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COUNTRY IMAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS: CASE CURRENT US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

This paper is devoted to the effects of country image on contemporary US-Russian relations. This is an attempt to apply the results of joint project (University of Florida and Lobachevski University) to the analysis of US-Russian bilateral relations in a broader sense as well as combine tourist management and political science methods and literature. The relationships between the U.S. and Russia have been steadily deteriorating in the last five years. The amount of negative coverage of both countries in Russian and American media and social networks has been gradually increasing for the last few years, starting with the Magnitsky Act and the Dima Yakovlev Law in 2012 and culminating over the events of political crisis in Ukraine, operation in Syria, economic sanctions towards Russia. Media and social networks, as well as rhetoric of official agencies of both countries reflect the growing levels of national pride and mutual animosity. We believe that foreign policy has become a special and independent type of social activity. Economic relations, economic integration, humanitarian relations (education, culture, science, tourism, etc.) are an important part of foreign policy today. Thus, country image does matter.

Keywords: US-Russian relations, country image, perceptions, animosity.

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Introduction

There doesn't exist any universally accepted understanding of such notion as *the outside world* in the national consciousness of a given country. Experts usually highlight such things as dynamic interaction of images and associations as well as stereotypes and attitudes. In various periods of the bilateral relations between the Russian and the United States of America both countries have been forced to clarify the specific features of their own identities. But in case of Russia it happens when its traditional regulatory systems are under pressure from a "foreign" system of values. Both societies are characterized by adaptive capabilities with regard to cultural interventions and twists of fate. But unlike in the United States, the Russian society preserves a predominantly "non-economic" nature of social interactions. Studying the depths of the collective consciousness of Russians and Americans, the perceptions that they have of each other help us to answer the questions: "How can we build relations? How can we find the balance between the rational and the emotional in the political decision-making process?'

For example, in Russia the country's growing self-identification as a Eurasian state has led to the appearance of the Eurasian Regional Power strategy, that is, we are witnessing a strong support of multilateral diplomacy. Russia is looking forward to repositioning itself within Eurasia. After a period of zigzagging between western and eastern values, a new idea is starting to dominate Russian domestic and foreign policy – a kind of striving towards a synthesis of cultures. Over recent years Russia has significantly shown itself as an actor willing to shape a different agenda of world order. Russia has not only demonstrated its ability to survive in the light of of sanctions and partial isolation, but is also implementing active foreign policy thus, protecting its national interests. Today we can see certain values that form the basis for the formulation of a new agenda. Moscow is talking not only about interests but values. This is a new dimension of Russia's foreign policy that has an impact on Russia's image. Russia's choice today is traditional values [7]. Complicated historical development of both countries have influenced the perceptions of the USA in Russia and Russia in the USA.

Russia and the United States have both experienced periods of partial isolation but timing was different. Several times Washington has made attempts to conduct isolationist foreign policy. The American society has long and strong isolationist tradition. Russia's development was even more complicated. After the Mongol invasion the Russian state was isolated from the rest of the world for more than two centuries. Ironically, the well-known sense of cultural closeness that the people of Russia felt towards Europe, coupled with the desire to find a path of development for the country that was its own [3]. As a result, it is officially recognized that the

identity of Russia is solidly linked to the Christian frame of reference in its Orthodox version. President Putin tends to actively demonstrate his commitment to precisely this vision of Russia's identity.

In 2008 in the Foreign Policy Doctrine Russia for the first time officially declared its strong commitment to developing the inter-civilizational dialogue. In February 2013 President Vladimir Putin signed the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation where we can find new principles of Russian foreign policy – increasing significance of cultural and civilizational dimensions in global competition today.

Dr. Douglas MacDonald describes two American basic traditions concerning, for example, value projection as an instrument of foreign policy: the Jeffersonian idea that the United States should, when possible, serve as an active agent for the spread of democratic values in the world, and the Washingtonian idea that US should serve as a model for the rest of the world by developing democracy at home, not by taking actions to foster it abroad. Since Woodrow Wilson's presidency American foreign policy has had many examples of active attempts to promote democratic values: Wilson's war to "make the world safe for democracy" by ending autarchy, Franklin Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms," and the value-laden rhetoric and policies of the Cold War presidents such as Harry Truman, John Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. Then Clinton's strategy of Promoting Democracy, George W. Bush's "Global War on Terror". In his speeches President Obama was an idealist. But as D. Trump (the then Presidential candidate) said idealism of the values Obama voiced totally contradicted the interests of the United States of America.

