to associate their brand with certain values by using public diplomacy.

Despite the fact that in the last decade and a significant amount of work has been done by the Russian authorities to form a state image abroad, it is worth noting that the fact that the goal is far from being achieved. Moreover, the image of the Russian Federation by the eyes of the international community is estimated by some experts rather as a negative (Simons, 2017). Undoubtedly, work in this direction should be intensified.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to assess whether Russia has been successful in altering its global image, such an assessment can be made by social media directors at both the embassy and ministry level. Doing so necessitates that operators of digital diplomacy accounts continuously monitor the manner in which nation branding messages are received and further disseminated by their online followers.

An important direction of activity at the moment has been working on the Internet. The creation of the accounts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia in Twitter and Facebook allowed to improve communications between ministry and audience to a considerable extent, to ensure the speediness of information exchange, which increased the efficiency of messages, more importantly, from the point of view of creating a positive image of the state. It made information more accessible for people, both in Russia and abroad.

Such a concept, according to the image communication scheme, should define the message (the desired "image"), the addressee, the addressee (or all actors), the code, the communication channel and the result. Each of these components is extremely important and can be of great importance in the final result of the implementation of the entire program for the formation of a positive image of the state.

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