



RESEARCH ARTICLE - COMMUNICATION

**Features for the Formation of the Media Image of Iraq in Russian Traditional and Digital Socio-Political Publications (Based on the Materials of “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, “Novaya Gazeta” and the Newspaper “Kommersant”)**

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Article Info.	Abstract
<i>Article history:</i>  Received 16 November 2024  Accepted 17 December 2024  Publishing 16 January 2025	Within the framework of this study, the author examines the features that shape the media image of Iraq in Russian media. It should be noted that all-important political and economic events in Iraq are covered in Russia, therefore, information about this country interests Russian citizens. During the period of the civil war in Iraq, Russian-Iraqi cooperation made topics related to this country important and covered in the Russian media space. At the same time, important questions remain about the peculiarities of media participation in creating public opinion, attracting public attention to important topics, and, as a result, creating a media image of Iraq in the minds of the Russian public. At the same time, with the emergence of many different information sources and the increasing incidence of dissemination of fake and unverified information, the public has become more discriminating and conscientious in consuming media, preferring proven and well-known resources with significant coverage. At the federal level, these are large federal publications distributed in both paper and electronic versions. Among the important and popular resources were selected publications with different forms of ownership and other information policies - “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, “Novaya Gazeta” and the newspaper “Kommersant”. On the pages of these publications and social networks, information about the most important and interesting events taking place in Iraq is published weekly. Based on this, we can say that Iraq is undoubtedly an important country, occupying one of the important elements in the information field in Russia. Here we must remember the long-term relationship between these two countries and the long history of their diplomatic relations.

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## 1. Introduction

Today, one of the most important tasks of any country is to create a positive image in the media within its country and vis-à-vis other countries. Within the framework of this study, the author examines the features that shape the media image of Iraq in Russian media. To conduct the study completely and qualitatively, we need to have a correct idea of this case as a whole. So, Iraq is an Arab country, in the southwestern part of Asia, which has borders with Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. It should be noted that Iraq is one of the first countries in which the cultural development of humanity began. Where the sites of the ancient stone settlement were first discovered, and on the territory of Iraq there were sovereign states in ancient times: Assyria, Babylon, and Akkad. Most of Iraq's population is Arab, about 80% of the total population. The remaining 20% includes peoples such as Armenians, Persians, Kurds, Turkmen, and others [1]. The country's economy is currently developing dynamically, and the basis of this economy is oil production, it must be noted that Iraq ranks 4th in the world in terms of the amount of extracted natural resources. In addition, there is a positive trend in the areas of industry and services, as well as agriculture. Of course, after the long and difficult consequences of the civil war in 2014, the country needs a long recovery, but due to foreign investment, the process of revival of many industries is moving faster. For example, the construction industries have major potential today, and the tourism sector is also gaining rising momentum. All of this affects the integrity of Iraq's image, even within the country. Within these conditions, where the bulk of the country's population is ignorant of the reality of the country, all media activities become very important in the process of forming internal and external images.

The topic of the formation of the image of Iraq in the traditional and digital media of Russia was raised more than once in various studies [2-9], including articles that dealt in detail with the features of the image of Iraq and elements of its structure. However, most studies were conducted before 2012, which means they have already partially lost their relevance. In our study, we analyzed social and political publications in Russia, starting from 2015 to 2022, and shared our findings.

## 2. Literature Review

In this article, we will consider the features of the formation of the media image of Iraq in Russian traditional and digital socio-political publications based on the materials of Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Novaya Gazeta, and the Kommersant newspaper. Material analysis was performed from 2015 to 2022.

The purpose of the work is to identify the basic features and characteristics of the media image of Iraq in terms of its influence on the formation of the public image of the country in Russian socio-political publications (“Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, “Novaya Gazeta”, newspaper “Kommersant”).

