

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL MANIPULATIVE STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL NETWORKS: A LINGUO-PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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The article is devoted to the description of typical verbal and non-verbal manipulative strategies and tactics employed in such popular social networks as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. The study characterizes the principal verbal and non-verbal means of manipulative influence in social media within the framework of contemporary digital communication. It is determined that social platforms, by ensuring rapid information exchange and personalized access to content, create a favorable environment for the dissemination of manipulative strategies that affect users on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels. The functioning of manipulative messages in digital discourse is highlighted, with particular emphasis on their ability to generate informational “bubbles,” reinforce groupthink, and diminish critical reflection. The main communicative strategies are analyzed, including the use of positive lexis, appeal to authority, crowd effect, fact distortion, irony, and sarcasm, as well as the deployment of visual and paralinguistic elements (images, colors, emojis, GIF animations, memes).

The study characterizes the interaction of verbal and non-verbal resources, which enhances the persuasiveness of manipulative messages and secures their impact on both the rational and subconscious dimensions of perception. The role of cognitive biases (confirmation bias, availability heuristic) in increasing the effectiveness of manipulative technologies is defined. The features of neuro-linguistic programming are examined as a tool for creating associations and dissociations that guide the evaluation and interpretation of information. Examples from the Ukrainian segment of social networks are analyzed, demonstrating real mechanisms of informational influence under the conditions of war and socio-political instability.

It is concluded that manipulation in social networks constitutes a multidimensional communicative phenomenon requiring interdisciplinary investigation from the perspectives of linguistics, psychology, and media studies.

Key words: social networks; digital communication; verbal manipulation; non-verbal manipulation; communicative strategies; media discourse; information influence.

Помазан Ігор, Ільїна Олена. Вербальні та невербальні маніпулятивні стратегії в соціальних мережах: лінгвопрагматичний аспект

Статтю присвячено опису типових вербальних і невербальних маніпулятивних стратегій і тактик в таких популярних соціальних мережах, як Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok. У роботі охарактеризовано основні вербальні та невербальні засоби маніпулятивного впливу в соціальних мережах у контексті сучасної цифрової комунікації. Визначено, що соціальні платформи, забезпечуючи швидкий обмін інформацією та персоналізований доступ до контенту, створюють сприятливе середовище для поширення маніпулятивних стратегій, які впливають на когнітивний, емоційний та поведінковий

рівні користувачів. Висвітлено специфіку функціонування маніпулятивних повідомлень у мережевому дискурсі, зокрема їхню здатність формувати інформаційні «коконі», підсилювати групове мислення та знижувати рівень критичного осмислення. Проаналізовано основні комунікативні стратегії, до яких належать використання позитивної лексики, апеляція до авторитету, ефект натовпу, спотворення фактів, іронія та сарказм, а також залучення візуальних і паралінгвальних елементів (зображення, кольори, емодзі, GIF-анімації, мему).

Охарактеризовано взаємодію вербальних і невербальних ресурсів, що підсилює переконливість маніпулятивних повідомлень та забезпечує їхній вплив як на раціональну, так і на підсвідому сферу сприйняття. Визначено роль когнітивних упереджень (ефект підтвердження, евристика доступності) у підвищенні ефективності маніпулятивних технологій. Висвітлено особливості нейrolінгвістичного програмування як інструмента створення асоціацій і дисоціацій, що спрямовують оцінку та інтерпретацію інформації. Проаналізовано приклади з українського сегмента соціальних мереж, які демонструють реальні механізми інформаційного впливу в умовах війни та суспільно-політичної нестабільності.

Зроблено висновок, що маніпуляція в соціальних мережах є багатовимірним комунікативним явищем, яке потребує міждисциплінарного дослідження з позицій лінгвістики, психології та медіазнавства.

Ключові слова: соціальні мережі; цифрова комунікація; вербальна маніпуляція; невербальна маніпуляція; комунікативні стратегії; медіадискурс; інформаційний вплив.

Introduction. The accelerated advancement of contemporary information technologies has profoundly reconfigured the communicative landscape of society, insofar as it has expanded the scope of interaction among users beyond the constraints of geographical distance and socio-cultural diversity. Digital platforms and social networks in particular have become not merely channels of information exchange but also influential arenas for the articulation of opinions, the construction of viewpoints, and the formation of public attitudes.

