

## “BRANDING” OF THE WORLD: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF HUMAN PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD

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### Summary

A specific feature of the modern world is the capitalization of not only ideas, objects, social practices and institutions, but of the world itself. Branding is a special process, allowing the construction of an acceptable picture of reality that is independent of the practices of care and political domination. It initially focuses on a desired and expected target. The main topic of the present research is the phenomenon of the “Big Bang” in the cultural and social field. The analysis of transformation of scientific theory into a metaphor of sociocultural reality enables us to trace the mechanism of symbolic creation in modern society. Its study contributes to revealing the peculiarities in redistribution of symbolic capital as well as benefits and privileges that a «world-brand» has in comparison with “world-pictures”, “world views” and other forms of symbolic capital. The “world-brand” as a result of symbolic creation in the cultures of post-industrial civilization can be represented in the explicit parameters.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural reality, “Big Bang”, valorization, mediator, cultural foundationalism.

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### 1. Introduction

The socio-cultural functions of a brand in the contemporary culture have become the subject of a detailed study by S. Shusharin. Brand review in the strategies of economic order is presented in the works of P. Temporal, V. Percy, C. Roberts, K. Drobo. The formation of branding mythology in the society of global consumption was the subject of comprehensive reflection by S. Tikhonov. In the aspects of local identity and innovative brand identity the problem is presented in the works of A. Musiezdov and D. Ratushinskaya. The range of research interest testifies to the relevance of the problem. In turn, the description of the phenomenon of branding of the world is a promising direction for the study of global strategies of socio-cultural dynamics.

While the industrial capitalism associated the world with a “vague object of desire” for human personal fulfillment, the post-industrial societies see the world as a vast space of global interactions. It is therefore not surprising that a scientific theory explaining the origin of the universe as a result of spontaneous interconnections at the cosmic level has gained such a wide recognition, having entered the public (popular) culture.

The big bang theory has turned the world into a “brand” that reveals to human consciousness the reality of one's needs, and perhaps the most fundamental of them: the human need for immortality. If in industrial civilization one's personal fulfillment is the highest human need (it would be enough to recall Maslow's pyramid of needs), then in post-industrial civilization one has an exceptional and, perhaps, a dangerous ability to construct needs.

## 2. The transformation of a theory from a scientific object to a socio-cultural

The object of the present research is based on the idea that the process of needs construction corresponds not only to psychoanalysis, phenomenology and existentialism, but also to the mechanisms of economic marketing.

The socio-philosophical methodology of this study supposing that Humanity has always had many doctrines about the origins of the world. And their purpose partly lies in answering the question “How did the world come into being?”, to determine where humans fit into the world and the global perspective on humanity's existence. Eschatological theories of Abrahamic religions known as creationism, the physical theory of the universe origin known as the Big Bang Theory, theories of evolution, as well as considerable metaphysical and post metaphysical reflection, of which Heidegger's «going back to origins» is the most popular, have a great influence in the modern world.

The theory of the Big Bang has the status of a scientific explanation of the origin of the universe and the prospects of humanity in the world. Its history begins in 1225, when the monk Robert Grosseteste, in his Latin manuscript “De Luce”, put forward the idea of the origin of the universe as a result of such physical phenomena as explosion and crystallization [9]. The formation of the theory continues today. And the British scientist Stephen Hawking has a special place in this process. His name is associated not only with the development of scientific justification of the physical explanation of the universe, but also with the fact that scientific theory was transformed into the socio-cultural phenomenon of the “Big Bang”, in which the universe, presented as a space of “everything”, turns into an object of global consumption. So, the valorization of the “Big Bang” theory in the cultural and social field and its transformation from a scientific concept into a «brand» is associated with Stephen Hawking.

The first stage in the transformation of a theory from a scientific object to a socio-cultural phenomenon is the social recognition. It came from Hawking's scientific merit and incredible willpower, since throughout his scientific career he suffered from an illness that limited his freedom of movement, and later, his ability to communicate and work. Even if Hawking did not get over the disease, his scientific achievements are evidence that it has not broken him.

