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**Official State Accounts Communication with Foreign Audiences through
Social Media under the Escalation of International Tension: Russia's
Experience**

Tatiana Scherbakova,
Moscow City Teachers' Training University
Moscow, Russia
demidovva1@mail.ru

The paper analyzes the forms and contents changes of public discussion about major foreign policy events in social networks sites. Social networks give essentially new opportunities for the public sector to personify communications with foreigners. In recent years all foreign policy departments registered official accounts on social networks. The paper is submitted the review of development and tendencies of foreign policy departments communication strategy at social networks. Research examines two types of accounts – official and personal (opinion leaders, VIP in the foreign policy). Research has two actors: official foreign policy accounts of Russia and the USA (for the international and Russian audience). Forms of influence, coverage of audience and the contents of official accounts of the MFA of Russia in Twitter, Facebook, VKontakte, YouTube, Flickr in 2014-2015 are analyzed. The same analysis is carried out for official accounts of Russian Embassies. The U.S. State Department and U.S. Embassy social networks accounts for the Russian audience were investigated. The result of research is the review of communication social networks rules, incidents and "methods of influence". Especially important point is the identification specifics and the opportunities to estimate the results of social networks communication.

Key Words: communication management, information and communication technology (ICT), social networks, social media, Russia, ministry of Foreign Affairs on social networks, electronic diplomacy, communication's policy of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Spokeswoman on social networks, twitter diplomacy, soft power, public diplomacy.

Author Last Name * Scherbakova
Author First Name * Tatiana
Author Middle Initial VI.
Author Address * Moscow, Russia, Leninsky prospect 82-417
Author Affiliation: Moscow City Teachers' Training University
Author E-mail * demidovva1@mail.ru

Introduction

Most generally, strategic communication is the state's projection of certain The review of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs electronic resources on social networks is presented in article from the moment of their emergence to today. Forms, character, content of communication's policy of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Spokeswoman on social networks and information on behalf of the Ministry are considered as public diplomacy. The main communication channel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on social networks is Twitter (the microblogs service); the majority messages of department are concentrated here. Russia is one of nine leaders countries on Twitter communications. Communication and presence on social networks are the important soft power element. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs agenda is reflected in statements on social networks. Social networks statements often become the basis for breaking news. In article is looking for the content's different for each social network and for strategy of public communication. Connecting of content's analysis and comparative research the main addressee the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on social networks are foreign Ministries, international and foreign mass media, and also the Russian public opinion. The Ministry's of Foreign Affairs accounts are too popular special for this audience. Russian users of social networks get a bigger response. Research are presented the phenomenon of transformation from the official communication style to personal and also the technology of informal messages from the Russian Foreign Ministry's Spokeswoman, who represents forma information as "personal opinion" and other communication approaches which application would be impossible out of social networks.

Process of integrative diplomacy and networking

Social networks are the integral channels of modern public diplomacy. The informal way of communication with foreigners is especially important during serious international crises, confrontation and armed conflicts. Social networks and blogs are the most impotent & mass channel of communication with foreign audience. Social networks communications must be considered in two main directions of modern diplomacy: public diplomacy and electronic diplomacy. The research of Russian MFA socials is about content and technical process of electronic communication. Development of social networks has led to emergence of new forms of public discussion of the major foreign policy events and direct bilateral communication of country representatives with the international public including ordinary social networks users. The Russian Foreign Ministry socials was has begun after V. Putin's performance on meeting for ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia in 2012¹.

The main & the most operational channel of the international public communication on social networks is microblog service Twitter. The first Twitter-

¹ Совещание послов и постоянных представителей России. Владимир Путин выступил на совещании послов и постоянных представителей Российской Федерации. Тема заседания – «Россия в меняющемся мире: преемственность приоритетов и новые возможности». 9.07.2012 // URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15902> [Accessed 15 December 2015] заседания – «Россия в меняющемся мире: преемственность приоритетов и новые возможности». 9.07.2012 // URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15902> [Accessed 15 December 2015]

account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has appeared in February, 2011 in English (@MFA_Russia), and the Russian (@MID_RF) has been started practically directly¹. Their content is similar. In September, 2014 Maria Zakharova (Deputy Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011-2015) characterized MFA's Twitter-accounts contents and communication: "Accounts are identical for 95%, but the small difference in content is: not everything interests English-speaking audience, and this distinction is blocked by 5% of publications. The role of our Twitter was to cut from the official report, all that is clear to journalists with whom we have got used to communicate in official language, but is superfluous for the ordinary user. So we give an essence of any official declarations, which were difficult to understand to ordinary people without the journalists' translation before. We became closer to audience and we are more clear for it"². Today the difference of tweets number both accounts has increased, the main attention is to Russian-language page. Now Russian-language the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Twitter (@MID_RF) has 1 mil.100 thousand users of Twitter, and English-language Twitter has only 114 thousand followers. During five years using the Russian version (@MID_RF) has 32,8 k. tweets its 8,2 thousand messages more than English version and 892,5 thousand followers more.

