

“The Portrayal of Russia in US Media Following the 2016 Election Hacking Scandal”

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For the past year, “the U.S. media has followed the story of Russia’s interference in the 2016 Presidential election—and the question of possible collusion between figures close to Donald Trump and the Kremlin—with vigor, intensity, and the deployment of an extraordinary amount of newsroom resources” (Yaffa 2017). Such an intense coverage leads to the question of what kind of images of Russia are created for readers in the United States and which existing stereotypes are reinforced.

Existing research on Russia’s image in US media mainly focuses on the American film industry (Heller 2005, Goering and Krause 2006, Katchanovski 2007). While there is some recent research on Russian stereotypes in US print and/or online media (Moscovici 2008, Bolshakova 2016) the majority of research centers around general foreign policy relations between the US and Russia and its historical roots (Fuller 1992, Snyder 1994, Leichtova 2014, Ringmar 2002, Trenin 2016, Tsygankov 2009).

Since the US coverage of the election hacking scandal is a recent and even current topic, little empirical research has been done on the academic level to look at reoccurring images in the print/online media in connection with Russia and the US election hacking.

The US Media outlet The New Yorker (Yaffa 2017) and the Russian outlet Meduza (**Kashin** 2017) have both published an article about Russian journalists’ opinion on the US coverage of the election hacking scandal. The concern and criticism from the Russian side shows that there is a need to take a closer, systematic look at how Russia is really portrayed in this context.

As a theoretical framework this master thesis will entail theories of media effects and stereotype research. As part of conceptual preliminary considerations the state of Russian-US relations and other election hacking scandals before the key event will be analyzed.

To get a deeper understanding of the effect and perception of the coverage, Russian and US experts will be interviewed in a qualitative manner before performing the quantitative content analysis of the US media coverage.

The content analysis will focus on the coverage of 3-5 major US daily newspapers after the election hacking scandal (the exact amount of outlets and the time frame still has to be determined).

By providing insight into the US portrayal of this current issue which is shaping US-Russian relations, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions both actors have of each other.

This master thesis will be defended in June 2018 in front of the evaluation panel of the School of Journalism and Mass Communications of the St. Petersburg State University.

Preliminary results of the study are to be presented at the International scientific conference of students, graduate students and young scientists "Lomonosov-2018" in April 2018.

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