DOSSIER

THE COMMUNICATION TRENDS REFERRING TO KAZAKHSTAN'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE (THE CASE OF THE WASHINGTON POST)

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ABSTRACT – The research analyzes journalistic materials published in The Washington Post that mention Kazakhstan from 1991 to 2017. Using content analysis as the primary research method, both quantitative and qualitative evaluations were conducted to gain historical insights. The study found that the highest number of publications occurred in 2013 and 2014. However, despite the increase in publications, it was observed that many articles were uninformative and did not contribute to the formation of a specific image of the country. Efforts to generate interest and build a positive narrative about Kazakhstan were not successful. The study also examined readers' comments online and concluded that perceptions of the country are still largely influenced by stereotypes.
Key words: Mass media. Country image. Stereotypes. The Washington Post. Kazakhstan.

AS TENDÊNCIAS DE COMUNICAÇÃO REFERENTES À IMAGEM INTERNACIONAL DO CAZAQUISTÃO (O CASO DO THE WASHINGTON POST)

RESUMO – A pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar materiais jornalísticos publicados no jornal The Washington Post que mencionam o Cazaquistão de 1991 a 2017. A análise de conteúdo é o principal método de pesquisa, permitindo operações quantitativas e qualitativas e fornecendo valiosas percepções históricas ao longo do tempo. De acordo com os resultados, o maior aumento de publicações foi observado em 2013 e 2014, respectivamente. Um número maior de publicações não afeta a formação de uma determinada imagem do país; os artigos foram classificados como não informativos. Os eventos de construção de imagem no Cazaquistão, que foram planejados para causar um aumento de interesse, infelizmente não produziram o efeito desejado. Foram analisados não apenas os textos jornalísticos, mas também as respostas a eles, em especial os comentários dos leitores on-line. Essa parte do estudo levou à conclusão de que a percepção do país ainda se baseia em estereótipos.
Palavras-chave: Mídia de massa. Imagem do país. Estereótipos. The Washington Post. Cazaquistão.

LAS TENDENCIAS DE COMUNICACIÓN REFERIDAS A LA IMAGEN INTERNACIONAL DE KAZAJSTÁN (EL CASO DE THE WASHINGTON POST)

RESUMEN – La investigación tiene como objetivo analizar los materiales periodísticos publicados en el diario The Washington Post que mencionan Kazajstán desde 1991 hasta 2017. El análisis de contenido es el principal método de investigación, que permite operaciones tanto cuantitativas como cualitativas y proporciona valiosas perspectivas históricas a lo largo del tiempo. Según los resultados, el mayor aumento de publicaciones se observó en 2013 y 2014, respectivamente. Un mayor número de publicaciones no influye en la formación de una determinada imagen del país; los artículos se clasificaron como poco informativos. Los eventos de creación de imagen en Kazajistán, que estaban diseñados para causar un aumento del interés, lamentablemente no produjeron el efecto deseado. No sólo se analizaron los textos periodísticos, sino también las respuestas a los mismos, en particular, los comentarios de los lectores en línea. Esta parte del estudio llevó a la conclusión de que la percepción del país sigue basándose en estereotipos.
Palabras clave: Medios de comunicación. Imagen del paí. Estereotipos. The Washington Post. Kazajstán.

1 Introduction

Since gaining independence, all former Soviet republics have become full-fledged participants in international relations, embracing economic, legal, political, and cultural autonomy. The term "state image" came into use, signifying for most the uniqueness, distinctiveness, success, and attractiveness of a country to external audiences. These newly formed states aspired to secure a prominent place in the international political and economic hierarchy, showcasing early successes in strengthening independence, distancing themselves from Soviet legacies, and crafting their own strategies to unveil their national potential. This ambition was entirely understandable.

Growth challenges, objective conditions, and past successes explain this phenomenon, creating a positive image for many nations. For Kazakhstan, the aspiration to stand out to an international audience was particularly clear. Positioned among a cluster of countries ending in – "stan" – many of which are its closest neighbors in the regional context of former Soviet Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan – Kazakhstan sought to distinguish itself on the global stage. How can a country achieve this?

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping national images: it not only reflects public opinions and prevailing views within a specific group but also largely creates them (Tokbulatova, 2019). Therefore, Kazakhstan – a nation actively striving to develop its tourism sector and promote international entrepreneurship – is highly invested in how its image is portrayed in foreign media. It continues to make every effort to influence and ensure the formation of a positive and accurate image.

Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy Concept emphasizes the need to consolidate the country's status as a responsible member of the global community, a key component of the geopolitical and geo-economic systems coordinating the Eurasian continent, and a leading state in the Central Asian region.

Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy Strategy focuses on achieving several goals, including intensifying "humanitarian diplomacy", popularizing the country's positive image within the global community, and promoting Kazakhstan's brand as an open jurisdiction for international partnerships.

In non-Kazakhstani English-language sources, information

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about Kazakhstan is often presented inadequately. For instance, the Western resource for tourists and travelers, Lonely Planet, describes the country as follows:

"Kazakhstan – the world's ninth-largest country – is the most economically advanced of the 'stans', thanks to its abundant reserves of oil and most other valuable minerals" (Lonely Planet, 2017).

By contrast, local English-language websites provide more detailed and timely information. Below are some excerpts:

> Kazakhstan is the largest land-locked country in the world, covering an area the size of Western Europe... Within its 27 years of independence, Kazakhstan has attracted over $200 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI), around 70% of the total volume of all investments attracted to Central Asia... In Doing Business, the World Bank's 2020 Report, Kazakhstan was ranked as the 25th... Kazakhstan is also a recognized leader in the global antinuclear movement... The country chaired key organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010 and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 2011... The rebuilding of Afghanistan is a major priority for Kazakhstan. The country has provided aid, student scholarships, and training programs for Afghan citizens. (Embassy [...], 2020).

Based on even this small comparison, we can observe a clear distinction between the image Kazakhstan seeks to project on the international stage and the image being shaped by foreign mass media. To determine what types of news about Kazakhstan are most engaging for foreign audiences, the authors analyzed publications spanning over 25 years.

As the primary object of research, the authors selected one of the most highly rated and widely recognized media outlets: The Washington Post. The Washington Post is a prominent American daily newspaper based in Washington, D.C. It ranks among the leading U.S. media outlets, alongside The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, and The Wall Street Journal. As the largest newspaper in the capital of the United States, it is one of the oldest and most influential publications in the country. The newspaper covers breaking news, national and international issues, essays, and commentary (Makeenko, 2006). Over its history, The Washington Post has earned 47 Pulitzer Prizes (Howard, 2008).

In December 2019, The Washington Post's total online audience reached 87.1 million people. By September 2023, the newspaper had 2.5 million online subscribers. However, the Online Subscriptions to News Websites Worldwide (2023) report noted a

decline in the newspaper's subscriber base. While other publishers in the ranking experienced growth, The Washington Post's losses were partially attributed to a "post-Trump slump" in readership following President Biden's election.

The genre and thematic diversity of content in The Washington Post was one of the key reasons for selecting it as the object of this study. Additionally, the newspaper features a regular section titled 'World', within which the subheading 'Asia' is included. This signifies that the issues and achievements of the Asian region, to which Kazakhstan belongs (comprising 85% of its geographical area), are consistently covered in the media.

