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Perception of Kazakhstan in the U.S through the New York Times Coverage

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Perception of Kazakhstan in the U.S through The New York Times Coverage

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my home country, Kazakhstan, which I am proud to be from.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Roxanne Watson, and committee members Dr. Liu and Dr. Brown for their valuable insights, recommendations and guidance.

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Abstract

This research study examines how the image of Kazakhstan was covered by the New York Times during 11 years and analyzed the most common perception of the Central Asian country, using framing as a theoretical framework. Textual-analysis approach was used as a method, exploration produced seven frames. The textual analysis approach demonstrated that negative coverage prevailed in the coverage of Kazakhstan, “in spite of friendly relationships with the USA”. Kazakhstan was framed as “authoritarian” “petro-state”, which got independence, but still follows “soviet-style” politics and largely influenced by its “hegemon Russia”. The country, which “has a complex about being recognized in the world” (Stern, 2008). Future research needed to promote the image of the country worldwide.

Chapter One

Introduction

Although Kazakhstan is the 9th largest country in the world, to most Americans it is still only known for its association with oil and the Borat movie. For many years Kazakhstan has been perceived as a country located "between Russia and China". This is the entire image of the fast-developing country from the perspective of the average American. Few people internationally know that Kazakhstan is a multicultural and multiethnic nation; rich in natural gas, uranium and precious metals and has enormous business potential (Saunders, 2007). Kazakhstan was one of the first countries in the world to give up nuclear arms on its territory and the home country of the world's first and largest cosmodrome Baikonur. As a leading country in the Central Asian region, Kazakhstan could drive more international interest and build a strong image in the world. However, due to lack of information and misrepresentation, the country has poor national branding worldwide. With independence Kazakhstan has an excellent opportunity to gradually promote and build its image.

There is a shortage of research articles about Kazakhstan's image, thus this research study is relevant. According to Katchanovski (2009), despite the maintained friendly relations between Kazakhstan and the U.S, negative news coverage about the post-Soviet country still prevails in the U.S. The aim of this study is to explore the news coverage of Kazakhstan by a prominent U.S Media outlet.

This study uses framing theory because of its appropriateness for use in analyzing political and social debate, specifically in the international context (Liu, 2009). According to

previous studies on framing news, “media content does not reflect the reality: it is through the framing of media discourses that reality is defined and organized” (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Tankard, 2001). Thus, framing is a pertinent framework for the study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Meta-theoretical philosophy

In this research paper, axiological meta-theoretical approach was used because the researcher attempts to testify about people's perceptions and the relativity of values. Axiology is the philosophical study of values, a division of philosophy. Its significance lies in the considerable expansion that it has given to the meaning of the term value in the unification that it has provided for the study of a variety of questions-economic, moral, aesthetic, and even logical-that had often been considered in relative isolation ("Axiology", 2015, para.1). In this research, the inquirer has to determine the purpose of the research. In this study, the inquirer is engaged in research with the goal of being neutral but is aware of subjectivity. Since testifying that the values are subjective, the inquirer's values may affect the research itself and the results of the research.

In this case, the concept of reflexivity also can be applied. "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484). The researcher was born and raised in Kazakhstan, thus "knowledge cannot be separated from the knower" (Steedman, 1991) and the researcher will never be able to discover ontological verity.

Theoretical framework

In order to define the frames through which Kazakhstan is depicted in online news coverage, this literature review provides an overview of framing theory and previous studies that have used media framing theory in examining international news coverage.

Gregory Bateson (1972), the English anthropologist, was the first to introduce the term “frame”. The term “frame” refers to “the central organizing idea for news content” and informs us of “what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankard et al., 1991, p.100). Entman (1993) was a pioneer in defining framing within the mass communication context. According to Entman (1992), to frame is to distinguish some reality features and make them more noticeable through text, thus promoting this particular perception of the described item. Entman (1993) outlines “four locations of frames in the communication process: communicators, text, receiver, and culture” (p.51). He then connects them to frame four functions: “to define problems, to diagnose causes, to make moral judgments, and to suggest remedies” (Entman, 1993, p.52). Two framing processes: selection and salience were also delineated by Entman (1993, p.52). According to Entman (1993), frames selection procedure implies calling attention to specific aspects and simultaneously diverting attention from others. While salience highlight some parts of selected information, “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1992, p.53).

The news frame is an integral part of a news story, providing “a template that guides journalists in assembling facts, quotations, and other story elements into a news story and for orienting interpretations by the audience” (McLeod & Detenber, 1999, p 3). Basically, framing theory states that audience’s impressions are expected to be influenced by certain media frames (de Vreese, 2005). According to Scheufele (as cited in Dedova, 2016), the

framing process consists of four steps: “frame building, frame setting, individual effects of framing, and journalists as audiences” (p.116).

