

IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN MOLDOVAN  
ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA SPACE

BY

TATIANA SANINA

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

August 2021

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Approved By:

Allan D. Loudon, Ph.D., Advisor

Marina Krcmar, Ph.D., Chair

Corina Cepoi, M.A.

## **Acknowledgements**

This work would not be possible without the dedication and guidance of my committee members. I am lucky to have these exceptional professionals, each bringing a particular expertise that has been immensely helpful to my learning process. I am deeply grateful to my committee chair, Dr. Marina Krcmar, one of the leading media effects researcher, for her patience and willingness to invest in me. I have learnt so much not only during the process of writing this thesis, but also while taking her Research Methods and Media Effects Theories classes. The knowledge I gained during her classes helped me tremendously in building my research design and understanding the effects of media consumption on audience attitudes. I am profoundly grateful to my thesis advisor, Dr. Allan Loudon, who believed in me and encouraged me throughout the year to pursue this research idea. Since I tend to tackle questions that are too vast or intangible for a paper, Dr. Loudon helped me narrow down my research question and focus on a particular issue that is important, yet, understudied in my home country. And last, but by no means least, I am grateful to Mrs. Corina Cepoi, a leading media expert in Republic of Moldova, who has contributed greatly with her insights and advice. I thank each committee member for their time and dedication. This work is a result of their continuous support and guidance.

## Table of Contents

|                                                         |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----|
| List of Tables .....                                    | iv |
| Abstract .....                                          | v  |
| Introduction .....                                      | vi |
| Chapter 1: Entertainment Media and Public Opinion ..... | 1  |
| Chapter 2: Neo-Soviet Identity .....                    | 10 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology .....                            | 20 |
| Chapter 4: Discussion .....                             | 38 |
| Conclusion .....                                        | 42 |
| Bibliographical References .....                        | 46 |
| Appendix 1: National Identity Scale .....               | 59 |
| Appendix 2: The Data Sample .....                       | 60 |
| Curriculum Vitae .....                                  | 61 |

## **List of Tables**

|                                                                                 |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Table I: The number of instances in Film C: The Architect of My Happiness ..... | 25 |
| Table II. Final inter-rater reliability .....                                   | 27 |
| Table III: The number of instances identified in the entire data sample .....   | 31 |

## **Abstract**

This study aims to identify whether entertainment media broadcast in Republic Moldova, which struggles with its identity crisis, contains frames that represent belonging to a particular national identity. Secondly, the study is preoccupied with the cinematic representations that can influence the perception of group identity. While this study focuses on group identity as a nation, it adopts Tajfel's social identity framework to explain the identification with a particular in-group and how this identification is represented in fictional media. Eight codes based on the NATID scale were applied to analyze the sample data consisting of the seven most viewed films on Moldovan television in 2019. The results demonstrated the presence of identity frames that depict national heritage, cultural homogeneity, beliefs system, and ethnocentrism characteristic to Russian culture, which is patriarchal, based on conservative values and beliefs. While Moldovans experience the identity of "becoming", being subject to constant transformations at the intersection of history, culture, and power, media plays a role of crucial importance for the consolidation of perceptions and possibilities, and as a result, it helps shape social and political attitudes of the viewers.

## Introduction

The emergence of mass media has eliminated the concept of place as the basic anchor for national identity, separating identity, or individual's membership in a group, from space (Waisbord, 1998). Nothing can match the media when it comes to diluting the tangible sense of territory and constructing instead imagined communities beyond geographic boundaries (Waisbord, 1998). Gender, ethnic, and racial representations in media provide an impetus for a constructed reality, which creates a shared understanding about the practices and the types of interactions within a community. Media and popular culture are an effective way to construct and nourish those social and cultural connections. Therefore, media can either transform social norms and ideas, or perpetuate beliefs and stereotypes. In this context, it is important to understand the narratives within the flow of information to countries such as Moldova, which struggles to shape its own identity as it has been subject to continuous intersection of history, culture, and power. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and unpack the media content its population consumes in order to unfold the beliefs and attitudes in Moldova.

Previous research indicates that fictional media often contains socially or politically relevant topics, themes, plots, dialogue, and imagery (Mulligan & Habel, 2012). People watch fiction to be entertained, but they may also do so with an eye toward accessing distant but realistic places, people, and situations, that may become apparent later. For example, viewers learn from watching *Friends* that one can be a waitress, live in a nice apartment in Manhattan, and hang out in interesting places during the day having long, funny conversations with their friends (Dill-Shackleford, 2016). In this way, entertainment media can expand horizons and vicariously introduce the viewers to new

feelings and experiences— without even leaving home. Although viewers likely approach fiction mindful of its shortcomings, they also know that it can provide insights for real life (Mulligan & Habel, 2012).

Messages in fictional media reflect various forms of biased themes - particularly framed messages that can capitalize on the audience's fears, vulnerabilities, and beliefs. In an example, Hollywood films, portrayed Russians or often the Soviet Union as the corrupt and evil actor that was manipulating its citizens, while life in the United States, as depicted in the films, is bright, rich, free, and full of opportunities. The United States intentionally or unintentionally reinforces the idea of American supremacy and greatness through the projection of the economic power, as well as a self-assigned image as the leader for democratic values. Alternately Russia focuses on its leadership in the conservation of traditional values representing the family-oriented society.

Message biases play a crucial role in creating concepts through films and media depicting a certain sense of reality. One of these thematic elements is the construction of national identity. Different cultures and nations have a variety of characteristics which may make them unique, but a catalog listing of these traits provides only a few core elements which the culture recognizes as setting it apart from others; those elements compose its “national identity” (Clark, 1990).

My native Moldova has been struggling for decades to build and comprehend its identity. In Eastern Europe shifting borders meant shifting cultural policies. As a part of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, part of Great Romania in the interbelic period (1918-1940), and part of the Soviet Union from 1940 until its independence in 1991, the territory of present-day Moldova has been a classic borderland, repeatedly

fought over and divided by outside powers eager to remake the Moldovans in their own image (King, 2000).

Before the 1920s Moldovans were regarded as an offshoot of the Romanians, whose dialect over the centuries has been influenced by the languages of neighboring Slavs (King, 2000). With the annexation by the Soviet Union and the creation of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), Russians continued restructuring the Moldovan identity. However, the Soviet Union did not suppress nationalism, but rather reshaped it (Caramas, 2001).

When the Republic of Moldova exited the Soviet Union in August 1991, it left behind the Soviet cultural policy. Books, academic articles, and pamphlets were published denouncing the “cultivation of an independent Moldovan identity in the Soviet period as a vast exercise of Stalinist denationalization” (King, 2000, p. 33).

Moldova was the only union republic whose majority population was culturally bound to a nation-state across the border, a situation that simply replayed within the socialist camp an older confrontation between Romania and the Russian empire. King, 2000, p. 37

While superpowers battle, small countries become battlegrounds. Lacking local media production capacity and infrastructure since its independence, Moldova became an arena for outside influencers deploying certain beliefs and myths, promoting divergent portrayals of reality. The notion that media can transcend space has become the backbone of theories that explore the relationship between media exposure and national identity. The "massification" of culture enabled by mass media has become an indispensable component of nation building and national identification (Wang, 2017). As Russian

media production enjoys a high level of popularity in my home country Moldova, I am interested, therefore, to analyze the narratives depicting identity frames in the entertainment media aired in Moldova. Understanding the messages in the media can provide insights into the process of shaping of national identity of Moldovans born after the proclamation of independence in 1991.

Media portrayal is more than a simple characterization or sketching the character by giving him or her the moral value of a person. Portrayal, according to Dill-Shackleford (2016, p. 119) implies the process of “framing a person – telling that person’s story in a way that fits the boundaries of a real or imagined reality encompassing specific norms and behaviors.” Media portrayal can be powerful as it represents images of people and their lives – from the hegemonic male to the ‘dangerous’ Western society that viewers accept as part of our reality, not realizing how this reality was constructed for them or the degree to which it contains myths.

This study explores the presence of distinct group identities represented as fictional frames in entertainment media space in the Republic of Moldova. It unpacks the way the media represent and misrepresent people and their experiences by the stories they tell about them. The first chapter examines the potential of fictional media to influence public opinion. Cultivation Theory is one of the key theories exploring the effects of television and entertainment media on opinion formation. Chapter II conceptualizes identity and reviews the process of identity building and its complexities in present-day Moldova, following the construction of the neo-Soviet sentiments. The methodology section explicates the research design based on the NATID scale applied to evaluate the selected media. The findings explore the themes identified in the sample

data. The implication of the coded themes on the neo-Soviet identity building is further discussed. Overall, this study aims to determine whether mass media entertainment contains themes and fictional frames that can cultivate a distorted social reality by framing group identity.

## Chapter 1: Entertainment Media and Public Opinion

An emerging literature has shown that fiction can affect learning and real-world beliefs for adult audiences. Early research explored the consequences of exposure to the miniseries *Amerika*, a fictional account of life in the United States in the aftermath of Communist control. Scholars found that viewers had heightened concerns about the Soviet Union (Lenart & McGraw, 1989). Feldman and Sigelman's (1985) study of the film *The Day After*, which chronicled the potential consequences of a devastating nuclear war, found that the content affected the audiences' levels of political knowledge, but it did not fundamentally alter viewers' political attitudes. More recently, Mutz and Nir (2010) randomly assigned subjects to observe either a positive or negative portrayal of the criminal justice system by the crime drama *Law and Order*. They found that participants' perceptions of the justice system and their views about the death penalty were affected by exposure to the entertainment media, particularly among those who empathized with the characters (Mulligan & Habel, 2012).

Moreover, research from communications and psychology suggests that those who consume fiction incorporate false information into their store of knowledge. Studies demonstrate that when people are exposed to information known to be factually incorrect, the fiction nevertheless interferes with their abilities to answer related knowledge questions (Gerrig & Prentice, 1991). Similarly, a series of laboratory experiments has shown that viewers, after they were exposed to fictional narratives, confused fact with fiction (Levine et al., 2010) and drew from fictional information when answering knowledge-based questions about the actual world (Marsh, Meade, & Roediger, 2003).

According to Marsh and Fazio (2006), “readers rely on fiction as a source of information, even when fiction contradicts relatively well-known facts about the world.”

Viewers can make meaning from fiction when they emerge in the story world and appreciate how the story has its own reality (Dill-Shackleford, 2016). The reality comes in part from the story’s ability to portray characters, situations, and ideas that resonate with the audience – a term defined as “hedonic enjoyment” by Mary Beth Oliver and Anne Bartch (Dill-Shackleford, 2016, p. 45). While watching a drama, viewers may experience “eudaimonic appreciation,” that emerges from the fan experience having assessed their own values and beliefs. Eudaimonic appreciation happens in response to thought-provoking media such as a complex fictional drama. For instance, the drama *Mad Men* helps fans to process what is important to them in everyday life, what their values are, what constitutes a life well lived (Dill-Shackleford, 2016).

