

## INDICATORS OF POLITICAL LEADERS' COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN ONLINE SPACE

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**Abstract.** Contemporary, including Russian, online-space has become an essential part of political processes. Brand new communication practices between political leaders and civil society actors based on digital technologies and new technological solutions are actively progressing. New public political actors who represent either real social subjects (bloggers, social network `group` administrators), or `imitations` in the form of computer programs or a synthesis `man-software` (bots, cyborgs etc.) emerge. They are being actively involved into political life, affect planning and execution of political decisions.

At a theoretical level, the main objective is, first of all, a conceptualization of political leaders' communicative strategies structure and its content in the online space, self-presentation of political leaders expressed through the profiles in social networks and blogs as well as mechanisms and forms of communication used online by the individuals and various groups.

Practical application of the research on political leaders' communicative strategies in online space is a collection of data which is necessary to create more efficient interaction mechanisms between political leaders and civil society actors based on best values and traditions, also considering contemporary digital technologies and ways of its influence on collective consciousness.

The increasing role of digital technologies in the life of contemporary society created the need for researches dedicated to subjects and processes of communication in online space. This research is dedicated to investigation of organizational structure of communicative strategies through the profiles of political leaders and their publication activities in the social network `VKontakte`. The research was based on the analysis of massive data, not located in the specific spot of content placement but

limited by the search keys. For the research some statistical and behavioral indicators have been revealed, among them are 'existence/non- existence of official profile', 'number of other profiles', 'number of posts', 'number of comments', and also we introduced an indicator 'cumulative number of potential views of the posts'. The results received during the pilot research helped us to understand that profiles with the names of political leaders have different statistical data for these indicators which means existence of wide range of communicative strategies used in online space.

**Keywords:** communicative strategies, digital technologies, online space, political leader, social networks

### **Introduction**

Process of digitalization taking place in the modern society entered into every field of human activities: politics, culture, economics, science etc. Modern society today can be viewed as both "real" and "digital". Because of the active penetration of digital technologies into lives of contemporary individuals, scientific community has to answer questions related to development of new methodological approaches, creation of new terms and synthesis of complementary investigation methods.

Nowadays scientists all over the world started to investigate digital policies. Some researchers study political communication in online space: structure of digital political communication (Gonzalez-Bailon S., Wang. N., 2016) and types of political communication in the social network Twitter between the political leaders (Conover, M.D., J. Ratkiewicz, M. Francisco, J.M. Goncalves, F. Flammini, and F. Menczer, 2011; Thamm, M., and Bleier A., 2013). Others investigate different forms of government policies (Ceron A., Negri F., 2016). There are also investigations on electorate and new opportunities given to them by digital technologies not only during the discussion process, but also their influence on political processes (Smith G., Richards R.C., Gastil J., 2015; Barros S.A.R., Sampaio R.C., 2016).

Investigation of communicative strategies in online space using the example of political leaders has the objective to develop such category as 'communication strategy' taking into consideration its creation and development in online space.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objective of the pilot research was to define, contextualize and systematize key components of political leaders' communicative strategies in online space. Their profiles and forms of activity are the subject of the research. Data for the analysis is taken from the "VKontakte" social network.

Based on the results of investigation on self image and communicative strategies of political leaders in the online space, we plan to create a program for more in-depth, complex research of political processes, new communication practices, conditions and factors of digital technologies' influence on mass consciousness.

In order to investigate communicative strategies of the political leaders in 'VKontakte' social network we have chosen as the object for the research users' profiles whose names and last names matched those of the 2018 Russian Federation presidential candidates. In the focus of the research was their publication activity in the social networks.

Among indicators helping to analyze communicative strategies of political leaders in 'VKontakte' social network, authors have chosen 'existence/non-existence of official profile', 'number of different profiles', 'number of posts', 'number of comments', 'cumulative number of potential views'.

