



PARALINGUISTIC MEANS OF MANIPULATIVE INFLUENCE ON THE VOTER AS EXEMPLIFIED BY DMITRY MEDVEDEV'S TELEGRAM CHANNEL

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Abstract. The article gives a general characteristic of polycode messengers, which represent an information space that connects different elements of the political system and creates conditions for continuous political communication. Communication through genre 2.0 formats becomes a means of manipulating mass consciousness through these information channels. The need for the analysis of polycode messengers is conditioned by their growing popularity as an arena of political struggle in the modern Russian-speaking information space.

Special attention is paid to Telegram messenger due to the convenience of receiving and distributing information instantly, compressed form of delivery and possibility to interact with other voters on that platform.

The objective of the study is to present and analyze the impact made on the addressee-actor within the information market of instant messaging service Telegram, to systematize and analyze the polycode media of written communication.

An important factor in this context is the polycode organization of the information presented. The role of paralinguistic means of influencing the electorate is assessed based on Dmitry Medvedev's official Telegram channel.

The research material was based on the posts in the official Telegram channel in the period from March 18, 2022 to December 12, 2022 (193 postings).

The main method of research is qualitative content analysis, which analyzes the paragraphematic means of written communication – the presentation of the text material and its graphic design, the text accompaniment by such non-verbal components as emoji. The article contains the description of the main paralinguistic means of communication which are based on the variability of the published material volume, typographic variations, upper case, quotation marks, list serve and emoji usage. The functions that emoji language performs in combination with a stand-alone verbal component are described.

Keywords: polycode messengers, Telegram, genres 2.0, political communication, paragraphematic means of communication, emoji

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ПАРАЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ СРЕДСТВА МАНИПУЛЯТИВНОГО ВОЗДЕЙСТВИЯ НА ИЗБИРАТЕЛЯ НА ПРИМЕРЕ TELEGRAM-КАНАЛА ДМИТРИЯ МЕДВЕДЕВА

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Аннотация. В статье даётся общая характеристика поликодовых мессенджеров, которые представляют собой информационное пространство, связывающее различные элементы политической системы и создающее условия для непрерывной политической коммуникации. Коммуникация через форматы жанра 2.0 становится средством манипуляции массовым сознанием через эти информационные каналы. Необходимость анализа поликодовых мессенджеров обусловлена их растущей популярностью как арены политической борьбы в современном русскоязычном информационном пространстве.

Особое внимание уделяется мессенджеру Telegram в связи с удобством мгновенного получения и распространения информации, сжатой формой подачи и возможностью взаимодействия с другими избирателями на этой платформе.

Целью исследования является представление, изучение и анализ воздействия на адресата-актора в рамках информационного рынка сервиса мгновенных сообщений Telegram, систематизация и анализ поликодовых средств письменной коммуникации.

Важным фактором в данном контексте является поликодовая организация представляемой информации. Роль паралингвистических средств воздействия на электорат оценивается на примере официального Telegram-канала Дмитрия Медведева.

Материалом исследования послужили посты в официальном Telegram-канале в период с 18 марта 2022 года по 12 декабря 2022 года (193 поста).

Основным методом исследования является качественный контент-анализ, в ходе которого анализируются параграфемные средства письменной коммуникации – оформление текстового материала и его графическое оформление, сопровождение текста такими невербальными компонентами, как эмодзи. Статья содержит описание основных паралингвистических средств коммуникации, которые основаны на вариативности объёма публикуемого материала, типографских вариациях, верхнем регистре, кавычках, списочном оформлении и использовании эмодзи. Описаны функции, которые выполняет язык эмодзи в сочетании с отдельным вербальным компонентом.

Ключевые слова: поликодовые мессенджеры, Telegram, жанры 2.0, политическая коммуникация, параграфемные средства коммуникации, эмодзи

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Introduction

As far back as K. Marx argued that “supply prepares demand” [9, p. 203], which can be seen as the dominant principle of functioning of a peculiar “information economy” that has been taking shape in the media space of political discourse in recent times.