This study aims to analyze journalistic materials about Kazakhstan as part of the broader discourse on the country, published in The Washington Post. The authors clarify that American media does not represent the entire global audience. The Washington Post was chosen specifically as an interesting case study.

The primary tools for constructing a country's image include the media, diplomacy, language policy, and the dissemination of national culture (Anisimova, 2021). In light of this, the contribution of this article to the body of knowledge about Kazakhstan's image lies in the analysis of how the image of this Asian country is shaped by European media.

The relevance of this study within the field of journalism is that it is the only one to cover such an extensive period of media monitoring regarding Kazakhstan in a single newspaper. For a country like Kazakhstan, whose national goal is to become one of the 50 most competitive nations in the world, it is crucial to understand how it is perceived on the international stage. There is no doubt that media texts play a significant role in image construction. If the country (as the initiator) establishes contact with foreign media and provides them with interesting and mutually beneficial information, it can influence the flow of news in a positive direction.

Furthermore, by understanding the preferences of foreign journalists and their audiences, Kazakhstan can offer exclusive content, such as texts, photographs, or access to unique speakers. Additionally, by identifying the journalists who most frequently cover events in Central Asia, it is possible to establish personal connections with them and organize the distribution of press releases. When information is presented without attribution, the ability to discern emerging trends becomes crucial for image-building or spin-doctoring.

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For journalism in general, this study can serve as a starting point for understanding media trends between Asian and European countries, using the example of Kazakhstan and the United States.

2 Literature review

There is no shortage of studies on Kazakhstan's image abroad. While research on this topic already exists within the scholarly community, these studies tend to focus on specific aspects rather than addressing the country's image in its entirety. For instance, the research conducted by Nametova and Tolymbek (2018) examines perceptions of Kazakhstan as a tourist destination. Their study aimed to analyze the views and perceptions of representatives from two European countries, namely the Netherlands and Germany, regarding the image of Kazakhstan. The study seeks to answer the following research question: How is Kazakhstan perceived as a tourist destination in Europe? The findings reveal a lack of public awareness about Kazakhstan as a country with a distinct identity among European audiences. In fact, the dominant image of Kazakhstan is linked to three major attributes: the fictitious Hollywood character Borat, nature, and tradition (Nametova & Tolymbek, 2018).

Zharkenova et al. (2023) provide insights into the branding efforts of Kazakhstan, noting that these are largely based on a policy established by the national operator JSC "NC Kazakh Tourism", in alignment with program documents and concepts approved by the government. These efforts include the preparation and airing of informational videos and other materials on leading global TV channels such as CNN, BBC, National Geographic, and others. However, among these efforts, the promotion of publications in major global media outlets is not mentioned. It may be deduced that the nation does not prioritize print media promotion, such as paid advertisements or sponsored content.

Although speculation has become widespread in the country that "Kazakh Tourism" funded the filming of two episodes of the popular travel program Heads and Tails, the organization itself asserts that only administrative support was provided, and the filming of all episodes was financed by the program's budget. However, the Kazakhstani government's official e-procurement portal

regularly publishes open tender announcements for the placement of advertisements (both online and offline) in foreign media outlets. Advertising campaigns aimed at foreign audiences have been officially launched, including "Travelstan", "Where Are We Flying?" and "Very Nice".

In their study of national branding, a group of researchers concluded that a country's cultural identity and creative offerings are significantly influenced by its national branding. A country can attract interest, capture attention, and ultimately increase engagement from both domestic and foreign audiences when it successfully promotes its creative and cultural heritage (Ibraimova et al., 2023). In their research conclusions, they suggest that local cuisine could be a successful avenue for constructing the country's image and national brand. Unfortunately, The Washington Post did not feature Kazakh national dishes such as *beshparmak, kurt, bauyrsak,* and *kazy-karta*, which could potentially attract an additional flow of gastronomic tourists to Kazakhstan.

The image of a country, as a key aspect of attracting tourists, presents challenges not only for researchers but also for journalists, who frequently write analytical pieces on the subject. For example, the article "*Kazakhstan: Striving to Get on the Tourist Trail*", published on EurasiaNet, discusses both the problems and the country's image, which is shaped by negative reviews on social media and blogs: "Online travel forums are full of complaints about astronomical prices combined with poor service in Kazakhstan. Yet, tackling these issues does not appear to be a priority for the government, even though it would like to attract high-end tourists" (Lillis, 2014).

There have also been attempts to study the internal image of Kazakhstan. Among such studies, the authors highlight the paper by Shakirova (2015), *"Country Images of Kazakhstan: From Stereotypes and Critique to Positive National Branding".* This article investigated the impact of public perception – both positive and negative – on Kazakhstan's national image, a construct systematically cultivated by the capital's, Astana, government. A favorable image of the country is essential for all major stakeholders involved in the national branding process, namely: the government, business, and society.

The paper by Tokbulatova (2019), "*The Image of Kazakhstan in Russia Based on Media Materials*", is most closely related to the authors' area of research. This article is dedicated to identifying and comparing the various images of Kazakhstan formed by five

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Russian newspapers – Kommersant, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Soviet Russia, Novaya Gazeta, and Zavtra – which, together, are believed to cover a wide spectrum of ideological and political preferences among Russians. The study was based on a database of publications collected during a continuous content analysis of these newspapers for two key years: 2001 and 2016. According to the data gathered, Kommersant was the only newspaper that contributed to the formation of a balanced, multilateral view of the country, ultimately fostering a relatively cohesive image. One of the key conclusions drawn by Tokbulatova (2019) is particularly relevant to the authors of this manuscript: a noticeable decrease in attention to Kazakhstan. The study found that Kazakhstan holds little interest for Russian readers, even though their socio-political views are relatively aligned with those of Kazakhstanis.

Another study worth noting is devoted to analyzing the language of The Washington Post through the example of political headlines. Although the author primarily focuses on Asian countries, Kazakhstan is not included in the sample (Flayyih, 2020).

It is also significant to mention that in 2010, the Astana Times information portal was launched with the slogan "Bringing Kazakhstan to the World". In addition to providing its own content, the portal briefly reprints materials about Kazakhstan from foreign English-language media. According to a search query in The Washington Post for the period 2010-2024, only two articles were found – one concerning the bloody January events of 2022 and the other about the Tengiz oil field. From this, it can be inferred that Kazakhstanis are primarily interested in "outside views" on matters that are economically and politically significant.

Upon analyzing the research on the study of a country's image, the role of mass media in shaping this image becomes apparent, particularly in The Washington Post, where terminology is interpreted widely and freely.

Expressions such as "term", "definition", and "concept" are often used synonymously. However, within the context of a specific article or scientific discussion, the word "term" is more appropriate, as it carries a stricter and more definite meaning, which clearly delineates the scope of the research.

When studying a state's image in the media (or the country's media image), the borrowed word "image" is used, which, like its synonyms in English – such as "figure", "stereotype", "similitude",

"symbol", "representation", "embodiment", "concept", and "idea" – carries semantic differences and nuances.

The Anglicism "image" is widely used in both everyday life and academic spaces. This usage facilitates the internationalization of reality, fills gaps in language, and unifies lexical units of communication. However, any term borrowed from another language and culture cannot remain unchanged; it undergoes a process of "adaptation". In this case, it is necessary to draw a conditional boundary between the terms "image", "stereotype", "reputation", and "brand", despite their relatedness. Divergent interpretations of these terms underscore the interdisciplinary character of the research subject.