We have identified the main features of the formation of the image of Iraq in media news materials and also developed the main approaches to analyzing the linguistic and stylistic features of the information image of Iraq. In the course of the work, the three largest socio-political publications “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, “Novaya Gazeta” and the newspaper “Kommersant” were analyzed. An analysis of the materials was carried out for the period 2015-2022, the audience and accounts in social networks were considered in detail, and the distribution of content was. In the course of the study, general scientific methods were used, such as system and structural-functional, as well as theoretical methods: comparison, analysis, and induction.

## 3. Discussion

Moving on to the direct analysis of publications in the socio-political publications “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”, “Novaya Gazeta” and the newspaper “Kommersant”, it is worth paying attention to the topics most often covered by these newspapers. In all three publications, news materials related to Iraq are most often published in the “Politics”, “In the World” and “Economy” columns, less often you can find materials in the “Culture” and “Accidents” columns. From this, we can already conclude that the most relevant publications on Iraqi affairs are on political and economic topics, but on the pages of newspapers, there are also materials on the ancient and rich culture of Iraq.

### 3.1. Publications of “Rossiyskaya Gazeta”

Let's take a closer look at the publication "Rossiyskaya Gazeta". This is one of the largest modern newspapers that daily publishes important and high-quality information about events at the regional, federal, and international levels. In terms of audience coverage among social and political newspapers in Russia, Rossiyskaya Gazeta is considered the leader in its field. We were able to see the following features of shaping the media image of Iraq in this newspaper. Firstly, in all analyzed publications, relations between Russia and Iraq are based on mutual support and mutual assistance. In the eyes of Rossiyskaya Gazeta readers, Iraq is a country that has been a reliable partner in areas such as economy, energy, agriculture, and others for many years. This is certainly a positive element in Iraq's image because strong relations with Russia constitute an important element of the political situation throughout the Middle East. Second, the picture of Iraq in this publication is somewhat one-sided. This is because the Iraqi topic often appears only when considering political or military conflicts. But at the same time, the following topics were raised on the newspaper's pages for this period: the fight against the new coronavirus infection, the development of the Iraqi oil market, the low standard of living of the country's population, and the cultural and historical heritage of Iraqi cities.

For example, consider how the fight against the new coronavirus infection was carried out in Iraq, and how this topic was covered within the framework of Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Article “Russian Sputnik V vaccine registered in Iraq” dated March 4, 2021. From the text, we learned that Iraq has become the 45th country in which the Russian vaccine has been registered and approved. “More than 20 people were killed in a hospital explosion in Baghdad” (21.04.25) “The number of victims of the fire in a Baghdad hospital rose to 23” (25.04.21), “82 people were killed in a fire in a hospital in Baghdad” (04/25/21). All materials are devoted to one event - an explosion in a clinic for coronavirus patients. The first publication provides a small information note about what happened, on the same day, a little later, other news appears that the death toll from the explosion has risen to 23. And on the evening of April 25, materials appear indicating 82 dead as a result of a major fire. It should be noted that the most voluminous in terms of the amount of information is the last material. Here readers will learn about the causes of the accident, and what measures will be taken in the investigation of the tragedy. But less than 3 months later, news appeared in the Rossiyskaya Gazeta news feed with the title “At least 13 people died in a fire at a Covid hospital in Iraq” (12/07/2021). The text does not yet mention the causes of the accident, but it mentions the tragedy that occurred. At the end of April and even speaks about its perpetrators: “The fire, which started as a result of the explosion of an oxygen cylinder, was blamed on the hospital administration, which committed ‘negligence and negligence.’” After this tragic incident, the Iraqi Minister of Health resigned. The next day, July 13, it was published News in the newspaper Articles “Putin expressed his condolences to the President of Iraq regarding the fire in the hospital.” The Russian President expressed his sincere condolences to Iraqi President Barham Salih: “Mr. President, please accept my sincere condolences regarding the tragic consequences of the fire in the hospital in the city of Nasiriyah.” Russia shares the grief of those who lost loved ones as a result of this disaster and hopes for a speedy recovery for all those affected. After analyzing these materials, it can be concluded that relations between Russia and Iraq are based on mutual support and mutual assistance.

