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THE ROLE OF MASS MEDIA IN SHAPING THE IMAGE OF A POLITICAL LEADER ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN SH. MIRZIYOYEV

This article analyzes media messages regarding the activities of the second president of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev. An assessment is made on the formation and transformation of the president's image based on scientific literature on this topic and media content. The methodological base is the study of materials of famous scientists, as well as media reports to review and analyze the development of the image of the president of Uzbekistan from 2016 to 2022.

The purpose of the study is to determine the type of image of the head of state, formed with the help of the media, as well as the process of its change and evolution from the time of election to the present period. The activity of the president in the context of providing informational occasions and the subsequent influence of Uzbek and other media of various directions and genres on the formation of the image are studied. The role of the mass media in the design and promotion of the image of the head of state is critically analyzed on the example of Sh. Mirziyoyev, both among the citizens of the state and citizens of other states. The article also traces the connection between the image of Sh. Mirziyoyev as a president and the brand image of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The results of the work can be considered confirmation of the close relationship between the media and the formation of the image of the head of state, while informational occasions, including those that have a secondary effect on the development of the image of the head of state in close dependence on the image of the state as a whole, can also be created by the president himself. The importance of forming certain types of positive image of the head of state in connection with the design of an open and positive brand of the state is traced.

The relevance of the study of media interaction and the work of the head of state to form a positive image is confirmed by the need to ensure citizens' confidence in the policy of their leader, increase his authority and voter loyalty, and, as a result, establish a positive image of the state in the international arena.

Keywords: president, Republic of Uzbekistan, image, media, Sh. Mirziyoyev, reforms.

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Өзбекстан Республикасының Президенті Ш. Мирзиеевтің мысалында саяси көшбасшы имиджін қалыптастырудағы масс-медианың рөлі

Бұл мақалада Өзбекстан Республикасының екінші президенті Шавкат Мирзиеевтің қызметіне қатысты медиа хабарламаларға талдау жасалды. Осы тақырып бойынша ғылыми әдебиеттер және медиаконтент негізінде Президент имиджінің қалыптасуына баға берілді және оның өзгеруі қадағаланды. Әдістемелік база белгілі ғалымдардың материалдарын, сондай-ақ 2016 жылдан 2022 жылға дейін Өзбекстан президентінің имиджін дамытуды қарастыру және талдау үшін бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының хабарламаларын зерттеуге негізделген.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – Мемлекет басшысының бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының көмегімен қалыптасқан имиджінің түрін, сондай-ақ сайланған уақыттан бастап қазіргі кезеңге дейінгі оның өзгеруі мен эволюциясын анықтау. Президенттің ақпараттық себептер беру контексіндегі қызметі және әр түрлі бағыттағы және жанрдағы өзбек және басқа да бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының имиджді қалыптастыруға кейінгі әсері зерттелді. Ш. Мирзиеевтің мысалында Мемлекет басшысының бейнесін безендіруде және насихаттауда бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының рөлі қарастырылып отырған мемлекеттің азаматтары арасында да, басқа мемлекеттердің азаматтары арасында да сыни тұрғыдан қарастырылған. Сондай-ақ, мақалада Ш. Мирзиеевтің президент ретіндегі имиджі мен Өзбекстан Республикасының бренд-имиджі арасындағы байланыс көрсетілген.

Жұмыстың нәтижелері ретінде бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары мен мемлекет басшысының имиджін қалыптастыру арасындағы тығыз байланысты растауға болады, сонымен қатар ақпараттық себептерді, оның ішінде Мемлекет басшысының имиджін дамытуға жанама әсер ететін жағдайларды тұтастай алғанда мемлекет имиджіне тығыз байланысты Президенттің өзі де

жасай алады. Мемлекеттің ашық және оң брендін ресімдеуге байланысты Мемлекет басшысының оң имиджінің қандай да бір түрлерін қалыптастырудың маңыздылығы байқалды.

БАҚ-тың өзара іс-қимылын және Мемлекет басшысының оң имиджін қалыптастыру жөніндегі жұмысын зерттеудің өзектілігі азаматтардың өз көшбасшысының саясатына деген сенімін қамтамасыз ету, оның беделі мен сайлаушылардың адалдығын арттыру, сондай-ақ халықаралық аренада мемлекеттің оң имиджін қалыптастыру қажеттілігімен расталады.

