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## VERBALIZATION OF MANIPULATIVE STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL NETWORKS FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

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**Key words:** *linguistic manipulation, strategies, tactics, social networks, Twitter, Facebook.*

The article deals with the specificity of verbalizing manipulative strategies and tactics, used in the networks Facebook and Twitter. The relevance of the present paper is determined both by the modern research paradigm of linguistics, in the center of which mass communication as a linguistic and psychological phenomenon appears, and by the insufficient degree of investigation of the peculiarities of realizing the manipulative potential in the discourse of social networks. The purpose of our study is to identify, systematize and analyze the leading strategies and tactics of language manipulation and the means of their implementation in the social networks Twitter and Facebook, which over the past decades have been leading communication platforms in the world. The object of the study is the process of functioning of strategies and tactics of linguistic influence used in the discourses of the studied networks, and the subject constitutes the linguistic means of implementing these strategies and tactics. For the investigation, 365 text fragments of various content (such as entries in user chronicles, comments, replies, reposts, retweets, information on hashtags and keywords, and posts from communities) were taken from the texts of Twitter and Facebook social networks by means of a continuous sample. The results of the conducted linguistic research prove that in the social networks Twitter and Facebook, the authors of messages use different types of manipulative strategies in their posts, among which the following can be singled out as the dominant ones: strategies of persuasion, positivity, distortion of data, encouragement, self-presentation, identification and discrediting. In order to implement these strategies, addressees use numerous tactics, namely: the tactics of

increasing the interlocutor's importance, praise, exemplification, self-promotion, solidarity with the interlocutor, veiling, changing the subject, glittering generalities, stereotyping, appeal to authority, positive reinforcement, hyperbolization, appeal to emotions, plain folks, criticism, blaming, insulting comments, threatening, "friend or foe" opposition, appeals and promises.

## **ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЯ МАНІПУЛЯТИВНИХ СТРАТЕГІЙ У СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖАХ FACEBOOK І TWITTER**

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**Ключові слова:** *мовне маніпулювання, стратегії, тактики, соціальні мережі, Twitter, Facebook.*

У статті розглянуто особливості вербалізації маніпулятивних стратегій і тактик, які використовуються у мережах Facebook і Twitter. Актуальність започаткованої наукової розвідки визначається, перш за все, сучасною дослідницькою парадигмою лінгвістики, яка акцентує особливу увагу на витлумаченні масової комунікації як лінгвістичного, так і як психологічного явища. Основним викликом у цьому контексті є недостатнє вивчення специфічних особливостей виявлення маніпулятивного потенціалу в дискурсі соціальних мереж. Мета статті полягає у виявленні, систематизуванні та аналізі провідних стратегій і тактик мовного маніпулювання та засобів їх реалізації у соціальних мережах Twitter і Facebook, які впродовж останніх десятиліть займають провідні позиції серед комунікативних платформ у світі. Об'єктом дослідження є процес функціонування стратегій і тактик мовного впливу, які використовуються у дискурсах досліджуваних мереж, а предметом – лінгвістичні засоби реалізації цих стратегій і тактик. Матеріалом дослідження слугувало 365 текстових фрагментів різного змісту, таких як записи в хроніках користувачів, коментарі, відповіді, репости, ретвіти, інформація за хештегами та ключовими словами, публікації зі спільнот, вилучених з текстів мереж Twitter і Facebook засобами суцільної вибірки. Як показали результати проведеного лінгвістичного аналізу, у соціальних мережах Twitter і Facebook автори повідомлень використовують у своїх дописах маніпулятивні стратегії різного типу, серед яких, як домінуючі, виокремлюємо стратегії переконання, позитиву, викривлення/спотворення інформації, агітації, самопрезентації, ідентифікації та дискредитації. Для реалізації цих стратегій мовної сугестії адресанти послуговуються численними тактиками, а саме: підвищення значущості співрозмовника, вихваляння, екземпліфікація, самопросування, солідаризація із співрозмовником, вуалізація, переакцентування, «сяючі узагальнення», навішування ярликів, посилення на авторитет, опис позитивної перспективи, гіперболізація, апелювання до почуттів, гра в протонародність, критика, звинувачення, образа, погроза, створення опозиції «свій-чужий», заклик та обіцянка.

**Introduction.** Over the past decades, Twitter and Facebook have been the leading communication platforms in the world. Despite the fact that the specificity of the process of manipulating consciousness has repeatedly been the subject of scientific research by both Ukrainian and foreign scholars (O. Bykova, J. Bryant, O. Horina, T. A. van Dijk, D. Kalishchuk, K. Kuns, A. Radiuk, N. Sidenko, L. Shvelidze, S. Thompson etc.), the problem of studying the mechanisms of linguistic influence in the discourse of social networks is insufficiently studied and requires scientific elaboration and generalization.

