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# INFORMATION-PSYCHOLOGICAL SECURITY IN MULTICONFESSIONAL SOCIETY

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## Abstract

The current state of ensuring Kazakhstan's national security requires the development of expert knowledge-based state policies and strategies in this realm, identification of the system of national values, the vital interests of individual, society and state, external and internal threats to these interests, as well as the search for effective measures to ensure security in all the realms. Information-psychological security as a component of Kazakhstan's national security plays an important role in effective provision of national security. The purpose of the article is to substantiate in theoretical terms information-psychological security through identification of the basic principles and mechanisms of information-psychological influence; to carry out the empirical study of particular features of stereotyping the Islamic issue in Russian-language mass media in the context of individual information-psychological security in multiconfessional society in Kazakhstan, and, finally, to suggest a package of measures to ensure individual information-psychological security.

The article demonstrates the importance of understanding the mechanisms of information-psychological influence as well as psychological techniques for the subsequent provision of public and individual health security. The results of the conducted empirical research demonstrated that stereotyping of Islam in the Russian-language media as a method of information-psychological influence had such characteristics as institutionalisation, politicisation and desecralisation of the religion; distortion of its fundamental teachings; actualisation of prejudiced attitudes towards Muslims; all these factors negatively affect interconfessional relations in Kazakhstan.

*Keywords:* influence, ethnic, religious stereotype, heterostereotypes, multiconfessional environment

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## 1. Introduction

The problems of individual and public information-psychological security (hereafter abbreviated as IPS) in the conditions of modern social and cultural

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transformations in Kazakhstan are extremely important, because IPS is a component of state information security.

IPS in general is defined as the absence of threat of information influence. The active social actors and their minds are subjected to direct influence of information factors, which transforming through actor's behaviour, actions (or inaction), dysfunctionally affect social subjects of different systemic structural and functional organization. The peculiar feature of information influence on individual consciousness is that, due to its universal nature, it can pose a threat to any kind of human security [1]. Detailed study of information-psychological influence and its links with human security is extremely important, because the mode of life nowadays directly depends on information support and various information influences [2].

Nowadays, people receive a considerable share of information from various sources such as pieces of art (including fictional prose and poetry, which contain predominantly emotional and aesthetic information), mass media, the Internet, social media, interpersonal communication, which can destabilize the state of IPS at any particular period.

Researchers distinguish between the following main forms of influence: coercion (threat, divesting authority, humiliation, violence), influence as social reinforcement (reward, social recognition, assistance), influence as normative regulation through traditions (obedience to traditions and actual values), influence as imitation of personal model (charisma), influence as recognition of professional prestige (expert opinions and projection), influence as persuasion (empowerment, delegation of responsibility, fostering cooperation and decision making) [3].

The concept of security defined as the protection from destructive effects is relevant from the perspective of influence; it is an internal resource of counteraction. In this context, in terms of personal IPS it is important to understand the fundamentals of information-psychological influence on individual consciousness and health in general, which involves personal consumption of particular piece of information via technical devices as well as in the process of direct interpersonal communication. According to G.V. Grachev, the influence can lead to the following negative interrelated changes:

- 1) Psychological changes, effects on human mental health. Due to complicated nature of identifying the border between normality and pathology, it is more difficult to trace these changes. The loss of adequacy of world's reflection in the consciousness, individual attitude to the world and information can be the indicators of such changes. The personal degradation involves simplified representation of reality phenomena, more primitive reactions as well as transition from top needs (in self-actualization, social recognition) to the bottom ones (physiological, everyday needs).
- 2) Changes in values, life philosophy and information psychological stance, beliefs, individual world view, which lead individuals to manifest antisocial behaviour and pose a threat to the entire society and the state on the whole [4].

It should be noted, that the particular feature of information-psychological influence on individual consciousness is the failure to realise its devastating consequences, and, as matter of the fact, this influence is a threat to individuals as such: because brain, consciousness and subconsciousness control individuals, everything that stimulates their activities passes through thinking. Therefore, it is necessary to produce changes in the very consciousness or subconsciousness to alter behaviour. The threat of modern psychotechnologies of information influence is increasingly active influence on human subconsciousness for the purpose of mass manipulation, which is intensively used by various sources of information producing the corresponding information-psychological influence with the aim of inducing desirable actions or reactions by individuals, which are not always good for individuals themselves.