Түйін сөздер: Президент, Өзбекстан Республикасы, имидж, БАҚ, Ш. Мирзиёев, реформалар.

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Роль масс-медиа в формировании имиджа политического лидера на примере президента Республики Узбекистан Ш. Мирзиёева

В данной статье проведен анализ медиасообщений о деятельности второго президента Республики Узбекистан Шавката Мирзиёева. Дана оценка формированию и трансформации имиджа президента на основании научной литературы по данной тематике и медиаконтенту. Методологическая база опирается на изучение материалов известных ученых, а также сообщений средств массовой информации с целью рассмотрения и разбора развития имиджа президента Узбекистана в 2016–2022 гг.

Целью исследования является определение типа имиджа главы государства, сформированного при помощи средств массовой информации, а также процесса его изменения и эволюции со времени избрания до нынешнего периода. Изучена деятельность президента в контексте предоставления информационных поводов и последовавшее влияние узбекских и иных средств массовой информации разных направленностей и жанров на формирование имиджа. Критически разобрана роль средств массовой информации в оформлении и раскрутке образа главы государства на примере Ш. Мирзиёева как среди граждан рассматриваемого государства, так и граждан других государств. В статье также выявлена связь между имиджем Ш. Мирзиёева как президента и бренд-имиджем Республики Узбекистан.

Результатами работы можно считать подтверждение тесной взаимосвязи между средствами массовой информации и формированием имиджа главы государства при том, что информационные поводы, в том числе второстепенно влияющие на развитие имиджа главы государства в тесной зависимости с имиджем государства в целом, также могут создаваться самим президентом. Авторы отмечают важность формирования тех или иных типов положительного имиджа главы государства в связи с оформлением открытого и позитивного бренда государства.

Актуальность исследования взаимодействия СМИ и работы главы государства по формированию положительного имиджа подтверждается необходимостью обеспечения доверия граждан к политике своего лидера, повышения его авторитета и лояльности избирателей, а также, как следствие, установлением положительного имиджа государства на международной арене.

Ключевые слова: Президент, Республика Узбекистан, имидж, СМИ, Ш. Мирзиёев, реформы.

Introduction

In the current geopolitical and social situation, when no examples of impeccable social construction have been found, the state governance structure tends to be democratic, as the most common and used in the most economically developed countries of the world. The democratic construction of state governance implies the free expression of the will of the people and their active participation in political processes, in particular in the elections of people called upon to manage on behalf of society one or another structural unit of the state apparatus, geographical entity, or, in fact, stand at the head of the state. “The goals and requirements of the democratization of power and social orders are now almost universal slogans for political movements of any type” (Soloviev A., 2006).

As it is known, the basis of the democratic system of government is the collective participation of the people, i.e. citizens of the state in the process of management and decision-making. The people are a participant in the administrative process and a direct source, on behalf of which the government chosen by the people acts.

Even states with closed systems of government with signs of authoritarianism, with one-party political systems, still existing monarchical forms of government, are striving for a democratic construction of the system. So, for example, the United Arab Emirates is a constitutional monarchy, where the very name of the state contains a monarchical beginning: Emirate is a state headed by an emir, which in turn means the title of the supreme ruler of a Muslim state and can be compared with the titles of “prince” or “duke”. And yet, the UAE is a constitutional mon-

archy with many signs of democratic governance, albeit partial, pinpoint. On the one hand, political parties are banned in this Muslim state, the emirates are headed by hereditary emirs, on the other hand, the state has both a president and a parliament. In addition, “an important sign is the fact that the country provides for other bodies, some of which may be selective” (Lermontova M., 2021).

It is also interesting to consider the democratic exploits in the process of statecraft that take place in relatively young independent systems, in particular, the countries of the former Soviet Union. In some places, there are signs of autocracy, authoritarianism and totalitarian regimes. Some democratic foundations are oppressed, for example: closeness, dishonesty, fraud in the conduct of elections. And yet, all the states of the former Soviet Union declare themselves precisely as democratic, and no doubt, corresponding processes are developing in each, however, with their own geographical, historical and national characteristics.

