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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Representation of Iran's Image in Russian Media (A Case Study of RIA Novosti News Agency)

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Relations between Iran and Russia have faced numerous challenges and fluctuations over the past two centuries, never following a stable or reliable trajectory. In the years following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran's relations with the newly independent republics-particularly Russia-entered a new phase. During this phase, both countries endeavored to strengthen their ties in various domains. While Iranian media have sometimes portrayed a favorable image of Russia, the majority of domestic and Persian-language media, to varying degrees, suggest that the relationship between the two countries leans more toward benefiting Russia, resembling the exploitation and colonialism of past centuries, with no clear advantage for Iran. This article aims to explore how Iranian representation is depicted in

Russian media. Despite recent efforts to align against the West, the partnership between Russia and Iran appears to rely heavily on shared security interests at bilateral, regional, and global levels. Of particular interest is how Russian media, as a reflection of public opinion, view Iran, with the analysis of its portrayal serving as a potential means of addressing existing issues and perceptions while identifying challenges moving forward.

Method:

This article's main focus is on how Iran is portrayed in Russian media, specifically within the RIA Novosti news agency, utilizing Stuart Hall's representation theory. The analysis includes news published by the Russian news agency on military-political, economic, and cultural-social topics from the start of the Russian war against Ukraine (February 24, 2022) to the beginning of 2023.

Findings:

A total of 131 news items were evaluated through open coding, resulting in the extraction of 131 codes from the headlines. These codes were then categorized into three main areas: military-political, economic, and cultural-social. Selected codes in the military-political realm included the power of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, extensive military cooperation, Iran's neutral stance, and the development of space cooperation, among others. In the economic field, codes focused on economic cooperation, Iran's exports to Russia, and efforts to circumvent sanctions. Cultural codes highlighted the kinship factor and cultural interactions. Through selective and axial coding, core codes were identified, such as breaking Western hegemony and fostering East-East cooperation. These codes reflect the current conditions and relations between Iran and Russia, particularly in their joint efforts to counter Western sanctions and enhance economic ties. The emphasis on cooperation, trade, and shared interests between the two nations signifies a significant shift in their relationship dynamics.

The field of culture, however, has been less affected by the positive approach in interactions. Although this area has been more targeted by the Russian media, displaying a cultural alienation between the two countries, emphasizing the activation of cultural capacities between the two nations can be considered a factor in fostering affinity between them.

Conclusion:

According to data from a Russian news agency, both sides have prioritized expanding bilateral relations and interactions. This hinges on presenting a positive image of interactions and favorable portrayals of each other in the media, aligning with Stuart Hall's concept of representation. The Russian media's approach of presenting a positive and acceptable image of Iran can be seen as a step toward bringing the two countries closer.

Furthermore, considering representation as the use of language, signs, and images that depict things, the language and signs used in this Russian media's news indicate a shared goal between the two countries to enhance bilateral relations. Russia has endeavored to showcase a positive image of Iran domestically to bolster bilateral cooperation, increase strategic interaction, and elevate their influence regionally and internationally. Despite challenges, recent efforts by Iran and Russia have focused on enhancing economic cooperation, navigating American sanctions against Iran, maintaining a balance of power with neighbors, and jointly developing soft power in the Middle East.

The current trend in representation by the Novosti news agency aligns with initial expectations, but enhancing the depth of information about Iran and highlighting positive aspects could further enhance bilateral relations. It is evident that relations between the two countries are more people-centric than government-centric. Elevating positive representations of Iran in Russian media-a form of public media accessible to the masses-can fortify relations and foster mutual understanding.

Moreover, the historical context of Iran-Russia relations has led to a negative perception in Iranian public opinion toward Russia. Positive representations in the media can help counteract this negativity and promote a more constructive mindset.

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Data available on request from the authors.
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