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**TOLERANCE/INTOLERANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES  
DEDICATED TO MIXED MARTIAL ARTS**

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***Abstract***

The article discusses communicative tolerance/intolerance on the social media pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts (MMA). Authors found out that both «active» and «passive» communicative tolerance are presented in social media. «Active» tolerance is expressed by statements in which users correctly cooperate with others, while «passive» communicative tolerance is expressed in the form of «likes». Trolling and flaming are the forms of communicative intolerance that are presented on social media. We found the implementation of trolling and flaming on the pages dedicated to combat sports. Authors came to the conclusion that the fighters themselves influence the speech behavior of fans of mixed martial arts on the Internet. Fans can both repeat the words of the fighters, and respond to their words in an aggressive manner. Aggressiveness of this sport and a large number of so-called «trash talk» contribute to the intolerant communication on the pages dedicated to combat sports. Authors also carried out a quantitative analysis of tolerant and intolerant comments for the most popular topics among MMA fans in social media. We have found out that popular topics cause a large number of intolerant comments. Moderation can prevent the appearance the most offensive intolerant comments, but one third of the total numbers of comments on the moderated pages are intolerant.

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**Keywords:** Tolerance, intolerance, social media, communication, sports.



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## 1. Introduction

Social media have become the fastest growing segment of the Internet and very important field of communication. Nowadays, the term «social media» means web resources that allow an individual user, or a specific group of people, to represent themselves on the Internet by creating their own page and communicating with other users. Social media attract the interest of researchers, including linguists, who studied social media from the point of the communicative space (Yurina, Borodulina, & Makeeva, 2017) and from the point of view of the language tools used in them (Piianzina, 2018; Smagina, 2017).

We consider comments on the social media pages that are dedicated to the mixed martial arts. Mixed martial arts are the fastest growing sport in recent years. Combat sports are particularly vivid in expressing the aggression, competitiveness and spectacle that are inherent in sports. Sports and the behaviour of sports fans are relevant topics for the linguistic studies. At the same time, the behaviour of mixed martial arts fans on the Internet has not been a subject of linguistic study.

For our study, we selected public pages that are covering mixed martial arts from VK.com and Facebook. Public page is a type of online community. Public page can be created by any user of a social media. The content of the public page is available to everyone, but only page managers can upload information to the so-called «wall» of the page. Most public pages give their followers an opportunity to comment. Public pages dedicated to sports is an unexplored research niche, since social media comments were not considered by linguists in terms of the peculiarities of the cognitive mechanism that leads to the formation of tolerance/intolerance.

## 2. Problem Statement

So-called «toxicity» is one of the main features of the Internet as a field of communication. Toxic behaviour in the Internet includes offensive messages, as well as prolonged harassment of individuals or groups of people while using social media, instant messengers and other types of Internet communication. Toxic behaviour is an example of intolerance in the Internet. Toxicity is a cause of growing concern among website managers.

We assumed that the communicative environment of public pages devoted to the mixed martial arts leads to an intolerant communication among the followers of these pages, due to the aggressive nature of this sport. In order to stop the growing process of intolerance in social media it is necessary to find out what is the ratio of tolerant and intolerant comments and what is the source of intolerance in these Internet communities.

## 3. Research Questions

What types of communicative tolerance are presented in sports-themed social media pages?

What types of communicative intolerance are presented in sports-themed social media pages?

What is the impact of mixed martial arts on communication in sports-themed social media pages?

What is the ratio of tolerant and intolerant comments in sports-themed social media pages?

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

To find out if the aggressive nature of mixed martial arts affects the manifestation of intolerance in social media.

#### 5. Research Methods

The reliability of the research results is provided by the representative corpus of linguistic material and the application of traditional and modern scientific methods and techniques. The study materials are 11,000 comments on the public pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts from 2017 to 2019.

This type of study determined the use of both general scientific methods (observation, induction / deduction, analysis / synthesis, systematization, classification), and proper linguistic methods, such as the method of linguistic description, content analysis, cognitive analysis and interpretative analysis. An experiment was used, which made it possible to obtain study material in a form of survey results.

#### 6. Findings

**6.1** During the research of sports-themed social media pages, we found out the following. There are two types of communicative tolerance: active and passive tolerance (Isaeva, 2010). However, it is still unknown whether it is possible to detect these types of communicative tolerance in social media as it exists as a unique communicative field (Yurina, Borodulina, & Makeeva, 2017).

