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**REGIONAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE AS AN OBJECT OF
INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

Veronika Katermina (a)*, Anna Gnedash (b)

*Corresponding author

(a) Kuban State University, 149, Stavropolskaya st., Krasnodar, veronika.katermina@yandex.ru

(b) Kuban State University, 149, Stavropolskaya st., Krasnodar, anna_gnedash@inbox.ru

Abstract

Regional political discourse, including political content and asynchronous multimodal discursive fields produced by it, accumulates the potential of social action in online space which can lead to both constructive and destructive actions in offline space. To analyze the regional political discourse, a political content management model was applied and the research methodology was tested. The empirical base of the study was the “Typical” community on the VKontakte social network, formed on the basis of administrative centers of 22 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. To analyze empirical data, a hybrid operational toolkit was developed and tested with the aim of conducting an interdisciplinary analysis of regional political discourse. For each of the 22 “Typical” communities, a Data Set was formed from messages published by participants between January 1, 2018 and June 1, 2019. As a result of the study, it became possible to identify the characteristics of regional political discourses in the context of the elections of the heads of constituent entities of the Russian Federation in 2018 and to identify trends in the formation and development of asynchronous multimodal discursive fields in the online space of the Russian regions. Such studies of the regional political discourse in the online space allow us to conduct a new qualitative and quantitative analysis of the socio-political situation in Russian regions in order to effectively build communication between the government and civil society as well as identify possible points of growth of protest moods in social networks and online communities in online space.

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Keywords: Regional discourse, political content, online space, constituent entity of the Russian Federation, election of governors, political process.



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1. Introduction

The post-information society, or network society, has moved to a new stage of its development – the "post-truth era", in which the transformation of information and communication technologies providing almost unlimited possibilities for the formation of political content determines the main vector of social growth due to the emergence of mechanisms of containment / direction of public discourse (Hester & Srnicek, 2017; Ridout, 2018). Thanks to mobile communications, the Internet and social networks as well as citizens can be self-organized anywhere in the world without involving the authorities in just one hour. This means that the emerging new types and channels of political mobilization can transform modern democratic governance structures in complex or emergency situations and become a key mechanism for restructuring the interaction of power and civil society in solving global and local problem situations (Ridout, Fowler, Branstetter, & Borah, 2015; Wallis & Given, 2016;). Such new types and channels of political mobilization can have both constructive and destructive consequences (Pearson, 2017; Volkova & Panchenko, 2016) for the development of socio-political systems.

2. Problem Statement

We define political content as a part of the socio-political reality reflected in the consciousness of actors and reproduced in a verbal and non-verbal form (Ryabchenko, Malysheva, & Gnedash, 2019b). Political content forms a continuous environment – an information and news field consisting of discrete messages through which social and political actors in the public sphere interact. 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 process of political content formation, its consumption and further transformation and impact on social reality both online and offline is described by an explanatory model of political content management. This model is based on the fact that political content forms a continuous environment – an asynchronous multimodal discursive field consisting of discrete messages through which social and political actors in the public sphere interact, both institutional and non-institutional (Ryabchenko, Gnedash, Malysheva, Shestakova, & Nikolaeva, 2019a). An asynchronous multimodal discursive field includes asynchronous multimodal discourses that specify the development vectors of the entire field and determine the possibility of forming the potential of any social action. A distinctive feature of asynchronous multimodal discourses that are formed in the online space is that the verbal content is supported by other forms (Kahn, 2017), for example, emoji or video files, thereby strengthening it and focusing the attention of the online audience, increasing the likelihood of accumulating social action potential .

Political content management as one of the processes for analyzing and monitoring the socio-political system can be applied at different levels from local communities to the federal level (Katermina & Gnedash, 2018; Theocharis, 2015). An asynchronous multimodal discursive field formed by political content is a reflection of the activities of a network community from a small community of residents of

any locality to network communities operating within the subject of the Russian Federation and the whole country

An important stage in the political content management system is the stage of analysis of the methods of production and reproduction of political content by actors of the socio-political process. The analysis of political content and the formation of its management system is especially important at the regional level in anticipation of a new electoral cycle in the Russian Federation.

3. Research Questions

3.1. What are the main linguistic-discursive characteristics of political content produced by political actors in the online space?

3.2. What socio-political topics are determined in the regional political discourse?

3.3. How can the discourse and content produced by institutional political actors (government, governors, official publics, media) be characterized?

3.4. How can the discourse produced by non-institutional political actors (users, online communities, top bloggers) be characterized?

3.5. What are the main features of the formation and development of regional political discourse in the online space of modern Russian regions?

