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TROLLING ON SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES DEDICATED TO MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

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Abstract

The article discusses trolling behaviour on the social media pages dedicated to mixed martial arts (MMA). The communicative environment of pages dedicated to mixed martial arts is intolerant in general due to the aggressiveness of this sport and trash-talk of the fighters that affect subscribers of those pages. Trolling behaviour leads to intolerant communication among the followers of these pages. Trolling is defined as a provocative communicative behaviour on the Internet aimed at inducing an intolerant reaction. Authors found out that trolling is one of the major sources of intolerant communication on pages dedicated to mixed martial arts. There are two types of trolling on the social media pages – single and collective trolling. A single troll tries to disrupt a normal conversation and amuse himself. Particular trolls could become famous in their communities. Collective trolling emerges when trolls begin to jointly troll specific individuals or public pages. Trolls can unite into their sub-communities and attack their victim collectively.

Keywords: Trolling, intolerance, social media, communication, sports.

1. Introduction

Social media has become one of the most important parts of the Internet and a place that provides people an opportunity to influence the opinions of others. It gives a possibility for a provocative communicative behaviour known as trolling.

Mixed martial arts have been the fastest growing sport in recent years. Combating sports are particularly vivid in expressing the aggression, competitiveness, and spectacle that is inherent in sports. Sports and the behaviour of sports fans are relevant topics for linguistic studies. At the same time, the behaviour of mixed martial arts fans on the Internet has not been a subject of linguistic study.

For our study, we selected public pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts from VK.com. VK.com is the largest Russian social network. The public page is a type of online community. A public page can be created by any user of social media. The content of the public page is available to everyone, but only page managers can upload information to the so-called 'wall' of the page. Most public pages give their followers an opportunity to comment. Public pages dedicated to sports is an unexplored research niche since social media comments were not considered by linguists in terms of the features of trolling on those pages.

2. Problem Statement

The so-called 'toxicity' is one of the main features of the Internet as a field of communication. Toxic behaviour on the Internet includes offensive messages, as well as prolonged harassment of individuals or groups of people while using social media, instant messengers, and other types of Internet communication. Toxic behaviour is an example of intolerance on the Internet. Toxicity is a cause of growing concern among website managers.

We assumed that the trolling behaviour on public pages devoted to the mixed martial arts leads to intolerant communication among the followers of these pages. In order to stop the growing process of intolerance in social media, it is necessary to find out what are the aims, types, and forms of linguistic embodiment of trolling behaviour.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the features of trolling behaviour on public pages devoted to mixed martial arts?

2. Is trolling one of the major sources of intolerant behaviour on pages dedicated to mixed martial arts?

3. What types and forms of linguistic embodiment of trolling behaviour exist on the social media pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts?

4. Purpose of the Study

To find out if the trolling on public pages devoted to the mixed martial arts affects the manifestation of intolerance in social media.

5. Research Methods

The reliability of the research results is provided by the representative corpus of linguistic material and the application of traditional and modern scientific methods and techniques. The study materials are 11,000 comments on the public pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts posted between 2017 and 2019.

This type of study determined the use of both general scientific methods (observation, induction / deduction, analysis / synthesis, systematization, classification), and proper linguistic methods, such as the method of linguistic description, content analysis, cognitive analysis, and interpretative analysis. An experiment was used, which made it possible to obtain study material in the form of survey results.

6. Findings

1. Social media allows users to create their content and give consumers more power than any other form of mass media (Berthon et al., 2012). In the day and age of constant flow of information, individuals and groups can use intolerant language to get their message across (Nacos et al., 2011). Trolling can be described as one of the forms of intolerant communication.

There are several definitions of trolling. Their common feature is the accent on the negative nature of this phenomenon. Trolling is defined as a phenomenon that is experienced in the interactions between Internet users, aimed to gain a strong response from as many users as possible by using offensive, emotionally-charged content (Jalonen et al., 2016). Abdullina and Artamonova (2017) define trolling as a focused and motivated communicative behaviour focused on the destabilization of the media space. Trolling can also be defined as deliberate and deceptive attempts to provoke reactions from other users in social media (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017). Voroncova (2016) defines trolling as a verbal provocation to escalate a communicative conflict on the Internet (Salnikova & Chekan, 2016).