Not surprisingly, there has been much controversy between the two schools over the periodic attempts to actively promote democracy. Scholars can give a lot of examples when it is hard to define the driving force of foreign policy decision-making: e.g. whether President W. Wilson, the author of "14 Points" and supporter of "self-determination," conducted military intervention in Mexico, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Panama for political or economic reasons. President George H.W. Bush, despite his anti-communist sentiment, didn't put an end to diplomatic relations or apply sanctions to China after the massacre of democratic rebels in Tiananmen Square. President Bill Clinton intervened in Bosnia in 1995 after Bosnian Serbs invaded certain international sanctuaries in the former Yugoslavian republic, but he didn't do it in Rwanda, where the Hutu were committing genocide against the Tutsi at the same time.

American interests are evidently more powerful in some regions and under some circumstances, and thus, Trump's innovations are not really new. However, taking into account Tillerson's words (when he was the Secretary of State) and Trump's speeches some experts believed that current US administration has publicly said something that should never become official policy of the country that wants to be an international leader. Values based on foreign policy have a strong impact on the country's image.

In addition to the historical approach used in this paper we have used some sociological research methods, primarily the analysis of surveys carried out over the years by Russian agencies – the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), the Public Opinion Foundation and the authors' observations in regard to the results of several joint projects conducted by scholars from Lobachevski University and University of Florida published in several journals [1,5,6][1]. The interpretation of the images that people of Russia and the USA have of each other, as well as insights into how these images influence bilateral relations arises at the intersection of political science, sociology, history and tourism marketing.

[1] The data were collected in November–December of 2014 at a large Russian university in the city of Nizhni Novgorod, an industrial, transportation, and educational center in the European part of the country, with a population of 1.3 million people. Prior to settling on a student sample, the data sources available to the researchers were carefully considered. Due to the sensitivity of the topic at the time of the study, the attainment of a large enough representative sample of Russian tourists to supply reliable data was deemed not feasible. It was argued (Saffu &Walker, 2005, p. 562) that as "citizens of their respective countries the students should mirror the larger national attitudes of their countries." From the methodology perspective, student samples have been used for testing theoretical propositions, as they are demographically homogeneous, and thus random sources of error may be better controlled (Lepp, Gibson, & Lane, 2011; Martínez & Alvarez, 2010; Netemeyer et al., 1991). In conclusion, this study examined the ways in which consumer perceptions of a destination and willingness to visit that destination are affected by their perceptions of the destination country, animosity toward that country, and ethnocentric tendencies. The study applied the country-of-origin effects frame of reference to the tourism domain, where the US served as a tourism product and Russia was the tourism-generating region. This article is based on some conclusions presented in the papers published before. For more: Do strained bilateral relations affect tourists' desire to visit a country that is a target of animosity? Svetlana Stepchenkova, Elena Shichkova, Minseong Kim & Mikhail I. Rykhtik Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, (2017), DOI: 10.1080/10548408.2017.1374907 To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2017.1374907

Study background

Country Image

Country image has been regarded as a multi-dimensional concept (Han, 1989), including economic, technological, political and social variables of a country, marketing and tourism [14; 15; 20]. Image has been understood as the sum of beliefs, impressions, and attitudes that an individual or a group holds about a product, a brand, a person, a country or any other object [17]. Regardless of whether these perceptions are true or false, images guide and shape behavior, as people have a tendency to act on their images rather than on facts [9]. The present paper is focused on country image concept.

In general country image has been defined as "the total of all descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs one has about a particular country" [1.5], or "a simplification of large number of associations and pieces of information connected with a place" [16]. Country image refers to the attitudes that people of one country hold toward another one [8]. According to recent literature, country image comprises both cognitive and affective components. The cognitive dimension of country image refers to peoples' beliefs of a country, incorporating levels of economic development, living standards, industrialization, technological advancement and so forth, whereas affective country image includes emotions and feelings regarding a country as well as its people. Both components of country image are particularly distinct yet interrelated [8].

Country image has been understood in two ways: as "mental maps or knowledge structures related to countries" that people rely on while making product judgments and buying decisions [16]; and as "consumers' general perceptions of quality for products made in a given country" [10]. Both traditions view the country image construct as having a number of dimensions like, for example, political, economic, technological, and social desirability [18], "country image as a network") or technical advancement, prestige, economy, and service ability dimensions [10], "country image as product perceptions").

