

MEDIA DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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OFFICIAL DISCOURSES OF POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE DIGITAL REALITY (2005-2019)

News from official sites of Ukrainian, Russian and Belarussian presidents are considered to be models of official discourses of the states. With the Python program, several indicators were calculated. High numbers of communication intention indicator (more than 0,15) with imitative communicative intention (not changeable in more than 50% of texts for long periods) are discovered in Russia and Belarus. Ukraine has a lower and more stable first indicator and the real purpose for communication. Three phases of the transformation of the discourses were: communique phase (2005-2009 UA, 2005-2010 RU, 2005-2014 BY) with political interrelations intensity indicator growth from 0,4-0,6 to 1 (UA, BY) and further growth up to 1,5-1,8 (BY, RU); mixed – with combined offline and online techniques (2010-2013 UA, 2011-2019 RU, 2015-2019 BY) the indicator 0,8-1; professional (2014-2018 UA) – the indicator 0,38-0,6.

Keywords: official discourse, post-Soviet countries, authoritative regimes, transitive regimes, political communication.

As a rule, researchers and practitioners distinguish several phases of web-texts' changes: web 1.0 (with online texts being copies of offline ones), web 2.0 (with implications of web-techniques: community-building, interactivity, hypertext, cross-media)¹, web 3.0 (web-services, content personalization)². Official discourse is not obligatory repeats all these tendencies, because its' main purpose isn't a commercial one. One more reason for come unique ways of the discourse development is political climate or political regime. However, digital reality may have some influence of the discourses' messages. Especially if we speak about more democratic ones. After all, democratic officials should sell their messages not in commercial, but in political way – to gain more internet-hits in order to get more attention and influence. Thus, democratic discourses may be more flexible for some digital norms. Thus, the way of the messages production in the digital times may help a researcher to define a regime and discourse properly.

Post-Soviet countries developed a variety of unique regimes, where government-society interrelations have a variety of forms, thus official discourses of the states may be useful for the research of the discourses transformations in the digital reality. In this paper, Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian digital official discourses will be studied, a method of differentiating of the discourses will be proposed and several phases of the discourses transformation will be considered.

Digital official discourse

There is an amount of the official discourse scientific discoveries, and different formats and genres of official messages are taken into account. For instance, the publications of investigative committees³, reports⁴, a government's programs or strategies⁵, manifesto⁶,

¹ O'Reilly, T. (2005). *Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*. <<https://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>>.

² Barassi, V., Treré, E. (2012). Does Web 3.0 come after Web 2.0? Deconstructing theoretical assumptions through practice. *New Media & Society*, 14(8), 1269–1285. <DOI: 10.1177/1461444812445878>.

³ Burton, F., Carlen, P. (2013). *Official Discourse (Routledge Revivals): On Discourse Analysis, Government Publications, Ideology and the State*. Abington: Routledge.

⁴ Burton, F., Carlen, P. (2007). Official Discourse. *Economy and Society*, 6, 377-407.

⁵ Atkinson, R. (2000). Narratives of Policy: the Construction of Urban Problems and Urban Policy in the Official Discourse of British Government 1968–1998. *Critical Social Policy*, 20 (2), 216.

⁶ Antaki, C., Finlay, W. M. L., Walton, C. (2009). Choices for People With Intellectual Disabilities: Official Discourse and Everyday Practice. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, 6 (4), 260-266.

official rhetoric or writing¹, speeches and other texts, written by officials². However, in this research news from a president's site considered to be a model of the official discourse. As far as information materials from the website reflect all the public official events, and informs about all the rhetoric, not only a single genre, like speech, interview or report. Thus, the president's site news considered to be a more complete version of official discourse.

Presidents' sites haven't given a lot of attention. Here we have some papers about Obama's online activity as a pioneer of the web-technologies use in politics³ and his use of White House website to build more transparent relations with public⁴. President websites are also used as a dataset for presidential speeches, interviews and etc. Thus, there is lack of research in the official president's news policy, formats of news texts, news texts' transformations in the digital reality.

As for official discourses analysis, researchers observe some transformations in them; changes in narratives⁵, concepts⁶; social goals representing⁷ were taken into account. Meanwhile, in this research not content, but form will be taken into account, and as far as content and form are interrelated, changes in the latter will help us to understand some digital evolution in the first one.