Several studies have offered evidence that fiction can influence attitudes and even perceptions of public officials. Davis and Davenport (1997) showed that African Americans who saw the movie *Malcolm X* became more race-conscious and concerned about race relations as a result. Similarly, experiments by Holbrook and Hill (2005) demonstrated that dramas including *Without A Trace* and *ER*, increased perceptions of crime and health care as important issues, respectively, and that this media influenced respondents’ perceptions of Presidents Clinton and Bush. Mulligan and Habel (2011) offered evidence explaining the way in which fiction frames issues could affect political attitudes. Similar to news media, fictional media also frame issues, and such framing was shown to matter for shaping related attitudes on abortion in the case of incest and the extent to which one follows his/her own conscience (Mulligan & Habel, 2012).

One of the most cited theories explaining the relationship between the media messages and the public's responses in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors is cultivation theory. Introduced in 1967 by George Gerbner for the first time, cultivation theory had a macrosystems approach. Gerbner was exclusively concerned with the influence that messages gradually exerted on the public as people were exposed to media messages in their everyday lives (Potter, 2014). The theory proposed that consistently heavy long-term TV viewers, when compared with light viewers, perceived the world as more closely resembling that depiction on TV than actual lived reality (Gerbner, 1998). The central thesis of Gerbner's cultivation theory was not that TV violence promotes violence in society; rather, the dominance of TV and its frequent portrayal of violence perpetuates, in heavy viewers, a fear that benefits the power of those in authority, acts as a means of social control, and maintains the status quo and hence unequal power in society (Gerbner et al., 1980). Therefore, cultivation is not a short-term effect measurable through an effects theory of behavior, but rather a long and gradual transformation of the viewers' general outlook and beliefs (Potter, 2014).

There are some media effects scholars who accept cultivation theory but intended to add variables to increase cultivation's predictive power over that of using only TV viewing (Potter, 2014). These tests have added variables such as perceived reality (Busselle, Ryabalova, & Wilson, 2004; Potter, 1986), transportation (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008), and distance (Bilandzic, 2006; Hetsroni, Elpariach, Kapuza, & Tsfonti, 2007; Van den Bulck, 2003). In addition, there is a growing number of studies where scholars reject at least one of Gerbner's most fundamental claims and replace them with their own claims. Some of these claims suggest moving away from a macro focus into a

micro focus and situate the locus of meaning in receivers instead of the media messages (Potter, 2014).

Despite this clear boundary for cultivation analysis, many researchers used micro measures of exposure instead of using total TV viewing as a predictor of cultivation indicators. For example, Potter (2014) argues in his analysis that evidence for a belief in a mean and violent world should be more attributable to exposure to violent programming rather than to total TV exposure. Empirical tests generally confirmed this expectation as genre level exposures (crime drama and news) were found to be stronger predictors of cultivation than total TV viewing exposure (Grabe & Drew, 2007; Hawkins & Pingree, 1980). Other researchers testing additional cultivation indicator topics also found that when they used more specific level of television exposure measures, they were able to predict respondents' beliefs better (Potter, 2014). These studies have tested exposure to talk shows (Glynn, Huge, Reineke, Hardy, & Shanahan, 2007), make-over programs (Kubic & Chory, 2007), romantic shows (Segrin & Nabi, 2002), medical dramas (Van den Bulck, 2002), and local news programming (Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). Additionally, Potter (2014) indicates that some studies tested a cultivation effect from exposure to a single TV series such as *Grey's Anatomy* (Quick, 2009).

Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania developed a project that builds on the legacy of Gerbner's theory. The Annenberg Coding of Health and Media Project (CHAMP) analyzed large samples of the U.S. media content over long periods, going from 1950 to 2010 (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2012). The project also determined whether mass media entertainment has enduring themes and content that can either cultivate distortions in social reality or encourage the development of harmful

behavior repertoires, especially in adolescents (Fortner, 2014, p. 130). The findings from CHAMP demonstrate that popular mass media entertainment has recurring themes and portrays men and women in stereotypical roles, which can cultivate differences in audience gender stereotypes. These recurring themes and behavioral patterns can also encourage the development of stereotypical forms of gendered behavior by direct modeling of males as violent and of females as sex objects (Fortner, 2014). Along with the stereotypes and norms, media can also create fantasy objects and even a sense of shared culture. Culture includes socially constructed meanings, including shared beliefs, values, and rules (Dill-Shackleford, 2016, p. 75). For example, there are Star Wars light saber toys for sale that an American boy may have grown up playing Luke Skywalker versus Darth Vader with his friend using light saber toys. Luke and Darth and their light sabers are all fantasies constructed by media and films, they are also cultural icons – recognizable pieces of our shared culture (Dill-Shackleford, 2016, p. 75).

### **Fictional Framing**

The entertainment media contains narratives of how issues and characters are framed in storytelling. Framing is “the process by which a source defines the essential problem underlying a particular social or political issue and outlines a set of considerations purportedly relevant to that issue” (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). A study conducted by Holbert et al. (2005) suggests that fictional entertainment media also frame issues, defining relevant considerations for viewers. Mulligan and Habel (2012) developed a theory of the effects of entertainment media on attitudes thus proving that fictional framing influenced opinions on the two issues under study: the choice of

abortion when it results from incest, and the morality of following one's own conscience as opposed to a set code of conduct.

Framing research posits that when dealing with social or political problems and controversies, the news media must find a way to organize and present complex issues for viewers efficiently and concisely. Time and viewer attention are both limited, so news media present issues as discrete “interpretive packages” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) that help viewers understand an issue's essence. These issue packages encompass “a central organizing idea, or frame, for making sense of relevant events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). In packaging an issue for public consumption, news media present some dimensions of an issue, or some relevant considerations, but not others (Entman, 1993). Unlike news media, which package information through their reporting on events, fictional entertainment media conveys socially and politically relevant messages through character development, dialogue, and plot. According to Mulligan (2012), fictional media may present topics as “issue packages” that give meaning to contestable political issues. The context in which the issues are raised, and the valence, tone, and implications of characters' reactions to the issues, highlight some facets of the issues, or offer a certain perspective on the issues (Mulligan & Habel, 2012).

Similar to the news, entertainment media use framing to help people conceptualize complicated topics by providing clues about what are the most relevant considerations. News media are constrained to be balanced in their framing of contestable political topics; fictional framing does not need to be impartial. Creators of fictional media can craft a context where a certain way of perceiving an issue dominates at the expense of others without concerns about an ethic of objectivity. Mulligan & Habel

(2012) suggest that these fictional frames would be likely to influence opinions in ways similar to those of news media framing. By setting the context in which people think about an issue, fictional frames could affect how people perceive the issue and, ultimately, their opinions toward it. Holbert et al. (2005) show that the fictional television program *The West Wing* framed the role of the president as chief executive, political candidate, and private citizen. Whereas Holbert and his colleagues show that fictional media do in fact frame issues, the theory of fiction framing takes this demonstration of framing in fiction one step further by hypothesizing that fictional frames influence real world attitudes in ways consistent with the implications of the frames.

### **Media environment in Moldova**

While the media market in Moldova is highly understudied, Moldova has faced serious challenges of producing its own quality news and entertainment content since its independence. It is partly due to lack of financial investments, lack of quality education in media production and management, and most importantly – lack of corresponding infrastructure that would sustain large scale independent media production.

Television continues to be the most influential medium, with 80 percent of Moldovans saying it was their primary source of news and information, according to a survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI, 2019). Social media was the next most consulted source nationwide used by 35 percent of the populace followed by the internet (other than social media) with 33 percent.

The most popular television channel in Moldova, Prime TV, rebroadcasts Pervii Kanal popular programs from Russia. The most prevalent Russian-produced content includes entertainment programs and talk shows (NATO StratCom, 2017, p. 39).

According to an IRI survey in 2019, which also analyzed viewing habits, Moldovans preferred the entertainment programs broadcast by Russian stations in Moldova: Prime had the largest audience share with 31 percent.

The volume of news and entertainment is balanced, according to Tudor Darie, manager and cofounder of Interact Media Company – an independent media outlet in the Republic of Moldova. However, the entertainment content, for the most part, is imported from Russia or Romania (IREX, 2019). Valeriu Vasilica, director of IPN news agency, agreed that Moldovan society is strongly anchored to and influenced by foreign entertainment programs, mostly Russian, that capitalize on and encourage linguistic, historical, and cultural affinities. Russian programs are significantly more affordable, in contrast to less accessible Western programs. Along with entertainment programs retransmitted from Russia, audiences also consume large doses of Russian propaganda on issues such as the superiority of Russian cuisine over American cuisine or the strength of the education system in Russia (IREX, 2019).

Within Moldova, 40 percent of the population see Russia as a guarantor of peace and a factor in stability compared with 21 percent who believed the country was a destabilizing factor. Notably, 80 percent of those who see Russia as a peacekeeper and 58 percent of those who see the U.S. as a destabilizing factor identified as ethnic minorities. These are the consequences of the fact that most people in Moldova get their news from Russian TV stations. For instance, Prime TV, which rebroadcasts the Russian station Pervii Kanal, had the highest figure in terms of socio-political news consumption at 53 percent, while RTR Moldova, REN TV Moldova, and TV7, which used to rebroadcast content provided by NTV, also had relatively high news consumption rates of 18 percent,

10 percent, and 9.7 percent, respectively (media-azi, 2015). Moreover, in 2016 Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin was the most popular politician among Moldovans with a 62 percent approval rate. Comparable figures were 33.5 percent for the Romanian president, 25.3 percent for the American president, and 10.7 percent for the Ukrainian leader (Barometer of Public Opinion, 2016).

## **Chapter 2: Neo-Soviet Identity**

### **Is there a Moldovan identity?**

Historically, prior to 1991 Moldova had never existed before as an independent state within its present borders. From the mid-fourteenth to the fifteenth century, an independent principality of Moldova emerged in the lands between the Carpathian Mountains and the Black Sea. In the fifteenth century, Moldova became a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire. In 1812, which became a significant turning point in the history of Moldova, the Russian Empire annexed the eastern half of Moldova located between the rivers Prut and Nistru, naming it Basarabia (King, 2000). Shifting borders, renaming a state, and changing its language became a pivotal moment - a part of the Russian Empire's plan to create the idea of a Moldovan nation which would be distinct from the Romanian nation (Caraus, 2001).

By 1918, Basarabia had become a part of Greater Romania, only for it to be annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and become part of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (M.S.S.R.), formed in that year, together with a small region on the east of the river Nistru called Transnistria (Caraus, 2001). Within a little over a century the identity of the people living on the territory of the present-day Moldova has dramatically changed several times. Moldovans were forced to switch their core cultural and social identity. Moldovans serially adopted memberships to fundamentally different groups: from the Russian Empire, to a united Romania, to an invented Soviet community.