The relevance of the present paper is determined both by the modern research paradigm of linguistics, in the center of which mass communication as a linguistic and psychological phenomenon appears, and by the insufficient degree of investigation of the peculiarities of realizing the manipulative potential in the discourse of social networks in general, and in Twitter and Facebook in particular. The purpose of our study is to identify, systematize and analyze the leading strategies and tactics of language manipulation and the means of their implementation in the social networks Twitter and Facebook.

**Materials and methods.** For the investigation, 365 text fragments of various content (such as entries in user chronicles, comments, replies, reposts, retweets, information on hashtags and keywords, posts from communities) were taken from the texts of Twitter and Facebook social networks by means of a continuous sample. The methods of theoretical generalization, description and consecutive analysis were used as the prevailing ones in the conducted scientific research.

**Discussion.** Linguists are interested in the phenomenon of manipulation due to the fact that it is realized through natural language by skillfully using certain linguistic resources to influence covertly the cognitive, emotional and behavioral spheres of the addressee's life. In other words, manipulation is a kind of psychological influence that is not obvious to the target: the latter believes that he or she makes decisions and choices on his or her own. The modern understanding of manipulation is the programming of the thoughts and aspirations of the masses, their moods and even their mental state in order to ensure their behavior as required by those who own the means of manipulation (Akkurt, 2020: 9; Zaitseva, 2012: 102). This is the art of managing people through targeted influence on their consciousness and instincts (Dmytruk, 2006: 87); the skillful imposition of intentions on another person that do not necessarily coincide with their own desires and needs (Ruda, 2012). Accordingly, we define language manipulation as the purposeful implementation of the peculiarities of language use in order to influence the addressee covertly in the way desired by the speaker.

In order to achieve the goal of manipulative influence in the process of communication, planning of activities (namely, strategy and tactics) is required. In the research, we interpret the communicative strategy as the optimal realization of the speaker's intention to achieve a specific goal of communication by choosing effective speech actions and their flexible modification in a particular situation. As for the tactics of speech influence, we understand it as a system of sequential speech acts that contributes to the implementation of the chosen strategy.

At the present stage of the linguistic science development, a generally accepted classification of strategies and tactics of language influence have not yet been elaborated, since due to the diversity of real communicative situations there is a problem of choosing optimal criteria for their unification, typification and stratification. The main principles of classification of communication strategies are based on a logically structured and stylistically formed message that has a certain impact on the addressee, while using a variety of language tools, in accordance with the goal and specific conditions of communication. The study of communicative strategies takes place within individual discourses, where communication is regulated both in content and form, and interlocutors are guided by the status-role rules of speech behavior. In view of this, we take as a basis a number of classifications (Brown, 1987: 68–70; Semeniuk, Parashchuk, 2010: 29; Horina, Oliinyk, 2020: 24–25; Kovalenko, Marchenko, 2019: 217; T. A. van Dijk, 2006: 45), which, taking into consideration the subject of our study – the peculiarities of verbalization of communication strategies in the discourse of social networks, allow us to analyze this phenomenon thoroughly and in detail. Accordingly, we distinguish the strategies of persuasion, positivity, distortion of data, encouragement, self-presentation, identification, discrediting, which are realized through the tactics of increasing the interlocutor's importance, praise, exemplification, self-promotion, solidarity with the interlocutor, veiling, changing the subject, glittering generalities, stereotyping, appeal to authority, positive reinforcement, hyperbolization, appeal to emotions, plain folks, criticism, blaming, insulting comments, threatening, “friend-or-foe” opposition, appeals and promises.

According to the results of our linguistic analysis of 365 text fragments of various content (such as entries in user chronicles, comments, replies, reposts, retweets, information on hashtags and keywords, posts from communities) taken from the texts of Twitter and Facebook social networks by means of a continuous sample, the persuasion strategy in the analyzed fragments of social media discourse is the most used (33%). According to our observations, it is realized through the tactics of appeal to authority (6%), positive reinforcement (5%), plainfolks

(5.5%), hyperbolization (4%), and appeal to emotion fallacy (12.5%).

For example, the tactics of appeal to authority is quite common and effective in social networks: mentioning a public figure in a message in the appropriate context makes a convincing impression on the recipient and he or she is manipulated in the way, intended by the addresser: “*Hey, these apps really work. Top Apple officials said they’re the best. They will work wherever you go, Top Apple officials assure*” (Twitter, John Faul, 10.05.2023). In the message, the representatives of the world-famous *Apple* corporation are mentioned, who, according to the author, believe that a certain product is effective in its work, as they nominate it as *the best*. Of course, this sounds quite convincing to the average recipient.