Some of the indicators ('existence/non-existence of official profile') were considered as static, other ('number of posts', 'number of comments') – as behaviorist (Howard P.N., Kollanyi B., 2016; Howard P.N., Woolley S., Calo R., 2018; Bolsover G., Howard P., 2018).

### **Methodology**

In order to conduct a pilot research with the objective to develop indicators for communicative strategies of political leaders in online space, the following software was used: ElasticSearch (information collecting and storage), PHP scripts (data collection via API VK), Kibana, Tableau Desktop, Tableau Server (data visualization). Algorithm of the research specified the following steps: 1) creation of the keyword list. 2) Indication of the research period. 3) Data integrity analysis in Kibana/Discovery for every keyword within defined time frame. 4) Creation of the diagram with the number of active profiles of the users with the names and last names identical to the 2018 Russian Federation presidential candidates. 5) Creation of the diagram for network publication activeness of the profiles with the candidates' names based on number of posts and number of comments. 6) Estimation of the 'cumulative number of potential views of the posts' made by the users with the names identical to those of presidential candidates.

List of Key Words for investigation of active accounts of candidates for presidency of Russian Federation consisted of names and last names of the candidates: Sergey Baburin, Pavel Grudinin, Vladímir Zhirinovski, Vladimir Putin, Ksenia Sobchak, Maxim Suraykin, Boris Titov, Grigory Yavlinsky. Time frame of the research was set from 01.01.2018 till 31.12.2018. In the 'Vkontakte' social network publication authors can be either users or groups (groups, pages, events). While investigating active (publishing posts/comments) users accounts with the names and last names

of the candidates for presidency of Russian federation authors of the researched considered only authors-users.

### **Findings**

During the research it was revealed that the following candidates have official accounts confirmed by the administration of `Vkontakte` social network: Zhirinovski, Titov, Yavlinsky. At the same time all the candidates for presidency have other profiles which could possibly be bots, fake profiles, fanatics, political forces, Dark PR agents etc. Existence or non-existence of official profiles as well as number of other profiles can be considered as important indicator when studying communicative strategies of political leaders in online space.

On the figure 1 you can see the dynamics based on number of profiles with names and last names of the candidates for presidency in 2018. Number 1 in the ranking for active accounts in the `VKontakte` social network is V. Putin (571), number 2 – P. Grudinin (105), number 3 – B. Titov (47), number 4 – V. Zhirinovski (40), number 5 – S. Baburin (26), number 6 – G. Yavlinsky (14), number 7 – K. Sobchak (7), number 8 – M. Suraykin (4). Shortly before presidential elections on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2018 biggest number of active profiles was under Vladimir Putin`s and Pavel Grrudinin`s names - 58 and 25 accounts respectively.

On the figure 2 you can see the ranking of the profiles under candidates` names based on number of posts and comments published in 2018. Another meaningful indicator is publication activeness in social networks of the profiles which consists of posts and comments. On the top position in the ranking of published posts and comments are accounts under Vladimir Putin`s name – 3678 posts and 5773 comments. On the second position in the ranking of posts published in 2018 are accounts under Vladimir Zhirinovsky`s name – 732 posts, but in the ranking based on number of comments, accounts under his name went down to the 4<sup>th</sup> position – 229 comments.

In the third position of the ranking based on the number of posts are accounts under Pavel Grudinin`s name – 500 posts, in the ranking based on the number of comments, accounts under his name are in the second position – 1575 comments. In the 4<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking for number of posts are accounts under B. Titov`s name - 397 posts, these accounts are also in the third position for number of comments – 242 comments. Closing top 5 leaders for publication activeness in the social networks are accounts under Grigory Yavlinsky`s name, they have published 108 posts and 117 comments.

Thus, the winners for the number of post publications and comments connected to political topics are the users under Vladimir Putin`s name.

Profiles under Pavel Grudinin`s name are characterized by high publication activeness of comments.

