



## The Impact of the Media on the Muslim Image Forming in Modern World

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### Abstract:

Islamic culture, morality and the image of Muslims are comprehensively studied by researchers from various fields. This article analyzes the influence of modern media, which has a huge impact on the formation of the image of Muslims and attitudes towards Islamic culture in general.

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Today, Islamic culture can be seen as a combination of several cultural communities, including different Islamic countries, which are closely interconnected with each other by a single culture, history, Islamic tradition and language. Man is the main object of Muslim culture. It is considered traditional, with a high degree of unity, which is based on a religious foundation. The path to perfection, indicated in the texts of the Koran and hadiths, runs through moral values: goodness, beauty, mercy, faith, which are the values of human culture.

Since the end of the 20th century, neo-traditionalist tendencies have intensified everywhere in the Muslim East, associated with the search for national identity, the desire to return to the foundations of traditional Islamic culture and, relying on them, to solve the problems of the spiritual and material development of the Muslim world.

The rise of religious extremism and terrorism, combined with the activation of various kinds of Muslim movements and organizations in Western countries, caused a rapid growth of anti-Islamic sentiments. Acts of jihadism are often and unjustifiably perceived by the public consciousness, whose values are mainly formed by mass culture, as an integral attribute of Islam and Muslim civilization as a

whole, making Islamic religious institutions responsible for terrorist attacks.

Despite the tolerance and political correctness accepted in European countries, it is not possible to hide the mindsets expressed by the phrases “clash of civilizations”, “intercivilizational conflict”. Even people who are not familiar with the theses of S. Huntington have formed a stable prejudice that makes them evaluate the ongoing conflicts as the result of insurmountable civilizational contradictions, which are based on something other than religion. Against this background, anti-immigrant sentiments are spontaneously growing in many European countries. Thus, the issues of preserving the national culture and unique European identity, issues of painless integration and political rights of the new inhabitants of Europe are on the agenda of the new united Europe. [1]

The extremely negative image of Islam in the modern world, as well as the intercivilizational conflict itself, develops in the context of global processes, when cultural differences seem to fade into the background, and the influence of the media increases. Also, this is cultivated by the publication in the media of tendentious statements by Islamic politicians, clerics, who talk about the imminent Islamization of Europe, jihad against the “infidels” and the creation of a Pan-Islamic state in the future. [2]

The radicalization of the image of Muslims is influenced, first of all, by the problems associated with the difficulties of integration into the cultural and civilizational space of European peoples. Muslim immigrants top all lists of problem citizens. This social group has the highest percentage of the unemployed, the disabled, criminals, perpetrators of acts of domestic violence and troubled teenagers.

Naturally, Muslims do not always share the values that prevail in the world. And by integration, many indigenous people of European countries understand complete assimilation, a situation when former immigrants cease to identify themselves with a certain non-European ethno-national community.

In this regard, of particular interest is the consideration of the image of a Muslim in modern mass culture. These images are a powerful tool for influencing the minds of people and therefore require special attention. Stereotypes are an integral part of the perception of any culture, which undoubtedly affects the psychology and behavior of people, influence their interethnic contacts and consciousness. About 2/3 of human behavior is determined by stereotypes. The assimilation of these stereotypes by a person takes place in different ways in the process of inculturation and socialization. Stereotypes are acquired in the process of encountering phenomena that are most often encountered on the path of a person. Thus, it can be the media, people from close circles, books or systematic actions. Most of the research is devoted to the influence of stereotypes both on people and society as a whole, and the influence of people on these stereotypes. The era of mass media and electronic information is radically changing both the human environment and himself.

The media acquaints people with the peculiarities of the development of culture. This helps to increase the level of aesthetic education, achieve mutual understanding, relieve social tension, and contribute to the unification of society. This is the function of mass culture, the social value of which is determined ambiguously. The media really develops society, introducing it to the latest trends in the development of culture. However, the ability to produce an unlimited number of programs of a low artistic level brings up bad taste in the consumer. From this we can conclude that the sources and carriers of these stereotypes are both the individual and society as a whole.

The course of the study of stereotypes in the context of religion has certain methodological obstacles. First of all, this is a search for differences between religious attitudes and a person's perception of his

particular religion. A person concludes the search for the truth of God within the framework of his understanding, changing the religious understanding to suit his own attitudes, which subsequently formed into social stereotypes.

