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PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF CIVIL CONFRONTATION REPRODUCED IN THE UKRAINIAN SEGMENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Purpose. The purpose of the article is to identify the psychological effects of civil confrontation, having an impact on the active part of Ukrainian society – users of social media (namely Facebook). The civil confrontation is a process occurring within the civil society as an important part of Ukrainian political process overall, and has been developed in a controversial way. The values' promotion by "soft power" tools and the competition of discourses are of particular importance in this issue.

Methods. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) was utilized as a research method for the explanation of the "message-context" relationship, pointing out the positions of interest groups, and demonstrating the discourses' interaction. The ethogenic approach provided the effective data work in the circumstances of a strong correlation between the object and the context and of an impossibility of laboratory experiments. Theoretical sampling was used for data collection.

Results. As a result of data analysis, the following psychological effects shaped by the practices of civil confrontation in social media are described: monotony, desensitization, ambivalence and alertness. These effects may be used to divert public attention, change (increase or decrease) the level of protest potential, push impulsive actions, impose conflicting ideas, or stimulate society to changes in values (both in a positive and in a negative ways).

Conclusions. Considering the increasing anomie in the Ukrainian society, the psychological effects may cause a sense of helplessness and exhaustion among citizens, and make the society prone to the various manipulative influences. Consequently, they could be used by interest groups to construct an agenda and establish the dominance of their own discourse at public arenas. Further research in this area should assess the potential impact of psychological practices on different target groups in the short-term and long-term perspective.

Key words: *civil society, psychological practices, critical discourse analysis, monotony, ambivalence, desensitization, alertness.*

ПСИХОЛОГІЧНІ ЕФЕКТИ ГРОМАДЯНСЬКОГО ПРОТИСТОЯННЯ, ВІДТВОРЕНІ В УКРАЇНСЬКОМУ СЕГМЕНТІ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕДІА

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Мета. Мета статті – виявити психологічні наслідки громадянського протистояння, які впливають на активну частину українського суспільства – користувача соціальних медіа (у цьому разі Facebook). Громадянське протистояння розглядається як процес, який значною мірою відбувається в межах громадянського суспільства, що в Україні є важливою частиною політичного процесу, але має суперечливі



тенденції у розвитку. У цьому питанні особливе значення мають пропагування цінностей з використанням інструментів «м'якої сили» та конкуренція дискурсів.

Методи. Дослідницький метод аналізу критичного дискурсу (КДА) був використаний як метод, який пояснює взаємозв'язок повідомлення з контекстом, вказує на позиції груп інтересів у дискурсі та демонструє взаємодію різних дискурсів. Використання при цьому етогенічного підходу дає змогу ефективно працювати з даними в умовах сильного зв'язку об'єкта з контекстом та неможливістю проведення лабораторних експериментів. Дані були зібрані з використанням теоретичної вибірки.

Результати. У результаті їх аналізу були визначені психологічні ефекти, сформовані практиками громадянського протистояння в соціальних медіа, і включають монотонність, десенсибілізацію, амбівалентність та наполегливість. Відповідні ефекти можуть бути використані для відволікання уваги суспільства, зміни (нарощування чи зниження) рівня протестного потенціалу, підштовхування до імпульсивних дій, нав'язування суперечливих ідей чи стимулювання суспільства до переосмислення цінностей як у позитивному ключі, так і в негативному.

Висновки. З огляду на зростаючу аномію в українському суспільстві, ці ефекти можуть призвести до того, що громадяни відчуватимуть безпорадність та виснаження та зроблять суспільство більшою мірою схильним до маніпулятивного впливу різного типу. Як підсумок, вони можуть бути використані групами інтересів для конструювання порядку денного та встановлення домінування власного дискурсу на публічних аренах. Подальші дослідження у цьому напрямі мають оцінювати потенційний вплив психологічних практик на різні цільові групи в короткостроковій та довгостроковій перспективі.

Ключові слова: громадянське суспільство, психологічні практики, критичний дискурс-аналіз, монотонія, амбівалентність, десенсибілізація, алертність.

Introduction

Internet and social media outburst has become another important stage of communicative revolution, and the social media as a source of communication has been influencing all social spheres, including the political process. In Ukrainian political and psychological scientific discussions, the social media is relatively new subject. It has collected a new wave of attention throughout the Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014, so the information and psychological impact of the aggressor country is one of the elements of the warfare. The internal aspect of social media psychological impact is represented in the research.