The Soviet approach to the national problem was that of ethno-nationalism, both on academic and empirical levels (Connor, 1994). The Russians advanced two hypotheses to justify the existence of the Moldovan nation. One tsarist hypothesis

claimed that the Moldovans were a Slavic people that had adopted a Roman language in the Middle Ages. Another hypothesis claimed that the population living in Basarabia had developed as a separate nation in the nineteenth century when they ceased to share cultural and historical experiences of the united Romanian nation. Thus, according to the Soviet nationality theory, each people passed through a number of evolutionary stages: tribe (“plemya”), nationality (“narodnosti”), bourgeois nation and socialist nation (Caraus, 2001). The Volochi, the ancestors of both Romanians and Moldovans split during either the second or the third stage. The Volochi in the south interacted with the South Slavs and became Romanians, while the Volochi in the north interacted with the East Slavs and became Moldovans (Caraus, 2001). The argument of the creation of Moldovan nation in the Middle Ages proved to be more popular and easier to maintain.

The Soviet Union did not suppress nationalism, but rather reshaped it. The populations incorporated into the U.S.S.R. were required to have a national consciousness on a local level and to express their patriotism at the union level. At the same time, Soviet patriotism was supposed to replace national local identities. Patriotism was presented as a moral quality, and it involved “a political act of showing loyalty for the interests and welfare of a country and its citizens”, which also involved sacrifice for that country (Ikuenobe, 2010, p. 298). This double national strategy has similarities with the agrarian reform of the Bolsheviks: to gain the support of the enormous mass of peasants incorporated in the empire, land was allotted to the peasants for a short period of time, and later taken back – a strategy found to be more successful than the patriotization of ethno-nationalism. Although ethno-nationalism was a created construct, it was stronger than Soviet patriotism. Therefore, Walker Connor (1994) considers the case of the Soviet

Union to be the most instructive example for the force of ethno-nationalism wherein the multigenerational program to exercise nationalism and glorify Soviet patriotism has proven remarkably ineffective.

During the last century, Moldovan identity was based on Stalin's definition of a nation: "a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make up manifested in a community of culture" (Caraus, 2001, p. 19). The membership to a larger and diverse group, which represented an extension to the out-group, became a means to transform the sentiment of belonging from a small nation tied to Romanian tradition to a big conglomerate of ethnicities and cultures. Since the annexation of Basarabia, Romanians ceased to be part of the in-group and became not only "the others," but also the enemy that embodied the evil power. Almost overnight, the Soviet identity was imposed as a new reality that had to be adopted and accepted immediately. The categorization of "Soviet" versus "Romanian" allows for the allocation of group membership, which is a constitutive step in the social identity formation according to Tajfel and Turner.

### **Neo-Soviet Identity**

With the end of the Soviet Union, there was a mass perception of the loss of Soviet communality and of a unified Soviet cultural text, a Soviet master narrative that had produced a distinct kind of conformism. This feeling of loss, reflected in the new post-Soviet world was either celebrated or mourned, but there was no clear agreement as to what exactly constituted that cultural text in the first place (Boym, 1995). Svetlana Boym (1995) claims the formation of two types of nostalgia. The utopian one is centered around dreams of rebuilding the utopian greater motherland. This view is aligned with

imperialistic intentions and mostly Russian identity. The second one emphasizes longing and desire. This type of nostalgia is referenced in the works of many post-Soviet artists, members of the former underground (Boym, 1995). Zealous promoters of an alternative cultural identity, separate from the Soviet identity, were silenced by the Soviet regime. One of the leaders of the Moscow underground culture of the 1970s and 1980s, poet and artist Dmitrii Prigov, considers the end of the Soviet Union to be the end of a culture-centric Russian universe, the end of that imagined community of readers of Russian literature that began to dissolve with the demise of censorship (Boym, 1995). The post-Communist artists reconfigure and preserve various kinds of imagined communities and offer cultural hybrids of Soviet kitsch and memories of totalitarian childhood that emerge in painting and conceptual art. Moldovan artists, writers, and historians saw the end of the Soviet era as an opportunity for a rebirth of Moldovan (that is, Romanian) national culture (King, 2000). In this case, the idea of national identity was envisaged based on the return to the past.

## **Identity**

Identity constructs such as gender, ethnicity, class, nationality, and sexual orientation are social constructs that differ across time and culture (Veenstra, 2011). Human beings are not the sole authors of their lived narratives; rather, society plays a role in their identity construction (Somers, 1994). As Hall (1992) argues, identity is a matter of not only being but also becoming. One's identity is the sense of the self and the relationship of self to the world — “a system of beliefs or a way of construing the world that makes life predictable rather than random” (Kriesberg, Northrup, and Thorson, 1989, p. 55). The narrative identity perspective posits that lives of individuals are not simply a

series of events; rather they are constituted by a human consciousness of relationships and connections. Thus, identity takes the form of lived narrative structures complete with settings, scenes, characters, plots, and themes, the individuals being the authors of their life narratives who construct their identities from the choices they make and the plots they enact (McAdams & Janis, 2004). A people, therefore, have the agency on constructing their own identity based on their collective consciousness.

Perceptions of the self and others are affected by differences in social context: identities “can be maneuvered by altering the connections between self and other nodes” (Abrams, 1999, p. 214). Furthermore, Turner et al. (1994) argue that variations in individuals’ behavior reflect the activation of different self-perceptions and social perceptions framed by different social comparisons (Lee, 2008). In 1979 British psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner introduced the Social Identity Theory, where our “social identity” within a group shapes our norms, attitudes, and behavior. In the initial experimental paradigm, Tajfel and Turner applied the Social Identity Theory to explain intergroup relations, discrimination, and racism. This framework is also applied in national identity research. Tajfel and Turner (1979) conceptualize a group as:

a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership of it. (p. 59)

According to the Social Identity Theory (SIT), members of a society chose to identity with a group to gain self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Tajfel and Turner

(1979) proposed three cognitive processes involved in evaluating others as “us”/in-group or “them”/out-group.

**Social categorization → Social identification → Social comparison**

Firstly, individuals need to perceive themselves as “similar to or different from others as members of a discrete and discontinuous categories – that is, “groups” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 58). Categorization can contribute to important sense making activities, as individuals define themselves and appropriate behavior by referencing to the norms of the group they belong to (Weick, 1995). The “identification” stage can be achieved by activating a cognitive and evaluative function. A member has to be aware of membership, and that awareness has to be tied to value connotation. Besides cognitive and evaluative aspect, an emotional investment in the awareness and evaluations is necessary to identify with a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). And lastly, social comparison explains the process of comparing the “self” with the out-group, to which the in-group tends to assign negative values or characteristics to boost their own self-esteem and maintain the in-group’s favorable image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The social identity approach (encompassing both self-categorization theory and social identity theory) posits that the processes of social and self-categorization have been strongly linked to prejudice (Chan, 2016). SIT has been used to explain a wide range of inter-group phenomena, including inter-group discrimination. A key assertion of SIT is that two different, but interrelated concepts, known as the personal identity and social identity underlie one’s self concept. The personal identity reflects the characteristics and attributes that make an individual unique whilst the social identity reflects the individual’s membership in a group. Self-categorization theory (SCT) builds upon these

notions and is based on the related ideas that: (1) categories are used to organize people and objects, and (2) psychological group memberships, derived from self-categorizations, define one's social identity (Chan, 2016). SCT allows the possibility for an individual to belong to many groups and have many social identities, although the social identity that becomes salient at any time depends on contextual factors. In the case of Moldovan identity building, the ingroup membership has been a transformative idea due to frequent border shifts.

### **Identity as discourse.**

Membership categorization is explained by Stuart Hall (1989) as the presence and absence of the “otherness”, which was a key signifier in the shaping of the idea of “Moldovan identity”. Identity exists and is constituted through the discourse of belonging. Identity is viewed as “a system of social relations and representations” (Morley & Robins, 1999, p. 46). It is a continuous process of transformative nature, in which the two constitutive dimensions of self-identification and affirmation of differences are linked (Caraus, 2001). The realization of what differentiates one from “the others” is an important condition for identity formation. A national community uses these patterns to imagine itself as different from others (Billing, 1995).

Michael Ignatieff (1996) argues that national identity capitalizes on the “narcissism of minor differences” to create “major differences”, where narrative constructions are built on the idea of “us” versus “them”. According to the social identity theory, this process is necessary for the third stage of social comparison to build a complete idea of self as a nation.

A nationalist takes the neutral facts about people - their language, habitat, culture, tradition and history – and turns them into a narrative whose purpose is to illuminate the self-consciousness of a group, to enable them to think of themselves as a nation, with a destiny, a vocation and a claim to self-determination.

(Ignatieff, 1996, p. 215)

This process focuses on the tendency to highlight one trait or characteristic in codifying a national or ethnic group (Smith, 1999). For example, the nationalist discourses in Moldova differentiate between the ethnic majority and the ethnic Russians in order to make a distinction between “us” and “them” in Moldova. This capitalization of traits has become crucial for the representation of identities by the ruling elite and in the minds of the masses. An effective way to share the new beliefs is through institutionalized mechanisms, including education and mass-media. With the advent of mass communication and television specifically, the identity narratives became more vivid than ever.

Benedict Anderson (1991) claimed that mass communication plays a fundamental role in building a common identity. Print media, radio and broadcast media facilitated the process of identity shaping. Mass media allows a space of identification based not only on a common history, but also on common daily experience (Carauș, 2001). Mass media is a linking mechanism between the rituals of everyday life and the “imagined community” of the nation: “Nations are held together by beliefs, but these beliefs cannot be transmitted except through cultural artifacts which are available to everyone – books, newspapers, and electronic media” (Carauș, 2001, p.35). A strong imagined community

was forged by the Moscow-controlled mass media that succeeded to construct a single state media system which helped form and maintain a common Soviet identity. Anderson posits that nations are imagined communities, because their existence depends on a collective act of imagining which finds its expression particularly in the media. If media, including fictional media, portrays particular frames representing the desired culture and identity, this imposed perspective on the viewers can become a vivid reality. This argument is consistent with the social identity theory which stipulates that maximum difference (M.D.) are more important to the subjects than maximum in-group profit (M.I.P.) (Tajfel et al., 1979). Therefore, group favoritism is explained based on the competition with the out-group where the in-group will look for negative aspects and characterizations of the out-group to boost their own self-image.

Stuart Hall (1989) defined identity as a “production” which is never complete, always constituted within representation. Hall approaches the idea of cultural identity from two perspectives. The first view defines cultural identity as “the idea of one shared culture, a collective “one true self”, hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed “selves”, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 1989, p. 544). Common historical experience and shared cultural codes create the idea of “one people”, however this perspective on identity is problematic for nations experiencing identity crisis as it evokes confusion on “the idea of one”: what particular culture is the salient one? Additionally, this definition is too rigid as it limits the borderlines of the idea of “one true self” due to multiple previously shared identities: Romanian, Russian Imperialist, and Soviet. The fixation on consolidating a particular

identity and joining a particular in-group is what stagnates the formation of an independent Moldovan identity.