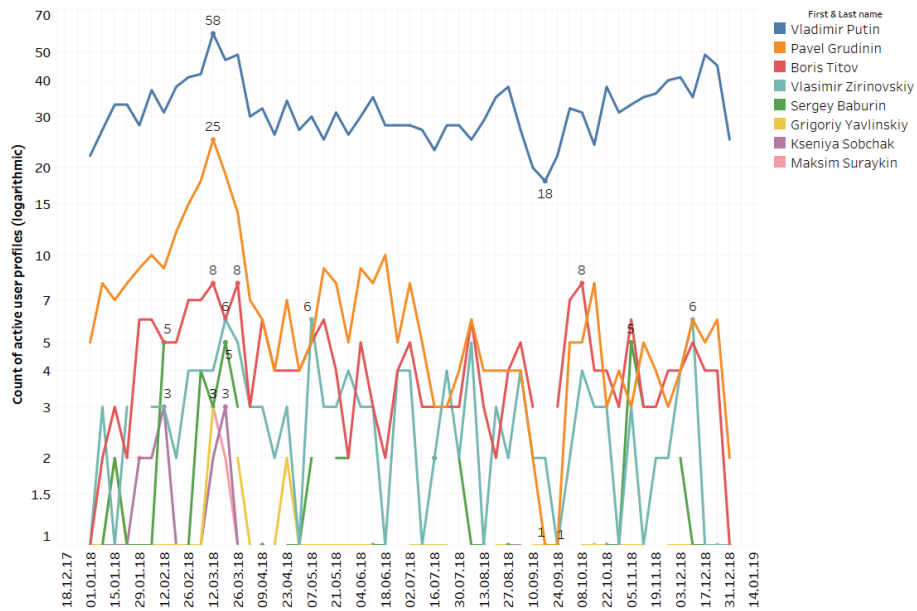


Figure 1 - Number of authors-users with the name and last name of the candidates for presidency of Russian Federation

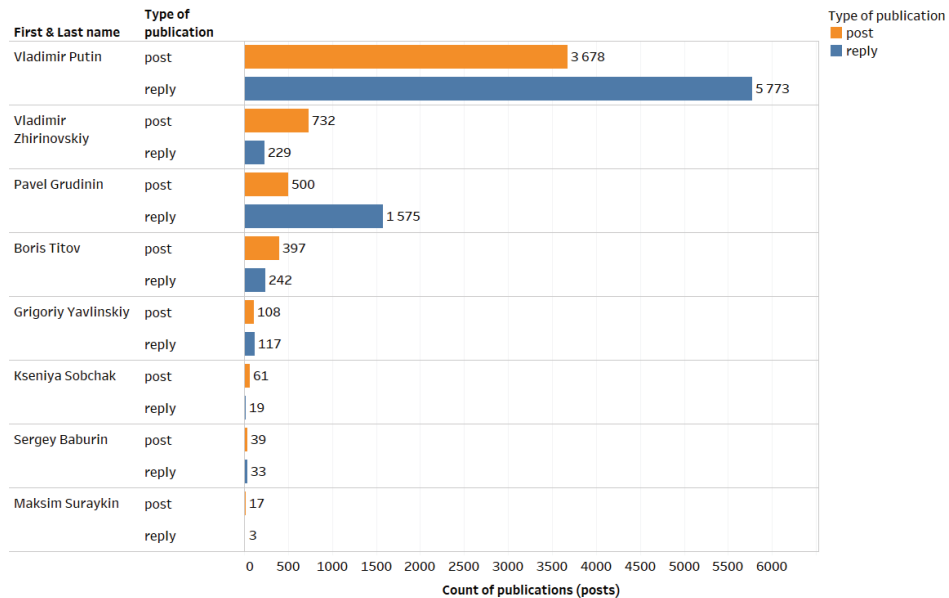


Figure 2 - Cumulative number of publications (both posts and comments), created by the accounts with the names and last names of 2018 presidential candidates

Next indicator - 'cumulative number of potential views of the posts'<sup>2</sup> allows us to study the effectiveness of political leaders' publication activities in social networks. While calculating cumulative number of potential views of the posts created by the profiles under names of presidential candidates (Table 1) we can see that the accounts under Vladimir Zhirinovskiy name are ranked higher than those under V. Putin's name - 305 351 287 views of the posts published by the accounts under Vladimir Zhirinovskiy name against 16 099 873 views of the posts published by the accounts under V. Putin's name.