A number of studies are produced, which are devoted to the peculiarities of communication and speech tactics and strategies in Internet communication [4], [12], in social networks [2], [11], [7], SMM techniques in social media [13].

Twitter, an American microblogging service and social network, started in 2006¹. Originally created as a platform for instant messaging in everyday communication, this social network quickly became a platform for discussing political events, largely influencing the formation of the so-called “genre 2.0”, which denotes “genre formats emerging under the influence of social media” [3]. Nowadays, instant polycode messengers, which include Telegram, have formed a space in which information connects different elements of the political system, in which the process of information in transfer is continuous and aimed at achieving consensus between the governing and the governed [10].

The high degree of communicative influence can be considered a traditional feature of political discourse. Any speech unit can have a huge response in the audience, arouse interest, and provoke a spectrum of emotions – from approval to hatred [5].

The emergence and proliferation of messengers has multiplied the speed of this response from the mass recipient: the use of social media has created the possibility of unmediated, safe and instantaneous interaction of all actors in the discursive process.

In our view, the growth in popularity of this form of interaction is primarily due to the change in the very strategy of interaction of the politician/political force with the potential voter. The influence of content distribution via messengers is growing, which is primarily due to the visual dialogue form of interaction with the audience.

In the process of political communication, the impact made on the addressee-actor is particularly important. The study aims to explore and analyze this impact within the information marketplace of the instant messaging service Telegram, which allows this impact to be carried out faster and more effectively than other, more traditional sources such as radio, television or websites.

Communication is one of the means by which political elites control the masses in a state. In recent years, the information market has proposed a change in the strategy of interaction between the politician and the political audience through the delivery of information via messengers, through creolized, poly-coded text. Speech impact in order to create conditions for sustainable influence on human consciousness is carried out “through the creation and functioning of political myths transmitted through the media, where the main means of speech influence is creolized text” [14, p. 7].

In this regard, we believe that communication carried out through genre formats 2.0 become a means of manipulating mass consciousness through these information channels. Manipulative influence is carried out directly through the speech sign, and it is the use of messenger as the main channel of influence on the addressee in the information market that allows one to carry out this influence quickly and effectively.

The organization of information presentation in this context is not unimportant. Within the framework of genre 2.0 we would like to establish what paralinguistic means of communication are implemented through the official Telegram channel of representatives of the country’s political elite – using Dmitry Medvedev’s Telegram channel as an example² – and how they can influence the consciousness and political choice of a potential voter.

¹ Pew Research Centre statistics on Twitter, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2009/02/12/twitter-and-status-updating/> (Accessed 10 October 2022).

² Official Dmitry Medvedev’s Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Accessed 07 June 2022)

The growing role of messengers as an arena of political struggle in the modern information market in Russia

It is found that messengers have made significant changes to the strategy of information delivery and have become, for many voters, the main daily source of political news.

According to Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM)³, Russians most often read news on social media (39%) and in the media (38%), and the growth of citizens' media activity is increasing year by year.

Among the main reasons for the success of the shift in information primacy towards messengers are:

- maximum personalization of content: the voter follows only the news they are interested in;
- instant access to the latest information, often ahead of traditional Internet sites;
- convenience of getting information through a smartphone;
- high availability of information, the ability to obtain information, for various reasons, not available or not yet published in other sources;
- the ability to give feedback and voice one's opinion (messenger function "instant reactions");
- the opportunity to interact with other constituencies (open comments), the possibility of discussion among like-minded people;
- relative privacy;
- instant distributability;
- minimal length, concise presentation, outline form;
- presentation of information through "written colloquialism", facilitating the audience's understanding of political processes.

All of the above characteristics of messengers allow voters to meet the need for constant digital interaction with each other and with government representatives. Importantly, Telegram channels allow for real-time access and discussion, thereby outpacing classic media outlets. The further development and high demand for these media genres suggests the need for further discourse research in this direction.