People who post those provocative comments are called 'trolls'. Trolls are ugly, unpleasant creatures in Scandinavian mythology. Nowadays, the figurative meaning of the word 'trolling' has come to the forefront (Sinelnikova, 2016). The oldest example of trolling can be traced back to 1982 (Hardaker, 2013). Another likely origin of the term can be traced back to the Vietnam War in the 1960s where US Navy pilots used the term 'trolling for MIGs' for provoking enemy fighter pilots (Bishop, 2014). A troll can be defined as a user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be part of the group, including professing or conveying pseudo-sincere intentions, but whose real intentions are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for their amusement. Four interrelated conditions are related to trolling: aggression, deception, disruption, and success (Hardaker, 2010). This definition maintains the view of trolling as intolerant and conducted for the achievement of personal goals but adds deception to it. There are several reasons why a troll could hide his true intention. First, it prevents the targets from reasoning against the trolling influence. A straightforward offensive message can be dismissed more easily than a subtle suggestion framed as a constructive argument. Second, most discussion forums are moderated, and, typically, openly offensive posts are quickly removed (although the rules and practices may vary), thus reducing their effectiveness arguments (Jalonen et al., 2016). Troll uses emotional distancing, indifference,

and black humour (Melnikova, 2018). The main goal of a troll is to draw other people into the communication process (Lisenkova, 2017).

An Internet troll also can be defined as a member of an online social community who deliberately tries to disrupt, attack, offend or generally cause trouble within the community by posting certain comments, photos, videos, GIFs or some other form of online content (Tayade & Shaikh, 2017).

We define trolling as a provocative communicative behavior on the Internet, aimed at inducing an intolerant reaction. The initial message of a troll does not have to carry insults, mockery, or other features of intolerant comments.

2. The communicative environment of pages that are dedicated to the mixed martial arts is intolerant in general due to the aggressiveness of this sport and trash-talk of the fighters that affect subscribers of those pages. To identify the biggest sources of intolerant comments we surveyed intolerance on the My Life is MMA page. The survey participants were asked the following questions:

Who, in your opinion, usually leaves negative comments on social media:

A) trolls

B) haters of individual fighters

C) regular followers

The purpose of the survey was to find out what are the sources of negative/intolerant comments in social media, based on the opinion of the followers of sports-themed social media pages.

A total of 363 responses were received. 161 respondents believe that ordinary users who are not fighters' haters and Internet trolls leave negative comments on social media. 147 people believe that negative comments are mostly the result of provocations by trolls, and 55 respondents believe that negative comments are mostly posted by anti-fans - haters of individual fighters. The survey showed that trolling is one of the major sources of intolerant behaviour on pages dedicated to mixed martial arts.

3. There can be different typifications of trolling in social media. Spruds identified two major types of trolls: classic and hybrid. The definition of classic trolls is very close to those offered by other researchers, whereas the hybrid troll is seen as a tool of information warfare. The hybrid troll is distinguished from the classic troll by behavioral factors: intensively reposted messages, repeated messages posted from different IP addresses, and/or nicknames and republished information and links (Spruds et al., 2015). The motivation behind this type of trolling is not the satisfaction of one's psychological needs but the propagation of a (typically political) agenda. Trolling is a useful tool for any organization willing to force a discussion off-track when one has no proper facts to back one's arguments (Jalonen et al., 2016).

