

*As a manuscript*

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**SOCIOCULTURAL CODES OF FRENCH IDENTITY  
IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

Specialty: 24.00.01 –Theory and history of culture

**Abstract**

of the thesis for the scientific degree  
candidate of cultural studies



Moscow, 2020

The thesis titled «Sociocultural codes of French identity in electronic media» has been carried out at the Department of Culturology and Sociocultural Communications of the ANO VO "New University of Russia". Scientific adviser – Doctor of Cultural Studies, Professor, Olga Vladimirovna Shlykova, Deputy-Director of the «Civil Society and Social Communications» IPAM of the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education «Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the President of the Russian Federation».

An explosion of interest in the study of identity is observed at the turn of the 20th - early 21st centuries, because all aspects of social life, concepts, "power and pathos" of identity politics, its structural "roots", and heuristic potential are revealed and evaluated through identity, as through a prism. The relevance of certain aspects of identity especially increases in the context of a rapidly developing digital civilization. These aspects include identity as a special cultural marker, the basis of social action, and the result of the identification process, which consists of discrimination and identification with the external environment in relation to a particular country or region.

For Russian cultural studies research and the practice of cultural diplomacy, this topic is distinguished by a new wave of attraction, since Russia, with all its uniqueness and originality, remains a country of European culture. Consequently, it is very important for the Russian state to maintain the strength of interactions and scientific communications with France, which, along with Germany, is one of the two central states of the European Union.

The history of Russian-French cooperation has recently passed the 300-year mark of the official establishment of diplomatic relations. The study of French socio-cultural identity in such an important matter as the establishment of bilateral Franco-Russian

relations, of course, contributes to the strengthening of mutual understanding between countries.

The French models of building their own, French, World are also heuristic – a space within and outside the state itself (including digital), which affects the economy, politics, education, culture and art, as well as the level of decision-making on a global scale. Not all modern researchers acknowledge the existence of the French World.

But this position is not indisputable, since the French World exists and is actively developing, thanks to the skillfully built policy of "soft power" of the French state, as well as modern media technologies that significantly expand the borders of the French World through the creation of the French-speaking Internet and related French-speaking media.

In fact, all francophone states are united within the framework of the framework of the international organization called "Francophonie". The tangle of identity contradictions is especially evident in the modern French media. In the dissertation, the topic of French identity in the modern world is considered with its technocentric globalization trend, which enhances the rhythm of relevance highlighting the need to identify and streamline the essence of the phenomenon of identity, national and cultural identity, including its network cultural practices.

It is noted that multiple identities also require their own systemic comprehension. The special focus of attention on the network sociocultural identity is due to the need to analyze it as an alternative to real identity or a component of multiple identity. The research hypothesis is related to the study of the contradictions between the emerging tendency to dissolve French identity in the European one, a decrease in the degree of its influence on the global picture of the world and the preservation of mechanisms for the sustainable positioning of the cultural identity of France, including by means of online communication.

The contours of the core of the socio-cultural identity of the French can be found in the materials of the websites of famous French news outlets. It has been proven that under favorable conditions, the WWW-space of the country's news sites can become a transition point for the transmission of identity codes to new generations of French people.

Additionally, it is noted that the mechanisms of sustainable positioning of the cultural identity of France have been preserved precisely because codes are preserved in the cultural memory of the French as a kind of supporting structures of this identity. The object of the research is French identity at its present stage.

Research subject: socio-cultural codes of French identity in the country's electronic media.

The **goal of the thesis** is to identify the codes of French identity and the cultural and communicative potential of online comments on French news web-sites.

### **Research objectives:**

1. Give a classification of groups and levels of research by French identity;
2. Investigate the evolution of the approaches of French researchers to the issues of French identity in the period from the late 19th to the early 21st centuries (based on the works of J.E. Renan, F. Braudel and P. Nora);
3. Identify the "effect of additional knowledge" in the development of French identity through the knowledge of the culture of the "Other";
4. Analyze the ways of forming a distinctive media system of France and the digital French world in the modern historical and cultural context;
5. Reveal the socio-cultural codes of French identity in the materials of French websites, justification of comments on the Web as a special code of French identity, integrating its traditional and current formats;
6. Consider the relationship and areas of autonomy of the French and Russian national and cultural identity at the present stage.

The choice of the theoretical and methodological basis of the research is due to the lack of development of the topic at the present stage.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research methodology, based on the comprehension of several blocks of scientific literature, naturally stems from the need to overcome the fragmentation of research on the immediate topic of the work, namely, on the study of the sociocultural codes of French cultural identity.

The following research methods are used in the work: discursive, communicative-pragmatic, participatory observation method, linguoculturological and content analysis of comments to the materials of media websites, the method of sociological survey.

In the Introduction, the relevance of the topic is substantiated, the object and subject are determined, the goal and objectives of the study are outlined, the theoretical and methodological basis of the study, scientific novelty are presented, the provisions put forward for defense are formulated.