The basis for the formation of stereotypes is a comparison of certain features and characteristics of one's own and another people and consists of a comparison of "we" and "they", although most often a person is not aware of this. Classification according to the principle "us-them" is not a recent development. From time immemorial, man has been comparing and contrasting himself and the group to which he belongs with that "foreign group". At the same time, people belong to different social strata, classes, political, religious and other groups. At the same time, the process of identification and differentiation takes place, leading to the formation of social identity, that is, the individual's awareness of himself as a member of a certain group and his evaluative attitude towards this belonging.

The mechanism of interethnic perception, which consists in the tendency to evaluate the phenomena of the surrounding world through the prism of the traditions and norms of one's ethnic group, considered as a standard, is called ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism in its essence does not carry a negative connotation and is not dangerous. However, at a time when imaginary or real differences are elevated to the Absolute and gradually turn into a hostile attitude towards another people, as an "ethnic prejudice", some problems arise.

The formation of negative stereotypes, that is, stable images of foreign cultures inherited by generations, has its roots back to primitive human consciousness, which was characterized by the identification of everything alien with a hostile world. But the saturation of these stereotypes with specific motivation and the emergence of prejudices regarding specific peoples or cultures entirely depend on the history of international and intercultural relations. At the same time, it is important to note that images once formed under the influence of certain historical circumstances become incredibly stable, traditional, and subsequently weakly subject to change. Such, of course, is the image of a Muslim, which began to take shape in the Western tradition immediately after the advent of Islam and was consolidated during the time of the Crusades. The subsequent stages in the history of the relationship between Western culture and Muslim culture only slightly corrected this image.

The creation of the image of Islamic culture as fundamentalist in the Western media began in the 70s in connection with the revolution in Iran, the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan, a series of terrorist attacks organized by the Hamas organization for the liberation of Palestine. The situation worsened in the 90s, when a number of Islamist groups spread throughout the Middle East and began to carry out massive terrorist attacks. The key event that influenced the perception of Islam in the minds of the Western world was the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York. The media began to actively use the image of the "crusade" of the West against terrorism, which negatively affected the perception of Muslims around the world.

If we talk about Europe, then during the second half of the 2000s, many prominent politicians and public figures began to talk about the failure of the policy of multiculturalism, caused by the inability of European governments to create the right policy for integrating a huge wave of refugees from the countries of the Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Reporting on the riots involving Muslim youth on the outskirts of European capitals also influenced the radicalization of the image of Islam in the West.

In modern conditions of gradual overcoming of social instability, strengthening in the public consciousness of the ideas of interfaith and interethnic tolerance, the leaders of Muslim organizations are forced to place emphasis on the unity of all Abrahamic religions and the truth of religious teaching in general. On this basis, there is a general trend towards convergence of positions between various confessions, the emergence of ecumenical organizations and movements. Despite this, the radicalization of the image of Islam continues.

The radicalization of the image of Muslims manifests itself on several levels:

- in the ideological sphere in the form of adherence to rigid interpretations of “takfir” - the concept of orthodox Islam, which accuses of departing from Islam and complete disbelief;
- in the family and household sphere, it manifests itself in the form of excessive claims, nit-picking, rigidity, coercion of family members and those close to excessively strict adherence to optional Islamic prescriptions that restrict the freedom and self-realization of women, as well as in family violence;
- in the public sphere manifests itself in intolerance towards
- dissident, liberal-minded Muslims, non-believers, as well as breaking off relations and boycotting certain social groups;
- in the political sphere it manifests itself in the non-recognition of the legitimacy of liberal-minded, moderate, Western-oriented governments, parties, movements and organizations that do not share the harsh and extreme interpretations of Islam. [3]

The reasons for the radicalization of the image of Muslims have different roots. For example, socio-economic reasons are poverty, poverty, insecurity, youth unemployment and lack of prospects for the younger generation. There are also demographic reasons. In Islamic countries, as you know, the economy is developing at a low pace, along with a high population growth and birth rate.

The authority of the clergy is extremely low. The older generation does not have the same influence on the youth as before. The traditional Islamic society was subjected to the strongest influence of the West, which significantly affected the way of life of Muslims. The imposition of consumer ideology, Western mass culture, and the redefinition of social roles and statuses are all viewed by Islamic society as a real disaster. Thus, a certain split is taking place in the Muslim world, the social situation is becoming more and more tense.