## 3. Discussion

The scientist's achievements have been recognized as a contribution to the general theory of relativity, the development of black hole theory and the theory of space-time. According to the information provided by Scopus, Stephen Hawking represents the University of Cambridge (Cambridge, United Kingdom) in the world scientific community. The period of publication activity covers 1965-2014. Total number of papers is 136, total number of citations is 23,854 in 15,214 publications, h-index: 65, co-author of 39 publications. Sphere of scientific interests: physics, astronomy, mathematics. According to WorldCat' Identities Hawking is the author of 863 works, presented in 3.076 publications in 36 languages with a circulation of 93.106 copies.

Honoring the scientific work of Stephen Hawking. In 1974 he was elected a member of the Royal Society of London. He has received more than 20 prizes and awards over the years, including the Albert Einstein Medal (1979), Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1982), the Princess of Asturias Award (1989), the Chevaliers of Honor (1989), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2009) and others. In honor of the scientist, the asteroid “7672” (discovery was registered on October 26, 1995 at the Cletus Observatory) was named after Hawking (*Gideroni, 2004*). Information about S. Hawking is available on the Internet



at the official website. Wikipedia has a biographical article “Stephen Hawking” written in 93 languages, including two with “gold stars” in Macedonian and Vietnamese and one with “silver star” in Chinese. There are also articles in English and Chinese about Stephen Hawking's image in popular culture, “Stephen Hawking in popular culture” (Wikipedia: Stephen Hawking in popular culture). The IBDM online film database “Hawking” has pages “Stephen Hawking (Actor. Writer)” and «Stephen Hawking (Character)”.

There is no doubt that all these facts testify to the versatility (“scientist”, “actor”, “writer”, “character”), worldwide recognition of the British scientist and global interest in his personality. Stephen Hawking is not just a man of many talents, but a symbol-person of many facets. The fact of social recognition means not only recognition of the scientist's achievements and merits, but also indicates the vector of symbolic creation. From a scientist solving problems of physics and astronomy, to the creation of an image of a person unraveling the mystery of the origin of the universe.

It is the vector of “approaching reality” determined not only by the demand for scientific discoveries in the modern world, but also by the elements that make up the myth of “Stephen Hawking”. The symbolic creation of this myth is determined by the ability to measure it. Perhaps in today's world, where numbers calculate celestial bodies, capitals/funds, and the speed of information transfer, where units of measurement become increasingly large, and applied simultaneously to micro-level objects, the notion of «numbers» becomes a myth. The myth arisen at the intersection of Hawking's real life and popularity is calculated and quantified by the demand for ideas through scientometric methods and originality by the circulation of works, as well as the artistic image by the number of viewers.

However, the social positions of the Stephen Hawking myth got a foothold in the sociocultural reality not only by the parameters of calculation, but also by the quality of the social position that the scientist defends. It includes social and political position, views on the problems of scientific evolution, philosophy and religion.

Hawking's socio-political position is expressed in his statements in support of the Palestinian people in the struggle for the creation of a nation-state, the referendum for independence in Scotland, and measures to combat global warming. In the summer of 2015, Hawking, together with E. Musk and S. Wozniak called for a ban on the creation of killing machines, but, as some commentators noted: such robots have already been created and are functioning successfully in the military sphere. He has also made public statements about the undesirability of contact with aliens, the dangers of artificial intelligence, and parallel worlds.

On the religious interpretation of the origin of the universe, he is less categorical. In a special interview for *The Guardian* on creationist theory, the most prominent contemporary British scholar stated that for anyone who fears the dark, religion is a means of self-assistance [9]. It is likely that rejection of the present and fear of the future is the source of metaphysical expectation and religious quest. And so, the position of the twenty-first century scholar is characterized by a critique of philosophy and a compromise with religion.