In this regard, the phenomenon of informational manipulation has assumed heightened significance. This is attributable to the fact that modern communication media not only disseminate data but also actively shape the emotional states, behavioral patterns, and cognitive orientations of audiences. Such dynamics, thereby, underscore the necessity of an in-depth exploration of the mechanisms, strategies, and instruments of informational influence in the digital sphere.

Within this communicative ecology, both verbal and non-verbal resources play a decisive role in affecting user perception and conduct. Notably, verbal manipulations function as a particularly potent instrument for the construction of targeted messages that exert psychological pressure on recipients, thereby fostering specific cognitive predispositions and emotional dispositions.

Scholars have examined communicative features both in literary texts and within professional and political spheres. In particular, O. Antonov

analyzed communicative styles of character speech [1]; Yu. Kosenko developed the theoretical foundations of language communication [7]; T. Pieshkova and O. Vorobiova analyzed communicative strategies in German-language specialized texts and their translations [10]. A significant contribution was made by F. Batsevych, who elaborated the principles of communicative linguistics [2]. In the field of manipulative strategies L. Polishchuk and T. Pushkar analyzed politeness strategies and tactics in political discourse [11].

Thus, within Ukrainian scholarly tradition, a wide range of approaches to the study of communicative strategies and tactics has been established. These approaches encompass literary, political, and professional discourse, confirming the relevance of the problem for contemporary linguistics.

The Aim of the Article. At present, social networks provide high-speed information exchange, unrestricted access to content, and a wide range of opportunities for the creation and dissemination of messages. These affordances, however, increase the risk of exploiting information for manipulating audiences, reinforcing stereotypes, and shaping or reshaping public opinion. The toolkit of verbal manipulations in social media encompasses a variety of techniques of influence, rendering them not only instruments of communication but also mechanisms of social control capable of exerting rapid impact on the cognitive sphere of individuals. As society becomes increasingly dependent on information, the relevance of this research is determined by

the urgent need to safeguard information security, foster critical thinking skills, and ensure transparency of communication in the digital environment. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive theoretical and practical examination of verbal and non-verbal manipulation tools employed in social networks.

Results. The interest of linguists in the phenomenon of manipulation can be explained by the fact that this type of influence is realized primarily through natural language. However, linguistic research on this issue is not yet comprehensive: most studies focus on particular aspects of manipulation, while many questions remain insufficiently explored. From a linguistic perspective, manipulation may be defined as the use of linguistic means in interaction with paralinguistic ones, with the aim of exerting psychological influence on the addressee and reinforcing specific attitudes or mental dispositions.

Since their emergence, the functions of social networks have undergone considerable transformations. The experience of daily use over the past decade has demonstrated that virtual communities exert a profound influence on users, leading them to engage in actions pre-designed by initiators of manipulation, who regard influence as one of the primary functions of words and expressions.

Manipulative strategies in social networks operate both at the individual level and at the level of mass consciousness, where a user becomes part of a group or community sharing similar views. Through algorithms that monitor user activity, trace preferences, and predict interests, social networks construct highly individualized environments. These environments give rise to so-called “information cocoons,” in which users are predominantly exposed to information consistent with their beliefs, values, and opinions. This phenomenon significantly enhances the effectiveness of manipulative strategies, as users continuously receive confirmation of their own views, thereby reinforcing their sense of truthfulness and reducing their capacity for critical thinking.

From the standpoint of social psychology, manipulation in social networks is viewed as a process that influences the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of information perception. The effectiveness of manipulative techniques frequently rests on the creation of a sense of belonging to a group, which provides users

with a perception of the importance of their position insofar as it is shared by others. This form of manipulation is reinforced through symbolic signals of approval from the group such as likes, comments, or shares that generate the illusion of mass support for a particular idea. In such cases, manipulative influence reaches its peak: recipients begin to perceive the group’s position as the only valid one and attempt to defend or disseminate it among others. This phenomenon, known as “groupthink”, entails the subordination of individual opinion to dominant group perspectives, thereby significantly diminishing the ability for critical analysis.

Particular attention should also be paid to mechanisms of manipulative influence rooted in cognitive biases and psychological features of information processing. Confirmation bias (the tendency to focus only on information consistent with pre-existing beliefs) and the availability heuristic (the preference for information immediately accessible at the moment of decision-making) substantially amplify the impact of manipulation. Manipulative messages exploit such biases to provoke specific impressions or emotional responses, which foster deeper user involvement in discussion and increase adherence to certain viewpoints. Manipulation based on cognitive biases further contributes to the consolidation of more rigid positions among users, as these positions are grounded in personal convictions rather than objective information.