The presented studies on the psychological effects of civil confrontation in social media will be useful for those interested in conflicting socio-political processes in Ukraine and involved in the protection of society and citizens in the social media domain. It may be topical for political and social psychologists seeking to develop social programs to minimize the negative effects of conflicts within representatives of different identities in Ukraine, as well as for political consultants and communicators in the development and implementation of their strategies. The ideas and tools contained in the research may also inspire the scientific search of scholars working in the fields of psychology, psycholinguistics, communication science and conflict studies.

1. Theoretical substantiation of the problem

The study of the psychological effects caused by the practices of civil confrontation in social media is largely related to the phenomenon of civil confrontation itself,

which may be defined as a form of intra-social group confrontation. The latter is characterized by crystallization of value contradictions among the conflicting sides and may deploy into other varieties of conflict interaction. Civil confrontation is a complex phenomenon that is more acute than the social tension, but has not developed into social conflict yet. It's important to comprehend that within one country social tensions between some groups can exist (for example, between "old-generation" of civil servants and employees of the newly created policy analysis directorates), and civil confrontation among others (such as supporters and opponents of certain political forces), as well as social conflict (such as between representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine). Exacerbations in the continuum of conflicting socio-political processes occur as a gradual escalation of the strife, which is becoming more and more severe.

The civil confrontation is a process, which largely takes place within the civil society, and sometimes is even defined as the counteraction between civil society and government structures via the desire to establish control over the activities of state bodies (Petukhov, 2012). In the Ukrainian context, the similar situation was taking place in 2014–2015 after Euromaidan, with the first wave of initiative people joining the civil service and civil society growing, while the political power had been weakened. In order to function efficiently, both the authorities and the civil society institutions had to cooperate to overcome the tensions and ensure the harmonious cooperation of official and non-official institutions.

The development of civil society in Ukraine has been quite controversial. In the aftermath of the change of government in 2014, there was a significant progress in this direction, and civil society proved to be an integral attribute of democracy. Moreover, since certain elements of civil society have gone back to the Soviet era (trade unions, individual religious communities, etc.), we may assume that a fragmented civil society can exist even within undemocratic system (Kornievskiy, 2016: 268).

The values are of importance for the civil society, therefore the goals of citizens are varied and dynamically changing. For instance, the low trust to the law enforcement agencies has been stimulating the development of respective directions (such as investigative journalism), and the war which started in 2014 stimulated volunteer movement, when the values of solidarity, patriotism and freedom are shared by significant amount of people. Since the values cannot be uniquely false or true and criteria for value choice are always conditioned by context, the need of solidarity is large (Polishchuk, 2016).

In fact, strange as it may seem hostilities in Ukraine had some positive impact on civil society in terms of its consolidation. Standing against the external aggression of Russia is one of the main factors of civil society strengthening by giving the society a new meaning of existence and helping to reduce disagreements between organizations with a “pro-Ukrainian” agenda (Kornievskiy, 2016). Thus, the development of civil society is a major factor to prevent the emergence of civil war: such communities promote greater coherence of social relations and better coexistence of people. One of the goals of civil society is to ensure a dignified, happy and harmonious life, and in the process of becoming such a society, members of the political community should take into consideration the opinions of their opponents and seek compromise in order to achieve common prosperity (Rybalka, 2017).

The stance of the civil society depends on how free is communication within it to a large extent, because this instrument enables people to assert their rights and interests. In a civil society where the values of freedom are essential, conflicting socio-political processes are likely to be less radical, as citizens are more prepared to cooperate and yield, and there is no universal dominant value scale, where the deviation is punished by sanctions. But even in such a utopian version of civil society, civil confrontation would take place as a way of rotating values shared by particular groups, and these processes take place in the communicative sphere.

The discourse is the embodiment and implementation of social practices in the communicative sphere, which makes its research important in order to understand how the relations between society members are built. This discourse can influence the decisions made by individuals and shape their identity, as well as cause the escalation or de-escalation of the conflicts (Ivanov, 2005). However, not all discourses matter that much – in fact, a very small number of problems acquire the important status and turn into dominant topics, while the number of problems themselves does not decrease. Consequently, in the domain of communication the conflicts exist as the competition of discourses for the hegemony at the public arenas, which is not a new idea in scientific discourse – Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) wrote that since social attention was the scarce resource, staying in the midst of socio-political discourse was the only way to keep the problem topical. In the civil society, this discursive competition is maintained by the interest groups (organized sets of communicators presenting certain social problems), and this competition feeds the civil confrontation.