There are different types of frames in media studies. Previous studies on the framing process define two major types of frames: media and audience frames. According to Scheufele (as cited in Kostadinova & Dimitrova, 2012), “media frames are those located in the media text, while audience frames are cognitive patterns or schemata that individuals hold” (p.106). Gitlin (1980) explained “media frames as working routines for journalists that allow the journalists to quickly identify and classify information and to package it for efficient relay to their audiences” (p.7). Audience framing is highly influenced by media framing (Cappella and Jamieson, 1996; Iyengar, 1987). Episodic and thematic frames (Iyengar, 1991) are also highly investigated in media studies. Thematic frames focus on more general issues with background information, while episodic frames concentrate on a concrete story as a case study (Haigh & Bruce, 2017). Apart from the aforementioned types of frames, scholars distinguish other generic frames such as: gain and loss frames (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), morality frames (Neuman, Just & Crigler (1992), responsibility frames (Iyengar, 1987) issue and strategic frames, mostly used in political campaign coverage (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Price et al., (1997) define the three most common values, which capture people’s attention: “conflict, human interest and consequence” frames . However, de Vreese (2005) identifies issue-specific frames, relevant for specific topics and events. “An issue-specific approach to the study of news frames allows for a profound level of specificity and details relevant to the event or issue under investigation” (Semetko & de Vreese, 2004, p.93). In general, the type of frame analysis used depends on the subject under examination. This research will mostly focus on issue-specific frames emerging through a preliminary analysis of related publications.

Framing shapes people's thoughts by emphasizing certain aspects of specific issues (Nelson et al., 1997). Framing theory is widely used in studying media coverage, varying from social to political issues (Hallahan 1999).

International News Framing

According to D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010), framing effects differ based on personal experience and knowledge of an individual. However, often the cooperation between news frames and prior knowledge shape individual's perceptions toward the issue.

In the case of international news coverage, the dominant ideology of the nation appears to function as a major source in determining framing (Akhavan-Majid & Ramaprasad, 1998). Therefore, international news coverage tends to reflect the domestic media's commonly held stereotypes rather than real foreign countries concerns (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1998; Entman, 1991; Lee and Yang, 1996). Some scholars suggest that socio-political reality influences frames used (Scheufele, 1999; Entman, 1993; Pan et al., 1999). Bazaa & Hsiao (2010) state that news coverage of a foreign country by any country's media is the consequence of diplomatic relationships with this country. Flournoy and Stewart (1997) note that people's recognition of a particular nation is highly influenced by its home media coverage of this country. "The meaning of an international event is often created more by the image and understandings originating in the host country's cultural and political ecology than by the event itself" (Rachlin, 1988, p.45). Since framing influences people's perception of international issues and news; this theory is suitable for online international news coverage and this study.

International news plays a significant role in understanding world image (Hachten et al., 1999; Van Ginneken, 1998; Wanta & Hu, 1993). However, there are several reasons why news doesn't cover the whole world and some countries are given preferred coverage. According to Watanabe (2013), "the top 10 most covered countries in news are the US,

France, the UK, Russia, Bosnia, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain” (p.143). Trade relationships among countries were found to be the main prognosticator of international news coverage, whereas the presence of an international news agency is the secondary predictor (Watanabe, 2013). According to Rosengren (1977), a country’s population, geographic size and economic power also have a positive effect on the amount of news coverage it receives worldwide. Traditionally, countries with higher GDP have a tendency to be covered more than other nations (Ahern, 1984; Ishii, 1996). Golan in his paper “Inter-media agenda setting and global news coverage: Assessing the influence of the New York Times on three network television evening news programs” indicates that The New York Times and television news when covering the international panorama focus only on several specific countries, he also confirms previous findings, which state that some countries considered more newsworthy than others (2007). In 2001, Riffe and Budianto conducted a content analysis of 24,794 U.S television-programs and found a decline in international news coverage, and specifically in reporting developing nations. Moreover, the coverage of developing nations was mostly negatively framed, while third-world countries were neglected in the majority of cases. The United States and Western Europe continue to be leading newsmakers across the world. However, this situation is going to change in the near future.

With the rapid growth of online resources, international news coverage is expected to increase (Berger, 2009). The first electronic version of newspapers appeared in 1980 and were offered by Prodigy, CompuServe and America Online. Later studies on the World Web confirm that news remains among the most popular online activities (Lin, Salwen, Garrison, & Driscoll, 2005). According to Dimitrova & Neznanski (2006) unlike traditional mass media, online sources allow a reader to interact and leave feedback. According to Paterson (2005), recently “there was a significant increase in dependence on news agencies for

international news in almost all online news services” (p.147). Thus, online coverage is preferable as a source than newspapers to examine the perception of Kazakhstan in the U.S.

Kazakhstan History: Overview

The history of the Kazakh people and their ancestors, of all nations and nationalities inhabiting the Republic of Kazakhstan is an organic part of world history. Kazakhstan is located in the heart of the Eurasian continent. Its territory is 2,724,900 square meters. km (1,049,150 square miles). This is the second in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and the ninth largest country in the world. Kazakhstan borders with China, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Russia. Despite bordering The Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan is also world’s largest landlocked country. Kazakhstan is a home country of the world’s first and largest cosmodrome “Baikonur”. The first manned flight into space was held on April 12, 1961 from the Baikonur cosmodrome. Currently, it is leased by the Kazakh Government to Russia (until 2050) and is ruled by the Roscosmos organization.

The vast territory of Kazakhstan is rich in minerals. Enterprises engaged in the extraction and processing of coal, oil, gas, non-ferrous and ferrous metals play a leading role in the national economy. The main minerals are: nonferrous and ferrous metal ores, uranium. The world's largest reserves of chromium, vanadium, bismuth, fluorine, iron, zinc, tungsten, molybdenum, phosphorite, copper, potassium, cobalt, kaolin and cadmium have been explored in Kazakhstan. There are about 200 oil and gas wells in the country, including the largest one - Tengiz (800 million tons of oil). Nowadays, Kazakhstan is a sovereign and independent state with vast territory and a rich history.

