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## The image of a political entity in the regional dimension: the specifics of formation and peculiarities of perception by public opinion

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**Abstract.** The research identifies key problems in the field of correcting and maintaining the image of a political subject in the mass media and deepens the differentiation of concepts from the sphere of political image. Practical recommendations are offered for optimizing strategies and technologies for improving the image characteristics of a political subject using PR communications, visual and verbal components available in the arsenal of practical politicians, which are offered to them by moderators of political image-making processes at the regional level. The results of the study can be used to effectively build the image of a regional politician and develop an image strategy and tactics within the framework of electoral cycles. The factual material, theoretical provisions and conclusions proposed by the authors of the research can be used in teaching elective courses related to political science issues. The results of the study can also be useful in the cultural and educational activities of participants in election campaigns and those interested in the regional political process in modern Russia.

**Keywords:** governor, communication, image, PR, political process

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## Introduction

The formation of a positive image of a politician is an integral part of political activity. In the modern process of political interaction, the image of the object of political communication becomes important. Currently, there is a focus of PR specialists on professional image-making and the use of various mass media to create a proper image of a media personality. PR professionals used various methods of verbal and visual communication to inform the electorate about the candidates, to interest voters and to form a favorable attitude towards the chosen ones.

An urgent issue is the need to study the mechanisms not only for creating an effective political image of a politician, but also for maintaining it, as well as correcting it. Political image is exactly the tool that helps not only to establish contact with the public, but also to correct the socio-political situation, the mood in the media and improve the psychological climate in society.

### **The concept of image and its formation in the system of socio-political relations of the region**

A successful image in the face of fierce political competition and an overabundance of information in the media is becoming one of the key success factors. Currently, there is a tendency for researchers to synonymously use the terms “image”, “image”, “reputation” and “stereotype”. In this regard, the problem arises of distinguishing these definitions. Researcher D.P. Gavra believes that “when studying the image of any object — be it a person, a company, a region or a state — it is important to understand that it (the image) has an information and communication basis. It is formed based on information about the object, which is transmitted through communication processes. The information used to form an image is called image-forming information” [1. P. 31–32]. Today, public political discourse uses many strategies of linguistic influence and political technologies that somehow shape the image of politicians and authorities. At the same time, political technologists and researchers define the concept of “image” in different ways: as an “image”, “demonstration of the best personal and business qualities”, “a standard of what is desired”, “a fashionable symbol”, “a socially significant stereotype” and even “a communication unit”, “a collapsed message” [2—7]. The difference in concepts consists in different components of the meaning of the terms “image”:

- the image displays the brightest side of the object, and the image arises in the mind of the object as a whole or part of the object;

- the image is common to many people, the image is individual in the human mind;
- the image functions as a tool for recognizing a politician, and the image is the basis for image formation;
- not all objects can have an image, but an image can form in the mind of any object;
- the image can arise spontaneously, and can be created purposefully with subsequent management and control, and the image has only a spontaneous, uncontrolled nature of occurrence.

Also, very often the term “image” is replaced by the concept of “reputation”, although this is not the same thing. “From the point of view of positioning an individual or organization, an image is a declared (ideal) position, that is, a planned, definite image that is intended to be promoted to target groups, and reputation is a (valid) position perceived by the audience, the dry residue of the image” [8. P. 120]. In other words, image-building measures are reputation positioning. The image is designed to form a specific attitude. Reputation is already a certain attitude, an assessment of the subject, that is, it is already a completed phenomenon. Image is used to be considered in a general context with reputation, for example, in the development of so-called reputation management, but this does not give grounds for identifying image by reputation [9. P. 364–365]. The difference is that the image is created and changes quickly, the main tool for its formation and correction in communication are public relations, primarily advertising and PR campaigns, publicity (positive reviews in the media). A reputation that is resistant to all unpredictable cases takes much longer to build. At the same time, it is longer and “exploited”.

