

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****MARKERS AND DETERMINANTS OF DIGITAL CONTENT IN
THE ONLINE SPACE OF RUSSIA**

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Abstract

Modern reality, which led to the emergence of new discursive strategies, models and techniques to use the language and manipulate it to achieve predictable results, has brought a large number of discourses, including political one, online. To analyze markers and determinants of digital political content of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in the online space, a political content management model was applied and a hybrid research methodology was tested. The empirical base of the study included 22 Typical communities and 21 Overheard communities on VKontakte social network in those 22 constituent entities of the Russian Federation in which in 2018-2019 the campaigns for the position of head of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation were held. The generated Data Set contained about 350,000 messages with audio, video and textual content. Parsing of network data was carried out by means of a computer program “Structural and relational parsing of political content” created and registered by N.A. Ryabchenko. The Data Set underwent a frequency analysis to identify digital political content markers; the frequency analysis was supplemented by a directional content analysis and a folksonomic analysis. To highlight the determinants of digital political content in Russian Federation entities a linguistic-discursive analysis which included content analysis, discursive analysis, semantic analysis of tags and hashtags was used. As a result, 15 digital markers were identified – these are the areas of community activity and 16 determinants in civic network political content in the regions.

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Keywords: Constituent entity of the Russian Federation, election of governors, online space, political content, political process, regional digital content



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1. Introduction

The online space allows institutional and non-institutional actors in the public sphere to be in constant interaction, the product of which is continuously produced and reproduced digital political content. Compared to offline content, digital content is continuously transformed by members of various social networks and communities since it is the basis of their interactions (Jones et al., 2015). At the same time, the transformation of digital political content triggers changes in the social networks and communities themselves defining social and political action offline.

It is obvious that with the improvement of technology, the pragmatic potential of digital content in the online space is increasing on a scale that is difficult to imagine and measure. This process, like every (especially large-scale and effective) phenomenon, can be considered from the point of view of a constructive and destructive impact on the social environment. Destructiveness is determined by the following characteristics of the digital political context, functioning online (Ilie, 2004; Masías et al., 2018; Volkova & Panchenko, 2016):

- lack of responsibility of the creators for the content and the consequences resulting from its placement and distribution;

- lack of awareness among the participants of online interaction that verbal interaction in the online space, starting from communication in social networks and ending with the dissemination of information in social networks and communities, is essentially a social action that leads to certain consequences of different potential and scale;

- lack of predictive models for analyzing the direction of development of digital content based on a linguistic analysis of existing discursive practices;

- absence of description models, as well as schemes for regulating digital content within the online space, which excludes the possibility of identifying, monitoring, and managing discursive practices that have destructive potential (inciting ethnic and national conflicts, destructive actions against the nation, state, and other states).

2. Problem Statement

In the online space, digital political content is formed by institutional (sites of government bodies, sites of political parties, sites of political and state leaders, online media) and non-institutional (bloggers, opinion leaders on social networks, media people, network communities, individual users of social networks) public policy actors. Unlike political content generated in offline space, non-institutional actors in the online space play a significant role and not only consume political content but also reproduce it thanks to social networks and the horizontal architecture of the online space as a whole. The online space as a field of political practices is heterogeneous in terms of the distribution of social capital and the effectiveness of socio-political practices. This heterogeneity is determined not so much by the different level of population's access to the Internet but by the complication of the development of structural elements of the online space both from a technological point of view and from the point of view of the social characteristics of their use by users (level of publicity, temporary nature of information storage, institutional barriers). The basis of the online space is social networks that operate on the basis of social platforms Facebook, VKontakte, etc.

(Murthy, 2018; Mutsvairo, 2016; Rees, 2020); any public sector actor, one way or another, directly or indirectly, reflects their activities on social networks; they are the basis of social media with the largest audience for the consumption of digital political content.

3. Research Questions

The main research task was to find answers to the following questions.

3.1. What are the specifics and content of digital political content produced by network communities in the regions of the Russian Federation?

3.2. What problematic socio-political field is formed by regional network communities in the online space?

3.3. What are the linguistic-discursive markers of digital political content in the regions of the Russian Federation?

3.4. What topics are determinants of digital political content?

3.5. What are the tendencies in the formation and development of digital political content and asynchronous multimodal discursive fields created by network communities as non-institutional political actors in the online space of Russian regions?

4. Purpose of the Study

The main conceptual basis for the study of digital political content produced by network communities is the scientific idea that the online space and the digital content formed in it is the main platform for the consolidation and articulation of the interests of both individual citizens and network communities (Batorski & Grzywinska, 2017; Martynov, 2012; Pearson, 2017; Shomova, 2019). In a network society, online communications within network communities lead to certain offline actions and practices which may not always be constructive for the current government in a city, region, country (González-Bailón & Wang, 2016; Stevens, 2012; Theocharis, 2015).