Originally, kazakhs belong to the Turkic people, however there are two thousand ethnic groups, nations and nationalities of the world. Kazakhstan is a European-Asian country that combines the history, culture and religion of the East and West. About 100 representatives of other nations and nationalities live in this Central Asian country. Ethnic Kazakh people are a

mix of Turkic and Mongol tribes that migrated in the 13th century. Starting from the 4th century, until the beginning of the 13th century the territory of Kazakhstan was a place of residence of the Western Turkic tribes who created states which consistently fell and rose, each existing some several hundreds of years following each other until the Mongol invasion. In 1511, the Kazakhs became known in Western Europe as a separate ethnic group (Tolesh, 2012). In the 18th century, the area was conquered by Russia and in 1936 became a part of the Soviet Republic. There was an influx of immigrants because of the agricultural program in the 1950s-60s, which encouraged soviet citizens to cultivate Kazakhstan's grasslands. "In general, the population history of the region can roughly be divided into the following three periods: Before Russian Rule, during the Soviet Period and Since Independence" (Tolesh, 2012). The current population of Kazakhstan is more than 18 million people.

On December 16, 1991, Kazakhstan declared its independence and President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the Constitutional Law "On State Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan" (Nazarbayev, 2010, p.70). The post of President of the Kazakh SSR was first established on April 24, 1990 by the Supreme Council, where Nursultan Nazarbayev was elected as the first president of Kazakh SSR. After Independence, the first national elections were held and Nazarbayev became the President of Kazakhstan. Subsequently, he won in all national elections that followed with the majority of votes: 1999 (79.78%), 2005 (91.15%), 2011 (95.55%) and 2015 (95.22%). On June 15, 2010, Nursultan Nazarbayev was assigned to the "Leader of the Nation" status on the basis of the new Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan ("Biography and career of N.A.Nazarbayev", 2017). The Constitution also guarantees him immunity from all criminal offenses, except treason (Kazakhstan Country Review 2017, p.12). In 2011, The Parliament of Kazakhstan approved a referendum, which would waive all presidential elections until 2020, but Nursultan Nazarbayev rejected this idea. Nazarbayev continues to be the main

policy maker in domestic and foreign political arenas. Daniel Witt, Vice Chairman of the Eurasia Foundation in his article “Kazakhstan’s Presidential Election Shows Progress” acknowledged the role of the President: “Nazarbayev has led Kazakhstan through difficult times and into an era of prosperity and growth. He has demonstrated that he values his U.S. and Western alliances and is committed to achieving democratic governance” (2011). “Politically, while critics have questioned the presidency of long-serving Nursultan Nazarbayev, the fact of the matter was that under that strongman leadership, the country enjoys stability” (Kazakhstan Country Review, 2017, p.2)

Along with the questionable long-term presidency, Kazakhstan faces human rights, free press and religious freedom issues. According to the Freedom House Report in 2017, Kazakhstan is classified as a consolidated authoritarian regime and with no free press.

Kazakhstan Image Worldwide

Kazakhstan is one of the largest countries in the world; however, to most Americans it is still simply and even vaguely associated with oil and the fictional character Borat. According to Katchanovski (2009), “the majority of stories (67%) that constituted the total length of the US television news programs concerning Kazakhstan from 2004 to 2008 were dedicated to a Hollywood movie called “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan”” (p.8). The film was directed by Larry Charles with the participation of British comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, who is also co-author of the script and one of the film's producers. The film is a pseudo-documentary comedy, the main figure of which is Cohen's character Borat Sagdiyev, a kazakh journalist traveling in the US and meeting with different people. Despite limited rental worldwide, the film proved to be commercially successful, garnering \$261,572,744 in the global box office with a budget of \$18 million, and also received good critical reviews. In 2006, Sacha Baron Cohen won the Golden Globes award for the "Best Actor in a musical film or comedy" nomination. "Borat"

was also nominated for an "Oscar" award in the best adapted script category. The film's slogan: "Come to Kazakhstan, it's nice!" The scenes that take place in Kazakhstan were, in fact, filmed in the Romanian rural village Glod in the Dambovita county (Hasan, 2006). Characters who speak supposedly in Kazakh, in fact, speak Romanian, Hebrew, Armenian and other languages. The film also contains phrases in different Slavic languages. For example, "Yak She mash!", which Borat uses as a greeting, in fact means "How are you" in the Polish language. Saunders (2007) in his paper "In defence of Kazakhshilik: Kazakhstan's War on Sacha Baron Cohen" states that this Central Asian Country is constantly struggling with its worldwide presentation because of Baron Cohen's movie. The movie received enormous backlash from the Kazakhstan government and officials. Authorities blocked the website borat.kz, registered under the national domain "kz", banned the film itself on Kazakhstan territory and CIS countries and threatened to sue Mr. Cohen (Van Ham, 2010).

