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MEMES AS A WAY OF MANIPULATION IN THE PROCESS OF DIGITAL INTERACTION

Summary. The article is devoted to the manipulative possibilities of memes in the process of Internet communication, which develops due to the fast and uncontrolled growth of social networks. The author highlights main manipulative methods of memes usage and the influence they may have on the Internet users. Moreover, the article presents key ways of verbalizing the memes' manipulative possibilities. The author stresses out the need of carrying out practical experiment which may set the statistical level of memes manipulability.

Key words: memes, digital interaction, Internet, communication, manipulation.

Nowadays interaction among the Internet users has become a topic of high interest for thousands of scientists all over the world due to a fast growth of the means of communication in the digital area. Impressive role is granted to trendy memes which have become basic for everyday communication without direct stressing on authors' intentions. Moreover, memes may ease the process of interaction using not only written symbols but including images and short video-episodes which have additional informative load to increase the possible effect turned to the Internet users.

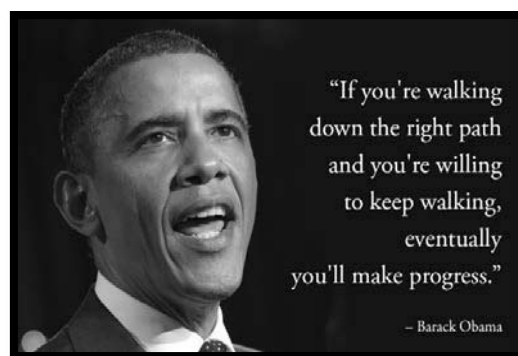
Modern scientific world includes huge amount of works which are devoted to the wide **range of problems** of the Internet interaction between numerous users. Communication in social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, etc.) includes tens of means of sharing, tweeting, commenting and developing information. An essential step has been occupied by *memes* which have become irreplaceable in the wide area of Internet. There are various works of numerous scientists devoted to the analyzation of Internet memes based on lexicology, morphology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, etc. among which it is possible to enlist scientific efforts of Blackmore S. [5], Dr. Dawkins R. [7], Daze A. [9], Tyler T. [12] and many others.

The **aim** of this work is determined by the high level of memes' manipulation spreading on Internet social networks especially memes on political issues with both positive and negative background and informative load.

The latest **publications and researches** analyze memes mostly from the side of linguistics and communication but this article will conduct the research based on psycholinguistics highlighting the possibilities of memes to influence the emotional state of users as well as their decisions. One of the latest works devoted to memes and their manipulative possibility "Web Culture: Using Memes to Spread and Manipulate Ideas on a Massive Scale" was published by an independent researcher of the Berglund Center for Internet Studies Gavin Brown, who pointed out "Qutb's ideas later on influenced fanatical groups such as Al-Qaeda and other followers of Osama bin-Laden. The memes, or ideas, created by the fanatical Islamic organizations were spread out in the world through newspapers, radio, television, and eventually the Internet is a convenient mode of communication for

"toxic-memes" [6, p. 190]. Thus, the author presents a bright example of the way manipulation works in media. The mentioned term toxic-meme was firstly introduced by an American philosopher and cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett at the TED conference in 2002 presenting a speech "Dangerous Memes" [8]. He understands under this concept the fast process of memes' spreading and their way of appearance. They may occur here and there having the same intention but various ways of sharing. In one night the news can travel the whole world round and get deep into the thoughts of users without their understanding. Daniel Dennett compared memes with Lancet Fluke (*Dicrocoelium dendriticum*) due to the common possibility to *hijack* one's brain to manipulate it. This description may be very accurate being applied to memes. They, as well as lancet flukes, act secretly, without showing their presence – but the results are the same – users can not longer rely on self-thinking while on Internet there is not any "self" and "alone" allowed. Every time a person thinks he/she is fully responsible for decision making there is one thing to keep in mind – your decisions are, probably, inspired by numerous memes.