According to some culturologists, the main reason for the formation of a negative image of Muslims is ignorance of the foundations of Islamic culture. In their opinion, today almost all religions are faced with two, at first glance, mutually exclusive processes: the ultimate secularization of consciousness, the lack of elementary knowledge about the faith of their ancestors, and fundamentalist movements, which are commonly considered terrorist. Many relate to religion only at the ethnic level, that is, for example, a person considers himself a Muslim, because he was born in a Muslim family, but at the same time he does not enter into a religion, may not attend a mosque, may not fast. When a person decides to follow the path of entering into religion, he is faced with the problem of mastering spiritual experience. Today, people have gained open access to information, including Islamic texts, by studying which a person questions the authority of the traditional guardians of Islam. [4]

Considering the image of Muslims, we can say that usually these are negative characters who are far from the high ideals of Islam, terrorists and persons prone to this type of activity, or Arab sheikhs, eager

to get beautiful girls into the harem. Drug dealers and slave traders are also the most typical film characters. There are many other, no less impressive characters in the face of crime bosses, religious fanatics, petty thieves, militants and others. And what is strange, almost always the on-screen image of Muslims is nondescript, represented by actors of the second and third plan, while not very pretty, conveying to the viewer a sense of fear and anxiety.

But the storyline of the films and its characters are simply the idea of the writers and the director, embodied by the actors, who convey the image of their character using acting skills. And the formation and rooting of the image of Muslims in the subconscious of people directly depends on the representation of Islam in the media. From the intonation of the transmission of information, the video sequence and the subjective assessment of events expressed by the correspondent, depends on what the audience will have a picture of what happened and its characters. For example, it is enough to recall the news reports on a series of terrorist attacks on Paris in November 2015 by France 24, DWTV and a number of other television companies. Breaking news releases began as soon as the explosions occurred, people were seized with panic. Of course, the investigation could not yet give definite results due to the too short time period, and not a single terrorist group had yet managed to announce its involvement in what happened, but the journalists immediately announced the involvement of Muslims. In the first reports, this information, which at that time was not accurate and unreliable, was actively exaggerated. From the TV screens they announce that someone has seen suspicious people in traditional Islamic attire, someone has heard war cries, although people have not yet talked about this in interviews. A terrifying video sequence is presented to the viewer's attention: a cordoned off street, families crying with fear, and the police packing the bodies of the dead for transportation and examination.

According to the same scheme, the first information about the terrorist attacks in Brussels was presented to the world. The media today do not always convey an objective picture, and often do so from the subjective side. Correspondents undertake to voice unconfirmed versions based only on the stereotypical thinking of a person.

The consequence of this approach to the formation of the image of Muslims is Islamophobia, which confidently covers various sectors of society, especially during the period of increased activity of radical Islamists belonging to terrorist organizations.

Today, the need for a demonstration and the other side of the coin is being discussed at the highest level. Statements about the importance of creating a positive image of Muslims can be heard from famous cultural figures, scientists and politicians. Most of them believe that the current presentation of Islam in the media is biased and blatant. Often, people do not try to understand the issue, but draw on the information that is on the surface, and then, on the basis of this information, form an opinion and attitude towards something.

A sociologist at the University of North Carolina in the United States, Christopher Bale, has done a very interesting study. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the scientist began to take an interest in public opinion about Muslims and Islam in order to understand how anti- and pro-Islamic non-governmental organizations interact with the media. Bale carefully studied more than fifty thousand articles published in major American publications such as the New York Times, USA Today, Washington Times, as well as news reports from leading television networks CBS, CNN and Fox. As a result of the study, it was revealed that many reports and publications are aimed at awakening fear,

hatred and rejection in a person. For the media, these techniques are beneficial, as they allow you to arouse interest in the press release. Information is often misrepresented. The price of a high rating of the publication in this case is discrimination and xenophobia towards Muslims, as well as clouding the minds of people who belong to other religious denominations. [5]

