The image of Syria in the world media, and its impact on the implementation of the anti-crisis strategy

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Abstract: the article presents an analysis of the image of Syria in the world's leading media (for example, the British, Chinese and Russian media). The need for such an analysis is due to the fact that based on the results obtained, it will be possible to predict the effectiveness of the implementation of the developed anti-crisis strategy of Syria. The results of the study reflect the degree of awareness of the general population about the events of Syria, as well as the tonality of publications about the country. The calculations revealed trends in the level of interest in the country, as well as the ratio of positive and negative information about it in the media. The predicted values of the analyzed data were calculated and recommendations were made on the introduction of the anti-crisis strategy of Syria (on its revision).

1. Introduction

The country's image reflects its investment attractiveness and consists of two components:

1. Quantitative – determining the frequency of references to Syria in the flow of news messages, which reflects the degree of awareness of it in the general population.

2. Qualitative – determining the tonality of publications about the country (Syria).

The quantitative and qualitative components of the image are determined in the context of different media and time periods using the method of content analysis and special services.

The relevance of the study of the image of Syria at the moment is high, because the government has developed an anti-crisis strategy aimed at rebuilding the country after a period of destruction of many sectors of the economy under the influence of the military-political crisis. The main stake in the anti-crisis strategy was made by the Syrian government on the development of the leisure industry (tourism industry).

In order to study the formation of the image of the country (Syria) in the leading media to determine the effectiveness of the anti-crisis strategy, we select the hypothesis.

Hypothesis: "the perception of Syria as a tourist country will allow implementing the anti-crisis strategy with the greatest efficiency."

Objective: to determine the image of Syria in the media.

Research Objectives:
1) to identify the number of references to Syria in the main search engines of the Internet;
2) determine the topic of the population’s requests for Syria, calculate the proportion of negative and positive requests;
3) calculate the number of references to Syria in the leading media of the world, Russia and Syria for specific semantic units;
4) to analyze the tonality of the text of the leading media about Syria;
5) to predict further mention of Syria in the media selected for research;
6) to draw a conclusion about the image of Syria on the basis of information provided about the state in various media and evaluate the effectiveness or inefficiency of the development and implementation of an anti-crisis strategy.

2. Materials and Methods
The procedure for studying the formation of the image of Syria in the leading world media will be implemented using content analysis.

The method of content analysis, which is used by modern analysts and experts, is often used not only to study the phenomena of mass communication, but also to determine the objectives of the strategy for promoting a particular product (service, industry, region, country, etc.). Its effectiveness is higher, the more studied data of the same order.

The main procedures for content analysis are reduced to the identification of semantic units. Semantic units can be represented as:
- concepts or terms;
- characters;
- thoughts and opinions;
- topics formulated in articles, texts, radio and television programs;
- names and surnames of people;
- facts and events;
- characters and heroes, etc.

Semantic units are distinguished by experts conducting content analysis according to the following rules:
1) firstly, the semantic unit must correspond to the purpose of the study. If this is the image of the country, then it should contain the name of the country and the main events that form the image (a set of associative events, themes, heroes, influential personalities, etc.);
2) secondly, the semantic unit must correspond to the objectives of the study. If, when studying the country's image, the task was set of determining the attitude to it formed in the media, it is necessary to distribute it into several categories. For example, to compose a set of topics with a positive and negative meaning;
3) thirdly, the semantic unit must correspond to the hypothesis. If, when studying the country's image, there is a hypothesis that it has a negative image, then it is necessary to focus on this statement, highlighting subtopics in topics with a negative meaning.

The semantic units will be indicators of the ideas outlined in the study.

Further, in order to study the image of Syria, we consider the review of its events in the press of the world media. For analysis, several world media were selected, access to which is available from Russia:
- The Guardian – UK daily [7];
- China Daily – the Chinese daily political newspaper [6];
- The Independent is a UK daily newspaper [8].

3. Results
The goal is to study the number of references to Syria in the indicated sources, including references with semantic positive and negative load. In table 1. data on the frequency of references to Syria in the three designated world media included in the TOP-10 are presented.
Table 1. The frequency of references to Syria in the world media.

| The media       | 2012   | 2013   | 2014   | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   | 2018   | 2019   |
|-----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| The Guardian    | 1587   | 111017 | 347700 | 1286490| 2058384| 1348358| 1321920| 1224000|
| including       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| negative load   | 1445   | 99915  | 316407 | 1144976| 1790794| 1132621| 1123632| 1022040|
| China Daily     | 432    | 7560   | 11120  | 25789  | 24589  | 21110  | 22700  | 25585  |
| including       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| negative load   | 398    | 7100   | 10290  | 22950  | 18110  | 11243  | 8720   | 5427   |
| The Independent | 957    | 63046  | 166046 | 251586 | 279540 | 264474.04| 261080| 244000 |
| including       |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
| negative load   | 937    | 56741  | 146120 | 218800 | 229230 | 211580 | 187977 | 153720 |

The semantic negative load refers to the number of references to the following text units – “war in Syria”, “crisis in Syria”.