According to Schatz (2008), since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan had constantly been working to build its image worldwide. Kazakhstan was one of the first countries in the world to give up nuclear arms on its territory. "It is exactly 20 years ago that the last nuclear warhead was removed from the territory of Kazakhstan, which at that time possessed the fourth largest nuclear arsenal in the world" (Ashikbayev, 2015, p.1) The president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev "had gone to great pains in order to be visible on the world stage" in comparison to Kazakhstan's counterparts, other Central Asian countries (Schatz, 2008, p.54). Billboards and full-page advertisements trumpeting the country's accomplishments such as "giving up nuclear weapons, engineering an economic transformation, avoiding interethnic strife, land of democracy" and so on were published by newspapers such as The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and The Economist and featured on CNN, ABC and BBC (Marat, 2009). However, in 2006 when "Borat", the Hollywood comedy was released, Kazakhstan was presented as "anti-democratic, paranoid,

racist, homophobic, misogynistic, economic, and political backwater milieu” (Saunders, 2007, p.227; Schatz, 2008). The movie exploited the real Kazakh flag and portrayed the country as a “primitive, quasi-fascist state with failed economic system” (Saunders, 2007, p.226). Despite repeated complaints from the Kazakhstan government, the film was largely appreciated by Western audiences.

Most in-depth reports about Kazakhstan in the international media focus on political, press and speech rights issues and come through the Western press such as BBC or Russian news agencies. Stephen Kinzer (2001), in his article “5 Ex-Soviet Asian Republics are now courted by the U.S.,” describes Kazakhstan as “unknown to most Americans.”

Despite a small number of references in the media, Kazakhstan was systematically building its image. Kazakhstan’s diplomats worldwide, through public speeches presented the latest political and economic accomplishments in order to create a positive and prominent international identity (Marat, 2009). The Department of International Information in cooperation with various PR agencies has created campaigns to neutralize the bad publicity brought by Borat. In 2006 the ‘Heart of Eurasia’ message was created and promoted through different international media outlets (Verhotunmov, 2007). In 2005 President Nursultan Nazarbayev published a monograph called “V serdce Evrazii” (In the Heart of Eurasia), outlining the change in the location of the capital from Almaty to Astana (Nazarbayev, 2005). Since Astana was located between Europe and Asia, the president called it the center of Eurasia, which “has soaked up the cultural heritage of both West and East for centuries” (p.1). Since the monograph was published, the ‘Heart of Eurasia’ slogan has been systematically used during Kazakhstani official’s speeches and presentations. This message emphasizes the country’s political weight, vast territory, natural resources and geostrategic advantages (Marat, 2009). Schatz (2008) outlines that during the period between 2006-2007, the slogan was financially sponsored and promoted through such media outlets as The New

York Times, CNN and the BBC. Verhotunmov claims that, thirty-second infomercials presented Kazakhstan as a free and democratic country and “the Central Asian leader and a reliable strategic partner of the United States” (as cited in Marat, 2007, p.1130). These manipulations were meant to divert attention from Cohen’s notorious movie. Between 2009-2011, Kazakhstan used another slogan “Road to Europe”. The message is aimed at connecting the Central Asian country with Western States (Tazhin, 2008).

In 1997, Nursultan Nazarbayev firstly announced “Kazakhstan-2030” Strategy. The main purpose of the program was to achieve “economic prosperity and political stability by promoting Kazakhstan’s geostrategic location, natural and human resources, and historic heritage” (Nazarbayev 1997, p.1). Yet, Western research mostly continues to perceive Kazakhstan as a petro-state and authoritarian country, since Nazarbayev has been ruling the country for 27 years while opposition forces have no real rights (Dave, 2008).

According to previous studies, there is a shortage of research articles about Kazakhstan and not much information about Kazakhstan worldwide, thus competent analysis is needed. The purpose of this study is to concentrate specifically on US online coverage, to see the manner in which the U.S media portrays Kazakhstan today.

Chapter Three

Method

Since this study is exploratory and “most of what is to be reported is not amenable to communication in quantitative form” (Stebbins, 2001, p.42), the researcher uses qualitative research method- textual analysis. was chosen in order to define what frames and themes about Kazakhstan were used in online coverage. The textual-analysis is commonly used in the mass communication sphere and “enables a researcher to decipher the overarching themes based on the sum of mini-messages” (Carr, Pratt & Herrera, 2012, p.297). Textual analysis approach allows an understanding and evaluation of social realities through the meanings found in texts (Brennen, 2013). The research will analyze one of the most respected and popular sources in the U.S and worldwide - The New York Times newspaper, which has been found to impact news reports in other media outlets (McCombs, 2004).

The New York Times newspaper was selected because of its position as the American “newspaper of record” and its inclusion in international news coverage studies (Chang, 1987). The New York Times was founded in 1851 and as at 2017, had the largest combined print and online circulation in the United States. According to Houston, Spialek & Perreault (2016), The New York Times “contains content that has been found to be similar to that of other U.S. newspapers and television news programs” (p.242).

Procedure

In this qualitative study, The New York Times coverage of Kazakhstan was textual-analyzed, emergent frames and themes were outlined. Research started with a close reading of articles and moved to the creation and “development of emergent interpretations

and to tracking themes, frames, and angles” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). “Key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols emphasized in the news narratives” (Entman, 1991, p.7) were indicated during reading and re-reading processes. Frames emerged inductively across the articles and were identified in advance as a basis for categorizing articles. Articles were examined for most representative examples of emergent frames in order to consider how international issues are reported and how The New York Times portray Kazakhstan to the audience.