The communicative-discursive approach to the analysis of linguistic phenomena primarily directs scholars’ attention to the speech activity of the individual, as a result of which communicative interaction between the addresser and the addressee becomes the focal point of research. The study of linguistic units is carried out within the framework of the linguo-pragmatic orientation of contemporary linguistic inquiry.

It should be emphasized that linguopragmatics, as a distinct branch of philological scholarship, took shape in the second half of the twentieth century, with its theoretical foundations grounded in the studies of speech act theory and activity-based conceptions of language.

In the following sections, we will examine the most typical communicative strategies of manipulation in social networks, with a particular focus on their linguistic and paralinguistic realization. Special attention will be given to

the mechanisms through which these strategies shape cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses of users, as well as to the ways in which they reinforce or undermine critical thinking in digital discourse.

Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is conceptualized as a tactic realized within a model of communication and behavior based on the construction of reality in the individual's consciousness in the form of a deep structure shaped through verbal and non-verbal interaction, as well as a set of techniques and operational principles (contextually determined beliefs) through which effective strategies of thinking and behavior are modeled.

Fundamental to NLP is the activation of three key components responsible for the storage, processing, and transmission of information: neuron – language – brain. The interaction of these elements provides the conditions for influencing not only the audience's perceptions but also its behavioral responses. In most cases, the mechanisms of neuro-linguistic programming are actualized through the play of associations and dissociations, which makes it possible to construct new semantic connections or, conversely, to distance certain images, thereby directing the recipient's perception and evaluation in a desired way.

Figure 1 illustrates the use of positive language in a Facebook post by Yevhen Klopotenko. The manipulative effect here is achieved

through emotionally charged marketing strategies that rely on lexical units with positive semantics (e.g., “good”, “calm”), which evoke associations with harmony and comfort. Such linguistic choices stimulate the recipient's imaginative experience of the product even before it is prepared.

The comparison of the cooking process to “*culinary meditation*” romanticizes the act of food preparation, transforming it into an almost sacral practice. In this context, the recipe is framed not simply as a set of instructions but as a path toward inner peace. Sensory markers, such as the phrase “*turn on good music*”, create an association with a cozy and pleasant atmosphere, distracting from potential difficulties in cooking and focusing attention on the positive experience.

Particularly noteworthy is the combination of the noun “*meditation*” with the phrase “*an hour and a half*”. Although the duration of preparation might typically be perceived as a drawback, the positive connotation of “*meditation*” reframes it as an advantage, encouraging the recipient to reinterpret the process positively.

The visual component further amplifies this effect: a close-up image of a slice of cake functions as a visual trigger, evoking an immediate sensory impulse and the desire to replicate the recipe. Thus, the interplay of positive lexis, sensory associations, and aesthetically appealing imagery constitutes an example of soft manipulation, whereby the reader does not simply follow a recipe but experiences it on an emotional level.

Appeal to authority, also referred to as transfer, represents one of the common strategies of manipulative influence. Its essence lies in the subtle and unobtrusive mention of an influential person or source, which creates the illusion that this figure agrees with and supports the speaker's position. In social networks, the most persuasive impact is achieved by posts that present seemingly “well-grounded” arguments.

In scholarly literature, this strategy is often interpreted as an argumentative strategy, which, according to S. Neryan, “is aimed at explanation, demonstration, and persuasion in the truth of certain statements, as well as at influencing the addressee through rational means” [9, p. 79]. A key feature of this strategy is the reference to an authoritative source intended to confirm the speaker's claims.



Figure 1

In social media communication, such references frequently appear without the explicit mention of names, while still performing the same legitimizing function. For example: “*History repeats itself. As the classic said, this has already happened*” (Facebook, 30.01.21); “*Experts note that the maximum level of air pollution in the capital may reach an index of 50*” (Facebook, 09.04.20). These examples demonstrate how appeals to authority foster a perception of credibility, even when the actual source remains vague.

Figure 2 illustrates an example of the “appeal to authority” tactic. The post presents five lemonade recipes, but instead of merely listing the ingredients and preparation steps, it emphasizes that all five recipes were allegedly created and recommended by Hector Jiménez-Bravo, a well-known chef and judge of the television show MasterChef Ukraine.

Phrases such as “*Hector recommends*” or “*Hector offers*” generate a trust-inducing effect: if advice comes from a popular and authoritative figure, it is perceived as correct and useful, even though the individual’s expertise (culinary arts) has no direct relevance to medicine or health.

