

UDC 94(477)»1914/1918»:008+316.722+930.85
DOI <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/86-3-3>

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SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE PERCEPTION OF THE SUPREME POWER BY THE UKRAINIAN PEASANTRY IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR (ON THE MATERIALS OF POLTAVA PROVINCE)

This article explores the sociocultural mechanisms involved in the formation, maintenance, and collapse of the symbolic image of supreme authority during the First World War, using the perception of Emperor Nicholas II by the Ukrainian peasantry of the Poltava Governorate as a case study. The authors adopt an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical-cultural, socio-psychological, typological, and comparative-historical methods. Drawing on archival sources, periodicals, folklore materials, and court cases involving accusations against peasants for insulting the monarch, the study traces the evolution of the popular perception of tsarist power – from a sacralised ideal to the image of a distant, powerless, and even hostile ruler.

The research focuses on the process of the desacralization of monarchical authority in the popular imagination, unfolding against the backdrop of military defeats, socio-economic upheavals, state propaganda failures, and the loss of effective communication channels between the state and society. The article demonstrates how traditional archetypes of the “tsar-father” gradually gave way to ironic and critical views of power, which was no longer perceived as a reliable source of protection and stability. Particular attention is paid to the worldview of the Poltava peasantry, where traditions of Cossack autonomy, the influence of folklore, national-cultural movements, and the legacy of Shevchenko’s anti-monarchism fostered a sceptical or alienated attitude toward centralized imperial authority.

The study argues that the image of power in mass consciousness is not a fixed ideological construct, but rather a dynamic cultural product shaped by communication between state and society through symbols, rituals, language, media, and emotional narratives. In the context of eroding trust, information scarcity, and social stress, popular culture activates compensatory mechanisms such as rumours, irony, folkloric frameworks, and “alternative images.”

This article contributes to the study of the cultural history of power and symbolic legitimacy, highlighting the importance of a regional approach to analysing political imaginaries. The conclusions drawn are relevant for contemporary practices of state communication, political image-making, and trust management in times of crisis, emphasizing that power is, above all, a symbolic contract with society – one that must be continuously renegotiated within the framework of cultural expectations.

Key words: emperor, Nicholas II, World War I, Ukrainian peasantry, Poltava province, imperial image.

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СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНІ АСПЕКТИ СПРИЙНЯТТЯ ВЕРХОВНОЇ ВЛАДИ УКРАЇНСЬКИМ СЕЛЯНСТВОМ В УМОВАХ ПЕРШОЇ СВІТОВОЇ ВІЙНИ (ЗА МАТЕРІАЛАМИ ПОЛТАВСЬКОЇ ГУБЕРНІЇ)

У статті досліджено соціокультурні механізми формування, підтримання та краху символічного образу верховної влади в умовах Першої світової війни на прикладі сприйняття постаті імператора Миколи ІІ українським селянством Полтавської губернії. Автори застосували міждисциплінарний підхід, що поєднує історико-культурний, соціально-психологічний, історико-типологічний та історико-порівняльний методи. На основі архівних джерел, періодичних видань, фольклорних матеріалів і судових справ щодо звинувачень селян в ображненні монарха простежується еволюція народного уявлення про царську владу: від сакралізованого ідеалу до образу чужого, безвольного і навіть ворожого правителя.

У фокусі дослідження – процес десакралізації монаршої влади в народному уявленні, що розгортається на тлі воєнних поразок, соціально-економічних потрясінь, провалів державної пропаганди та втрати владою ефективних каналів зворотного зв'язку з населенням. У роботі продемонстровано, як традиційні архетипи «царя-батьюшки» поступають іронічному та критичному баченню влади, яка більше не здатна забезпечити захист та очікувану стабільність. Увагу приділено особливостям світогляду селян Полтавщини, на землях якої традиції козацької автономії, впливи фольклору, національно-культурного руху та спадщина Шевченківського антимонархізму сприяли розвитку скептичного або відчуженого ставлення до централізованої імперської влади. Дослідження демонструє, що образ влади в масовій свідомості є не фіксованим ідеологічним конструктом, а динамічним культурним продуктом, який формується в комунікації між владою і суспільством через символи, ритуали, мову, медіа та емоційні наративи. В умовах втрати довіри, дефіциту інформації та соціального стресу народна культура мобілізує компенсаторні механізми – чутки, іронію, фольклорні моделі та «альтернативні образи».