The use of the positive reinforcement tactics as a part of the persuasion strategy is recorded in cases where the author tries to convince the addressee that if the latter fulfills certain conditions, it is possible to achieve a specific positive result, for example: “*His recommendations are cool. Believe me. Whenever I try some of the herbs that he promotes on his blog, I see the desired result... gorgeous... abundant hair... I think you should follow all his pieces of advice*” (Twitter, John Faul, 04.06.2023). The speaker tries to persuade the interlocutor to buy the products advertised by a certain person on his/her blog, emphasizing the positive prospect of getting *gorgeous... abundant hair*.

The plain folks tactics function as an attempt to win over the audience by identifying with them in order to establish closer relations. In such examples, the author’s personality is associated with positive values through their connection with ordinary people, and the use of this tactics can be traced mostly in political speeches, for example: “*Unions built the middle class, and when they secure better wages, benefits, and working conditions they help ALL American workers. I’ll keep standing shoulder-to-shoulder with workers in Michigan and across our country*” (Facebook, Gary Peters, 31.09.2023). In this message, Senator Gary Peters uses the universal quantifier *all* in reference to *American workers* and promises to stand with them *shoulder-to-shoulder* trying to create a circle of “his own”, which includes everyone he lists, including himself, and this way indicating that he is a part of the middle class, just “an ordinary American”.

Hyperbolization tactics usually have a positive connotation: as a part of the persuasion strategy, it is used by the speaker mostly to express encouragement, support, etc., for example: “*There’s nothing we can’t do! Do you hear me? We can do EVERYTHING!*” (Twitter, Jenn Gingrich, 22.04.2023). Here, the author hyperbolizes their joint capabilities with the recipient by using the phrase *There’s nothing we can’t do*, but in such a positive and optimistic way he supports the

addressee and tries to win him over on his side. In addition, exclamatory sentences (*There’s nothing we can do! We can do EVERYTHING!*) and capitalization in the word *EVERYTHING* are used on the syntactic and graphic levels, and all this adds emotionality to the statement and is an additional linguistic means of the persuasion strategy realization.

There are numerous examples of the use of appeal-to-emotions tactics, which consists in using emotionally colored vocabulary (with positive connotations), repetition, etc. According to our observations, these tactics are often used in combination with other tactics and within the framework of various strategies, for example: “*Time is winding down, and the door to the PLDO Scholarship Program is about to close. Before the clock strikes midnight, ensure your application is in. ...This is your chance to become part of an intellectually stimulating journey where linguistic diversity thrives and ideas take flight...Don’t let this opportunity slip away – apply now and open the door to a world of discovery!*” (Facebook, Danielle Andrea, 15.08.2023). By appealing to the recipient’s feelings, the author of the message tries to convince them to apply for this particular program, emphasizing that time is fleeting (*time is winding down*) and it will soon be too late to register (*the door to the PLDO Scholarship Program is about to close*), so it is important not to miss this opportunity (*Don’t let this opportunity slip away*). The addresser uses evaluative lexemes (*intellectually stimulating*) to evoke an emotional reaction to his words from the addressee, thus implementing the tactics of appeal to emotions. In addition, the latter are intertwined here with the tactics of positive reinforcement, which enhance the manipulative effect of the message (*apply now and open the door to a world of discovery*).

The strategy of encouragement is also quite frequently used in the analyzed research material (17%). It was found out that it is represented mainly by the tactics of appeals (10%) and promises (7%) and is mostly used in messages of a political character or those related to certain globalization phenomena and processes. The use of encouraging strategy with relevant tactics in messages on everyday topics is observed mostly in advertising messages, for example: “*Your luck is as deep as the ocean you’re on, mighty racer!!! Don’t be torpid! Register now! Let’s sail away as champions!..*” (Facebook, Regatta Iniversity, 28.07.2023). Here, the authors of the message use a combination of appeals and promises tactics to encourage the addressees to register for their course, join them, and, as they promise, become champions (*Let’s sail away as champions!*). At the same time, using the imperative mood, the addressers urge not to delay and register immediately (*Don’t be torpid! Register now!*). Among the linguistic means of implementing the encouraging strategy at the



lexical level, we note the use of an evaluative lexeme with a positive connotation *mighty*, as well as the expression *Your luck is deep as the ocean you're on*, which enhances the effectiveness of argumentation through the expressiveness of stable expressions. At the syntactic and graphic levels, we can observe the use of exclamatory sentences and the repeated use of exclamation marks in one of the sentences to further emphasize the importance of the message.

