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## **CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A METHOD OF RESEARCH OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

The use of the social media diplomacy in political discourse is indisputably getting more popular every year. In this regard social media are the way of reaching each member of the society directly and quickly, allowing them to interact with the

audience. This article is aimed at studying the specific features of political discourse in social media and offering the paradigm for its analysis. With this aim, a research of the nature of political discourse in social media is first conducted. It is explained that this discourse is developing in the conditions of high competition for public attention, thus requires to be interactive (even proactive), credible, and reach the target audience. Based on this position, an explanation of the method suitable for the analysis, critical discourse analysis, is provided. Due to the nature of research area, such method seems legitimate for identifying, interpreting and explaining power relations and competition of discourses. Moreover, for the case of Ukrainian society and civil confrontation taking place in it critical discourse analysis could provide necessary answers in terms of avoiding negative consequences.

**Key words:** critical discourse analysis, social media, soft power, civil confrontation.

**Яровий Д. О. Критичний дискурс-аналіз як метод дослідження політичного дискурсу в соціальних медіа.** Використання соціальних медіа в політичному дискурсі стає все більш популярним із кожним роком. Соціальні медіа – канал, здатний досягти кожного члена суспільства безпосередньо й швидко, і такий, що дає змогу взаємодіяти з аудиторією. Стаття спрямована на вивчення особливостей політичного дискурсу в соціальних медіа та розроблення схеми його аналізу. Для цього проведено дослідження природи політичного дискурсу в соціальних медіа. Пояснено, що такий дискурс розвивається в умовах високої конкуренції за увагу громадськості, отже, він зобов'язаний бути інтерактивним (і часто випереджувальним), яке заслуговує на довіру, і бути спрямованим на цільову аудиторію. Виходячи із цієї позиції, надається пояснення наукового методу, придатного для дослідження, тобто критичного аналізу дискурсу. У зв'язку з характером дослідницької сфери цей метод видається обґрунтованим для ідентифікації, інтерпретації та пояснення відносин сили й конкуренції дискурсів. Крім того, стосовно українського суспільства й громадянського протистояння, що відбувається в ньому, критичний аналіз дискурсу надає потрібні відповіді з погляду уникнення негативних наслідків.

**Ключові слова:** критичний аналіз дискурсу, соціальні медіа, м'яка сила, громадянське протистояння.

**Яровой Д. А. Критический дискурс-анализ как метод исследования политического дискурса в социальных медиа.** Использование социальных медиа в политическом дискурсе становится все более популярным с каждым годом. Социальные медиа являются каналом, способным достичь каждого члена общества напрямую и быстро, и позволяющим взаимодействовать с аудиторией. Статья направлена на изучение особенностей политического дискурса в социальных медиа и разработки схемы его анализа. Для этого проведено исследование природы политического дискурса в социальных медиа. Объясняется, что такой дискурс развивается в условиях высокой конкуренции при внимании общественности, таким образом, он обязан быть интерактивным (и часто предваряющим), заслуживающий доверия, и быть направленным на целевую аудиторию. Исходя из этой позиции, предоставляется объяснение

научного метода, подходящего для исследования, т. е. критического анализа дискурса. В связи с характером исследовательской области этот метод представляется обоснованным для идентификации, интерпретации и объяснения отношений силы и конкуренции дискурсов. Кроме того, в случае украинского общества и происходящего в нем гражданского противостояния, критический анализ дискурса предоставляет необходимые ответы с точки зрения избегания негативных последствий.

**Ключевые слова:** критический анализ дискурса, социальные медиа, мягкая сила, гражданское противостояние.

**Research problem.** In the modern age of overwhelming use of Internet and social media the latter is frequently used as an instrument of broadening political influence and achieving different goals through reaching the networks of information consumers in the Internet. The social media is now used with a varying degree of success by global and national political actors, which allows us to speak about it as about the instrument of political discourse and one of the concepts representing soft power in politics.