Стаття сприяє вивченню культурної історії влади та символічної легітимності, акцентуючи на важливості регіонального підходу до аналізу політичних уявлень. Зроблені висновки мають значення для сучасних практик державної комунікації, іміджмейкінгу та кризового управління довірою до інституцій, оскільки показують, що влада – це символічний контракт із суспільством, що вимагає постійного оновлення в межах культурних очікувань.

Ключові слова: імператор, Микола ІІ, Перша світова війна, українське селянство, Полтавська губернія, образ імператора.

Problem Statement. In the digital age and mediated world, power is increasingly defined not as a legal construct but as an image, representation or symbolic capital that needs to be constantly reaffirmed in the information space. Today's political leaders are hostage to public expectations, crises of trust and continuous visual evaluation. Modern communication technologies have strengthened the role of symbolic and emotional factors in the perception

of power: the leader's brand has become almost more important than his decisions.

Against this background, the following questions are acute: how are symbolic images of power formed, preserved or destroyed? What mechanisms ensure legitimacy in the eyes of society – sacral, media or behavioural? How does the "language of power" change in extreme situations? These questions are key for the sphere of management of socio-cultural

activity, which is connected with the creation, management and research of cultural meanings in the public sphere. The analysis of historical cases allows us to identify universal patterns of perception of power as a cultural phenomenon. Especially valuable is the experience of the “premodern” period, when communication between power and society relied on myth, faith, visual images and rituals. One of such cases is the evolution of the image of Emperor Nicholas II in the consciousness of the Ukrainian peasantry during the First World War.

Analysis of Research. Despite the growing interest in the issues of symbolic power and the culture of memory, Ukrainian historiography and cultural studies still pay limited attention to the topic of perception of power as a socio-cultural construct, especially in the regional context. Studies focusing on the image of Nicholas II tend to concentrate on political or biographical aspects, leaving aside the social imagination, the structure of mass consciousness and the transformation of symbolic legitimacy. The mechanisms of power representation in conditions of war, crisis or information vacuum, as well as the ways in which peasants perceived, adapted or rejected the official “brand of power” have hardly been analysed. Thus, the issues of perception and evaluation of the supreme power in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire were discussed in a number of historical studies, primarily in the context of legal, social and political processes.

So, the article of A. M. Bovhyria (Бовгіря, 2008: 87–100) considers cases of prosecutions of Ukrainians for insulting the honour of the monarch in the XVIII century. The author analyses in detail the legal practice of protecting the symbolic status of the emperor and shows how the authorities strove to affirm the special sacral status of the sovereign in the mass consciousness. However, the work focuses mainly on legal mechanisms and institutional protection of the monarch’s honour, without touching more deeply on the transformation of the image of power itself as an element of popular culture.

The article of V. Mylko (Милько, 2020: 14–23) is focused on the study of public moods during the First World War. Particular attention is paid to the perception of the war by the peasantry, attitudes towards mobilisation and the front, the spread of rumours and defeatist opinions. Although the author touches upon the changes in attitudes towards the imperial power, the analysis is limited to the description of changes in moods, without a systematic comprehension of the evolution of the image of the supreme power as a cultural phenomenon.

M. V. Potapenko (Потапенко, 2016: 396–400) reveals the gradual loss of confidence in Emperor Nicholas II on the example of court materials of the Nizhyn District Court. The author points out the facts of criticism of the tsar, the emergence of discontent and irony towards the monarchical power. Nevertheless, the study

is limited to the description of public sentiment and does not proceed to the analysis of the image of power as a symbolic construction, which is subject to change under the influence of social and cultural factors.

Thus, the available studies provide a valuable factual basis for understanding the perception of monarchical power, but they focus mainly on legal, political and socio-historical aspects. Socio-cultural analysis of the transformation of the image of the supreme power – as a brand, as a channel of cultural communication with society – is still an underdeveloped area in Ukrainian science. This paper aims to fill this gap.