Conditions of modern digital diplomacy require Twitter presence. The European analysts of network activity recognize the success of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, Ilan Manor is a PhD candidate at the University of Oxford. He attained a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Communications from Tel Aviv University. His thesis explored the manner in which nations portray adversaries on official digital diplomacy channels during times of crises. Manor's research on Selfie Diplomacy, or the manner in which nations use social media in nation branding activities, appears in the recently published Digital Diplomacy. I. Manor considers that the Russian Foreign Ministry is Top7 of the most influential social foreign policy structures of the modern world.³

However I. Manor considers, that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs communications is more presentation, their audiences are the representatives for Foreign Ministries of other countries, the foreign journalists & V.I.P, but not for foreigners & ordinary users. I. Manor analyzes the network's activities of Russian Embassies: it is considerably reduced.⁴ In 2013 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has

¹ Official twitter-account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in Russian @MID_RF// URL: https://twitter.com/MID_RF; Official twitter-account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in English @MFA_Russia// URL: https://twitter.com/MFA_Russia [Accessed 03 June 2016]

² Панченко П. Как МИД РФ использует социальные сети в информационной войне. RB.Ru. 25.09.2014 // URL: <http://www.rb.ru/article/kak-mid-rf-ispolzuet-sotsialnye-seti-v-informatsionnoy-voynе/7387277.html> [Accessed 9 February 2016]

³ Manor I. Imagining Digital Diplomacy as Social Networks// URL: <http://digdipblog.com/imagining-digital-diplomacy-as-social-networks/> [Accessed 23 March 2016]

⁴ Manor I. The State of Russian Digital Diplomacy 06.09.2015// URL: <http://digdipblog.com/2015/09/06/the-state-of-russian-digital-diplomacy/>[Accessed 23 March 2016]; The State of Russian Digital Diplomacy-Part 2 10.09.2015// URL: <http://digdipblog.com/2015/09/10/the-state-of-russian-digital-diplomacy-part-2/>[Accessed 23 March 2016]; The State of Russian Digital Diplomacy -Part 3. 20.09.2015// URL: <http://digdipblog.com/2015/09/20/the-state-of-russian-digital-diplomacy-part-3/>[Accessed 23 March 2016]

appeared in the Facebook network¹ (<https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia>). There is an opportunity to make more extensive posts, supplying its by photos, video and references. The audience to this page constitutes is: 352215 total page Likes & 18489 people talking about this page. That is a quite good activity ratio of department, for comparison the basic page of U.S. State Department acts on English language, which is since 2009, and has 1548625 subscribers, and the page for Russian-speaking audience "the USA in Russian - U.S. Department of State", acting only in 2016, has 1718 subscribers. On MIDRussia page we can find official declarations & ironic posts deprived of heavy diplomatic lexicon. Journalists and users notice its. The page becomes the channel of agenda forming.

Users can to extend material, to express emotions and thoughts (there is a system of "likes"), and also to comment on posts and to write personal messages. The administrator of the page reserves the right to delete comments in which the obscene language, offensive remarks in relation to participants of discussion or the administrator of the page, the discussions which are not connected with a discussion/post subject and also spam or advertisements are used. The comments violating rules are removed from the page.

This page has no English-speaking analog. The main audience of the page – Russian-speaking. During the foreign policy conflicts there are reposts of mass media articles and others emotional posts. The impact of the Internet and the rise of social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, are generating a wealth of reactions.

Spokesperson accounts enhanced significance of social power and ability to shape agendas through non-hierarchical means of policy-making.

The personal account of the Director of the Information and Press Department of Maria Zakharova became the most active element of Ministry of Foreign Affairs communication on Facebook in 2015 and 2016.

Maria Zakharova was appointed as the Director of the Information and Press Department of the Russian MFA in 2015. After May, 2015 content of the personal page had sharply changed: the da-to-day posts, emotional posts and longreads, its size as newspaper article written in journalistic note style, many posts are with amateur photos & replies to users comments began to appear here. The format of maintaining the personal page is successfully chosen, for example:

- a) Alternation of information on private life (decoration of a New Year tree, the dropped-out tooth of the child and etc.);
- b) Articles reasoning on hot national, religious, social topics;
- c) Photo comments by the working moments;
- d) The personal opinion about professional questions.