A pragmalinguistic analysis makes it possible to reveal how appeals to authority increase audience trust and enhance manipulative influ-

ence, particularly when genuine quotations are partially transformed or distorted to reinforce the manipulative message.

Figure 3 illustrates the use of the “**crowd effect**” tactic. First, the visual component depicts the head of the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine, K. Budanov, against the backdrop of Crimea with a Ukrainian flag and a cup of coffee. This imagery evokes hope among Ukrainians, suggesting that the peninsula will eventually be returned under Ukrainian control and that normal life will resume there (symbolically framed as “*we will surely have coffee*”).

Second, the verbal component – the phrase “*getting ready to drink coffee in Crimea*” – also contains manipulative elements. The verb “*getting ready*” is used in the first-person plural form, while the pronoun “*we*” is omitted. This linguistic construction implicitly appeals to collective participation, creating an orientation toward mass involvement and a sense of unity. Such framing strengthens the emotional and mobilizing impact of the message by presenting it as a shared aspiration.

Distortion of facts constitutes another significant verbal tactic of manipulation, which involves the deliberate alteration or selective presentation of information in order to create a misleading impression. The primary aim of this strategy is to reshape users’ perception of reality, impose a particular interpretation of events, or construct an illusion of objectivity in the message.

Such manipulation is achieved through the intentional omission of critical details, the one-sided emphasis on either exclusively positive or exclusively negative aspects, as well as through highlighting specific elements that evoke strong emotional responses. This enables the speaker to construct messages that appear truthful at first



Figure 2



Figure 3

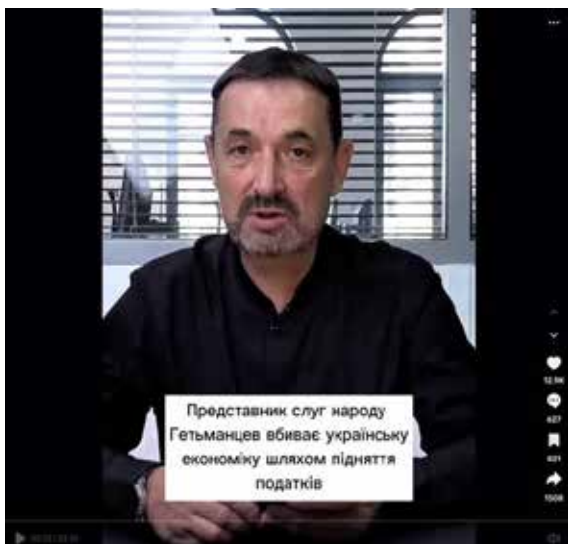


Figure 4

glance but are, in fact, subjectively framed to produce a desired effect.

Figure 4 presents a fragment from a TikTok video in which criticism is expressed regarding the activities of Danylo Hetmantsev, particularly his proposal to raise taxes. In this case, the tactic of fact distortion is evident: Hetmantsev did indeed articulate ideas about tax reform, but not with the intention of “*destroying the Ukrainian economy*,” as the message suggests. Rather, his aim was to stabilize state finances and ensure consistent budget revenues for the following year. The primary objective of this manipulation was to create a negative perception of the politician through the deliberate misrepresentation of facts.

A striking example of linguistic aggression is the hyperbolized statement “*Hetmantsev is killing the Ukrainian economy*.” The verb “*kill-ing*” carries a strongly negative connotation and functions as a linguistic trigger, provoking fear for the future of the economy and suppressing rational reflection in recipients. It forces an emotional reaction directed at the politician as a person rather than at his actual policies or proposals. The absence of supporting facts, figures, or references to legislation indicates the use of labeling instead of analytical reasoning, despite the fact that Hetmantsev’s actions were, in reality, aimed at supporting the Ukrainian economy.

The practice of fact distortion constitutes a complex and multifaceted manipulative strategy that creates the illusion of objectivity while being subjectively oriented toward producing a predesigned effect in the consciousness of users.

This phenomenon typically involves selective presentation or deliberate modification of information to generate a distorted perception of events. The danger of this tactic lies in the fact that social media users, often lacking the ability to verify the source or context of a message, tend to accept such claims as truth. Consequently, manipulative content spreads rapidly and fosters a skewed vision of reality, thereby amplifying its influence on collective consciousness.

Irony, sarcasm. Sarcasm, as a more aggressive form of irony, enables the speaker to impose a negative attitude toward a particular object in an indirect manner. From a pragmalinguistic perspective, irony and sarcasm are considered effective tools of manipulative influence, as they provoke emotional responses and engage the audience in implicit support of a particular idea.