Before the First World War, the emperor retained in the popular consciousness a sacralised status formed by religious tradition, church rhetoric, visual codes and family archetypes (“tsar-father”). However, from 1914, under the pressure of war, mobilisation, rumours, loss, lack of feedback and propaganda inconsistencies, this image begins to stratify and then collapse. The Tsar loses his status as a sacral mediator, turns into a silent, aloof and incomprehensible person, and then into an object of criticism, irony and complete desacralisation. This transformation is a vivid example of the socio-cultural instability of symbolic power, as well as how, under conditions of stress and disruption of communication channels, the brand of power can be destroyed at the level of everyday perception.

The aim of the article is to analyse the mechanisms of creating, maintaining and collapse of the symbolic image of the supreme power in traditional society on the example of the perception of the figure of Nicholas II by the peasantry of Poltava province during the First World War in order to identify general patterns of management of the image of power in crisis conditions. The study is aimed at solving the following problems: to identify the key cultural and religious grounds for the sacralisation of power in traditional society; to show how power through the institutions of church and propaganda tried to maintain its own image (brand); to identify the mechanisms of declining symbolic capital – loss of trust, emergence of irony, rumours, “alternative images”; to describe how in wartime and crisis there is a gap between the image of the authorities and the everyday perception of the people; to determine the socio-cultural significance of the historical case study for modern practices of image-making and management of cultural communication of the authorities.

Research methods. The study is based on the integrated use of sources and methods of analysis, synthesis, generalization and systematization. The main sources were the materials of the Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine in Kyiv (fonds 320, 321) and the State Archives of Poltava region (fonds 138, 83). Additionally, periodicals, statistical and folklore collections, as well as fiction were used.

The methodological basis of the study is also the historical and comparative method (for comparing

different models of perception of the supreme power by the Ukrainian peasantry during the First World War), the historical and typological method (which allowed to identify the stable types of ideas about the image of the emperor in the minds of the rural population), and the socio-psychological method (for analysing mental attitudes, public sentiments, and social stereotypes associated with the figure of Nicholas II). This interdisciplinary approach provided a comprehensive vision of the problem and allowed us to trace the dynamics of the transformation of the image of the supreme power in wartime.

Presentation of the main material. It is generally believed that the victory of the February Revolution was due to the desacralisation of imperial power and the collapse of “naive monarchism” among the peasantry. At the same time, we should not talk about the death of the monarchical idea itself, but only about the vote of people’s distrust towards Nicholas II, which is confirmed by the restoration of authoritarian power in the USSR. In most cases, the object of modern studies of the mentality and social behaviour of peasants is the Great Russian provinces with the further extrapolation of the results to the entire imperial space. In this context, the reconstruction of the image of Nicholas II through the prism of the perception of his population in the Ukrainian provinces acquires actual scientific importance.

On the eve of the First World War, 85% of the population of Poltava province lived in rural areas. At the same time, about 40% of the population of the province were Cossacks – bearers of a special mentality and traditions rooted in the Hetmanshchyna of the XVII–XVIII centuries (Обзор..., 1916). The majority of Cossacks did not know serfdom, were mobile, with a pronounced desire for individualism. They were often the complete opposite of the communal peasant. In contrast to the peasantry, which held tightly to the land and perceived the war as an evil fate, the Poltava Cossacks, brought up in the spirit of glorious traditions, were quite willing to serve. Several times during the XIX century (1812, 1831, 1855, 1863) Cossack regiments were formed in Poltava region, which successfully fought on the fields of the Patriotic and Crimean wars. At the same time, the long existence in a common socio-cultural space brought the mentality and social attitudes of Poltava peasants and Cossacks as close as possible.

In the patriarchal-communal consciousness of the Great Russian peasant, the tsar was the personification of the sacred principles of the state-family (Little Father Tsar) and the executor of God’s will (Tsar is God’s bailiff), whereas the Cossack peasant population of Ukraine perceived the tsar more like a chess king: a piece whose high status is determined by the rules and without which the game is impossible. For a long time, the perception of Russian emperors in the Ukrainian peasant environment was situational. The reaction to the deterioration of living standards

in the Ukrainian village during the reign of Nicholas I was a saying: “*In the Empress’s time (Catherine II – authors) we feasted on loaves, now under the Tsar we can’t even eat crumbs.*”