Iraq is striving to become a reliable partner in the eyes of the Russian public, which is why information about the approval of the Sputnik V vaccine in Iraq appeared earlier than in many other countries. The materials in which Russian President Vladimir Putin expresses his sincere condolences regarding the fire emphasize the friendly and strong relations between Russia and Iraq. Therefore, we can say that most of the analyzed materials have a structurally negative assessment of Iraq within the framework of these Russian media. However, topics related to the ancient and rich history and culture of the country help to fully reveal the characteristics and perception of the people, what facts and events of world history happened in Iraq and thus reveal the image of the country. For example: “A luxurious Assyrian palace was discovered in Iraq” (04/16/2020), “A 5,000-year-old sanctuary of the Sumerian god of war was excavated in Iraq” (01/04/2020) or “Russian archaeologists excavated Walls in the center of the ancient Babylonian city” (06/24/2021). The first post deals with a preserved palace from the time of the Assyrian Empire, discovered by German archaeologists. “It is known that about 3,000 years ago, the city of Nimrod was located in this area, which was the royal capital. There are many legends associated with the place where the palace was located. Second publication “A 5,000-year-old sanctuary of the Sumerian god of war has been excavated in Iraq” (01.04.2020). It says that an international research team of archaeologists working in Iraq discovered a cult site used for rituals in honor of the warrior god. “During excavations, archaeologists found more than 300 broken ceremonial ceramic vessels, bowls, bowls, and jars with spouts, in addition. To a large number of animal bones, probably sacrificed.”

The analyzed materials are very interesting, they provide many facts proving that Iraq is one of the most ancient countries with a long and rich heritage. Also, as confirmation of this idea, we can recall that today there is a great deal of thinking on the topic of the emergence of Islam in Russia around the year 922 AD, that is, from Iraq, and this confirms the reality of the centuries-old relationship between these two countries.

As part of the analysis of this publication, we can draw the following conclusion: the theme of aggression and the entire negative element of the image of Iraq occupy a certain place. In general, with all this, the image of Iraq as a country that absorbs all cultural, historical, and political potential is formed, as we see, mainly from a positive point of view or not at all.

### 3.2. *Publication of Kommersant newspaper*

The next publication that we will consider as part of our research is the Kommersant newspaper. This is a Russian daily socio-political publication with a strong business block. The frequency is six times a week, it is published on all digital platforms simultaneously - VKontakte, Telegram, Odnoklassniki, and others, and it also has its official website: <https://www.kommersant.ru/>. For analysis, let's take publications from the period from 2015 to 2022. Let's think about how the idea of Iraq has changed in this media, and what features of the formation of the media image can be distinguished in this publication.

In the period from January 1 to December 31, 2015, 197 publications were published on the official website of the Kommersant newspaper, where the name of the country Iraq was found. Iraq was mentioned in political events taking place in the world and concerning other countries - the United States, Turkey, Iran, etc. Also in 2015, there were several publications in which the overall media image of Iraq was negative. This was primarily due to the US invasion of Iraq and the civil war, as well as poor basic living conditions. For example, take the December 7, 2015 post "Government will increase the level of pain relief." The text addresses palliative care for terminally ill citizens and the level of provision of this care in different countries: "According to the latest study conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit, dedicated to the "Quality of Death" in various countries of the world, Russia ranks 40th in terms of palliative care (among 80 participating countries. In the study, among them the first place is occupied by Great Britain, and the last by Iraq)". It should also be noted here that the healthcare system in Iraq was generally on the verge of complete collapse, due to the hostilities and the lives of people in the country were very difficult.