Scientists from other countries where Muslims make up a significant part of the population also share this position. For example, Russian sociologists argue that despite the absence of direct xenophobic materials that concern Muslims, the press tries to create Islamophobic attitudes using headlines and journalistic remarks that influence the consciousness of society. A woman in Islam acts as a symbol of purity, femininity and humility. However, due to the popular image of a suicide bomber in the media, as well as women fighting for the right to be photographed for a passport in headscarves, negative stereotypes have arisen in society towards a Muslim woman. Subsequently, this contributed to the creation of the "image of the enemy." An example is the media coverage of the event that took place in Moscow on February 29, 2016, when a crazy nanny, after decapitating a girl, screamed and waved her head at the Oktyabrskoye Pole metro station. News sites were full of the following headlines: "A woman with a child's head in her hands shouted "Allah Akbar" at the Moscow metro" [6], "A woman in a hijab with a child's head in her hands was detained near the metro in Moscow" [7], "Muslim woman cut off the head of a child in Moscow" [8], "In Moscow blocked the square in order to catch a Muslim nanny who cut off the head of a child [9]. You can continue this list with more than a dozen publications on federal and regional Russian resources, but they have one thing in common: journalists are not shy and are not afraid to form a negative image of Muslims, Islamophobia, denoting religious affiliation in this kind of news ("Muslim", "Muslim", "hijab", "Koran"), nationality ("Uzbek", "Chechen", "Caucasian") or using the terms "shahid", "jihad" and others unnecessarily. Many Russian media capture the public sentiments planted by Western policy, transfer it to Russian reality, where they, in turn, form a negative image of a Muslim. Moreover, as the review of the Russian media shows, this is done, for the most part, by not very clean Internet sites in pursuit of traffic and a cheap audience.

The Russian historian and writer I.V. Sheremet is of the opinion in this regard that the media not only capture the dominant moods in society, but also create stereotypes of mass consciousness. Having a colossal manipulative potential, the mass media introduce phobic attitudes into people's minds. Criticism of the dogmatic and ritual aspects of Islam in newspapers and on television is interspersed with reporter footage depicting kneeling Muslims during collective prayer or giant crowds of pilgrims in Mecca. [10]

Still, it is impossible to say that the media is not tolerant of Islam. However, one must understand that many media outlets one-sidedly and deliberately distort the coverage of the religion of Muslims. Such barriers to mutual understanding in society will be possible to overcome only in the case of mutual initiative of the media and representatives of the Islamic society.

Against the backdrop of recent world events, which include a number of terrorist attacks and attacks carried out under the auspices of ISIS, and, accordingly, under the flag of Islam, it is especially important to form in the public mind the correct image of a Muslim and the religion of Islam, and also to convey to people that, in addition to criminals there is a huge number of Muslims who have moral principles and share the spiritual values of other faiths.

Summing up, it can be argued that the modern representation of the image of a Muslim is largely due to a certain historical "tradition" of negative awareness of the "other", which belongs to Muslim culture and in the vast majority of cases is perceived as "alien". Today in the world there is a lot of talk

about Islam, but very little is known. This is confirmed by the mass replication of the stereotypical identification of Islam with terrorism. And the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 became the dividing line in modern history in the issue of the perception of Islam by the non-Muslim community. After that, in the United States and many other countries, Islam begins to be seen not as a world religion, but as a real threat to humanity.

The perception of Islam today is incredibly politicized and it is imperative to distinguish between the concepts of "Islam", "Islamism" and other terms that are not at all close in meaning. What are the reasons for anti-Islamic stereotypes and negative perception of the image of a Muslim? It is definitely impossible to answer this question. But the main reasons for the existence of negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims should not be sought at all in the sphere of culture, religion or some ethnic characteristics, but in politics. Everyone knows precedents when conflicts with representatives of Islam in a number of countries were used for electoral purposes and radical parties came to power.

Also, people themselves, citizens of European countries, who are not always ready to recognize and respect the right to the identity of Muslims, often contribute to the rooting of negative stereotypes. And Muslim immigrants, who do not always make concessions, are afraid of losing their national or religious identity. On the other hand, as is known, the Muslim ethical and legal systems contain those attitudes that can contribute to the harmonization of relations between the Muslim community and the non-Muslim community.

Traditional Islam, being a culture of peace and mutual understanding, cannot become a tool for destroying peace in modern society. Based on this, Muslim peoples, relying on the tools of mass culture, must oppose the negative and distorted ideas formed in the West with the modern image of a true Muslim. Despite the ongoing attempts to present Islamic culture as untenable in the global world and hindering social progress, it is undoubtedly a part of modern world culture and a significant value for humanity.

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