Communicative tolerance is an attribute of personal relationships with other people. It shows a person's tolerance for unpleasant qualities and actions of his communication partners. According to V. Bojko (1998), the general communicative tolerance depends on life experience, personal qualities and moral principles. Majority of Russian people think that tolerance must have limits and there are such social phenomena where tolerance is not applicable (Mikhaylova, 2016).

For our study on active and passive tolerance, we chose the «My Life is MMA» page from VK.com. The popularity of VK.com in Russia determines the use of this particular social media service. This public page is devoted to the mixed martial arts and currently has more than 200 thousand followers.

The definition of «passive tolerance» says that it does not seek a single truth, but «quietly» agrees with many opinions, each of which can be true for the holder of this opinion (Isaeva, 2010, p. 50). Within the framework of «active tolerance», followers can express their disagreement with the opinion of others, without going beyond the rules of behaviour accepted by the community.

Considering the norms of communication on social media, there are a lot of examples of active tolerance among the comments on «My Life is MMA» page:

*ддс и кейн 2-3, как по мне - это избивание в одну калитку. В списки лучших боев уж точно не попадает. Ну это лично моё мнение. [I think that JDS-Cain 2 and 3 were just one sided beatdowns. Not in the list of greatest fights. It's my personal opinion]*

*но однако зрелищно?зрелищно! [But was it spectacular? It was]*

*А так да, довольно зрелищно, я согласен. Но если выбирать из такого типа боев, то бой Мэт Браун - Эрик Сильва - намного зрелищней. Или Яир против Пэнна. Ну это опять-таки,*

*сугубо личное мнение* [It was relatively spectacular, I agree. But I prefer fights such as Matt Brown vs Erick Silva, or BJ Penn vs Yair Rodriguez. But it's just my opinion]

*хм. Перечисленные тобой бои зрелищные, но все же отдаю предпочтение мною выше названными* [Those fights are spectacular, but I would prefer those that are mentioned before]

For example, in this dialogue we see an exchange between two people who don't seem to agree in everything but they're respectful to each other. We also can see the admitting of subjective perception and positive review of some of the components of another person's opinion – which are the signs of active tolerance.

We decided to test our hypothesis that says that passive tolerance can be expressed in the form of so-called «likes». Like is a conditional expression of approval for a material, user, photos, which is expressed with the click (Kirilina, 2015, p. 71).

We take a survey among the followers of «My Life is MMA» public page to determine the value of «likes» for followers. They answered the following question: «What is reason for liking other person's comment?». 2,664 participated in this survey. There were four answers:

1. I completely agree with the statement; 2. The statement seemed interesting, even if I do not agree with it/I do not completely agree; 3. The statement seemed simply ridiculous (funny, witty, etc.); 4. For all of the reasons listed

A survey conducted on the «My Life is MMA» public page showed that 40 percent of the page followers (1,089) give «likes» for all the reasons included in the survey. If we consider options with a specific opinion, then the leading option is «I completely agree with the statement» with 28.8 % of respondents (768 respondents). This answer meets the definition of «passive tolerance». Given that the option with this opinion is included in the most popular answer, this proves that «likes» can be a form of manifestation of «passive» communicative tolerance in social media. Thus, it was confirmed that both «active» and «passive» communicative tolerance are presented in social media. At the same time, «active» tolerance is expressed by statements in which users correctly cooperate with others, while «passive» communicative tolerance is expressed in the form of «likes».

**6.2** While studying the types of communicative intolerance in social media, we found out the following. In addition to the natural negative reaction to messages, researchers distinguish two different types of intolerant communication in social media: trolling and flaming. Trolling and flaming are forms of verbal aggression that are specific due to the discursive specifics of Internet communication (Voroncova, 2016, p. 112).

Aggressive, intolerant comments can not only be a consequence of the emotional reaction to the news, but also a reaction to «troll» messages, which creates a separate category of intolerant communication. There are several definitions of trolling. Their common feature is the accent on the negative nature of this phenomenon. Abdullina and Artamonova (2017) define trolling as a focused and motivated communicative behavior focused on the destabilization of the media space. Voroncova defines trolling as a verbal provocation with the goal of escalating a communicative conflict in the Internet (as cited in Salnikova & Chekan, 2016, p. 220). People who post those provocative comments are called «trolls». The intention of the «troll» is to aggravate the conflict for the purpose of his own entertainment (Sinelnikova, 2016).

