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THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLE OF CIVIL SERVANT IMAGE FORMATION IN THE MODERN INFORMATION AGE

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Abstract
This article explores the socio-psychological aspects of the concept of civil servant image, its essence, and the factors governing its formation. The role of the image concept within the system of various social sciences and the methodological approaches to its study are analyzed. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of a civil servant's image are clarified, and their interconnections are revealed. Contemporary strategies for developing and managing the image of civil servants are discussed. Based on the research findings, practical proposals aimed at enhancing the social prestige of public service have been developed.

Keywords: Civil servant, image, social representations, cognitive component, emotional component, behavioral component, mediatization, social construction, professional image, socio-psychological factors.

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Introduction

In contemporary society, the image of civil servants has acquired considerable significance, as it plays a pivotal role in determining the level of public trust in state authorities, the prospects for cooperation with citizens, and the overall effectiveness of public administration. The image of a civil servant encompasses not merely external appearance, but an entire complex socio-psychological phenomenon. For this reason, a comprehensive and multifaceted scholarly investigation of this subject represents an urgent and pressing task.

The concept of image is currently recognized as an important instrument not only for understanding social processes, but also for analyzing economic, political, and cultural phenomena. In particular, in recent years the question of forming and refining the professional image of civil servants has assumed strategic importance. Within the framework of civil service reform, the issues of image formation and management are attracting increasing scholarly attention. This situation, in turn, clearly demonstrates the necessity of conducting a thorough and comprehensive scientific investigation of the theoretical-conceptual aspects of the image concept as well as the directions for its practical implementation.

Likewise, the study of image from various perspectives, the development of methods for its improvement, and the introduction of those methods into practice remain among the most important tasks of contemporary scholarship.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Uzbek National Encyclopaedia defines the word «image» (Eng.-*image*, Latin *imago* — symbol, appearance) as a representation of a «person, phenomenon, or object» [1]. This encyclopaedic definition concisely and precisely captures the essence of the concept of image.

In studying the scholarly-theoretical foundations of the image concept, one may draw upon the

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research of numerous specialists and scientists. In the course of a thorough theoretical analysis of the foundations of image, the fundamental work of Kenneth Boulding, published in 1956 under the title *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society*, holds particular significance and methodological value. In his study, Boulding defines image as a «subjective model of knowledge», considering this concept to be a fundamental element of the process by which human beings perceive and comprehend reality [3]. According to the scholar, every individual perceives the surrounding world not directly, but through an individual image. In this way, it becomes possible to explain how a person perceives, evaluates, and relates to the surrounding environment through the medium of image. According to Boulding's theory, image not only reflects reality but also determines the direction of human behavior.

The prominent representative of the socio-cognitive psychology tradition, Serge Moscovici, developed his celebrated theory of «social representations», which serves as an important theoretical foundation for understanding the image of civil servants. According to this conceptual approach, social representations concerning civil servants are formed collectively within society and subsequently consolidated in individual consciousness [8].

The phenomenon of image, which in the past — particularly in the views of Uzbek scholars — manifested primarily in moral-ethical dimensions as prestige and reputation, has today attracted the attention of numerous representatives of the social sciences. In many studies, special attention has been devoted to the socio-psychological aspects of civil servants' image. According to general conclusions, the image of a civil servant is formed through the correct comprehension and fulfillment of social roles.

The socio-dramaturgical approach of the American sociologist Erving Goffman serves as an important methodological foundation for understanding image, widely disseminated through his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman analyzed human social behavior on the basis of a theatrical metaphor, interpreting image as a «strategy of self-presentation» [2].

Contemporary sociological and socio-psychological studies examine civil servant image as a «social construction». As emphasized in Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, social reality — including the image of a civil servant — is not an objectively existing phenomenon, but is constructed, formed, and consolidated through the process of mutual social interaction within society [6].

In the field of mass communications and journalism, the image of civil servants is analyzed in detail from the perspectives of media content, public relations (PR), and strategic communication. These disciplines study the image of civil servants not only theoretically but also practically, developing technologies for its formation and management. From the standpoint of contemporary communication studies, the image of civil servants is interpreted as a «symbolic reality» formed, transmitted, and preserved by the mass media [9].

Based on the «agenda-setting theory» developed and elaborated by McCombs and Shaw, the role and influence of mass media in the formation of civil servants' image are studied [5]. The majority of citizens receive information about civil servants precisely through the mass media. The mass media not only report on the activities of civil servants but also present them within a particular context and with specific connotations, thereby shaping their image in the public consciousness.