In 2016 and 2017, 311 publications were published on the Kommersant newspaper website, which mentioned information about Iraq, and 103 on the official VKontakte page. The vast majority of the material was related to the war in Iraq. In December 2017, news began to emerge about the end of the war against ISIS and the complete defeat of the terrorists. Perhaps that is why only 95 articles on Iraqi life were published in 2018, which is much less than in the previous two years. The publications mainly dealt with the country's post-war reconstruction and the consequences that the people of Iraq had to endure.

Therefore, summarizing the creation of the information image of Iraq in the newspaper "Kommersant" in the period from 2015 to 2018, we can draw the following conclusion: the information image of Iraq is presented rather narrowly, both thematically and qualitatively. The image of Iraq in the eyes of Kommersant readers is shaped by coverage of the military conflict. Under the influence of the peculiarities of online technologies, the type of small Internet message of information becomes the main way to get any information.

In 2019-2020, 396 news items related to Iraq were published on the Kommersant website. In the first half of 2019, the topic of strengthening relations between Iraq and Russia was covered in detail, to continue the fight against the terrorist organization ISIS. The analyzed materials for the period 2019-2020 show that the topic of Iraq is often raised in connection with negative political or military problems, the consequences, as well as the fight against these very problems. However, it should be noted that during this period there were materials showing relations between Russia and Iraq, where Iraq is presented as a good friend and long-term partner of Russia. In 2021, 186 materials were published on the site, related to Iraq. Although in many materials there was only a small reference to the country, the main information was related to other countries. The materials for the first three months of 2021 covered events dedicated to the difficult military-political situation. Iraq had been in a state of crisis for a long time, and serious contradictions remained between the main political forces in the country.

During the year, several materials were published revealing the negative impact of the new coronavirus infection on the general situation in the country: "Coronavirus - 2020 in the world" (01/31/2021), "OPEC + and coronavirus drop Lukoil production" (03.08.2021), "Iraq played the role of peacemaker" (08.30.2021). In 2021, information about Iraq was often published under the title "A Day in History." However, all the events mentioned were sad: the beginning of the military operation against Iraq, the largest terrorist attack in Baghdad, the revolution in Iraq, and others. At the end of 2021, a very interesting post was published, which I would like to dwell on in more detail: "The Middle East has become defiantly conflict-free" (12/30/2021) Iraq has long been a "ground of redemption" between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The text says that Iraq has managed to become the mediator between these two countries and improve the situation: "But this year it has been particularly noticeable that Baghdad, for the first time since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, is turning from a subject of regional politics into a topic. It has once again become its voice Others are heard and important to the Arab countries." Thus, 2021, despite several problems, has become a kind of growth point for Iraq. Iraq tried to reach an agreement with neighboring countries, not to undermine the country's security, but on the contrary, to make people's lives stable and peaceful.

For the current year, the website of the newspaper "Kommersant" has not published much material related to Iraq. In most posts for 2022, Iraq is mentioned indirectly, or cited as an example of a country with a particular position. But separately, I would like to note how Iraq supported Russia in the face of the United States and the West as a whole in the situation with Ukraine. In materials on this topic, Iraq is mentioned as a partner and ally of Russia. In general, information about Iraq in the socio-political publication "Kommersant" occupies an important place. An important component in shaping the media image of Iraq is the idea of the country, which is shaped by the events taking place in it. It is worth noting here an important task, both for journalists and for public relations specialists: reliable information about real facts and events related to Iraq. After all, real facts are the basis for forming any image, especially when it comes to looking at the country from the outside. In this publication, as well as in Rossiyskaya Gazeta, the media image of Iraq is formed rather limitedly, since in 80% of cases the Iraqi topic in the media agenda arises only in connection with political or military reasons. In addition, threats posed by ISIS are actively covered. A general analysis of materials for the period 2015-2022 indicates that Kommersant is not an information source that constantly analyzes events in Iraq. But all the important moments that happen in this case are always covered in this media. In this case, it can be said that the media image and the public image of Iraq in the socio-political publication "Kommersant" are formed mainly under the influence of news resources and are more neutral.