This instrument, being accessible and covering the high amount of communicators and communicants, could impact the social, political and economic processes, which has been proved by the events of “Arab spring” in early 2010-s, EuroMaidan, and recently, by the unexpected win of Donald Trump at the US elections, who almost ignored the conventional media in his campaign, paying most attention to the Internet.

In Ukraine, social media is also widely used, and the amount of users of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other channels is extensively growing every year, targeting people from more varied focus groups than ever. Unfortunately, social media is often used in a destructive way, causing social instability or other negative consequences. It makes important for political psychologists to pay attention to this area, and investigate how they could research and influence the developments taking place in social media.

Consequently, **the aim of the present article is** to discuss the specific features of political discourse in social media and offer a methodological framework for its comprehensive analysis from the point of view of political psychology.

**Theoretical review.** Before proceeding with the presentation of methodology, it is necessary to discuss the specific features of political discourse in social media, which largely predetermines the suggested paradigm for its analysis.

Since with the technological outbreak, the monopoly on information has been dissolved in all civilised countries from political power to everyone who is using Internet, the political elites had to change their operation model as well. Currently political groups of interest have to be especially proactive and rapid in setting their agenda. In their hands, the technology-enabled networks of the global web may be both the source of mass hysteria, confusion and hostility, when spreading propaganda, and the source of cross-cultural communication and understanding with limitless potential, when having the right knowledge and being used in a constructive way [4].

Joseph Nye stresses that in the information age the measurement of the effectiveness of information activities is not the expenditures on it, but the change of people's minds. He argues that in the modern conditions of excessive development of information technologies the "paradox of plenty" has occurred, when overwhelming amount of information is distracting people, preventing them from focusing on important things. It means that nowadays "attention rather than information becomes the scarce resource" [5, p. 99]. It adds even more value to the usage of social media, where the amount of information is so excessive that it can't be measured. Thus, the pressure on those who use the information product created in social media is extensive, so is the competitiveness for their attention. The competition of discourses in public arenas makes the discourses more aggressive and more tend to represent the polar opinions. Consequently, the discourses start to collide, which eventually leads to the collision of identities. In brings the issue – how are the discourses becoming more or less efficient?

According to Nicholas Westcott, the main implications of the social media usage in policy and diplomacy are service delivery, ideas, networks and information. Westcott underlines that promoting ideas is the main instrument of achieving success, and writes that it is essential to influence public opinion by being present in the right virtual spaces and calibrating the message to the various virtual audiences. He suggests that interactivity, i.e. the possibility to cooperate with target audience in the real-time regime and respond towards its needs, makes such efforts more efficient. These implications allow claiming that social is acting in support of conventional political discourse, being one of the tools of its adaptation to the Internet age [7].

Interactive political discourse cooperates with the target audience of consumers, and responds to their queries, even those which are difficult

and/or provocative. This interactivity may have different forms of coming out: either as a reaction towards the issues arising (reactive approach), or as an agenda-setting in the international politics (proactive approach). Interactivity requires moving from one-way information-driven communication to two-way experience-sharing and relationship-building. In the conditions when information channels have been extremely expanded, the attention of the target audience is easily distracted. When people notice that their question are left unnoticed, they quickly lose interest and don't monitor the newsmaker anymore [9]. In this instance agenda-setting in political discourse could mean not only responding, but also preventing the interest of public by supplying information which is demanded.

The example of successful realisation of this agenda on the international level is provided by the USA, whose "e-diplomacy" strategy, mobilising the American public to "get busy on the Internet" and proactively interact with foreign audiences to carry out some of American's diplomatic strategies, has been actively promoted since 9/11. It has been realised via answering question asked in the web, real-time transmitting the most important events (for example, via micro-blogging), providing feedback to commentators and even organising contests among users. These activities may also cover, e. g., the application of the US Ambassador's personal micro-blogs, which become very popular in the country of residence and usually get numerous reposts and comments.