According to our observations, in order to implement the strategy of distortion of data in social networks (15%), the use of tactics of veiling (4%), changing the subject (4.5%), glittering generalities (3.5%), and stereotyping (2%) is quite common.

When applying the tactics of veiling, euphemisms are mostly used, the main function of which in such cases is to conceal the negative actions, for example: *"The authorities of one of the largest corporations had to let go one third of their employees because of certain financial problems they have been facing since the beginning of this year"* (Twitter, Mr. Malky, 18.05.2023). The euphemism *to let go*, which conceals the meaning of "to fire", is used to avoid aggravating the recipients' perception of the information that one third of the employees of a huge corporation was laid off due to the financial difficulties of the institution.

The tactics of changing the subject involve the use of repetition as a way to manipulate covertly people's minds in the direction the speaker desires, for example: *"Yes, they sometimes sell non-genuine products...I admit...But they do free home-delivery, free warranty service, free bonus programs!"* (Twitter, John Faul, 18.06.2023). The author tries to divert the reader's attention from the obviously well-known fact that a certain company sells non-authentic products (*Yes, they sometimes sell non-genuine products...I admit...*): the multiple repetition of the lexeme *free* is an effective means of refocusing the addressee's attention (*free home-delivery, free warranty service, free bonus programs*). In this way, the speaker emphasizes exactly the information that the potential recipient needs to focus on.

The tactics of glittering generalities involve the use of people's positive feelings and emotions towards certain concepts and words that can function as words-indicators – lexical items with the meaning of evaluation that express universal values. Among the analyzed material, examples of the use of glittering generalities tactics were recorded mainly among advertising messages: *"Ecologically pure. Natural and Organic. These new series of hair care are just for you..."* (Twitter, John Faul, 03.05.2023). The use of the lexemes *ecological, natural* and *organic*, which, of course, in the minds of the potential recipients are associated exclusively with something that causes universal approval and recognition, is a special means

of manipulating human consciousness. After such a presentation of a new hair care product, there arises a desire to get it.

The tactics of stereotyping consist in choosing vocabulary with negative connotations to refer to a certain phenomenon, person, idea, etc. Such labels cause the addressee's disapproval, generate unpleasant associations, and form a general negative attitude towards the phenomenon that is denoted by such a label. To hyperbolize a negative trait, dysphemisms are mostly used, for example: *"...hey, you! You sound like an egghead!... You are a 'special-interest-group', aren't you??? But all you're saying is just bullshit, I'm telling you!!!"* (Facebook, Rishav Mitra, 14.07.2023). Here, the author talks to the recipients' using lexemes with negative connotations: *egghead* in the sense of "clever", *bullshit* in the sense of "lie", and also calls him and everyone involved a *special-interest-group* to reinforce negative associations. In addition, at the syntactic and graphic levels, exclamatory sentences and multiple repetitions of the exclamation mark (*...I'm telling you!!!*) are used to enhance the emotionality of the statement and help create a manipulative effect.

In the posts of social network users, the use of a self-presentation strategy (10%) can also be traced, which aims to create a positive impression of someone and exert a pragmatic influence on the addressee. As a rule, this is realized with self-promotion (3%) and praise and exemplification tactics (7%) in order to create a positive image, for example: *"It's my pleasure to announce the brilliant minds who will be participating in shaping the discourse at this year's Philippine Languages Debate Open. Join us in welcoming a distinguished roster of judges, each a master of their craft; we are ready to steer conversations and ignite intellectual fires through fair, impartial, and unbiased judging that will fuel every debater's thirst to improve in the sport"* (Facebook, Danielle Andrea, 17.08.2023). In this message, the linguistic means of self-presentation strategy implementation are the grammatical forms of the first person plural (*we*), as well as personal and possessive pronouns (*my, our*), and at the semantic level, the evaluative vocabulary with positive meaning is used to characterize the speakers (*brilliant minds, a distinguished roster of conversations, master of their craft, unbiased judging*).

Among the analyzed examples, fixed in social media posts, there are cases of positivity strategy implementation (7%). When it is used on Twitter and Facebook platforms, communicators mainly apply the tactics of increasing the interlocutor's importance (7%). This strategy aims at communicating positive information to the interlocutor in the form of a compliment, praise, flattery, etc. in order to gain the addressee's favor for further cooperation, for example: *"How*

*splendid! What a wonderful choice! Wow, how brave you aaaaaare!*” (Twitter, Jenn Gingrich, 17.07.2023). In this message, the speaker uses evaluative lexemes exclusively with positive connotations *splendid* and *wonderful* in order to set the recipient in a positive and favorable mood towards his/her personality. In addition, the author uses letter prolongation in the word *aaaaaare* and the interjection *Wow* to have a stronger emotional impact on the reader.