In the **first chapter**, "French Identity: Cultural Projections of French Researchers", four paragraphs present the conceptual foundations of the study of the phenomenon of identity, while proposing a three-stage approach to reflecting the object and subject of research (clause 1.1), in which the main role is assigned to the study of French research in question. In modern Russian cultural studies, there is sometimes a simplified concept of French cultural identity based on stereotypes, and not on genuine knowledge, therefore, we introduce new substantiations on this issue into the national cultural knowledge.

Based on the actual French-language material, the sociocultural codes of French identity, which constitute its core, are derived (clause 1.2). Presented are the features of analysis of identity through the perception of the Other, which the author used when conducting the research (p. 1.3), and the features of the semiological approach

of French-speaking authors, based on the semiology doctrine of F. de Saussure (p.1.4).

**The second chapter**, named "Codes of French Identity in the Sociocultural Dynamics of the Leading French Media", consisting of 4 paragraphs, defines the author's understanding of the phenomenon of sociocultural codes and consistently demonstrates their manifestation at the stage of formation of modern French media and their gradual unification into a single block, first in the course of creation of newspapers (clause 2.1), radio and television, then the national telematic system Minitel (clause 2.2) and, finally, under the auspices of the Internet.

In paragraphs 2.1.-2.3, the sociocultural codes of French identity are revealed in the course of a content analysis of the interface of the websites of the leading French media. In paragraph 2.4, the author presents the results of a linguoculturological analysis of the text of comments on the materials of French websites written by representatives of the French middle class, grouped by the author according to the most relevant and most often mentioned by the French topics that are correlated with sociocultural codes of French identity at the present stage. It also provides the results of a continuous sociological survey and the method of participatory observation of workers in an average French enterprise.

**In the Conclusion**, it is emphasized that the scientific knowledge of the carriers of French culture and their understanding and interpretation of their identity are of fundamental importance for understanding the modern sociocultural codes of French national-cultural identity.

It has been proven that the core of the national and cultural identity of the French is based on the following sociocultural codes:

- belonging to the bourgeoisie (the French economy is based on the work of medium and small enterprises);
- a sufficiently high level of secondary education, to which everyone has free access;
- lack of mono-ethnicity;

- lack of a religious component;
- attitude towards the French language as a cultural heritage;
- understanding of their high status as an educator of other peoples and states, – presented in the interface of the French media websites in the Internet space, in the comments to the materials of the websites of the most famous French media.

**Two Appendixes** present the results of a content analysis of the interfaces of the websites of the leading French media in comparison with a content analysis of British websites (Appendix 1) and the text of the questionnaires (in the original language and in Russian translation) for conducting a sociological survey (Appendix 2).

**Novelty of the research:**

1. a three-level classification of identity studies has been developed: Cultural projections of domestic and French researchers on French identity in their historical dynamics can be represented in the form of 3 groups, which made it possible to reflect:

- how representatives of a nation (ethnos, region) identify themselves and are perceived by other nations and ethnic groups,
- how French culture, undergoing unification under the influence of globalization processes, at the same time, expands its communication boundaries at the expense of other cultures (speakers of the French language), including digital culture.

2. The "French vision" of the transformation of the cultural paradigm has been substantiated: from the Nation-State to the Nation-Society, from the memory of the people to the places of memory and from the neglect of the role of language in cultural identity (J.-E. Renan) to its representation as the central part of the core of identity (F. Braudel, P. Nora, Carrer d'Ancos). The status of the national-cultural French identity, which occupies a central position in the triad "regional - national-cultural - European identity", has been determined;

3. it has been proven that the modern French mass media system is a fundamentally new environment of interaction, bringing changes in the real areas of life and

activities of the modern French representative of the middle class, who preserves cultural traditions and the stability of value priorities, including in the conditions of "elusive reality" and "beyond identity";

4. a linguocultural analysis has been undertaken, applied to the materials of news sites in the French Republic for the first time. On its basis, more than 10,000 comments were considered, behind which there is "the geometry of the code", its monopoly (according to J. Baudrillard);

5. based on the provisions and conclusions formulated in the implementation of tasks 1,2,3,4, cultural and communicative codes owing to the development of digital civilization have been identified, in which not only the format of information presentation – comments on websites – is manifested, but specific codes of identity are clearly traced due to the mentality of the French, the peculiarities of French culture.

6. To support the results obtained during the analysis of comments on the pages of the sites, a continuous sociological survey of the French was carried out among the representatives of the middle class (70% of workers in a medium-sized city enterprise, men and women, with higher and secondary technical education), which made it possible to generalize typical identification markers distinguishing the carriers of French culture.