One of the major criteria of civil confrontation in discourse is the emergence of the image of the enemy. Construction of such an image is one of the traditional means of identity creation and channeling the negativity on the particular group (Kozyrev, 2008). The presence of identity-confrontation process separates unspecified social tension (where there is no clear enemy) from the more active phases of conflict, in particular from the civil confrontation.

There are certain features of constructing civil confrontation in the discursive field of Ukraine, which create the specific configuration for the construction of certain psychological effects. These features include the exploitation of ethnic and civic identity markers, the influence of external interest groups, opponents’ dehumanization, semantic ambiguity etc. And since the civil confrontation has been taking place among the broad range of people, the social media, being actively used by civil society members, is one of the fields of effects construction.

The political discourses in social media are intensifying, becoming a representation of “soft power” in politics. The political crisis of 2013–2014 and Euromaidan demonstrated the significant role of social media in the political mobilization of the society, which is an *inter alia* linked to the high socio-political activity of social media users. Although this channel of broadcasting discourse is not comprehensive, it has an impact on the target



audience involved in political transformation in the society. Social media contributes to the dissemination of discursive practices, especially among the youth, which has been increasingly involved in political life, not least through the Internet (Oleshchuk, 2014).

Among other things, social media discourses influence the political identity of citizens, which is important for the balance of power and for determining the path of social development. The communication in this domain is less restricted for the participants, at the same time less productive and constructive, and often more aggressive – due to several reasons, such as the principally unlimited amount of participants, trans-temporality of discussion processes (every discussion started in the Internet will remain there forever), permeability of communication boundaries, lower level of censorship and self-censorship, poorer amount of communication channels (as a rule, only text and, occasionally, photos are relevant in political discussions online), etc.

To understand the communications in social media, the concept of parasocial relations is important. Being an infrastructure of interactive communication, Internet contributes to the formation of virtual relationships, which is a way to solve the problem of such relationships absence in the physical world. This occurs in the course of parasocial interaction, when the individual has the illusion of interacting with a media figure, or by someone else who “exists” online. Such relationships are convenient and can “draw” a person into the virtual media world, where the individual will choose partners who illustrate his ideas about life (Horton & Wohl, 1956). A choice of who to interact with provides not only a sense of comfort for Internet user, but leads a person to polarization, as he chooses between ready-made alternatives that inspire certain thoughts and the critical thinking is not that necessary anymore (Badmaeva, 2014).

2. Methodology and methods

Studying the psychological effects utilizing a qualitative method requires a thorough analytical model elaboration to explain the limitations and stipulate for the objectivism of the used approach and interpretations. The methodological validity for qualitative methods in this case is related largely to the phenomena of objectivity and subjectivity. There is no substantive definition of the subjectivity of researcher: it is often defined as a set of features of human uniqueness, namely personal hierarchy of researcher’s values, worldview, political views, habits, peculiarities of emotional reactions, etc. (Sainskaya, 2007).

With the development of constructivism and phenomenology in the twentieth

century, discussions have intensified that the objective world is constituted by humans. And although it may exist without the subject knowing, the former’s meanings can only be constituted by the latter. Researcher living in the same social world as the people under his study is able to interpret the motives of human actions, social relations between them based on personal experience of conscious life. Understanding one’s own position (for example, by keeping a diary of thoughts and emotions that arise while working on a study) can help the researcher to make conclusions in this case value neutral (Gotlib, 2012). In the 1990s, the researcher’s detachment from analysis (particularly during the in-depth interview) was criticized for not providing all the answers, and some researchers offered a constructivist approach based on A. Schütz’s phenomenology. This approach determines that the scientist acquires new ideas and meanings that are introduced into social reality through the individuality of the life experience of the person. While social reality is changing through meaningful activity of people, social meanings are also changing (Guba et al., 1994).

Thus, “subjectivity” is a source of social information that allows capturing the diversity of the social world. The researcher may be recognized as part of the study, since the data themselves do not provide a pass to the reality and need to be tied to a cultural and temporal context. It is the researcher who sets such a context, and the active interaction of the researcher with the social world enables studying the reality.

