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UNIVERSAL CODE ELEMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL IMAGE AND PHENOMENON OF PREDICTION IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

Анотація: *У статті мова іде про феномен «передбачення» у аудіовізуальному медіа та його вплив на міжнародний політичний імідж, що розглядається на основі актуального прикладу новообраного президента США Дональда Трампа. Констатується певна нестача досліджень на тему, через яку природа впливу на міжнародний політичний імідж появ певної фігури у аудіовізуальному медіа та алюзій на нього поки що може бути наведена лише умовно та теоретично. Наведена актуальність проблеми та висувається необхідність продовження досліджень на наведену тематику у рамках політичних досліджень міжнародних відносин.*

Ключові слова: *міжнародний політичний імідж, універсальний код кінематографу, аудіовізуальне медіа, логіко-інтуїтивний аналіз, пре когнітивний аналіз.*

Annotation: *Article dwells upon phenomenon of prediction in the audiovisual media and its influence on the international political image, which is illustrated by a recent example of the USA president-elect Donald Trump. Shown is the certain lack of researches of the topic, because of which nature of such an influence on international political image provided by person's appearances in the audio-visual media and allusions in such could be so far only theorized. Actuality of a problem is stated and the need of eventual*

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research in the field of political studies in the international relations is drawn as well.

Key words: *international political image, universal code of movies, audiovisual media, logic-intuitive analyses, precognitive analyses.*

Аннотация: *В статье речь идет о феномене «предсказания» в аудиовизуальном медиа и его влиянии на международный политический имидж, что рассматривается на основе актуального примера новоизбранного президента США Дональда Трампа. Констатируется определенная недостача исследований на тему, из-за которых природа такого влияния на международный политический имидж появлений фигуры в аудиовизуальном медиа и аллюзий на него в нем же пока может быть приведена лишь условно и теоретически. Приведены актуальность проблемы и выражается необходимость продолжения исследований на данную тематику в рамках политических исследований международных отношений.*

Ключевые слова: *международный политический имидж, универсальный код кинематографа, аудиовизуальное медиа, логико-интуитивный анализ, прекогнитивный анализ.*

Problem establishment.

Analyses of current researches and publications. A situation of fakes spreading all over the news, unfortunately, is very common in the modern world. It is a much rare occasion when something was actually right and is yet still disregarded as fake, which is an occurrence evidenced lately in Post-Soviet countries (and, mainly, Russia) regarding a situation on whether popular satirical cartoon show *«The Simpsons»* (Created by Matt Groening, developed by James L. Brooks and Sam Simon, Gracie Films in association with 20ᵗʰ Century Fox, 1989-Present) predicted Trump's presidency or not. As an example of such news item being «debunked» there is a blog post by Russian 2X2 TV channel (which

airs «The Simpsons» officially in Russia) which directly states in the headline «The Simpsons» had not predicted Trump's win in 2000" and yet manages to directly contradict that in the statement itself saying that "In 2000 The Simpsons had actually predicted Trump's win". While the article also dwells upon the fact that popular illustration of «prediction» shared through social network was actually taken from 2015's special *Trumptastic Voyage* (dir. David Silverman, written by Al Jean, Gracie Films), it is also obvious that the headline contradicts the meaning of a statement, even if, as stated in the post, *«Overall, that picture is 80% fake»*. [20] Episode in question is the seventeenth episode of the eleventh season of the show, named *Bart to the Future* (dir. Michael Marcantel, written by Dan Greany) in which one of the show's protagonists, Bart Simpson gets a glimpse into the future, specifically in 2030. In that variant of the show's future (which is not, by the way, considered canon in the lore) Trump becomes a president of the United States at an unspecified point prior to this year, before first «straight female» president Lisa Simpson and leaves country with a «budget crunch». [21] Long-time producer and writer of the show, Al Jean addressed the fact in a recent interview and explained that prediction was actually a joke with a logical basis, as in 2000 Trump was talking about running for president as a reform party candidate. What is interesting that media attention to the fact, while not reaching it's peak was still there prior to elections, as actual writer of the *Bart to the Future* episode, Dan Greany was also asked about the prediction in an interview for *The Hollywood Reporter*, dated March 16, 2016. In it he stated that *«The Simpsons has always kind of embraced the over-the-top side of American culture ... and [Trump] is just the fulfillment of that.»* [13]