The spread of anti-monarchist sentiments in Ukrainian society is associated with the works of Taras Shevchenko. Folklore images of Ukraine’s enemies, created by the poet, had a low level of personification (Poles, Muscovites, Turks, etc.) and even Catherine II, who ordered the destruction of Zaporizhian Sich, was called “mother”. The embodiment of evil, according to T. Shevchenko, were quite specific Russian emperors. Thus, in the poem “The Dream” (1844) you can find images of the most odious, from T. Shevchenko’s point of view, Russian tsars. Near the “Bronze Horseman” he recalls “cannibal executioners”: “crazy” Peter I (“*that First, who crucified our Ukraine*”) and “hungry wolf” Catherine II (“*And the Second, finished the widow, orphan...*”). T. Shevchenko also pays attention to the reigning persons at that time: Nicholas I (“*drunken, angry “the sergeant-major tsar”*”) and Alexandra Fedorivna (“*like a dried-up mushroom*”). Without waiting for an answer to his question – “*Oh people, oh people! Why do you need tsars? Why do you need their hounds? After all, you are humans, not dogs!*” – the poet believes that one day “*the people will quietly... lead the Tsar to the executioner*” (Шевченко, 2003).

The revolutionary events of 1905–1907 made another mental shift in the consciousness of peasants. Whereas the bourgeois reforms of the mid-20th century secured de jure basic civil rights for them, the first Russian Revolution transformed their perception of the supreme power. During this period, the work of political parties in the countryside became more active; peasants gained experience in parliamentary activities, drafted orders to the State Duma demanding “land and will”.

In the view of the Cossack and peasant population, the “ideal tsar” is a thrifty master who takes care of his land in peacetime and a brave supreme leader in the hour of military trials. It is a paradoxical fact that during the First World War the militant Kaiser Wilhelm II became such an “ideal ruler” for the peasantry in contrast to the “insignificant” and unfortunate Tsar Nicholas II. The peasant consciousness put a “plus” sign where the anti-German propaganda had planned “minuses”: the years of preparation for war, the construction of ships, aeroplanes and submarines.

A characteristic view of Nicholas II, typical at the beginning of the war, is given by one of the characters of A. S. Makarenko’s novella “Honour” (Макаренко, 1955). The events take place in Kostroma, a working-class suburb of Kremenchuk. Semen Maksymovych, whose prototype was the father of the famous educator, in this way reacts to the outbreak of the German war, before which “life both in the town and in Kostroma had been peaceful”: “*The Germans don’t*

have the guts – that's why the Tsar is bad. You can't go up against the Germans with a Tsar like that. Their Kaiser's got a moustache like no other, and ours looks like the house painter Kustykov. He should've just kept quiet, the clumsy fool." Semen Maksymovych used the word *clumsy fool* (nestuliaka) to describe anyone awkward or unlucky. <...> *"Our Tsar's no good for war. Whatever he touches, he messes up. Fought the Japanese – messed it up. Tried to make a constitution – messed that up too. Well, that's just like the painter Kustykov."*

Such views were circulating among workers and peasants at a time when in the capitals and large cities there was an unprecedented surge of patriotism and readiness to wage war to the victorious end.

The first ten years of Nicholas II's reign significantly undermined the authority of the dynasty and the Church, even among the traditionally conservative peasantry. Relevant aspects of the clergy's activity became the revival of loyalist sentiments and the education of youth in the spirit of all-imperial patriotism. The Church enthusiastically accepted the tasks entrusted to it. Before the beginning of classes in theological schools and diocesan colleges, priests held sermons. They emphasised the special, exceptional conditions in which the new school year was beginning, and the recently started war was positioned as a great idea of depriving the Slavic world of the scourge of Germanism. It was precisely this perception of the war that was to serve as a pledge of the students' further willingness to make sacrifices.

In a relatively short time, the religious and patriotic upsurge became a characteristic phenomenon not only for metropolitan life: through the efforts of the Church, it was "exported" to provincial society as well. Against the general background of this trend, a noticeable increase in the authority of the imperial family can be observed. It is worth noting that the charitable activities of the Empress and the Grand Duchesses played a significant role in this.

The church life of Poltava region in the first months of the war was marked by a series of public services, patriotic sermons, and religious processions, with the provincial centre serving as the epicentre of these events. For instance, the *Poltava Diocesan Gazette* noted the special solemnity with which prayer services for the granting of victory to the Russian army over the enemy were held in the town of Stari Sanzhary (August 4, 1914) and the village of Lukashivka in the Zolotonosha district (September 8, 1914) (Полтавские..., 1914: 2182–2187).

