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ONLINE HATE PROPAGANDA DURING ELECTION PERIOD: THE CASE OF MACEDONIA

Abstract

The paper offers a critical discursive and pragmatic analysis of a corpus of hateful Facebook and Twitters status updates of politicians, political activists and voters in the 2016 pre-and-post election period, in Macedonia. Aiming to determine how power is exerted on social media, the paper focuses on identifying the stance social media users take when posting messages with political content. The analysis first attempted to unveil what speech acts the hateful posts are predominantly composed of (e.g. assertive, directives, expressives), what roles the authors of the posts normally assume, who the hateful political discourse in the given socio-political context is directed to, as well as what are some of the predominant linguistic strategies underlying the analysed hateful comments. The results show that, by using mostly assertive and expressive speech acts, social media users assume mainly the roles of analysts and judges and only subsequently the one of activists, they mostly address politicians directly and they use a lot of negative lexis, rhetorical figures and boosters as interpersonal metadiscourse markers to express their negative stance and exert power and dominance.

Key words

hate speech, elections, speech acts, stance, positioning, power, propaganda

1 Introduction

The use of the new media for political communication purposes and the degree of the impact these might have on participatory democracy (Poulakidakos and Veneti 2016) has been a subject of debate since the mid-1990s by many scholars (McChesney 2000; Norris 2001; Vaccari 2008; Towner and Dulio 2012; Deželan and Vobič 2016; Velasquez and Rojas 2017 etc.). The advent of social media such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter has led to modernisation of political communication (Carpenter 2010). Such electronically mediated computer forms still present the most popular types of discursive interactions used for, as Jones, Chick

and Hafner (2015) put it, attaining particular social goals, enacting particular social identities, and reproducing particular sets of social relationships.

In this paper social media posts are studied as social interactions on political topics in a digital world. More specifically, the paper tackles a very current global issue (online hate or cyberhate on social networking sites) in relation to an understudied European country (Macedonia) and very important political events that happened prior to and post the 2016 Parliamentary elections in Macedonia (the Colorful Revolution and the Storming of the Parliament). This paper analyses how people use these status updates as specific types of texts to act and interact with other participants in the social world and enact power and dominance in social and political contexts. Political activity and the political process involve not only politicians but also people or ordinary citizens, who "take the role of voters, members of pressure and issue groups, demonstrators and dissidents" (van Dijk 1998: 23) engage actively in political discourse (Earl et al. 2013; Segerberg and Bennett 2011; Grant et al. 2010; Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013; Atifi and Marcoccia 2017), especially during times of heightened political activity like elections (Burgess and Bruns 2012: 384), as their main aims are to persuade or manipulate the electorate into accepting and endorsing their ideology, and, at the same time, to demean or even to demonize the ideology of "the others", i.e. the opposing parties.

Since social media allow users to express their stance openly (Velasquez and Rojas 2017), many of them craft their posts carefully so that they can earn points for themselves or their preferred political option. However, the posts are diverse, polarized and there are many, especially in the Macedonian context, which range from patriotism to hate and are abundant with negative, obscene, vulgar, hateful and disruptive content.

Several authors (Kopytowska and Baider 2017; Baider and Kopytowska 2017; Kopytowska et al. 2017; Assimakopoulos et al. 2017; Watanabe et. al. 2018, among others) have discussed this fake patriotism and the presentation of "the other" in different political contexts on the social media. To counter this tendency, a lot of modern democracies in the world (e.g. Denmark, France, Britain, Germany and Canada[1]) have made efforts to install special mechanisms for tracking and detecting hateful contents and banishing them from social media platforms (see Laanpere 2017). Unfortunately, this is not the case with Macedonia[2] where hateful political

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[1]   The Legal Project. European Hate Speech Laws. Available at: http://www.legal-project.org/issues/european-hate-speech-laws
[2] Although the law against hate speech has been installed in Macedonia's legal system, its practical implementation still seems to be lagging far behind (Neshkovska and Trajkova 2017). There has not been a case in Macedonian context when hateful content was removed from FB or Twitter, although there are many abundant with negative, obscene, vulgar, hateful and disruptive content. And it also seems that people got so used to this form of expression of opinions that they do not seem to recognize it as such any

discourse "occupies" social media almost unimpeded and unrestricted particularly during election periods, when it is used as one of the main persuasive means by "us" to assume power over "them".[3]

Macedonia has had a tough period before and after the parliamentary elections in December, 2016. The events that preceded and followed that period, mostly related to the fight for power between the two main political parties (the right-wing VMRO and left-wing SDSM), due to their extremely contentious nature, divided the society to its very core. The discontent was transferred mostly on Facebook and Twitter, which seemed to be the first choice of many citizens for venting their anxiety and displeasure. Many of the comments posted, being written on the spur of the moment, present a true outpour of anger and discontent and sometimes even hatred. So, this paper analyses how political actors (politicians, political activists and voters) aim to gain or preserve power and dominance in the political and social arena of the contemporary Macedonian society by using hate speech on social media.

More precisely, in this paper critical discourse analysis and pragmatic analysis are employed to investigate how people engage in hate speech on Facebook and Twitter to express their stance and position regarding highly charged situational context of the 2016 Macedonian parliamentary elections. In fact, the paper addresses and seeks the answers to the following questions: "What speech acts underlie the hateful discourse posted on social media?"; "What language strategies are utilized in making the discourse posted on social media hateful?"; "What roles do authors assume with their hateful messages?" and "Who are these messages directed to?".