Country's reputation is a subject of increasing interest for the practice and research of public relations and public diplomacy and it could have certain influence on foreign publics' supportive intentions toward the country [11]. Based on it, we can speculate that country's reputation can influence consumers' purchase intention. Admiration towards a certain country is positively related to its products, in other words, admiration can positively affect both product evaluation and willingness to buy. In other words – admiration is an important condition for productive bilateral economic relations.

Experts believe that international political incidents between "foreign firms' of home and host countries have a greater impact on the effective country image than they do on the cognitive country image, and further influence consumers' purchase intention toward "foreign firms" products in the host country. Therefore, firms having their business in the host country that has political conflict relationship with their home country need to avoid measures that utilize an effective image of their home country" [2]. It means that despite the "ice period of bilateral relations", both countries (the USA and Russia) need specialists in order to consult those who take risks and continue to do business in both countries.

Animosity

Animosity is a hostile attitude comprising beliefs and emotional components; it is the "remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events" [13]. Animosity is defined as "the emotional antagonism toward a specific party of various levels of intensity" [1]. Animosity is rooted in historic conflicts over border or territories, past conflicts, more recent economic disputes, or diplomatic confrontations. Actions by governments and organizations in such conflicts can increase levels of animosity towards their respective countries, which, in turn, can result in boycotting their exports by international consumers. Research by Klein et al. (1998) and the subsequent studies support the link between animosity and willingness to buy the product from the country-target of that animosity. The effect is direct and negative: an increase of animosity levels coincides with a diminishing willingness to buy. That's why we can admit that a current negative image of Russia in the United States and vice versa creates long-term obstacles for developing bilateral relations.

Jung et al. (2002) classified the types of animosity from a different angle, in other words, along two dimensions: stable-situational and national-personal. Stable animosity, as the name suggests, refers to general antagonistic emotions accumulated in a long-standing conflict between the countries or in difficult political relationships over a prolonged period of time. Murray and Meyer studied fears of the Soviet Union in Americans originated in the stand-off of the Cold War period and "ingrained" with every exposure to the negative news about the country [21]. This is an example of a stable animosity towards contemporary Rus-

sia, and its indicators can be found in tourists' perceptions of Russia as a travel destination [1,6]. Situational animosity arises due to a current circumstance and can interplay with the stable one, that is, produce "spikes" over the background stable animosity. National animosity is a product of memories about how the country-target of animosity has treated the person's home country in the past, while personal animosity is thought to arise from personal negative experiences with a foreign country or its people in the context of tourism, business travel, or interaction in an international setting.

Individuals seek to express their identity through consumption, and domestic products often have important social and cultural connotations and may serve as a symbol for national identity [22]. National identification and consumer ethnocentrism are related concepts, as national identification strongly influences individuals' judgments of their own country and of other countries [20], often making consumers positively biased in their evaluations of domestic products versus foreign alternatives. Many experts stick to the opinion that animosity can be negatively associated with country evaluations, leading even to boycotts.

Discussion

In order to understand the dramatic nature of the changes that have taken place in Russian public opinion, it is necessary to look at the attitudes of Russian people towards the United States of America. Experts claim that a new model of social consciousness has appeared in Russia. For example, in 2014 the number of Russian people saying that the United States was an instigator of World War II was bigger than in 2003 (2003 – 2 %, 2014 – 4 %), in addition to Germany, which 82 % of respondents held accountable for starting the War. During the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War the Russian public consciousness showed an unconditional preference towards the United States as the best development model. Pro-American sentiments were at an all-time high in 1990-1993 with 70% to 80% of the Russian population viewing the United States favorably. In response to the USA's decision to start bombing Yugoslavia in 1999 the positive opinion dropped to almost 30 %. Experts believe that this impassioned response against the military operation led by the United States and its allies against Christian Serbia was partly due to the fact, that Russian people could very well imagine a similar scenario happening in their own country [3]. Similar reaction was in 2003 (the invasion of Iraq) when 66 % of respondents reported negative opinions with regards to the United States, and again in 2008, when the United States was severely critical of Russia's actions in the conflict in South Ossetia [4].