The psychological effects are studied utilizing the ethogenic research approach proposed by Harre (2015), which is suitable when the researchers face a strong connection of the object to the context, dynamic nature of the environment, and are unable to carry out laboratory experiments due to their low environmental validity. This way of research involves studying the real life of people in the sphere of their interaction (in this case – in social media). The expediency of such study is explained by the fact that any concept is understood only in the process of coordination of individuals, which is fully based on a series of meaningful statements. The ethogenic model is based on the fact that a person should be regarded as a subject of his own actions who organizes and directs his own actions independently, not as a passive conductor of the environment. Therefore, in order to understand a person’s social behavior, it is necessary to penetrate into the world the social values that underlie the behavior through the analysis of the statements, actions

and meanings attributed to the actions. An instrument of this is the analysis of the actors' language.

The research method, Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), allows understanding the context of communication, conducting stakeholder analysis, and comprehending the discursive interaction processes. For CDA, the inevitable elements are the concepts of power, history and ideology – the latter being treated as a system of judgments and beliefs, put forward by a certain interest group. All these concepts are expressed through the language (Fairclough, 1992).

The data was collected based on the theoretical sampling approach, which, unlike probabilistic sampling, does not assume a collection plan, yet is governed by the relevance of concepts. The criterion of theoretical sampling is theoretical saturation – the stage of the study, at which the analysis of new data does not add significant new concepts to the theory. Thus the theoretical relevance (materiality) of concepts is proved when they are repeatedly present or noticeably absent when comparing cases and have sufficient significance (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003: 20).

In order to fully capture, the psychological effects in different situations, the communicative situations were examined depending on the level of expressive saturation of texts, the intensity of the discourses' struggle in the virtual environment and the prevalence of discourses outside the virtual environment. The source of the empirical material is the Facebook accounts of active users involved in political discourse.

3. Results and discussions

Psychological effects of civil confrontation in discourses are constructed by different psychological practices, and are promoted by certain groups of interests to exert influence on the political community. The effects described below include monotony, ambivalence, desensitization and alertness.

Monotony is a decrease in conscious control over the performance of activities that occur with frequent repetition of stereotyped actions (Gupta, 2015). For a person in a state of norm, a constant change of the information environment is required, and monotony arises due to the emergence of an emotionally-motivational vacuum. It is related to apathy and indifference, leads to decreased attention and nervous fatigue, builds anxiety and stress, and reflects the desire of the subject to take steps to escape from this state independently. In Ukrainian social media monotony arises as a result of the overuse of polar discourses,

such as "politics and sport" or "politics and culture". On the level of profane discourse, these topics have been continuously exploited since the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014, and have been actively pursued by both "anti-Russian" and "pro-Russian" interest groups. Sport and culture have traditionally been regarded as elements of "soft power", yet the sympathies of less politically involved citizens often take precedence over political ideologues. A similar situation occurs with blurring of attention to public protests, which do not cause a violent reaction of communicators. The discursive tools used in these cases are familiar to the audience and do not elicit emotional reactions. Monotony leads to diminished public attention and lowers the attention of citizens to the events happening around. This effect can be used to divert attention from important events by "clogging" the discourse with unnecessary information to diminish the protest potential of society by marginalizing protest, or by forming in the public "fatigue from war". In order to get out of the state of monotony or at least reduce its negative manifestations, it may be necessary to change a rhythm of information sharing and to illuminate the information from a position that shifts the social focus, thus causing new reactions.

Ambivalence is defined as a complex combination of opposing feelings, thoughts and desires, causing the contradictory states of the emotions and behavior. It is manifested in the coexistence of equal in potential, but mutually unacceptable opposite desires, thoughts or feelings. The strongest reaction to personal ambivalence is an aggression – verbal or physical, which is accompanied by feelings of irritation or anger (Zelinska, 2001). In terms of society, ambivalence – unlike monotony – leads to the production of social anxiety. It can be characterized by the presence of parallel and equivalent directions for the implementation of contradictory or mutually exclusive behaviors and occurs through the cultivation of such norms in society. The current psychological state of Ukrainian mass consciousness as a whole may be defined as ambivalence, as citizens lack clear convictions and values or demonstrate ambivalence through nihilism, absenteeism and conformism. The ambivalence of political consciousness lies in the absence of a system of well-defined political values of society, of agreed opinions about the country's future. It serves to push citizens to commit (or support) impulsive actions that will not be favored by rationally thinking members of society. This effect directly leads to the escalation of civil confrontation, since



it deepens misunderstandings not only between members of society and different groups of communicators, but also internal misunderstandings among those who experience ambivalence. Reducing the negative effects of ambivalence is possible through engaging society in dialogue, making compromise proposals and seeking a “common denominator” – an idea that will unite Ukrainian citizens rather than separate them.