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Muhammadjonova L.A., in her work *The Ethics and Image of a Civil Servant*, identifies the principal constituent components of a civil servant's image [7]. According to Muhammadjonova L.A., the image of a civil servant does not emerge in isolation; rather, it is the product of several interlocking forces that operate simultaneously within society. Her work identifies five key determinants that govern how this image takes shape in the public mind.

The first of these is **historically embedded stereotypes and social representations**. Long before any individual civil servant steps into office, society already carries a body of settled expectations about what public officials look like, how they behave, and what motivations drive them. These pre-existing perceptions are not accidental — they have been accumulated and reinforced over generations, drawing on the particular historical circumstances, cultural inheritance, and collective memory of a given society. As such, they function as a kind of cognitive background against which every new encounter with a civil servant is interpreted.

Second, **the portrayal of civil servants in mass media** exerts a formative influence on how the public comes to perceive them. Whether through the daily press, television broadcasts, radio programmes, or online platforms, the information that reaches citizens is never merely neutral reporting. What is selected for coverage, the framing and tone adopted, the degree of critical scrutiny applied to official conduct — all of these editorial choices accumulate over time into a composite image that can be either favorable or deeply damaging. Citizens who have little direct contact with public administration rely almost entirely on this mediated picture.

Third, **the personal conduct and professional performance of civil servants themselves** constitute perhaps the most direct source of image formation. The way an official speaks to members of the public, the degree of integrity they display in their work, their respect for procedural norms and ethical commitments, and even their physical bearing and manner of dress — each of these contributes to the impression they leave behind. In this sense, image is not something that can be wholly managed from the outside; it is, to a significant extent, something that civil servants build or erode through their day-to-day behavior.

Fourth, the **prevailing system of values and the level of political culture in a given society** shape the standards against which civil servants are judged. A society with strong civic traditions, a well-developed sense of political rights, and a robust public ethic will tend to hold its officials to a higher standard of accountability. Conversely, where political culture remains underdeveloped, the threshold for what is considered acceptable conduct may be considerably lower. The moral and ideological landscape of a society, in other words, sets the terms on which civil servant image is evaluated.

Fifth, and closely related to the foregoing, is the **overall standing and perceived legitimacy of state institutions**. No civil servant operates in a vacuum; they are always seen as a representative of a broader institutional apparatus. Where that apparatus commands respect and trust, individual servants tend to benefit from a measure of reflected prestige. Where state institutions are viewed with suspicion or contempt, even capable and conscientious officials may find it difficult to cultivate a positive public image. The institutional context, in this way, either supports or undermines individual image-building efforts [7].

F. Ravshanov, in his scholarly work, writes the following concerning the personal qualities and moral character of a civil servant: «A civil servant must possess a number of qualities, including legal and political culture, sufficient professional competence to perform one's duties, the ability

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to carry out one's actions precisely and impeccably, expertise in one's field, a keen sense of national mentality and harmony with national traditions, and knowledge of matters related to the objects of governance» [4]. This quotation illustrates that the image of a civil servant demands harmony between the inner and the outer. A civil servant must demonstrate not merely an appropriate external appearance, but also the richness of one's inner world and alignment with spiritual values.

Research conducted in the field of social psychology clearly identifies three principal structural components of civil servants' image — the cognitive (epistemic), emotional (affective), and behavioral (conative) components. The cognitive component encompasses information and knowledge about a civil servant, the emotional component represents the affective attitude toward the servant, while the behavioral component reflects individuals' propensity toward certain actions in relation to that servant.

Within the discipline of political science, the image of civil servants is studied in the broad context of political processes and events, in close connection with the public administration system and the activities of political institutions. Within this framework, the image of a civil servant is regarded as a particular manifestation of political image and is analyzed in organic connection with political culture, the system of political values, and political ideology.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As a result of investigating the socio-psychological aspects of civil servant image formation, the following important conclusions may be drawn.

First, the image of a civil servant constitutes a complex, multifaceted socio-psychological phenomenon in whose formation objective and subjective factors exert a combined influence. These factors may be divided into two principal groups: internal (the civil servant's personal characteristics, professional qualities, communicative competencies, and moral-spiritual values) and external (stereotypes formed in society regarding public service, the characteristics of the media environment, political-legal culture, and the level of trust in state institutions).