Hybrid trolling is prevalent in the political sphere. In our case, we can identify two types of trolling – single and collective. A single troll uses this type of behaviour to amuse him- or herself. There are plenty of examples of single trolls on pages that are dedicated to the mixed martial arts. One of the examples of trolling on the MMA social media page reads as follows:

Короче, Хабиб сказал, что возможно проведут UFC 249 в Америке, даже если Хабиба не будет на этом бою. Хабиб не может из России вылететь, так как и в России и в США закрыли границы, короче Хабиб улетел в Дубай, но его развернули и отправили в Россию. Суть такова: Хабиб как баран улетел из США раньше времени, и получилось, так, что слился с боя. Возможно, сам того не зная, короче, не быть этому бою. Короновирус был специально выведен, чтобы этот

бой не состоялся [So, Khabib said that they might hold UFC 249 in the US even without him. Khabib can't leave Russia because both Russia and the USA locked their borders, so Khabib flew to Dubai but they turned him back to Russia. Basically, Khabib flew out of the US ahead of time like an idiot and now he took the coward's way out of the fight. Maybe he didn't even know it, but this fight is not going to happen. Coronavirus was made purposefully to stop this fight from happening].

The author intentionally left a comment that could anger fans of the Russian fighter Khabib Nurmagomedov. It provoked the following reaction from the followers of the Best of MMA page:

Баран! Юфс сказали что бой 100% будет не в США а в ОАЭ, это они виноваты! [Idiot! UFC said that this fight would 100% not be in the US but in the UAE, so they are to blame].

Ты чем слушал? Это юфс сказали ему лететь в Абу Даби. Так как бой там будет 99 процентов якобы [Were you listening or what? UFC told him that the fight is going to happen in Abu Dhabi. Allegedly, it's going to be there, 99 percent].

Баран ты и те, кто тебя воспитали, Хабибу сказали, что в США бой 100% не пройдет и на 99 он пройдет в Дубае, он улетел из Америки, но в Дубай не пустили, так как границы закрыты и ему пришлось вернуться в Россию [You are an idiot and those who raised you, too. Khabib was told that the fight would not be in the USA for sure and they gave 99% that it would be in Dubai, so he left the USA but he wasn't allowed to Dubai because they closed their borders so he had to come back to Russia].

Another example of a single 'troll' comment:

Мейвезер специально тянет резину, не соглашается на бой. Видать, прекрасно знает, что Грегор станет сложнейшим испытанием в карьере. Всё-таки как никто другой разбирается в предмете, грамотно оценивая текущую ситуацию. Взвесив все за и против, решил не рисковать наследием в схватке со столь грозным оппонентом. Грегор церемониться не будет, одно касание левой - и заказывай катафалк с оркестром [Mayweather is deliberately dragging it out and wouldn't agree to the fight. Apparently, he knows very well that McGregor will be the biggest challenge in his career. Still, he understands the subject like no one else, so he is assessing the current situation correctly. After weighing the pros and cons, he decided not to risk his legacy in the battle with such a formidable opponent. McGregor will not pull any punches, one touch with his left hand - and you can order a casket].

The author of this comment specifically posts a provocative commentary that does not fit with the majority of users. He tried to convince other subscribers that MMA fighter Conor McGregor could beat one of the most accomplished boxers of all time Floyd Mayweather in a boxing bout. When he is accused of trolling in the following comments, the author adds:

Дело в том, что я никогда не шучу и всегда настроен крайне серьёзно. Уже неоднократно разжевывал, почему Грегор нокаутирует Мейвезера [The fact is: I never joke and I am always very serious. I repeatedly told you why McGregor will knock out Mayweather].

Some of the trolls who post their comments on the public pages dedicated to the mixed martial arts could become celebrities in this community. For example, the author of the previous comments is the user known as Red Marl. He became famous in the combat sports community for his outrageous troll remarks. Other users created a whole public page called Typical Red Marl around him, where they put his comments from different pages so other people could follow his newest remarks. In that case, troll not only amuses himself but also entertains the whole sub-community of his 'fans', who could both laugh at and with the

troll figure. For example, the subscribers of this page are laughing at Red Marl's suggestion to pay him for his fight predictions but also enjoying his choice of words:

Когда будешь готов, я тебе дам свои реквизиты: куда подъехать и куда позвонить [When you will be ready I am going to give you my requisites where to go and what number to call].