At times, authors do not clarify the terms they use in different contexts or their synonyms, leaving the reader to infer shades of meaning independently. This is particularly evident in journalistic genres, where such an approach complicates the understanding of the author's intent. To limit unnecessary terminological pluralism and a free approach to definitions, we propose distinguishing between existing approaches to definitions based on methods of analysis and areas of research.

Many people, of course, intuitively understand that the image of something or someone carries an abstract and even exalted character. However, the term "image" can also carry a utilitarian-practical connotation. For example, while the phrase "Your bright image is forever in my memory" might be heard in a romantic context, the expression "bright image" would hardly be appropriate in this scenario.

We found Graver's position, presented in his 2012 research, to be particularly interesting. He discusses image/state image (and related concepts) within the context of a specific scientific discipline, emphasizing that the tasks and methods prevailing in particular research areas shape the understanding of these concepts. Several key areas can be highlighted:

- Research within political psychology, where the image/image dichotomy is presented as follows: the country's image is a phenomenon that is stable, exists in consciousness, is objective, and "real", while the image itself is more dynamic. In other words, the phenomenon is always present. But when it is specifically designed, it becomes an image (Shestopal, 2008).
- Cultural studies of the country's image, where the concept of "image" is interpreted broadly, without delving into whether the phenomenon exists naturally or is artificially simulated.

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- The field of economics and marketing, where the state image is interpreted as a product or brand, with both a material and intangible value. In this context, the image has measurable and evaluative content, with a rational nature.
- Sociological research, based on specialized scientific methods, does not seek to clearly distinguish between the concepts of "image" and "brand", as long as it does not obstruct case studies.
- The study of the state image in the context of the media's functioning.

This perspective suggests the image is a purposefully manipulated representation of the nation within the media, designed to influence audience opinions regarding the state's leadership, political system, cultural and economic prospects, and other key features.

In this article, we focus primarily on the latter approach to studying the country's image, although the other areas are also of interest and should be considered. Drawing boundaries to indicate where the image "ends" and where the "kingdom of image" begins, with the brand attached to it, is not an easy task.

Ergo, according to the monitoring, the highest number of comments on material mentioning Kazakhstan followed the publication of the article *"Yes, Kazakhstan should change its name. This map shows why"* (Fisher, 2014). The number of comments left by users was 41. The popularity, or in other words, the high readability of this material among the electronic version of the newspaper's audience, can be explained by the fact that the issue raised in the article is highly controversial and concerns every citizen of Kazakhstan. The article discusses the initiative of Kazakhstan's first president to consider renaming (rebranding) the country from 'Kazakhstan' to 'Kazak Yeli', as the suffix 'stan' is associated with countries perceived as economically unattractive, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This measure was intended to help achieve the country's marketing goals: increasing attractiveness for tourists and investors and improving the national image.

The issue, widely covered in the local media, evoked a variety of emotions among Kazakhstanis. All materials dedicated to the question received high ratings and a large number of comments.

The image of a country serves as a combined indicator of the state's authority and the success of its actions in the international

arena, reflecting the foreign public's assessment of the country. In the modern global information society, where the processes of exchanging, receiving, and conveying information have reached a qualitatively new level, the importance of a state's international image cannot be underestimated (Burakanova, 2017). In the context of an emerging information society, Kazakhstan's international image-building and information counteraction system needs to be distinguished by flexibility and efficiency.

A factor that positively impacts a country's international image is the spiritual production of truthful information about the nation, intended for consumption both within the country and beyond its borders.

When discussing the notion of democratization from the perspective of a country's image, we look back to when Kazakhstan declared its independence at the end of 1991. The former president Nazarbayev proclaimed that Kazakhstan would be the "Central Asia Tiger" (drawing an analogy with animals symbolizing national identities: Russia as a bear, China as a dragon), aligning with the Tiger Cub Economies. This term refers to the rapidly developing economies of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, the five dominant countries in Southeast Asia. However, the lack of transparency and the high rate of corruption hindered Kazakhstan's ability to achieve the goal of becoming a true leader in Central Asia in terms of social welfare. Despite its resource-rich economy, Kazakhstan failed to meet the aspiration of becoming the "Central Asia Tiger". Nonetheless, there is a success story to be told: Kazakhstan's adaptation of Lee Kuan Yew's Singapore model of economic and democratic reforms appears successful. This model, involving non-Western democratization and the digitalization of all aspects of social life in Kazakhstan, has notably manifested in a realistic and stable e-government system, unlike the previous system, which was initiated through Nazarbayev's reforms from 1991 until 2019 (Honrada et al., 2023). Thus, the country's image from a democratization perspective has evolved, drawing on a post-colonial model from Southeast Asia.

Last but not least, Kazakhstan's energy resources play a crucial role in shaping its image as a factor in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Petroleum is of immense significance to Kazakhstan. It serves as the primary source of the country's relative prosperity and the main driver of its rapid economic development in

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recent years. Patrice Dreiski notes that due to the importance of oil and its non-renewable nature, "the government wanted to establish control, and this wish to control is something normal" (Dreiski, 2010). Therefore, the strategic role of petroleum, as well as the desire to establish control and ensure the proper management of its oil fields, were among the key factors that led the government of Kazakhstan to adopt resource nationalism (Mukan et al., 2013).

Finally, due to the geopolitical turbulence in Eurasia, Kazakhstan's image is under scrutiny by Western sanction practitioners. Having been an economic and military ally of Russia, the recently formed "Gas Union" of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan marks a turning point, symbolizing a significant shift in the energy dynamics of Central Asia. Against the backdrop of pressing energy challenges in the region, this union aims to address the immediate needs of the member states from Central Asia. However, it also presents many long-term geopolitical and economic issues for the parties involved (Ranjbar et al., 2024).

The evaluation of this project in Kazakhstan has encountered significant criticism, primarily regarding its potential to negatively affect the country's international standing and its long-range plan to attract foreign direct investment in the energy sector via pipeline diplomacy.

Thus, this study seeks to address several gaps simultaneously. Considering the growing trend and the significance of enhancing the country's image for the government (to foster tourism and improve the business environment), the authors of this paper will first undertake a detailed examination of all materials published about the country in influential, widely-read media outlets. Secondly, the study will highlight existing communication trends and, based on these insights, offer recommendations for events and scenarios that could positively influence the country's brand. Additionally, the authors intend to provide practical recommendations for improving interactions with foreign media.

The research question, aimed at expanding the body of knowledge regarding the representation of non-Western countries in American media, is as follows: what communication trends affecting Kazakhstan, as presented in The Washington Post, have a tangible impact on the country's international image?

3 Materials and methods

Content analysis constituted the primary research approach. The authors employed both conceptual and relational analyses. The study's objective adhered to Berelson's (1952) model to determine the communicative goals, priorities, and patterns of individuals, groups, and institutions; the readership of The Washington Post was considered as the community in this case. Due to its extensive readership in both print and online formats, the newspaper represents a substantial segment of the foreign audience.

To clarify, content analysis is a research tool used to identify the presence of specific words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data (e.g., text in The Washington Post). Through this method, the authors quantified and analyzed the presence, meanings, and relationships of particular words, themes, or concepts. For instance, the authors evaluated the language used in news articles in The Washington Post to detect any bias or partiality. The authors then inferred the messages within the texts, the identity of the writer(s), the audience, and even the surrounding culture and time context of the text.