4. Purpose of the Study

Modern reality, which led to the emergence of new discursive strategies, models and techniques for operating the language, including manipulating information in order to achieve predicted results, has allowed a huge number of discourses to go online. Obviously, with the advancement of technology, the pragmatic potential of text in online space increases 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. In terms of the power of destruction, the development of linguistic discursive online practices is comparable to the atomic bomb – an incredibly large-scale total destruction and preservation of destructive consequences for many centuries (González-Bailón & Wang, 2016; Jost, Barbera, Bonneau, & Langer, 2018).

In connection with these circumstances, interdisciplinary research is of interest (Jones, Chik, & Hafner, 2015), which allows to analyze regional political discourse in the online space using a hybrid operational toolbox to conduct a new qualitative and quantitative analysis of the socio-political situation in the regions of the Russian Federation in order to effectively build communication between the government and civil society as well as identify possible points of growth of protest moods in social networks and network communities in the online space (Ryabchenko, Katermina, Gnedash, & Vulfovich, 2019c).

5. Research Methods

To analyze regional political discourse, a political content management model was applied and a hybrid research methodology was tested. The empirical basis of the study was the “Typical” community

on the VKontakte social network: these communities are one of the most common groups in the online space and they are associated with the discussion of issues and problems as well as the vital activities of citizens and authorities at the regional level. One of the key events of 2018 in the socio-political life in Russia was the election of the heads of constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Direct elections were held in 22 Russian regions which served as a criterion for their inclusion in the study. Typical communities include Abakan, Anadyr, Barnaul, Blagoveshchensk, Vladivostok, Vladimir, Voronezh, Ivanovo, Kemerovo, Krasnogorsk, Khabarovsk, Krasnoyarsk, Magadan, Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Orel, Pskov, Samara, Tyumen, Yakutsk. To analyze empirical data, a hybrid operational toolkit (mathematical analysis of social networks and communities, linguistic-discursive analysis, relational sociology) of analyzing political discourse and content in the online space was developed and tested. For each of the 22 subjects, a Data Set was formed from the messages published by members of the Typical communities from January 1, 2018 to June 1, 2019 (the total number of messages was about 160,000 messages containing audio, video, textual content). The Data Set was subjected to frequency analysis to identify markers of those asynchronous multimodal discourses that make up the asynchronous multimodal discursive field of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and which determine the development vectors of the potential of social action. Frequency analysis was supplemented by directional content analysis and folksonomic analysis.

6. Findings

6.1. The model of newspaper discourse penetrates into the online space covering all newspaper headings: editorial, articles on political, economic and social topics, cultural and sports information, weather forecasts, horoscopes, etc. Keeping the external features of the newspaper style, posts published in social networks also have their own characteristics. This trend is especially pronounced in the most popular topic for all the studied communities and regional discourses – the weather. The personal nature of the messages is emphasized by discursive markers (“however”) and personal comments (“have a low skill level of 50-60%”).

6.2. Environmental issues are becoming ubiquitous and replace political issues in the discourses under study. Ecological problems reflected in the messages can also be considered from different angles. In some regions, this event is covered from the point of view of officials and it is dominated by numbers, place names, purpose and result (“Typical Barnaul” and “Typical Yakutsk”).

“In Vladivostok, an action was held by the inhabitants of the Russian island against dust” (Typical Vladivostok). This post is emotional and reflects the opinion of not officials but participants in the event. It also indicates the date, the number of protesters, a detailed description of the actions and the purpose but the events are covered differently. The purpose of the action is indicated on the posters – “to remind the authorities that it is promised to pave the local primer in 2012”. The whatsapp messenger was also chosen as the means of communication – “the islanders agreed on a flash mob for the popular whatsapp messenger – spread out over different sections of the dirt road on Sunday morning.” The protesters prepared “expressive elements” – “in addition to posters and masks, you can also see a stroller with a doll, symbolizing children who have to breathe dust like adults.” Thus, the use of symbols helps to express the protest more clearly.

The struggle for ecology is inextricably linked with the protection of animals. The work of volunteers is also covered in many posts in almost all the regions. There are also posts with warnings about wild animals. Some posts are published anonymously: “Anonymously. In the southwestern region of Krasnozvezdnaya, Shhendrikova, Lyuba-Shevtsova streets, a wild pack of dogs runs around, while it attacks small animals, several cats are strangled. Do not keep small dogs without a leash walking them. Be careful, such a pack can attack a person ”(“Typical Voronezh ”).

Environmental issues interact with advertising discourse. The appearance of advertising messages, the purpose of which is to show the environmental friendliness of one place or another, is expressed in the following posts: "Leo's eco house invites people who wish to spend their holidays comfortably." In this post, the repetition of the word “ecology” and its derivatives (eco, environmental) as well as synonyms (pure, natural) enhances the effect necessary for the advertiser.

6.3. Formation of regional identity through history, traditions and visual means (historical information, photographs and postcards). In many of the studied “Typical” communities, posts on the history of the place occupy a rather large place in social networks as well as photos and postcards (“Typical Kemerovo”, “Typical Tyumen”, “Typical Moscow”, “Typical Abakan”).