But even that was not the earliest known addressing of the fact, as British newspaper *Metro* did an article on the fact back on July 30, 2015. [] It is of interest that at the time world was all about comparing predictions from audio-visual media to real life, as on October 21, 2015 a cult science fiction movie *Back to the Future Part II* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, written by Bob Gale

and Robert Zemeckis, Universal Pictures, Amblin Entertainment, U-Turn Productions, 1989) was literally back to the future as said date was a destination time of the time travel from 1985 in the movie. As it was the case with *The Simpsons*, writer Bob Gale was also interviewed about certain predictions, including the one about, of all people, Donald Trump. Gale confirmed that similarities noted by audience between the latter and one of the main antagonists of the movie, Buford "Biff" Tannen (from alternative timeline of 1985) were in fact deliberate. [5] Although, at the time portions of Tannen's personality that were based on Trump were his 27-floor casino (In 1984 Trump built a 37-floor Trump Plaza Hotel), operations in real estate and, partially, looks and personality (including advocacy of plastic surgery), there is another portion which is considered a prediction – Tannen used his wealth to influence the Republican Party before assuming some political powers on his own, isolating the town of Hill Valley as an autonomous zone, every citizen of which is encouraged to call him "America's greatest living folk hero", effectively fulfilling the same *«over-the-top side of American culture»* as Trump. [19]

What is interesting about both predictions about Trump from 1989 and 2000 is that they are actually culturally interconnected – episode *Bart to the Future* is not only named after *Back to the Future* franchise, it is also directly visually and plot-wise influenced by it. So, in short, what we have here is that two connected audio-visual media ventures that had fictionalized characters based on Donald Trump (one of which is eponymous) predicting a really close approximation (especially if combined) of an actual political event from 2016. Of course "prediction" is a loose term. For example, statistically, being world's longest running current TV show on its 28th season in 2016, *The Simpsons* were nearly bound to get a few things right – and they did it more then once. It could be considered a part of phenomenon which even has a name in pop culture, amusingly applied after an episode of the rival satirical cartoon show, *South Park* (Created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, developed by Brian Graden, Comedy Central, Braniff, Comedy Partners, South Park Studios, 1997-Present),

«The Simpsons Already Did It» (dir. Trey Parker, written by Trey Parker, David R. Goodman, Kyle McCulloch, Glasgow Phillips, Tim Talbot, 2002). [15] Still, the fact that writers of an animated show predicted someone's presidency 16 ears prior to elections, while countless analysts and sociologists failed to do so immediately before such, provides for a food for thoughts. What was done through the "artistic filter" here is actually very similar to precognitive analyses and/or logical-analytical analyses. Both approaches are far from conspirology and pseudoscience and are implemented successfully in a lot of humanitarian scientific disciplines, including political studies in the international relations. [3]

Selection of previously unsolved part of the issue. It is obvious at this point that methodology of media research in the international political relations still has something left out, underestimating crucial concepts of audio-visual media appeal and not concentrating enough on fiction media, which at times tend to predict and even shape political situations. It is further demonstrated by the fact that United States of America, world's largest and most experienced provider of popular culture content is at times as puzzled as anyone else when audio-visual media tends to predict something in "life imitates art" way. Being one of the youngest but also more popular art forms, audio-visual media are harder to predict in their own development due to lack of centuries of development literature, music and fine arts have, which allows to predict tendencies comparing similarities between time periods. In 2000, the same year when *The Simpsons* predicted Trump's presidency no one was able to tell that Internet will be able to rival television in terms of audio-visual content… Apart from audio-visual content itself. And nowadays we have internet community proclaiming Trump's win as it's own due to overwhelming influence of Internet meme culture on Trump's political image. It was even specifically noted by some of the internet users that Trump winning the elections as a victory of memes, an assortment of entertaining internet products regarding any possible topics which are pre-dominantly based and shaped by audio-visual media such as TV series, movies, cartoon shows, anime, video games, etc. [12]

Trump is also no stranger to audio-visual media himself. A lot of people outside the USA may still feel that they were familiar with Trump before and in many cases they will be absolutely right and it might be, that it was not any kind of news coverage. For example, each winter holiday season in many countries movie *«Home Alone 2: Lost in New York»* (Dir. Chris Columbus, Written by John Hughes, 20th Century Fox, Hughes Entertainment, 1992) is something inevitable to see on television or elsewhere. In that movie future presidential candidate could be seen in a very small role (almost as himself), helping protagonist by giving him directions. And that's not the only time when Donald Trump was in the movie – his acting filmography has at least 20 appearances in movies and television series among with countless documentaries, a hit reality show, (which he produced and hosted) and even a softcore pornographic movie [6, 18].

What is of interest here is that Trump is not the only presidential candidate who had appeared in movies over the years – for example Senator John McCain had appeared in at least four movies [9]. Are there any reasons why serious presidential candidates are so eager to appear on the movie or television screen, even in bit parts on light-hearted comedy movies and shows? Maybe there are, maybe not, but we can theorize that such behavior might result in politicians familiarizing international audiences with themselves in an intricate way, those creating something of a passive, preventive international political communication, becoming much more prominent figures then they are today. Being a figure of pop-culture has some massive benefits. Is there any surprise in the fact that Trump has spent on his campaign much less then his rival Hillary Clinton ($403.1M opposite $795M) [7], considering the fact that his figure is all over the media, with hit TV Show *«Gotham»* (Developed by Bruno Heller, based on characters created by Bob Kane, Bill Finger and others, Primrose Hill Productions, DC Comics, Warner Bros. Television, 2014-) comparing arch-villain Oswald Cobblepot to Trump as the latter succeeds becoming the mayor with a rather familiar slogan «Make Gotham Save Again»

[10] and Japanese viral videos like *«Spider-Man Ride Donald Trump Banana Car Candy Finger Family & more»* gaining views on the Internet [14]. Considering that, despite being a villain, character of Cobblepot actually has a really big fandom (not to mention that he gets elected in the show), it might be paradoxically good publicity for Trump.