In light of the time constraints and the challenges posed by automation, the authors preprocessed the materials manually before the study. Additionally, during the analysis, the authors utilized two pre-existing study designs (Manheim & Albritton, 1983) as a foundation for obtaining data on the country's image.

The foundation of the study is based on all the informational messages mentioning Kazakhstan in The Washington Post from December 16, 1991 (the date Kazakhstan declared itself an independent sovereign state) to December 31, 2017. This 26-year period will serve as a timeframe for drawing certain conclusions. Initially, the authors sought to divide the research into two segments for comparative analysis: 1991–2017 and 2018–2023. The comparison would offer a historical perspective during periods of significant political and social events in Kazakhstan, as mentioned in The Washington Post. The research period covers the tenure of the country's first president, Nazarbayev, who ruled for 28 years. However, by 2018, a gradual transfer of power began to unfold: the parliament's powers were expanded, and eventually, the presidency transitioned.

As for the 2018–2023 period, the data is still being

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operationalized. Moreover, the authors contend that after the rise of the internet and, more specifically, social media, it became increasingly difficult to have a significant impact on the construction of Kazakhstan's image. This image became relatively stable. Furthermore, since early 2017, many English-speaking citizens of Kazakhstan have been actively contributing to the process of content creation on social media, aiming to foster a positive image of the country abroad.

Based on the aforementioned materials, the authors will identify existing communication trends related to the country, as well as extract the components of the country's existing or "perceived" image. According to Lopes (2011), three levels should be considered when analyzing brand image, and Cohen's kappa coefficient method was used to measure statistical data for inter-rater reliability concerning qualitative (categorical) items:

1. Perceived image
2. Actual image
3. Desired image

Statistical analysis of coded survey respondent units was conducted using Krippendorff's alpha. The coding scheme categorized textual units into subsections for quantitative counting, typological classification, message tone assessment, relational indexing, topicalization, image analysis within The Washington Post, and analysis of consumer comments. This method is used in counseling and survey research, where respondents code open-ended interview data into analyzable terms.

The authors ensured consistency and validity when coding the same dataset. This process helped demonstrate that researchers were arriving at the same conclusions: negative materials about Kazakhstan were published less frequently in the media compared to other types of content.

4 Results

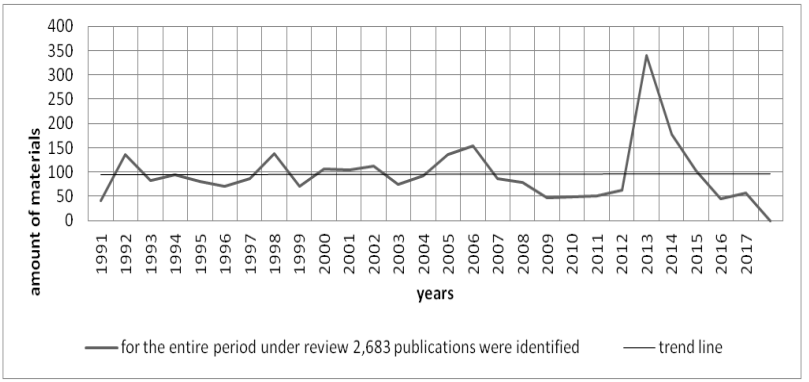
Journalistic materials about Kazakhstan in The Washington Post are published quite frequently, with an average of 103 articles within the specified timeframe. This translates to almost one publication every three and a half days.

4.1 Quantitative counting

During the aforementioned timeframe, the newspaper published 2.683 informational messages mentioning Kazakhstan. The sampling was conducted manually from the hard copies of the Sunday weekly edition of The Washington Post. All summarized data on the number of publications for the reviewed period are presented in figure 1.

Figure 1

Fluctuations in the number of publications mentioning Kazakhstan in The Washington Post



As seen in the diagram (figure 1), the newspaper began publishing materials shortly after the country gained independence. In 1991, The Washington Post featured the "new country" in 40 articles. By the end of the period under study, in 2017, the number of publications about Kazakhstan, which had by then established itself on the global stage, rose to 56.

The largest surge in publications occurred in 2013 and 2014. The smallest number of publications mentioning Kazakhstan appeared in 2009, 2010, and 2016.

In this research, the authors will further examine in detail the journalistic materials from the period of the most significant surge (2013-2014) and analyze the factors behind this increase.

In addition to clear quantitative data, the authors will also consider the qualitative nature of the publications. To obtain accurate data, the authors will differentiate between materials where

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Kazakhstan is merely mentioned and those that contain substantive information about the country.

4.2 Division by typology

The authors categorize all publications into three types, based on examples provided in the paper by Manheim and Albritton (1983):

1. Non-informative messages: these are news items where the object is mentioned several times but is not the central focus of the message.
2. Informative messages: these are news items in which the object is the central figure of the message.
3. Analytical reviews and the author's opinion (analytical surveys): this category differs from the previous two in that it includes evaluative (or estimated) judgments, where the author expresses an opinion about the object (Albritton & Manheim, 1985).

An analysis of the message types, using Albritton and Manheim's design, produced the following results: out of 2.683 messages mentioning Kazakhstan, 1.988 were classified as non-informative, 579 were classified as informative, and 106 were classified as analytical. This means that 1.988 publications were not focused on events in Kazakhstan or individuals from Kazakhstan; in 579 publications, events or people from Kazakhstan were the main subject; and 106 publications were analytical reviews or opinion columns, where authors expressed their views about the country or its events. Thus, the overwhelming majority of publications mentioning Kazakhstan were non-informative.

According to the authors' estimates, analytical reviews and opinion columns about Kazakhstan constitute only about 3.9 percent of the total number of materials for the period under review ($106 \times 100 \div 2.683 = 3.95$). This low percentage suggests a lack of significant financial or tourist interest. If such interest were present among readers, journalists would likely publish more reviews and analytical materials. In other words, demand creates supply.

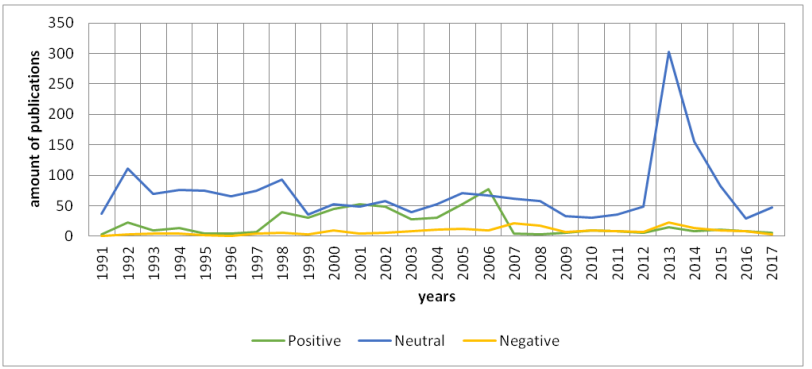
4.3 Determining the message tone

Now, we can evaluate the articles for the positive or negative attitudes towards the country. According to Kunczik (2016), a negative message conveys weakness, poverty, stagnation, instability, economic recession or crisis, corruption, irresponsibility, famine, technological disasters, and so on. Natural phenomena, such as hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides, and avalanches, are not included in the theoretical calculation of adverse events. In contrast, positive news conveys reports of progress, promotion, resources, facilities, power, stability, sustainability, and accountability, as well as cultural or sporting events. If the country is merely mentioned as a location or geographical area, the paper would be considered neutral.