Subject of the study

Telegram is one of the most popular messengers (in 2022, it became one of the 5 most downloaded applications, with over 700 million users). In Russia, this messenger has quickly become not only a means of everyday communication, but also a popular news source, as evidenced by the high number of subscribers to official channels of news agencies and publishers: "РИА новости" – 2,054,837 subscribers, "СМИ Россия" – 2,165,630 subscribers, "Топор Live" – 2,963,580 subscribers, "Госуслуги" – 789,114 subscribers, "Новая газета" – 374,506 subscribers, "Россия 24/7" – 346,162 subscribers, "РБК" – 317,971 subscribers⁴.

Telegram is a contact social network, that is, it is an information channel in which participants receive and broadcast information, express their opinions, exchange comments, and at the same time have the opportunity to establish "a closer interpersonal contact between two or more members of the group" [8, p. 40].

Today, the positioning of Telegram channels as personal media is gaining popularity. In the Russian information field it is quite a common phenomenon – politicians, journalists, public figures, TV presenters have their Telegram-channels (for example, "Kadyrov_95" – 3,031,365 subscribers, "Вячеслав Володин" – 763,958 subscribers, "СОБЧАК" – 212,084 subscribers). However, this phenomenon is not very common among contemporary federal politicians.

³ Official site of Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/mediapotrebienie-rossijan-monitoring> (Accessed 7 August 2022).

⁴ Online catalogue of Telegram channels and chat rooms, <https://tgstat.ru/> (Accessed 10 September 2022).

Against this background, the appearance of Dmitry Medvedev in the Telegram space, firstly, did not go unnoticed and aroused interest among readers, and, secondly, it became a new information phenomenon in the process of communication of the country's top leadership with the electorate.

The channel of Dmitry Medvedev "Дмитрий Медведев", Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, appeared on March 14 and the first post was published on March 18, 2022. The Telegram channel quickly became popular (985,376 subscribers as of 12 December 2022) and marked a new form of communication between actors in political communication. Dmitry Medvedev himself stated: "...I believe that people should receive <...> information <...> without ambiguity, without diplomatic subterfuge, but in clear, simple language, understandable and at the same time direct"⁵. In recent times the concepts of "information warfare", "fake news", "propaganda" have not left the information field of both Russian and European media, which is why politicians face the difficult task of manoeuvring and positioning their point of view on a number of problems in this information field.

The object of the study was the verbal signs of political discourse in the Russian-language media sphere of Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel.

The subject of the study was the organization of the Telegram channel's verbal material and its communicative (manipulative) potential. Its expressive structure and volume were taken into account, as well as its conditioning on the semantic parameters of the discourse.

Research methods

Against the backdrop of the events since February 24, 2022, the topic of the special military operation entered widely into the media and everyday discourse, and the appearance of a federal politician in the information field in the format of his own Telegram channel was an important new form of political communication in the country.

The research focused on the posts in the official Telegram channel from the first publication, March 18, 2022, to December 12, 2022, i.e. 193 postings. A statistical method was used to assess the published material in terms of volume.

The main method of research was qualitative content analysis, which was used to analyze the paragraphemic means of written communication: the presentation of text material, its graphic design, and its accompaniment with emojis and illustrations.

Using the method of a continuous sampling of speech signs in Telegram-channel an attempt was made to analyze the communicative pragmatics of political discourse on the material of speech signs of Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram-channel.

Analysis and results of the study

Quantitative indicators of the posts

Both short messages (up to 100 printed symbols) and long posts (2500 printed symbols and more) can be found on the Telegram channel. The analysis of the quantitative indicators of published material can be seen in the table:

Post volume (in printed symbols) from 18.03.2022 to 12.12.2022:

Post volume in printed symbols (p.s.)	Number of posts for the period indicated
from 1 to 100 p.s.	41
from 100 to 400 p.s.	47
from 400 to 700 p.s.	28

⁵ From Dmitry Medvedev's interview with Al Jazeera, <https://eadaaily.com/ru/news/2022/06/03/medvedev-obyasnil-nediplomatichnost-svoih-vyskazyvaniy> (Accessed 15 July 2022).