In addition, we should note that individual, group and mass consciousness are the most important objects of the IPS in the present context. Thus, social regulative mechanisms working in each social group are as follows: group consciousness, mentality, traditions, and customs. The group consciousness (ethnic, national, religious) is the most powerful mechanism; it is the system of common values, ideals, emotional advantages and other stereotypical elements of consciousness that often move into the domain of the group subconsciousness. These group factors have significant influence on forming unique model of people, who are typical representatives of particular group as well as active carriers of certain group stereotypes and patterns of behaviour. Powerful information-psychological influence is exercised through them, because it is easier to influence the public consciousness of the whole group or class through these typical representatives.

The innovation technologies of information-psychological influence are introduced and used in the modern conditions of social development. The method of centralised influence and, in particular, the method of information manipulation of various strata of the population are the most frequently used. The latest information-psychological techniques, methods and forms of influence are intensively applied by manufacturers, advertisers, and mass media. The degree of influence depends on the contents as such (i.e. substance, complexity, social meaning), the quality and quantity of information, and individual psychological condition. Fear, apathy, frustration encourage unconscious and uncritical perception of information [5].

As a result, destructive behavioural stereotypes, habits, and mode of life develop and become ingrained. These factors decrease the intensity of threshold norms of behaviour, moral, ethical, legal prohibitions; as well as depreciate spiritual values. This, in its turn, leads to increase in crime rate, lawlessness, immorality, high rates of homicide, suicide and other kinds of destructive and antisocial behaviour of people in the society. This can even lead to chaos and anarchic phenomena.

Modern destructive information technical propaganda encourages the emergence of opposition in the human psyche, which, in its turn, unbalances and destabilizes personality. Individuals lose their 'self', do not understand their life

mission, can neither set an aim nor devise a definite plan on implementing and achieving the aim.

This influence is having especially destructive effect on the younger generation; the youth have neither adopted rigid information psychological stance yet nor acquired the ability to protect themselves from this kind of influence. This influence fundamentally distorts the normal development of the personality. That is why it is enormously important to analyse the mechanisms of information-psychological influence on individual human behaviour as well as on the one of the society as a whole.

Mastering these mechanisms makes individuals twice as responsible in the face of themselves and the society, since individuals are part and parcel of the society, due to which they live and function. Such mechanisms demonstrate the functional structure of this phenomenon enabling us to get the better idea of this concept. So, the above-mentioned mechanism affects not only individual behaviour, but also the process of decision-making at any level of civil society and state organisations in any domain of social life.

One may distinguish between verbal and non-verbal mechanisms of information influence. The schemas of conscious information perception form the basis of the verbal (principal) mechanism. It reflects the general schemas of information processes in the social environment. At first, certain mode of thinking, world view, system of values and interests form in a person; the process of their widening and development in particular direction takes place; as a result, certain moral and semantic filter emerges. Finally, after getting new information, analysis and absorption take place using the above-mentioned filter. As a result of this process new actions are produced, individual behaviour transforms in accordance with particular situation. The orientation and stability of the filter as such influence any given result. The qualitative and substantive characteristics of such filter depend on ideological propaganda, religion, system of philosophy, national and ethnic indicators, education system, historical factors, and media [6]. Media are the most influential ones, in particular, radio, television, periodicals, the Internet, cloud technologies, social media and others. Stable 'filter', information-psychological stance, person's ability to make adequate decisions, certain situation, time, circumstances, typical human behaviour, the quality of informing depend on timeliness, completeness, comprehensiveness and reliability; they are the leading factors of adequate human behaviour.

However, one should note that there are many factors of verbal information-psychological influence that can essentially transform the mechanism of making adequate decisions in people with the goal of controlling decision-making. They include sophisticated, target-driven, plausible misinformation, intentionally distorted information, selectively chosen facts, incomplete information, stereotyping. Thus, people (even having stable and reliable filter) can make decisions and, consequently, adequately act in accordance with the information content, while their behaviour, in fact, will be inadequate for the real situation.