Figure 5 illustrates an advertisement constructed through a combination of visual and cultural allusion, employing the tactic of sarcasm. The object here is Artemivsk salt, which is currently unavailable for purchase. The manipulative effect is achieved by indirectly ridiculing individuals who had managed to stock up on salt earlier. The phrase “*when you stocked up back in 2014*” functions as a sarcastic commentary against the backdrop of shortages and rising prices for salt due to the war. Such wording fosters solidarity with the recipient, who may have acted in a similar way.

The visual hyperbole of a “*pile of salt*” reinforces the comic effect, as the quantity far exceeds realistic reserves. The Artemsil brand employs self-irony, shaping an image of itself as a “familiar” brand that understands its audience and participates in a shared cultural dialogue. To intensify the effect, the image draws upon a scene from the film *Scarface*, in which the protagonist sits in front of a mountain of cocaine; in the advertisement, this substance is replaced with salt, creating a “salt-drug” parallel and producing an effect of absurdity and humor.

Among the most widespread non-verbal means of manipulation in social networks are images, emojis, GIF animations, and memes. These instruments are particularly powerful because they are able to immediately capture attention, evoke strong emotional responses, and shape specific cognitive and attitudinal patterns in recipients.

Images enhance emotional impact through the use of colors, symbols, and cultural allusions.



Figure 5

Visual elements can dramatize events or, conversely, convey trust and reassurance, thereby facilitating the rapid dissemination of content. The choice of imagery often predetermines how the audience interprets the message, especially when emotionally loaded photographs or symbolic representations are used.

Emojis have become universal markers of emotional expression. Their incorporation into text messages not only simplifies interpretation but also sets the emotional tone of communication. By providing cues such as humor, sadness, or indignation, emojis guide the recipient's perception and often reduce the level of critical thinking, making the message more persuasive.

GIF animations combine dynamic visual content with emotional coloring, generating a sense of lightness and entertainment. They frequently carry humorous or sarcastic undertones, which strengthens manipulative potential by encouraging the audience to perceive the message as playful or informal, thereby lowering cognitive resistance.

Memes serve a dual function: as tools for transmitting information and as vehicles for shaping collective social perceptions. Their effectiveness lies in the use of irony and satire, which allow complex political or social phenomena to be presented in simplified, emotionally charged forms. Memes spread rapidly across platforms, reinforcing stereotypes and cultivating shared positions among users.

A crucial role in non-verbal manipulation is played by **color and symbolic representation**. Colors carry culturally embedded meanings that influence subconscious reactions: for instance, red is typically associated with danger, urgency, or anxiety, while green evokes feelings of calm and trust. Similarly, national symbols function as cultural anchors that foster feelings of patriotism and belonging.

Taken together, these non-verbal devices form a typology of manipulative strategies that significantly influence the emotional and cognitive reception of information. Their immediacy and universality make them indispensable instruments in shaping attitudes, reinforcing social norms, and steering public opinion within the digital environment.

Conclusions. The conducted research demonstrates that verbal and non-verbal manipulation in social networks represents a complex system of communicative strategies aimed at influencing users' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Social media platforms, by virtue of their speed of information exchange, multimodality, and personalization through algorithms, create favorable conditions for manipulative practices to spread rapidly and deeply affect public consciousness.

It has been established that manipulation in digital communication is realized through a wide range of strategies – from the use of positive lexis, appeals to authority, irony, sarcasm, and fact distortion to non-verbal means such as images, colors, emojis, GIFs, and memes. These strategies are effective precisely because they exploit cognitive biases, reinforce group identity, and create “information cocoons” that reduce the audience's critical thinking abilities.

The analysis highlights that the combination of linguistic and paralinguistic tools considerably amplifies manipulative influence. Verbal constructions acquire additional persuasive power when supported by visual or symbolic representations, thereby engaging users on both rational and subconscious levels.

The findings also confirm that the study of manipulative strategies requires an interdisciplinary approach that unites linguistics, social psychology, and media studies. Such integration allows for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms by which communication technologies affect the formation of opinions, attitudes, and collective behavioral patterns.

Ultimately, the results of this study underscore the urgent necessity of developing effective countermeasures against manipulative influence in digital communication. Among them, the fostering of critical thinking skills, the promotion of media literacy, and the culti-

vation of conscious information consumption are of paramount importance. Only by raising awareness of manipulative practices can society safeguard its information security and ensure a transparent and democratic communicative environment.

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