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POST-TRUTH CONCEPT: INFODEMIC OF AGGRESSION IN NON-CLASSICAL WARS

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Abstract

The article examines the concept of post-truth as a weapon in non-classical – information and hybrid – wars. These wars do not apply «traditional» weapons, but from this their consequences are no less destructive – the individual is deprived of empathy, and society as a whole is dehumanized. Post-truth ignores the values of humanity and relies on post-memory, which denies the real history in favor of the written one for the aims of education. This attitude considers history not only as the framework of social regulations, but also as a process of history repetition. Modern times are full of infodemia that leads to aggressive behaviour. Post-truth is information that does not appeal to consciousness, but relates to emotions of people and social groups, and first of all, it provokes negative cognitive-emotional states – frustration, resentment, fears, aggression. From a propaganda tool, post-truth turns into a daily discourse of social networks that support and reinforce negative phenomenology, as network communities are diffused, have a low level of group identity, and do not provide interpersonal mutual support. The author has developed a technology for script inclusion – the introduction of a peaceful text that distracts the debating participants from mutual offences.

Keywords: Post-truth, post-memory, aggression, network wars, script implantation

1. Introduction

Two and a half thousand years ago, a Chinese old wise man said, «The highest art of war is to conquer the enemy without a fight» (Sun Tzu, 2014). Of course, humanity today has not given up the idea of wars and revolutions, bombing and destruction of peaceful population happen often. According to Nazaretyan (2014), the «coefficient of slaughter» from antiquity to modernity has significantly reduced. Modern wars, retaining all the terrible connotations, have acquired some new features. Firstly, the possibility of remote control of weapons creates the illusion of a «fake» death, resembling Shooter – a soldier cannot look in another soldier's eyes, he is not ashamed, not afraid, he is not sympathizing with anyone. Secondly, «the mass media image is combined with violence in the indisputability of global evil» (Shkuratov, 2006), due to which wars, like everything else, take place in front of us. Thirdly, the growth of information flow and technology has led to a shift in the "core of cause-and-effect relationships in the realm of virtual reality" (Nazaretyan, 2014, p. 119). Hybrid and information-network wars have been added to the «usual» wars.

According to Rheingold (2006): Network war is a new kind of confrontation, where heroes – from terrorists and criminal gangs, representing the evil side to military men, representing the goodness, use network forms of management, doctrine, strategy and technology, taking into account the requirements of the media age. (p. 151)

Thanks to the «new» wars, the concept of post-truth appeared and began to be actively used – a word that cannot be deciphered in any way (for example, «after the truth», «last truth», «truthful message», «anti-truth»), but means that the whole truth is buried under a layer of lies that the media produces.

According to Nazaretyan (2014) The media, focusing on the expectations of the public, builds information priorities upon a four-step ladder. Reports of misfortunes and tragedies are "more interesting" than positive reports. The most interesting tragedies occurred on the fault of people. The most interesting man-made tragedies are those that are provoked deliberately (conflicts, especially large-scale ones). The top of the information rating is occupied by conflicts that express differences in group affiliation. (p. 117)

2. Problem Statement

Post-truth as a phenomenon has always existed. Harari (2018) writes that «Some fake news lasts forever», and «some fake news only lasts seven hundred years», and «truth has never been remarkable on the agenda of Homo sapiens. If you stick to unalloyed reality, few people will follow you» (Harari, 2018). It turns out that post-truth functions to unite people, because it has the function of power, which is preferable than truth – crowds follow power, but not the truth. Russian culture has something to say about truth as faith and justice, there a phrase from the film «Brother»: «strength is in truth, brother», that touches every mind and heart.