The first step was to determine the sample. Initial research found 1,874 articles in The New York Times mentioning Kazakhstan during the 11-year period. As defined, The New York Times plays a significant role in international and US. news coverage, thus it was chosen as a source for this research study. Media coverage of The New York Times was examined during the 11-year period between 2006-2017. To take in January 1, 2006, when the slogan “The Heart of Eurasia” was implemented and the “Borat” movie was released and through October 1, 2017, after conducting World’s Fair EXPO-2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan. There were no limitations, all publications devoted to Kazakhstan were included. Publications were searched through ProQuest, online databases, which allows advanced research and limit search by specific dates. The researcher initially used the key phrase “Kazakhstan”. The unit of analysis was the article itself. For purposes of the research, the inquirer eliminated all articles that has general information focusing on mundane news, non-related to the country’s image. The rest of the articles were filtered until the most compelling examples were left, resulting in final sample of 15 articles.

The entire coverage was summarized into six main recurring topics or broader categories, which the author identified from an early reading of the stories: 1) politics 2) economy, finance 3) culture 4) sports 5) space 6) other. It helped to develop more specific

categories or frames. Framing analysis included all stories that mentioned all the topics above. A set of specific frames were outlined.

Frames Definitions

1) *“Kazakhstan-the country of Borat”*- this frame is the most common frame used by different sources. The frame is based on the fictional movie “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious”, released in 2006. The film attracted great attention in different parts of the world. The movie caused a negative effect on Kazakhstan image and received enormous backlash from Kazakhstan government and officials. The provocative movie guaranteed widespread media coverage and candid responses from everyday people (Blouke, 2015). As a result, the “fictional movie” was perceived as the real image of Kazakhstan

2) *“Post-soviet country”*- this frame is based on the country’s territorial history as part of the USSR between 1936 until the USSR collapsed in 1991. Kazakhstan declared its independence on December 16, 1991, yet is still referenced as “soviet country” or “post-soviet country”.

3) *“One of “STAN” countries”* – this frame outlines the stereotype of Central Asia as a region of seven " STANS" - Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. However, those seven countries are significantly distinct from each other. In the majority of cases, people don’t see the difference between the “Stan” countries.

4) *“Authoritarian and corrupt country”* – this frame emphasizes the illegitimate twenty-seven-year rule by President Nazarbayev, since its formation on December 16, 1991. Articles distinguish a “hyper centralized political system designed to perpetuate the interests of the president, his family, and the ruling elite” (Plenta, 2016). This frame also focuses on

incidents of pressure and violence against human rights activists, politicians, journalists and opposition in Kazakhstan.

5) “*Astana-futuristic capital*”-this frame outlines the futuristic character of the current capital of Kazakhstan. Astana became the capital of Kazakhstan in 1997. According to Nazarbayev, the main reason for the transfer of the capital is geostrategic location, because Astana is located in the center of the state. “The realities of the present and a number of geostrategic factors forced us to take a new approach to the process of forming our own geopolitical space.” (as cited in “The historical role of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to move the capital of an independent state”, 2013). Since the establishment of the capital, Astana became an ambitious, well-planned project. Its modern architecture is the result of famous Western and Asian architectures such as Norman Foster and Kisho Kurokawa. Striking in its scale and design, Astana architecture draws the attention of the western media outlets, especially in contrast to vast steppe surroundings. The capital’s skyscrapers are usually compared to the Dubai (the capital of the UAE) skyline and have started to earn the country some international recognition.

6) “*Petro-state*” –this frame describes Kazakhstan as one of the major oil-importing countries. Kazakhstan is often called a country of oil, due to its twelfth position in oil reserves. There are more than 200 fields of oil and gas wells. A greater number of oil wells are located in the Atyrau region. The largest deposits are Tengiz (800 million tons of oil), Royal (30.5 million tons of oil) and Kenbai (30.8 million tons). It is generally accepted that petro-states rely only on their oil and gas revenues and mostly have bad reputation. According to Sabonis-Helf (2004), in spite of the perception that natural resources are wealth source and can serve as a catalyst in country development, the history of petro-states has not been successful.

7) “EXPO-2017”- frame is based on World Exposition, which was hosted by the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana between June 10, 2017 and September 10, 2017. The theme of the EXPO was Future Energy. The exposition attracted more than 3 million people and was covered by thousands of media outlets worldwide. “Expo 2017 is an opportunity to experience a nation that has been proactively shaping its global identity since declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991” (Rabimov, 2017).

Research Questions

RQ1: How has Kazakhstan been framed in The New York Times from January 1, 2006 until October 1, 2017?

RQ2: What frames are mostly represented, negative or positive?

Chapter Four

Findings and Analysis

This research paper endeavored to examine the perception of Kazakhstan in the U.S through The New York Times coverage since newspaper serves as agenda-setting for other news outlets (Golan, 2007). The finding section of this study will present an overview of all chosen articles and emergent frames for coverage of Kazakhstan during the 11-year period.