The difference between an image and a stereotype is defined as follows: an image needs human interaction with a phenomenon to form an image, and a stereotype does not need this to form an image; an image usually does not endow phenomena with useful characteristics other than their functional features, and a stereotype forms a certain number of differences, making them simpler or even exaggerating some of them; the image is more “mobile”. This is due to his need to respond to constant environmental changes, at the same time, the stereotype is a more permanent phenomenon, usually persisting for a long period of time; the image sets certain directions for speculation, the stereotype is perceived ready-made, unrelated to personal experience. On the one hand, “these two concepts are different because they have a heterogeneous nature in origin, and on the other hand, the image is based on a stereotype. Since the stereotype is embedded in the base of the style and serves as a kind of auxiliary element to its implementation” [10. P. 132]. Therefore, the image has an information and communication component, so it is considered a tool for communicating with the

collective consciousness. A well-chosen and composed image is the most effective way to work with the mass consciousness.

As a result of the rotation of the regional political elite in 2018, I.G. Artamonov was appointed head of the Lipetsk region instead of O.P. Korolev, and in September 2019 he successfully passed the election procedure for the post of governor of the Lipetsk region. At the same time, previously, the figure of the “alien Varangian” from the cage of the so-called “effective managers” was perceived by the regional political elite and public opinion with a certain degree of wariness.

The population’s alertness was caused primarily by his manner of communication, new words related to the field of high technology. Because of this, it was quite difficult to establish trust. Residents of the region were skeptical of his promises and reacted negatively to the image of the Moscow official. His connection with federal structures has caused some controversy in public discourse. Several unsuccessful speeches and the use of “newfangled” words and technologies in meetings with voters only increased skepticism. The only way to change this situation and get the support of the residents was to demonstrate their competence through specific cases and active information support (to focus on the rational and legal legitimization of their person).

Establishing close ties with the media, which emphasized the positive qualities of I.G. Artamonov (family, love of sports, leadership experience in a large financial organization, responsibility and financial literacy), played a special role in creating his image. He begins to position his business background as an advantage, since, according to him, he has no official restrictions on the perception of events in the region. I.G. Artamonov stated that the assessment of his work and the results will be done by the residents of the region themselves [11].

I.G. Artamonov emphasized his desire to work for the benefit of people and improve living conditions in the region. He acknowledged that his former business defines his approach to leadership, but he does not consider this a disadvantage, but rather an advantage. He expressed confidence that his business experience would allow him to consider the situation in the region more objectively, without restrictions and the “blurred view” of traditional officials. I.G. Artamonov emphasized that this is a challenge for him, but it is important for him that his activities be appreciated by the residents of the region.

It should be noted that in this interview Artamonov appears as a political leader who seeks to realize his plans and goals to improve various spheres of life in the Lipetsk region. He emphasizes his practical field of activity and assures that his business experience will help him to be more effective and efficient in his work. The PR specialists of the new governor emphasized efficiency in management and

his desire to solve specific tasks. Separately, it was said about the governor's ability to interact with the residents of the region. As a result of direct communication, the appropriate measures are taken to solve citizens' problems.

The style of work of the employees of the governor's office during that period also changed under the influence of I.G. Artamonov. They are becoming more task-oriented, which contributes to a more rapid response to problems and improvement of the situation in the region.

Thus, during this period, the image of I.G. Artamonov is being formed as a strong and successful leader whose activities are aimed at solving the problems of citizens and achieving prosperity in the region. The candidate of the United Russia party for the post of governor of the Lipetsk region has completely abandoned the traditional formats of campaigning. Instead of frequently using billboards and posters with the candidate's image, he prefers to focus on solving the problems of the region. At the last elections in the region, there was not a single familiar poster or leaflet with his image. However, I.G. Artamonov has been actively engaged in solving specific problems all this time and has met with representatives of various industries to discuss solutions. You can find his plans and design solutions for the coming years in newspapers and booklets. The candidate did not make direct calls to vote for him but informed the population about his work and the upcoming changes.