Hall's second view on identity does not exclude the first one, and it is rather focused on the differences rather than similarities. It is the "what we are" or "what we have become" as a result of interventions over centuries. Hall (1989) argues that identity is not a mere historic fact that later becomes a cinematic representation, as identity has no fixed meaning. In Hall's terms, Moldovans experience the identity of "becoming". Since identities undergo constant transformation, they belong to the future as to the past. They are subject to continuous intersection of history, culture, and power. Power is an important element in this equation. In the last two centuries Moldovans were not positioned at the centrality of power dominance, but rather at the periphery being forced to adopt the incoming orders. This perspective on identity is relevant for the Moldovan identity case as it provides more flexibility and a sense of reconciliation - it would be impossible to return to previously owned identity.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study focused on the analysis of the national identity as a social construct. The identity construct represented in the entertainment media is measured through the analysis of narratives and the identification of how issues and characters are framed in storytelling. National identity is defined as

[T]he extent to which a given culture recognizes and identifies with a set of focal elements that set it apart from other cultures by exhibiting greater complexity and variation in the institutions of those aspects than others.

(Cui & Adams, 2002, p. 638)

National identity is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct reflected in four latent constructs: national heritage, cultural homogeneity, belief system and consumer ethnocentrism, measured by a coding scheme adopted from the 17-item national identity scale called "NATID" (Keillor et al., 1996,1999).

The qualitative content analysis involved the following procedures:

#### **Pilot coding**

##### **1. Defined categories**

In the initial stage of the qualitative content analysis, the existent research was used to identify key concepts for the initial coding categories. The coding for this study was based on the 17 item-national-identity scale (NATID) by Keillor & Hult, 1999 (see Appendix 1). The original 17 scale items are formulated as questions, and those 17 items identify 4 underlying national identity (NATID) dimensions: national heritage, cultural homogeneity, belief system and ethnocentrism. Each construct contains three to four items that describe it. For the purpose of this study the number of items was reduced to

simplify the coding process, particularly because they were used to define and identify kinds of content rather than being used as questions aimed at individuals. Thus, the content analytic method begged streamlining of items. For example, the three items: “A specific religious philosophy is central to one’s national identity”, “Participation in some form of religious activity is central to one’s national identity”, and “Religious education” were similar in the sense that participation implies the practice of a belief. Therefore, the second and third items were deleted. Then, the remaining question was edited to work as a coding category. The first item under the third dimension *Belief system* was edited to read “religious philosophy.” The items “A specific religious philosophy is not an important part of one’s identity” and “A true American would never reject their religious belief” were deleted as they are contained in the larger “religious philosophy” category. Five questions under the dimension *Ethnocentrism*: “Products manufactured in one’s country are preferred to foreign ones”, “Local products are always perceived the best”, “Buying foreign products hurts local business and causes unemployment”, “Supporting local products are preferred even if the costs are higher”, and “Only those products that are unavailable in the U.S. should be imported” were merged into one item: “Consumption of local products.” These questions have a comparative scope because the original NATID scale was used for comparative studies and marketing research. However, the present study does not compare focuses only on one identity, therefore these questions do not serve the purpose of this research. As a result, 9 items were selected for the identity frames that were to be used in the coding and then edited to use items as coding categories. Here are the categories:

**National heritage.** According to Keillor et al. (1996, 1999), national heritage is defined as the presence of important historical figures and events in the history, which reflects a given culture's sense of their own unique history (Huntington, 1997). The differing histories and events associated with individual nations may produce differing national heritage as a characteristic of national identities (Cui & Adams, 2002).

1. *Important people from the country's past.* References to notable or famous people, such as politicians, artists, poets, and others, who have lived in Russian Empire or the U.S.S.R., and are now admired by people today.
2. *Positive portrayal of historical events.* Characters mention only the positive aspects of a historic event.
3. *Strong historical heritage.* Patrimony, or places of significance to people on account of historical, physical (e.g. archaeological, architectural) and cultural values. Heritage is represented as a place or location that is given an important symbolic meaning.

**Cultural homogeneity.** The number of subcultures within a given set of national boundaries is hypothesized to have an inverse relationship to the strength of national identity.

4. *Certain cultural attributes.* A cultural attribute is a characteristic of human action that is socially acquired by the people and is shared as a common trait within a group. A cultural attribute can be: a) an object, b) an action, or c) a belief. The cultural attribute needs to be specific to the people, and different from other peoples.

5. *Common historical background.* The nation is formed on common historical background, therefore certain legends or historic events are shared by a group of people
6. *Pride for one's nationality.* The characters express pride for being part of the society or nation they are part of.
7. *Activities that identity a people* include certain habitual activities that are characteristic for a people. It is what the members of a particular society are expected to do.

***Belief structure.*** It is defined as the role which religion or supernatural beliefs play in facilitating cultural participation and solidarity, and the magnitude to which a culture actively identifies with a unique national identity. A belief structure's role in culture is multifaceted. It can serve to promote cultural participation, provide a mechanism for conflict resolution, or a means through which psychological tensions and distortions can be reduced or eliminated (Spiro, 1967). Overall, a belief structure enables a psychological bridge to be constructed between individual beliefs and a culture's aggregate social structure (Husted, Dozier, McMahon, & Kattan, 1996).

8. *Religious philosophy.* A concept, belief, term, argument, or practice adhering to a religion or supranatural belief, which are central to one's national identity.

***Ethnocentrism*** is the tendency that individuals or societies have to make evaluations and attributions using their own cultural perspectives as the base line criteria (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). This element is viewed as a means of accounting for the importance placed on maintaining culturally centered values and behaviors (Keillor and Hult, 1999).

9. *Local products*. Portrayal of predominantly local products or goods.

## 2. Coder training

The reliability coder was selected from the Wake Forest graduate student body based on the convenience principle. The coder is a native Russian speaker familiar with Russian culture. The coder received one hour training focused on the purpose of the study and the guidelines on the coding process. Additionally, the coder was provided with the coding guide which contains the description of the nine categories identified in the first stage along with relevant examples and rules for the coding process. The coder was assigned to watch film C: *The Architect of My Happiness*. Film C was split by the author of the study into 35 scenes that corresponds with thematic sequences. For instance: Scene 1 depicts a conversation between the main characters; scene 2 portrays a sequence from the hospital room. Each scene was attributed a number – for example, scene 5 has the corresponding code C 5.

Coders were assigned to identify “instances” in each scene through the entire film. An instance is a sequence from a scene representing a situation that was an example of one of the NATIDs. This could be a framed message in the form of a visual scene, a verbal expression, or context. Anything that was considered to be an example of one of the NATID categories would be identified as an “instance.” These could be verbal elements (words, expressions, phrasing), audio elements (music, sounds, tone of voice etc.), and non-verbal cues (context, visual elements such as scenery). Thus, the coders were asked to do two things: a) identify specific instances, themes or examples of identity frames from the scene that depict the idea of identity; b) decide if the selected instance representing identity fits into one of the provided categories, and identify which category

it fits into using the coding guide and sheet. The reliability coder coded independently from the main coder. As a result, reliability could be coded for both the identification of instances and for the category that each instance fit into.

### 3. Coding process

As a result of the pilot coding, the reliability coder identified 27 instances, while the main coder identified 41 instances within 35 scenes in the designated Film C, *The Architect of My Happiness*. A given scene can contain more than one instance. The instances identified in this sample contained verbal and visual references. For instance, scene C33 contained two instances under the category Common historical background: “In Russian Empire, all marriages were legalized by blacksmiths,” and “Heavenly Blacksmith was the superior God for Slavic people”.

*Table I: The number of instances in Film C: The Architect of My Happiness*

| Categories                               | Nr of instances<br>(reliability<br>coder) | Nr of<br>instances<br>(main coder) |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Important people from the country's past | 0                                         | 1                                  |
| Positive portrayal of historical events  | 0                                         | 0                                  |
| Strong historical heritage               | 1                                         | 0                                  |
| Cultural attributes                      | 12                                        | 21                                 |
| Common historical background             | 0                                         | 2                                  |
| Pride for one's nationality              | 0                                         | 0                                  |
| Activities that identify a people        | 13                                        | 7                                  |
| Religious philosophy                     | 1                                         | 1                                  |
| Local products                           | 0                                         | 8                                  |

*Notes. Film C: The architect of my happiness contains 35 scenes*

#### 4. Data analysis

As a result of inter-rater reliability coding, the agreement in the *likelihood* of occurrence of instances depicting identity frames is: 0.89, and the agreement in *frequency of occurrence* is 0.88. The results indicated low agreement for the *category 4: Cultural attributes*, *category 7: Activities that identify a people* and *category 9 Local products*. A qualitative review of the responses showed that coders might have identified the same instances under different categories. For example, the reliability coder identified “drinking tea” as an instance under the category *Activities that identify a people*, while the main coder attributed the same instance to category *Cultural attributes* as teatime is not simply an activity but also a symbolic act of sharing and listening to each other’s issues and challenges. After a careful consideration, it was clear that *Activities that identify a people* and *Cultural attributes* contain similar semantic descriptions – activities are also part of cultural attributes. Therefore, categories 4 and 7 were merged to eliminate the bias.

#### 5. Reliability report

As a result of eliminating one category the interrater reliability increased to *likelihood agreement* of 0.91 and *frequency agreement* of 0.90. The final reliability report is represented below.

Table II. *Final inter-rater reliability*

| Categories                               | <i>Likelihood</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Important people from the country's past | 1                 | 1                |
| Positive portrayal of historical events  | 1                 | 1                |
| Strong historical heritage               | 0.91              | 0.91             |
| Cultural attributes                      | 0.71              | 0.6              |
| Common historical background             | 0.97              | 0.97             |
| Pride for one's nationality              | 1                 | 1                |
| Activities that identify a people        | -                 | -                |
| Religious philosophy                     | 0.94              | 0.94             |
| Local products                           | 0.8               | 0.8              |
| Total                                    | 0.91              | 0.9              |

*Notes. Film C: The Architect of My Happiness contains 35 scenes*

## **The study**

### **1. Sample data**

Due to the nature of this study, purposive sampling is the most suitable method to evaluate the identity frames represented in entertainment content. Ten most viewed entertainment programming in 2019 were selected for this study to ensure high external validity. The data was derived from AGB Nielson in Moldova, the only agency authorized to measure television viewership in Republic of Moldova since January 2004 ([www.nielsentam.tv](http://www.nielsentam.tv)). The data provided by Nielsen (See Appendix 2) contains:

- the distributing channels,
- the ratings of the most viewed programming for 2019,
- AMR (Average Minute Rating) individuals: the average number of audiences per minute,
- AMR percent: the percentage of the audience watching television per minute in relation to the total population.

The data excluded from the sample:

- The fourth title represents a television show. The data set did not specify the number of the episode that reached this rating. Due to insufficient information about the specific content, the third title was excluded from the sample.
- According to the data, the twenty top viewed films were produced in Russia, with the exemption of the fifth and the sixth films, which are produced in Ukraine. These two units are outliers in the pool of the top viewed films based on the country of production, and therefore were excluded from the sample to maintain consistency and reliability of the findings.