The troll can disrupt the discussion, give other users bad advice and weaken the feeling of mutual trust in the community. So, along with messages from users who sincerely want to share their point of view, there are troll messages that deliberately distort the real picture of the events and manipulate other users minds in order to engage them in a communicative game (Abdullina & Artamonova, 2017). Trolls can use different features of social media, including emoticons and demotivators (Smagina, 2017). A distinctive feature of trolling is an aim at confrontation. The troll deliberately ignores the principles of courtesy and seeks to provoke aggression and useless disputes. (Gricenko, 2018).

We define trolling as a provocative communicative behavior on the Internet, aimed at inducing an intolerant reaction. Initial message of the trolls does not have to carry insults, a mockery, or other features of intolerant comments. MMA communities in the Internet were originally aimed at sportive communication with the distribution of roles between fans of different fighters. Sports fans create their virtual identity by supporting and resisting each other (Knobloch-Westerwick, Mothes, & Polavin, 2017), (Vereshhagina, Gafiatulina, & Samygin, 2018, p.34) but troll conducts its own separate game. One of the examples of trolling on the MMA social media page:

*Лучший тяж в истории говорили они.. Проиграл деду который выступает на несколько весовых ниже* [They said he is the best heavyweight in history. Than he lost to a grandfather who fights several weights below]

The author of this comment specifically posts a provocative commentary that does not fit with the majority of users. This comment, which disputed the accepted opinion about Fedor Emelianenko among MMA fans, provoked the following reaction from the followers of the «Best of MMA» page:

*В смысле? Но так считает весь мир смешных единоборств, посмотри интервью бойцов, лучших в мире, все они говорят что Федя, величайший!* [What do you mean? But the whole world of mixed martial arts thinks so. Just watch interviews with the fighters, with the best in the world, they all say that Fedya is the greatest!]

Flaming is a dialogue, the meaning of which is the polemic process itself, i.e. a dispute for the sake of a dispute in which communicants can use all possible means (Voroncova, 2016, p. 111). The more participants are involved simultaneously in this dialogue, the greater the likelihood of a flame occurring. The triggering mechanism of such a dialogue or polylogue in the Internet is usually a trolling comment, so flaming is the result of effective speech provocation. The main technique of the flaming is the transition to personal insults. Here's an example of such a dialogue on the MMA social media page, where provocative commentary about the fighter provoked a response from another communicant, which caused flaming, which consisted of mutual insults.:

*Интересно Орловский Сам В курсе, Что он Делает? Ни Ударки солидной, Ни Борьбы, Ни Грентлинга* [I wonder if Orlovsky himself understands what he is doing? Neither solid punches, nor wrestling, nor grappling]

*он когда то считался одним из лучших ударников в ММА, что ты несёшь?* [He was once considered one of the best strikers in MMA, what are you talking about?]

*когда то Много чего было. Он щас ни кому не нужен. А что ты несешь? Насекомое* [There were a lot of things back in the day. Right now no one needs him. And what are you talking about, you insect?]

*все с тобой понятно. Домашний тапок ты, стучи дальше по клавишам* [Everything is clear with you. Go back to being a keyboard warrior]

Trolling and flaming are the forms of speech aggression. They exist due to the discursive specifics of the Internet communication. We found the implementation of trolling and flaming on the pages dedicated to combat sports.

**6.3** While studying the effect of mixed martial arts on communication in sports-themed social media pages, we found the following.

The sports environment is determined by the rival attitude of fans of different teams and athletes to each other. Sports fans use offensive language to hurt their opponents in a discussion. Mixed martial arts is a particularly aggressive sport that is built on the confrontation of individual fighters. Fighters often use insults to foster interest in their fights. We believe that the very nature of combat sports influences the speech behavior of mixed martial arts fans on the Internet. MMA fighters actively use social media to promote their fights due to its features (Piianzina, 2018, p. 235) and trash talk is one of the biggest tool for promotion. The aggressiveness of this sport and a large number of so-called «trash talk» (mutual insults before the fight) contribute to intolerant communication on the pages dedicated to mixed martial arts.

Trash talk is considered a deliberate form of aggressive communication by individuals that can foster rivalry and motivate both constructive and destructive behavior. (Yip, Schweitzer, & Nurmohamed, 2017, p. 135). Trash talk is a part of promotion of some of the fights in boxing and mixed martial arts. Words and whole phrases of fighters that were said during the promotion of MMA events are included in the vocabulary of sports fans, and are actively used in the discussion of fights on the Internet:

*Jeremy Stevens? Who the hell is that?*

In this example, the follower of the «Best of MMA» page comments on the publication dedicated to the UFC fighter Jeremy Stevens. He used the phrase of another fighter - Conor McGregor, who once emphasized the relative obscurity of his potential rival.