It brings us to understanding, that one of the instruments ensuring interactivity of political discourse, which allows to spread first-hand ideas and information, discuss it and get a feedback, is social media. The existence of the wide network of people with shared interests, certain level of mutual trust and public authority (especially when we speak about policy-makers or civil society activists) simplifies the spread of idea, making it possible to share the news, position or comment within minutes. Especially important it becomes in the conditions of crisis communications, when speed is of particular importance, or when other information sources are restricted.

However, it's also actual for society in the period of permanent crisis, where mutual trust between state, society and different groups representing both these categories is low. For Ukraine, where civil confrontation has been artificially escalated by Russia, as well as by different internal groups, such situation is a common practice, and different interest groups of official and unofficial status are utilizing such situation.

To understand the effectiveness of different channels of social media communications depending on their status, it is important to be critical regarding the level of social media credibility among their customers.

On the one hand, unofficial communications could be more powerful, as the source identity has been recognised very important for the persuasiveness of the message in the Internet. People often “rely more on word-of-mouth news based on social media than on traditional press when seeking interpretation and understanding of current events” [8, p. 18], and when these news are personalised, they sound more convincing and reliable. Social media provide the audience with the information from most different sources, which people from their personal circle of communication have found interesting. It means that users are not selecting the content source first, instead they select the story itself, depending on its level of trust to particular communicators or interconnections with particular social media newsmakers. It generates the pluralism and competition of the sources and opinions [2, p. 260].

On the other hand, in the functioning of social media as information source the “paradox of plenty” remains actual, and for some groups of users, especially conservative, information posted by any individual is less credible than other types of information sources. Regarding this, it is important to work on the reputation of the sources. “Internet remembers everything”, and social media messages of those conducting political discourse should be very carefully selected, concerted with the official policy and exact (avoid disinformation).

At the same time, in the modern environment, personalised activities in political discourse (social networks, blogs) have given the target audience opportunity to directly communicate with the foreign policy agents, who are now perceived as being ordinary, “someone-like-me” people, not like impersonal statehood machine [9]. Consequently, it is influencing the very discourse which communicators are using, and they have to find a balance between official representation and keeping their communication personalized. Finding this balance properly creates favourable conditions for promoting the ideas and values through the social media.

Thus, the social media is one of the channels of political discourse. It has its own peculiarities, like high level of interconnection among users, rapid reaction on the events, differing approaches towards formal status, and all these features altogether make social media an instrument of influencing the society, which requires a complex research from the positions of political psychology. The above outlined theoretical framework in

connection with suitable methodological model will allow establishing an analytical scheme, which enables understanding of the psychological features of social media discourse.

**Major findings and results.** The research of political discourse through the social media has to answer the question through explaining the mechanisms of discourse, how is it organized, what group of interests are behind and what are their instruments. This kind of research requires a method which through the examination of messages and its context will provide the understanding of the goals of communication, connect it with the political and social events, and the identity, interests and motives of the communicators. Speaking about the case of Ukraine, it should allow concluding, what are the mechanisms of escalating civil confrontation in the social media, and providing some models to avoid negative consequences of this process.

In order to elaborate the research design it is necessary to reflect about different methods of the research of communication. In the large selection of qualitative and quantitative methods possible, this should be one aimed at the analysis of specific texts. It provides such major options, as content analysis and discourse analysis.

While content analysis is used effectively to identify the categories prevailing or missing in the text, this approach provides mostly a quantitative measurement. In political communication, especially in such sensitive environment as social media, focus on the meaning and the context is more important, since frequency is not identical to the importance. The discourse analysis provides understanding of the meaning and the goal of the message, allows to identify the interests, correlate it with the social context, and elaborate social practices presented in the communication.

The object of discourse analysis could be defined as the patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life [3]. There are several well-known approaches to discourse analysis: Laclau and Mouffe' discourse theory (which focuses on the constant struggle of different discourses, "each representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world", in order to achieve hegemony), discursive psychology (which researches the usage of existing discourses flexibility "in creating and negotiating representations of the world and identities") and critical discourse analysis, or CDA (with the main interest in the analysis of change and intertextuality, i.e. "how an individual text draws on elements and discourses of other texts" [3, p. 7].