In such conditions, when the people, aka the electorate, become the main lever in governing the state, first to the public, and then, in case of success, to the political arena, some persons who strive to gain power by electing to the post of head of state on behalf of the people come out. Elections provide legitimacy, recognition of obtaining the right to control a person (candidate) on behalf of the majority of citizens of the state.

So, in order to be elected to the post of head of a certain subject, whether it be a region, city, district or the post of a representative of a part of society in government bodies, such as parliament or the senate, in addition to presenting to the people, i.e. to voters, his program, to explain how the candidate intends to represent those who voted for him, what he intends to do for them, how he will protect and promote their interests, it is necessary to ensure the recognition of the candidate himself. People vote not so much for a program, but for a person, who intends to govern on their behalf and ensure the functioning of power. This also applies to the election of heads of state in democratic systems or those who claim to be such. The main activities in the election campaign include “activities that allow for a deep agitation of voters and form a positive image of the candidate in their minds” (Malkin E., 2006). That is, the most important action in the framework of the election campaign is the presentation of the image of the candidate, as well as broadcasting it to the mass audience of voters.

In order to ensure the recognition of the candidate, the concept of his image is indicated, thanks

to which it is possible to increase recognition in the eyes of the people in mass terms. Not the last, and perhaps even the leading role in the creation, promotion of a candidate or his image, is played by the media, public relations, which broadcast the candidate to a large audience.

There are many definitions of the term “image”, with reference to a candidate for a responsible state post. Depending on the contexts and angles from which the term is considered, the functions and typologies of the image also vary.

Considering the image of the head of state, the political image comes to the fore. In this segment, “the image includes personal, social and symbolic groups of characteristics” (Grinberg T., 2006). Each of these characteristics have important functions in the creation and further development and dissemination (transmission) of the image of a candidate for a high post.

Some of these characteristics of the image will be considered in this paper on the example of the current President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Miramonovich Mirziyoyev.

Technologies for creating and developing an image are varied and depend both on the real qualities of a person and on those created by PR specialists or imagemakers. There is a dependence both on emerging situations and on the methods of presenting certain human actions by the media. “The image has a certain rhythm, a constant change of images embedded in it, and own dynamics” (Pocheptsov G., 2001).

The most important component in establishing contacts between a candidate (or an already acting leader, head of state) and his electorate, people, citizens, on whose will his election and current support depends, is the link that provides these contacts. These are the media through which the head of state broadcasts his actions and also promotes his image. The mass media provide a demonstration of many qualities of a leader, from which his image is formed even during the election period, when a candidate seeks to show his personal qualities, such as, for example, courage, charisma, education; social characteristics such as marital status, participation in certain social gatherings, sports clubs, personal life. The symbolic image also plays an important role.

The main factor in the formation of the image, especially at the level of the election campaign of a candidate for the post of head of state, oddly enough, is not to ensure the creation of a positive image, but to broadcast it at the right time and to the right audience. “Mass media is the main driving

force in social policy. Information power in society belongs not to those who transmit, and not to those who consume information, but to those who provide it" (Nurtazina R., 2011). In addition, you need to understand that the image is gradually transformed and even more so after the candidate becomes the head of state. Some features of the image, which were most effective during the election campaign, become less relevant during the performance of duties as head of state. Special skills, mental type, appearance, style of communication or public speaking - all these qualities require special processing during the election campaign, while they can be changed as head of state.

Also, the media and the technologies associated with their use affect the image of the candidate and, in fact, the head of state in different ways. Political advertising, image clips, biographical documentaries fade into the background and become less in demand for the head of state. In this post, the image is transformed in other ways, more through information occasions, situations, actions of the leader, which are broadcast by the media of various directions to the audience. The audience itself is also temporarily transformed from direct voters to citizens who follow the actions of the elected head of state.

As head of state, almost any activity becomes the object of public scrutiny, discussion and interpretation. Under such conditions, the image of the head of state becomes well known. In addition, "any politician is the most effective image maker and "promoter" of his own image" (Olshanski D., 2003). This is especially relevant on the position of the head of the state, since the political technologies of the election campaign have already been passed and the stage is not so much of shaping the image, but of strengthening it, developing it in one direction or another.