Trash talk also provokes fans to respond aggressively. For example, when Conor McGregor posted on his Twitter page: «I run New York», some of his followers responded: «*A loser can never run New York*», «*You run nothing except your big mouth*».

We conducted a survey regarding intolerance on «My Life is MMA» page. Participants were asked:

1) Does trash talk affect the negative environment and the manifestation of intolerance in mixed martial arts?

The purpose of our survey is to identify whether trash talk is associated with a negative environment and intolerance in mixed martial arts. Our hypothesis says that trash talk is a source of negative environment in mixed martial arts.

We received 362 responses. 310 respondents (85.6%) believe that trash talk of individual fighters, which is the essential part of mixed martial arts, affects the negative situation in sports in general, which lead to intolerance in social media. 52 people do not believe that trash talk negatively affects sports.

Then survey participants were asked:

1) Who, in your opinion, usually leaves negative comments on social media: A) trolls; B) haters of individual fighters; C) regular followers

The purpose of this question was to find out what are the sources of negative/intolerant comments in social media, based on the opinion of the followers of sports-themed social media pages.

A total of 363 responses were received. 161 respondents believe that ordinary users who are not fighters' haters and Internet trolls leave negative comments in social media. 147 people believe that negative comments are mostly the result of provocations of trolls, and 55 respondents believe that negative comments are mostly posted by anti-fans - haters of individual fighters.

Then survey participants were asked: «Do you leave negative/intolerant comments on particular posts?»

The purpose of this question was to identify that most followers of the «My Life is MMA» page leave negative comments on this page. 362 responses were received. 236 respondents admitted that they leave negative comments on «My Life is MMA» page. 126 people do not leave such comments.

Then, the respondents who answered positively to this question were asked: «What mostly makes you leave negative comments on this page?» The purpose of this question was to find out what exactly is the reason for their negative comments.

123 people indicated that the main reason for their negative comments was the comments of other users with whom they disagree. 80 respondents admitted that they mostly react negatively to the statements of fighters, which are published on the «My Life is MMA» page. 9 people indicated that the reason for their negative comments was the defeat of their favorite fighters. The following reasons for the negative comments were identified personally by respondents: boring fights, «bad fights», «idiots», «stupidity of people», victories of their favorite fighters (with the desire to mock the fans of the losers), specifically Khabib's victory, desire to mock people as a whole. 1 person singled out the «bags» option (an insulting word for unsuccessful fighters) and 1 person identified the «haters» option, indicating a desire for a negative response to the comments of haters of individual fighters.

Survey showed that most of the subscribers to the «My Life is MMA» page leave negative comments on that page. Subscribers believe that the negativity is mostly the result of the behavior of both ordinary users and provocative trolls and haters. MMA fans mostly react negatively to the comments of other fans with which they disagree, as well as to the statements of the fighters that are published on the page. Followers believe that trash talk of individual fighters affects the negative situation in sports in general.

We came to the conclusion that the fighters themselves influence the speech behavior of fans of mixed martial arts on the Internet. Fans can both repeat the words of the fighters, and respond to their words in an aggressive manner. Aggressiveness of this sport and a large number of so-called «trash talk» contribute to the intolerant communication on the pages dedicated to combat sports.

**6.4** Studying the ratio of tolerant and intolerant comments on pages on social media pages dedicated to mixed martial arts, we found the following. To identify the implementation of communicative tolerance/intolerance on the sports-themed social media pages, we carried out a quantitative analysis of comments for three events that attracted the greatest interest of MMA fans in

2018 and 2019: the fight between Khabib Nurmagomedov and Conor McGregor, as well as a press conference before the fight and decision of the athletic commission based on the results of the fight.

We reviewed the comments on the two Russian-language MMA-themed pages from VK.com: «Best of MMA» and «Po Morde», as well as comments on the English-language «MMA News» page from Facebook. «Best of MMA» is the most popular mixed martial arts news page in Russian and has over a million followers. The page has moderation, the function of which is to remove the most offensive comments. Public page rules state that insults and provocations are prohibited on that page. Po Morde is a public page with approximately 90 thousand subscribers, in which there is no such control over comments from the management. «MMA News» is one of the leading English-language pages on mixed martial arts. There are not any communication rules available on this page.

We reviewed 387 comments on the «Best of MMA» page on a press conference with Conor McGregor and Khabib Nurmagomedov on October 5, 2018. Some of the comments cannot be attributed to tolerant or intolerant communication - they do not express positive and negative emotions. This post has 48 such comments. These are, for example, questions, links to other posts and sites, music inserted in comments:

*Не могу смотреть. Че там пацаны?* [I can't watch. What's going on guys?]