Since 2013 the situation has been deteriorating. The Ukrainian Crisis, conflict in Syria, anti-Russian sanctions have led to the escalation of a conflict between Russia and the United States and its NATO allies. By 2014, the United States had topped the list of countries which Russia has the most hostile relations with (73 %), in early 2015 – 81 % and in September 2016 – 65%. The number of Russians who believe that the military attack is likely to come from the United States grew from 19 % in 1990 to 53 % in 2015 [3].

Anti-Americanism, that is, a "consistent hostility towards the government, culture, history or peoples of the U.S." is currently on the rise in Russia (propaganda level). Russian media portray the U.S. as a deeply flawed country, with an ineffective political system and social and racial problems. For example, the events in Ferguson, Missouri were highly publicized in the Russian media and social networks. Reducing dependence on US Dollar in international trade publicly proved but inefficiency of US economy and financial system. The incorporation of Crimea brought up a burst of national pride and 86% of popular support for president Putin (Levada Center, 2014), while the Western sanctions were met with indignation and ridicule: *Sanctions? Do not make my Iskanders laugh*. This is yet one slogan from the line of designer T-shirts with patriotic prints, which were an instant commercial and media success when they appeared in August of 2014. In response to Western sanctions over the Ukrainian crisis, the Russian government imposed a sweeping ban on the imports of meat, fish, seafood, cheese, milk and milk products, as well as fruit and vegetables from the USA, the EU, Australia, Canada, and Norway. This move was largely met with approval by the Russian population; as expressed in the words of Russian prime-minister Dmitry Medvedev: "the ban will bring Russia much good – the shelves in our malls will be cleared and filled with Russian produce – we must not miss such an opportunity to expand import replacement [importozamescheniye]" (Interfax, August 7, 2014).

Despite the rising levels of national pride and animosity towards the USA, the arrivals of tourists from Russia to America were also rising, albeit slightly. With some improvements in the US procedure for obtaining visas (2013–2014), the number of Russian tourists to the USA reached record levels of 343,310 visitors, a 2 % increase from the year of 2013 (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 2014). While the Russian government does not restrict international travel, the conflict between Russia and the USA has spread to the tourism sphere as well,

with the advisory issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2015, item 1005-22-05-2015) to the Russian citizens to carefully assess the risks of travelling to the USA. Therefore, as follows from the discussion, the feelings of animosity, national pride are very much present in contemporary Russia, and their influence on the decision-making of Russian tourists needs to be examined (See more: [5; 6]).

Hofstede's (1980) cultural scale identifies Russia as a collectivist society. Russians traditionally consider their obligations to the state as a priority, and serving Homeland and self-sacrifice are important characteristics of Russian national identity. The power of the current regime is based on neither financial nor economic foundations; rather it is grounded in the political institutions and parties and in the lack of a meaningful opposition. The protests of 2011, the largest since 1991, originated in the not-so-wide Russian middle class in Moscow and St. Petersburg and did not gain much support from other strata of the Russian society. For quite some time, Russia has been politically stable; this is not in the sense that the people have had a voice, but they have not challenged the state. For example, the Dima Yakovlev Law issued in 2012, which forbids adoptions of Russian children by international parents, was accepted by the Russian people as a state's instrument of protecting children from ill treatment, primarily in the USA. The unchallenged assumption that the state is, first and foremost, helps to explain the overwhelming support for president Putin's actions towards Ukraine and foreign policy in general as well as the absence of a strong negative reaction of the majority of the Russian society with respect to sanctions imposed by the USA, the EU and some other countries. Surveys of public opinion indicate that it is unlikely that Russians would consider mass protests like the ones seen, for example, in Greece or the CIS countries like Ukraine and Armenia in response to social or economic difficulties or governmental mistakes. It is easier in Russia to mobilize public support to stand for the state's interests and well-being. The results of presidential elections on 18 March, 2018 prove this observation.

Experts have revealed the direct impact of animosity on ethnocentrism. The ethnocentric tendencies of Russian people are being fueled by animosity rhetoric, contrasting Russian values and the way of life to all things foreign to Russians. Western sanctions, in particular, were met in the Russian society with a boost in national pride and a stream of publications in the media promoting "patriotic" reliance on the domestic products, especially food products. Thus, while the consumer ethnocentric tendencies are low overall, the effect of animosity on ethnocentrism is distinct. Conceptually, however, the reported impact of animosity on ethnocentrism can be envisioned as a link between anti-Americanism and backlash against U.S. brands. Anti-Americanism is found in a broad range of attitudes and actions critical of the United States; however, historically, the term has been generally applied to resistance to the spread of American consumption values abroad by American business.