The strongest, most publicized informational occasions in this context can be reforms, innovations, changes in existing systems or legislation, as well as situations that do not depend on the leader that occur regularly, such as, for example, currency fluctuations, deterioration of the geopolitical situation (which in conditions of globalization can have an impact on the most distant states and economies) and the immediate reaction of the leader to them. Some of these situations were considered in the framework. An assessment of the influence of mass media messages on Sh. Mirziyoyev's image is provided.

In addition, the factor of the image of the head of state in relation to the brand or image of the state it-

self seems significant. In the conditions of presidential republics, where the head of state has a solid, if not excessive political, public influence, the images of the leader and the state in the international arena are often identified. "The main thing when conducting PR events related to the image of the country is to achieve public outcry as a result of specific actions, for example, congresses, landmark meetings of leaders" (Rozhkov I., Kismereshkin V., 2008).

The object of the study is the content of the media, as a translator and intermediary that informs the audience, i.e. people, the image of the head of state, and sometimes interpreting it at his own discretion, depending on the political orientation. The hypothesis is the assertion that the media have a strong and diverse impact on the image of the head of state and, as a result, on the image of the state itself in the conditions of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The relevance of the topic can be traced by the latest events related to the global geopolitical confrontations of this year, when the media are actively involved in the process, in particular, of information wars, the formation of public opinion, both citizens of their states, and foreign, foreign-speaking, within the framework of transnational media corporations. In the context of a strong concentration of state forces, the economy, aimed at the implementation of a certain geopolitical will, the image of the head of state, as well as its maintenance and development with the help of the media, both public and private, both professional and specialized (Internet media), is the most important component for ensuring stability in the state, calmness and confidence of citizens for their future, supporting their leader or protecting him and counteracting the discrediting of state policy and the image of the head of state, when it comes to confrontation and information warfare.

Methodology

Based on a review of the literature, as well as scientific articles, an analysis of the influence of the media on the formation and development of the image of the head of state is conducted. Based on news, information and data provided by the media of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, as well as English-language media, a content analysis to study of the formation and transformation of the image of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirmonovich Mirziyoyev in different countries was carried out. On the basis of content analysis, comparative analysis of literature and study of sources

by the method of deconstruction, the results were found and interpreted in the context of the influence of the media on the formation and development of Sh. Mirziyoyev's image.

Results

In 2016, when the current leader of the Republic of Uzbekistan was the prime minister, an article dedicated to Shavkat Mirziyoyev as one of the candidates for the post of head of state after the long-term rule of Islam Karimov was published. The journalist visited the small homeland of the prime minister and undertook some research on his origins and nationality. In particular, "Shavkat is "not Tajik", but "Uzbek", - the article says, based on a survey of local residents. "He does not forget his ordinary relatives, and several yachmans were even at his daughter's wedding", is written further.

The journalist makes an attempt to check the information about Sh. Mirziyoyev provided by the media and compare it with those that were obtained during conversations with residents of the prime minister's small homeland. "Websites often mention the cruel behavior of Mirziyoyev, who allegedly often engaged in assault. In the village, however, no one spoke badly of him". The journalist draws conclusions about what voters expect from the prime minister if he leads the country: "They want only one thing: that if Shavkat becomes the head of state, he will make sure that Uzbeks and Tajiks live as before - in friendship and consent" (Kurbanova M., 2016).

Conducting a study on the biography of a potential president of the Republic of Uzbekistan is undoubtedly relevant. Here the author makes an attempt to study and analyze the social connections of a possible future president in the framework of studying his image. "The social ties of the leader with the family, the immediate environment, with various social groups and voters, the social affiliation of the leader is the most stable component of the political image in the communicative field" (Grinberg T., 2006). As you can see, the journalist indicated the ethnicity of the prime minister, his current ties with different groups within the framework of his family relations, personal qualities (which already refers to the personalized characteristics of the image), which were identified in the media and refuted by people. Based on this article, some impression is already being created, i.e., the image of the prime minister is developing as a person who maintains ties to his "roots", interethnic friendship.