3.3. The publication of Novaya Gazeta

For a more complete and in-depth study, consider another socio-political publication, Novaya Gazeta. This is a Russian newspaper with the same trend, but it differs from the other two newspapers analyzed above. Novaya Gazeta is an opposition, liberal, and democratic publication created in 1993 by a small group of journalists. The newspaper's staff claims to take a "non-aligned position" with current trends, opinions, and parties in disputes. In the newspaper, you can see sharp criticism of serious problems in the fields of politics, economics, health, and education, as well as find coverage of positive experiences and actions corresponding to the moral ideal. Until now, the newspaper has been suspended since March 28, 2022, due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, so for our analysis, we will take publications from 2015 to February 2022.

In 2015, the newspaper published 90 publications that mentioned information related to Iraq. As in previous editions, most of the material is devoted to the topic of politics and economics. I would like to note that on the website of this publication when considering a particular material, the number of the printed issue is indicated, which is very convenient when analyzing the printed version of the newspaper.

In 2016, most of the materials on the site were devoted to the difficult military-political situation. The texts reported on the tragic events in Iraq, expressed sympathy for the country's civilians, and condemned the leadership that could not restore order in the country. Our attention was drawn to the publication in the print issue of the newspaper No. 72 dated July 6, 2016, with the interesting title "#A\_Iraकेc and\_only" Figure 1.



Figure 1. Publication of "Novaya Gazeta" from 06.07.16, issue No. 72

After a series of horrific terrorist attacks in Baghdad, Iraqis of different faiths decided to unite against terrorism and their government. Interestingly, the text itself says that especially for Novaya Gazeta, Iraqi journalist Milad Sami provided materials in which he described in detail how the residents of Baghdad suffered from the worst terrorist attack in the past 10 years. "The preparation of the people of Baghdad for Eid al-Fitr (Eid al-Adha - the feast of breaking the fast after fasting) this year was particularly lively. The city's streets, markets, and cafes were crowded with people. But the anticipation of the holiday was quickly erased. At the touch of a button. The flames of the explosion consumed hundreds of people who had not it cooled after the smile on their faces. Sadness dresses all of Baghdad in black because of the tragedy that befell the central neighborhood of the city - Karrada. Then there are the opinions of eyewitnesses of different professions and ages, who tell how sadness has taken hold of the city: "All the residents of Baghdad wear black these days. People light candles at the scene and stop, reading prayers for the souls of the victims. A protest campaign began on the Iraqi social networks #Я and \_only". The text is voluminous, fully reveals the mentioned topic, and forces readers to sympathize with the citizens of Iraq.

After reviewing the materials for 2015 and 2016 in detail, we concluded that Novaya Gazeta journalists often touch upon aspects of problems that other media ignore due to bans or self-censorship. The media image of Iraq as a state for this period is rather negative, but at the same time, the authors of the materials sincerely sympathize with the civilians of the state.

The years 2017 and 2018 brought a lot of new things to Iraq. Most events occurred in history and affected the lives of civilians. Novaya Gazeta published more and more materials about the weakness of American policy in Iraq, the emergence of new influence from Iran, and the upcoming referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. In their texts, journalists reveal in detail the causes and conditions of the events that occurred in Iraq. Novaya Gazeta journalists are trying not only to describe the events but also to explain the reasons for what is happening in an accessible way and to provide an analysis of the situation as a whole to the Russian public.

In the materials for 2019 and 2020, Novaya Gazeta most often analyzed the conflicts taking place in Syria, Libya, and Iraq. Comparing these publications with texts from previous years, it can be seen that the idea of the impossibility of reaching a stable consensus has been more actively advanced. The positive solution to these problems, according to the authors of the materials, depends largely on the influence of other countries, such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the United States. However, each country involved in these conflicts pursues its own goals and tries to maintain its influence. Iraq is presented here as a country fragmented along ethnic, religious, and regional lines. The country's economy cannot emerge from the crisis, and even oil revenues are greatly reduced. The main state authority does not have complete control over the situation; therefore, mass protests continue.

