internet political troll

by Ivanka Mavrodieva

Abstract:

The phrase ‘Internet political troll’ acquires different meanings in the political and media language in Bulgaria. The connotation is created using figurative language and the word has continued to have a negative connotation in a specific socio-cultural context during the last two decades. Internet political troll is used to name people who send and share messages on sites, social networks, virtual forums and chatrooms. Their goals are to present politicians and political parties in a negative light, to destroy their authority and reputation. Internet trolls are most active during the parliamentary, presidential and local elections campaigns. They also operate in situations outside elections where the aim is to discredit politicians, causes, campaigns, programs, platforms etc.

Словосъчетанието "интернет политически трол" придобива различни значения в политическия и медийния език в България. Конотацията се създава с помощта на преносна употреба на език и думата продължава да има негативна конотация в специфичен социокултурен контекст през последните две десетилетия. Политически трол в интернет се използва за назоваване на хора, които изпращат и споделят съобщения в сайтове, социални мрежи, виртуални форуми и чатове. Техните цели са да представят политиците и политическите партии в негативна светлина, да разрушат техния авторитет и репутация. Интернет троловете са най-активни по време на кампаниите за парламентарни, президентски и местни избори. Те действат и в ситуации извън изборите, когато целта е да се дискредитират политици, каузи, кампании, програми, платформи и др.

Etymology:

troll (n.1)

supernatural being in Scandinavian mythology and folklore, 1610s (with an isolated use mid-14c.), from Old Norse troll "giant being not of the human race, evil spirit, monster." Some speculate that it originally meant "creature that walks clumsily," and derives from Proto-Germanic *truzlan, from *truzlanan (see troll (v.))". Online Ethimology Dictionary

Vann Vicente (What Is an Internet Troll? (and How to Handle Trolls)) says “*Internet trolls* are people who want to provoke and upset others online for their own amusement. [...] An internet troll is someone who makes intentionally inflammatory, rude, or upsetting statements online to elicit strong emotional responses in people or to steer the conversation off-topic. They can come in many forms.”

Internet political troll

The Internet political troll is active in politics, election campaigns and he /she works for political parties, associations, NGOs and foundations. In recent years, there has been talk of corporate internet trolls.



Dunav Most

Cultural specificity:

The examples are selected after the analysis of some online media. “The first example in that line is “Bivol” (“Биволъ, BSP Leaks”), a site publishing articles of the investigating journalists. The title of the article is “An army of anonymous Red Guards of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) mobilized for the zombing of the society” PUBLIC zombie” – “Армия анонимни хунвейбини на БСП мобилизирана за обществено зомбиране”. The additional information includes facts that 672 *trolls* produced 10,154 comments in the favour of the BSP. February 11, 2014, 15:28, 16,847 visitors. https://www.bivol.bg/

Another online media, “Vesti”, quoted the site “Bivol” and added an article titled "Bivol: Internet "trolls” with thousand comments in favour of BSP’’ (Интернет “тролове” с хиляди коментари в полза на БСП). http://www.vesti.bg/

The observation and analysis give sufficient fact to conclude that big political parties in Bulgaria use trolls: Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (CEDB), Democrats for Powerful Bulgaria (DPB) which follow a different political ideology in comparison of the BSP. For example, the publication “Encyclopaedia of small political trolls”

(“Енциклопедия на дребните политически тролове”) confirms the assumption of the website. Some publications of online media Web Cafe give information to reach the conclusion that political trolls are a negative manifestation of digital activism. WebCafe



Internet political trolls from different parties Sakndalno.net

A similar position is presented by Frog News. http://frognews.bg/ Konstantin Valkov who is a journalist from *Darik Radio* published the article “Run! The trolls are coming!” (“Бягай, троловете идват!”) in the newspaper “24 hours” (“24 часа”), and he comments on the activities of political trolls during the election campaigns. http://www.24chasa.bg/

The journalist concludes that it is a negative phenomenon of digital activism of politicians and citizens in the current political life in Bulgaria. This phenomenon is named “trolling” (“тролене”) in online media. Konstantin Pavlov-Komitata published the article “War of the trolls” in Offnews on 18.08.2014. https://offnews.bg/