Of course, in some fields there are different ways to implement these changes. Nowadays, in highly changeable societies, "political elites to manage fluid, increasingly fragmented, but highly dynamic and yet fragile society"⁸, and these their efforts may also be fixated in texts they present. Additionally, if we speak about different kinds of official discourses, there are may be some peculiarities for more and less stable or competitive discourse practices. For instance, N. Fairclough distinguishes conservative (with stable structures and interrelations) and transformative (changeable because of some crisis) reproductive discourses⁹. Additionally, to save a political order, the elites need to persuade a society on their legitimacy¹⁰, and ways of persuasion may differ within the discourses, for instance, in China case it is supposed, that rational arguments aren't so widely used, than in Western countries¹¹. Moreover, changes and modern challenges of the 21st century may push even authoritative governments to some transformations. For instance, in China's case some evolution of "communication climate" was observed¹². If we speak about Russia, a "reinvention" of nationalist rhetoric was stated because of Crimea annexation and the war on Donbas¹³.

Taking into account observations of post-Soviet regimes scholars and reports of Freedom House, Reporters without borders, IREX, we will be waiting to see some differences between Ukrainian transitive regime (with more rapid transformations and diverse content) and Belorussian and Russian authoritarian regimes (with slower or no transformations at all and with ritual content domination). Additionally, the period

¹ Barabantseva, E. (2009). Development as Localization. Ethnic Minorities in China's Official Discourse on the Western Development Project. *Critical Asian Studies*, 41 (2), 225-254.

² Lams, L. (2018). Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 23, 387-411.

³ Borins, S. (2009). From Online Candidate to Online President. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 32 (9), 753-758. <DOI: 10.1080/01900690903004080>.

⁴ Coglianese, C. (2009). The Transparency President? The Obama Administration and Open Government. *Governance*, 22 (4), 529-544. <DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0491.2009.01451.x>.

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⁷ Cai, B. (2008). Official Discourse of a "Well-off Society": Constructing an Economic State and Political Legitimacy In Doreen D. Wu (ed) *Discourses of Cultural China in the Globalizing Age*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

⁸ Cite for: Cao, Q. Introduction: Legitimation, resistance and discursive struggles in contemporary China. In Q. Cao, H. Tian, P. Chilton (eds) *Discourse, Politics and Media in Contemporary China*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1-22.

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¹² Lams, L. (2018). Examining Strategic Narratives in Chinese Official Discourse under Xi Jinping. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 23, 387-411.

¹³ Teper, Y. (2016). Official Russian identity discourse in light of the annexation of Crimea: national or imperial? *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32 (4), 378-396. <DOI: 10.1080/1060586X.2015.1076959>.

of 15 years will be taken for the research, as far as the official discourses of the countries were discovered for relatively short periods: Putin's first presidency¹, "color revolutions"², Crimea annexation³, so-called "Ukrainian crisis" etc.

Material and method

News from official sites of Ukrainian, Russian and Belarussian presidents were collected and analyzed with specially designed Python program. The period of the research was 2005 – 2019. For the Ukrainian case, web-archive (Wayback machine) was used, as far as on the official site only the texts of the running president are available. Of course, there was not a possibility to collect all the news, because the archive doesn't save all the texts (especially in the beginning of the observed period – see table 1). However, the percent of news, taken for the research was 26% in average. We consider it being enough for the reconstruction of the whole picture.

Table 1

The number of news items on the web archive of Ukrainian presidents' official site

Year	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Avail. texts	55	45	615	514	245	420	416	902	484	564	480	686	417	788	70 (till 20.05)
Total	No data			3407	3345	2102	3211	3784	3226	1997	1870	1240	1210	1380	No data
%	-	-	-	15	7,3	19,9	12,9	23,8	15	28,2	25,6	55,3	34,4	57,1	-

In the collected texts, several indicators were analyzed.

Political interrelations intensity indicator (Pii) – number of political actors (subjects, institutions mentioned per text). A special vocabulary of political actors was created for the research.

Communication intention indicator (Ci) – number of texts with a statement as a main topic per text. The news with a "communicative" verb in a headline (reported, said, claimed – etc.) were taken into account. A special vocabulary of such verbs was created (on the basis of the most common headlines in news media).

Salient purpose of communication intention (spCi) – percent of the most popular "communicative" verbs.

Results: Political interrelations intensity in post-Soviet countries

In both Russian and Belarussian official discourses one can see periods with high intensity of interrelations (a relatively big number of political actors per text) – figure 1.

However, analyzing the prominent headlines, we can notice some imitative interrelations in both discourses, because of traditional communique style usage, where names and posts of news heroes were mentioned. For example:

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with the head of the Transneft company, Semyon Vainshtok

The Python program finds here 3 mentions of political actors (underlined). However, more common internet-style is without whole titles and with different (not event, but the event result) approach to the headline composing, for instance:

Russia's Transneft starts oil supplies to Belarussian refineries.

Here the program finds 1 mention.