At the beginning of 2018, in the Republic of Uzbekistan, some intermediate conclusions are drawn on the work of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as president. After many years of permanent rule of the first President of the Republic, Islam Karimov, Shavkat Mirziyoyev after a confident victory in the elections and taking office as head of state immediately begins to position himself as a reformer. The media not only agree with this, but also actively support the president's image, especially since there are many reasons for such conclusions. The Business Russia portal sums up the year as follows: "During the first 12 months of his work as president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev has already won the glory of a reformer: the head of state has set a course for liberalization, having carried out significant changes in the systems of the Ministry of Defense and the Armed Forces, in education, the economy and the personnel policy of the republic". The same article quotes the words of the president himself: "To protect the interests of a person, first of all, you need to communicate with people, to know well their worries, aspirations, life problems and needs. We have recently forgotten about communicating with people" (Business Russia, 2018).

The famous scientist and theorist of imageology G.G. Pocheptsov writes that "positioning can be imagined as a protrusion in the object of those characteristics in which the consumer is most interested" (Pocheptsov G., 2011). At the beginning of this segment of the analysis, it was not by chance that the first president of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, was mentioned. He was often accused of dictatorship and suppression of the opposition (Human Rights Council, UN, 2015). Therefore, after the long-term, undisputed and virtually uncontested rule of Islam Karimov, it can be assumed that the citizens of Uzbekistan were interested in the changes and reforms that were formulated and initiated by the new president Sh. Mirziyoyev.

The statement of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, given in the article, can be interpreted as a desire to remove, or at least minimize those boundaries that hindered ordinary people, citizens to convey their thoughts, complaints, desires and legitimate demands to those in power. Saying, "we forgot about communicating with people", the president probably had in mind precisely these boundaries, between the institutions of power and the people. "There are boundaries that separate members of a particular organization from all others, boundaries that separate decision makers (managers, commanders, rulers) from executors. Only those who understand the essence of the phe-

nomenon of blurring of boundaries and its significance for the future will be able to navigate events and take leadership in the future”, Sally Helgesen writes (Hasselbain, F., Goldsmith, M., Somerwill, A., 2001). Probably, the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, by his statement, tried to give a message for further blurring of these boundaries.

The positioning of Sh. Mirziyoyev as a reformer in relation to the previous system continues. “The new leader of the state, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has proclaimed a course of reforms, which in many ways means a desire to get out of the period of Karimov’s stagnation and all kinds of prohibitions”, Center-1 writes (Center-1, 2018). Of course, being a reformer who breaks the old system and builds a new one of his own, the president faces certain problems. The path of a reformer and an innovator is always difficult, as the system established over the years somehow resists.

In connection with the liberalization of the country’s political course, again, in comparison with the previous period of Islam Karimov’s rule, Shavkat Mirziyoyev is called a progressive leader. Indeed, many of the changes he proposes and implements can be called innovative. In particular, active work is underway to modernize and increase the competitiveness of the country’s economy. “The elimination of the dual exchange rate, free exchange of currency for business and the population, tax reform, reform of the customs industry, borrowing from development banks, saturation of the economy with money through soft loans, reduction in the share of cotton in crops, diversification of agriculture, banking reform - such a list of changes in state neighborhood was noted by Kazakhstan political scientist Marat Shibutov in an overview article of the business newspaper (Vzglyad, 2019). Undoubtedly, far from the highest level of economic indicators, in particular, those related to the gross domestic product, taking into account purchasing power, greatly affects the quality of life of the population. For example, it begs a comparison of these positions with neighboring Kazakhstan, which in 2019 was 61st in the world ranking, while Uzbekistan is in 130th place in the world list (The World Bank, 2015).

Therefore, when some notes or news stories about real reforms in the economy, which, among other things, lead to an increase in the country’s GDP and many other shifts towards the development of economic partnerships, the establishment of production, the creation of jobs, the expansion of the tourism industry and etc. appear in the media, we are talking about the president, who solves the

most urgent and pressing problems of the people. Such a note in the Review.uz article: “As Shavkat Mirziyoyev said in his speech, over the next five years, \$120 billion will be attracted to the economy, including at least \$70 billion of foreign investment” (Khakimov O., 2001), confirms the actions of Sh. Mirziyoyev in the framework of the implementation of his own program, announced during the election campaign, which is aimed at strengthening the country’s economy, in addition to other political and social reforms, as one of the most important areas of his activity. The work to ensure economic growth correlates with the statement of G.G. Pocheptsov that “the task of the leader can be considered as a reliance on the goals of the audience, but then he must build a bridge between the goals that the audience is focused on, to the goals that he sees as defining” (Pocheptsov G., 2000).