Using a special resource (http://eurekaengine.ru), you can confirm the presence of negative tonality in the texts.

For example, in one of The Guardian’s latest articles, “Fighting continues on Syria-Turkey border as war crimes alleged”, based on the emotional emphasis on the Syria topic, the authors mentioned about the country:
- 6 times – neutral;
- 2 times – negatively.
Tonality of the text: negative +2.

In a November 2019 article by The Independent, “Everything you were told about the Syrian war was wrong – until now,” the authors mentioned Syria:
- 5 times positive;
- 4 times negative;
- 4 times neutral.
Tonality of the text: positive +2.

In view of which it can be noted that the tonality of the text when highlighting the theme "Syria" is positive. However, positive articles constitute a minority of the total.

In a recent China Daily article, “Challenges before final peace in Syria,” about Syria, the authors mention:
- 6 times positive;
- 4 times negative;
- 6 times neutral.
Tonality of the text: positive +1.

In view of which it can be noted that the tonality of the text when highlighting the theme "Syria" is positive. Their number in the Chinese media is higher than in the media of other states.

Based on Table 2, it is possible to build the predictive value of references to Syria in the future by the British media, including in a negative aspect. Fig. 1. A graph of the construction of forecast values is displayed, where the period 2012-2014 was excluded in order to eliminate the effect of distortion of current data.
Figure 1. Building forecast values for media coverage in the UK about Syria.

The graph shows that the number of mentions of Syria to the British media will be reduced in future periods to 1563058 in 2020 (of which 1,034,942 – negative references) to 1,473,550 in 2021 (of which 1,024,098 – negative references).

Fig. 2. Predictive values of mentioning the Syrian topic in the Chinese media are built. The periods of 2012-2014 are also excluded here in order to eliminate distortions of current data.

Figure 2. The construction of forecast values of the mention in the media of China about Syria.

The graph shows that the number of mentions of Syria in the Chinese media will be reduced in future periods to 23265 in 2020 (of which 4410 – negative references) to 23036 in 2021 (of which 3336 – a negative reference).

Further, in order to study the image of Syria, we consider a review of its events in the Russian press using the example of the Gazeta.ru resource.

The goal is to study the number of mentions of Syria in Gazeta.ru, including references with semantic positive and negative load. In table 2, data on the frequency of references to Syria in Gazeta.ru are presented [9,3].
Table 2. The frequency of references to Syria in Gazeta.ru.

| Indicators                                | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| The total number of references to "Syria"| 2634 | 1884 | 1429 | 4495 | 6530 | 5221 | 3911 | 2105 |
| Mention of the "war in Syria"             | 203  | 350  | 203  | 500  | 779  | 607  | 552  | 387  |
| Mention of the "crisis in Syria"          | 108  | 125  | 122  | 382  | 517  | 375  | 230  | 155  |
| Mention of "tourism in Syria"             | 1    | 9    | 2    | 32   | 21   | 25   | 13   | 8    |
| Mentions of "rest in Syria"               | 2    | 6    | 3    | 29   | 22   | 17   | 9    | 9    |

The table shows that the positive image of Syria is analyzed by studying the data of such semantic units as “tourism in Syria” and “vacation in Syria”. The negative image of Syria is analyzed by studying the semantic units “war in Syria” and “crisis in Syria”.

From the table it follows that the interest in the topic of “Syria” in the Russian media has decreased in 2017, with the trend in 2019 was preserved. The same is observed in the frequency of references to the war and crisis in Syria. Mention of tourism and leisure in Syria in the period from 2012 to 2019 held a low proportion of the total amount of information about Syria. The proportion of negative and positive characteristics is displayed by years in Table 3.

It follows from the table that the Russian press discusses more negative events in Syria, while in 2019 they amounted to more than a quarter of the total amount of information posted in Gazeta.ru about Syria.