These results can be explained by the fact that V. Zhirinovskiy has an official account, which was confirmed by the administration of the 'Vkontakte' social network. The account has a maximum number of followers - 445 118 of subscribed followers.

**Table 1 - Cumulative number of potential views of the posts created by the accounts under 2018 presidential candidates' names**

First & Last name	Official account, confirmed by the administration of VKontakte				No			
	Count of accounts	Count of posts	Average count of followers	Potential total view posts (*)	Count of accounts	Count of posts	Average count of followers	Potential total view posts (*)
Vladimir Zhirinovskiy	1	686	445 118	305 351 287	23	46	5	294
Vladimir Putin					311	3 678	1 074	16 099 873
Grigoriy Yavlinskiy	1	108	45 953	4 962 944				
Kseniya Sobchak					11	61	3 252	1 666 722
Boris Titov	1	233	1 898	442 191	20	164	47	2 797
Pavel Grudin					48	500	427	39 807
Maksim Suraykin					5	17	475	7 663
Sergey Baburin					18	39	26	791

## Discussion

Research on political leaders' communicative strategies in online space requires development of new theoretical statements on digital communication and patterns of its development. One of the hypotheses proposed by the authors is that effective communicative strategies in online space can influence formation of leader in digital space and his strategies of self-representation.

Authors of the research acknowledge that the research on political leaders' communicative strategies in online space anticipates a wide range of indicators. Besides indicators mentioned before the analysis of the following additional indicators is needed: 'content analysis of publications', 'number of publication copies', 'time of publication's placements', 'structure of the content', 'publication spots', 'number of fake followers', 'number of re-

<sup>2</sup>Cumulative number of potential views of the posts is the result of multiplying number of published posts by each account by average number of the subscribers of this account.

posts` etc. We must also mention that the indicator `cumulative number of potential views of the posts` requires further elaboration with the description of limitations as when calculating this number we need to consider that among the subscribers can be bot accounts that do not view posts but are used in order to increase the subscriber`s audience of the political leader.

The obtained results helped us to see that the accounts under 2018 Russian presidential candidates` names differ from one another in the indicators defined by the authors of the research. The following candidates have official accounts: V. Zhirinovskiy, B. Titov and G. Yavlinsky. The biggest number of the accounts in the `VKontakte` social network are under V. Putin`s name. Profiles under candidates` names differ from one another in number of posts and comments. Number one in the ranking based on number of posts are the accounts under V. Putin`s name. At the same time, we can see that the leaders with the biggest number of posts can have lower positions in the number of comments. Thus, profiles under political leaders` names differ not only in publication intensiveness, but also in publication (post, comment).

One of the most curious is the research result on `cumulative number of potential views of the posts`. One official account under the name of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has 445 118 subscribed followers (in the average per year). Quantitative indicator of the subscribers allows (now it is still lacking precision) calculate `cumulative number of potential views of the posts`, which is bound together with the indicator of the effectiveness of political leaders` communicative strategy in online space. In case of the official profile under the name of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, `cumulative number of potential views of the posts` equals 305 351 287 views. This indicator for the accounts under Vladimir Putin`s name reaches 16 099 873 views.

Results of this pilot research allow us to make several conclusions, the most important of which is that 2018 presidential candidates applied different strategies in online space. Their strategies were different both in terms of the objectives and methods, and ways to achieve the results. The difference between the objectives and implementation mechanisms was determined, most probably, by the difference in target audiences, in the recipients` age group, to whom these messages were sent.

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