In 2021, 50 texts were published on the newspaper's website, 40 on the VKontakte page, and 25 in print. The main part of the material is devoted to the migration crisis that arose in the spring of 2021. Thousands of people from Iraq were forced to live in a temporary camp while waiting to enter the European Union. Many of them tried to make their way across the border but faced stiff resistance. According to Novaya Gazeta, since 2018, more than 180,000 people have left Iraq due to the unstable internal political situation in the country and the Middle East region as a whole.

An analysis of Novaya Gazeta publications for the period 2015-2021 showed that this is a serious analytical publication, thanks to which readers not only learn operational news from around the world but also become aware of the causal relationships of certain events, prerequisites, and forecasts. The topic of Iraq is raised less frequently in this publication than in the newspapers Rossiyskaya Gazeta and Kommersant, perhaps since the newspaper has an oppositional and human rights orientation and only considers the most important news related to Iraq. It should be noted that some of the topics raised by Novaya Gazeta journalists were not considered within the framework of the other two publications. For example, the topic of the migration crisis on the Belarusian border. On the one hand, the topic of Iraq is presented in the newspaper in the form of small informational messages that immediately notify events of the most relevant social importance. On the other hand, it is often possible to find the author's evaluative materials, in which the journalist's position on a particular issue is traced. The media image of Iraq, for example, in this publication is either neutral or negative.

#### 4. Results

A content analysis of three Russian socio-political publications "Rossiyskaya Gazeta", the newspaper "Kommersant", and "Novaya Gazeta" showed that the Iraqi topic occupies a well-defined place in each of them. However, Iraq's image as a country is somewhat limited. An active media activity for all three publications is to determine the location of the terrorist threat posed by ISIS, declared in Iraq, but the presentation of this information in each newspaper is different. For example, "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" in its materials mainly tries to show friendly relations between Russia and Iraq, to present arguments confirming the centuries-old friendship between these two countries. In the eyes of the Russian public, Iraq is presented as a partner in the fields of agriculture, economy, and energy. The media image of Iraq here is mainly shaped from a positive point of view or not at all. Kommersant, as well as Rossiyskaya Gazeta, mention Iraq concerning political events taking place in the world and concerning other countries - the United States, Turkey, Iran, etc. Sometimes there are materials on sports and cinema, on the culture and history of the country. The media image and public image of Iraq in the socio-political publication "Kommersant" are formed mainly under the influence of news resources and are more neutral. In Novaya Gazeta, the topic of Iraq is raised much less often than in the other two newspapers, and at the same time, most of the texts in which a neutral or negative media image of the country. Novaya Gazeta journalists often conduct their investigations and present arguments as evidence of their positions. Texts related to Iraq, as a rule, reflect the personality of a particular author, so you can find the use of such stylistic techniques as intertextuality, language games, irony, irony, word-making, and others. The study and analysis of these social and political publications made it possible to determine their conceptual component, to determine their role in shaping the media image of Iraq in the eyes of the Russian public. Among all the analyzed publications related to Iraq, the following positive concepts can be distinguished: "A reliable and long-term partner of Russia", "One of the first countries with a long and rich heritage", and "A leading country in terms of oil production". At the same time, it is impossible not to talk about the negative concepts that also affect the overall formation of the image of Iraq: "powder keg", "fragmented country", "sphere of clarification of relations", "war", "chaos", "economic instability".

#### 5. Conclusion

Based on our research, we came to the following conclusions: In the formation of the media image of Iraq in Russian socio-political publications, the idea of the impossibility of reaching a stable consensus plays an important role, under the influence of their state positions and historical and cultural characteristics. The vast majority of the Russian public has little idea where exactly Iraq is, and what important facts and events are associated with this country. The government of the country cannot control the information that affects the formation of the image. To protect the media image of Iraq outside your country, you need to create a large number of media events and, most importantly, actively develop your media.

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