Another very interesting conclusion is that general animosity has a strong negative impact on people of Russia, the perceptions of the US as a country and is directly and negatively related to the desire to visit it [1].

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to analyze the relationship between bilateral relations, country image and consumers' purchase intention. This study focuses on two types of country image (i.e., affective image and cognitive image) and emphasizes that different country image has a different effect on bilateral relations. We believe that country image can act as a double-edged sword, leading to positive consumer outcomes under good relationship between countries as well as negative consumer outcomes in the situation of political conflict.

Creating a negative image of Russia in the world can generate difficulties for business contacts and projects. Law levels of economic relations between Russia and the United States today raise the risks of unreasoned and dangerous political decisions. But from the practical angle, the results of the study (accepting all limitations) can be interpreted as relatively positive for US-Russian relations. The levels of animosity and ethnocentrism of Russian consumers have no direct effect on the willingness to visit the USA as a vacation destination. Intention to visit is directly affected only by customers' perceptions of destination's tourist offer. Moreover, while ethnocentric tendencies of Russian consumers have a negative impact on evaluations of America's destination attributes, the levels of consumer ethnocentrism are generally low, that is, Russian consumers are not ready to refuse from using the products of the USA and other international brands. With respect to the willingness to buy US destination product, animosity and ethnocentrism are mediated by the country image and destination image, respectively. It means that there is a chance for changes. The Russian society is ready for interactions. Anti-Americanism is mainlya propagandistic instrument of current elite.

Companies of both countries: American companies operating in the Russia and Russian companies operating in the USA need to be careful about political conflicts between these two countries, because it is hard to predict the political conflicts that will occur in the future, and of course, people's reaction toward the issue. Therefore, knowing how to cope with the problems caused by political conflict between their home country and host country is becoming a crucial competence in order to survive and thrive in the host country.

There is one positive conclusion. As we are living in the globalized world, it is hard to shut down all relations. It means that there is future of Russian studies in America and American Studies in Russia. Business and governments will need specialists who have such knowledge and expertise.

What actions can we undertake to make Russia and the USA speak the same language? First of all, we need to break the vicious circle of mutual accusations. Washington's and Moscow's actions should be based on the interests with respect to proclaimed values and take each other's sore spots into account.

Referring to the future it seems that such tools of public diplomacy as students exchange, tourism, cultural and academic contacts, everything that creates favourable conditions for reestablishing mutual understanding between the peoples of Russia and America can prevent a deadly conflict between two nuclear powers.

With low level of economic cooperation and no chance for its developing in the foreseeable future (due to sanctions and very complicated procedure of legal regulation of this process) public diplomacy is the only possible instrument. Despite a negative image people of Russia are ready to buy products and have a desire to visit the United States of America. And image does matter.

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ИМИДЖ СТРАНЫ И ЕГО ВЛИЯНИЕ НА ДВУСТОРОННИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ МЕЖДУ ГОСУДАРСТВАМИ: ПРИМЕР АМЕРИКАНО-РОССИЙСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

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Статья посвящена влиянию имиджа страны на современные американо-российские отношения. Авторы применяют результаты совместного проекта (Университета Флориды и Университета Лобачевского), к анализу американо-российских двусторонних отношений. В методологическом плане авторы объединяют науку управления туризмом с политологией и литературой. В последние пять лет отношения между США и Россией неуклонно ухудшаются. Объем негативного освещения обеих стран в российских и американских СМИ и социальных сетях постепенно увеличивается, начиная с Закона Магнитского и Закона Димы Яковлева в 2012 году и заканчивая событиями политического кризиса в Украине, операциями в Сирии, экономическими санкциями в отношении России. СМИ и социальные сети, а также риторика официальных агентств обеих стран отражают растущий уровень национальной гордости и взаимной вражды. Мы считаем, что внешняя политика стала особым и самостоятельным видом социальной активности. Экономические отношения, экономическая интеграция, гуманитарные отношения (образование, культура, наука, туризм и т. д.) сегодня являются важной частью внешней политики. Таким образом, имидж страны играет большую роль.

Ключевые слова: американо-российские отношения, образ страны, восприятие, враждебность.

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