In the next note, where Sh. Mirziyoyev, through the Western media, is again called a reformer, it is said: “The image of the president among the Uzbek people has risen to “heaven” and, together with the image of the head of state, promotion of the image of the country is the area where Uzbekistan is most succeeded” (Akromov O., 2018).

This brings the study to the next topic under consideration, which is directly related to the image of the state and the president. These two images are intertwined.

As an example, consider the topic related to the tourism industry of the economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which was one of the first to undergo major changes, reforms and development under President Sh. Mirziyoyev. Here is one of the headlines: “New Uzbekistan. How Shavkat Mirziyoyev is transforming tourism”. The Business FM review writes about “a revolutionary document, signed by Shavkat Mirziyoyev”. It also describes the measures that the President and the Republic intend to take in order to “increase the flow of visitors to the country from 1.3 million people in 2016 to 10 million in 2022” (Business FM, 2019). Or “Uzbekistan has a great untapped potential for the development of other types of tourism, especially medical, pilgrimage and ecological tourism” (Spot, 2022).

Even despite the fact that the coronavirus pandemic, which was not known and could not be taken into account in plans and forecasts, made its own adjustments, in particular, to the tourism industry of all countries of the world, the Republic of Uzbekistan continued to work in this direction, and Sh. Mirziyoyev, after six years, although not with reformist beginnings, but rather with a course of persistent

continuation of the work begun, has been developing the tourism industry. “The Ministry of Tourism, khokims and other responsible persons have been instructed to return the tourism sector to pre-pandemic levels” (Narodnoye Slovo, 2018).

There is a lot of evidence that in 2022 the work laid down by the reformer Mirziyoyev continues. *Gazeta.uz* writes: “Shavkat Mirziyoyev instructed to make fuller use of the undiscovered tourism opportunities in Uzbekistan” (*Gazeta.uz*, 2022). “Mirziyoyev noted that the presence of historical monuments and sights is not enough to attract tourists; hotels, museums, transport, roads, food outlets and quality service are needed” (Sputnik Uzbekistan, 2022).

Thus, using the example of the country’s tourism industry, one can observe a certain transition of the president’s image from a reformist to a consistent, executive image of a skilled and experienced statesman who, despite the difficulties caused by the global crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic, continues to work in a given direction.

In 2017, already being the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev visits the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In one of the notes, the journalist draws attention to the appearance of the president, or rather to the censorship and retouching of photographs of the president in the Uzbek media. “The president should look young, without distracting elements and not lower than his colleagues. Therefore, the main state news agency of Uzbekistan continues to retouch and modify photographs of the country’s leader”, the note says, however, an interesting fact is remarked “It is noteworthy that Shavkat Mirziyoyev was the first to post the original photos on his Facebook, where they are still located” (Umaraliev T., 2017).

In order to analyze this note regarding the appearance of the head of state, let us pay attention to the importance of the appearance of a public person in the context of the formation of his image. “Appearance is one of the types of image-forming information” (Panasyuk A., 2007). The journalist notes that, on the one hand, this type of self-censorship is traditional for Uzbek political strategists and the media, when the appearance of the head of state is corrected, improved and retouched with the help of modern technologies and photo processing applications. However, at the mention of the journalist, we see that Shavkat Miromonovich himself posted original photos on his personal social networks. This may indicate that the president is also shaping his image by himself, independently of the traditional

methods of the state media. “Sometimes a change in the appearance of a person is presented as a change in his image, which does not correspond to the laws of image formation in psychology” (Panasyuk A., 2007). Probably, Sh. Mirziyoyev prefers a different approach to image formation, namely, to honestly and openly demonstrate his appearance, instead of using retouching, even if it is in opposition to the official media. In addition, this demonstrates the president’s approach to modern social networks as a means of communication, in particular, with young people, being their active user. The visual image and its presentation are the most important components of the formation of the image of a public person, and even more so the head of state representing the country.