The pages of the *Poltava Diocesan Gazette* featured a rather accurate description of the state of society in the early months of the war: *"Intrigues and quarrels have fallen silent, and it seems that the parties have ceased to exist. All eyes have turned toward the approaching storm."* This statement ceases to appear as mere propaganda when one examines the biographies of those

who delivered loyalist speeches at religious and patriotic events at the beginning of the war. An example of this is the member of the Poltava District Council, Ya. Stenka, who delivered the following words during a solemn prayer service for the granting of victory to the Russian army in Stari Sanzhary on August 4, 1914: *"In this difficult hour, the entire Russian people have declared to their Little Father Tsar that they are ready to lay down their lives and possessions for the faith, the Tsar, and the Fatherland..."* (Полтавские..., 1914: 2182–2187). Not long before this event, Ya. Stenka had been classified by the police authorities as politically "highly unreliable" and was described as a "Little Russian nationalist" who had been "sowing unrest among the people from the summer of 1905 to the summer of 1910" (ДАПО: 3).

On October 20, 1914, at the initiative of students of Poltava Theological School, a patriotic demonstration was held in the provincial center to mark the twentieth anniversary of the death of Alexander III. The procession included students from the Alexander I Gymnasium, the Mariinska Girls' Gymnasium, and the Real School. Near the Monument of Glory, a thousand-strong demonstration with imperial flags, portraits of Nicholas II and the royal family sang a hymn, wished long life and shouted "Hurrah!". Patriotic speeches to the assembled students were delivered by V. F. Kharkov, a teacher of the seminary, and L. A. Seniavin, a teacher of the Theological School (Полтавские..., 1914: 2551–2553).

The visit of Nicholas II to the provincial centre on January 28, 1915 was a kind of apotheosis in the series of patriotic events and public services, typical for the first stage of the war. At the train carriage the emperor, who visited Poltava for the third time in eleven years, received the report of the governor Baggovut A. K. and the head of the garrison Major-General Strakhovskiy. At the ceremonial reception, welcoming speeches were delivered by M. I. Herzenvits, the provincial marshal of the nobility, and F. Solohub, Chairman of the Provincial Zemstvo Board. Along the route of the imperial cortege, troops and students from Poltava educational institutions were stationed.

It was to the person of the emperor as the highest ally and authority that one of the conflicting parties in rural disputes often appealed. Not infrequently this was followed by the opponent's profanity against the emperor and the corresponding statement about insulting "His Majesty", which makes it possible to attribute a significant part of such appeals to skillful provocations. For example, in March 1914, such an altercation took place in Kokhnovskiy volost office of Kremenchuk district, where two local Cossacks quarrelled. To the argument of the Cossack Nedbailo: *"Why are you scolding me, I have served the Tsar for seven years and have a certificate from him!"* Cossack Shtepa answered: *"Screw you... with your diploma and the emperor!"*. Everything happened in the pres-

ence of seven witnesses, as noted in the statement made by Kokhnovskyi village headman D. M. Volya (ДАПО: 4).

Newspaper reports about the situation at the front, rumours, personal impressions, letters of soldiers, eyewitness accounts of certain events become the sources of formation of negative perception of Nicholas II. Thus, in early August 1914, a retired teacher of the Poltava Theological Seminary I. I. Polonskyi sent to the emperor "a letter of outrageous content" (ІУДІА, спп.1369: 2), and A. I. Kulinich expressed the idea that "the Tsar-dog should be eradicated" (ІУДІА, спп.1354: 2). In official reports, both cases are explained by aggravation of mental illness.

In the midst of the spy mania and searches for the "internal enemy", the primary sources of negative attitudes toward the war and defeatist sentiments were considered to be subjects of the Central Powers and Jews. For example, at the very beginning of the war, the German subject F. Hutiar was arrested. He had been holding conversations with the peasants of the village of Kehychivka in the Kostiantynograd district about their dire economic conditions and the futility of war with Germany. To illustrate his points, F. Hutiar marked the locations of fortresses and troops on a map of Russia, and his "political briefings" were accompanied by expressive remarks such as: *"What a scoundrel Russia is!"* and *"Foolish England: what does it expect to gain from Russia for its friendship?"* (ДАПО: 8–9).

