Political discourse in online communities as a communication technology of network control

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Abstract

The paper is aimed at identifying the potential possibilities of the power in the management of the networking political discourse formation process via network, discursive and communication theoretical and methodological approaches. As a result, technological discursive possibilities of external influence on the closed online communities and their social effects were identified. In Conclusion, a promising direction of research is the further development of the topic in the direction of studying the problems of managing democratic processes, network activism, discursive communicative technologies of political manipulation and forms of resistance to their dissemination in the form of various anti-censorship technologies.

Keywords: Online, Communities, Social Media, Technologies.

El discurso político en las comunidades en línea como tecnología de comunicación para el control de redes

Resumen

El documento tiene como objetivo identificar las posibilidades potenciales del poder en la gestión del proceso de formación del discurso político en red a través de enfoques teóricos y metodológicos de red, discursivos y de comunicación. Como resultado, se identificaron las posibilidades discursivas tecnológicas de influencia externa en las comunidades cerradas en línea y sus efectos sociales. En

conclusión, una dirección prometedora de investigación es el desarrollo ulterior del tema en la dirección de estudiar los problemas de gestión de procesos democráticos, activismo de redes, tecnologías comunicativas discursivas de manipulación política y formas de resistencia a su difusión en forma de varios tecnologías de censura.

Palabras clave: En línea, Comunidades, Redes Sociales, Tecnologías.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networks as an object of study have long been an interdisciplinary phenomenon; depending on the goals the research is focused on the structure, communication, interaction of network members or the way of self-organization. However, the main problem for the authorities is seen in the limited possibilities for establishing control over online communities by political elites or other political actors. Active attempts are being made to search for network control communicative technologies. Variants of attempts to use influence tools range from the introduction of the Internet censorship technologies to the production of fake news.

The purpose of the paper is to identify the potential possibilities for the authorities to manage the process of forming network political discourse and assess the readiness of online communities and social media to be involved in this process. The research problem statement is implied by the purpose to be sought: to give a theoretical and methodological substantiation of the problem; consider new technologies for controlling social network members; assess the subjectivity of social communities in the political discourse; assess the

role of social media as a communicator between the government authorities and online communities; and consider diffuse networks as an independent subject and agent of influence of communicative technologies (COULDRY & HEPP, 2018; ÇIFLIGU, 2018; RINCÓN, SUKIER, CONTRERAS and RAMÍREZ, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The choice of network control communicative technologies as a research topic is explained by its social and practical significance and the lack of consolidated scientific knowledge in this area. In view of the magnitude of the stated topic, all attention will be focused on one of the network control technologies: the formation of political discourse in the online communities. From the entire theoretical and ideological set of resources, it is worth pointing out the following methods for understanding different levels of this topic as having a heuristic potential for its studying:

- A conceptual level, enabling to carry out philosophical reflection;

- A discursive level, enabling to implement a discursive scientific approach;

- An empirical level, enabling to evaluate the implementation of technologies as communicative network practices.

The conceptual level is represented by the concepts of communication theories that have not lost their significance yet and were proposed by the main representatives of the Toronto school: MAGGETTI (2014) who described the influence of media technologies on the society, including the language and methods of information transfer. Karl W. Deutsch created a communicative model of the political system, enabling to get an idea about the patterns of society management implementing control over the society.

SCHRAPE (2015), relying on a systemic approach, stated that with the advent of the Internet, meso media (many to many relationships) were gaining popularity, which had a significant impact on the society, defining its evolution towards expanding the capabilities of media user rights. At the same time, the opponents of this point of view rightly point out that network communication is influenced by the authorization as a regulator of relations on the Internet. A number of interesting publications are devoted to the mediated construction of reality. In continuation of studying, the problems related to the social construction of reality by COULDRY AND HEPP (2018) raise the question that the constructivist approach requires rethinking in the world of digital media and social networks.