Regarding the tone of the messages, the distribution is as follows: out of 2.683 messages, 551 had a positive tone, 1.909 were neutral, and 213 were negative. The summary data are presented in figure 2.

Figure 2

The publication tone about Kazakhstan in The Washington Post



As can be seen from figure 2, most publications are neutral by nature; this means that they do not significantly influence the construction of the country's image. They merely record the existence of Kazakhstan as a nation within the global geographic

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space. Additionally, based on the obtained data, the following communication trend can be identified: negative materials about Kazakhstan are published less frequently than the others.

4.4 Relations index

Another gradation that can be made is the separation of all posts into two categories: governmental news and public news. We will use the methodology proposed by Smith (1993), which offers indicators to establish the image of a country at any given time based on content analysis of information sources. Corporate image assessment, when sociological data are unavailable, is performed by this methodology through the analysis of the ratio of corporate to non-corporate news. The same research design was employed by Barrett et al (2007) to assess the images of different countries. According to this methodology:

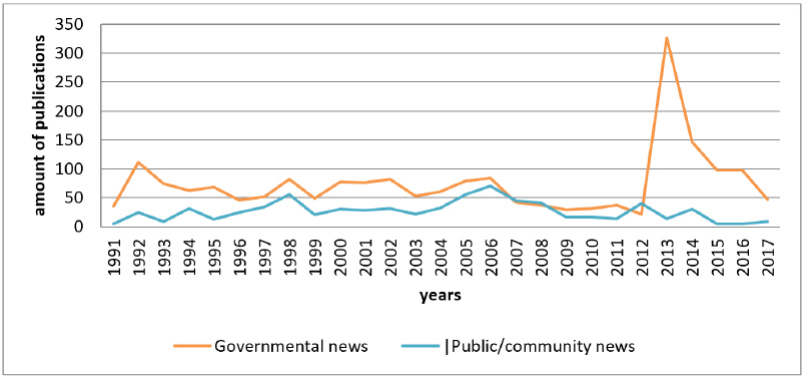
- Governmental news: news where the main subject is a public agency, a national company, civil servants, or various governmental or pro-governmental actors.
- Public or community news (society messages): news where the main subjects are the members of civil society, voluntary associations, or the general populace.

Based on the ratio of these two types of messages, the so-called postcode relations (relations index) can be identified – this is the ratio between governmental and community news, calculated using a specific formula. The value of this index is crucial in determining the country's image: the smaller the index, the better the country's image.

The analysis of the attitude index, or postcode relations, based on the combined approach of the aforementioned research design, showed the following results: there were 2006 governmental news items and 725 public news items. Thus, on average, over the 26 years, the attitude index was 2.77. The details are shown in figure 3.

Figure 3

Relations index – the ratio between governmental & public/ community news about Kazakhstan in The Washington Post



If we examine the index indicator by year, the best result is observed in 2012, when the number of official and public or community messages was nearly the same. In contrast, the worst result occurred in 2013, when the volume of official news sharply diverged from public news.

The dominance of official publications about the country during this period can be perceived by the audience as the publication of paid materials and an artificial inflation of publications by an interested party. It may also appear as propaganda or as the clumsy, overly explicit, and intrusive efforts of a PR department. For the country's image, the predominance of official news is not a favorable indicator regarding the development of civil society.

4.5 Topicalization

The publications from the 2013 timeline will be analyzed further. What could have caused such results? We sought to understand this by studying the topics of the messages. We categorized the topics into five main groups: politics, economy, society, health & environment, and terrorism. This classification was based on the identical headings and subheadings in the newspaper.

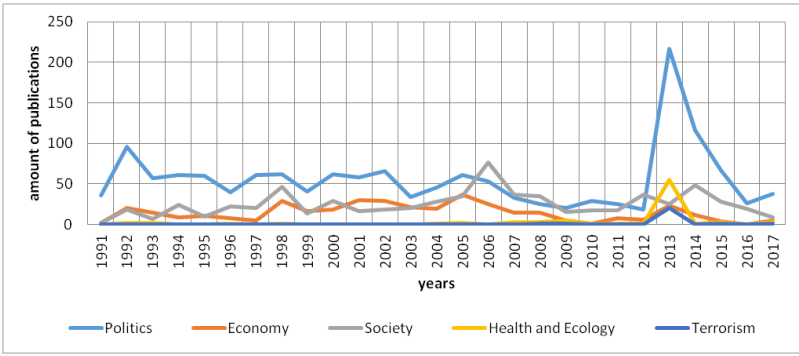
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In the 'society' group, we include all messages related to culture and entertainment, sports and tourism, science, education, and technology.

Health and ecology, due to their relevance to the nation's image, were treated as a distinct area. This is a matter that often draws attention when people are making decisions about visiting the country.Similarly, the topic of terrorism holds particular importance, as it negatively impacts the country's investment and tourism image. The results are presented in figure 4.

Figure 4

Publication topics about Kazakhstan in The Washington Post



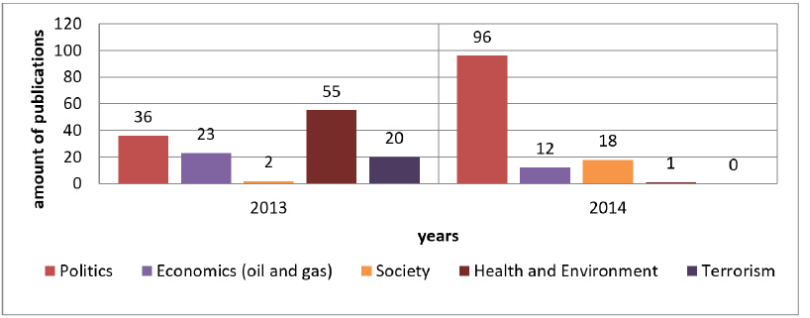
Thanks to the obtained data, the authors can highlight another communication trend: terrorism is not associated with Kazakhstan in the media space, as most of the indicators on this topic are zero.

The prevalence of political and economic topics once again demonstrates Kazakhstan's desire to present itself as a stable state for foreign direct investment. Most of these news reports are official, and their information is typically sourced from authorized personnel.

The largest surge in publications occurred in 2013 and 2014. Figure 5 illustrates the authors' topical analysis of the articles published during this timeframe.

Figure 5

Subjects of publications mentioning Kazakhstan in The Washington Post in 2013-2014



This is not the first time the 2013 and 2014 timeline has been the focus of the authors. During these years, a large number of articles in the political category were published in the newspaper.

This was primarily due to the fact that on February 26-27, 2013, the first negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program were held in Almaty (Kazakhstan's former capital and largest city by population). The negotiations were attended by five states, the permanent members of the UN Security Council (Russia, China, the USA, France, and the UK), as well as representatives from Iran and EU countries. Kazakhstan did not participate in the negotiations, instead acting as the moderator. On April 5-6, 2013, the second round of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program took place in Almaty once again. In 2014, this topic continued to be discussed in the media, as Kazakhstan's peace-oriented and multi-vector foreign policy remained a focal point. The country voluntarily renounced the nuclear arsenal it inherited from the Soviet Union, which contributed to the positive construction of its image for foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction. This was part of a broader shift from a Marxist centralized planned economy to a free market economy.