The image of a civil servant encompasses all spheres of the civil servant's activity. This is not merely external appearance, but an integral system that includes cognitive, professional, emotional, communicative, and ethical components. This indicates that image-formation strategies also require a systemic and comprehensive approach.

Social representations and cognitive schemas play a significant role in the formation of civil servant image. These socio-psychological mechanisms shape perceptions of civil servants and attitudes toward them in the human mind. Cognitive schemas are mental structures present in the human mind for perceiving and comprehending reality; they facilitate the processes of receiving, classifying, and evaluating information. Cognitive schemas pertaining to civil servant image enable citizens to rapidly comprehend and assess the behavior of civil servants.

Second, the image of civil servants manifests as a dynamic process that takes shape in the social consciousness through specific stages.

These stages unfold in accordance with socio-psychological laws and are of great significance in the formation of civil servant image. Among them, the stages of cognitive processing and emotional evaluation play a particularly distinctive role, as it is precisely at these points that the stable components of image are formed.

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Third, the effectiveness of a civil servant's image depends to a considerable extent on its degree of authenticity — that is, its correspondence with real qualities and competencies. Two aspects must be emphasized here: (1) image must be grounded in real characteristics, otherwise it cannot be sustainable; (2) image must be strategically managed and developed, for even the most genuinely positive personal qualities do not of themselves automatically translate into an effective image.

The authenticity of a civil servant's image requires harmony between one's inner world and external appearance. Sincere dedication to spiritual values, ethical principles, and professional standards constitutes the primary condition for forming a credible and influential image for a civil servant.

Fourth, in the context of the contemporary media environment, civil servant image is increasingly subject to the process of mediatization. Mediatization is the process by which the laws and logic of media increasingly permeate and exert profound influence upon the activities of other social institutions in modern society. As a consequence of this process, civil servants are compelled to continuously take into account the laws of contemporary media, media requirements, and media logic in developing and managing their image, and to align their activities with these demands.

Under conditions of mediatization, the image of civil servants is to a large extent shaped and disseminated by the mass media. In this context, image-creation processes are carried out through mechanisms of framing and social construction. Framing is the process of presenting events within a particular context and a defined interpretive framework; it is carried out through the mass media and engenders certain attitudes toward civil servants in society.

Fifth, in the socio-psychological study of civil servant image, the identification of three principal structural components of image — the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components — holds important methodological significance. These components are interrelated and mutually complementary, collectively constituting civil servant image as an integral system.

The **cognitive component** encompasses knowledge, information, and representations about the civil servant. This component, alongside factual information, also includes representations of the civil servant's competence, experience, and professional qualities. The cognitive component forms the rational-logical foundation of image.

The **emotional component** reflects the affective attitude toward the civil servant — that is, feelings such as sympathy, antipathy, respect, trust, or distrust. This component is the most influential and variable part of image, and it shapes the general emotional background of citizens' attitudes toward the civil servant.

The **behavioral component** indicates the degree of readiness and propensity toward certain actions in relation to the civil servant. This component reflects the practical outcome of image and manifests in the practical relations between civil servants and citizens.

Sixth, in the context of contemporary digital society, new aspects and developmental tendencies in civil servant image are being observed. The development of digital technologies and social networks opens up new opportunities for the formation and management of civil servant image, while simultaneously giving rise to new risks.

Digital communication channels (official websites, social networks, messaging applications, mobile apps) provide civil servants with the opportunity to form their image directly and to

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communicate with their audience in an unmediated manner. This creates a possibility of exerting considerably greater influence over the image of civil servants compared to images formed through traditional mass media.

At the same time, another important aspect of image formation in the digital environment is the increasing level of transparency and observability. This situation demands from civil servants an even higher degree of professionalism, adherence to ethical principles, and the consistency of all their actions.

Seventh, the importance of the socio-psychological approach in developing practical strategies for the formation and management of civil servant image is growing. These strategies must be created with due consideration of the characteristics of image components, their interaction, and the socio-psychological laws governing image formation.

CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of investigating the socio-psychological aspects of the concept of civil servant image, the following conclusions may be drawn:

The image of a civil servant is a complex, multifaceted socio-psychological phenomenon in whose formation internal (personal) and external (social) factors exert a combined influence. Identifying the interrelationship of these factors and the mechanisms of their influence enables a systemic understanding and effective management of image.

The image of a civil servant constitutes an integral system comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that develop in interconnection with one another. Each of these components reflects a specific aspect of image and fulfills a defined function. For the comprehensive development of image, it is necessary to refine all components in a proportionate and balanced manner.

