

Turkish policy in Kazakhstan`s Instagram content: political analysis

Abstract. The article examines the perception of Turkey by Instagram users in the news resources of Kazakhstan.

The use of machine learning methods allows to study a large volume of data to solve the problem. The connection between the formation of the image in the mass media and the perception of international relations among citizens is noted. The role of Instagram in covering political news among Kaznet users is revealed. The analysis of comments was performed with the help of information processing tools. The author states that there is no unified strategy for shaping the image of Turkey among users: Turkey as a discursive image is formed both from the point of view of abstract concepts (economics, health care, politics) and a specific personality, represented by R. Erdogan. Attention is paid to the connotations associated with the ideas of Pan-Turkism and the image of Turkey. It is concluded that users pay more attention to internal problem, comparing information provided by the news with situation in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, Turkey, Erdogan, Instagram, Sentiment-Analysis, Data Science.

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Introduction

The COVID-19 Pandemic became a moment, political scientists decently name in the term of "political instability". Previously considered to be frozen, the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the fall of 2020 flared up with renewed vigor, and its significance is being still assessed by the experts in the field of international law and military policy. In addition to the change in the status of the territories, this conflict is notable for the increased role of Turkey, and directly of President Erdogan, who posed himself as a main Azerbaijan`s ally. Turkey took an active part, assuming the role of a peacemaker [1], and R. Erdogan repeatedly expressed support for "friendly and fraternal Azerbaijan"[2].

Such activity "behind enemy lines" primarily in the media sphere was reflected in the focus of modern analysts, causing extrapolation by a constellation of factors to the CIS countries. Therefore, in this aspect we decided to choose Kazakhstan, as a country which tight bonds with Turkey has become stronger.

Russian International Affairs Council`s expert A. Vorobyov notes that in Kazakhstan, pro-Turkish sentiments are on the rise, and the conflict in Karabakh only intensified them, in addition to the already high reputation of the Turkish president: "The President of Turkey R. Erdogan is perceived by part of the Kazakh population as a strong and fair leader"[3]. Western researchers believe that in modern conditions, Turkey and Kazakhstan are intensifying bilateral cooperation under the auspices of the Turkic peoples` unification.

For example, D. Bifulchi emphasizes that such a rapprochement is welcomed in the Turkic

states but causes concern both in Russia (undermining the EAEU project) and in China (creating tension in the XUAR) [4]. Moreover, the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also welcomes the promotion of the idea of pan-Turkism. Speaking at the informal summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking states, he put forward the following idea: "Our goal is to turn the Turkic world into one of the most significant economic, cultural and humanitarian regions of the 21st century" [5].

Despite the fact, that the topic of pan-Turkism became popular after the conflict in Karabakh, many analysts and scholars pay attention to the role of Turkey as a leader in the integration of Turkic states, but there is practically no *scientific research* on the perception of the Turkey's role and the idea of pan-Turkism.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the content containing the perception of Turkey by users of the Instagram network in the news resources of Kazakhstan.

Methods

In the article, a theoretical analysis of scientific literature, statistical data processing and machine learning methods were used.

The relevance of the study lies in the necessity of Kaznet's users opinions analyzing and their further interpretation. The study touches upon international relations and political aspects, as understanding the perception of Turkey and its politics allows to reveal the existing users' attitudes in the socio-political dimension.

The use modern technologies like Data Processing (and artificial intelligence) are innovative in the study of public opinion in Kazakhstan in particular and the media in the CIS regions in general.

To solve this goal, the following tasks are put forward. Firstly, it is necessary to identify the connection between the media and public opinion. Secondly, the information selection and explanation must be performed. After collection and systematization of data, it can be interpreted and concluded.