215 comments on this entry can be called tolerant. Users express positive emotions without offending other people.

*Хабиб удивит ребятки!* [Khabib will surprise you guys!]

120 comments for this press conference we can call intolerant. The most popular expression of intolerance in these comments is the use of derogatory, rude words in relation to the fighters and to fans of a fighter who is not supported by the communicant:

*ты тон сбавь интриган. Это ты у нас тут эксперт весогонки. Ты хоть тяжелее своего телефона в жизни поднимал что-нибудь.* [Calm down you schemer. So we have an expert in weightlifting here. Have you ever lifted anything heavier than your phone in your life?]

More than half of the comments (16 of 24) dedicated to the press conference of Nurmagomedov and McGregor from «MMA News» page were intolerant, for example:

*He left so he didn't look like a twat again*

Three comments cannot be classified as tolerant and intolerant (these are questions and a retelling of the events that took place). Five comments are examples of tolerant communication.

We reviewed 2098 comments dedicated to the fight of Conor McGregor and Khabib Nurmagomedov, which took place on October 7, 2018, on the «Best of MMA» page. 117 comments cannot be classified as tolerant and intolerant. 1360 comments on this topic can be called tolerant. First of all, this is a manifestation of positive emotions associated with the victory of the fighter, for who those fans were rooting:

*естественно я счастлив, что хабиб выиграл* [Of course I am happy because Khabib has won]

621 comments from «Best of MMA» page we can call intolerant.

We reviewed 73 comments on the Nurmagomedov-McGregor fight from the «MMA News» page. 9 comments cannot be attributed to tolerant and intolerant communication. For example, it's the clarification of the name of submission after which the fight was finished. We consider the 26 comments

on that topic to be tolerant. 38 comments on the fight between McGregor and Nurmagomedov on the «MMA News» page were intolerant.

A quantitative analysis of 136 comments on the fight from the «Po Morde» page revealed 4 comments that cannot be attributed to tolerant or intolerant communication, 58 tolerant comments and 74 intolerant comments.

Then we conducted a quantitative analysis of the comments on punishment that Nevada State Athletic Commission appointed on January 30, 2019 after the fight between Khabib Nurmagomedov and Conor McGregor. We reviewed 462 comments on the «Best of MMA» page. The 37 comments do not fall into the categories of tolerance and intolerance. 370 comments on this news are tolerant and 55 comments on that news we can call intolerant.

We reviewed 104 comments on punishment that Nevada State Athletic Commission appointed from «MMA News». 24 comments do not belong to the categories of tolerance and intolerance. The 27 reviewed comments can be called tolerant. 53 of 104 comments from «MMA News» were intolerant.

A quantitative analysis of 54 comments on that news from the «Po Morde» page revealed 14 comments that cannot be attributed to tolerant or intolerant communication. 13 reviewed comments can be defined as tolerant and 27 comments from «Po Morde» page are intolerant, for example:

*То есть кукареконол просто клоун?* [So McChicken is just a clown?]

We found out that the number of intolerant comments on the pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts to some degree depends on the moderation that is carried out on the page. A hot topic related not only to a fight itself, but also to the insults at press conference, as well as a brawl after the fight, provoked intolerant statements by subscribers of these pages. Intolerant comments prevail on the pages that are not moderated by page managers.

## 7. Conclusion

The ratio of tolerant and intolerant comments on pages on social media pages dedicated to mixed martial arts has shown that, in general, the communicative environment of those pages is intolerant. A tolerant environment can exist when the management of public pages removes the most offensive intolerant comments. But even with such management from about one third to one fifth of the comments remain intolerant. Pages that do not have such control by the management become an intolerant communicative environment due to the aggressiveness of combat sports. The results of the study were confirmed by a survey that showed that most subscribers to the «My Life is MMA» page leave negative comments. Subscribers believe that the negativity is mostly the result of the behavior of both ordinary users and provocative trolls and haters of fighters. Usually, MMA fans react negatively to the comments of other fans with which they disagree, as well as to the statements of fighters that are published on the page. Subscribers believe that trash talk of individual fighters affects the negative situation in this sport in general.

It was concluded that the fighters themselves influence the speech behavior of MMA fans on the Internet. Fans can both repeat the words of the fighters, and respond to their words in an aggressive manner. Aggressiveness of combat sports and a large number of so-called trash talk contribute to the intolerant communication on the pages dedicated to combat sports.

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