The selected sample data includes the following films with the indicated duration (the titles were translated from Russian language).

Film A (full, 88 minutes): *The Right for the Last Night*

Film B (part 1: 88 minutes): *Madonna from the Countryside*

Film C (full, 94 minutes): *The Architect of My Happiness*

Film D (part 1: 90 minutes): *Rusk*

Film E (part 1: 92 minutes): *I Hate You*

Film F (full, 85 minutes): *The Weighty Feeling*

Film G (full, 96 minutes): *The Other Bank*

## **2. Unitized scenes and instances**

Seven most viewed films and short series were selected based on the rating principle. Given that reliability coding ascertained that suitable reliability existed between the main and reliability coder, the main coder conducted all of the remaining coding. The main coder began by identifying all relevant instances that represented a NATID. Each film was split into scenes to create smaller units of analysis. Each instance from a scene that reflected an identity frame was identified and introduced into one of the proposed eight categories. An instance is a sequence from a scene representing a situation which is accompanied by a framed message in the form of a visual scene, a verbal expression, or context. The analysis was based on verbal elements (words, expressions, phrasing), audio elements (music, sounds, tone of voice etc.), and non-verbal cues (context, visual elements such as scenery). Similarly to the pilot coding, the data sample needed to be divided into smaller units of analysis for convenience. Each of the seven films were split by the main coder into scenes

representing thematic sequences: film A = 25 scenes, film B = 24 scenes, film C = 35 scenes, film D = 38 scenes, film E = 31 scenes, film F = 33 scenes, and film G = 30 scenes. The total number of scenes in the entire data sample is 216.

### **3. Main coding by main coder**

The analysis was conducted based on eight codes: important people from the country's past, positive portrayal of historical events, strong historical heritage, cultural attributes, common historical background, pride for one's nationality, religious philosophy, and consumption of local products. After the selection of the sample data and division into scenes, each film was viewed separately. After identifying instances, those individual instances were coded. Recall that, the analysis was based on verbal elements (words, expressions, phrasing), audio elements (music, sounds, tone of voice etc.), and non-verbal cues (context, visual elements such as scenery). The coder assigned each instance with a unique meaning to only one category to ensure clarity. For example: the scene B3 (minute 04:26) from the film *Madonna from the countryside* contained a sequence depicting a carpet on the wall. While the carpet is a local product and could be attributed to the category Local products, it was instead attributed to Cultural attributes, because it is customary in Russian society to place carpets on the wall to keep the house warmer. Therefore, the carpet, as an object, represents a cultural attribute in this case.

#### 4. Findings by category

As a result of the content analysis, 166 instances were identified in the data sample of a total of 216 scenes. The most common frames, or 78 per cent of instances were allocated to *cultural attributes*, or the fourth code, which is also the largest category as it includes specific objects, attitudes, actions and beliefs characteristic for Russian culture and lifestyle. Overall, 39 per cent of scenes contained a cultural attribute. However, for the purpose of this study this code did not need to be divided into more specific items. Strong historical heritage and pride for one's nationality, included about 2 per cent and 0 per cent respectively from the entire number of instances. The references to religious practices and beliefs characteristic to Russian Christian orthodox belief represent about seven per cent of the total. And lastly, ten per cent of instances were attributed to the consumption of local products. The following sub-section will further elaborate on each code separately.

Table III: *The number of instances identified in the entire data sample*

| Categories                               | Number of instances | Percentage (%) of instances |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Important people from the country's past | 2                   | 1.2                         |
| Positive portrayal of historical events  | 0                   | 0                           |
| Strong historical heritage               | 3                   | 1.8                         |
| Cultural attributes                      | 130                 | 78.3                        |
| Common historical background             | 4                   | 2.4                         |
| Pride for one's nationality              | 0                   | 0                           |
| Religious philosophy                     | 11                  | 6.6                         |
| Local products                           | 16                  | 9.6                         |

Notes. The data sample 216 scenes split from 7 films

## 5. Findings by total

Considering the genre of the films analyzed in this study – melodrama and romance, the content is tailored towards women. Daily soap operas and dramas are shown to be more popular among women, however men also watch such content, that is full of stereotypes and myths (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). Following the hypothesis of this study, the fictional frames identified in the data sample contained identity frames portrayed through symbolism, habits and beliefs, and traditional values, rather than political or patriotic themes as expected earlier in this study. The stories depicted in these dramas carry narratives of “the village prose”, the idea of the “Russian sole”, the authoritative man who is in charge of decision-making, and the woman-savior who needs to be fragile and enduring at the same time with her unconditional love for her family and community for which she is ready to sacrifice everything.

## 6. Narrative description of findings by category.

The following sub-section will further elaborate on each code separately.

### National Heritage

*1. Important people from the country's past.* This code includes references to notable or famous people who are admired by people today. Examples may include references to politicians, artists, poets, and others, who have lived in the Russian Empire or the U.S.S.R. Two films out of seven contained references to “great Russian poets” without mentioning exact names. Dmitrii Pirogov, a poet and artist born in the Soviet times, extensively used the myth of the poet in Russian culture, “the poet who was supposed to be a second government and the conscience of the nation” (Boym, 1995). Additionally, according to an old Slavic legend mentioned in one of the films,

blacksmiths were highly respected people in Russian Empire. Blacksmiths would legalize marriages, create name tags for the newborn and perform other important public duties. The highest Slavic God was called Heavenly Blacksmith. In *The Architect of My Happiness* (the Russian word for “blacksmith” in this context is the closest in meaning with the English word “architect”) the blacksmith was introduced as a metaphor – the man was offered a chance to carve his own destiny by forgetting his past and building his future based on the “right” traditional values: love, family and honest work, unlike his previous lifestyle based on materialistic values. In this context, materialistic values expressed in wealth and possessions without hard work are a portrayal of the new Russian society that adopted the Western lifestyle, including non-Christian practices such as bachelor parties. This lifestyle is criticized by the parents, who are respected figures in Russian society. Therefore, the return to old traditional values is presented as a solution to a happy and meaningful life.

2. *Positive portrayal of historical events.* While characters did not expressively praise past events, they did not criticize the political system or government, nor challenged historic events. One potential explanation can be the genre of the films, which focuses mostly on the social aspects of life, rather than political circumstances. Additionally, the complete lack of references to historical events can be a strategy to avoid censorship in the future.

3. *Strong historical heritage* represents the patrimony, or places of significance to people on account of historical, physical, and cultural values. The geographical metanarrative, which describes the significance of nature and the village prose, carry an important symbolic meaning for Russia. The idyllic rustic dwelling, visual

depictions of fields, and the untouched beauty of nature represent the escapism in the countryside as a form of reconnection with the supranatural source of energy. The village-prose and love for nature reflects the imperial nostalgia, the times when Russia covered even larger territories. These are representations of the ‘old Russian soul’. Moreover, Russian people believed in the healing power of nature and most importantly in the greatness of Russia as it possessed vast lands and natural resources. Alexander Prokhanov, one of the leading figures of the Russian nationalism since 1970s, described the village prose in his article *Metaphor of the present* as “the cultivation of a vision of a long-gone world”, legitimizing Russia as an empire and the Soviet experiment as universal (Laurelle, 2019, p. 45).

### **Cultural Homogeneity**

4. *Cultural attributes*. This code was the most frequent one containing 130 instances. It includes examples of specific objects, attitudes, actions and beliefs characteristic to Russian culture and lifestyle, such as the idea of the Russian soul, traditional gender roles, the importance of one’s family, the respect for one’s parents, the sacrifice for the communal good, and the spirit of collective society. The Russian soul is represented through the character strength, specifically through subservient and idealized Russian women who sacrifice their existence for the community and their families. While the Russian women must keep the family and community together, the authoritative and powerful men provide for and protect their families. These strictly defined gender roles result in further development of conflicts, such as the need to get married early enough, infidelity and its normalization in Russian society, homosexuality, which is not tolerated or even discussed in public. For

instance, the homosexual character in the film *I Hate You* owns a big favor to his employer because she hired him while his chances of being employed because of his sexual orientation were minimal despite his high qualifications. Additionally, adherence to conservative values assumes significant pressure for the modern woman to marry before the age of thirty and maintain a united family, even if her husband is not loyal or respectful with her. This implies that she needs to maintain her marriage intact by being subservient and supportive without challenging anything her husband does, including infidelity. This frame was central to all the films under this study. Family, as a social cell at the micro level is a reflection of the entire society at the macro level. While there was no connection to the political life, the subordination and discipline at the individual level is meant to create order in society both at the micro and macro level. Therefore, authority should not be challenged, but rather trusted even if significant loopholes are evident.

Corruption, including bribing to showcase gratitude, is another practice reflected in the data sample. While corruption is not a desired topic, it appears in several films as a deeply embedded element in the lives of Russian people. This is a major factor as corruption creates impediments and even tragic circumstances which Russian people need to overcome with their strength. The corrupt environment serves as a challenge for testing the endurance of the Russian soul – the strength of the character and kind heart. The ‘Russian soul’ is more relevant than ever as the characters need to prove not only their strength, but also their affection for other members of society who need to be helped and saved. However, the protagonists in *I Hate You* and *Rusk* were not aiming to fight the corrupt system, but rather acknowledge its occurrence while

focusing on bringing justice with their own efforts. Interestingly, corruption is not always viewed negatively. It is also a convenience or a way to build relations and show gratitude. For instance, one of the protagonists in *I Hate You* decides to offer the doctor some money in an envelope, additionally to paying the official hospital fees. Her actions were meant to ensure that the doctor would pay particular attention and care of the patient. While this is a common practice in the post-Soviet space, bribing in this case is not perceived as an illegal or negative practice. Bribing is a convenience, especially for those who have the resources to use this tool, and some mild forms are normalized in daily life activities.

5. *Common historical background.* While criticism is avoided in melodramas, there are several references to the difficult times Russian people had to prove their strength, such as the post-Soviet reformation period in *I Hate You*: “You survived through the 90's and the 2000's, and you will endure now” (scene 26).

Moreover, tragic family romance, characteristic to classic Russian literature, which holds an important part of Russian cultural heritage, is also transported into modern era through entertainment. Tragic destiny is a theme that was frequently present across the sample data. Almost every family carry stories of war, separation, and tragedy. Russians and Russian speakers can relate to it especially due to complex history in the region filled with wars and conquests.

6. *Pride for one's nationality.* While direct praising is not characteristic for the Russian culture, love and devotion are expressed indirectly through actions or attachments to the elements of Russian's wealth: nature, people (the commune), and at the micro level – the family.

### **Belief System**

7. *Religious philosophy.* The data represented only Christian Orthodox rituals and traditions, such as the customs related to mourning and burial. These depictions were observed in three films out of seven: *The Right for the Last Night*, *I Hate You*, and *Madonna from the Countryside*.