Table 3. Percentage of negative and positive characteristics of Syria in Gazeta.ru, %.

| Indicators                                | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| The proportion of negative characteristics| 11,81 | 25,21 | 22,74 | 19,62 | 19,85 | 18,81 | 19,99 | 25,75 |
| The proportion of positive characteristics| 0,11  | 0,80  | 0,35  | 1,36  | 0,66  | 0,80  | 0,56  | 0,81  |

Using a special resource we characterize the tonality in the texts. For example, in a recent article Gazeta.ru, "The armed conflict in Syria – a miniature model of a third world war," the authors of the country was mentioned in the article:

- 5 times – neutral;
- 2 times – negatively.

Tonality of the text: negative – 2.

Figure 3. Predicted values for mentioning the Syrian topic in the Russian media are built.
It follows from the graph that the number of references to Syria in Gazeta.ru will decrease in future periods from 2232 in 2020 (of which 508 are negative references) to 1492 in 2021 (of which 389 are negative references).

Next, we compare the number of references to positive and negative events that characterize Syria in the Syrian newspaper Tishreen. In table 4, data are presented on the frequency of references in the Syrian press about military and crisis events, as well as on leisure and tourism in Syria [11,4].

Table 4. Frequency of references to positive and negative events in Syria in the Tishreen newspaper.

| Indicators                        | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| The number of references to positive events | 12   | 33   | 48   | 117  | 211  | 243  | 465  | 579  |
| The number of references to negative events | 256  | 378  | 899  | 1980 | 2356 | 2117 | 1190 | 859  |

The table shows that the Syrian media do not observe such a high difference between negative and positive events in 2019. Their structure can be displayed in Fig. 4.

The graph shows that the situation began to improve in 2018 – the positive tone in the country's news reviews increased, and in 2019 this trend continued.

Fig. 5. Predicted values of the number of mentions of information of a different nature about Syria in the Tishreen newspaper were built. Data from 2012-2014 is not used so as not to distort current trends.

It follows from the graph that the number of negative references to Syria in Tishreen will decrease in future periods from 677 in 2020 to 335 in 2021, and the number of positive references will increase from 676 in 2020 to 794 in 2021.

Figure 4. The structure of the tonality of information about Syria in the Syrian media, %.

Figure 5. The construction of forecast values of the mention in the Syrian media of negative and positive events.
4. Discussion
In table 5. Let us present generalized data of the analysis of the image of Syria.

Table 5. The formation of the image of Syria in the leading media.

| Indicators      | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|-----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| The world's media | Frequency of references | 2976 | 181623 | 524866 | 156386 | 523625 | 13 | 163394 | 2 | 160570 | 85 | 149658 |
|                 | tonality | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Russian media   | Frequency of references | 2634 | 1884 | 1429 | 4495 | 6530 | 5221 | 3911 | 2105 | 2232 | 1492 |
|                 | tonality | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | + |
| Syrian media    | Frequency of references | 268 | 411 | 947 | 2097 | 2567 | 2360 | 1655 | 1438 | 1353 | 1129 |
|                 | tonality | - | - | - | - | - | - | -/+ | -/+ | + | + | + | + |

In general, we can summarize that:
- the frequency of references to Syria in the world's leading media (UK and China) in the forecast periods will increase in 2020, with a gradual decrease in interest in 2021. The tonality is negative (negative value), which will continue in the next 2 years;
- the frequency of references to Syria in the Russian media in forecast values will increase in 2020, but will decrease sharply in 2021. The tonality of the data is negative (negative value), but in the next 2 years may change towards a positive value;
- the frequency of references to events in Syria (semantic units) will be reduced in the forecast data, while the positive tonality will prevail over the negative.

5. Summary
During the study of the image of Syria in the world media, the following conclusions were drawn:

1) The image of Syria on the basis of requests in the Yandex system is evaluated negatively: the state where military and military operations take place.

2) The data obtained by the Google system indicate that the image of Syria is evaluated negatively: the state where hostilities are taking place.

3) According to the results of a study of world media, the image of Syria is negative, the country's image is determined by such characteristics as “country is a war zone”, “crisis country”, etc. There is practically no information in the world media about the positive aspects of Syria.

4) The positive image of Syria appears only in the local newspapers of Syria, and the trend of such dynamics is increasing. The number of semantic units “vacation in Syria”, “tourism development” almost doubles in 2018-2019 compared to previous data.

Recommendation: the image of Syria as a provider of tourism services or a vacation spot is practically formed only at the state level (inside Syria). In general, Syria remains a state with a tense situation, where there are military conflicts and other crisis phenomena. In view of which, the Syrian government needs to adjust the anti-crisis program, strengthening measures to promote information on tourism and leisure in Syria in the world media. Only after such events can a positive effect be expected from the implementation of the anti-crisis strategy.
6. References

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