On the contrary, other candidates such as A. Sherin (LDPR), S. Tokarev (KPRF), L. Ksenofontova (SR), O. Khomutnikov and E. Tretyakov, had different strategies and degrees of fame among citizens. It is obvious that the elections were held in a calm atmosphere, and the results were predictable, which is explained by the competent use of administrative resources by I.G. Artamonov as acting governor with his confident and active approach.

After the elections, interest in the new head of the regional administration gradually began to decline, and the number of publications about him is decreasing. Nevertheless, the governor's team continued to actively interact with the media, but in more traditional forms.

### **Features of perception of the image of a political subject by public opinion and its optimization**

Understanding what leadership qualities I.G. Artamonov possesses is important for forming an objective understanding of the processes of legitimization of a political entity in the region. As follows from the data obtained during the sociological measurement, most respondents note sociability

(18% of respondents), entrepreneurship and determination (16%), organizational skills and education (13%) as key qualitative characteristics of the current governor [10. P. 131–136]. It should be noted that when creating the image of a political entity, business and professional qualities are important, since a charismatic and convincing leadership style helps a politician influence public opinion and act as an inspiration for his supporters. The ability to lead and motivate a group of people is important for a successful politician. A politician should have in-depth knowledge of public administration, legislation and current political processes. Work experience in administrative authorities or in related fields also helps to create the image of a competent politician who can achieve real results.

At the same time, communication skills as the ability to establish contacts and interact with various stakeholders (government contractors, commercial and public organizations, the media, etc.) are important for an effective political actor. Network thinking allows a politician to establish contacts, organize cooperation and reach agreement. Most respondents believe that the current governor of the Lipetsk region has such business and professional qualities: high intelligence, the ability to unite people to achieve a common goal. In addition, moral and ethical properties play an important role in the formation of a political entity since a practical politician who adheres to high moral and ethical principles is more likely to arouse the trust of voters and the public. This can lead to more support and loyalty in the long run.

Among the most striking qualities of Artamonov, respondents emphasize perseverance (22% of respondents), integrity (16%) and dedication (17%), as well as responsibility (11%). Artamonov is associated with leadership, residents of the region noted the external characteristics of the governor in second place, business and professional qualities in third place and moral and ethical qualities occupy the last place. Thus, the results of the sociological measurement allow us to draw the following conclusions:

- residents of the Lipetsk region are quite actively following the political life of the region, are interested in the subjects of politics, as well as the events that are taking place in the region. The main sources of information about the political life of the region and about political figures are the Internet and television, and social networks are also one of the communication channels. A negative factor is the fascination of a third of the respondents with information from unreliable sources, such as the yellow press and numerous Telegram channels. Therefore, it seems advisable to optimize some interaction between the governor and the public;

- the perception of the image of the governor of the region, in general, can be considered as positive. Most respondents noted both the appearance of the politician and his communication skills, as well as professional and leadership qualities. The main advantages of a politician are integrity, determination and perseverance. However, it should be noted that the moral and ethical qualities of the governor were put in the last place, therefore, it will be necessary to work on improving the image of Artamonov in this part.

In our opinion, one of the important directions for optimizing and correcting the image of a regional politician, and particularly the governor of the region, can be considered the intensification of various web communications between government entities and society. It is this toolkit that, in modern conditions, will bring people closer to active participation in politics and establishing proper feedback with the regional authorities. This channel of interaction of the subject of regional power should be unobtrusive and not set goals in the form of manipulating the audience. It can be applied in daily work, providing news about the work done, the results in solving social issues. It is no secret that currently the most active part of the population and the main electorate are represented by Internet users. However, government agencies often do not pay sufficient attention to this area, which devalues the importance of promptly informing residents of the subject of the federation and limits the channels of its dissemination to traditional and outdated ones.