Post volume in printed symbols (p.s.)	Number of posts for the period indicated
from 700 to 1000 p.s.	29
from 1000 to 2500 p.s.	16
over 2500 p.s.	32

Thus, we can see that the author of the Telegram channel tends to alternate the volume of information presented. The channel contains both short notes and medium-length posts and even longreads. This shows that the author provides both short comments and short evaluative judgments about the events he is interested in, and detailed analytical notes in which he provides a more in-depth analysis of these events.

Paragraphematic means of written communication on Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel

In his Telegram-channel Dmitry Medvedev uses not only traditional – linguistic – means of communication, but also paralinguistic, particularly graphic means for presenting information. The need for “graphic design” (A.A. Atabekova's term) [1] is determined by the need to present the relevant characteristics of natural language in the context of Internet communication. When first encountering the test material, the graphic heterogeneity of the text becomes evident, which contains a variety of means of graphic communication in written communication, in particular:

I. Font variation.

1.1 Bold type:

a) is used in the headings of the post:

- “Зеленский предложил Раде утвердить решение о конфискации российского имущества”;
- “Оружие, которое есть и которого сразу нет”;
- “П5: прощальные песни политических пигмеев пиндостана (не-Пелевин)”;

b) within the text to highlight individual word combinations or whole sentences:

- “И вопросами конфискации преступно нажитого имущества киевского режима и его возвратом пострадавшим жителям Донбасса успешно занимаются наши Вооружённые силы”;
- “Ситуация на Кавказе изменилась”;
- “В 2022-м нам пришлось ответить гораздо жёстче. Теперь необратимо изменился весь мир...”⁶.

1.2 Bold and/or italicised type:

- “Что ж, Штатам требуется новый Афган, в который стремительно превращается нынешняя Украина. **Воровская воронка засасывает всё больше дорогостоящего вооружения**”;
- “Ибо покусилась она на сокровенное – *бабло*, которое, как известно, не пахнет ни порохом, ни трупами”;
- “Но есть и ещё одна задача, которая уже *решена*. С Россией стали *считаться по-настоящему*”;
- “Этот вывод обескураживает, но это, увы, так. Они нас всех ненавидят! В основе этих решений *ненависть к России – к русским, ко всем её жителям. Ненависть к нашей культуре. Отсюда отмена Толстого, Чехова, Чайковского и Шостаковича. Ненависть к нашей религии*”⁷.

1.3 Capitalization:

- “**НАШИ ГРЕХИ (в чём виновата Россия)**”;
- “Иными словами, <Германия> объявила России гибридную войну. Следовательно, Германия действует как ВРАГ РОССИИ”⁸.

⁶ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 8 August 2022).

⁷ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 31 May 2022).

⁸ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 4 September 2022).

II. Presenting verbal material in the form of a list:

- “В переводе с японского на русский язык это означает:
 1. Нефти будет на рынке существенно меньше, а цена её будет гораздо выше. Причём выше прогнозной астрономической цены в 300–400 долларов. Сравните с динамикой цен на газ.
 2. А вот у Японии не будет ни нефти, ни газа из России. Как и участия в проекте по СПГ «Сахалин-2».
 Аригато!”;
- “Германия: а) недружественная страна, б) ввела санкции против всей экономики России и её граждан, в) поставляет Украине летальное оружие, направленное против наших Вооружённых сил”⁹.

III. Quotation marks:

- «Скотный двор: принципы «правильного» равенства»;
- «Глядя на то, как корёжит американцев – госсекретарь Блинкен в «поздравлении» с 77-летием Победы даже не вспомнил про СССР»;
- «Совершенно очевидно, что «помощь» в таком беспрецедентном масштабе объясняется вовсе не любовью к Украине и даже не поддержкой собственной экономики»;
- «Эти «мечтатели» умышленно игнорируют простую аксиому: *насильственный распад ядерной державы – всегда шахматная игра со Смертью*»¹⁰.

