

PSYSOC 2013

## Images on Environment in the US and Russian Media Agenda in a Comparative Perspective

Polina Ermolaeva <sup>a\*</sup>

*a Department of Sociology, Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Center of Advanced Economic Research in the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kazan, 420111, Russia*

---

### Abstract

The article describes the differences and similarities in media reporting and framing of environmental images across US and Russian national and regional newspapers. The cross-newspaper analysis highlighted that in the portrayal of environmental images, the US press, compared to Russian press, took a major step forward. The rationale of such a discrepancy in media coverage could be caused by the different media industry in Russia and the US as well as by the different social and geopolitical context.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of PSYSOC 2013.

*Keywords:* environment, Mass Media, Russia, social constructivist

---

### 1. Introduction

Mass media is a meaningful part of our everyday life. Giddens [1] emphasizes that mass media “integrate distant events into the framework of personal experience” and help to construct the meanings to political, social and environmental issues.

A literature review demonstrates that mass media coverage on the environmental issues has been a topic for multidisciplinary researchers who focus on the types of the environmental issues [2,3,4], scientific information [5,6], types of journalists [7,5], urgency [7], claim-makers [8,9,10], models of post-soviet media [11].

US media researchers emphasize studying the media coverage of particular environmental risks such as climate change [6,12], toxic waste [13], the analysis of coverage of specific environmental disasters or events [14] or the

---

\*Corresponding Author: Polina Ermolaeva. Tel.: +7-843-292-0010  
E-mail address: [Polina.Ermolaeva@tatar.ru](mailto:Polina.Ermolaeva@tatar.ru)

drivers in coverage of certain environmental issues [15].

Russian scholars are embedded in a much broader perspective. Under the concept of ‘green culture,’ scholars simultaneously study various domains of the environmentalism such as environmental knowledge [16,17], environmental activism [18].

Such difference in scope of the environmental images presented by US and Russian scholars could be explained by the dominant paradigms of the national social sciences. In Russian social research, a social functionalism perspective aiming at analyzing the social phenomenon in a holistic approach is quite influential while in the US adopts a phenomenological perspective.

Despite the fact that cross-cultural analysis of the media coverage is becoming more popular among the researchers [19, 20, 21], the comparative analysis of the media images presented in the US and Russian press has not been examined in the current literature. Thus, neither an adequate conceptualization of the environmental images portrayed by the Russian versus the US press, nor sociological analysis of differences between the countries’ media agenda of the environmentalism has been analysed.

To address these limitation, my research primarily focuses on the portrayal of environmental images in the US and Russian press. This allows connecting our discussion with postmodernist writers who play off the two meanings of the word ‘image’. Images are, on the one hand, reproductions, but they have a second meaning as well: a mental picture of something not real or present. Baudrillard [22] argues that dramatic changes in the technology of reproduction have led to the implosion of representation and reality. As Guy Debord [23] suggests, in “societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles, which is the main production of present-day society”.

## 2. Literature review

To analyze the environmental images in these two meanings, the article employ the social constructivist theory that is highlighted on the relationship between producing the objective discourse and the actors’ background, the resources they use to legitimate their claims.

Employing the given approach, mass media is viewed as a part of a process of economic, political, social, and cultural struggle. According to this approach, different classes, sectors of capital, and social groups compete for social dominance and attempt to impose their visions, interests, and agendas on society as a whole to constitute them in an objective discourse. Together, environmental groups, government officials, private industry, scientists and other claim-makers constitute the “social problem industry” or what Hilgartner also called “public arenas model” [8]. As active members of the public arena, they bring attention to some environmental topics and ignoring others. Attracting media attention to the environmental problems, however, is only half of the task for claim-makers: “... the real battle is over whose interpretations, whose framing of reality gets the floor” [24]. In fact, everyone can be a part of the “social problems industry” and articulates their claims, signing petitions, participating in social movements, etc. But the groups who have more power have better chances to legitimate their claims and play a more significant role in shaping the discourse about environmental images. The claims made by less powerful groups can be interpreted by more powerful groups in a way less powerful groups neither expect nor support.

Research on news sourcing [2,5] illustrated that government officials, private industry and scientists were quoted by mass media much more than environmental groups. For example, Sigals' study [25] found that almost 75% of news sources presented in the New York Times and the Washington Post during 20 years’ time were governmental officials. Also it was found that when environmental pressure groups do appear as the main definers, they usually articulate themselves in mass media through public demonstration or protest rather than through a legitimate way [26]. Besides, the studies indicated that environmental groups have more access to local media coverage than to the national press [8].

To analyze how environmental messages are structured within media discourses, researchers have addressed journalist norms. The research on the topic stressed that journalists do not report environmental issues, they report news [24]. In this respect, reporters frame environmental news according to many journalistic norms and imperatives that make the events newsworthy, including timelessness, conflict, prominence, significance and human interest [7]. Altogether, they constitute the newsworthiness of the media coverage.

In addition, several researchers [8,10] indicated that the environmental coverage is determined by the cultural system and socio-economical values. Successful claims made by those who reinforce the dominant cultural values and governmental interests [27].

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1112946>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1112946>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)