"Реквизиты" ахахахах [«requisites» ahahahah].

The subscribers of the Typical Red Marl page can also genuinely like some of his troll comments:

Соннен - это второй Брок Леснар- стероиды+рестлинг+лнп и полное отсутствие какого-либо скилла. Да, как шоумен базара нет - хорош, шоу делает бесспорно... но как боец - извините. Леснар там тоже с Миром разыгрывал "кровавую" баню. Один другого обещал съесть вместе с детьми на завтрак и наоборот. И американцы это хавали на ура, рейтинги зашкаливали, попкорн разлетался пачками, кока-кола лилась рекой, публика в экстазе! [Sonnen is the second Brock Lesnar - steroids + wrestling + LNP and the complete absence of any skill. Yes, there is no doubt he is good as a showman, he is creating a show for sure... but as a fighter – Oh, please. Lesnar, too, played the "bloody" bath with Mir. One promised to eat another one with his children for breakfast and vice versa. And the Americans were buying it, the ratings were off the charts, popcorn was flying in packs, Coca-Cola was pouring in, the audience was ecstatic!].

Мне все-таки нравится как он "красиво" расписывает [I still like how 'beautifully' he writes it].

Collective trolling is a more specific type of trolling behaviour that we identified on the social media pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts. Collective trolling appears when trolls begin to jointly troll specific individuals or public pages. For example, there is a whole page that works as a 'troll hub' for people who want to troll the MMA referee and jiu-jitsu practitioner Karen Pashikyan. Pashikyan became famous in the MMA community in 2014 when he posted his fights and his motivational videos that sounded over the top for some of the members of the combat sports community. A whole sub-community of trolls emerged around this person. Those trolls created a public page that is centered around organizing troll attacks on Karen Pashikyan. Trolls post their messages to Pashikyan and comments on this page, as well as discuss their plans. These trolls happily share their messages to the victim of trolling and the victim's responses:

Привет, Каро, я - репортер с 1 канала, хотел бы взять у вас интервью по поводу вашего проигрыша на ADCC, какие у вас дальнейшие планы? И когда вы вернете свое чемпионство [Hi Karo, I'm a reporter from Channel 1, I would like to interview you about your loss in the ADCC tournament. What are your future plans? And when will you get your championship back?].

Пошел отсюда, щенок. Давайте следующего сюда [Get out of here sucker. Now give me the next one].

Another example of troll messages from this page:

Здравствуйте, Карен, каким образом я бы мог попасть в вашу школу единоборств? [Hello, Karen, how can I get into your martial arts school?].

Привет, абонемент в моей академии 10000тг до 18000тг, с 10 утра до 10 вечера ежедневно [Hi, gym membership in my academy costs 10000KZT to 18000KZT, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily].

Ты, че, обсос раздутый, такие цены заряжаешь? Ты на это бабло себе абонемент на йогу берешь, что ли, чтоб растяжку наработать, который у тебя нет? [You bloated sucker, why do you charge that much? Do you use this money for a yoga class or something to work out a stretch that you don't have?].

The trolls on that page went as far as making phone calls to their victim while later sharing the records of those calls on the page.

Single trolls are prevalent on pages that are dedicated to mixed martial arts, but there are particular cases when collective trolling emerges.

7.   Conclusion

We found out that troll behaviour is prevalent in the comment section of the social media pages dedicated to mixed martial arts. Our survey showed that it is one of the major sources of intolerant communication in social media. Trolling can be defined as a provocative communicative behavior on the Internet aimed at inducing an intolerant reaction.

We identified two types of trolling behaviour on public pages dedicated to mixed martial arts- single and collective trolling. A single troll amuses himself but also can entertain other members of the community. There are cases of single trolls who became famous for their comments and got themselves into the center of attention of the sub-community of their followers who enjoy their comments. Collective trolling emerges when trolls begin to jointly troll specific individuals or public pages.

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