## **2. The role of ethnic and religious stereotypes in the study of interethnic relations**

Ethnic and religious stereotypes in mass media environment deserve special research focus as phenomena, which have such peculiarity as special method of development due to their influence on how the society functions. Research on ethnic and religious stereotypes emerged within the framework of the sociological approach and gradually formed a special research field, which intensively develops now due to the efforts made by religious studies scholars, ethnographers, cultural studies scholars, and ethnolinguists. Research into the content, processes of formation and legitimation of ethnic and religious stereotyped patterns in mass media will allow solving numerous topical problems in complex body of interethnic relations, revealing the nature of ethnic identities, as well as preventing political and social tensions.

The significance of the role of ethnic and religious stereotypes can be understood, first and foremost, taking into account the current situation of identity transformation in the post-Soviet society. Secondly, the context of the existence of multivariant system of identities in modern Kazakhstan is of great importance: in Kazakhstan a considerable share of the population are the Orthodox Russophones using Russian-language mass media as information sources (periodicals, the Internet, etc.)

According to western scholars, “The history produced a lot of religious stereotypes, due to which the formation and preservation of ethnic groups, nations, religious communities, and confessions took place. At the same time, uncontrolled domination (especially, the use of these stereotypes in theory and practice of social and individual life) posed problems for the way ethnic and religious communities functioned, led to struggle between them, and even to their collapse: as a result, other ethnic groups, nations, religions and churches appeared.” [7]

Stereotyped forms constitute the majority of research on the relationship between the ‘Christian West’ and the ‘Muslim East’. Researchers’ focus on the issue is conditioned by the recognition of the role of stereotypes in the deteriorating relationship between civilizations and religious systems.

Ethnic and religious stereotypes form the structure of the cultural space of nations, act as signifiers of nation-building factors. Stereotypes, prejudices, beliefs, attitudes are applied not only in the discursive practices of informal everyday communication, but also often constitute the content of official media discourses. They permeate national identity, which expresses itself in various forms - from objects of mass culture to academic research and literary works [8].

The new perspective on identity as a dynamic construct has replaced longstanding predominantly essentialist understanding of it in the 1990s. The new perspective declared that identity is permanently built up and transformed under the influence of political factors, media practices as well as the planetary factors of globalization and regionalisation.

If one recognises that religion is integrated into culture, one may examine the society through the lens of inherent cultural conflict, which includes ethnic and religious groups which have not only different, but sometimes even colliding value systems. In the context of a globalising information society, any restrictions imposed by certain religion can at any period of time become the central issue or the starting point for discussion in another ethnic and religious system. In multiconfessional environment such prohibitions inevitably become the subject of cultural and social reflection acquiring especially important forms in mass media ('Islamic scarf controversy', 'Muhammad cartoons crisis', etc.).

One should note that the interaction of two or more religious systems is always the process of creating, using or rejecting stereotypes, because in the course of social interaction people are guided not by adequate representations about the bearers of other culture, but rather by those incomplete, isomorphic or distorted images that are constructed by people from currently topical components [9].

So, the qualitative and morphological features of ethnic and religious stereotypes, first and foremost, reflect representations and needs of subjects of stereotyping, and only secondly, the properties of stereotyped objects. According to the results of modern ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic studies, this group of stereotypes plays ethno-differentiating role, which is important for ethnos' identity and self-actualisation in the form of ideas about 'own' and 'other' people, 'own' and 'other' religion, rituals and value systems. In mass culture characterized by the ordinary (naive, folk) world view the attitude towards the representatives of other ethnic groups is largely determined by the concept of ethnocentrism, when 'own' traditions, 'own' religion, 'own' customs and 'own' language are perceived as the only 'real' and 'correct' ones.

### **3. Ethnopolitical conflict in Kazakhstan - the dissemination of stereotypes through the mass media**

The ethnic and religious stereotype of Islam is extensively represented in the Russian-speaking media environment: it is a syncretic construct, in which the ethnic or religious components are contextually reflected. Observers traditionally suppose that the issue became topical due to post-Soviet mass media practices. During the religious renaissance, media attention was focused on shaping the images of their religion as well as 'new post-Soviet believers'. Along with boosting the authentic religious identity of the 'Russian World', the negative image of 'others' religion' was often created; the consequences of this work can be observed up to now.

