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MEDIA DISCOURSE IN THE DIGITAL ERA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF ITS FUNCTIONING

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Abstract

This article covers the study of the psychological mechanisms in their correlation with the functioning of media discourse in the modern society. The study focuses on the media discourse as a multifaceted, multifunctional and indispensable phenomenon in the individual and public consciousness. It is demonstrated that the design and functioning of a present-day media discourse occurs by taking into account the psychological mechanisms of human consciousness (the recipient and sender of a certain media message), which actively interacts with the media discourse space, in which information exchange actually happens. A person of the third millennium turns out to be an “embedded” representative of the new media world, and his cognitive, affective and behavioural properties of consciousness are closely connected with the existence of a new digital environment. It is this new media environment, which produces a lot of different media discourses every second that activates the action of such psychological mechanisms in the individual’s mind as goal-setting, psychological attitude and reflection. Finally, this research suggests that the functioning of a media discourse of any complexity in its correlation with the above-mentioned psychological mechanisms can be considered as one of the most powerful tools for influencing the individual and public consciousness of modern man and society.

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Keywords: Media discourse, human consciousness, psychological mechanism, reflection, psychological attitude, goal-setting.



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1. Introduction

The new media discourse of the third millennium is recognized to be an important source of communication between different people, organizations and countries at a present digital epoch. Nowadays media discourse is the main form of existence of the language of modern media, as well as a special version of the term “discourse”, defined as “speech action” (Van Dejk, 2009); “a form of using the language in real time (on-line), reflecting a certain type of human activity” (Uvarova, 2015, p.48); “a type of verbal communication involving a rational critical examination of values, norms, and rules of social life” (Habermas, 1985, p.8).

Web 2 platforms emerged in the first decade of the XXIst century and particular through social network sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Vkontakte have fostered users’ creative impulse and opened up new conduits of participation, not only horizontally, between social peers, but also vertically, between users and established institutional hierarchies, be they in the media or in the political, corporate or professional realm (Demata, Heaney, & Herring, 2018). Moreover, new media discourse space has been providing people from all socio-economic sectors with the opportunity to voice their opinions, by introducing the means to share one’s viewpoint with little effort and cost (Morgan, Cheong, & Bedingfield, 2018). We suggest, that the new media discourse space of the third millennium with its information resources is a multi-level phenomenon that dominates at all levels of society and thereby forming a new image of the human world, which allows an individual to navigate and act in modern living space. Thus, we may assume that the present-day media discourse which includes popular social networks, blogs, wikis, mobile phone apps and Youtube channels has turned into a new form of reality that reaches the man, incorporates into his consciousness, activates its psychological mechanisms and is able to make an impact on a person’s cognition, emotions and behaviour.

2. Problem Statement

Meanwhile, the problem of the actual new media discourse functioning is that its Internet-based nature with a great number of applications lead to the creation and exchange of user-generated contents (Valentini, Romenti, & Kruckeberg, 2016) which often turn into the hub of multiple, diverse and asynchronic relationships with different levels of social actors’ participation, their various behaviour patterns and intentions. Therefore, there is a need to investigate which specific mechanisms of the human consciousness explain how certain new media discourse communicative interactions can have an impact on people’s opinion and how these mechanisms may influence relational outcomes.

3. Research Questions

By taking into account the role of the new media discourse on the functioning of human consciousness, we would like to introduce the following two research questions.

3.1.RQ1. What are pragmatic features of the formation and functioning of the present-day media discourse?

Contemporary scientific works on discourse studies often rely on concepts of pragmatics which “identifies and examines language units in relation to a person or a group of people who use this language” (Akhmanova, 2016, p.344). Moreover, pragmatics is rarely seen as a separate area in the framework of discourse research. A pragmatic approach involves the analysis of speech utterances (both oral and written) as actions designed to have a definite effect on the audience. Thus, we suggest that this approach becomes especially relevant in the analysis of the new media discourse, whose main function is to influence the target audience. A tactical approach involves the analysis of speech statements as actions designed to provide a certain effect on the recipient. Besides, pragmatics studies what happens when people begin to use semantic and syntactic units in real communication situations and therefore, studying the pragmatic context should be taken into account as well. Normally, it includes both linguistic and extralinguistic components that accompany the communication situation, i.e.: social, ethnic, biological characteristics of the participants in the media discourse communication, their relationships, interests, views, ideological preferences etc.

When analyzing the formation and functioning of the new media discourse within the pragmatic framework it is also necessary to take into account the social, cultural, national characteristics of the media actors (the communicants); the conditions of their verbal communication; their goals and intentions and the possible interpretations of what was said by the addressee.