Unique rumours arose as a product of a synthesis of personal impressions of the events and the most ridiculous speculations. In early August 1914, Cossack L. I. Butenko, a resident of the village of Pyrky in Zinkiv district, upon learning that Vasyl, the son of Cossack F. F. Kovshyk, had been drafted to serve and defend the "Tsar and the Fatherland," erupted in *"profanity directed at the Tsar."* After the cursing, he added: *"Why defend him, those fools who defend him together with Russia! Not later than August 15, the Austrians will come to Pyrky and execute everyone and destroy everything. The Austrians will crush the village and defeat Russia."* Following this, he cursed the existing order, spoke of the large number of wounded he had seen in Poltava, and mentioned that wealthy peasants were not sending their sons to the army. L. Butenko cited letters from a fellow villager, who had deserted from the 11th Dragoon Riga Regiment and fled to Austria back in 1912, as the source of his information about the imminent defeat of Russia (ДАПО: 5).

A peculiar phenomenon of cases of insulting the emperor is the presence in many of them of a "Jewish trace" – a Jew who, together with a Ukrainian peasant, criticized Russian orders or a Jewish owner of the shop or tavern where the crime was committed. Thus, in December 1914, a resident of Kremenchug, Jew M. Slavinsky "spread alarming rumours about the defeat of the Russian army from the Germans in the

presence of lower ranks and outsiders", "denounced the government, criticized its actions and praised the German way of government" (ДАПО: 33).

Since 1915, refugees and prisoners became a new source of information about the war. According to agency data of Poltava provincial gendarmerie, in 1916, prisoners living in peasant families of Kremenchuk district "undermine confidence in the victorious offensive (Brusilov's breakthrough – authors)" and stated that all provinces up to the Dnieper would soon be ceded to Austria (ІУДІА, спп.220: 73).

In early 1916, residents of Pervozvanivka, Poltava district, H. Bohuslavskyi, S. Z. Rudenko and the secretary of the parish court A. Myrko "spread rumours" about the imminent German victory and the Poltava region's transfer to the Kaiser's subjection, which would rid the peasants of the "Russian regime" and improve their situation. The inevitability of the German victory was confirmed by the phrase "Starving Russia will not beat the Germans" (ІУДІА, спп.1542: 3–5).

A particular grievance against Nicholas II was the introduction of the state monopoly on alcohol. During a conversation in the shop of the Jewish merchant Goltman about the war, a peasant from the village of Krestyshche, Kostiantynohrad district, V. I. Demianyk, remarked: *"Our Tsar, before the war, only washed bottles for the wine monopoly and allowed drunkenness, while Wilhelm was preparing the army and shells. If Germany had taken us, it would have been better for us than now."* (ІУДІА, спп.1551: 2–7).

Nicholas II's pre-war tax policy and the lack of order in the country were criticized not only by the "defeatist" camp. In the late summer of 1914, during the threshing, S. Mordych, a Cossack from Demchenkovskiyi hutor, said: *"Our Tsar has no order, he imposed taxes on the land, there is money, and he started a war."* (ДАПО: 32).

Military failures and general social exhaustion led the population of the province to various conclusions. S. Bondarenko, a peasant from Iordanivka village, Hadiach district, believed: *"This war is not from God, but from people and from the devil. The devil invented this war. The General Staff is to blame for everything."* (ІУДІА, спп.1544: 3–5).

Conclusion. The historical example of the perception of the figure of Nicholas II shows that the image of power is a cultural product depending on many factors: religious archetypes, social rituals, communication channels, visual and behavioural representations. The image of power is stable as long as there is trust supported by symbolic logic (ritual, visual order, sacredness). In a crisis, especially a protracted one, power loses symbolic capital if it does not maintain effective feedback channels; ignores new forms of mass culture; lags behind perception – does not actualise itself in the changing media field. People's interpretations of power (through rumours, folklore, prayers, irony) become a mechanism to compensate for the loss of trust. The loss

of symbolic effectiveness leads to the replacement of power by mythical figures, which is especially characteristic of traditional societies, but is also possible in digital societies (theories of the “deep state”, cult of heroes, etc.). It is important for modern specialists

in the sphere of image-making and cultural policy to understand that the image of power is not just a visual style, but a socio-cultural contract that must be constantly re-formatted in the context of society's expectations, values and experience.

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