Discussion

In the 21st century, the process of conflicts mediatisation is an integral part of postmodern society, where content on social networks determines the image of the state and leaders to a greater extent than objective facts like the rating of military power or economic potential. As J. Baudrillard noted: "Nowadays the virtual is decisively gaining the upper hand over the actual; our destiny is to be content with such extreme virtuality, which, in contrast to Aristotelian, only frightens us with the prospect of a transition to action. We are no longer in the logic of the transition of the possible into the real, but in the hyperrealistic logic of intimidating ourselves with the very possibility of the real" [6]. E. Gilboa writes in more detail about the connection between media, conflicts, and politics in third countries, thinking that not the conflict itself is important for the media, but rather its representation and approach. An international conflict can both cause bewilderment among ordinary citizens (the expediency of a conflict / the use of certain measures / logic of action), and sympathy for any side, or even for humanity, promoting the ideas of pacifism [7].

A. Wendt supports such point of view, as the one of the main researchers of social constructivism in the field of international relations. According to Wendt, the states themselves and their actions are formed only in the process of interaction not only with each other, but also with elements like groups, identities etc. In similar context, actors perceive each other as "rivals" or "allies", "friends" or "enemies", basing on the general structure of knowledge, formed discursively [8; p. 73]. Thus, for an ordinary citizen, international relations are not objective constellations of

facts, but knowledge about the current situation, which formed in the process of interaction with the media. The images used in the discursive reproduction of key symbols, therefore, can be significant both for understanding the perception of foreign policy (for example, "pragmatic politics", or "the authority among others"), and internal, since they are a yardstick for understanding the role of "us" in comparison with the "other". T. Van Dijk wrote about this phenomenon in more detail: "People, of course, are under the power of the news ... But their understanding of the news and how they change their opinions and assessments depends on their previous assessments and ideologies (shared with other members of the group) and from their own experience). And these very personal interpretations of news, the mental model of events are the basis for the specific personal actions of the individual" [9].

In this case, the Internet is a public platform for citizens, where they can discuss topics of concern and express their own opinion. Thus, discussion of news is one of the ways to involve people in socio-political issues [10; p. 419]. The analysis of comments on social networks rocketed in the 2010s, on the background of the internet's access spread and information gathering tools. In general, a relatively open policy on moderation and free commenting have created a whole layer of data available to researchers. At the same time, the issue of the discussion's quality is pushed into the background by researchers. According to P. Weber, there is a "dialogue of the deaf" in the comments: demonstrating the publication of their own opinion without active involvement in the discussion process. Thus, users prefer to publish their own reaction to the event, rather than discuss its sources or consequence [11; p. 942]. Demonstrating their own opinion, users do not expect feedback, which creates favorable conditions for research, allowing obtaining the necessary data without participating in any interview or survey. Scientists also pay attention to political discussions, where comments serve as an indicator of public discontent, postulating certain symbols and signs, and demonstrating a way of describing the world. Discussion of politics on social networks, at the same time, always balances on the edge. Users openly demonstrate their rejection of individuals or other people's views, openly reacting to news or statements [12]. The subject of a message or news, thus, can serve as an indicator of dissatisfaction or acceptance, allowing getting information about the worldview of citizens and their attitude to the political event in general. For example, Tumitan and Baker predicted election results in Brazil prior to the polls based on an emotional analysis of the comments [13]. Using Python, this research collected the data and processed it, dividing the comments into groups, and creating a portrait of elected. Using the most frequent words, they were able to describe each politician in the terms, published by users. Such research proves the necessity of using Data Science method in political science.

Thus, the study of the comment's sentiments in the Kazakhstan's segment of Instagram reveals not only the peculiarities of Turkey's perception, but also the policy pursued by the authorities. The use of modern technologies makes it possible to automate the analysis process by processing large volumes of data and objectively assessing the emotionality of comments and their content. Basing on the understanding of international relations from the point of view of A. Wendt, the existence of Turkey as an image (not impersonal institutions) is precisely due to its representation in the media. Therefore, the study of the ordinary Kazakhstan's citizens thoughts about Turkey during the conflict between the two above-mentioned countries allows not only to determine the effectiveness of the Turkish «Soft power» but reveal the existing sentiments of a wide range: pan-Turkic, neo-Ottoman, Pro-Turkic and Turanist.