Relatively low indicators of Belarus and Ukraine between 2005-2009 can be explained with another communique-technique usage: publishing of statements without source mention. For instance,

Greetings to all Christians of Belarus who celebrate Christmas on 25 December.

As we see, only Pii indicator isn't enough to speculate about the discourses without references to the news texts, and here the calculation of the news headlines types (communique-style, mixed and professional) is needed. However, the Python program nowadays can't solve this program for several reasons. So Pii indicator to be interpreted properly have to be analyzed along with others.

Thus, let's see Ci indicator (figure 2).

¹ Casula, P. (2013). Sovereign Democracy, Populism, and Depoliticization in Russia. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 60 (3), 3-15. <DOI: 10.2753/PPC1075-8216600301>.

² Nikitina, Y. (2014). The "Color Revolutions" and "Arab Spring" in Russian Official Discourse. *Connections*, 14 (1), 87-104.

³ Teper, Y. (2016). Official Russian identity discourse in light of the annexation of Crimea: national or imperial? *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32 (4), 378-396. <DOI: 10.1080/1060586X.2015.1076959>.

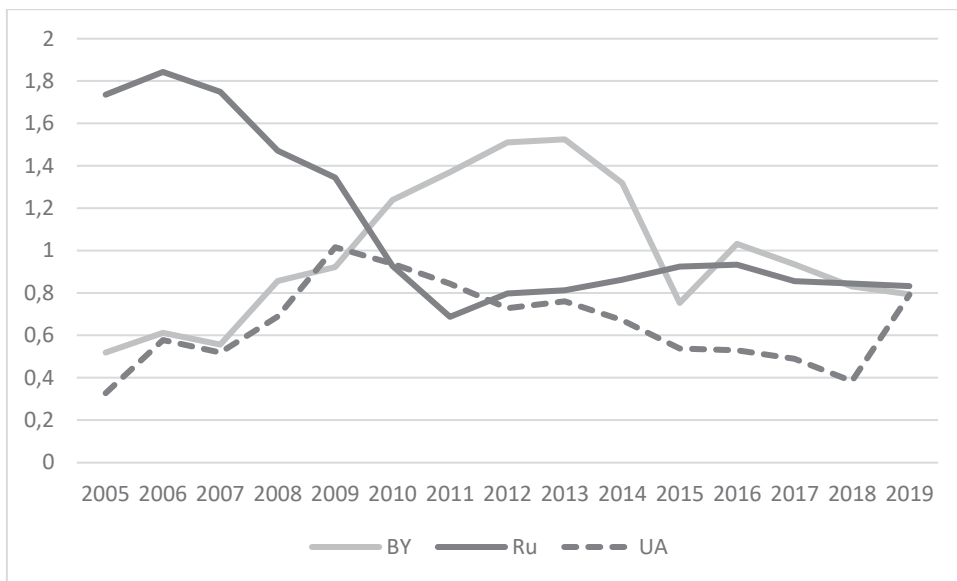


Fig. 1. The Pii indicator in Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian official discourses

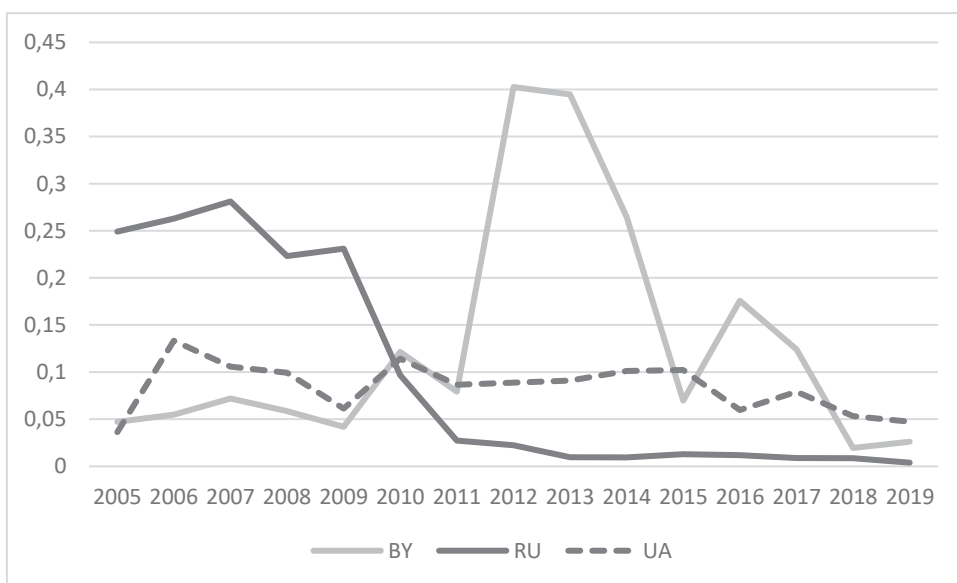


Fig 2. The Ci indicator in Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian official discourses

Here we have almost the same picture, where there are the biggest numbers of the indicator for Russia between 2005-2009 and for Belarus between 2012-2014. This means, that the periods of political actors multiplication are coincided with the periods with the high number of texts, where the statement considered to be newsworthy. Additionally, there is the positive correlation between the two indicators in the case of Belarus (0,79). It’s also interesting, that in Russian case the indicator has been decreasing significantly since 2011.