In the second half of the 2000s, Kazakhstan implemented most of the market reforms and overcame the transitional stage of transforming its economy into a market economy. The EU and the U.S. recognized Kazakhstan as a country with a market economy. The necessary level of openness was achieved with minimal government intervention; foreign trade was practically liberalized; 80% of the

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property was privatized; macroeconomic stability was established; and the exchange rate of the national currency was stable. Thus, according to the main criteria of economic development, the country joined the World Trade Organization in 2015.While the main focus of the negotiations was nuclear weapons, the newspaper publications placed greater emphasis on political and diplomatic relations between the participating countries. Journalists, in their analysis, classified these publications as being politically oriented. However, it is important to note that Kazakhstan was mentioned only as the venue for the event. The newspaper did not highlight any special role or activity on Kazakhstan's part in the negotiations. The media instead focused on the interactions between the leaders of Syria and U.S. representatives. The Kazakhstani government aimed to portray the nation in foreign media as an active participant in resolving global issues. However, this aspiration did not come to fruition.

If we attempt to use the method for discovering events described in news texts to identify specific patterns that express event semantics (Umamaheswari & Geetha, 2015), we can observe that Kazakhstan often appears in news texts merely as a designation of the event location.

The total number of publications in the 'Politics' category was 132 (for both 2013 and 2014). In the context of this study, it was particularly interesting to examine the impact of such a large-scale event as international negotiations on nuclear weapons (with the superpowers hosting the event on Kazakhstan's territory) on the external image of the country. Unfortunately, despite the frequency of publications mentioning Kazakhstan in the studied newspaper, little emphasis was placed on the role of Kazakhstan itself.

In the categories of healthcare, environmental protection, and ecology, 55 articles were published in 2013. The central information motive in this category was the meteorite that fell to Earth. The bulk of the meteorite fell in Chelyabinsk, Russia, but a fragment of the small celestial body, which had collapsed due to deceleration in Earth's atmosphere, collided with the Earth's surface on February 15, 2013. Small parts of the meteorite fell in the border areas of Kazakhstan. Once again, in several publications, Kazakhstan was merely referred to as a location.

In 2014, 127 articles mentioning Kazakhstan were published, with 96 of them classified in the 'Politics' category. A large number of messages in this category were related to the tragic plane crash

of March 8, 2014. The Malaysian Airlines flight, which operated a scheduled passenger route from Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) to Beijing (PRC), disappeared from radar over the South China Sea 40 minutes after takeoff. A total of 239 passengers, including the cabin crew, were aboard the flight and were all declared dead in January 2015. The investigating authorities were unable to determine the circumstances and causes of the incident. At that time, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak stated in the initial days following the event: "The last communication of the aircraft was in one of two possible corridors: the northern corridor, extending approximately from the border of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to northern Thailand, or the southern corridor, extending approximately from Indonesia to the South Indian Ocean".

The words of N. Razak were cited in nearly all publications related to this incident (Achenbach, 2014). Kazakhstan is mentioned in these articles solely as a landmark. Clearly, these publications do not contribute to the international image of Kazakhstan. However, according to the conditions of the study, all publications mentioning Kazakhstan must be analyzed. All these articles were categorized as 'Politics' since the incident served as an opportunity to raise issues surrounding political relationships between countries. In the articles mentioned above, Kazakhstan was naturally far removed from the central subject of discussion. Therefore, in terms of promoting the country's image, these publications could only indirectly affect the recognition of the country.

The second most frequently discussed topic in this category was the occupation of Crimea. A multi-perspective analysis of Russian-Ukrainian relations was presented in the newspaper. The geopolitical situation in the region was discussed with considerable interest, particularly the risk of a repeat of the Crimean scenario in regions bordering Russia. One such region is the northern part of Kazakhstan, where a significant number of ethnic Russians reside. A series of articles titled '*Stay on Course*' examined the U.S. government's stance on the situation. The U.S. president engaged in negotiations not only with the Russian president but also with leaders of other countries, including Kazakhstan.

Thus, the authors can assert that political events influenced the frequency with which Kazakhstan was mentioned in quantitative terms and, as a result, affected only the recognition of Kazakhstan. However, these events hardly influenced the formation of a positive or negative image of the country. This represents another communication trend.

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Another significant topic in this category was the selection of the venue for the 2022 Winter Olympics. One publication included the following quote: "The International Olympic Committee announced three 'finalists' who submitted applications: Oslo (although the Norwegian government does not seem inclined to accept the proposal this year, as only 36 percent of Norwegians support it in polls); Almaty, Kazakhstan (an uncomfortable choice due to the country's human rights record and political repression); and Beijing (with the added concern of an unfavorable air quality situation)" (Rampell, 2014). Contrary to expectations, Kazakhstan's bid for the Olympic Games contributed to a more negative image of the country in the media.

The remaining categories did not exhibit significant publication increases during the study period.

4.6 The concept of image in The Washington Post

Today, one of the primary aspirations of any country is arguably to create a positive image in the eyes of the global community, particularly if it is successfully integrating into the 'global village'. This image can provide a significant advantage in numerous areas, including foreign policy, trade, economic development, tourism, and the attraction of investments (Nikitinsky, 2006).

The Kazakhstani government is actively working to establish a positive national brand in the context of nation-building. To achieve this, Kazakhstan has pursued a policy of hosting a variety of international mega-events (Shakirova, 2015).

There is no doubt that Kazakhstan is striving to create a positive image on the international stage. However, many of these efforts often result in the country being referenced merely as a geographical entity. Moreover, some initiatives, such as its bid to host the Olympic Games, have, in fact, had a negative impact on the country's image.

Other large-scale image-building projects in Kazakhstan, which were intended to generate a surge of interest, unfortunately, did not produce the desired effect. Researchers have also characterized such mega-projects as problematic, noting that governments often employ an "unhealthy cocktail of underestimated costs and overestimated revenues" when promoting these initiatives (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003).

This study delves into the concept of image in The Washington Post and explores the role of the media in shaping the state's image and reputation in foreign media. Both qualitative and quantitative measures of image markers and their components are provided in detail, allowing for the detection of consistent trends and problematic areas, as well as the identification of potential solutions. Ultimately, the research concludes that the image of Kazakhstan, as portrayed in The Washington Post, is generally unappealing. Regular American audiences show limited interest in Kazakhstan, although this interest notably increases during significant political and social events, as outlined in the article.

4.7 Consumer comments analysis

In order to fully capture the image of Kazakhstan as constructed by The Washington Post for its readers, the authors decided to analyze not only the articles themselves but also the responses to them. Specifically, the newspaper's official website allows its audience to leave comments on each publication, ask questions to the article's author, or respond to questions posed by previous commentators, within 14 days of the material's publication (according to editorial guidelines). In the authors' opinion, an analysis of reader responses can offer a different perspective – reflecting the views and ideas already formed about the country, providing an important context.

Considering that in 1991, when Kazakhstan became independent, there was no possibility of commenting on journalistic texts online (the newspaper's official website was launched only in 1996), this analysis cannot encompass the entire period. This limitation is one reason why this section is not included in the main part of the research but is instead presented as a significant addition in the discussion section.

A search query with the keyword "Kazakhstan" on the newspaper's official website yielded 1994 results (from 2018 to 2020, inclusive). The authors deem it important to include a brief analysis of the comments in this study. This research hypothesizes that the portrayal of Kazakhstan in English-language media, particularly The Washington Post, constitutes a cultivated public perception of the

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nation, strategically and expertly constructed within the international English-language media landscape.