Immediately after the presidential elections in October 2021, where Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev was re-elected for a second presidential term, he is again called a reformer: “he initiated some reforms that made the presidential elections somewhat more democratic”. It also notes: “Mirziyoyev was praised for opening the country to the world, which improved the standard of living. In the international arena, he promoted regional cooperation and interacted constructively with global players” (Gotev G., 2001). A certain image of Sh. Mirziyoyev, which has already been entrenched in him among the people with the help of the media, is emphasized again, not only within the Republic of Uzbekistan, but also in the international arena. Here one can guess some image strategy, which was laid down during the first presidential election campaign. “The main goal of the image strategy is to form and promote the most favorable idea of the political “object” in the mass consciousness” (Olshanski D., 2003). Thus, it can be assumed that the most preferable image for Sh. Mirziyoyev was precisely the image of a person capable of doing things, going against a well-functioning system in order to reform it, start labor-intensive economic transformations, which probably corresponded to the voters’ ideas about the leader they would like to see the head of state.

The factor of connection between the image of the President and the image of the country, as well as increasing the recognition of the country in the international arena, including through the development of the tourism industry, has already been noted. This can be perceived as a separate round of Sh. Mirziyoyev’s image as a patriotic leader striving to promote his country and increase its recognition. The *Economic Times* emphasizes that “for the first time in the recent history of Uzbekistan, the Head

of State will deliver a speech at the UN General Assembly in Uzbek language this year” (Dipanjan R. Ch., 2020). There can be many reasons for this, from attracting foreign investment to the country to increasing the recognition of the state brand in order to attract the flow of tourists, however, one should not lose sight of the fact that speech in the Uzbek language, a priori, is directed and dedicated to the native speakers of this language, i.e., largely citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Such speeches, and subsequently headlines in the world media, undoubtedly contribute to the formation of a certain positive image of the president, and may also be a kind of message to the national identity of Uzbeks and citizens of Uzbekistan.

Among others, a rather critical article dedicated to Shavkat Mirziyoyev was studied. The author speaks ambiguously about the activities of the second president of the Republic of Uzbekistan, criticizes in the position of a person from a country with a highly-developed economy and a long democratic tradition of governance, but, nevertheless, emphasizes the positive shifts in relation to the previous period of the country’s history, literally in all respects: economic development, political reforms and more. In many European rankings, Uzbekistan is gaining new positions. Thus, the author writes that “in the era of Mirziyoyev, there was a significant increase in independent local journalism on the Internet with the help of news sites such as Gazzetta. Uz, Kun.Uz, Hook Report and independent bloggers use Telegram channels and Facebook pages to reach a wide audience and resolving contentious topics in a way that would have been impossible under Karimov” (Hug A., 2020).

Further, to continue the analysis of the image of the President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev, let us turn to the ratings. It is absolutely impossible to determine the exact state of the image, such as, for example, positive or negative, reformist or conservative, without a survey of all citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Since, for obvious reasons, this is impossible to do, let’s try to study polls and ratings compiled on the basis of analytics and statistics.

In 2018, the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion conducted a survey among citizens of the Russian Federation, including: which of the CIS heads of state they trust the most. “Mirziyoyev took sixth place in the rating of confidence in the leaders of the CIS countries among Russian citizens: over the year, support has grown by 3%” (Podrobno.uz, 2018). It would seem that the rating of the president of Uzbekistan is not so high

among Russians, however, it should be noted that those 3% by which the level of confidence has improved is a significant figure. Overpowering such traditionally close partners and allies of the Russian Federation as Belarus and Kazakhstan seems to be a very difficult task. In addition, the rating of the previous president of Uzbekistan, who pursued a closed policy, was probably even lower. Here we are talking about the course of openness that Sh. Mirziyoyev took. This also applies to the development of new economic partnerships, attracting investment in the Uzbek economy, industry, facilitating visits to the country as tourists, in particular, for residents of the Russian Federation. Based on such considerations, we can conclude that the rating of Russians’ trust in an open, friendly partner, which Sh. Mirziyoyev and Uzbekistan position themselves to be, will only grow.