Thus, we may conclude that pragmatic features of the new media discourse are closely linked to the media participants’ consciousness. Human consciousness is shaped under the influence of a number of psychological mechanisms, for example, reflection, attitude and goal-setting. That is why, our second research question is dedicated to the problem of how the human consciousness interacts with the new media discourse environment and how its psychological mechanisms help the new media discourse function.

3.2.RQ2. What is the role of psychological mechanisms (reflection, attitude and goal-setting) in the functioning of the present-day media discourse?

For methodological substantiation of the concept of “psychological mechanism”, the researchers use Rubinsteyn’s (2019) perception of the “mechanism” which is the process of awareness of a person’s experience of his attitude to something very significant for him. In addition to this interpretation of the concept of “mechanism”, in our scientific study we will also consider it, on the one hand, as a process of influence, driven by the inclusion of verbal and non-verbal systems in order to establish communication for the transmission of information that is necessary for joint activities. On the other hand, the idea of the mechanism of interaction is revealed through the analysis of the psychological “contribution” of the participants of this interaction, “exchange of actions”, that is, through their mutual influence (Guslyakova & Guslyakova, 2019). The psychological mechanisms for presenting information in a media discourse space is, first of all, a hierarchical structure, which includes three basic mechanisms that influence an individual in the process of his interaction with a media discourse: the mechanisms of goal-setting, psychological attitude and reflection (Guslyakova, 2013).

The goal-setting mechanism involves the identification of several key goals and objectives of the media content necessary for presenting a media discourse to the communicants with their “correct” (directed) perception and subsequent actions.

The mechanism of psychological attitude is a given representation of information in a media discourse; highlighting a specific audience to which some knowledge or information will be addressed. It should be noted that the readers may also have a certain psychological attitude to particular media content or its senders.

When interacting with media discourse space and the perception of media content in the minds of the recipient, there is an understanding and analysis of the information received. In this case, we are talking about the process of reflection on a perceived piece of information by the individual’s consciousness. Therefore, correspondingly, the third important psychological mechanism of human consciousness - the mechanism of reflection - is involved.

The influence of these psychological mechanisms on information recipients in the course of their interaction with the media discourse space is the focus of our particular attention in this research.

4. Purpose of the Study

Thus, in this study, we introduce a novel approach for the analysis of the present-day new media discourse, its pragmatic nature and its effect on a person’s consciousness. We focus on analyzing the functioning of modern Russian and foreign media discourse in its interaction with the psychological mechanisms of the individual’s consciousness in the era of digitalization.

5. Research Methods

To understand how the psychological mechanisms function and influence the present-day new media discourse we propose a specific perspective that benefits from the richness of communication theory, advocating the study of language use in discourses (the study of language form, language meaning, and language in context) (Gee, 2014).

As a media discourse consists of the sequence of sentences, it is the ways in which sentences connect and relate to each other across time in speech or writing. While speaking or writing, we choose what words and phrases we will put into or package into sentences (ibid). Hereby, we conducted content and structural analyses and observed the pragmatic contexts of Russian, English and French media discourses that belong to various media platforms (Komsomolskaya Pravda, Kommersant, Argumenty i Fakti (Russia); BBC, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, The Telegraph (Great Britain); New York Times, CNN, USA Today (USA), The Toronto Star (Canada); Le Figaro, France 24, Le Monde, Paris Match (France)), including their official pages in social networks such as Facebook, VKontakte and Twitter. We also studied the Youtube videos with famous Russian, British, American and French public figures (for example, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Nikita Mihalkov, Alexei Navalny, Oprah Winfrey, Emmanuel Macron, etc.) and analyzed the comments left by viewers, readers or listeners of famous people’s media discourses. This material helped us to identify the representation of psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness on a verbal as well as non-verbal levels.

6. Findings

We would like to give an example of the media discourse generated by a famous Russian film director, producer and a public figure Nikita Mikhalkov in his famous social program “Besogon TV”. The media discourse under analysis is based on the program «Ad pust, vse cherti zdes'» (“Hell is empty, all the devil is here”) from November 8th, 2019 (Mikhalkov, 2019). In this media discourse Mikhalkov reflects on a scandalous event - the wedding of TV anchor, journalist, socialite Ksenia Sobchak and a Russian theatre director and a poet Konstantin Bogomolov, as well as talking about why a wedding sacrament, put on a par with debauchery and mockery, can have dire consequences for the church as well as for the present-day society.

Thus, the mechanism of reflection is presented in N. Mikhalkov's intention to share his thoughts and emotional experience about the problem of a moral basis of the present-day Russian society. Moreover, the author's aim is to make his audience understand that Russian people must question themselves about how they perceive such important concepts as *svyatost'* (holiness), *tainstvo* (sacrament), *traditsii* (traditions) and *vera* (belief). These concepts are vital for the survival and further development of the Russian nation as well as the Russian state.