He describes different kinds of trolls: some of them are spontaneous, others follow the norms of netiquette; but the greater part of political trolls take part in the negative virtual political communication in Bulgaria and it is a display of a specific digital activism in the visual space.” (Mavrodieva 2014: 477-485)

The topic of political internet trolls has been active in recent years. Their payment is being commented on more and more. For example, Valeria Belchevska published the article "Profession" political troll": BGN 1,200 per month for 20 posts a day. Influencers take far more to promote parties", Професия "политически трол": 1200 лв. месечно за 20 поста на ден. Инфлуенсърите пък взимат далеч повече за промотиране на партии, 8 март 2021. https://www.dnes.bg/

At the same time, there are positive phenomena, for example, the Yes Bulgaria party supports the initiative not to recognize Internet political trolls during the parliamentary elections in 2021 in Bulgaria. The initiative is part of the "You Count" campaign. "We are looking for 12,000 defenders of the vote for fair and free elections." https://dabulgaria.bg/

The Bulgarian Agency of PR Agencies in Bulgaria (BAPRA) is also campaigning, with parties not using internet political trolls in the parliamentary elections. Public communication experts are against "troll factories" and the use of fake profiles. https://www.actualno.com/

The topic of internet trolls is relevant in the Bulgarian media, such as BGAir TV https://www.bgonair.bg/ and Radio Free Europe. https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/

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Problematization:

Bulgarian politicians follow the well-known model from direct and media political communication and they adapt it to new circumstances in the virtual environment. Posting on social networks makes their position more popular. Simultaneously they prefer mediated communication to personal exchange. As a result, more political parties pay Bulgarians, especially representatives of the Net generation who play the role of trolls. They post, broadcast, and share messages created preliminary by experts on political PR. Very often the netizens discover that such messages, arguments, and slogans are not the results of the personal political activism of the netizens. (Mavrodieva 2014: 477-485)

Communication strategies:

There are different types of trolls according to Petko Dimov: evil trolls, paid trolls, propaganda trolls, lurking trolls, trolls' maniacs. (Петко Димов) https://postvai.com/cyber/trol-trolene.html

Petko Dimov presents different strategies of trolling initiated and developed gradually in the UK, Russia, USA, West Europe etc. He presents tools and techniques used by trolls. (Димов) https://postvai.com/cyber/trol-trolene.html

The goals of communication strategies are to insult and discredit a political opponent or a political party. At the language level, trolls use colloquial words, sometimes slang, and even obscene words. Political internet trolls use the argument against the individual, as well as populist arguments in online communication. From a sociolinguistic point of view, some of the words are short-lived, others are occasionalisms. The third group of words and expressions are patterns and clichés used to name the opponent. A political competitor is defined as an enemy or an unworthy politician who does not adhere to basic moral and ethical principles. Therefore, the communicative manifestations are language, rhetoric, political PR levels.

Subversion:

The subversions of the use of the word ‘Internet political troll’ are on several levels: linguistic, political, social, media, and others.

Internet political troll is used as a noun.

The noun "трол“– ‘troll’ is masculine. It is a short/brief variant of “интернет трол “/ “интернет политически трол” (Internet trolls, Internet political troll). The plural form of the noun is "тролове” – trolls. The noun „тролене“ is the derivative word and it is used as a synonym of the word „тролинг” adapted from English - trolling.

We accept that the word ‘troll’ has a different meaning in comparison with hater, lurker, social bot.

The hater presents mostly negative assessments on the Internet, but he is not always engaged in politically and socially significant topics.

The lurker is mostly in a passive position and observes as a member of virtual groups and less often expressing his position-second option.

Social bots spread information created by people or teams, but they are not real.

The troll (Internet political troll) is involved in election campaigns, he spreads messages, and he does not always believe in the idea or program of a party or politician. In many cases, the troll receives a financial reward for his work. He is not always convinced of a platform and is not a conscious digital citizen. The Internet political troll does not take part in the processes in a civic society on the basis of beliefs and attitude to be an active citizen or netizen.

Discussion:

The assumption is that the activities of political trolls are a mechanism or meta-tool of negative digital activism of Bulgarian politicians and political parties. Media in Bulgaria are conducting journalistic investigations in connection with domestic political trolls as a negative phenomenon in civil society, political life, elections and digital citizenship.

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