FENTON AND BARASSI (2011) critically interpret the logic and individual and collective forms of mediated participation in politics through social networks and summarize the results of a study of alternative media within the trade union movement in the UK with a conclusion this may pose a threat to political groups. The direct

participation in politics in the form of political protests and the resistance movement is associated primarily with the growing role of alternative media on the Internet in politics. Thus, as proved by Leung and Lee on a large empirical survey material, an active online counter-public is being formed. There are some other aspects to be considered proposed by BOSCAN and VILLALOBOS (2016). They point out that to make correct political decisions in this regard, that is, that they acquire an ethical character, a discipline such as bioethics comes to facilitate dialogue between scientists and politicians.

The network theoretical approach is most widely used in studies devoted to the problems of actors' autonomy in complex socio-technical systems, such as the Internet. Relying on the network approach and the Bourdieu field theory, Bluemke and Friese (2008) proposed their own method for studying the relations of online communities with the political and media field as exemplified by Twitter. They suggested simulating Twitter communication between politicians, the media and civilian agents during elections in Belgium. Analysis of the models showed a decentralized and weakly cohesive network with predominantly civilian agents.

Roberts explores the phenomenon of social activism in connection with the activities of the new media, using a political-economic approach, and tries to figure out, whether network activists are actually citizens independently acting and free-thinking, or they are the result of implementing online consumption standards in the neoliberal economy. Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) of LATOUR

(2007) helps to rethink the concept of the social, and the basic term of the method actor-networks makes it possible to consider the network as an independent actor. According to LATOUR'S (2007) definition, anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor. VERHOEVEN (2018), using the theory of LATOUR (2007), poses the question of who can be a participant in building actor networks and convincingly shows that public relations specialists can play this role.

Analyzing online campaigning organizations to participate in public policy debates and mobilize citizens involved in campaigning, VROMEN AND COLEMAN (2013) paid special attention to the strategies and tactics of discursive politics, the communication strategy of storytelling, to help citizens identify themselves with the problem and create a community (as a case study of Australia). The same can be said about the growing number of organizations launching campaigns on the Internet during elections (VROMEN & COLEMAN, 2011; RAMÍREZ, ESPINDOLA, RUÍZ y HUGUETH, 2019; VILLALOBOS, RAMÍREZ and DÍAZ-CID, 2019).

Martin Scott states the dual, ambiguous nature of the influence of media, including social ones, on the formation of democratic participation and the development of society. One can find evidence in favor of social media as a source to form knowledge about the political process, and not just a news provider on topics relevant to the Internet users. Sometimes the main political problems often derive from ethical problems that have not

been resolved (HERNÁNDEZ DE VELAZCO, 2007; HERNANDEZ DE VELAZCO and CHUMACEIRO, 2018), but also many ethical problems are the result of serious political dilemmas (BOSCAN and VILLALOBOS, 2016; RAMÍREZ, AVENDAÑO, ALEMAN, LIZARAZO, RAMÍREZ and CARDONA, 2018).

3. METHODS

Since this paper is of a theoretical nature, it assumes only some elements of empirical methods as preparation for the next applied stage. Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, more commonly known as Critical Discourse Study (CDS), is a multidisciplinary research that focuses on a discourse analysis of the abuse of power. Unlike most other approaches, CDS not only connects discursive structures with social structures, but also does this through a socio-cognitive interface that integrates mental concepts of communicative and social situations and events with cognitive structures underlying the discourse (MATHUR ET AL, 2018: CLEMENTE-RICOLFE & GARCÍA-PINTO, 2019).

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) was developed in the USA by (NOSEK ET AL., 2005). The IAT methodology was worked out in line with social psychology as applied to implicit attitudes, which are understood as automatic evaluation of any objects without understanding its causes. The IAT method rather quickly became

popular in foreign studies of the recent fifteen years. Implicit methods enable to obtain a more accurate result related to personal attitude (perhaps not always realized), the result that is free from the effects of social desirability, both at the level of attitudes and at the level of personal values. The essence of the test is to identify the hidden attitudes and stereotypes of people who can open blind spots between stereotypes and reality.

The empirical substantiation of conclusions about the activities of online communities and network media was obtained as a result of monitoring the network online space using the Medialogia and YouScan resource systems. YouScan provides monitoring and analytics of textual and visual mentions of brands on social networks, blogs and online media, forums and review websites.