English-speaking Kazakhs provided the majority of commentary on The Washington Post's article regarding the country's name change. This can be inferred from the usernames of those who left comments, which include names such as Galym, Farhad, Uaahmed, Alibek Taizhanov, Khan Shatyr (the name of the largest shopping center in Astana), Altynai Adilbayeva, Umirbek Khabai, Talgat Taskhozhayev, Serik Jumanov, and Erik75. These names – first names, last names, and the names of landmarks – clearly belong to ethnic Kazakhs or individuals from neighboring Turkic-speaking countries, but they can hardly be considered authentically American.

For this article, the opinions of people who are already familiar with the country, such as those of Kazakhstani citizens, are not of primary interest. The focus is on the opinions of foreigners, whose perceptions of the country's image may be influenced by media coverage. However, the fact that Kazakh citizens are actively commenting online, seemingly with a foreign audience in mind, suggests that they care deeply about how Kazakhstan is portrayed internationally. This, in turn, represents another communication trend.

Turning to a meaningful analysis of the comments signed by typical 'American' or 'Western' nicknames, it becomes clear that foreign readers approached the journalistic text somewhat like a game, with many offering their own suggestions for the country's new name. For example, a user named Richard Blish writes: "Regarding a new name for Kazakhstan... what about something to honor the Silk Road?" Bruce from Baltimore suggests: "How about Kazakhia?" Tito Edwards proposes: "... change the name..., say Sericuma, Latin for Silk. ... I am trying to be creative and neutral for the nation". T-rama comments: "... Maybe they should go for an anglicized version, Kazakh Land, or the Central Asian Federation. That would get them the investments they want and avoid ethnic controversies."Continuing to analyze the comments, the authors can identify another small group – those that mention "Borat", the well-known pseudo-documentary comedy film in which a journalist from Kazakhstan travels across America. For example, Levantine writes: "The irony is that for all the 'stans', Kazakhstan probably has the biggest nation brand recognition because of Borat". Counter Point adds: "Doesn't any legitimate story on whether Kazakhstan should change its name have to include at least a passing reference to Borat? ... Sorry, but that was the first

thing I was thinking when I read the headline, and yet no mention". Archy Bunka writes: "Borat says, no, to rename".In a third group, characterized by humor and satire, comments can be found such as the one from JustAGirl, who writes: "Currently, the proper reference to citizens of Kazakhstan is 'Kazakhstani'... If the country is renamed Kazakh Yeli, I wonder what the new reference to citizens other than ethnic Kazakhs will be? Kazakh Yelians?"The authors also note the high level of awareness among The Washington Post readers about the country's history. Levantine comments: "... Nazarbayev already changed the name of the former capital Alma-Ata to Almaty. Then he moved the capital to Akmola, and changed that name to Astana". This comment was made in 2014, and in 2019, Kazakhstan's capital was renamed again – from Astana to Nur-Sultan, and then from Nur-Sultan back to Astana in September 2022.

5 Discussion

Burakanova (2023) noted: "Image is an aggregate indicator of a state's authority and the success of its actions in the international arena, the assessment of foreign public opinion about a country. In today's global information society, the important role of the international image of the state cannot be underestimated".

However, the media are not the only "creators" of a state's image. Often, they are not the primary source of information, which may come from government institutions, public opinion leaders, PR companies, press services at various levels, celebrities, or ordinary citizens, all of whom contribute to shaping the state's reputation at the interpersonal communication level. The media, as intermediaries, formalize and fill the information environment for both external and internal audiences. In this context, they play a significant role in forming a state's reputation on the international stage. Yet, it is also crucial to consider the journalistic community, both national and foreign, as a key subject in the formation of a state's image.

After all, the media are not a "mirror" of existing reality; they are not simply a means of distributing objective data about events. Rather, they clearly or subtly convey a particular perspective, interpreting events. The public adopts the views and values of the intermediaries in the information environment. The mass media has

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considerable power to change the audience's perceptions, thereby shaping public opinion. As Klushina (2000) noted: "Assessments (whether positive or negative) are embedded in the message; their presence in the text is often unnoticed... The addressee perceives the assessment on a suggestive, emotional level, and it seems as though they have arrived at this evaluative conclusion on their own".

This situation is common in shaping the opinions of both internal (fellow citizens) and external audiences. Self-perception of the country by Kazakhstani citizens, as well as social, political, economic, and cultural processes, is of significant importance. Within the global media landscape, the selection of a particular agenda in news or analytical content implicitly or explicitly reveals a subjective perspective. This, in turn, has a substantial impact on the assessments and attitudes of foreign audiences towards Kazakhstan as a state, shaping emotional and political positions among foreign institutions and citizens.

In discussions of the external perception of the country in foreign media, some researchers argue that the role of the media in shaping reputational characteristics at the present stage is clearly diminishing. As such, sociocultural issues are becoming more prominent in contacts (Sabitov, 2009). Cultural events, interstate relations, personal citizens' experiences, tourism, private contacts, and free access to Internet data are all important factors in shaping and adjusting perceptions. However, this does not diminish the role of the media, which now reaches a much larger audience. Internet platforms and their significant influence on the social and political environment are among the most important communication factors.

We must also recognize the media industry's convergence, the integration of different media, and the redundancy of content in traditional media. The existing potential of the "traditional press + internet" partnership can be professionally and skillfully leveraged to either strengthen the country's positive image in the international arena or, conversely, harm its reputation.

Summing up, the authors can assert that the image of Kazakhstan constructed in readers' minds is based on several key associations: The Great Silk Road, Central Asia, Borat, and Nazarbayev. All of these can be categorized as stereotypes. Kotler and Gertner (2002) suggest that while stereotypes help simplify representation, they can also distort reality. This is particularly evident with the 'Borat' stereotype. The film bears no relation to the real Kazakhstan.

In fact, media publications have contributed to the generation of many myths about countries (Nametova & Tolymbek, 2018). Kazakhstan is working diligently to dispel these negative myths, including through the media.

A limitation of this study is the inability to compare reader comments with journalistic materials for the entire period under consideration. Yet, audience feedback analysis is still important because the data on prior knowledge informs better recommendations for content and approach.

By combining the results of this study with the recommendations made by Wolfsfeld (1983), the following conclusions can be drawn:

A. To effectively cultivate the country's image, it is important to tailor it to the target audience. Additionally, communication should be disseminated through various channels to reach a wider audience. Although this requires substantial investment, the effect of reaching the target audience is often low. In this case, working with a wide-reaching communication channel like The Washington Post is entirely justified, given that the newspaper has a global readership and significant influence.

B. Coordinated action to change the image can transform a negative image into a positive one. However, this process takes time and will continue until a critical mass of news, indicating a more favorable image of the country, has been accumulated. In other words, Kazakhstan will not be able to achieve the desired image all at once. Other positive news has not yet reached a critical mass, and readers continue to associate the film Borat directly.

C. Changing the image of a subject is possible if the recipient is at least somewhat familiar with the country – the object of the image transformation – and, secondly, if there prevails the belief that the country is not merely "an object to sell" (advertising). As the analysis of reader comments revealed, they are already familiar with the basic ideas about the country. What remains is to increase the number of published social materials without overtly promoting the country's brand.