According to I.A. Bykova: “the situation with the configuration of political institutions in modern Russia, unfortunately, makes it inevitable to reproduce situations of communicative failures at the regional level and other institutions with weak resource provision” [11. P. 47]. Another important area may be to improve the quality of the stylistic nature of interaction between the public and the regional authorities. The formation of a positive image of the administrative elite in the region involves overcoming all forms of snobbery towards ordinary people on the part of the so-called “effective management”. It is necessary to avoid the use of so-called obscene vocabulary in public communications, and completely abandon all forms of sybaritism, which causes rejection among socially vulnerable segments of the population. It seems advisable to intensify communication channels of public relations through interaction on social networks, and more active involvement of young people in the political life of the region. Currently, residents of the Lipetsk region over the age of 18 are mostly inactive in the political and social spheres. The younger generation does not have sufficient knowledge of politics and does not show interest in studying it. Older people are traditionally skeptical about the

possibilities of influencing a powerful subject, they attempt to adjust political decisions only when they affect their personal interests. People have a rather neutral attitude towards the authorities. They form their opinion based on what they have heard from someone or random information. They consider the authorities boring, conservative and uninteresting, and state that only those who belong to the administrative elite need to understand their work. It is necessary to make more active use of various marketing tools, including transit and outdoor advertising, as well as radio advertising. In addition, regular event events with the participation of the head of the region will be held, at which issues related to the activities of the authorities in the Lipetsk region will be discussed, they should involve leaders of youth movements, business leaders, businessmen and representatives of the Government of the Lipetsk region.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the above, it seems important to continue improving the organization of effective interaction with the main target audience in real time, considering the current global and local challenges in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. It is advisable to introduce the practice of monitoring and sociological measurements of public opinion everywhere on the platform of various Internet resources, since this direction assumes a low cost for the budget of the region and the simplicity of organizing such research without involving a large staff of administrative workers. The intensification of the process of forming a positive image of the administrative elite in the region can be significantly influenced by the acquisition of systemic qualities of the procedure for rapid reflection on public sentiment in regional society, and the improvement of the mechanism of two-way communication between regional authorities and the population. It is necessary to continue the practice of providing relevant and in-demand information for citizens, thanks to the availability of competent press specialists, to multiply communication channels with politically active citizens of the region on the Internet. In addition, it is advisable to stimulate the search for new relevant tools to promote their initiatives using interactive Internet platforms, which will involve regional and municipal officials. The introduction of new creative solutions for communication between the regional government and the population will help improve the loyalty of citizens towards it, ensure that the trends of radicalization of the sentiments of the general population towards top officials in the region are overcome, and solve the current tasks of forming an optimal image of political actors.



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## Имидж политического субъекта в региональном измерении: специфика формирования и особенности восприятия общественным мнением

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**Аннотация.** Выявлены ключевые проблемы в сфере коррекции и поддержания имиджа политического субъекта в масс-медиа, углублено разграничение понятий из сферы политического имиджа. Разработаны практические рекомендации оптимизации стратегий и технологий совершенствования имиджевых характеристик политического субъекта с помощью PR-коммуникаций, визуальных и вербальных составляющих, предлагаемых модераторами процессов имиджмейкерства на региональном уровне. Результаты исследования применимы для эффективного построения имиджа регионального политика и разработки имиджевой стратегии и тактики в рамках электоральных циклов. Материалы статьи могут быть полезны ученым в области социально-гуманитарного профиля, интересующимся региональным политическим процессом в современной России, а также участникам исследовательской и культурно-просветительской деятельности профессорско-преподавательского состава вузов. Теоретические положения и выводы, фактический материал, предлагаемые авторами исследования, могут быть использованы в преподавании курсов по выбору, связанных с политологической проблематикой.

**Ключевые слова:** губернатор, коммуникация, образ, пиар, политический процесс

**Заявление о конфликте интересов:** Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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