Critical discourse analysis is the approach providing theories and methods for the empirical study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in society. One of the models existing within this approach is three-dimensional model, elaborated by Norman Fairclough [1]. The main feature of the model is that discourse is deemed as having binary nature, being in a dialectical relationship with the social world. Thus the discourse is both reproducing and impacting reality and being influenced by it, and the context is extremely important for understanding the discourses.

The reason to use the CDA for research of the political discourse in social media is its strong emphasis on understanding the ideological influence towards power relations, which is the foremost component of policy. According to Fairclough, discourses might be more or less ideological, but nevertheless ideologically they contribute to the transformation of power relations [3, p. 75]. Critical discourse analysis will help to trace the specific features of such transformation in social media texts, which are largely contextual. It will also allow identifying the variety of discourses in the same texts, and comprehending their competition with each other. Speaking about the specific case of Ukraine, analysis of political discourse in social media could provide.

The three-dimensional model provides differentiated approach to analysis. The text analysis is focused on the linguistic features (how are discourses performed), analysis of discursive practice (how the text is produced and consumed, and how do the discourses interrelate), and of the social practice (how do the discourses interact with the wider world and to see what implications do they have to relevant actors regarding power relations).

The analytical tools of CDA are broad: they cover the deep research of the intertextual chains in the text, relations between content and its structure, possible interpretations of the discourses, relations between speakers and consumers, wording, grammar, and social context of the discourses. Application of this model can provide description, interpretation and explanation of the political discourse and answer the research question, depending on which sphere is being studied.

The research design of the CDA is flexible, and it could be tailored to match the characteristics of certain research project. It includes such steps as the choice of the research problem, formulation of research questions,



selection of material, its transcription and the analysis itself [3]. The below presented methodological scheme of research presents the example of the application of CDA to the research of civil confrontation in Ukraine through the political discourse in social media.

First stage is the explanation of the validity and reliability of the method for the situation. It starts with understanding of the essence of the CDA. The critical discourse analysis, as derives from its name, should contribute to the issue of some injustice or challenge in the society. Also, it has to provide explanations and critique to the case in study to disclose the possible misinterpretations, discover all the variety of meanings in the particular discourses.

The research of political discourse in social media, especially on the case of Ukraine, would be a representational method. Such discourse is functioning in the conditions of partition both in the camp of recipients and suppliers of the information. The values and ideologies in Ukrainian society are dispersed and often questionable, and both external and internal groups of interests, which are shaping them, aren't unilateral in their actions and discursive acts. The understanding of the needs and values of Ukrainian citizens is sometimes distorted, and the dissonance exists between expectations towards the Ukrainian authorities and their real actions.

The interest groups participants to the confrontation are arising to due group polarization, which is a psychological mechanism of their construction. Group polarization is a psychological mechanism of fragmentation of discourses and increase of confrontation. As the result of group discussion, difficult discourses and polar opinions are not getting smoother, but instead polarize. As the result competition between groups is growing, and they are less collaborating with each other and more competing [6]. In social media, with low degree of censorship and self-censorship, quick and spontaneous reaction of users and low level of emotional control, the polarization is activated even more than in off-line life, becoming a mechanism of constructing group confrontation.

In regard of this notions, the CDA will allow to identify policies in qualitative measurement: which topics and how are disclosed in the messages of different actors, what is the meaning of messages in regard of social context, which social practices are shaped, and how do the actors relate to each other in the communication process? It will demonstrate the possible roots of misinterpretations of information and suggest the way to avoiding it.

The choice of the material analysed through the CDA depends on the research problem, researcher's background and access to information. The array of communication in the Internet (especially in social media) is large, rapidly proliferating and contains numerous excessive messages, therefore before analysing it is extremely important to set and explain certain limitations of the amount of material used via defining the chronology and sources.