It is significant that many scientists try to distinguish and analyze memes depending on the individual Internet users' intentions. But are there only individual intentions? Have you ever paid attention to the situation when memes with the same emotional marking arise throughout different Internet pages in your social networks almost at the same time? Mostly, they are turned to blacken politicians and their actions, especially if there is time for elections ahead. That is the case when intentions are broader and mainly they are not a result of one individual work, but a group of people whose aim is to influence the thoughts of Internet users who are, at the same time, voters (Pic. 1). There has even been created the website "Barack Obama Famous Quotes" which serves to prosper the brightest phrases put in by the former US President Barack Obama. It may compete with the numerous negative memes which main role was to decrease the image of the president.



Pic. 1. "Barack Obama famous quotes" [3]

Typical Internet users simply scurve through memes without noticing identical forming components (in this definite case –

negative), but that is only illusion of being unnoticed – man’s brain may keep this information and even transfer it into an everyday life. The more regularly you meet negative or positive information the more chances you have to agree with it. So, if we look at the memes not only as at the significant aspect which can spread real, sometimes creepy information used for fun, but also as at the key visual aspect to manipulate public thinking, we will see the whole picture more clearly. It is easier to manipulate one’s thoughts via the most visited places by voters, places where everyone share information, react on and create it as well – social networks. It is impossible to find more visited places than trendy social networks. People spend the biggest half of the day surfing networks without paying special attention to it. The youth can not call it a day if he/she has not tweeted or shared at list one post. That is how the whole system works. You like a definite meme, want it to be seen by your friends, share it, thus – you prolong not just its existence, but, as well, possible manipulability without even understanding that.

Talking about “possible manipulability” it is necessary to understand that not every meme may be the influential weapon – everything depends on the circumstances and intentions of its creator. While one meme exist for fun only or cite the words of famous people another meme may by the time bomb with special task. This task may be divided into several phases:

- 1) to check persons manipulability;
- 2) to choose the most appropriate unit of manipulation;
- 3) to adopt memes in accordance with the audience and with the needed result.

For example, there are plenty of negative memes devoted to the valid President of the USA Donald Trump who has been occupying his position for almost a year already. There is even an Internet page on Facebook “Bigly Trump Memes” [4] which spreads and shares corresponding memes (Pic. 2, Pic. 3).



Pic. 2. “Bigly Trump Memes”



Pic. 3. “Bigly Trump Memes”

Both memes serve to show the whole negativism of actions proved by the current president of the USA. Their idea is to check the level of nation being unsatisfied with the chosen leader – the first picture gives the floor for thinking while the second one tries to present “general truth” which is to be acceptable by users. That is one of tens of possible ways of gathering like-minded people to strengthen one’s ideas.

Have you ever asked yourself how much time it is required to get used to information of any kind to change your personal ideas and thoughts? The reality is that it takes not so much time as we have been thinking before. In the book “Analysis of Mass Manipulations in Russia” by ZelynskyiS. the scientist stresses out “That does not have anything in common with zombing. In this case everything is more skillful. Needed information which has been already placed in the individuals may be stored in the person before the time of manipulation. <...>This manipulating mass of people can be formed very quickly and can be used in any moment, place and time.” [13, p. 79] Thus, every meme may become a weapon of thinking for every separate individual.

Manipulation (hidden appealing to unconscious, illusory as well as traditional believes of people) and persuasion (direct, open add ressing to the conscious, critical, innovative views of people) can complete each other [1]. Disinformation, playing with facts, keeping and hiding the information – those factors may easily create another reality where black is white, a bottom is a top and everything is turned upside down, but being presented as a true issue may have a positive result implementing the needs of a creator.

An average person spending at least from 3 to 8 hours on Internet meets at list fifty memes per day in numerous social networks which serve as territory to form the way of your thinking. The first negative meme may arise resentment as well as simple neutral ideas, the second time a person meets the meme with the same emotional load he/she may change one’s own impression for softer. This situation may appear many times and can lead to the whole change of one’s ideology.