There is something else important. We are all got involved into information wars. Emotions that cannot be experienced and expressed physically do not disappear, they need a way out. Believing or not believing the given information, being angry and disappointed, we express emotions by changing the addressee to a minimally harmless one – the «interlocutor» in the social network. Can and should we do something about the post-truth? Harari (2018) seems to suggest that things should be left as they are. Korovin (2009) in his research «Network Wars» formulated the conditions for opposition of network aggression: the development of ideologemes and the creation of network laboratories. At the conference «Countering extremism and terrorism in the digital world» Korovin (2009) proved that terrorism can be defeated only by an idea. According to Kurennoy (2016), in order to resist post-truth, it is necessary «to know how to use your own mind, as well as to be guided by obvious common sense, and not by big ideologies». Is the resistance to post-truth an individual problem? Harari (2018) writes about choosing either power or truth. The choice is disastrous, but we suggest choosing the truth and the technology of peacemaking. This is a real problem of research and practice.

3. Research Questions

The key issue of the research is the actualization of the problem of post-truth not only as an instrument of governmental propaganda, but also as a part of the everyday routine discourse of social networks: discourse of irresponsible people who generate the post-truth. The research is also focused on the study and test of the possibilities of resisting post-truth through network (virtual) peacekeeping.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to study the phenomenology of the routine post-truth and its emotional background; develop a tool for cyber peacekeeping.

5. Research Methods

Research methods are general theoretical: philosophical reflection of network ressentiment, ensuring the acceptance of post-truth. In the empirical part of the study, the author uses the following methods: categorical analysis, content analysis, scriptological analysis, as well as descriptive statistics and factor analysis. They allow identifying and describing the phenomenology of post-truth ressentiment and predicting the possibility of preventing its acceptance.

6. Findings

For Russian culture, the question of truth is existentially enrooted. According to S.V. Efimova, «the original meaning of the concept of "truth" presupposed the presence of some kind of power, superiority (spiritual or material), in the ones who possessed it» (Efimova, 2005, p. 63). However, if we agree with the thesis that truth is objective, and truth-justice is subjective, that is, «colored» by attitude and emotions, then post-truth is one of the versions of truth-fairness. The Russian history of truth as a moral value of justice is going through a fateful crisis, as a result of which everyone makes his own truth. In the pseudo-reality of

post-truth it is almost impossible to negotiate and interact. Conscious or subconscious misinformation gives rise to that apolitical synthesis of parasitism and self-destruction of society in which modern Russia has been in the recent decades.

Ilyin (2008) wrote, History knows countless living examples of the fact that the masses did not at all want a real policy and a program corresponding to it, but fell for the anti-political and anti-state proposals of demagogues». Thus, he proves that true political service «does not mean individual groups or independent classes, but all the people as a whole. (p. 357)

Uncertainty, diversity and distrust of the truth lead to the intensification of negative reactions. The resource of social solidarity in the name of social peace shrinks like pebbled skin. The main role in this plot is played by a deliberately organized lie, to which society has lost its immunity. The transformation of information into inaccurate fake facts sows aggression in society, imposing anti-social points of view. Drowning a grain of truth in an avalanche of absurd fictions is a common thing in the era of fake news, the «poison» of which feeds most of the consumers of network information. The underdeveloped critical thinking of the consumer society makes it an «easy prey» for trust in alternative facts. They switch trust to themselves and feed on it. Streams of inaccurate information produce a cacophony of quasi-changes, in the hum of which the voice of truth is practically indistinguishable.

The USSR fell victim because of post-truth, and at present it is buried under the burden of post-truth. The change in the public consciousness of the Soviet people along the lines of the Western liberal versions led to the voluntariness of the suicidal behavior of atomization as «detachment of a person from his roots», from his natural ties, with the subsequent massification of impersonal sources of production and consumption. According to Shkuratov (2006), the mass culture of mature totalitarianism contains a very large share «of elaborate materials intended for mandatory readings, views, group discussions, quotations, memorization. This applies not only to party documents, the works of leaders, but also to a selected range of works of art. The material is selected or prepared by special departments, approved at the top, then spread among populations. However, with strict subordination of such actions, a counter movement from below is also required, a kind of correct, controlled self-organization» (Shkuratov, 2006). In conditions of the global Internet, truth and post-truth merge in symbiosis. Attempts to distinguish them are multiplying, without convincing anyone of anything. What is surprising is this: the path is always very short to post-truth («crooked» truth, lies), whereas it is not only long, but also difficult to the real truth.