From the sample of 15 articles, the analysis shows that a large number of articles related to the frame “Kazakhstan-the country of Borat” especially during the 2006-2008 period. Peculiarly, most articles devoted to Kazakhstan refer to the name of Sacha Baron Cohen and the suddenly famous movie “Borat” regardless of whether they are a positive or a negative in coverage. Greenberg (2007) in his article “Oil Money Flows, and City Prospers” admirably describes Almaty city and mentions the Borat character “Borat may have imprinted in the minds of many people a sense of ridiculousness about Kazakhstan, but there is little that is ridiculous about this sprawling business hub.” Moreover, even when the articles are not referring to the movie itself, words, expressions and phrases that relate to Borat are frequently used in the texts and titles about Kazakhstan. In an article “A Wandering Kazakh, before Borat” (2008) devoted to the Kazakh film industry and release of “Mongol” movie, the author, David.L.Stern designated the presentation of the movie “Revenge of the Borats”. “Jagshemash, Premier Bush” (2006) is another vivid example. In this case, the word “Jagshemash”, a greeting word used in the movie, was used for the title of the article.

Apart from the aforementioned examples, the majority of articles between 2006-2009 were devoted to comparisons of the real Kazakhstan and the “fictional foreign land” (Safire,

2006, p.20), while the other half focused the “war” between the Kazakhstan government and Sacha Baron Cohen, and Kazakhstan’s reaction to the movie. The article “Kazakhs shrug at Borat While the State Fumes” by Steven Lee Myers (2006) is a two-page article which combines both. “There is almost nothing, in short remotely truthful in the satiric depiction of Kazakhstan popularized by Sacha Baron Cohen” (Lee Myers, 2006, p.3), starts the author and then he devotes the other half of the article to the “State Fume”.

Since the movie presented an “extremely negative, biased, and factually incorrect virtual image of Kazakhstan” (Katchanovski, 2009, p.8), the country’s backlash was expected. “Borat has managed to infuriate and confound the country’s officials”. However, the tone of the author is more derisive than descriptive. He ends the article citing an editor from Kazakhstan Ms.Udod : “The government is young. Maybe we take these things more painfully.” (Lee Myers, 2006)

Apart from describing the obvious enmity between the government and Mr.Cohen, the article mentions the political situation in Kazakhstan: “Mr. Nazarbayev’s presidency, by contrast, is autocratic and tolerates little public criticism”, which falls into the second mostly used frame “Authoritarian and corrupt country”. This frame is based on accentuating the twenty-seven year rule of Kazakhstan’s only president, Nursultan Nazarbayev. It also outlines violations of human rights, democracy issues and thriving corruption in the Central Asian country. “An iron-fisted dictator who imprisons his opponents, bans opposition parties and controls the press” (Levin, 2006). There were several long articles in New York Times dedicated to the visit and meeting of Nursultan Nazarbayev and George H.W. Bush: “Bush and Kazakh Leader Play Up Partnership” (Stolber, 2006), “Balancing Act: U.S. Welcomes Kazakh Leader (Myers & Greenberg, 2006). In the article “Oil, Cash and Corruption” (Stodghill, 2006), the author calls this meeting “one of the biggest snow jobs” and criticize

Bush's actions, citing Senator Levin “It’s just hypocritical for President Bush to issue statements on combating foreign corruption and then embrace a dictator”.

Another common expression often used in terms of Kazakhstan is “authoritarian or autocrat lite”, however this phrase is usually used in more positive articles. Segal (2017) describing “EXPO 2017” comments on the political situation: “Mr. Nazarbayev, 77, isn’t refereeing the never-ending tournament of clans, he is the nation's stern and loving grandfather, a ruler whose style might be described as autocrat lite”. In another article Nazarbayev’s presidency is described as an “Authoritarian lite system that has more in common with the strongman rule in Russia, and increasingly in Turkey” notes Barnard (2007) in an article titled “Kazakh Capital, a Post-Soviet Creation, Is Growing Real Roots”.

The “Post-soviet country” frame is generally connected with the “Authoritarian country” frame, which can be explained by frequent comparisons of the political regime in the USSR and in sovereign Kazakhstan. It also leads to comparison with Russia due to close relationships between the two countries. In April 2011, Ellen Barry, the New York Times journalist, released three articles about the presidential election in Kazakhstan: “Strongman and Stability Guide Kazakhs in Vote” (April 2), “Kazakhstan President Appears to Have Won Easily” (April 4), “A Good Old-Fashioned Election” (April 10). All three articles are similar in content, and describe a “Soviet-style political system” and Nazarbayev’s popularity: “Mr.Nazarbayev is probably the most successful of these (Soviet system); he enjoys genuine popularity among his citizens, who credit him with shaping Kazakhstan into Central Asia’s island of wealth and stability” (Barry, 2011, p.4). The author outraged by “super-fabulous re-election” and the whole situation on post-soviet space: “The great paradox, both here and in Russia, is that the titular leader is in fact popular enough to win a free election”. As it was mentioned earlier, these three articles contain analogous information

and were written by one author, which makes one hesitant to recognize their originality and purpose.

