

Conference Paper

Media Culture As a Factor in the Representation of Ethnic Traditions

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Abstract

The article considers the role played by media representation of ethnic cultures in the formation of ethnic identity. The author seeks to trace the process of ethnic culture representation in ethnic television programs.

Keywords: ethnic culture, media communications, media culture, ethnic identity, ethnic images.

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1. Introduction

Preserving ethnic identity in contemporary media space is an important challenge, because the majority of media producers translate universal images and values. As a result, ethnic cultures become subsumed within a huge volume of information transmitted by the media. The goal of this paper is to analyze national TV channels as the tools for the preservation of ethnic identity. Media is not only a system of mass media and mass communications, but a powerful sociocultural environment “engaged in the production and distribution of images (including ethnic images); it is a system through which human beings comprehensively appropriate their environment in its social, moral, intellectual and artistic dimensions” [2, p. 17].

2. Methods

This paper uses general theoretical methods (analysis, synthesis and generalization) for the purpose of systematic cultural research; comparative historical and structural functionalist approaches were used to perform more in-depth analysis of specific problems and to explore emergence, development and interpretation of ethnic practices.

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3. Discussion

According to the researcher A. Chernykh, traditional media (newspapers, magazines, television) performed one-sided communication based on the linear transfer of information. He believes that the emergence of the Web has changed this situation [6, p.18] by providing opportunities for the bi-directional communications, where the recipient of the message is capable of sending an answer.

Identity as a foundational part of ethnic culture can be defined as a set of characteristics allowing for an individual to identify him/herself with a concrete ethnic group. Mental attitudes existing within the context of ethnic identity manifest themselves in images and symbols of a given culture. Many researchers interpret ethnic culture as an adaptation to the environment. However, it is important to note that ethnogenesis is not an event through which an ethnos appears in a particular moment in time, but an evolutionary process. Some elements of ethnic culture have to endure certain assimilation as a result of development and change, including technological progress.

I. V. Shvedova uses the concept of “ethnocultural identity” defining it as an immutable personality trait based on cultural memory. That is, ethnocultural identity anchors value-laden experience of an ethnos and transmits it in an artistic form [7, p. 149]. It has been noted that the changing forms in which a cultural experience is transmitted lead to the diversification of ways in which ethnic cultures are represented by media. N. A. Kochelyayeva proposes the following criteria of the analysis of ethnic cultures: “the need to take into account specific regional character, pay attention to everydayness of a concrete ethnic culture, as well as note aesthetic expressions of traditional values” [1, p. 127]. N. B. Kirillova stresses that “the structure of identity changes under the influence of mass media” [2, p. 86]. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the need to use media tools to develop balanced identity during the critical periods of individual development.

National television programs have been chosen for the purpose of analyzing media representation of ethnic cultures. These are “Novyi vek” TV and radio broadcaster, a media holding of the Republic of Tatarstan and Volga region [5]. Exploring the video archive of this TV channel, I discovered that such characteristics of ethnocultural identity as artistic values and national character traits are represented in the programs about ethnic cuisine, urban development, and famous local residents. At the same time, such programs focus on “including” the Tatar ethnos in global history. In general, the value of historical process is represented through the broadcasting of ethnographic materials.

Another resource representing an ethnic culture is “Bashkortostan” TV and radio company, a state-owned media holding of the Republic of Bashkortostan [4]. This

channel describes its goal as following: “to provide objective, timely and comprehensive information about the life in the region”. This information network pays particular attention to the thematic programs for children, which provide the younger generation with an access to local cultural heritage. Children’s educational programs use important ethnic symbols: dolls, houses, ethnic clothes, ornamental patterns, household items, decorative arts. The soundtrack is also based on ethnic motives. The broadcasting is done in Bashkir language. Ethnic inclusion in global culture is represented by the “Culture” section of the news. This section describes side by side local ethnic cultural achievements and global cultural events.

Therefore, national television, as part of mediaculture, transmits patterns of ethnic culture as images and representations. Audiovisual component of media representation expands the tools available for the transmission of cultural memory. At the same time, they tailor their messages to the specific regional-dependent core audience. The need to create and support positive ethnic identity influences thematic content and its representation.

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