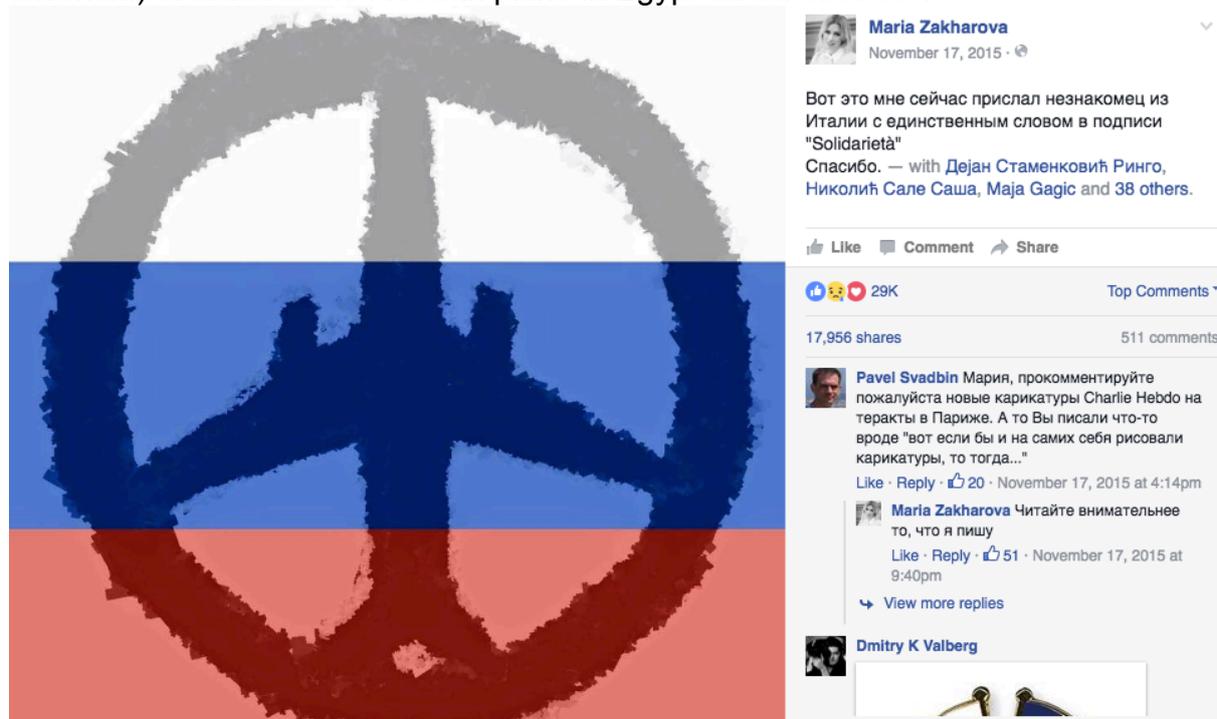
This format does the account of the official representative very popular for journalists and ordinary in-Russian audience. Now Spokesperson account² likes more than 176547 users of a network, each post has repeated reposts, "likes" marks

¹ Official Facebook-account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in Russian // URL: <https://www.facebook.com/MIDRussia/timeline> [Accessed 27 May 2016]

² Official Facebook account of Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in Russian // URL: <https://www.facebook.com/maria.zakharova.167> [Accessed 12 June 2016]

and comments, contents of publications become regular object of attention of Russian and foreign mass media.

The most part of friends of the Russian Spokesperson are Russian journalists and leaders of public opinion. M. Zarakhova many time publicly declared private judgment of the posts¹, the FB Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MIDRussia) page often reposts material from the Spokesperson page with hashtags #opinion. This personal account became the powerful channel to make news, public opinion, and also start of network activities (like flashmob in social networks). So the BBC journalists' analysis result and monitoring clearly that placement of a photo with a plane against the Russian tricolor silhouette by Maria Zakharova became the beginning of powerful memorial movement on social networks after the announcement of the reason (act of terrorism) of crash of the Russian plane in Egypt on October 30².



Picture 1. Screenshot of photocollage

The publication of a photocollage not only has collected more than 29 thousand 'likes'³, but also has started a mass wave of expression of grief by users of a network and repeated publications in mass media.