The aforementioned non-verbal means of communication are responsible for conveying the emotional component of communication. Font variation is responsible for highlighting, graphic and intonational variation is a kind of way of approximating the written text to the sound speech. At the graphical level, in some textual elements of Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel there is an orthographic approximation to transcription, expressed in capital letters since capitalization also helps to convey voice modulation and intonation, and is also used to visually attract the reader. The use of inverted commas is a means of conveying irony, sarcasm, drawing the reader's attention to the subtext and can also be seen as a paragrammatic way of conveying the author's attitude to current events.

Combining emoji with a standalone verbal component

Another striking feature of the Telegram channel in question is the relatively widespread use of emoji. The presence of emoji in the text of Telegram channels is a common phenomenon. Going back to the primary function of this messenger – communication, information exchange and discussion – it can be said that emoji have an intonation function and are a digital expression of human emotions. However, their rather abundant use is not the most obvious trait for a politician of this rank and certainly increases the impact on the perception of the address.

Here are some examples of emoji used in Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram-channel based on the classification of R. V. Kozhina who identified a number of functions of emoji language [6]:

1. **Emotive (expressive)** – conveying emotions and moods to the interlocutor using emoji:
 - “Получается, что наше продовольствие – наше тихое оружие 😊”¹¹ – the author uses the “winking face” emoji to express positive emotions related to the outcome of the analysis of the coming food crisis”;
 - “Думаю, недалёк тот день, когда улыбающаяся Грета Тунберг появится в Европе в рекламе автозаправок под американским брендом 😊”, “Исполнять пока рано, но если есть такая просьба – рассмотрим 😊”, “Если, конечно, не уйдёт из американской юрисдикции 😊”¹² – emoji “smiling face”, “face with tears” to express irony, sarcasm.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 3 September 2022).

¹¹ Here and below, the meaning of emoji is cited from the website of UNICODE, an organisation dedicated to standardising an informal graphic language and creating new emoji, <https://home.unicode.org/> (Accessed 20 August 2022).

¹² Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 11 April 2022).

2. **Meta-linguistic** – interpreting a particular emoji's meaning:

• “Молодцы! Мудрые решения европейских политиков! 🕯️🕯️🕯️” – the emoji “candle” is used in the context of analysis of European energy policy, in particular plans to abandon Russian gas, the symbol of the candle, the fire is interpreted as a source of energy;

• “Мы ценим последовательность и принципиальность наших европейских партнёров 😄😄” – the symbol “clown” is used to implicitly express the figurative meaning of the word – “joker”, “non-serious person”, “laughing stock” when assessing the actions of Western colleagues;

• “Типа нет условий пока для брака, много опасений в отношении такого марьяжа 👩👰👩” – the emoji “woman symbol”, used twice along with the emoji “bride” denotes same-sex marriage;

• “Но в НАТО Вашингтон главный, а само это НАТО в отношениях с ЕС старший партнёр, более зрелый, 1949 года рождения, в отличие от ещё юного, 30-летнего Евросоюза 🤝🤝”¹³ – emoji “two men holding hands”: male figures in this verbal accompaniment become a symbol of two international organisations – NATO and the EU – between which a close partnership has been established.

3. **Duplication** – using an emoji after written text to confirm, reinforce an emotion:

• “Пора менять национальные привычки немцев!”;

• “Долой мясо и колбасу 🐷🐷🐷!” – The emoji “schnitzel”, “meat on the bone”, “ham”, “hot dog” duplicate the verbal component “national habits of Germans, emphasize the presence of a large number of meat dishes in German cuisine;

• “Получается, завтрак съедим сами 🍳🍳🍳. Обедом, возможно, поделимся с друзьями 🍷/🍷🍷. А ужин врагам не отдадим 🍦🍦. Обойдутся. Лучше тоже сами съедим, а с утра спортом активнее позанимаемся 🏃🏃🏃!” – The use of emoji symbolizing food and exercise echoes what was said about eating and exercising in the morning;

• “Вот Байден 😄 ведь недавно признался, что санкции никого не остановят, но важно, чтобы *сохранялась боль*. No comment.”