The existence or absence of such sentiments can serve as an indicator of the success of Turkey's information policy. Basing on understanding of the role of "itself" in the international sphere, Turkey can act as a model for further comparison and search for similarities and differences, which are used to determine the role of "us" in both domestic and foreign policy.

In this study, 1595 comments were collected from the social network "Instagram". This

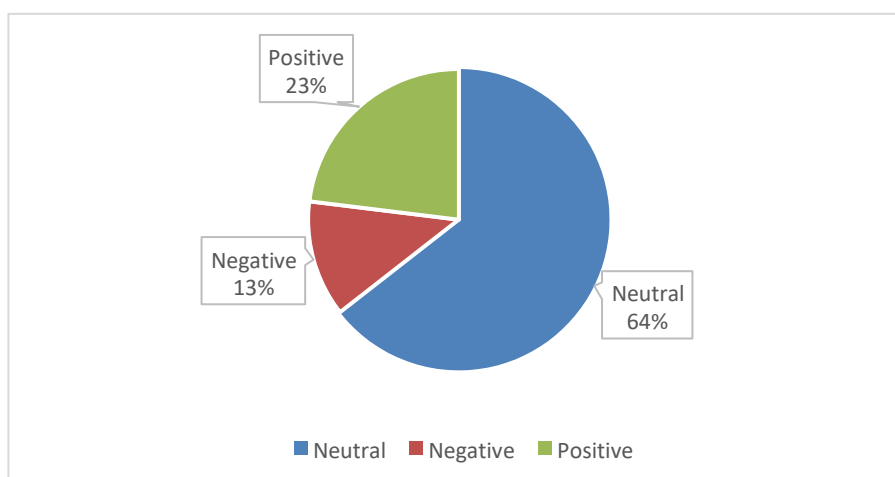
social network was chosen for several reasons, among which the most significant are high coverage of Kazakhstanis, narrow focus of discussion (post in the feed determines the topic), lack of censorship. Sh. Kylybaeva and A. Nurshanov, in their research, note the high involvement of users in the consumption of the Instagram`s content (36.9% of Almaty youth spend 1 hour on the social network and 38.5% of them spend 3-4 hours), while 80% of respondents agreed with the statement "I get information about politics through Instagram". Study shows that about 50% of respondents watch 1-3 political posts and 17% - more than 5 [14]. Thus, Instagram is a source of public opinion formation, where content and its perception play a decisive role in shaping the ways of describing the worldview.

1,595 comments were collected from well-known news pages such as Kaznews, Kazprecc, Kazpress.kz, Kazakh_inform. Python script grabbed posts that mentioned Turkey or its president, Erdogan (For example, "Erdogan urged to equate Islamophobia with anti-Semitism", "Kazakhstan and Turkey will strengthen military cooperation ", "Special forces from Turkey and volunteers from Russia are ready to go to Nagorno-Karabakh").

Using scripts, the whole comments under the posts were loaded into an Excel file (dataframe). Further, using the Python programming language, the dataframe was processed by the Dostoevsky library. The library, based on its own database, determines the emotionality of comments depending on the words and their tone. Then it assigns one of three categories to the comment: "Negative" (the emotionality of words has an offensive or negative connotation), "Neutral" (words and the meaning of the commentary do not have a clearly defined polarity, or they express a statement of facts), "Positive" (the commentary and its content have an approving or exclamatory nature). The accuracy of the library is 86%, considering training on a pre-prepared dataframe (without it the accuracy is 71% [15]). The research of comments using sentiment assessment is one of the important elements in understanding public opinion, according to L. Sapiras and R. Weber [16]. Such results demonstrate not only an emotional response to the mention of Turkey in the context of the conflict, but also the perception of Turkey in general (as well as its policy and the actions of the establishment), and the logic of comparing Kazakhstan with Turkey.