In general, when it comes to the country's image, bad news tends to have a negative impact, whereas good news often doesn't have a significant positive effect and tends to have a more neutral impact. An excessive amount of positive information can, in many cases, provoke distrust. Efforts in this direction should not be too explicit. As previously mentioned, the best approach is to strike a balance between positive and neutral information. Naturally neutral

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and negative news appears in the media on its own, allowing the country to lobby for positive information in equal measure.

Additionally, in the discussion section, we can briefly compare the country's image as constructed by The Washington Post with the image presented by another prominent newspaper, The New York Times. For example, on June 15, 2004, the newspaper published a description of Kazakhstan as a tourist destination in Central Asia. On August 20, 2015, an article in the "International Business" section noted that the exchange rates of Kazakhstan's neighboring countries in Central Asia would also decline. In these and other similar instances, Kazakhstan is positioned as part of the Central Asian region.

In 2006 and 2007, The New York Times actively introduced its audience to Kazakhstan's film and fashion industries, framing them as typically Asian. These publications sparked significant interest, judging by the number of views (Genzlinger, 2007). Thus, in comparison with the newspaper considered here, The New York Times forms the country's image in much the same way – as an integral part of Central Asia.

As practical advice for improving the image of Kazakhstan in Western media, it is important to emphasize the need for an English-language media presence, with materials that are open and freely available for reprinting and distribution. Furthermore, it is crucial to develop an effective official press service that can promptly process requests from Western journalists for official information, statistics, and provide expert spokespeople. The distribution of press releases and the establishment of personal relationships with journalists also play a vital role. Direct PR materials about the country are not recommended; instead, it is better to promote Kazakhstan through the social and economic achievements of ordinary citizens. As experience shows, Western audiences tend to favor specifics: names, surnames, regions, firms, and companies.

6 Conclusions

In conclusion, let us focus on the main research question: which country's initiatives can provoke positive publications in foreign media and help construct and build a positive image? To answer this question, it is first necessary to define the so-called 'gaps' or 'information voids' in the media space. By filling these voids

with the necessary and relevant information, the country can achieve the desired result.

These 'voids' can be identified by analyzing the published materials related to Kazakhstan, which will reveal journalists' interests. Similarly, analyzing communication trends and comments will uncover the audience's interests. By combining these two zones of interest, areas emerge where the country can actively work on its image.

The following preliminary results were obtained:

1. Negative materials about Kazakhstan are published less frequently than others.
2. Terrorism is not associated with Kazakhstan.
3. Political events have influenced the frequency with which the country is mentioned, affecting its recognition as a geographical feature, but have had little impact on the construction of a positive or negative image.
4. Citizens care about the image Kazakhstan will project in the international arena.
5. The image of Kazakhstan constructed in readers' minds is based on several key associations.
6. Kazakhstan's image is primarily associated with its pro-Russian stance in the context of foreign policy initiatives and its membership in a single economic and partnership union.

The situation proves to be highly favorable for Kazakhstan and for the entire process of constructing a positive image.

Regarding the final research task – what kind of informational motives can the country offer Western media, particularly The Washington Post, in order not only to secure a presence in the media space but also to earn the loyal attitude of the foreign audience – several options can be put forward, based on the following:

1. News about society and people is most interesting to the audience.
2. Western readers prefer stories of personal experience.
3. News about society is preferred in the process of creating a positive image.

Why not tell the world community about a Kazakhstani entrepreneur engaged in a specific local business? Furthermore, if this entrepreneur happens to be a woman, the material will cover several thematic areas: gender equality, stereotypes, local specifics, history, tourism, business, investment, and the economy.

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Articles about volunteers will also be interesting and engaging. The volunteer movement is inherently international in nature. Kazakhstani volunteer organizations cooperate with many foundations and sponsors.

In other words, if the central figure of journalistic material is a person from Kazakhstan who has achieved significant success in any field, such an article will not only arouse interest from a foreign audience but also help the country address any negative associations, accumulating positive momentum for subsequent image formation. According to the communication trend that Kazakhstanis are interested in creating a positive image for the country, there should be no difficulty in finding such "heroes" who would be willing to provide interviews themselves.

The initiation of large-scale international events does not yield significant results. The main focus in constructing the country's image should be on its citizens – whether they are researchers, volunteers, students, doctors, or police officers. Such news stories will swiftly fill a void in the media space and increase the country's credibility among foreign audiences, such as potential tourists, investors, and others. Additionally, these stories will not provoke rejection from readers, as they are not tied to promotional material.

By following these straightforward guidelines, government agencies and English-speaking domestic journalists will be able to significantly improve the country's foreign image.

Therefore, the interest in Kazakhstan from foreign media can be driven, firstly, by the country's considerable influence in the Central Asian region; secondly, by potential partnerships in the economic and cultural spheres; and thirdly, by the increasing interest of tourists in exploring less popular global destinations.

The research data from this study may be useful for future analysis in conducting similar studies in related fields.

A significant limitation of this work is that the country's foreign image was considered without examining the internal image of the state among its residents. However, conducting such an analysis and comparison is not feasible within the scope of a single research paper.

The analysis shows that The Washington Post does not cover the 2020 and 2021 timeframe regarding Kazakhstan's international image, neither through the lens of Kazakhs themselves nor through international experts with a focus on Central Asia, particularly

Kazakhstan. The reason is quite clear: Kazakhstan, like many other countries, was grappling with the covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the state's image, as presented in The Washington Post, did not gain prominence during this period due to the absence of relevant data on the discussed timeframe. One could infer that The Washington Post either did not observe or was not particularly interested in Kazakhstan's covid-19 lockdown, or in the national economic damages resulting from it, nor the fact that Kazakhstan developed its own vaccine, QazVac, alongside other global vaccine brands.

The Washington Post has published 11 articles concerning the recent political transformation in Kazakhstan to date. In this regard, the country's reputation and international image have indeed been damaged, according to these publications. In all 11 articles, the newspaper highlights that the former Soviet republic was embroiled in political crises, accompanied by a fuel price hike. As the world's leading nation in energy reserves, this crisis contributed to the formation of a negative image of Kazakhstan in the international community. Furthermore, the invitation of foreign military troops to support the regime during the bloody January 2022 unrest marked a precedent in international political and military structures, suggesting that methods and scenarios for supporting internal conflicts could be employed not only in response to external attacks but also to quell internal strife. This narrative continues to shape the negative image of Kazakhstan among readers.

The current paper analyzed the development of the historical segment of the Republic of Kazakhstan's media image in The Washington Post. It cannot be denied that foreign media platforms possess significant potential as tools that either shape the country's positive reputation or, conversely, harm its image in the external arena.

Stereotypes and perceptions about the state may be incorrect and biased, yet they can be purposefully shaped. The state's image strategy is a long-term, time-based, comprehensive program aimed at influencing public opinion abroad. This must be acknowledged, particularly given the global competition across all spheres of international life. First and foremost, the competition for geopolitical influence, cultural expansion, the attraction of investments, and the increase in exports and tourism attractiveness must be taken into account.

In an era of information wars and targeted media aggression, deliberate efforts to destroy the reputation of adversaries in the international community have become part of strategic capital.

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Therefore, it is imperative to focus on the external image. This is especially crucial for countries with limited military, economic, financial potential, and human resources.

To improve Kazakhstan's visibility in the news, it is essential to engage with foreign media and journalists working within Kazakhstan. Actively providing valuable and engaging information will help capture the interest of foreign readers and highlight the uniqueness of Kazakhstan.

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