Desensitization refers to the cognitive and behavioral models associated with aggression and anger. This effect is an example of the formation of conditioned reflexes, when a person becomes accustomed to violence and the latter ceases to interest him anymore. Being no longer worried about violence, people are having a lower level of empathy (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). Desensitization in Ukrainian social media arises from the discrediting of discourses (namely, liberal and “tolerant” discourse) gradually defining the boundaries of what is allowed. By aggressively ridiculing the core values of discourse while at the same time committing violent actions, opponents raise the threshold of sensitivity in society. It leads to the tolerance to ethnic, domestic, religious or political violence, and if this process is implemented gradually, its negative effects will be minimally noticeable in the early stages and will manifest sharply in the long run. The negative impact of desensitization should be minimized by disclosing information about such practices and by drawing attention to the “cooling” of social sensibility, articulating the importance of preserving human values.

Alertness is a state of readiness to act keeping the calm behavior, or the ability to immediately switch to active action. This means that society is ready to act in any conditions. It describes the state of certain social movements or political parties as ready for can be described (Simard and Wong, 2001). Alertness is the opposite state to the passiveness, which arises from the reaction of communicators to the actions of opponents. It may arise in the form of the emergence of self-organized social platforms (such as cars with “EU number plates” owners) or grassroots initiatives on peaceful and organized protest, involving non-violent methods (Night at Bankova street).

The described psychological effects may have special role considering the increasing state of anomie in Ukrainian society. Although anomie is positioned as a concomitant process of social change in general, it manifests itself differently across the globe, and in modern Ukraine anomie started with sharp radical changes of all systems of society and was

further aggravated by the military conflict, Crimea annexation and civil confrontation. At the psychological level, this results with the inability to control social life, giving citizens a sense of helplessness and exhaustion. Anomie has penetrated to the individual level and led to the emergence of the infantile society, in which individuals are inherent in the setting to live at the expense of the social care of the state, narrowing the field of social interest to full one-dimensionality, the dominance of selfish attitudes, the weakening of the regulatory functions of moral consciousness, last but not least – sensitivity to manipulative influences. Being morally exhausted, members of society are comfortable victims of influence by elites and ersatz elites in establishing social dominance (Kochubeinyk, 2018). It can be easier to influence society in such a state and, accordingly, the application of the described psychological effects will have consequences – monotony leads to a loss of motivation by citizens to change the social agenda, desensitization – to the “exclusion” of their individual groups from the process and groups’ dehumanization, and ambivalence contributes to further destabilization of the psychological state of citizens and to the commission of impulsive actions.

Conclusions

Civil confrontation as one of the stages of the continuum of socio-political conflicts is interesting precisely because at this stage there is a crystallization of value contradictions and opposition of interests of different groups. If this is identified in a timely manner, if possible factors of its dynamics are identified, then mitigation of its course is quite possible – with greater attention to the information and communication space and the events that take place in it.

Establishing in the political discourses the image of the enemy as one of the main criteria for the emergence of such a confrontation, unfortunately, is relevant for modern Ukraine. The reluctance of members of the public to hear each other, to engage in constructive discussion, to take the place of others – further fueled by the ambitions of politicians and other interest groups – has been leading to exacerbation of tension without problem solving. This is even more relevant in the context of the hybrid war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, one of the main directions of which is informational confrontation and pressure on Ukrainian society using various instruments.

With the advent of the Internet and social media, the world will no longer be the same as it was before. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, image boards have all influenced

the creation of a specific communication environment – dynamic, competitive, interactive and essentially unlimited in the amount of information transfer. There are times when it is more difficult to hold a user's attention than to attract it, when without interactivity the communicator is less interesting to others, when no one is almost limited by censorship and frames, and the user of the information is able to choose whether he wants to be in the "information bubble" or is ready to form his own vision of the situation from different sources. In social media, group polarization is faster and more radical, attention is scattered, and lack of real contact impairs information transmission. Paradoxically, as channels expand, communication itself becomes less constructive and productive.

It is impossible to say unequivocally whether these changes are positive or negative. The investigated cases, which differ in the level of expressive saturation and intensity of the struggle of discourses in the virtual and non-virtual environment, show examples of the birth of both dangerous effects and those that can contribute to the consolidation of certain layers of the civil society. That is why further research in the field of political communication in social media will be more effective and useful for the society and the state if the potential impact of psychological practices on different target groups in the short and long term is evaluated and further ways of de-malignization of the civil confrontation are proposed, than negative effects.

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