Therefore, the mechanism of goal-setting in the media discourse under discussion is demonstrated through the content of the program linked to the examples of the Russian literature, culture, music and history in opposition to the so called being a media personality which may have a negative connotation in many pragmatic contexts. Mikhalkov, being the author of this media discourse, has a definite psychological attitude which is to show people the vices of the present-day media with such personae as socialite Ksenia Sobchak and her followers. At the same time the psychological attitude of the viewers of “Besogon TV” is extremely different and varies from the complete support of the author's worldview to a cardinally opposite point of view. The mechanism of psychological attitude is realized in multiple people's comments and contain not only their feedbacks on the program but also their ideas about the future of the country and the state of Russia's economy and politics at present.

For example,

“Each program is a cry of the soul. But! After all, you have access to Him [Vladimir Putin]! To His Grace! Why don't you tell Him what's going on? After all, He can stop! And organize cleaning in the country. Democratic cleansing ...”

“Dear Nikita Sergeevich! After watching your author's programs, I always feel a pleasant mental aftertaste, for which I am sincerely grateful to you for the moral depth, clarity of position and, in my opinion, the most important thing - your sincere desire to make our people, especially young people, more principled, in the best sense, more patriotic and more loyal to their country.”

“Useless chatter! Now everyone has the Internet, everyone has their own opinion and everyone knows everything!”

Probably, the last comment has a reasonable idea because the present-day media discourse space gives access to anyone and every person can generate his own media discourse. Thus, it will function by means of the psychological mechanisms of human consciousness – reflection, goal-setting and psychological attitude regardless of the geographical place, time and language.

In the British media discourse space Brexit is one of the most frequently speculated topics today. Therefore, both famous as well as ordinary British people generate their media discourses and reflect on a new political situation in the country.

For example, comments by the Guardian and Daily Mail correspondent and readers on Brexit.

“It’s done. A triumph of dogged negotiation by May then, briefly, Johnson, has fulfilled the most pointless, masochistic ambition ever dreamed of in the history of these islands” (McEwan, 2020).

“UK is a lovely place to live. There are total 3.7 million EU immigs in UK and around as many of non-EU immigs. So essentially the taxpayer pays for the housing, food and healthcare plus other things for 7 million of people. They do not need to work or pay tax. At the same time, they also take all the jobs. Make Brexit a success and cut the number to half. We can then focus on the remaining non-EU half” (Robertson, 2020).

The key words “pointless, masochistic, dogged” create a negative attitude towards Brexit. The purpose of this media discourse is to show that leaving European Union once, the UK will “win the battle but lose the war”. At the same time the second comment about Brexit possesses a positive psychological attitude and aims at underlying how important it is to close Great Britain’s national borders and control the number of immigrants from other countries “to cut the number to half”.

In the French media discourse space one can also find a lot of contradictory media discourses dedicated to the problem of Brexit and its consequences for the European Union.

For example,

“Face au Brexit, qui aura lieu ce vendredi 31 janvier à 23h, la presse britannique est partagée. Alors que certains s'en donnent à cœur joie, d'autres se demandent ce qui attend les Britanniques dans ce grand saut vers l'inconnu.” [As for Brexit, which will take place this Friday, January 31 at 11 p.m., the British press is divided. While some sources are rejoicing, others wonder what awaits the British in this great leap into the unknown] (Agence France-Presse, 2020b).

“Brexit: deux salles, deux ambiances dans la presse britannique.” [Brexit: two sides, two atmospheres in the British press] (ibid).

“Je suis fier d'être Français et Européen, la France et l'Allemagne sont les créateurs de l'UE et nous pouvons en être fiers.” [I am proud of being French and European. France and Germany are the founders of European Union and we can be proud of that] (ibid).

“Bravo les anglais!.. On vous a prédit les pires avanies, mais c'est tout le contraire qui se produira, vous allez retrouver votre indépendance, fini les diktats de L'UE, et bonne chance à vous. Un français qui vous envie.” [Bravo, the British! You been have predicted the worst humiliation, but it is the opposite that will happen and you will regain your independence and no more dictatorship of the EU, and good luck to you. The French envie you] (ibid).

“Les Britanniques ont oublié dans que état le pays avant son entrée dans l'UE. Maintenant il va falloir faire la danse du ventre devant Donald!” [The British forgot in which condition the country was before it entered the EU. Now they have to do belly dancing in front of Donald! ”] (ibid).

To sum up the above mentioned statements about the social, economic and political situation around Brexit, we may conclude that the psychological mechanisms of the functioning of the media discourses reflect the Brexit problem in two opposite directions. One can recognize two psychological attitudes. On the one hand, some comments leave a positive setting about the country's independence from the EU, but on the other hand, they are rather skeptical and full of irony. The goal-setting mechanism of these media discourses aims at splitting the European and British society into two camps which are pro-Brexit and anti-Brexit ones.