The script processed 1595 comments (Table 1 demonstrates the ratio), 42 of them were marked by the program as "undefined" (comments were at a borderline value or contained reference to other users).

Table 1. Comments emotionality



194 comments from the dataframe were marked as "negative". The main argumentation of the commentators is based on skepticism towards Erdogan and his "imperial ambitions", which are aimed only at populists and domestic consumers. The idea of creating united army is perceived negatively by some users. They wondered about the advisability of a war for "Turkish plans", while others compared the President of Turkey with Hitler, or talked about the ruler's populism: "Erdogan's ratings are decreasing day by day, this president is ready to say anything for the sake of power". An analysis of the users' argumentation shows that the most popular words in the dataframe are "War" ("The war did not lead to anything good, Erdogan's hands are covered in blood" - the user writes) - in the context of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the word "Our" (in comparison with Turkey and Kazakhstan). For example, "Look at the statistics... how many Turks died in Kazakhstan? Zero! And how many of our people die in Turkey: either they got hit by a car, or they are just killed and robbed...". Users do not trust the cooperation between Kazakhstan and Turkey in the military sphere, believing that relations between two countries should be built not on an ideological basis, but on a pragmatic one, where the economy should take the leading place: "At whose expense? Again, we will be deceived ..." - the user writes.

358 comments were marked as "positive". The users welcome the rapprochement of two countries and the idea of supporting the Muslim population around the world, as well as the role of Turkey in the settlement of the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Some commentators call Erdogan "Tough guy", "Leader of Muslims", "Strong Man". Users of the social network also note the assertiveness of the president, who is not afraid to express his own opinion and openly goes into conflict with Europe and the world system: "A big politician is not afraid to tell the truth", "A president who is not afraid to express his opinion ... in the case of Borat, he performed this (what "this" is unknown), putting up our flag together with Turkey's. Why our president is still silent?". In addition, commentators welcome the idea of Pan-Turkism, noting it either with emoticons of approval (thumb up), or commenting in the style of "Turan, alga (forward)" or "That's right, we are Turks, we have common history, traditions and language". However, it should differentiate positive image of Erdogan as a ruler from Turkey's government actions that are not represented by Erdogan himself. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of the comments is related to Erdogan's statements and his comparison with politicians in Kazakhstan.

However, most of the comments were marked as neutral. 1001 comments contained questions about the advisability of introducing a unified army (of the Turkic states), arguments about corruption in two countries, or facts without any emotional connotation. For example, one user writes, "Turkey was the first to recognize our independence," while another user wants "peace and tranquility," the third one suggests "to buy bayraktar drones". The neutral character of comments is often determined by interrogative sentences or expressions of skepticism about the situation as a whole: "Army? The money will be stolen and that's all, although something may work out...".

Results

In general, the express analysis of comments shows relative skepticism towards Turkey among a larger segment of users: 62.8% of comments were marked as "neutral", and at the same time were associated with discussions about the political background or the economic aspect of the news. 12.2% of the total number of comments were negative and 22.5% were positive. Such an analysis demonstrates not only the neutral perception of ordinary Instagram-users towards Turkey and its activities, but also the sentiments towards Pan-Turkism and the integration with the country: many commentators asked the question "at whose expense?" rapprochement will take place and under what conditions. However, the idea of creating "Great Turan" attracts Kazakhstanis, since many commentators note that it is Erdogan who would be able to create

"Turan", unite Turks and Muslims. Users also consider Turkey as a geopolitical alternative to Russia. The opposite opinion is shared by skeptics who note the excessive "assertiveness" of the president and his ambitions. Regardless of the comments' content, such ratio shows that Kazakhstanis in social networks are more concerned about internal problems (which is even indicated by the number of comments under the news related to the problems of medicine, law, and order) than by external ones (the average number of comments under the "internal" news is more than 200-300, while about 100 users are noted in posts about Turkey).