### **Consumer Ethnocentrism**

8. *Local products.* While there was no indication of the perception of quality of the consumed products, local drinks and traditional food were mostly represented across the data sample. Some of the traditional goods that were featured are: moonshine (samagon), pork fat (salo), Russian style sandwich with Doktorskaya sausage, Russian gingerbread (pryaniki), and there is always tea – which is not only a drink but also a way to invite someone for an open conversation and sooth their soul.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

Overall, these serials exaggerate a selection of real-life circumstances and assumptions. These types of programming create a world which seems very real, and viewers are unable to differentiate between the contrived world and the real one. Television serials have a definite impact on thought pattern of society, which is also claimed by Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). For instance, women have been portrayed as men would like to see them - beautiful creatures, submissive mothers of their children, efficient house keepers, but nothing else. This shows the stereotypical mindset of the audience where they enjoy men and women in their traditionally defined roles. Women are hardly shown as a working unless compelled by the circumstances. She sits at home even though she is highly educated. Working women were sometimes shown encountering harassment, which usually remains unsanctioned while masculinity is reinforced by such shows.

The selected media continuously portrayed the submissive and sacrificing image of women. In the films where women possess the power or excel in professions, such as portrayed in *The rusk* and *The other bank*, the ego of males get hurt, or those women are being discouraged to advance in their careers for a bigger cause – love, their family, or to maintain the status quo. Self-care is culturally perceived as an act of selfish behavior in the Russian-speaking world. The modern woman, represented in the selected films, is well educated, beautiful, independent but she still needs a hero to save her from the hardships that life brings. The portrayal of women in films through the frame of traditional values may lead to myths and further reinforcement of stereotypes in society.

Sociologist R.W. Connell claims that hegemonic masculinity includes a very specific vision of masculinity that is purported to be dominant in the culture. Connell is careful to stress that “this is a socially constructed ideal and that in reality most men do not fit the mythic ideal” (Dill-Shackleford, 2016, p.126). The vision of the dominant male in the Russian culture, as observed in the data sample, is a physically strong, heterosexual, powerful and successful earner. Women are construed as subordinate and subservient to these men – there is an emphasized femininity. The man in these films is portrayed as the embodiment of physical strength and authority while the woman carries the “Russian soul.” Therefore, media visions of men and women serve not to report reality but to reflect and support the cultural mythology of hegemonic masculinity.

Russia is taking the role of the guardian of the traditional values centered around traditional family and Christian values. As Laruelle (2019, p.4) emphasizes, “Putin’s administration branded Russia as the bearer of Christian conservative values,” which also became synonymous with Russian national identity. In the late ‘90s scholars such as Fiona Hill discerned the reemergence of patriotic themes in Russia and the abandonment of the Western rhetoric that had prevailed in the first years of post-Soviet Russia – freedom, liberalism, and wealth which became available both through travelling and cultural inventions such as music and films (Laruelle, 2019). The first years following the collapse of the Soviet Union was characterized not only through destruction, rebirth but also as the clash between the traditional ‘old’ and the liberal and open ‘new’ life. The rediscovery of the imperial past and the protection of Russia’s historical legacy and nature, expressed mostly through the “village prose” literature and art, was firstly studied

in the second half of the 1970s by authors such as John Dunlop, Alexander Yanov, and Walter Laqueur as a current for “revival” of Russian nationalism (Laruelle, 2019).

In the late ‘90s scholars such as Fiona Hill discerned the reemergence of patriotic themes in Russia and the abandonment of the Western rhetoric that had prevailed in the first years of post-Soviet Russia – freedom, liberalism, and wealth which became available both through travelling and cultural inventions such as music and films (Laruelle, 2019). The first years following the collapse of the Soviet Union was characterized not only through destruction, rebirth but also as the clash between the traditional ‘old’ and the liberal and open ‘new’ life. The rediscovery of the imperial past and the protection of Russia’s historical legacy and nature, expressed mostly through the “village prose” literature and art, was firstly studied in the second half of the 1970s by authors such as John Dunlop, Alexander Yanov, and Walter Laqueur as a current for “revival” of Russian nationalism (Laruelle, 2019).

Russia’s geographic position and its state development created a ground for divergence between Westernizing and Slavophil ideologies even centuries ago. As an heir to Byzantium with its special spirituality Russia has been viewed within an ecclesiastical concept (Likhacheva, A., Makarov, I. & Makarova, E., 2015). The ecclesiastical idea assumes a communal spirituality and, consequently, the notion of human brotherhood, which entails communal brotherhood in the case of the Russian identity. This ideology was also reflected in the films under this study, where the communal needs were placed above the personal ones. Particularly, it is the women who should sacrifice their own (private) comfort and desire for the family’s good, or in a larger context - for the good of the community. This was the recurring theme in 100 per cent of the sample data. The

narrative of woman-savior is not a new concept, but deeply rooted in Russia's rich history and literature. While the woman represents the ultimate sacrifice, kindness and gentle heart - the idea of the Russian soul, the man is the embodiment of power and authority. This tradition dates back to the Byzantine Christian tradition, which is seen as anti-Western (Likhacheva et al., 2015). Thus, the ecclesiastical vision entails a "return to the concept of Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality, or, in some other form - Spirituality, Statehood and Ecclesiastic idea," as a building block of Russian national identity (Likhacheva et al., 2015). However, the connection between nationalism and masculinity in Russian remains unstudied.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored the presence of distinct group identities represented as fictional frames in entertainment media space in the Republic of Moldova, and the way it cultivates particular behaviors and attitudes. While fictional frames do not represent facts, they carry meaning and symbolism which are relatable to targeted audiences. Thought-provoking drama clarifies the meaning of lived experiences by allowing the viewers to compare and introduce the television reality along their own experiences. Keith Oatley claims that fiction may be “twice as true as fact” because fiction intensifies and clarifies real life (Dill-Shackleford, 2016, p.46). It allows the audience to bring their own unresolved emotions to bear on the story world and resolve them in a space that is seemingly easier than the real-life space. Oatley’s view on written narrative is also relevant and applicable for the audio-visual narrative, such as film and television series. Viewers rethink their own identity and undergo their own experiences and emotions by engaging with the character’s storyline.

The sense of belonging to a group of people is beyond the notion of ‘land’ and ‘people’, it is rather the connection one has to a group of people based on shared cultural attributes, heritage, beliefs, and historical background. Identities undergo constant transformation, encompassing both the past, the present and aspirations for the future. As Moldova has changed its borders and political status throughout the last two centuries, the identity of the people living on its territory has presented a significant issue for building a strong new nation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a mass perception of the loss of communality, which was also reflected in art and media.

The political situation in Moldova has been very unstable in the recent years. Only in 2015, there was a change of five prime ministers. Political instability has increased Russia's influence in Moldova and has deepened the crisis of national identity. In the context of political crisis, fragile economic situation, and omnipresent corruption which has discredited the concept of European integration in Moldovan society, the pro-Russian voices became increasingly loud, and media and culture play a major role to achieve a larger political goal (Baar & Jakubek, 2017). The findings of this study demonstrate that the popular mass media entertainment contain themes that frame men and women in stereotypical roles based on traditional Christian orthodox tradition, which can cultivate differences in audience gender stereotypes and at a larger scale – their attitudes towards social and political issues.

Media and popular culture are an effective way to construct and nourish cultural connections among people. Moreover, heavy television or media viewership can transform the perception of social reality based on the television reality, according to the cultivation theory. Gerbner et al. (1978) claim that high consumption of television results in the viewer cultivating the view that life in the real world is the same as life portrayed in television programs (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al., 1977). Tyler and Cook (1984, p. 694) state that mass media also affect “societal level judgments” and influence “citizens’ views about the world.” Many researchers have described television as the most dominant social force of all mass media (Morgan & Shanahan, 1997; Shrum, 1998; Signorielli & Morgan, 2001). Therefore, although melodramas and romance might not seem threatening content, these genres carry multiple stereotypes and fictional frames that portray life through the lens of conservative values. This is the way media can

connect people beyond geographical borders. Once the viewers decide that their own experiences are closely related with those portrayed in Russian films, their perceptions of group membership can change. When there are not many significant distinctions between the viewers' lives and the experiences of the characters, the distant group known as "the others" turn into "us". Therefore, entertainment media can create a fictional idea of belonging to an extended in-group.

As the present study demonstrates, Russian entertainment media contains a large number of identity frames that bolster conservative traditional values based on divided gender roles and Christian orthodox norms and rituals. The return to traditional values and the imperialistic nostalgia does not encourage the process of challenging the paternalistic authority, or in a larger context – the authority overall. This provides reasons for concerns because voiceness and participation are important elements in a democratic society.

While Moldova is still experiencing an identity crisis, an unproportionate consumption of Russian media, both news and entertainment, can affect the formation of a separate national identity in Moldova through the cultivation of Russian-backed norms and beliefs. While this study did not test the degree of social categorization, identification, and comparison with Russian identity, the social identification approach explains the impact of media representations on viewers' perceptions. Following the findings of this study, the most viewed films and television series in Moldova contains stereotypes and themes that frame the social reality that is based on ideals and values characteristic to a conservative society based on strictly defined gender roles and respect

for authority, which contradicts the Western or European system of values, such as equality, respect for human rights and dignity.

Due to the lack of local media production in Moldova, the Russian-language content, which is still highly popular in Moldova, does not reshape the idea of what Moldovan identity is, but rather constructs and maintains a steady audience that engages and identifies with the representations portrayed in Russian produced media. Over time this audience develops a connection with Russian values through the identification with the norms and behavior characteristic to Russian and even Soviet society due to an emotional and cognitive emersion into a fictional reality. The popularity of such content does not necessarily indicate that Russian identity equals Moldovan identity, primarily due to the complex history and the ethnic composition of the population of Moldova. However, heavy and consistent viewership of Russian media frames the reality that might be already familiar to many Moldovans due to a shared common past with Russia. Therefore, media framing and manipulated cinematic representations threaten the process of identification with a non-Russian identity. As a result, in the context of uncertainty and lack of solidified identity, the injection of Russian media in Moldova is an effective strategy to recreate a cultural frame of reference that can be adopted by the consumers of such media over time.

### Bibliographical References

- Abrams, D. (1999). Social identity, social cognition, and the self. In D. Abrams & M. Hogg (Eds.), *Social Identity and Social Cognition* (p. 197-229). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Alecou, A. (2017). Shaping identities: The Cypriot Left and the Communist Party of Greece in the 1940s. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 30(2), 217–238.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12102>.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London, UK: Verso, 204-206
- Baar, V. & Jakubek, D. (2017). Divided national identity in Moldova. *Journal of nationalism, memory and language politics*, 11(1) 58-92.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/jnmlp-2017-0004>
- Barometer of Public Opinion in Moldova (2016 April). Institute for Public Policies.  
[http://ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP\\_04.2016\\_prima\\_parte\\_finale-r.pdf](http://ipp.md/public/files/Barometru/BOP_04.2016_prima_parte_finale-r.pdf).
- Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58, 707-731.
- Bilandzic, H., & Busselle, R. W. (2008). Transportation and transportability in the cultivation of genre-consistent attitudes and estimates. *Journal of Communication*, 58, 508-529. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00397.x.
- Bilandzic, H. (2006). The perception of distance in the cultivation process: A theoretical consideration of the relationship between television content, processing experience, and perceived distance. *Communication Theory*, 16, 333-355.  
doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00273.x.