The psychological mechanisms of the functioning of the present-day media discourses have a strictly pragmatic basis. Owing to them, the actual state of a certain problem is reflected in the society, the necessary psychological attitude as well as goals are chosen to launch into it, reach the audience and achieve a definite effect. The effects can range from inspiration, joy, excitement to indifference, stress, depression, despair, fear, shock.

For example, the feeling of fear and threat of the global pandemic can be noticed in the media discourses speculating the news about the coronavirus in China. One can observe the same psychological attitude and goal in different media discourses generated by Russian, French, British, American and Canadian media platforms (See Table 01).

Table 01. Russian, French and English-speaking media discourses reflecting on the coronavirus 2020 in China

Region	Country	Media platform	Media discourse
Europe/Asia	Russia	Kommersant	The number of people infected with a new type of coronavirus amounted to almost 35 thousand people, more than 700 died. The virus has spread far beyond China, where it was first detected at the end of 2019. In Russia, two cases of the disease were recorded (Kommersant, 2020).
Europe	France	Le Monde	L'épidémie a contaminé plus de 34 500 personnes en Chine. En France, ces cinq nouveaux cas, quatre adultes et un enfant, portent à onze le nombre de cas de coronavirus. [The epidemic has infected more than 34,500 people in China. In

			France, these five new cases, four adults and one child, bring the number of cases of coronavirus to eleven] (Agence France-Presse, 2020a).
Europe	Great Britain	BBC	It is also worth remembering that seasonal flu mostly kills the young and old, but can kill people in the prime of their life (BBC News, 2020).
North America	USA	New York Times	Another cause for concern was that some patients who at first appeared mildly or moderately ill then took a turn for the worse several days or even a week into their illness. The median time from their first symptoms to when they became short of breath was five days; to hospitalization, seven days; and to severe breathing trouble, eight days (Grady, 2020).
North America	Canada	The Toronto Star	Hundreds more Americans evacuated from the stricken zone in China began arriving Friday in the U.S., where they will be quarantined on military bases for two weeks (The Associated Press, 2020).

It is essential to notice that a competent construction and functioning of one or another media discourse must necessarily take into account the structural relationship of the psychological mechanisms of its participants' consciousness, to achieve the most effective result of the representation of information content in the proposed media discourse space. Thus, in summary, studying the construction of a media discourse while taking into account the psychological mechanisms of human consciousness in the process of its interaction with the media space will help to track both positive and negative qualitative and quantitative changes in the minds of modern people.

7. Conclusion

Our research has highlighted the importance of analyzing the new media discourse and its pragmatic features in relation to the psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness – reflection, psychological attitude and goal-setting. Psychological mechanisms is the system of psychophysiological, psychic and social prerequisites for a purposeful and integrated motivation of a person to a certain behaviour and activity (Leontiev, 1992). Taking into account the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies in people's everyday life, a person of the third millennium has become extremely active in the new media environment, by spending most of his quality time there and generating various media discourses. In their media discourses individuals may reflect on technological, educational, political, economic and entertainment spheres of public life.

The content of the media discourse is based on strictly pragmatic principles and aims at appealing to the audience's attention. The mechanism of the psychological attitude integrated in the content of the media discourse makes people experience multiple emotional states.

Thus, we may suggest that from the functional point of view, a modern media discourse can be comparable to a certain information matrix, which purposefully and intentionally penetrates human nature, dissolving and transforming it from the inside. And the psychological mechanisms of the human consciousness have become a driving force that in their interaction with the new media discourse environment are able to develop the consciousness of the man of the third millennium in the digital epoch.

Consequently, the present-day media discourse of the first quarter of the 21st century is an interaction platform where the discourse is introduced to a listener, viewer or non-present readers either in spoken or written form (Ayoub, Awan, & Abbas, 2016) and it plays a significant role in modern society by simultaneously constructing and maintaining societal norms and values (Neary & Ringrow, 2018). Besides, the modern media discourse space sets as its paramount task not only to distinguish various types of human activity but also to contribute to their further development, thereby acting as an indicator of the evolution of human consciousness.

The evidence from this pilot study intimates that the psychological mechanisms in their correlation with the new media discourse provide a more sophisticated level of communication with the audience as well as a more "tailored" engagement in everyday life of the individual.

At the same time we aware that our research has some limitations. For example, it is important to analyze the functioning of the new media discourse in its correlation with psychological mechanisms in more details on geographical, religious, gender, age, social and professional principles. These thorough observations may help to discover how people's communication evolves, why the system of human values, ideologies and beliefs is transformed and whether the humankind of the third millennium will be able to handle the information matrix we are living in at present so as to win in the battle with machine reasoning of the future.

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