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SCIENTIFIC AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF DIGITAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract: The article examines the scientific and methodological foundations for studying digital political discourse as an interdisciplinary field situated between linguistics, political communication, media studies and digital sociology. The relevance of the topic is explained by the fact that political meanings are now produced not only in speeches, parliamentary debates and mass media texts, but also in social networks, hashtags, comments, memes, short videos and online communities. The article clarifies the concept of digital political discourse, identifies its linguistic, pragmatic, multimodal and sociocultural features, and proposes an integrated research scheme. Special attention is paid to critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, corpus-assisted analysis, multimodal interpretation, network observation and ethical principles of digital data use. The study concludes that digital political discourse should be analyzed as a dynamic communicative practice in which text, image, platform affordances and user interaction jointly construct ideology, power, identity and civic participation.

Keywords: digital political discourse, social media, methodology, critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, multimodality, political communication, ideology, public sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse has always been a key object of linguistic research because political power is created, legitimized and questioned through language. In the traditional public sphere, political discourse was mainly represented by speeches, newspapers, party documents, interviews and official statements. The digital turn has changed this situation. Today political communication circulates through social media platforms, online news portals, messenger channels, comment sections and short-video services. As a result, political meaning is not produced by politicians alone; it is also produced by citizens, activists, journalists, influencers, bots and platform algorithms. Digital political discourse can be defined as a complex set of verbal, visual, audiovisual and interactive practices through which political actors and ordinary users discuss, evaluate and contest political reality in digital environments. It includes posts, comments, hashtags, memes, videos, captions, links, reactions and engagement metrics. The specific nature of this discourse lies in its speed, interactivity, multimodality and openness to constant reinterpretation. A single statement may be reposted, quoted, mocked, transformed into a meme or used as evidence in a new political argument. The aim of this article is to systematize the scientific and methodological foundations for studying digital political discourse. The objectives are to clarify the concept of the phenomenon, describe its main research categories, identify appropriate methods of analysis and outline ethical principles of working with digital data. The object of the article is digital political discourse, while the subject is the methodological framework needed for its linguistic and communicative interpretation. The research is based on recent works on social media critical discourse studies, social media research methods and political communication .

The first scientific foundation of digital political discourse research is the understanding of discourse as social practice. Political language does not simply describe reality; it organizes social relations, constructs political identities and offers models for interpreting events. In digital media this function becomes more visible because users can immediately respond to official narratives, create

counter-narratives and circulate alternative interpretations. Therefore, the unit of analysis should not be limited to an isolated text. It should include the communicative chain: original message, comments, reposts, hashtags, visual materials and the broader political context. Critical discourse analysis is one of the central theoretical approaches. It studies how language reproduces or challenges power, inequality, authority and ideology. In digital political discourse, CDA helps reveal how actors are named, how responsibility is assigned, how policies are justified and how opponents are delegitimized. However, contemporary CDA must take into account platform affordances: visibility, likes, reposts, trending topics, algorithmic recommendation and the possibility of coordinated communication. KhosraviNik's approach to Social Media Critical Discourse Studies is important because it connects discourse content with digital practice and technological mediation Pragmatic theory is another essential foundation. Digital political messages often act indirectly: they accuse, warn, promise, mock, invite, mobilize or legitimize without always using explicit formulas. Speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions, politeness strategies and irony should therefore be examined. In addition, frame theory and narrative theory are useful for identifying the stories through which political events are interpreted. A policy may be framed as reform, crisis, threat, renewal or injustice; each frame guides the audience toward a particular evaluation.

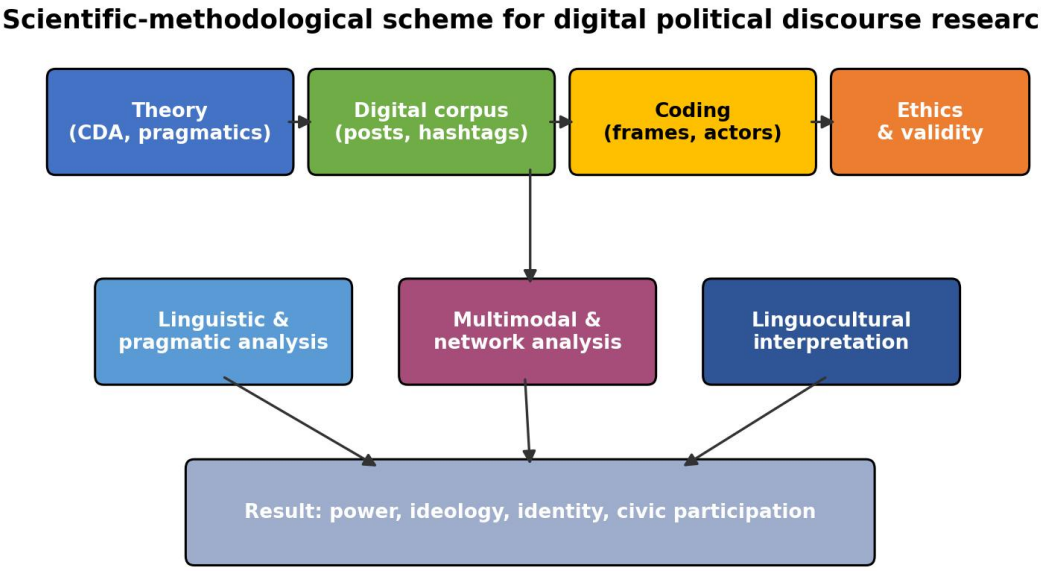


Figure 1. Scientific-methodological scheme for digital political discourse research

Digital political discourse has several distinctive features. Interactivity means that political messages become meaningful through audience responses. Multimodality means that words work together with images, videos, music, emojis and layout. Hybridity means that institutional and everyday speech coexist: an official statement may be discussed through colloquial comments, ironic memes and emotional reactions. Algorithmic mediation means that platforms influence which messages become visible and which remain marginal. These features make digital political discourse a dynamic process rather than a finished text.