The following frame “Petro-state” is frequently crossed with all the previously mentioned frames. The depiction of Kazakhstan as “an oil-rich” country was reflected in the large amount of references. Kazakhstan is one of the largest oil producers in the world, thus these frames are anticipated. However, the ultimate message within this frame is that Kazakhstan relies only on its oil reserves like other petro-states and therefore might be beneficial, regardless of its “bad reputation”. “Oil, gas and metals are the lifeblood of the country” (David, 2017). Stodghill (2006) calls Kazakhstan an “oil-rich developing country” with common corruption and bribery, indeed “important ally, a bountiful alternative to oil reserves in the volatile Persian Gulf”. Dowd (2006) in his article “Jagshemash, Premier Bush” also mentions this topic: “Nursultan Nazarbayev may have a corrupt and authoritarian regime where political opponents have been known to die very, very suddenly, but, hey, he’s got oil...Respect ”.

The petro-state frame was also widely used between 2008-2014, a period when there were unstable oil prices all over the world. Even so, articles focusing only on oil industry were not included in the final sample.

“One of STAN countries” frame was reflected in the article “Year of STANS” (Safire, 2006). In this article Kazakhstan was included to the STANS “on the fringe of the former Soviet Union”. Nonetheless, the author quotes Stephen Kotkin, who names all Central Asian STANS as “Trashcanistan”: “a dreadful checkerboard of parasitic states and statelets, government-led extortion rackets and gangs in power, mass refugee camps and shadow economies”.

Originally, the suffix “stan” comes from Persia and means “land”. Today, Kazakhstan translates as “Land of Kazakhs”, Afghanistan as “Land of Afghans”, which is the equivalent

of England or Deutschland in Europe. However, Central Asia STANS have serious difficulties with the image worldwide. Endless violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, along with the personal cult of the now deceased dictator of Turkmenistan only aggravate the situation for Kazakhstan. “It is forever lumped with the other “STANS” in the neighborhood, which are repressive by comparison” notes David (2017). Since Kazakhstan is still a young country, the association with STAN countries is not entirely beneficial. In 2014, in light of the negative association with the term “STAN” and in order to attract more tourists and investors, Nursultan Nazarbayev offered to rebrand the name of the country to “Kazak Yeli”, which means “Kazakh Nation”. However, until today, there is no further details. The reason why Kazakhstan wanted to get rid of "STAN" in the title is quite obvious. When in 2012 the candidate in the American elections, Herman Cain, admitted that he could not remember the name of the country's president, "Ubeki-beki-beki-beki-stan-stan", it was not just a crude tactlessness, but a reflection of the level of knowledge and respect of the average American for Central Asia (Trautman, 2014).

One of the rare positive frames covered by The New York Times is “Astana-futuristic capital”. This frame is also frequently associated with the name of Nursultan Nazarbayev. “The chief architect is really the president himself” accentuates Lee Myers in the article “Kazakhstan’s Futuristic Capital, Complete with Pyramid” (2006). “Astana, the gleaming city that he ordered built in 1990’s on the blank plane of the northern steppe, its skyline melding folk mysticism with science fiction” (Barry, 2011). Overall, the coverage of Astana is very positive and it is usually described as an “ambitious” project. Oftentimes it is compared to other famous cities, though the greatest number of comparisons is with Dubai: “Other countries have built futuristic capitals, like Dubai. But none have sprung up quite like Astana” (Lee Myer, 2006). “A sort of Dubai North, which is a show in itself” describes Astana Zuckerman (2017). “Futuristic Astana” frame was also largely used within “EXPO

2017” frame. As it was mentioned earlier, EXPO 2017, was hosted in Astana in summer 2017. The country was chosen as a host on June 2011 in Paris. As a result of a secret vote at the 152nd General Assembly of the Bureau International des Expositions, Astana beat the Belgian city of Liège with the majority of votes. For Kazakhstan, it was a huge victory and the potential for a serious PR campaign aiming to change the image of the country.

“Kazakhstan’s latest attempt at an “Open for Business Sign”- sarcastically describes EXPO David (2017), in his article “Can a Giant Science Fair Transform Kazakhstan’s Economy?” The six-page article was devoted to the impressions of the exposition and Kazakhstan economy. Overall the author was skeptical about any changes in Kazakhstan’s economy in the near future. On the other hand, the article by Zuckerman (2017) “In Kazakhstan, a World Expo Is All About Energy (and Dancing)”, is more positive than the previous one. It gives a quick overview of the exposition and Astana city and presents the city as a modern and developed megapolis: “I had visions of exotica. Kazakhstan! Nomads! Genghis Khan! What I actually found, were broad boulevards full of cars, jazz bars and Burger Kings...”

The author was expected to see more articles about “world’s largest science fair” (2017), since Kazakhstan spent a lot of resources to promote Future Energy EXPO 2017, there was a shortage of coverage.

Discussion

Overall, all represented articles were detailed and thorough, all frames were fully disclosed. The majority of articles covered more than one frame, and usually the mostly negative articles contained several negative frames. Generally speaking, negative frames prevailed. Moreover, the majority of genuine simpatico articles include negative information. For instance, in the article “Kazakh Capital, a Post-Soviet Creation, Is Growing Real Roots” (2017), Anne Bernard embraces nearly all Kazakhstani aspects such as history, people, architecture, policy etc. However, despite an overall positive overview and high evaluation

such as “resource-rich, consequential state”, the author expresses skepticism about democracy, human rights and self-determination: “Kazakhstan falls short of democracy and good governance, ranking poorly in indexes of corruption and press freedom; it has been cultivating relations with Russia, its longtime hegemon”. Even generally positive frames such as “EXPO 2017” contain negative information about the Central Asian country. By virtue of the whole picture, the perception is controversial.