Formulation of aims of the article. Article theoretically researches and dwells upon the fact that audiovisual influences on the political image in the international relations are rarely addressed and researched despite numerous accounts and empirical research prove great importance such media has in the age of Internet. It is obvious nowadays that selective analyses of cultural codes could be used for precognitive analyses, half-cooked elements of which could be found surprisingly in the works of popular audio-visual media, as a part of «artistic filtre» and «prediction» phenomena.

As an example of that, recent presidential elections in the United States of America had proved that audiovisual media could be used to great effectiveness in influencing political image of a candidate, which is conjunctive with his cultural image as well – the fact that Donald Trump was well-known not only in business and political circles, but also has a massive appeal being a staple of popular culture due to countless appearances in movies and television as well as Internet popularity, which is influenced and fueled greatly b such appearances.

Main goal of this article is merely to start a conversation about a problem of underdevelopment of audiovisual media studies in the international political relations, while such thing as *universal code of movies* (quasi-concept drawn by author due to lack of a proper formulated term as of now) influences visible interactions and important events, which could not be ignored in the age of globalization.

Conclusions. We have a habit to think of media attention as something led by news coverage, which, surely, could at least be theorized as a true fact of life. But works of fiction may also be a very crucial part of media coverage. And

the obvious problem that arises here is that facts of real life are easily replaced by scripted works of fiction, which are, at best, a kind of mythology, somewhat based on the facts of real life. The problem is in the fact we cannot be certain to which extent such formation of digital era mythology could be bended and controlled. Even if it is, to some extent, it seems that processes of media formation in the internet are too chaotic to say for sure and the internet now is a main key to modern audio-visual media, not only holding some new formations on it's own, but also aiding the older formats of television and movies in any possible way, including unprecedented cataloguing of audio-visual media, provided by such resources as Internet Movie Database (IMDb) [8].

What IMDb essentially does is making anybody capable of providing information about audio-visual media (including, in many cases, that of their own creation) and considering that the website had recently hit a mark of 26 years and is still going strong, lack of attention it receives in scientific circles is rather puzzling, especially since unlike Wikipedia, which is mainly financed by donations, IMDb, being a part of mogul Amazon seeks for another kind of donations – verified information and enthusiasm. IMDb had become not only a very strong part of industry on the international scale, but also an instrument of civilian diplomacy.

If you look at IMDb pages of some famous politicians, a lot of them (including Vladimir Putin [4] and even Adolf Hitler [17]) have photographs, media coverage and supplemental content on their pages, which is provided by paid services such as IMDb Pro for industry professionals, such as actors.

The problem is that we don't know for sure, whether acting appearances really influence politician's image on the international scale, or not. We should not exclude such probability, but it should be mentioned that movies, audio-visual media might have their own meanings for such appearance of politicians, as a part of information layer of the film or some cultural code. It could be said that certain units of such a code could even be considered having certain universality: while there might be a lot of different interpretations, it may still

satisfy the needs of politician, filmmakers and the audience, effectively being multi-functional structural elements in the big, multi-layered complex that audio-visual work of fiction is. [1, 2]

Of course, controlling the audio-visual media via standard "problem solvers" such as censorship would not help in modern-day society. In order to make situation more effective and controllable it's not a restriction of artists and entertainers which is required, but a way should be found to take into a consideration such thing as an «artistic filter», as a very important and influential layer of international information, while also what is needed to be found is what exactly influences events on a political scale. Such an understanding is impossible without certain universal codes, as we can't understand outline of specific cases without knowing the specs on how the system of audio-visual media entertainment works. That also requires taking into a consideration the fact that nowadays market of such re-shapes rapidly, providing massive abilities for independent media outlets to be as influential as news media and big-time Hollywood studios. For political studies in the international relations, audio-visual media, while not exactly being terra incognita, is a place of only a certain level familiarity, which could and should be enriched by further research, as security of the situation pretty much depends on intricate processes of international communication witnessed in a conglomerate of social media and audio-visual media, sometimes taking a form of interactive new media.

Disregarding a whole level of information is what evidenced through the drawn examples. Scarce coordination between a vast array of cultural studies and political studies prevents us from noticing relevant information which could have been used for actual and very serious forecasting of events. Considering that nowadays popular culture grows on a plain new international interactive level, influence of media of which audio-visual one is one of the most effective and dominant could not b ignored in the political studies of international relations.

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