The most important linguistic categories are nomination, predication, evaluation, argumentation and intertextuality. Nomination shows how political actors are named: leader, citizen, reformer, opposition, enemy, expert or victim. Predication reveals what qualities are attached to them: responsible, dangerous, honest, corrupt, patriotic or weak. Evaluation expresses approval or disapproval through adjectives, verbs, metaphors, punctuation, emoji and visual symbols. Argumentation identifies the reasons used to justify political positions, for example appeals to security,

law, justice, tradition, national interest or public will. Intertextuality is especially significant in digital discourse. Online political messages frequently quote speeches, laws, news headlines, historical events, slogans and previous posts. A short phrase may activate a whole chain of earlier meanings. Hashtags also function as intertextual signs: they classify content, express stance and connect individual posts to collective debates. Recent studies of political hashtags demonstrate that social networks may become arenas where political legitimacy is supported, criticized or contested.

A linguocultural perspective is necessary when digital political discourse is studied in English, Uzbek, Russian or other languages. Political concepts such as freedom, stability, reform, people, nation and justice have culturally marked meanings. Translation alone is not enough; the researcher must interpret the cultural associations, historical references and pragmatic expectations behind the words. In multilingual digital spaces, code-switching, transliteration and borrowed digital terms may also signal identity, group belonging or political attitude.

A valid study begins with a clear research design. The researcher must define the platform, topic, time period, language, political actors and unit of analysis. The unit may be a post, comment, hashtag, thread, meme, video caption or interaction network. Sampling may be based on keywords, hashtags, selected accounts, engagement level or specific political events. Each strategy has limitations: hashtag sampling captures visible communities but excludes posts without hashtags; account-based sampling gives institutional continuity but may miss citizen reactions; event-based sampling is useful for tracing changes before and after a political event. After data collection, materials should be preserved and organized. Because digital texts may be edited or deleted, screenshots, archived links and metadata tables improve reliability. Coding should then be carried out according to research aims. Possible codes include actor representation, ideological frame, pragmatic function, emotional tone, metaphor, visual symbol, intertextual reference and type of interaction. Corpus-assisted analysis can identify frequent words and collocations, while close reading explains their meaning in context. Network or hashtag analysis can show how discourse spreads and which actors become central. Triangulation is a key methodological principle. Qualitative interpretation should be supported by quantitative tendencies where possible, and computational results should be checked through human reading. Sentiment analysis and topic modeling may be useful, but they cannot replace linguistic interpretation because irony, sarcasm, mixed languages and cultural references often require contextual knowledge. The strongest model combines critical reading, pragmatic explanation, corpus evidence, multimodal analysis and contextual interpretation.

Ethical responsibility is one of the main requirements in digital political discourse research. Public accessibility of online data does not always mean that users expect academic analysis. Researchers should avoid unnecessary exposure of private individuals, anonymize usernames when needed and be especially careful with politically sensitive content. Ethical research also requires respect for platform rules, avoidance of harm and transparent explanation of how data were collected and used. The practical significance of this methodology is broad. It can help students and researchers develop critical media literacy, support journalists in recognizing manipulative framing, and assist educators in teaching responsible political communication. In the context of Uzbekistan and other rapidly digitalizing societies, the study of online political discourse is important for understanding civic participation, freedom of expression, public opinion and the risks of misinformation. Recent research on the media environment in Uzbekistan also emphasizes that digital transformation expands the political role of media and increases the need for balanced regulation and public accountability . Thus, digital political discourse research has both theoretical and applied value. It enriches linguistics by introducing new genres such as hashtags, memes, threads and short-video captions. It enriches political communication by showing how citizens and institutions interact in networked environments. It also contributes to pedagogy because the ability to interpret digital political language is part of modern civic competence.

CONCLUSION

Digital political discourse is a complex phenomenon shaped by language, image, technology, political context and user interaction. It differs from traditional political discourse by its speed, multimodality, interactivity, hybridity and algorithmic mediation. Because of this complexity, it cannot be studied only as a collection of texts. It should be examined as a dynamic communicative practice in which meanings are produced, circulated and contested across digital platforms. The scientific and methodological foundations of its study include critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, corpus-assisted analysis, multimodal interpretation, network observation, frame and narrative analysis, comparative linguocultural interpretation and ethical data principles. Each approach reveals one aspect of the phenomenon: ideology, communicative intention, recurring linguistic patterns, visual meaning, circulation, cultural specificity and research responsibility. Their integration creates a reliable model for analyzing how power, identity, legitimacy and civic participation are constructed in the digital public sphere.

The proposed methodological scheme can be used in future studies of political communication in English, Uzbek, Russian and other languages. It is especially useful for analyzing social media materials, election discourse, political hashtags, official online statements, public comments and digital civic movements. A transparent and ethically grounded methodology will allow researchers to understand not only what is said in digital politics, but also how, why and with what social consequences it is said.

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