Once again, the European institutions emphasize the political reforms aimed at the liberalization and democratization of society. Thus, the Barcelona Center for International Relations included Sh. Mirziyoyev in the list of prominent persons. “According to Spanish experts, today Uzbekistan is experiencing a “special spring” under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who during the first year of his activity, breaking all forecasts and stereotypes, initiated the process of opening the country, which the Uzbek people are already seriously feeling” (Vesti.uz, 2017).

The rating carried out by Burson Cohn & Wolfe is indicative. “According to researchers, the most popular social media page among the leaders of the post-Soviet countries belongs to Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev - 2.91 million subscribers. The Uzbek president took second place: he has more than a million followers” (Uraimov Zh., 2018). As noted earlier in the study, Sh. Mirziyoyev is an active user of social networks. He demonstrates a comprehensive work with voters, with young people, who are the main content maker and content consumer of social networks. In the context of the formation of the president’s image, this plays a positive role, as evidenced by a significant number of subscribers to the president’s page.

At the end of the review and content analysis of media materials, let’s pay attention to the public opinion poll of citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan. As the study showed: “to the question: “to what extent did the policy pursued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirmonovich Mirziyoyev justify your hopes and expectations?” - the absolute majority of survey participants

- 92.5% answered that they “fully justified” (Darakchi, 2018).

Of course, ratings and even official statistics are not indisputable indicators of either a positive image or a level of support. There are many critical articles devoted to the activities of Sh. Mirziyoyev. However, as it was shown in this work, the positive changes taking place in the Republic of Uzbekistan are noted even in those. It is no coincidence that the image of the president in this study was characterized as reformist. Declaring the implementation of large-scale changes in almost all areas of public life in Uzbekistan, Sh. Mirziyoyev consistently pursued an innovative policy of updating the system. These steps are visible not only from media reports, but also from actual economic, political and social indicators.

Conclusion

The enormous influence of the media on the formation, development and, sometimes, transformation of the image of the head of state seems indisputable. In modern realities, when almost every citizen has access to the Internet, a mobile communication device, pages on social networks and applications that recommend certain news messages, and without this, the figure of the head of state, who was on all agendas, really acquires the character of comprehensive openness and publicity. This factor simultaneously complicates and simplifies the formation of the image, making it even more versatile and ambiguous. In the context of an abundance of not even the informational occasions themselves and their coverage, but the media of various directions, different manner of presenting information, different political views, it becomes impossible to evaluate the image of a person on the scale of the head of state with one epithet, such as “positive” or “negative”.

Confirmation of the thesis outlined in the introduction that a politician, among other things or,

above all, forms his image on his own, can be the fact that Sh. Mirziyoyev is an active user of social networks and publishes photos in them without processing, even though in official, professional media (it is difficult to rank social media as such) retouched photographs are published.

Another thesis, indicating the relevance of the research topic and emphasizing the importance of cultivating a positive image of the head of state in the sense of citizens’ trust, as well as ensuring the transmission, broadcasting of such an image by the media, is justified by at least the number of notes from local, “home” media, media from neighboring countries and foreign, international media relating to the activities and image of the head of state. In the course of the work, both “loyal” media and independent media, in this context, were discussed. The study shows that despite the difference in the approaches of these media, it is nevertheless possible to isolate some, probably objective messages, which, despite neither criticism on the one hand, nor excessive praise on the other, are repeated.

Another hypothesis and task of this study was to confirm the serious influence of the media, as a link between citizens and the head of state, on the formation of the image of both the leader himself and the state in relation to him. Given the fact that Sh. Mirziyoyev, probably, regardless of image makers and creating his own image, pursued and is pursuing a policy of promoting, opening Uzbekistan to the business world and the international community, citizens of other countries as part of the development of a tourism program, in this case, the brand or image of state is tied to the image of Sh. Mirziyoyev in the international arena. The content analysis of the media regarding the development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan and the active influence of Sh. Mirziyoyev directly on these processes show how the images of the president himself and the Republic of Uzbekistan, which he heads, are connected in the non-Uzbek media.

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