One more position, which characterizes official discourses – is spCi indicator (see table 2).

Table 2

The spCi indicator in Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian official discourses

		2005		2006		2007		2008		2009	
BY	respond	40,0	speak	18,2	state	25,0	discuss	18,2	speak	28,6	
UA	speak/ congratulate	50,0	talk	16,7	congratulate	26,2	consider	15,7	congratulate	33,3	
RU	congratulate	71,5	congratulate	79,8	congratulate	77,6	congratulate	78,0	congratulate	74,0	
		2010		2011		2012		2013		2014	
BY	congratulate	62,1	speak	38,5	congratulate	81,2	congratulate	80,9	congratulate	80,4	
UA	congratulate	27,1	talk	27,8	congratulate	27,5	congratulate	65,9	discuss	35,1	
RU	congratulate	53,9	congratulate	36,2	congratulate	47,1	congratulate	36,4	congratulate	38,5	
		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
BY	congratulate	90,2	congratulate	95,7	congratulate	90,1	congratulate	46,7	consider	60,9	
UA	talk	42,9	talk	29,3	congratulate	36,4	talk	28,6	talk	33,3	
RU	congratulate	28,6	congratulate	46,2	congratulate	10,0	speak	40,0	congratulate/ respond	50,0	

As we see, in Russia's case the main purpose of communication is congratulation (except 2018) and there are periods, when the percent of such verbs is more than 50% (2005-2010 – the same years with high numbers of Pii and Ci). In Belarus one can observe almost the same picture between 2010-2018, however, periods with the verb's percent more than 50% are 2012 – 2017. In Ukraine, we have only one period with “congratulate” more than 50% – the last year of Yanukovich presidency.

If we speak about Ukraine, there are a variety of communication intentions' purposes: talk, speak, consider, discuss, which may show not ritual or imitative, but the real communication between political actors.

Conclusion

Thus, in the cases of Ukraine, Belarus and Russia we may distinguish several phases of official discourse transformations.

Communique style phase – with offline techniques usage: statements without sources and multiplication of political actors in headlines (2005-2009 for Ukraine, 2005-2010 for Russia, 2005-2014 for Belarus) – growth of the Pii indicator from 0,4-0,6 (rare mentions) to 1 and further growth up to 1,5-1,8. Here we additionally have for Belarus and Russia high numbers of Ci indicator with high numbers of “imitative” communication intention purpose (“congratulate” – more than 50%).

Mixed phase – with combined techniques usage (more short headlines without political actors multiplication) 2010-2013 for Ukraine, 2011-2013 for Russia, 2015-2019 for Belarus – Pii indicator between 0,8-1. However, for Russia and Belarus, “imitative” communication intention purpose is still dominant (in Russian discourse – with lower percent).

Professional phase – with predominantly internet-style headlines (2014-2018 for Ukraine) – Pii indicator between 0,38-0,6 and predominantly real communication intention.

As for Ukraine 2019 year needs additional considerations, here because change of the presidents the changes in the discourse may be considered (for instance a need to include new actors in the discourse or just other approaches towards news-writing, used by the new team). However, as far as Ukrainian political regime is not sustainable (there was an attempt of the regime authoritarianization in the times of Yanukovich), further observations of the indicator are needed.

And additionally both Ci (periods with more than 0,15) and spCi indicators (periods with more than 50% and not changeable “imitative” purpose from year to year) may help us to distinguish authoritative discourses of Russia and Belarus and transitive discourse of Ukraine.

If we speak about some correlation between the observed phases of the official discourses and more common for internet texts web 1.0 – web 3.0 periodization, we may only suppose, that more democratic Ukrainian discourse produced more internet-style oriented texts with more differentiated techniques usage

earlier, that Russian and Belorussian authoritative ones. Moreover, a phase of the discourse professionalization may be observed. Thus, it's possible to consider more stable authoritative discourses and more dynamic transitive one, which should be an efficient instrument for frequent challenges of competitive political climate.

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