Networked atomized masses are easy to combine, since they do not have a common identity. The intrusion of semantic sabotage into network discourse is capable of destroying the foundations of social life and its value orientations. This is facilitated by the multiplicity of criteria and assessments, allowing the information space to be defined and organized in such a way where each author promotes his conceptual apparatus and his coordinate system in the absence of common semantic fields (ideologemes). Behavioral models forming in networks penetrate objective reality through ways of thinking. The network «reflashing» of reality turns into militant anxiety and not a withdrawal into personal experiences. At the same time, the networks of the Russian Federation demonstrate the phenomenon of a priori powerlessness and helplessness

(«nothing can be changed»). Poetic discovery by Vl. Sokolov is becoming a mass norm: «And I don't need human rights, I am no longer a person».

The search for the identification of aggressive sources and the practice of their deactivation are designed to restore a reliable picture of social reality and social relations, reanimating trust in reality and rational thinking.

Post-truth is addressed not to the memory of society, but to its post-memory. What is post memory? The modernization of society, proclaimed by the modern state, does not contain ways to solve the life-meaning task of the people, who have been captivated by ideological totalitarianism for many years and have lost their sense of freedom and self-esteem in this captivity. Excluding voluntary ideological enslavement (partisanship, clannishness, sectarianism, groupism) – all those isolationist mechanisms of destruction of society and the public are generated by totalitarian strategies.

Freedom is not just «gifted» from above; it must be accepted, taken and faithfully implemented at the lower levels. Given from above, it can become a «fruitless gift»: at the lowest levels it will be underestimated, misinterpreted and «used for evil purposes».

As Ilyin (2008) said, during the Bolshevik propagation, Sovietism reflects the threats of the social tragedy of the liberal revolution from the upper levels in the late 90s, «To appreciate freedom, a person should understand its nature: its legal form, its legal limits, its reciprocity and compatibility, its purpose; moreover, he must mature in order to correctly realize its moral and spiritual foundations. If this does not happen, he will turn freedom into despotism, into a "war of everyone against everyone" and into chaos. And the tragedy of its loss will start again. (p. 371)

Ilyin (2008) posed the problem of public awareness of the «social framework of memory» simultaneously with French sociologist M. Halbwax. He worked with the problem of social memory, made an opportunistic claim about the science of that time (20-30 years of the XX century) that memory is not a purely individual process of storing and processing received impressions back in the 30s. Its activities are primarily determined by society.

Let us agree with the idea of Halbwaks (2005) that "our memory is based not on the learned, but on the history that we experienced" (p. 15). Thus, the historical component of individual autobiographical memory is a dynamic structure that strives to achieve a harmonious correspondence between «learned» and «lived off», as Nourkova (2009) states.

The social sanction of an individual's memory serves as a memorial framework, on the basis of which he «remembers and reconstructs», or builds the models set not by the past, but by the nowadays society that encodes memory. The past cannot be restored with the help of recollection, social frameworks serve as restrictors and codifiers of reminiscences. A retrospective in psychology is not a retrospective. It will be interpreted within the framework of nowadays memory span.

The social span of memory is formed by space and time. Therefore, the phenomena of spatial and temporal localization as generalized forms of sensuality are related to any and every perceptual act. Therefore, folk memory is formed by the social construction of space and time. The ideas about time and space are weakened in the unsocial frame of mind.

Points de repere (reference points), memory landmarks serve as reference basic social memories of the discrete structure of the folk consciousness of a social group. An interesting example of the social conditionality of memory is the territorial-time binding of Christian teaching and agiography to the locality and time. Evangelical events were ethnitized and territorialized. Halbwax (2007) wrote, "Our ideas about space pass through the social groups inhabiting it" (p. 13). Folk mental processes as streams of thoughts and images (time) correlate with individual consciousness as a place of these flows, the focus of the intersection of different folk development periods.