The same tactics of active personal presence at social nets there was Former US ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, is a case in point. McFaul (Stanford academic) was rated amongst the 'Twitterati 100' for 2013, using social media to engage in a 'Twitter war' with the Russian MFA and to engage with the Russian

¹ РИА Новости: Захарова: мои записи в соцсетях – это не официальные заявления МИД РФ 22.08.2015// URL:

<http://ria.ru/society/20150822/1201091961.html#ixzz440TUF2re/> [Accessed 18 April 2016]

² Russians demand revenge after Sinai plane bombing is confirmed//BBC 17.11.2015// URL: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-34846376> [Accessed 14 May 2016]

³ Facebook account of M. Zaharova URL:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10208307521035348&set=a.4365446944032.176170.1523648416&type=3&theater> has 29 k. "likes", 18 k. reposts ("shares")& more then 500 comments [Accessed 14 May 2016]

public on both US foreign policy and his personal life.⁵⁷ This appears to have changed somewhat following McFaul's' resignation and his replacement by a career diplomat, John Tefft. Unlike McFaul, Tefft has no personal Twitter or Facebook accounts, embassy being represented on these social media platforms by standard organization accounts on Twitter and the US Embassy Moscow page on Facebook.¹

Russian Spokesperson personalized communication changed communications environment in 2015-2016.

Facebook, Twitter and other digital tools may be useful but outcomes are dependent on contexts and the behavior of diplomats as social agents.

The system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs socials consists of: a) main accounts at Twitter, Facebook, VKontakte, a video hosting YouTube, Flickr, Instagram; b) the accounts of Press center, History and Records Department, Crisis Management Centre (department), department of the CIS countries, consular department; c) official accounts of embassies and consulates, permanent representatives and representations Russian Foreign Ministry; d) personal accounts of Alexander Yakovenko (https://twitter.com/Amb_Yakovenko) - Russian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Eleonora Mitrofanova (<https://twitter.com/EVMitrofanova>) - Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to UNESCO, Konstantin Dolgov (<https://twitter.com/KKdolgov>) - Russian Foreign Ministry's Special Representative for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law & Maria Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry's Spokeswoman. Accounts of Al. Yakovenko, E. Mitrofanova, K. Dolgov have little activities and aren't systemically and daily conducted, consist generally of reposts.

In total it is 598 constantly updated accounts in languages of the countries of presence.² On the question about content regulation of accounts, M. Zakharova answers: " As for our work in social networks, we have been given internal instructions, but they mostly concern technical aspects of working with social media. In fact, these are not instructions per say, but rather materials helping embassies, for example, to open their accounts or pages in social networks.

I can tell you about this work. It began about five years ago, and the Foreign Ministry was one of the first Russian authorities to start working systematically in social media. We opened a Twitter account, followed by accounts on YouTube and Facebook, and the ministry as an organization has an account on Flickr. Our embassies also have accounts in some other social networks that are popular in particular host countries like China, for example, which has national social networks [Sina Weibo, Browse]. Having launched this work as an organization and having opened our first accounts, we drafted recommendations for our embassies on how to work in social networks. As for what our diplomats and the ministry and embassy staff do in social networks, these networks are just another medium of our diplomats' work and life outside Russia. Hence, they should work properly, as befits a diplomat representing his country, who should respect the host country and its traditions and

¹ Hocking Br., Melissen J. Diplomacy in the Digital Age . Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael. July 2015 // URL: http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Digital_Diplomacy_in_the_Digital%20Age_Clingendael_July2015.pdf [Accessed 8 June 2016]

² Official accounts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation // http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/social_accounts [Accessed 23 March 2016]

customs. As I said, what we have are technological or technical recommendations. You should know that people from different age groups are working in the Foreign Ministry and Russian embassies, including young people for whom social networks have become a customary and even inalienable part of their lives, and older people who are used to working with the traditional media, who have nevertheless willingly joined the global trend and have opened their own accounts after requesting technical recommendations for doing this."¹

The official account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a video hosting YouTube has been registered on June 25, 2012, today it has 9 628 followers, the total volume of viewings makes 3 047 115², however because of a flow of negative comments, an opportunity to leave signatures to video has been closed, in other cases technical services manage to cope with questions of ensuring safe and continuous broadcasting in social networks.

New official account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is Instagram account. This account has appeared less than a month ago³. It's a new way of picture communication. For example, the post with the photo of menu with such message: "A business breakfast is an integral part of talks between foreign ministers. The menu consists entirely of Russian products"⁴. The public discussion of such content isn't always harmless, ordinary users discuss that those dishes are too expensive & aren't available to them. This post has a lot of negative comments. However such posts are the tools for making changes of the agenda.

Thus, in five years of communication work at social media the Russian Foreign Ministry managed to create harmonious structure of communications, further it is required to develop more flexible system of filling of content.

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¹ Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova Moscow, January 29, 2016 // URL: http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2039123?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB [Accessed 24 February 2016]

² Official YouTube account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation// URL: <http://www.youtube.com/user/midrftube> [Accessed 28 May 2016]

³ Official Instagram account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation// URL: <https://www.instagram.com/mfarussia> [Accessed 12 June May 2016]

⁴ Official Instagram account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation// URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BGmCSSBFiPK/?taken-by=mfarussia> [Accessed 12 June 2016]

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