- Bode, L. (2016). Political news in the news feed: Learning politics from social media. *Mass Communication and Society*, 19(1), 24-48.
- Borden, J. (2016). Effects of national identity in transnational crises: implications of social identity theory for attribution and crisis communications. *International Journal of Communication (Online)*, 377–400.
- Boym, S. (1995). From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia. *Representations*, 49, 133-166.
- Busselle, R. W., Ryabalova, A., & Wilson B. (2004). Ruining a good story: Cultivation, perceived realism and narrative. *Communications*, 29(3), 365-378.
- Caraus, T. (2001). National identity: invention or necessity? Case study: Republic of Moldova. *New Europe College Yearbook*, 09:15-74
- Castle, J., & Stepp K. (2018). Silver screen sorting: social identity and selective exposure in popular film viewing. *The Social Science Journal (Fort Collins)*, 55(4), 487–499 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2018.04.001>
- Chan, M. (2016). Media use and the social identity model of collective action examining the roles of online alternative news and social media news. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. Advance online publication. Doi:1077699016638837.
- Clark, T. (1990). International marketing and national character: a review and proposal for an integrative theory. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(4), 66-79.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1251760>.
- Connor, W. (1994). *Ethnonationalism: the quest for understanding*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

- Dill-Shackleford, K. (2016). *How fantasy becomes reality*. Oxford University Press.
- Direct Line with Vladimir Putin (2021 June). The Official website of the President of Russia: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65973>
- Davis, D.W., & Davenport, C. (1997). The political and social relevancy of *Malcolm X*: The stability of African American political attitudes. *The Journal of Politics*, 59(2), 550-564. DOI: [10.2307/2998177](https://doi.org/10.2307/2998177).
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14602466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Gamson, W.A. & Modigliani A. (1989). Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: a constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.
- Gerbner, G. (1969a). Toward ‘cultural indicators’: The analysis of mass mediated public message systems. *AV Communication Review*, 17(2), 137-148.  
doi:10.1007/BF02769102.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1980). The mainstreaming of America: Violence profile no. 11. *Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 10–29.  
doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1980.tb01987.x.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., Signorielli, N., & Shanahan, J. (2002). Growing up with television: Cultivation processes. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2nd ed., p. 43–67). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gerrig, R. J., & Prentice, D. A. (1991). The representation of fictional information. *Psychological Science*, 2, 336-340. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.1991.tb00162.x>.

- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Copeland, L., & Bimber, B. (2013). Political consumerism: Civic engagement and the social media connection. *New Media & Society*, 16(3), 488-506.
- Gillespie, D., & Smirnova, E. (2004). Alexander Sokurov and the Russian soul. *Studies in European Cinema*, 1(1), 57–65. <https://doi.org/10.1386/seci.1.1.57/0>
- Glynn, C. J., Huge, M., Reineke, J., Hardy, B., & Shanahan, J. (2007). When Oprah intervenes: Political correlates of daytime talk show viewing. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51, 228–244.
- Grabe, M. E., & Drew, D. (2007). Crime cultivation: Comparisons across media genres and channels. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51, 147-171. doi:10.1080/08838150701308143.
- Graham, S. (1999) *The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition*. Arnold London, Sidney, Auckland, 77-85.
- Hall, S. (1989). Cultural identity and cinematic representation. *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, (36), 68-81
- Hawkins, R., & Pingree, S. (1980). Some processes in the cultivation effect. *Communication Research*, 7, 193-226. doi:10.1177/009365028000700203.
- Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B. (2004). *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria.
- Hetsroni, A., Elpariach, H., Kapuza, R., & Tsfoni, B. (2007). Geographical proximity, cultural imperialism, and the cultivation effect. *Communication Monographs*, 74(2), 181-199.

- Holbert R.L., Dhavan V.S., & Nojin K. (2003). Political implications of prime-time drama and sitcom use: genres of representation and opinions concerning women's rights. *Journal of Communication*, 53(1),45-60.
- Holbert R.L., Tschida D.A., Dixon M., Cherry K., Steuber K., & Airne D. (2005). *The West Wing* and depictions of the American presidency: expanding the domains of framing in political communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 53(4), 505-522.  
DOI: [10.1080/01463370500102228](https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370500102228).
- Holbrook, R. A., & Hill, T. G. (2005). Agenda-setting and priming in prime time television: crime dramas as political cues, *Political Communication*, 22(3), 277-295. DOI:[10.1080/10584600591006519](https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600591006519).
- Husted, B., Dozier, J., McMahon, J. & Kattan, M. (1996). The impact of cross-national carriers of business ethics on attitudes about questionable practices and form moral reasoning. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 26, 391-411.
- Ikuenobe, P. (2010). Citizenship and patriotism. *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 24(4), 297-318.  
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25767225>
- International Republic Institute (2019, December). *Public opinion survey: resident of Moldova*. November 16, 2019 – December 8, 2019.  
[https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri\\_poll\\_december\\_2019\\_for\\_publishing.pdf](https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_poll_december_2019_for_publishing.pdf)
- IREX (2019). *Media sustainability index 2019*. The Development of sustainable independent media in Europe and Eurasia.  
[https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-  
eurasia-2019-full.pdf](https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/pdf/media-sustainability-index-europe-eurasia-2019-full.pdf).

- Keillor, B. D., Hult, G. T. M., Erffmeyer, R. C., & Babakus, E. (1996). NATID: the development and application of a national identity measure for use in international marketing. *Journal of International Marketing*, 4(2), 57–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X9600400205>.
- Keillor, B.D., & Hult, T.M. (1999). A five-country study of national identity: Implications for international marketing research and practice. *International Marketing Review*, 16(1), 65-84. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02651339910257656>.
- King, C. (2000). *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the politics of culture*. Stanford, CA. Hoover Institution Press.
- King, C. (1994). Moldovan Identity and the Politics of Pan-Romanianism. *Slavic Review*, 53(2), 345-368. doi:10.2307/2501297
- Kriesberg, L., Northrup, T.A., & Thorson, S.J. (1989). *Intractable conflicts and their transformation*. Syracuse, N.Y. Syracuse University Press.
- Kubic, K. N., & Chory, R. M. (2007). Exposure to television makeover programs and perceptions of self. *Communication Research Reports*, 24(4), 283-291.
- Kumari, A. & Joshi, H. (2015). Gender stereotyped portrayal of women in the media: perception and impact on adolescent. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(2), 279-845. 10.9790/0837-20424452.
- Laruelle, M. (2019). *Russian nationalism: imaginaries, doctrines, and political battlefields*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Lee, E. (2008). Socio-political contexts, identity formation, and regulatory compliance. *Administration & Society*, 40(7), 741–769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399708323096>.

- Lenart, S., McGraw, & K. M. (1989). America watches *Amerika*: Television docudrama and political attitudes. *Journal of Politics*, 51, 697-712. <https://doi-org.libproxy.wakehealth.edu/10.2307/2131502>.
- Levine, T. R., Serota, K. B., Shulman, H. C. (2010). The impact of lie to me on viewers' actual ability to detect deception. *Communication Research*, 37, 847-856. <https://doi-org.go.libproxy.wakehealth.edu/10.1177/0093650210362686>
- Likhacheva, A., Makarov, I. & Makarova, E. (2015). Post-Soviet Russian identity and its influence on European-Russian relations. *European Journal of Futures Research*, 3(4) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40309-015-0062-0>
- Marsh E.J., & Fazio L.K. (2006). Learning errors from fiction: Difficulties in reducing reliance on fictional stories. *Memory & Cognition*, 34, 1140–1149. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03193260>.
- Marsh, E. J., Meade, M. L., Roediger, H. L. (2003). Learning facts from fiction learning facts from fiction. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 49, 519-536. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-596X\(03\)00092-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-596X(03)00092-5).
- Marsh, R. (2007). The nature of Russia's identity: the theme of "Russia and the West" in post-Soviet cultures. *Nationalities papers*, 35(3), 555-578. doi 10.1080/00905990701368795
- McAdams, D. & Janis, L. (2004). Narrative identity and narrative therapy. In Angus, L. E., & McLeod, J. (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative and psychotherapy* (pp. 158-173). SAGE Publications, <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781412973496>
- Measuring perceptions of socio-political news by the media audience in the Republic of Moldova* (2015, November). Independent Journalism Centre. Retrieved from:

<http://media-azi.md/ro/publicatii/studiul-%E2%80%9Em%C4%83surarea-percep%C8%9Biei-consumatorilor-de-media-din-republica-moldova-asupra>.

Morales J. (2019). Symbolic categories and the shaping of identity. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 16(2), 252–278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRAM-06-2018-0040>.

Morgan M. & Shanahan J. (1997). Two Decades of Cultivation Research: An Appraisal and Meta-Analysis. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 20(1), 1- 45, DOI: [10.1080/23808985.1997.11678937](https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1997.11678937)

Mulligan, K., & Habel, P. (2011). An experimental test of the effects of fictional framing on attitudes. *Social Science Quarterly*, 92, 79-99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2011.00758.x>.

Mulligan, K., & Habel, P. (2012). The implications of fictional media for political beliefs. *American Politics Research*, 41(1), 122–146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X12453758><https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X12453758>.

Mutz, D. C., & Nir, L. (2010). Not necessarily the news: Does fictional television influence real-world policy preferences? *Mass Communication and Society*, 13, 196-217. <https://doi-org.go.libproxy.wakehealth.edu/10.1080/15205430902813856>.

NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2017, July). *The Moldovan information environment, hostile narratives, and their ramifications*. Riga, second edition. <https://stratcomcoe.org/moldovan-information-environment-hostile-narratives-and-other-ramifications>.