According to the logic of polar thinking, which is typical for shaping stereotypes of social interaction, at first, negative mind-set aimed at 'others' something' was fixed in the consciousness, and, subsequently, the corresponding cognitive base was constructed. In the Russian-language media reports, the concept of 'Islam' was associated with the concepts of 'war', 'terrorism', and 'violence'. Due to journalists' lack of education, extremist position was

extrapolated to all Islamic tradition. The rise of Islamophobia encouraged by political and media factors occurred in late 20<sup>th</sup> - early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now observers discuss the escalation of interethnic tensions as well as the persistence of negative stereotypes of Islam.

Retrospective analysis allowed to find out that the heterostereotype of Islam has had long history, which was constructed around the typical perception of 'self' and 'the others'. At the archaic level, antagonism towards Islam manifested itself through long standing confrontation between the Russians and various peoples practising Islam, which later led to the opposition 'Europe-Asia'. The negative heterostereotype was fuelled by conflict-prone precedents of interaction with 'enemies', 'adherents to other beliefs (inovertsy)', which were amassed and preserved in ancestors' generalized experience. This preserved attitude still determines the 'sentiment' of the Slavs' genetic memory towards peoples of the East. Because of high rigidity, heterostereotype puts up powerful resistance to alternative facts and cognitive practices presented in mass media.

The term 'Islamophobia' won popularity after the publication by the British think tank Runnymede Trust of the report 'Islamophobia: a Challenge for Us All' in 1997, in which the most common stereotypes were described as typical formulae of Islam representations in the mass media: Islamic culture is backward, static, hostile to dissent, fundamentalist, aggressive.

The September 11 attacks became powerful factor for triggering stereotype of Islam at cognitive, emotional and behavioural levels. The heterostereotype was legitimized in official Western mass media discourse; it acquired instrumental meaning in the implementation of Western countries' foreign policy.

Nowadays, mass media, including Russian-language ones, often play a key role in constructing moral panic on the so called Islamic threat reproducing 'catastrophic' definition of the situation and negatively labelled stereotyped images of 'the other' again and again. The use of any 'suitable' criminal situations for the implementation of the media political program is incorrect.

At present, the representation of Islam in its substantive and institutional dimensions remains the lacuna in the consciousness of Russophone diaspora in Kazakhstan, which is intensively filled with mass media constructs. Their construction is accompanied by the processes of ethnisation of crime, attachment of negative connotations to ethnonyms. It is based on the tradition of interpreting ethnos, according to which the characteristics of certain members of ethnic religious groups or confession related situations are spread to the entire ethnos and religion.

In our opinion, stereotyping of Islamic issue is not so much the consequence of certain journalists' stance represented predominantly by emotional component of package including stereotypes and mind-set, but rather the result of their lack of qualification, their adherence to the principles of ordinary perception. In media products one may find, in particular, the following examples of religious illiteracy: 'Muslim church' (mosque), 'Islamic God of

love', 'Muslim best-seller' (Quran), 'religion considered to be the most militant one' (crossword puzzle definition).

Stereotyping of Islam also manifests itself through development of such well-established semantic combinations as 'Islam is a threat to European stability', 'Islam is terrorism'. So-called 'labelling' is frequently used method of stereotyping, which facilitates the process of analysing events for mass audience by means of reminding about similar previous events and phenomena. Label as a means of discrediting individual or entire ethnic religious group functions using simplified definitions, which focus on one characteristic feature. This characteristic covers the complicated nature of the concept, narrows its content down and determines certain perception.

Therefore, the belief of allegedly implacable ethnic and religious differences between the Slavic Orthodox minority and the Kazakh Islamic majority is embedded in the mass consciousness of the Russophone population of Kazakhstan. In our opinion, it is the principal paradigm of ethnic political conflicts as well as unalterable basis for constructing conflict-triggering stereotypes of Islam.