According to the results of the conducted study, the strategy of identification as a means of manipulation in social networks is the least frequently used (5%) compared to other strategies identified and analyzed during the investigation. As a rule, it is realized through the tactics of solidarity with the interlocutor (5%). These tactics are aimed at demonstrating intimacy, closeness and like-mindedness with the communicative partner, and readiness to cooperate with him/her. Repetitions using the pronouns *we*, *our* instead of *I*, *my* create a sense of solidarity between the speaker and the addressee, for example: “*This is our chance ... This is our moment*”. “*I’m here ‘cause you need me... From now on it’s our common problem and it’s our task to find the solution...*” (Facebook, Rishav Mitra, 11.06.2023).

The strategy of discrediting (13%), used in the virtual communication space, demonstrates a direct dependence on the discursive features of online communication and is embodied in various forms. Thus, the linguistic features of the discrediting strategy implementation through tactics of criticism involve the use of negative evaluative and stylistic vocabulary directed at the addressee, as well as rhetorical questions and exclamatory sentences, for example: “*Common sense calling! Haven’t you grown up, or do you still believe yesterday’s history! Your the creators of, it’s your reproduction line of wealth! Which attracts assholes! Why else are you grounded on this planet? Yesterday’s hitlers rule today! Your its reproduction line of wealth! Killing you. God’s of the many! Isolated on a planet*” (Facebook, Wayne Jessop, 09.08.2023). Here, the author uses lexemes with negative connotations such as *assholes*, *hitlers*, *killing (you)* to present those he mentions in his messages in the worst possible way. In addition, the addresser uses rhetorical questions and exclamatory sentences to reinforce the negative characterization of his message.

Among the analyzed material, we have identified examples of the realization of the strategy of discrediting with the help of insulting comments tactics, which is an expression of verbal aggression and aggressive speech behavior. The linguistic markers of the implementation of these tactics are lexemes of evaluative semantics, stylistically reduced vocabulary, etc. that have a direct address or appeal to the

person. For example, in one of the comments, printed to the posts on the page of Senator Garry Peters, “*This guy is a bigger grifter than Biden*” (Facebook, Jason Lundy, 20.09.2023) we can observe the use of the lexeme “*grifter*” in its negative meaning of a dishonest person, involved in frauds. Moreover, the author of the message insists that Garry Peters (*guy*) is even a bigger grifter than another political leader (*Biden*) and by doing this he reinforces the effect of the discrediting strategy.

During the investigation, it has been established that the strategy of discrediting can be implemented in social media texts through the use of oppositions that lie in the “friend-or-foe” tactics, the latter often being combined with the blaming tactics to amplify/boost the effect of manipulation. For example, in the comments to the posts of Senator Garry Peters we come across the message “*How proud of the border are you? How about fentanyl flowing freely into our country? Proud of the two paychecks retirement pay and regular paychecks that you srew the American people out of? So yea Gary lying, cheating and stealing, insider trading Gary does it all*” (Facebook, Dale Fellows, 30.07.2023). Here, the author blames the Senator for *lying, cheating and stealing, insider trading*. He also accuses the politician of being guilty that *fentanyl is flowing freely* into the country. Moreover, the addresser considers that the political leader *srew(s)* his paychecks out of *the American people* and this way he opposes him to all the Americans, applying “friend-or-foe” tactics.

**Results.** Thus, in the social networks Twitter and Facebook, the authors of messages use different types of manipulative strategies in their posts, among which the following can be singled out as the dominant ones: strategies of persuasion, positivity, distortion of data, encouragement, self-presentation, identification and discrediting. In order to implement these strategies, addressees use numerous tactics, namely: the tactics of increasing the interlocutor’s importance, praise, exemplification, self-promotion, solidarity with the interlocutor, veiling, changing the subject, glittering generalities, stereotyping, appeal to authority, positive reinforcement, hyperbolization, appeal to emotions, plain folks, criticism, blaming, insulting comments, threatening, “friend-or-foe” opposition, appeals and promises.

The perspective studies in the investigated sphere include the linguistic analysis of the means of manipulation strategies implementation on the communication platforms Twitter and Facebook in separate thematic groups, as well as a comprehensive study of manipulative strategies in other social networks (such as Instagram, YouTube, Messenger, WeChat), which are also quite involved and popular among communicators in modern society.

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