The theoretical framework for the study of digital political content produced by network communities has become an explanatory model of managing digital political content – the process of generating digital political content, its consumption and further transformation and impact on social reality both online and offline.

Digital political content and the asynchronous multimodal discursive fields produced by it accumulate the potential of social action in the online space. The realization of the potential of social action by users of online space leads to various kinds of events, both online and offline, for example, the participation of citizens in the electoral process and the support of a particular candidate in elections at various levels (Wallis & Given, 2016). A comprehensive analysis of digital political content and the asynchronous multimodal discursive fields produced by it is an urgent task, especially during the period of electoral cycles. The definition of markers and determinants of digital political content created by network communities as non-institutional political actors in the online space of the Russian regions is also relevant and scientifically substantiated.

5. Research Methods

To analyze markers and determinants of digital political content in the online space of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, a political content management model was applied and a hybrid research methodology was tested. The empirical base of the study was 22 Typical communities and 21 Overheard communities on VKontakte social network in those 22 constituent entities of the Russian Federation in which in 2018-2019 campaigns for the position of head of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation were held. Over the past 3 years, VKontakte has remained the most popular platform for the formation and functioning of Russian network communities (Brand Analytics, 2019). In turn, the regional network communities “Typical” and “Overheard” are one of the most common groups in the online space; digital content produced by citizens in these communities is devoted to the discussion of issues and problems as well as the vital activities of citizens and authorities at the regional level. Typical communities include Abakan, Anadyr, Barnaul, Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok, Vladimir, Voronezh, Ivanovo, Kemerovo, Krasnogorsk, Krasnoyarsk, Magadan, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Orel, Pskov, Samara, Tyumen, Khabarovsk, Yakutsk. The studied “Overheard” communities were the same regions with the exception of the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug (there is no “Overheard” community in the capital of the ChAO, Anadyr). The generated Data Set contained about 350,000 messages with audio, video, textual content. To deal with empirical data, a hybrid operational toolkit for analyzing digital political content produced by online communities in the online space was developed and tested. The Data Set underwent a frequency analysis to identify digital political content markers; frequency analysis was supplemented by directional content analysis and folksonomic analysis. To highlight the determinants of digital political content in these constituent entities of the Russian Federation, a linguistic-discursive analysis which included content analysis, discursive analysis, semantic analysis of tags and hashtags was used. Parsing of network data was carried out by means of a computer program “Structural and relational parsing of political content” created and registered by N.A. Ryabchenko.

6. Findings

As a result of the study, 15 digital markers – areas of community activity – were identified and 16 determinants were singled out in civic network political content in these regions.

Markers (topics and areas of activity) of digital content in the studied 22 subjects of the Russian Federation are as follows:

Regional identity: frequent and direct self-determination as a reflection of regional identity is characteristic of digital content generated in Typical: Abakan, Anadyr, Voronezh, Krasnogorsk, Pskov.

Weather is the second active topic of discussion in Typical Abakan (due to the geography of Abakan, the weather in Siberia is extremely unstable); the theme is present in Typical Voronezh, Typical Magadan (geographical features of the port city), Typical Novosibirsk, Typical Samara.

3) Politics and political agenda:

- elections as the very first topic of discussion, issues of the regional political life and the active involvement of community members in political life in Typical Vladivostok (the names “Tarasenko” – acting governor of Primorsky Krai and “Kozhemyak” – governor of Primorsky Krai are often used), Typical

Voronezh (often used “Gusev” – the governor of the Voronezh region), Typical Krasnoyarsk (especially environmental issues and the election of the governor), Typical Khabarovsk (“Furgal” – the governor of the Khabarovsk Territory), Typical Yakutsk (“Avksentyeva” – Head of Yakutsk);

digital content related to the discussion of the budget of the subject of the Russian Federation, city improvement issues, regional development problems are frequent for Typical: Barnaul, Blagoveshchensk, Voronezh, Krasnogorsk, Magadan, Pskov;

political topics in Typical: Abakan, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod - are in the frequency minority compared to other markers.

Network identity: high activity on social networks, the active use of hashtags and Internet terminology is inherent to Typical Anadyr (the content is filled with pride that Anadyr (Chukotka), despite its remoteness, keeps up to date and remains in touch with other regions), Typical: Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok, Vladimir, Voronezh, Kemerovo, Magadan, Nizhny Novgorod, Omsk, Orel, Pskov, Samara, Tyumen.

5) Social services:

- the use of digital content of network communities as a means for advertising and promoting services, and not for communication, is typical for Typical: Anadyr, Orel;

- the topic of services and sales is present in the content of Typical: Voronezh, Kemerovo (food and food delivery), Krasnogorsk (automotive industry), Omsk (food, delivery, tattoo), Samara, Yakutsk (food delivery).

6) Money:

- topics of the ruble exchange rate, deposits, loans is the third most discussed topic in Typical Anadyr;

- monetary and financial topics are typical for Typical: Vladivostok, Voronezh, Ivanovo, Kemerovo, Krasnogorsk, Magadan, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Tyumen, Yakutsk.