Let’s imagine you are an individual with work, family and do not have much time to analyze and to be engaged into the modern policy, thus, you do not have enough time to form your own complete model of a satisfying politician. In this case the army of numerous memes will do everything for you. They will appear and follow you all over your path through social networks – they will digitally show all needed negativism or positivism which earlier or later will be accepted by your brain as your own.

Modern methods of digital manipulations are endless. They are used in combination with each other changing one aspect of the message into another, paraphrasing, trolling and playing the words to create a specific atmosphere to make everything possible to transform ideas of users into needed ones: back ground; script; frame; colours. Every factor has its place, time and role – nothing is done just for appearance.

Moreover, the main passage of memes consists of four properties that are key to understanding the current practices of media manipulation and which will “help” you to feel an appropriate mood of a message and even to share the view:

- the use of deliberately offensive speech;
- antipathy toward sensationalism in the mainstream media;
- the desire to create emotional impact in targets;
- the preservation of ambiguity [10, p. 5].

Every meme, even meaningless at first glance, may be rather informative and, as a result, manipulative. Mostly, they seem funny

or touchy, but the point is to make them usual and, at the same time, common for everyone. Authors try to appeal to the most outstanding features as:

- 1) traditions and customs;
- 2) valuable historical events;
- 3) discriminating factors (race, nationality, religion, sexual preferences, etc.);
- 4) weaknesses (physical, mental as well as in various positions – politics, economy, business, sport, etc.);
- 5) family (defense, well-being, etc.);
- 6) social issues;
- 7) famous people;
- 8) animals involved.



Pic. 4. "Reusable bag"



Pic. 5. "Bats are dancing"

The proposed pictures present three features – the first picture (Pic. 4) [11] shows a famous actor and, at the same time, reflects social problem of the modern world – pollution, rubbish and use of plastic materials; the second picture (Pic. 5) [2] is a bright example of memes based on animals and which mainly serve for fun.

All abovementioned factors may occur as key characteristics on the hidden path of manipulation. The more often you agree with the statements presented on the unit of meme the more chances you

have to be influenced by other common statements, but next time the intention of the meme's creator may differ and may be used to check how manipulative you are and what paraphrasing can be done to achieve one's goal. Only one word or word-combination may lead to totally different outcome.

It is important to figure out the possible rate of memes manipulability. Nevertheless, such study may become an essential work of psycholinguistics to set the statistical level of memes manipulability. Thus, it is necessary to carry out the practical experiment which will help to prove the possibility of memes to have influence on Internet users' decisions. The experiment is to hold out in two different groups of people with differences in gender and minimal differences in age (2-5 years). Such analyses may help to figure out the possibility of memes to manipulate the users decisions.

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Заботнова М. В. Меми як спосіб маніпуляції в процесі мережевого спілкування

Анотація. Стаття присвячена маніпулятивним можливостям мемів у процесі мережевого спілкування, які розвиваються завдяки швидкому та неконтрольованому поширенню соціальних мереж. Автор виділяє основні маніпулятивні методи, використання мемів та вплив, який вони здійснюють щодо інтернет користувачів. Також стаття надає перелік основних шляхів вербалізації маніпулятивних здібностей мемів. Автор наголошує на потребі провести практичний експеримент, який зможе встановити статистичний рівень маніпулятивних можливостей мемів.

Ключові слова: меми, мережеве спілкування, інтернет, комунікація, маніпуляція.

Заботнова М. В. Мемы как способ манипуляции в процессе сетевого общения

Аннотация. Статья посвящается манипулятивным возможностям мемов во время сетевого общения, которое развивается благодаря быстрому и неконтролируемому распространению социальных сетей. Автор выделяет основные манипулятивные методы использования мемов и влияние, которое они совершают на интернет пользова-

телей. Также статья предоставляет основные способы вербализации манипулятивных возможностей мемов. Автор подчеркивает необходимость проведения практического эксперимента, который сможет установить статистический уровень манипулятивности мемов.

Ключевые слова: мемы, сетевое общение, интернет, коммуникация, манипуляция.