#### **4. Discussion**

The conflict nature of the media discourse on Islamic and Orthodox Christian topics is especially significant, because each community in Kazakhstan perceives the discourse relying on various background data: the Russian Orthodox community perceives it in accordance with the situation of the early 1990s, meanwhile, the Kazakh community does it based on the concepts of forced Russification and partial loss of national identity during the Soviet period.

I.V. Savchenko writes, "...stirring up the topic of interethnic relations strengthens already established general beliefs on how to understand the situation, as well as reinforces the classic stereotype of division between 'us' and 'them'. Domestic and foreign politicians quite fruitfully exploit these negative mythologems. It is impossible to overcome such stereotypes immediately; the measures necessary to improve the situation include well thought out state policy and active cooperation with the civil society; these measures could gradually develop public immunity against such provocations ..." [10]

Nowadays, in Kazakhstan there are lots of threats to personal security associated with IPS due to attempts by certain forces to use mass media and Internet social media's information capacity in order to shape public opinion, public stance, as well as to have an influence on the masses to achieve the corresponding forces' interests, including the ones in the domain of interfaith relations. One may observe the application of modern technologies and methods of mass consciousness manipulating in the advertising industry, various television projects and TV shows, series, and other sources. Undoubtedly, children and teenagers are the most vulnerable to such information influence: when they get into the whirlpool of diverse information, they are just not ready

for its rational perception [11]. Therefore, certain information can lead to moral and psychological transformations and cause aggressive behaviour.

Significant changes taking place in the entire society are combined with many problems not only in the economic, political, and social domains, but also in the ethical and psychological ones. Inadequacy of the current legislation leads to overloading information space with materials containing elements of violence and cruelty, promoting drug abuse and other bad habits, national and religious hatred, disrespect for national and religious sacred objects. This, no doubt, negatively affects psychological and emotional personal development and leads to distorted perception of the environment [12]. That is why ensuring IPS of Kazakhstani citizens is one of the state's priority tasks.

Therefore, the state should take certain defensive measures in order to provide IPS; these measures can be subdivided into the following groups:

1. Regulation of information flows, in particular, control over them. Adopting this group of measures at personal level is associated with the denial of citizens' access to certain pieces of information, sources or channels of information distribution through its reliability verification.
2. Purposeful provision of information, in particular, the dissemination of educational information. This also should include organising information flows with the purpose of preventing and neutralizing the influence of certain information factors having negative consequences.
3. Usage of methods, ways and means of regular provision of socially important information. This group includes various forms of supplying socially important information on a regular basis, in particular, disseminating spiritual and cultural values, promoting traditions as well as moral and ethical norms.
4. Development of collective defence mechanisms against negative information-psychological influence. These measures are connected with organising collective defence based on the mechanisms of identification of the Kazakhstanis with particular social communities. Various methods and means can be used in order to achieve it: in particular, developing positive moral and psychological climate of work environment as well as encouraging the sense of belonging to some public organization or religious confession.
5. Improvement of individual skills at maintaining information-psychological resistance. This group of measures is aimed at gaining the practical experience of safe information and communication interaction (education employing specialised forms of psychological training) so as to form individual psychological mechanism for self-defence.

## **5. Conclusions**

Thus, in the conditions of modern social and cultural transformations in Kazakhstan the particular feature of negative information-psychological influence on individuals is as follows: this negative influence can be detected

only as a result of special expert evaluation, corresponding scientific studies and constant monitoring of the information space. Therefore, it is important to analyse the mechanisms of information-psychological influence and psychological techniques for the subsequent provision of public and individual health security.

The conducted empirical research demonstrated that stereotyping of Islam in mass media had such characteristics as institutionalisation, politicisation and desacralisation of the religion, distortion of its fundamental teachings, and actualisation of prejudiced attitudes towards Muslims, which negatively affected interconfessional relations in Kazakhstan. European and Russian-language mass media typically provide undifferentiated representation of religion in terms of human spirituality and in the context of externally indoctrinated speculative political claims.

Special security standards must be developed and implemented to identify the danger and potential threats, which are, as a rule, latent; these standards must be approved according to the established procedure and include the parameters of information-psychological influence that do not lead to negative consequences for the human psyche, established public moral norms, spiritual ideals, and values.

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