4. RESULTS

As a result of the study, technological discursive possibilities of outside influence on closed online communities were identified. Using a combination of cognitive and discourse approaches to describe some features of the formation of control over online communities determined the novelty of the study in the development of ideas of socio-cognitive methodology in the framework of critical discourse analysis. Control is understood as a category of managing a communicative situation, based on the ideas of PARK (2019), who defined it as the context, the text structure and conversation. The

communicative situation also includes such categories as the setting (time, place); current activities (including discourses and discourse genres); participants; various communicative, social or institutional roles and personalities; their goals, knowledge, opinions, relations and attitudes. Managing a communicative situation implies control over one or more of these categories.

The IAT method allowed for the investigation of attitudes that people do not want to demonstrate publicly and disguise them. As part of this research, a group of political science students from the Southern Federal University of Rostov-On-Don, Russia, consisting of twenty persons, was tested for stereotypes in attitudes to Russia-US relations. The majority of the tested group are weakly subject to stereotypical thinking (45% – 9 people), 15% (3 people) are strongly subject. More recently, the ST-IAT (Single Target Test) was developed, in which, according to the authors, stimuli (associations) belonging to the content category (values) are set by the respondent himself.

5. DISCUSSION

Network analysis, as is known, operates with two basic elements: actors and networks connecting them. Networks are most often viewed as an intermediary, a communicator in the interaction of actors, and so far very little attention has been paid to the study of the influence of networks on communication members. This research fills one of the significant gaps in network analysis, exploring the

possibilities of the network itself as a technical system, online communities and network media to act as an independent actor in the process of communication interaction. It continues the diffusion scientific direction, exploring a special kind of networks built on the principles of voluntariness: learning, imitation, and borrowing. GREENWALD & BANAJI (1995) point out the importance of diffusion networks, emphasizing that the method of policy formation depends on how widespread the diffusion networks of a given state are.

The study of the stereotype formation in this research serves as an approbation of test analysis, which will then be used to examine network phenomena such as echo chambers and filter bubbles. The research shows that people seek information from those whose beliefs are like their own, forming echo chambers.

The network management is tried to be carried out through political censorship technology. The problem of new forms of political censorship is discussed in the framework of the current academic debate around the role played by social media in the democratic system of society. Some authors describe social networks as a propaganda machine that spreads fake stories to a multimillion audience, distracting people from important issues, inciting hatred and fanaticism that undermines public trust and simultaneously participates in broad surveillance. MORA-CANTALLOPS ET AL. (2019) adhere to the opposite viewpoint, positively assessing the opportunity provided by online platforms for instant access to news on Facebook, bypassing

institutions, transforming social and civic practices, and influencing democratic processes.

6. CONCLUSION

The network, structural, and discourse approaches were considered as a theoretical and methodological substantiation of the problem, and the conclusion was made about the viewpoint available in the scientific literature that even democratic political regimes seek to control online communities and new social media. Echo cameras, filter bubbles and anti-censorship are the forms of avoiding the state control. Communicative technology of control over online communities through influencing the formation of network political discourse has led to the following effects: strengthening the role of network media, increasing network activism, increasing the use of network technologies in various political campaigns, including electoral ones. A different degree of subjectivity of online communities in political discourse has been established, which is clearly manifested in the degree of intensity of network contacts. The theoretical statement of LATOUR (2007) made in his network actor theory about the possibility of considering the network as an independent actor is proved in terms of diffuse networks as an independent actor and agent providing communicative technologies. Some theoretical conclusions were empirically verified during the work on the topic.

A comprehensive method was proposed for studying communicative technologies of control over online communities and network media through influencing the formation of network political discourse, which includes such methods as Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), Implicit Association Test (IAT) and the method of monitoring network media using the Medialogia and YouScan resources.

A promising area of research includes the further development of the topic in the direction of studying the problems of managing democratic processes (a case study of network actors), network activism and discourse communicative technologies of political manipulation and forms of resistance to their distribution in the form of various anti-censorship technologies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales
Año 35, Especial No. 23 (2019)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la
Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de
Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.
Maracaibo - Venezuela