During 2018-2020, we conducted empirical studies that revealed the «malicious» aggression of network communities manifesting frustration, depression, negation, atrocity, hatred, chauvinism, devaluation, dislike, envy in the verbal forms of insults, threats, grazing, depersonalization, provocation, trolling. All these types of aggression have a toxic effect on public opinion, which becomes painfully neurotic. The growth of resentment-extremist threats in group moods, expectations and intentions (despotism towards network groups) is determined by the consistency and strength of hyper-semiotization of aggression, resentment, anger, thirst for revenge, rabble-rousing.

The problem of ideological violence, which finds the greatest response among people who have experienced considerable shifts, is actualized by Garr (2004) in the research «Why people rebel»: «When people experience devastation, they become susceptible to ideologies...» (p. 87). The complication and aggravation of living conditions simplifies our perception, we easily perceive even absurd, but understandable ideologies.

The cognitive complexity of group ideology is activated and mobilized under the conditions of the cognitive crisis of the group: the ideology is subjected to the entropy of categories, becomes unstable and capable of radical changes. The group's desire for ideological integrity in the social consciousness of peoples persists, despite the ideological diversity, which allows the supersystem to control the characteristics of stability and entropy of ideological subsystems.

According to Ketov (2020), group integrity is not secure – network communities turn into echo rooms, where «group members support each other, instead of discussing» (p. 46). On the one hand, this creates the ground for the formation of a post-truth space, on the other hand, it destroys traditional social communities. Echo rooms «are temporary, unstable, they are easy to create and destroy, their members are easily manipulated by showing them memes and fakes» (p. 46).

The groups that generate discussions are also very conditional, since most political discussions are of a trigger, but temporary nature, triggering anti-catharsis. At the same time, communications in social networks have a huge impact on folk consciousness. We are trying to use this for peaceful purposes. Based on the hypothesis that agreement of the discussion «can be achieved with 30% of the conventional positions of the writers» (Peretolchin, 2016), Using the assumption that unity in the online discussion can be achieved with 30% of the agreed positions of the writers, we conducted «an experiment in the Russian-speaking sector of the social network Facebook» (Bakshutova, 2019). We have joined the discussion that started on May 11, 2019 (dedicated to the death of journalist S. Dorenko) in the community «Alexander Prokhanov», showing that the implantation of a constructive script can be carried out by the author of the text, the moderator of the group, the reader and the commentator; both unconsciously and consciously (Bakshutova, 2019).

The stimuli are a publication made by Lyudmila Ryabova from the Tg-channel «Pereborhes» about the death of S. Dorenko. The material got 32 reactions, 66 comments. After the post of the text, 36 comments were made (19% – subheadings that showed fear and resentment, 27% – aggression, 21.6% – indifferent comments and 13.4% - neutral), we have implanted a text into the discussion, the message of which is expressed in the title: «The evil you do stays with you» (Bakshutova, 2019).

Quantitative analysis of the results of the script-addition experiment in the discussion initiated by L. Ryabova proves that the goal was achieved. The addition of a portrait script, focused on the moral values of journalism, into the discussion in general led to an increase in the conventional position, although it did not reach the threshold value of influence; and Independent publication of this text reached 30% of the positions of constructive agreement, from which it should be concluded that this text has a peacekeeping resource.

7. Conclusion

Post-truth is convenient for everyone - for those who construct post-truth and post-memory, and for those who «consume» it – it fits into the system of existing stereotypes, does not disturb the conscience too much and does not require special reflections. Post-truth provides an opportunity for resent mental emotions to escape, although this exit has an anti-cathartic effect. The culture of opposition to post-truth is associated with the practice of shaping public opinion and social relations and is based on opposing the conscious falsification of the truth, on protecting trust of individuals to each other and the state as the basis of the health of the nation. The formation of the necessary public opinion is a preview to the active participation of the social community in the processes of restructuring, using the energy of society in the destruction of the antisocial order.

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