Initially, two more positive frames were outlined, however due to the absence of sufficient information, they were excluded from the final sample. The first one is the “*New Silk road*” frame, which is based on the speech made by Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, in September 2013 at the Nazarbayev University. The goal was to develop closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and in the Eurasian region. There was only one article dedicated to this occasion “Hauling New Treasures Along the Old Silk Road” (Keith, 2013). Apart from this, the frame didn’t appear in any other articles. The second one is the “*Triple G*” frame, devoted to outstanding Kazakh boxer Gennady Golovkin. Triple G is a big name in boxing and recently Kazakhstan has often been associated with his name. GGG-is winner of numerous champion titles and awards, he held about 40 fights, and was victor in all of them. In 2012, Golovkin made his debut on HBO. As at January 2018, he is the world's best active boxer, according to the Ring Magazine; and the best middleweight boxer, according to the Transnational Boxing Rankings Board (TBRB). There were several articles mentioning the name of Gennady Golovkin, but none referred to Kazakhstan, thus the author eliminated these articles. The deficiency of positive frames once again will lead to the predominance of negative perception.

The fact that the majority of articles about Kazakhstan were published in 2006. From the sample of 15 articles, 7 were published in the year 2006, when the movie “Borat” was released. Despite the fact that the Borat movie became “an unbearable cancer on the visage of

Kazakhstan” (Saunders, 2007, p. 226), according to numerous articles in The New York Times, it sparked interest in the real Kazakhstan. In the years, that followed the number of articles about Kazakhstan significantly shrunk. Moreover, in 2006, Kazakhstan released “The Heart of Eurasia” slogan, which was promoted through major international outlets in order to reduce bad publicity on the Borat movie. Nonetheless, during the search, no articles focused on “The heart of Eurasia” frame were discovered.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This study attempted to examine assumptions of Kazakhstan in the U.S online coverage. According to Wanta, Golan, and Lee, Cheolhan (2004), the more negative coverage a nation receives, the more negative perception it has among Americans. This study has found that, despite friendly relations with The United States, negative frames prevail over positive ones. This study was needed to define the current depiction of the country in the U.S by the main “newspaper of record” and probably most influential media outlet worldwide.

The previous studies make clear that the image of the country is negative in the USA, the prevalence of negative frames in this research might reflect a negative perception of Kazakhstan in the U.S.

All articles in this study focused on framing theory and its significance especially in international news coverage. Prior studies have determined that international news coverage reflects the media home country's interests and cultural stereotypes (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1998; Entman, 1991; Lee and Yang, 1996). Most of the researchers consider international news coverage subjective and due to the lack of information about Kazakhstan and shortage of research articles the prevalence of a negative coverage was anticipated.

The majority of the stories depicted Kazakhstan as “authoritarian” “petro-state”, which got independence, but still followed “soviet-style” politics and was largely influenced by its “hegemon Russia”. The country, which “has a complex about being recognized in the world” (Stern, 2008) and therefore was offended by “Borat”.

Unfortunately, “negative information tends to influence evaluations more strongly than comparably extreme positive information” (Ito, Larsen, Smith & Cacioppo, 1998). Apparently, the ubiquity of frames such as “Authoritarian and corrupt country” and the fictional movie “Borat” frames has a negative effect on the country’s image worldwide. However, the implementation of more positive frames such as “The New Silk Road”, “Astana futuristic capital”, “Triple G” and etc. has the potential to change this situation and influence public opinion worldwide.

Kazakhstan is still a young and unknown country in the global community, thus international perspective highly influenced by the media. Nonetheless it has a great potential to emerge from the shadows and build its “nation brand” (Anholt,1990). In the era of globalization, countries compete for attention, respect and the trust of potential consumers, investors, tourists and media. “A positive and strong nation brand provides a crucial competitive advantage in the era of globalization” (Giannopoulos, Piha & Avlonitis, 2011). In the majority of cases, the image of the country is the result of media coverage, created by people who have nothing to do with either culture or the people. The huge amount of information remains uncovered and therefore unexplored. This information vacuum must be filled.

However, until the worldwide media stops “selecting and highlighting some aspects of the problem while at the same time neglecting and excluding other aspects of the problem” (Entman, 1993, p.52) the situation will remain the same.

Limitations

Despite the presented augmentation above, this study has several limitations. First, this study focuses only on one media sources coverage. Excluding other sources means the results may not present a complete picture about the coverage of Kazakhstan. The frames discussed in this article could be examined, and more frames could be outlined. Although the

qualitative nature of this research and textual-analysis method allows engagement with rich data, a quantitative analysis of media framing would allow researchers to test the frequency of the proposed frames. Finally, even though The New York Times serves as “agenda-setting” for other media, the inclusion of different sources would benefit this study and make the sample more representative and meaningful.

Future discussion

To get the full depiction of Kazakhstan, future research on the image of Kazakhstan should look at other countries coverage. Examining a longer period of coverage would also improve the study. Further investigation should focus on coverage fluctuations, and tends to see how the coverage increased or changed from the beginning until today. The effects of such coverage also should be examined. The aftermath of the EXPO 2017 campaign can be examined in order to evaluate the effect of exposition on image of the country worldwide. Research examining other media sources, for example television or newspapers, would be beneficial as well.

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