- Necsutu M. (2020, October 5). *How Russia's soft media power is battling for Moldovan minds*. <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/05/how-russia-s-soft-media-power-is-battling-for-moldovan-minds>.
- Nelson, T., Clawson, R., & Oxley, Z. (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *The American Political Science Review*, 91(3), 567-583.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2952075>.
- Neuman, W.L. (2007). *The basics of social research: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. (second Ed.). Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Nielsen Data Analysis in Moldova. <https://www.nielsentam.tv/where2/moldova.asp>.
- Pascoe, G. J. (2015). A qualitative textual and comparative analysis of the representation of masculinity in the action and romantic comedy genres. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 5(3)  
<https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcmt/2513>
- Potter J.W. (2014). A critical analysis of cultivation theory. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1015–1036, <https://doi-org.go.libproxy.wakehealth.edu/10.1111/jcom.12128>.
- Quick, B. (2009). The effects of viewing *Grey's Anatomy* on perceptions of doctors and patient satisfaction. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53, 38-55.  
doi:10.1080/08838150802643563.
- Richards W. (2021, March 20). Investigation into Russia's Eurovision entry finds no "illegal statements" New Musical Express. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.nme.com/news/music/russias-2021-eurovision-entry-to-be-investigated-for-illegal-statements-2904048>

- Romer, D., Jamieson, P., Bleakley, A. & Jamieson, K.H. (2014). Cultivation Theory. In *The handbook of media and mass communication theory*, 115–136.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591178.ch7>.
- Romer, D., Jamieson, K. H., & Aday, S. (2003). Television news and the cultivation of fear of crime. *Journal of Communication*, 53, 88-104. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2003.tb03007.x.
- Rudman, D. (2008). Shaping knowledge regarding occupation: Examining the cultural underpinnings of the evolving concept of occupational identity. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 55(3), 153–162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1630.2007.00715.x>.
- Segrin, C., & Nabi, R. L. (2002). Does television viewing cultivate unrealistic expectations about marriage? *Journal of Communication*, 52, 247-263.  
doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2002.tb02543.x.
- Semenenko I. (2015). Ethnicities, nationalism and the politics of identity: shaping the nation in Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 67(2), 306–326.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.1002681>.
- Signorielli, N., & Morgan, M. (2001). Television and the family: the cultivation perspective. In Bryant, J. and Bryant, A. J. (Eds.), *Television and the American family*, 2, 333-351. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Shimp, T., & Sharma, S. (1987). Consumer ethnocentrism: construction and validation of the CETSCALE. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 24(3), 280-289. doi:10.2307/3151638.

- Shrum, L., Wyer, Jr., R., & O'Guinn, T. (1998). The Effects of Television Consumption on Social Perceptions: The Use of Priming Procedures to Investigate Psychological Processes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 447-458. doi:10.1086/209520
- Smith, P., & Phillips, T. (2006). Collective belonging and mass media consumption: Unraveling how technological medium and cultural genre shape the national imaginings of Australians. *The Sociological Review*, 54(4), 818-846.
- Smithson M., Sopena A., & Platow M. J. (2015). When is group membership zero-sum? Effects of ethnicity, threat, and social identity on dual national identity. *PLoS One*, 10(6) doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0130539>.
- Somers, M. R. (1994). The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach. *Theory and Society*, 23(5): 605-649. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF00992905>.
- Spiro, M. E. (1987). Religious systems as culturally constituted defense mechanisms. In *Culture and human nature: Theoretical papers of Melford E. Spiro*, edited by B. Kilborne and L. Langness (pp. 145-160). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tajfel, H. (1982). Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33(1), p. 1–39. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.33.020182.000245>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of inter-group conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of inter-group relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

- Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 454–463. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167294205002>
- Turner, J. C. (1975). Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 5, 5–34.
- Van den Bulck, J. (2003). Is the mainstreaming effect of cultivation an artifact of regression to the mean? *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47(2), 289-295. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4702\_8.
- Van den Bulck, J. (2002) The impact of television fiction on public expectations of survival following in hospital cardiopulmonary resuscitation by medical professionals. *European Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 9(4), 325-329.
- Veen R. (2021, April). Manizha’s “Russian Woman” lyrics recount the history of Russian women overcoming hardship, gender stereotypes and war. Retrieved from: <https://wiwibloggs.com/2021/04/02/lyrics-russian-woman-manizha-russian-woman-russia-eurovision-2021/263778/>
- Veenstra, G. (2011). Race, gender, class, and sexual orientation: intersecting axes of inequality and self-rated health in Canada. *International Journal of Equity Health* 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1475-9276-10-3>
- Waiguny, M. K., J., Nelson, M. R., & Terlutter, R. (2014). The relationship of persuasion knowledge, identification of commercial intent and persuasion outcomes in advergames--the role of media context and presence: Journal of consumer policy. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 37(2), 257-277. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.go.libproxy.wakehealth.edu/10.1007/s10603-013-9227-z>.

Waisbord, S. (1998). When the cart of media is before the horse of identity: A critique of technology-centered views on globalization. *Communication Research*, 25(4), 377-398.

Wang, H. (2017). Media exposure and national identity formation among college youth in postcolonial Macau. *Issues and Studies*, 53(4), 1-24.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org.go.libproxy.wakehealth.edu/10.1142/S10132.51117500096>

Worden, E. A. (2013) Life, Love, and Hegemony on Daytime TV: A Critical Analysis of Three Popular Soap Operas. Dissertations. Retrieved from:

<https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/375>

## **Appendix 1: National Identity Scale**

### **National identity scale (NATID), Keillor and Hult, 1999.**

#### ***National Heritage***

1. Important people from the country's past are admired by people today
2. One of the USA's strengths is that it emphasizes events of historical importance
3. The US has a strong historical heritage

#### ***Cultural Homogeneity***

1. An American possesses certain cultural attributes that other people do not possess
2. Americans in general feel that they come from a common historical background
3. Americans are proud of their nationality
4. People frequently engage in activities that identify them as American

#### ***Belief System***

1. A specific religious philosophy is what makes a person uniquely American
2. It is impossible for an individual to be truly American without taking part in some form of religious activity
3. Religious education is essential to preserve the cohesiveness of the American society
4. A specific religious philosophy is not an important part of being American
5. A true American would never reject their religious beliefs

#### ***Consumer Ethnocentrism***

1. We should purchase products manufactured in the US instead of letting other countries get rich off us
2. It is always best to purchase American products
3. Americans should not buy foreign products because it hurts American business and causes unemployment
4. It may cost me in the long run but I prefer to support American products
5. Only those products that are unavailable in the US should be imported

## Appendix 2: The Data Sample

The most viewed entertainment media in Republic of Moldova in 2019 (Nielsen, 2019)

| Unit of analysis | Channel     | Description\Target         | English translation           | AMR Total | AMR % | Country of production | Year of production |
|------------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Film 1           | RTR Moldova | Право последней ночи х/ф   | The right for the last night  | 231,301   | 7.61% | Russia                | 2016               |
| Film 2           | RTR Moldova | Провинциальная Мадонна х/ф | Madonna from the countryside  | 218,471   | 7.18% | Russia                | 2017               |
| Film 3           | RTR Moldova | Кузнец моего счастья х/ф   | The architect of my happiness | 210,632   | 6.93% | Russia                | 2016               |
| Film 4           | RTR Moldova | Анютины глазки т/с         | Anna's eyes                   | 210,519   | 6.92% | Russia                | 2019               |
| Film 5           | RTR Moldova | Неотправленное письмо х/ф  | Unsent letter                 | 197,741   | 6.50% | Ukraine               | 2018               |
| Film 6           | RTR Moldova | Гордиев узел х/ф           | Gordian knot                  | 195,536   | 6.43% | Ukraine               | 2014               |
| Film 7           | RTR Moldova | Сухарь х/ф                 | Dryasdust                     | 194,669   | 6.40% | Russia                | 2018               |
| Film 8           | RTR Moldova | Ненавижу х/ф               | I hate you                    | 189,760   | 6.24% | Russia                | 2016               |
| Film 9           | RTR Moldova | Весомое чувство х/ф        | Weighty feeling               | 186,783   | 6.14% | Russia                | 2013               |
| Film 10          | RTR Moldova | Другой берег х/ф           | The other bank                | 180,124   | 5.92% | Russia                | 2014               |

## Curriculum Vitae

### EDUCATION

**Wake Forest University** **Winston-Salem, NC, USA**  
**MA in Communication (GPA 3.8)** **August 2019 – August 2021**

- Coursework: Organization Communication, Rhetorical Criticism, Media Effects Theories, Social Psychology, International Communication, Digital Storytelling and Public Advocacy, Communication and Technology, Communication and Terrorism, Social Psychology, Research Methods, Persuasion.

**ADA University/ Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy** **Baku, Azerbaijan**  
**Master of Public Policy (GPA 3.52)** **September 2013 – May 2015**

- Coursework: Public Law, Policy Analysis, Finance and Budgeting, Economics, Statistics for Decision Making, Public Management, EU Law, Security Studies, International Political Economy, Spanish language.

**State University of Moldova** **Chisinau, Moldova**  
**BA in Public Administration** **September 2007 – June 2011**

- Specialization: Public Administration

**University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire** **Eau Claire, WI, USA**  
**Undergraduate Exchange Program** **September 2008 – May 2009**

- Coursework: World Politics, Political Parties and Elections, Spanish language, International Conflicts, Cultural Anthropology, International Relations Theory.

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Media Psychology Journal**  
**Editorial Assistant** **September 2020 – May 2021**

- Assist with technical review of academic article submissions
- Manage the journal's social media account

**Wake Forest University** **Winston Salem, NC, USA**  
**Teaching Assistant** **September 2019 – May 2020**

- Teach seminars for Public Speaking class, COM 101

**The U.S. Embassy to Moldova** **Chisinau, Moldova**  
**Media and Grants Assistant** **September 2016 – August 2019**

- Monitor print and broadcast media; write reports on political developments.
- Consult on media outreach.
- Draft, edit, translate documents, such as press releases, reports, statements etc.

- Manage Media Grants Program: draft notices and new initiatives, assist with technical review of grant process, monitor active grants, conduct on-site program monitoring, maintain professional contact with civil society representatives.

**University Foundation Centre  
Teacher (part-time)**

**Baku, Azerbaijan  
May 2015 – May 2016**

- Teach Study Skills, Sociology, UK Governance, and Academic Writing.

**ALEVEL Education Centre  
Education and Development Specialist**

**Baku, Azerbaijan  
October 2013 – May 2016**

- Consult clients on education opportunities and application process.
- Conduct recruitment of personnel, deliver training and development programs.
- Develop strategies for product promotion

**AIESEC in Azerbaijan  
Head of the organization**

**Baku, Azerbaijan  
July 2012 – July 2013**

- Lead an NGO with over 200 active members

**Delegation of European Union to Azerbaijan  
Trainee**

**Baku, Azerbaijan  
July – December 2014**

- Political Section work: Human rights monitoring, political headlines updates, NATO – Azerbaijan relations, attending court trials.
- Operations Section work: Policy Report on Energy Efficiency in Azerbaijan

---

## **LEADERSHIP & ACTIVITIES**

**International Youth Conference on UN MDGs**  
Mentor and speaker

**Bakuriani, Georgia  
March 2015**

**Amnesty International in Eau Claire**  
Event Organizer

**Eau Claire, WI, USA  
December 2008 – April 2009**

**Model United Nations Club**  
Member

**Eau Claire, WI, USA  
November 2008 – April 2009**

---

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Language skills:** Romanian (*native*), Russian (*native*), English (*fluent*), Spanish (*intermediate proficiency*), French (*Basic proficiency*).

**International familiarity:** professional and academic experiences in the USA, Moldova, the UK, Hungary, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Travelled to over 26 countries.