A significant characteristic of civil servant image formation in contemporary society is the influence of the mediatization process. This process requires civil servants to thoroughly understand the laws of media, media requirements, and media logic, and to adapt to them. For this reason, taking into account the characteristics of the media environment is of vital importance in image-management strategies.

The development of digital technologies and social networks opens up new opportunities for the formation and management of civil servant image, but simultaneously gives rise to new demands and risks. In these circumstances, developing the digital communication skills of civil servants and elaborating strategies for digital image management have become pressing concerns.

The effectiveness of a civil servant's image depends to a considerable extent on its authenticity — that is, its correspondence with real qualities and competencies. An artificial and manufactured image cannot yield long-term results and exerts a negative effect on trust in state institutions. For this reason, image strategies must be grounded in the development of genuine competencies and the cultivation of moral-ethical qualities.

The findings of this study point toward a number of concrete directions for improving how the image of civil servants is understood, cultivated, and sustained within the public service system. To begin with, professional development programmes for civil servants should be broadened in scope. Technical and administrative competencies alone are no longer sufficient; any meaningful investment in civil servant capacity must equally address socio-psychological awareness and

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communicative skill. The way an official listen, responds, and engages with the public is as consequential as their command of regulatory procedure, and training systems should reflect this reality.

Flowing naturally from this is the need for targeted instruction specifically focused on image formation and management. Civil servants rarely receive formal preparation for the reputational dimensions of their role. Dedicated courses and workshops — designed not as abstract theory but as applied, practice-oriented learning — would equip officials with the tools to understand how their image is perceived and how it can be developed intentionally and ethically.

Media literacy deserves particular attention as a standalone priority. The contemporary information environment — shaped by rolling news cycles, social media dynamics, and the rapid spread of both accurate and misleading content — places civil servants in a position they are often ill-prepared for. Building their capacity to engage confidently and responsibly with both traditional outlets and digital platforms is no longer optional; it is a professional necessity.

Beyond individual development, institutional mechanisms are equally important. A structured system for monitoring and assessing how civil servants are perceived by the public would provide decision-makers with reliable, evidence-based information. Regular surveys, focus group discussions, and systematic analysis of media content would together offer a far more nuanced picture than anecdotal impressions allow, and would enable timely, targeted responses where image deficits are identified.

At the policy level, the public service system would benefit from an explicitly formulated image strategy — one that sets out its conceptual premises, defines measurable objectives, and specifies the mechanisms through which those objectives are to be pursued. Without such a framework, image-related efforts are likely to remain fragmented and reactive rather than coherent and proactive.

Stronger, more deliberate engagement with mass media and professional communication agencies is also warranted. Civil servants and the institutions they represent do not exist in a media vacuum; the question is not whether they will be covered, but whether they will have any meaningful influence over how. Building sustained, professional relationships with journalists and PR practitioners — grounded in transparency rather than spin — is a far more durable strategy than ad hoc damage control.

The growing centrality of social media in public life calls for a corresponding regulatory and normative response. Civil servants need clear, well-reasoned guidance on how to conduct themselves across digital platforms — guidance that is neither so restrictive as to silence legitimate communication nor so permissive as to invite reputational risk. The development of such frameworks requires careful thought and practical expertise.

The moral and ethical dimensions of civil servant image should not be subordinated to communicative technique. Educational programmes rooted in national values and traditions offer a way of grounding image development in something more durable than strategic calculation — namely, a genuine internalization of the civic and ethical responsibilities that public service entails.

Within public institutions themselves, the creation of dedicated advisory roles or units focused on image and communication would help ensure that these concerns receive sustained professional attention rather than being absorbed into already overstretched administrative

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functions. A specialist in this domain brings a different kind of expertise to an organization — one that complements rather than duplicates existing capabilities.

Finally, the wealth of experience accumulated in other countries in this field should be drawn upon more systematically. Foreign approaches to civil servant image formation, wherever they have demonstrated genuine effectiveness, offer valuable lessons — provided they are not transplanted uncritically, but adapted with sensitivity to the social, cultural, and institutional context in which they are to be applied.

The conclusions and proposals set forth above serve the cause of the systemic socio-psychological development and effective management of civil servants' image. This, in turn, has a positive effect on enhancing the effectiveness of the public service system, consolidating public trust in state institutions, and promoting the development of civil society.

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