On the philosophical side, he notes the inability of philosophy to “keep up” with the progress of scientific-theoretical knowledge (Warman), to contribute to the future of humanity determined to find an answer to the question of the origin of life in the universe (8. McLeish). Thus, the «Stephen Hawking» myth is defined by the valorization of the cosmological theory presented by him in each of the segments of the cultural and social field, in science, philosophy, religion, as well as in public (popular) culture. Myth allows scientific theory to penetrate the level of everyday life. And, although the number of people who know the language of equations of fundamental physics is not a majority in the overall number of people, nevertheless, the



presence of «scientific language» at the level of everyday life allows to set a figure not only of a mediator, but also to include in his function the duties of «guarantor», responsible for relevance and significance of research, as well as obligations to «interpret» it. A peculiarity of S. Hawking's is that he is the author of scientific theories, their interpreter at the level of everyday life, and their popularizer in the cultural and social field.

The result of the consolidation of mediator functions is the creation of the “Big Bang” metaphor. The effectiveness of the «metaphor» in the cultural and social field is determined by the number of «responses» and «reactions» that it is able to produce. The “Big Bang” metaphor was used to produce a show that presented a sociocultural cross-section of contemporary youth, focusing viewers' attention on the “science and mundanity” contrast. It is about the sitcom of the same name, *The Big Bang Theory*. From 2007 to 2014, there were 8 seasons, 178 episodes, 18-24 minutes each with no commercial time. The effect of feasibility of the show is enhanced by its appeal to themes of everyday life, friendship, religion, and upbringing. The same effect is heightened by its appeal to the well-known *Battlestar Galactica*, *Star Wars*, and other artifacts of public (popular) culture. Each episode of the show reflects a certain touch of reality on the Vanity Map conceived and implemented by *The Big Bang Theory* director Chuck Lorry since September 28, 1999.

The very idea of reality mapping corresponds to two projects: Stephen Hawking's “Map of Theories” concept and the Google Earth program. Their distinctive feature is the creation of an “approximation topos” to adjust human beings to reality. Perhaps “approximation to reality” is a commercial proposition that the general public cannot refuse.

The formation of the privileged status of the consumer of reality is difficult to establish, since the «image of the world» represents the order of sociocultural reality itself, creating the illusion of direct, intuitive penetration into reality. Such a state of things can be defined as cultural fundamentalism. A sociocultural phenomenon called “fundamentalism” emerges in the context of North American Christian Protestantism in the early 1900s. It denotes confidence in the existence of unified principles and rules for the regulation of socio-cultural reality. A relevant example of cultural fundamentalism is creationism, which derives from the belief that the act of creating the world occurred in “six days” (*Gideroni, 2004*). The increase in the volume of terminological meaning of the term “fundamentalism” refers to the process of polarization in the cultural and social field. Therefore, the concept of “cultural fundamentalism” includes the meaning of “secular fundamentalism,” a movement aimed at protecting the values of secular culture in France and the United States.

The polemical significance is recorded in the phenomenon of “atheistic fundamentalism” which indicates a manifestation of disregard for the special role of Christianity in the symbolic formation of the European sociocultural world (*Archbishop of Wales, 2007*). Finally, the belief that the sustainable development of the global community can be ensured exclusively by market means is a characteristic feature of “market fundamentalism” (*Soros, 1999: 26*) In its turn, the appearance of the “world-brand” means the competition of fundamental images of reality in post-industrial civilization.

#### 4. Conclusions

The “world-brand” as a result of symbolic creation in the cultures of post-industrial civilization can be represented in the following parameters:

“Branding of the world” represents not only the symbolic creation of reality, which science, history and religion have traditionally been engaged in, but also the consumption of reality in the cultural and social field.

There is an obvious stratification of the holistic personality in the spheres of the cultural and social field in the sociocultural reality.

The correspondence of the creative potential of the individual and society. And it is neither institutional nor historical, its products, unlike the institutional elements of symbolic creation, involve direct consumption «here and now».

Apparently, it reflects the fact that modern natural science seeks to be more autonomous and claims a dominant position in the intellectual experience. Moreover, the possibility of capitalization of scientific ideas, knowledge, and technologies in the post-industrial world determines the fact that modern scientists are not disposed to share symbolic capital with philosophy, while religion has its own symbolic resources that under certain conditions can extend their expansion to the whole field of social intelligence. Overall, Hawking's social position demonstrates and convinces of the benefits of scientific understanding and rational responsibility to the future.

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