It is necessary to select a time lapse, which would allow to cover the research. The author suggests starting this process from 18 February 2014, when the events of Euromaidan became radicalized due to violent actions of President Yanukovich and his team, and civil confrontation all over the country became more dangerous. Speaking about the end up point, it would be the day of change of Government of Arseniy Yatseniuk to the Government of Volodymyr Groysman – 14 April 2016. Ending the period of research with the change of Government is justified by two reasons: it presents a point when civil confrontation between groups of interests has peaked due to their focus on entering the Government, and just after that a decline took place due to the temporary achieved balance.

Sources of the material are Facebook accounts of the active users, who take part in the political discourse. The accounts will be selected through the expert interviews, utilizing the opinion of the knowledgeable informants in the area of Facebook. Facebook is preferred to other social media channels (Twitter, YouTube, blogs, image boards) due to several reasons. Firstly, in Ukraine this environment is highly politicized, and the major part of web political discourse takes place in this sphere. Secondly, Facebook provides large texts, sometimes with the strong visual component (photos, videos added), which allows to apply discourse analysis broadly. Finally, this social medium encompasses almost all important communicators, which might be absent from YouTube, Twitter or blogs (thus the comparison would be non-representative).

The analysis, as it was mentioned before, will be based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The linguistic features of the text are the instruments used in the text, in this case – language used: wording, grammar, language (Ukrainian, Russian, English). The important elements to be identified are also transitivity and modality. Research of the transitivity is detecting the relations between processes and subjects/objects

(i. e., mention of the responsible actor in “Ukrainian authorities dispersed the group of protestants”, or its omission in “protestants were dispersed”), and research of modality focuses on the speaker’s affiliation to the message (“it is human rights violation”, “we deem it violation” or “may be considered as violation”).

The discursive practice may be defined as a process related to the production and consumption of the text. The discourses here mean sets of communicative concepts used in the certain social context. Its research will trace the intertextual chain of messages and identify discourses present in the political discourse in Facebook, what ideas are conveyed and how are they connected. It will provide the understanding of the interaction of communicators and discourses with each other.

The social practice is the relation of the discursive practice with its context, which is social world. Its analysis will be the concluding part, intended to reflect the relations of political discourse in Facebook with the events and processes of political life. It will map a social matrix of discourse [1], which will allow to understand the level of reactive or proactive character of discourses, and trace their evolution or regress. It is conducted via linking discourses with political and social events, including negotiations, official statements, publications, protests, interference of the third party etc., and its possible theoretical explanations by political and communication studies.

**Summary and further research prospects.** The present article discusses the specific features of political discourse in social media. The first characteristic mentioned is the proactive nature of such discourse and its ability to attract numerous people in real-time regime. The proactivity or reactivity of discourse is important to understand how influential it is, which have been provided by some major political events. Another issue with social media discourse is its reliability, which is connected with large amount of information and often informal way of its origination. The research of political discourse through the social media has to answer the question through explaining the mechanisms of discourse, how is it organized, what group of interests are behind and what are their instruments. These questions could be answered through the examination of messages and their context, goals of communication, and connection with identity, and motives of communicators.

In order to analyse such political discourse, a model of critical discourse analysis by Norman Fairclough would be relevant. Such analytical scheme for the political discourse in social media, utilizing the critical discourse analysis of public policy messages, is logically embedded into the theoretical framework of social media and discourse, which was discussed. It allows answering certain research questions, and could be applied to the research of civil confrontation in Ukraine. Such method concludes on the interests of certain groups, the values and ideologies they promote, utilization of different psychological mechanisms to achieve certain aim, thus providing implications to the discussion of the civil confrontation in Ukraine and methods of preventing its negative consequences.

The ongoing studies will be focused on implementing the method on practice to achieve results on the group polarization in social media as a mechanism of civil confrontation in Ukraine.

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