Conclusion

The collected data provide an innovative picture, where Turkey is not perceived as a monolithic formation, but rather as a dual one. On the one hand, it is represented by an impersonal military sphere, on the other hand, it is personified by R. Erdogan.

It should be noted that the connotations associated with Erdogan does not directly represent the state itself, but are more related to its personality and behavior (Comments with the logic "Turkey under Erdogan's rule ..." are absent), while abstract concepts such as "economics" "medicine", "education" are directly associated with Turkey as a state.

This division creates a dual comparison strategy for users: Erdogan serves as "the other" to compare with "us" in the sphere of personality and politics, while Turkey is more compared in an abstract sense, in the categories of "success", "security", i.e., aspects where the activity of the president is mediated both by the state apparatus and the people of Turkey as a whole.

In this case, Turkey's role in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia fades into the background: users do not perceive war as a justified means, and pay more attention to socio-economic indicators, demonstrating the involvement in politics in the terms of "sufficiency", rather than military categories. However, the idea of pan-Turkism and unification with Turkey attracts users and judging by the significant number of positive assessments of President Erdogan's actions, the personal factor plays an important role to a greater extent than Turkey's foreign policy.

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Қазақстанның Инстаграм контентіндегі Түркия саясаты: саяси талдау

Аңдатпа. Мақалада Қазақстанның жаңалықтар ресурстарында Instagram қолданушыларының Түркияны қабылдауы қарастырылады.

Машиналы оқыту әдістерін қолдану мәселені шешу үшін деректердің үлкен көлемін зерттеуге мүмкіндік береді. БАҚ-та бейненің қалыптасуы мен азаматтар арасындағы халықаралық қатынастарды қабылдау арасында байланыс бар. Қазнет пайдаланушылары арасында саяси жаңалықтарды жариялауда Instagram рөлі анықталды. Ақпаратты өңдеу құралдарының көмегімен түсініктемелерге талдау жасалды. Автор пайдаланушылар арасында Түркияның имиджін қалыптастырудың бірыңғай стратегиясының жоқтығын айтады: Түркия дискурсивті кескін ретінде абстрактілі ұғымдар (экономика, денсаулық сақтау, саясат) тұрғысынан да, Р.Ердоған тұлғасындағы нақты тұлға ретінде де қалыптасады. Пантюркизм идеяларымен және Түркияның бейнесімен байланысты коннотацияларға назар

аударылады. Пайдаланушылар жаңалықтармен ұсынылатын ақпаратты Қазақстандағы жағдаймен салыстыра отырып, ішкі проблемаға көбірек көңіл бөледі деген қорытынды жасалады.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, Түркия, Ердоған, Instagram, Sentiment-Analysis, Data Science.

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Политика Турции в казахстанском Инстаграм контенте: политический анализ

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается восприятие Турции пользователями Instagram в новостных ресурсах Казахстана.

Использование методов машинного обучения позволяет изучить большой объем данных для решения поставленной задачи. Отмечается связь между формированием образа в СМИ и восприятием международных отношений среди граждан. Выявлена роль Instagram в освещении политических новостей среди пользователей Казнета. Проведен анализ комментариев с помощью инструментов обработки информации. Автор констатирует отсутствие единой стратегии формирования образа Турции среди пользователей: Турция как дискурсивный образ формируется как с точки зрения абстрактных понятий (экономика, здравоохранение, политика), так и конкретной личности в лице Р. Эрдогана. Уделяется внимание коннотациям, связанным с идеями пантюркизма и образом Турции. Делается вывод, что пользователи уделяют больше внимания внутренней проблеме, сравнивая информацию, предоставляемую новостями, с ситуацией в Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, Турция, Эрдоган, Instagram, Sentiment-Analysis, Data Science.

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