Accidents and incidents; concerns about the high level of road traffic accidents, prevention and road safety are typical for the communities of Typical: Barnaul, Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok, Voronezh, Magadan, Omsk, Samara, Tyumen.

8) Entertainment and culture, contests:

- cultural events as the most popular topic for discussion in Typical Moscow;

- a discussion of active social and cultural life is characteristic of the regional communities Typical: Blagoveshchensk, Ivanovo, Omsk;

- drawings and contests for subscribers fill the digital content Typical: Vladimir, Kemerovo, Pskov, Tyumen.

9) News:

- digital content consisting of information and news resources prevails in Typical Blagoveshchensk;

- this topic is present in Typical: Vladivostok, Krasnogorsk, Magadan, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Pskov, Samara, Yakutsk.

10) Civic identity: active civic position of the participants of the communities Typical Blagoveshchensk, Typical Magadan.

11) Crime prevention and security: the marker is relevant for the communities Typical: Barnaul, Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok, Voronezh, Magadan, Omsk, Samara, Tyumen.

12) Local identity: the marker is typical for Typical Ivanovo (the community is small, but internal city events are actively discussed), Typical Krasnogorsk (Mitino village and Nakhabino working village), Typical Nizhny Novgorod (life within, the community is centered on its own local issues), Typical Omsk.

13) Coverage of public events in the region: this content is typical for Typical Vladimir, Typical Krasnoyarsk (Winter Universiad 2019), Typical Krasnoyarsk (repair work and public utilities), Typical Moscow (metro and public transport issues), Typical Nizhny Novgorod (2018 FIFA World Cup), Typical Novosibirsk, Typical Omsk, Typical Pskov, Typical Samara.

14) The tendency to anonymity (community members try not to give out their identities): most of all is present in Typical Magadan and Typical Omsk.

15) “I want” and “Why”: these markers are most typical for the digital content Typical Omsk.

Determinants of civil network political content in the studied constituent entities of the Russian Federation:

- “Garbage reform” prevails in the digital content Overheard: Tyumen, Omsk, Voronezh, Krasnogorsk;

- “Beautification of cities” is typical for all studied regions;

- “Roads” prevail in the digital content Overheard Yakutsk;

- “Ecology” is especially expressed in Overheard: Omsk, Barnaul, Orel;

- “Healthcare” prevails in Overheard Barnaul;

- “Criminal situation” prevails in the digital content Overheard Yakutsk;

- “Culture” prevails in digital content Overheard Vladimir;

- “Civic activism / passivity” is especially pronounced in Overheard Moscow;

- “Pension reform” is characteristic of all the studied regions;

- “Criticism of power is especially expressed in Overheard Ivanovo and Overheard Krasnogorsk;

- “Economics. Debts of regions” are especially expressed in Overheard: Orel, Yakutsk, Abakan;

- “The President's rating” is especially expressed in Overheard: Omsk, Yakutsk, Blagoveshchensk, Magadan;

- “Elections” is especially expressed in Overheard Moscow;

- “Officials and corruption” are especially expressed in Overheard: Yakutsk, Orel, Tyumen;

- “Freedom of speech” is typical for all the studied regions;

- “Renovation” is present Overheard Moscow and Overheard Orel.

7. Conclusion

The study revealed that the digital content of the regional communities “Typical” and “Overheard” is different in their style:

- digital content in regional communities “Typical” to a greater extent consists of anonymous informative messages (events, city and regional measures, actions of the government and local authorities); news reports (regional media); about 50% of this digital content contains hyperlinks to third-party resources; advertising is distributed; private messages and polls are rarely found. A neutral or formal-

business style prevails, a conversational style that usually does not contain vulgarisms. About 30% of this digital content is the official discourse and political agenda formed by the media and regional authorities; but this process is not systemic and occurs spontaneously.

- digital content in regional communities “Overheard” is clearly tied to time: it is typical to use the present tense in the narration of past events in personal messages of users, and past – in the messages of news agencies;

- the content “Overheard” in some regions coincides in style with the digital content “Typical” – Magadan, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara;

- digital content in the regional communities “Overheard” (especially in Abakan, Vladivostok, Voronezh, Orel, Khabarovsk, Yakutsk) is characterized by the presence of expressive or stylistically reduced vocabulary containing colloquialisms and often vulgarisms;

- graphically digital content “Overheard” is designed as a “conversation” (ellipsis is used to reflect thoughtfulness; multiple use of exclamation or question marks; active use of “emojicons” to show the power of emotions; rhetorical questions are used to enhance expressiveness and attempts to create live communication);

- the digitally political content “Overheard” is created directly by the users themselves and not by the media and authorities, thus, in this network community, citizens form their socio-political agenda;

- the main identified determinants of digital content are triggers of socio-political tension in the region.

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