6.4. In publications of the posts on topics of a political and economic nature as well as issues related to social problems, a neutral, dry, official style is traced in most regions.

So, for example, in one of the posts in the typical Samara community, it is reported that “in Tolyatti the chief of police of the Central District was fired. Former chief Vladimir Myasnikov was dismissed from the police department after an internal audit. Vladimir Myasnikov was interested in security officials in connection with the case of bribes in the Togliatti police, an exchange for protection of intimate salons. The status in the case is not yet known. ” This post is characterized by the use of terminology (“dismissal, police chief, Tsentralny district, police department, internal audit, bribe, police, status”). The source of this information is also indicated.

Information about the improvement of Barnaul – to describe the actions the use of verbs with a positive connotation in the future tense is typical (“equip, conduct, apply (road marking), install (racks), will be taken into account, planned to be implemented”); verbs in the past tense indicate completion of actions (“a number of activities completed, part of the work completed”).

"Typical Vladimir." A post related to politics has another modality: “Guys, I heard Zhirinovskiy come to the region. I wonder if there will be cheap PR in the form of distribution of money? To me, it’s humiliating – instead of implementing projects, have 500 roubles and rejoice. Sipyagin promises and the party leader shows by such actions that the region will not start living normally. ” First of all, it is necessary to pay attention to the personal appeal, which from the very beginning tunes to a more personal approach. The presence of vocabulary with a negative connotation is also characteristic (“cheap PR, distribution of money, humiliating”). In the context of the post, discontent is felt in relation to the head of the region (“by such actions the region will not start living normally”).

6.5. In some regions, an event in the city resonates, and as a result, the number of posts and reposts increases, so residents express concern and demonstrate cohesion.

In particular, residents responded to a series of explosions at the Crystal plant in Dzerzhinsk (Typical Nizhny Novgorod). In numerous posts, this event was covered from different angles: in the posts

there is both factual information conveyed by neutral vocabulary and a dry official style as well as emotional vocabulary indicating residents' indifference to the event.

6.6. It is also worth noting the following feature: in a particular regional community, a definite topic is reflected in a large number of posts in connection with which we can talk about the typicality and importance of this problem.

So, for example, in the posts of the Typical Blagoveshchensk community, much attention is paid to road accidents. The typical Voronezh community quite often highlights transport issues. The typical Kemerovo community is characterized by construction and polling posts. The Typical Barnaul community has many political posts. They are characterized by the following features: most of the information is given using neutral vocabulary; the posts provide links to authoritative sources, quotes, numbers and dates

7. Conclusion

As a result we have identified several features of the formation and development of regional political discourse in the online space of modern Russian entities.

First, the political discourse under study, formed by network communities in asynchronous multimodal discursive fields, is characterized by the active use of hashtags. Hashtags not only group messages of similar content in microblogs and provide the ability to quickly search for the necessary information but also get a creative character. The hashtag serves for a more capacious expression of meanings without the use of natural language syntax and moreover often acquires a special communicative status in a sentence.

Secondly, the discourse under study is distinguished by "personal" and identical posts in which love for one's region is shown which is achieved by vocabulary with a positive connotation. Graphical method should also be noted – the use of exclamation marks, emoticons as well as photographs demonstrating the beauty of the area. The toponyms “Khakassia”, “Abakan”, “Kemerovo”, “Khabarovsk”, “Moscow”, etc represent the people living in these territories. This enhances the effect and demonstrates the unity of people. The same effect is achieved by using the appeal "friends" which is the etiquette formula in communication. Typical turns of speech etiquette is a kind of language stock that regulates social and personal relationships between speakers of a given language. The formulas of address serve as one of the most important aspects of speech activity: the organization and regulation of communicative relations. The appeal is a function of the official linguistic unit which consists in emphasizing the direction of the text as a whole and its individual parts to the addressee as well as in establishing correspondence between the representations of the addresser and the addressee about the nature of socially typed relations between them in the process of creating and perceiving the text.

Thirdly, non-verbal forms are used along with verbal forms of treatment. The implementation of communication is characterized by new forms of shortening, the inclusion of graphic elements, emoji emoticons created in 1998 by Shigetak Kurit and included in the daily communication of each user of the media space. These tools express discursive and pragmatic information which is aimed at organizing discourse and speech contact, at the author's self-expression and his interaction with the addressee.

Fourth, virtually every post is accompanied by links and hyperlinks. In almost all regional posts there are a large number of links and hyperlinks to a particular event, information or photo, which is not accidental since this is one of the characteristic features of asynchronous multimodal discursive fields formed by communities.

Fifth, the themes of social and environmental issues in the discourse under study are more of a value than elections and political issues. In some communities, social and everyday life topics completely replace political issues. The personalities of candidates for various political regional and municipal posts are of interest to community members either in the case of negative informational throws or if the candidate led an active election campaign in the Internet space.

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