• “ВОПРОС: 1. Сколько процентов этой суммы украдут в текущей ситуации Зеленский с окружением, сколько украинские олигархи, а сколько освоят близкие к демократам американские компании, включая компании сына Байдена US 🤝?”

2. Какое время им потребуется на качественный распил этой суммы?”¹⁴ – The “money with wings” and “money in their eyes” emoji confirm the verbal component of the post about Mr. Biden's son's money.

4. **Substitution** – using an emoji as a substitute for a verbal element:

• “Принцип “своя рука – владыка” работает на все 🏆”;

• “А когда этот импорт становится реальным, так вообще полный 🐱”;

• “Байден обратится к Конгрессу с предложением выделить 33 млрд долларов на поддержку Украины (20 🇺🇸 – на войну, остальное – на экономику и гуманитарную помощь)”;

• “Тут выяснилось, что до особо одарённых персонажей, о которых я писал, начало доходить, что Россия – это наша любимая Родина”¹⁵.

5. **Meaning-making** – the use of emoji to reinforce the author's subtext, to create new meanings:

“Однако не факт, что это у них получится дважды зайти в одну воду 😄”¹⁶ – the author declares the need to use domestic messengers and social networks and doubts that Western media after blocking some Russian channels (in particular on Youtube) will be able to return to the Russian market, the “smiling face with glasses” emoji becomes a symbol of confidence that this is unlikely to happen.

Thus, when combined with an autonomous (or almost autonomous in a situation where emoji has a substitute function) verbal component, the use of emoji can create subtext, additional shades of meaning, be used as a tool to create irony, sarcasm, jokes and even create entirely new, unstated meanings outside

¹³ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 2 April 2022).

¹⁴ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 27 April 2022).

¹⁵ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 14 June April 2022).

¹⁶ Official Dmitry Medvedev's Telegram Channel, https://t.me/medvedev_telegram (Publication date 18 March 2022).

the given context. Such functional use of popular graphic symbols is able to influence the political recipient in the political communication process, as it engages additional channels of influence (visual) and is remembered by the reader more than a purely verbal message.

Conclusions

The analysis of the survey results suggests that the linguistic uniqueness of the authors of Telegram Channels is growing, which attracts a larger audience. The growth in the number of subscribers to a federal politician's Telegram channel may indicate a growing interest in it on the part of the electorate.

Linguistic individuality manifests itself first of all through the use of paralinguistic means of influence on the voter, which is not typical of other representatives of power. There is a variation in the volume of the material published: the author alternates between short messages (up to 100 p.s.), accompanied by graphic material (video messages, interviews, iconography, photos) and long analytical notes (over 2,500 p.s.).

The author of the telegraph channel uses paragraphematic means of written communication, such as font variation, upper case, quotation, list serve, emoji, whose use is atypical for public communication of a federal politician with a mass voter, because it reduces the status distance between the author and the reader. In this regard, the presence of various emoji on Dmitry Medvedev's official Telegram channel distinguishes it as a channel of communication with a reduced distance, makes the process of political communication more familiar to the user of the messenger and, thus, influences the perception of the politician in the "OUR – THEIR" paradigm as his own. Medvedev uses emoji in various functions – emotive, meta-linguistic, duplication, substitution and semantic formation. At the same time, the number of emoticons is limited, their use is organic and the material is understandable for both the expert community and the mass audience.

There is an autosemantic relationship between the verbal component and the paralinguistic means of influence: non-verbal means of communication are responsible for the transfer of the emotional component of the communication and, therefore, are a means of influence on the reader.

At the moment, this phenomenon is not as widespread in Russia as in other countries where many of the most important political figures have social media profiles (Italy, for example), but it could set a precedent for the development of this channel of communication between the political elite and the mass voter.

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