### **Provisions for Defense:**

1. The cultural projections of domestic and French researchers on French identity in their historical dynamics can be represented in the form of 3 groups: 1) studies related to the analysis of the initial stage of studying general works on identity in general, 2) studies that reveal the specifics of identity in conditions demolition of the bipolar world at the end of the XX century. and highlighting European, regional-ethnic and national-cultural identity, in particular, French identity, 3) works of French researchers proper from J.E. Renan to P. Nora. This group reflects the culture of the French spirit and semiological approaches to interpretations of the cultural text, which is a systemic organization of sign-symbolic space and an instrument for

ordering the "world of the signified" (from F. de Saussure to Natalie Pieguet-Gros), emphasizing the language of French culture as a basic mechanism for mastering pictures of the world. The vision of the culture of the Other is comprehended through the "prism" of one's own identity (From R. Barth to D. Plyuvinazh), when, studying the culture of the Other, the authors: R. Barth using the example of studying the identity of the Japanese, and D. Plyuvinage, examining codes of French national and cultural identity.

2. The concept of "national-cultural identity" in the works of French researchers has undergone changes during the formation of republican rule. For J.-E. Renan, at the end of the 19th century, i.e. at the very beginning of the formation of the French Republic, the main principles of self-identification were the jointly experienced difficulties in the past and the desire to move together in the future, while the factors of language, religion, the presence or absence of natural geographical "barriers" were not of fundamental importance. By the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, priorities shifted. The positions of F. Braudel and P. Nora differ from the point of view of J.-E. Renana. This is largely due to the historical and cultural background - irreversible changes took place in France itself: under the V Republic, the state began to lose its national features, and acquired new ones - the features of a community of people, the main cultural bonds of which were the national language and national cultural heritage.

3. The French mentality is an integral part of the core of national and cultural identity. The value of the linguocultural approach and its fruitfulness in the study of socio-cultural identity codes of offline and online formats lies in the fact that it reflects the relationship between the mentality, which contains a layer of traditional French culture, and the specifics of its new cultural forms. The latter, in the paradigm of the post-nonclassical picture of the world, represent an endless and continuously ongoing process of manifestation of "French - we" in the space of network identity, therefore there is reason to believe that the French-speaking Internet can become a

"place of transition" of culture, and in the future - part of the strategic program of a new cultural policy state.

4. The sociocultural codes of French identity include the following:

- in the center of French culture are the ideas formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and the triad "Liberty-Equality-Brotherhood", to which the concept of "cultural diversity" is now added;
- a special function, not only communication, but also socio-cultural, is played by the French language as the language of humanistic ideals, in which more than 500 million people, representatives of 5 continents, communicate, and in which theatricality, irony and special intertextuality are manifested;
- The main mission of the French is the enlightenment of other peoples and reverent attitude to their history and cultural heritage.

5. France has developed a kind of strategy for countering globalization challenges, aimed at organic integration into the world information space while curbing the transformation of its own identity. The French were among the first to create both radio and television and the nationwide communications system Minitel, the forerunner of the Internet in France. This is a manifestation of a purely French striving for maximum general validity and generalization of their results, for the justified realization of "their" history of identity. On the one hand, conditional identity codes (cultural and communicative) - information transfer codes - appear in the electronic media system. On the other hand, the codes are cultural and semantic, reflecting the mentality and characteristics of French culture.

6. Comments on the sites of the most famous and popular French portals represent a kind of manifestation of the construction of identity, first of all, national and cultural. At the same time, this is a special communicative phenomenon of a sign-symbolic nature, which allows one to identify the "encoded" text of an original culture, as well as to act as a new tool for the strategy of searching and "decoding" national and cultural identity, a network sociocultural code of French identity.

**Practical significance.** The interdisciplinarity of the study allows its results to be used in various fields: first of all, in business communication and public diplomacy, in the development and formation of new models of cultural policy, in which digital strategies for preserving French cultural identity and its heritage cannot be ignored. The Thesis is of particular practical importance in teaching cultural students, country studies and linguoculturological disciplines. The research results have been published in scientific journals, incl. from the list of the Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation and the Dissertation Council of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

**The numbers of publications:** 13 (5.9 pp), of which 3 were published in journals recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation (1.8 pp).

The degree of reliability and scientific approbation of the work.

The main provisions of the dissertation research **were tested** in the form of reports:

- at the XI International Conference "Languages and Cultures in the Modern World" (June 2-7, 2014, Paris, France);
- at the XV, XVI and XIX international conferences "The civilization of knowledge: Russian realities" (April 2014, April 2015, April 2018) ANO VO "Russian New University" (RosNOU, Moscow);
- at the international conference "Partnership between France and Russia: education, science, innovation, dialogue of civil society" (20.10. - 21.10.2017, Paris, Russian Spiritual and Cultural Orthodox Center);
- at the international conference "Authentic dialogue between Russia and France in the space of culture, language, literature" (April 20-22, 2018, Moscow State Linguistic University), etc.