In the upcoming sections, we first discuss briefly the interface between social media, stance-taking and politics, as well as the socio-political context in which the 2016 elections in Macedonia took place, both of which are crucial for and serve as a basis for the proposed analysis. Then, we lay out the research methodology employed in this study; and, finally, we discuss the results obtained from this research and draw relevant conclusions.

2 Social media, stance-taking and politics

Since social media have recently become an arena for public debate on many hot political issues (Brenne 2016), in the following sections we attempt to analyse why

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more. If they had reported it on a regular basis, Facebook would have been alarmed by now and it would have probably introduced some special mechanisms for its recognition.

[3] The hate speech disseminated or incited electronically has noted high increase in the past two years in Macedonia, while the level of sanctioning of the perpetrators under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Macedonia (Department of Electronic Crime) is virtually non-existent (Kalajdziev 2015).

and how people express their stance concerning political issues on two social media sites: Facebook and Twitter. Both social media networks are well-established and mainstream, thus "their users represent a diverse demographic among the population with Internet access, allowing participation to be meaningful and dynamic" (see Bridges 2017: 96).

Although they are considered different branches of social media since Facebook is mainly intended to network people and Twitter ideas and topics, both platforms serve two main communicative functions: interpersonal interaction and self-presentation (which also involves self-disclosure) (Johansson 2017, Carr et al. 2014: 179). Users of both networks write status messages which are directed at a specific audience: the user's network (Carr et al. 2014: 180), or at a wider audience if the user's profile is made public. However, while Twitter is a microblogging application that allows users to share, comment or express themselves in no more than 140 characters and to follow others based on their own interests and not for social connections, Facebook, offers users the possibility of building profiles within a system and establishing social connections (Velasquez and Rojas 2017: 4). Therefore, as Velasquez and Rojas (2017) argued, it is likely that users' expectations of what they will get from expressing their political views through the two different platforms differ. However, in this paper we do not focus our research interest on distinguishing how users share their political beliefs and views on the two different sites, but generally on both.

2.1 Social media and politics

As people nowadays generally spend a lot of time on social media, logically they have become one of their chief instruments for keeping up to date with the latest events happening in their country and worldwide. Hence, social media help in shaping public opinion, especially when it comes to political issues and ideology. For individuals who had already made their mind "novelty motivations are related with an interest in new information to find more arguments for their decision, and that for those who have not decided yet, novelty motivations are associated with a motivation to explore to resolve potential incongruences between new information and previous beliefs" (Velasquez and Rojas 2017: 9).

Himelboim, Mccreery and Smith (2013) have found that individuals most often follow others with similar political views and are exposed selectively to content posted on Twitter. Bakshy et al. (2015), on the other hand, suggest that on social media sites such as Facebook, users are exposed to ideologically discordant content posted by friends who have different political affiliations. Being aware of the fact that they are followed by people who might have opposite views and expectations, certain behaviour will be highly valued within their social group. More specifically, this recognition will allow them to acquire certain rank and privileges in the said

group (Velasquez and Rojas 2017) and will influence their decision on the language they choose to use when creating their status updates.

When people post politics-related messages on social media, their posts serve either the purpose of persuasion or propaganda. Authors might use persuasive language as a technique of using carefully managed information in order to influence public opinion, or they might use more of what is defined as propaganda or (rather intense) use of the sentimental factor to persuade in order to serve the aims of the propagandist by disseminating a certain ideology or doctrine (Marková 2008; Poulakidakos and Veneti 2016). According to Marková (2008: 37), even though propaganda and persuasion may well co-exist, the latter is an effort of dissemination of views and opinions on behalf of the communicator, through interaction and satisfaction of the intentions of both the pursuer and the pursuee (Poulakidakos and Veneti 2016). In order to discriminate propaganda from persuasion, Marková (2008: 49) suggests that they need to be studied as part of the systems (e.g. institutions, organizations, communication) to which they belong, rather than treat them as decontextualized phenomena. Theodorakopoulos (2006) names several propaganda techniques like: selective publication of evidence or partly presented facts; stressing out threats or dangers; "demonizing" the enemy and interpreting the facts in very specific ways.

In order to identify some text as propaganda, besides looking for evidence in the text argumentation, one must closely inspect the stance that the writer takes, i.e. how they evaluate facts and ideas, how they position themselves and their audience in the text they produce in order to exert power and dominance.

2.2 Stance and stance-taking

The notion of stance, which encompasses evaluation (Conrad and Biber 2000; Hunston and Thompson 2000) and assessment (Goodwin 2006), is very important for our analysis because it helps us realise why people say what they say in the way they say it. It also gives information on how people perceive themselves and their addressees, the political and social situation at stake, and in what direction they direct their thoughts and "movements" concerning the specific issues they discuss. For Du Bois (2007: 163) stance is a single unified act which encompasses three subsidiary acts; it is "a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field".

Stance can be understood as affective or epistemic, depending on whether the speaker positions themselves affectively, by presenting their feelings towards the content of the utterance (e.g. *I am glad/amazed etc.*) or epistemically, emphasising the degree of access the speaker has to the information that follows (*I know,*

obviously etc.) (Bridges 2017: 95; Du Bois 2007: 143). The general concept which subsumes both affective and epistemic stance acts is positioning - the act of situating social actor with respect to responsibility for stance and for invoking sociocultural value (Du Bois, 2007: 143). However, Du Bois (2007) emphasizes that positioning goes hand in hand with subjectivity. Therefore, in utterances which are characterized as positioning the following questions arise: *What is the speaker positioning himself about?; What is the speaker agreeing or disagreeing about?; Who are they agreeing or disagreeing with?; Who does the speaker address and why?;* We dwell on the concept of stance in our analysis and try to answer these questions in order to understand the role the authors of Facebook and Twitter status updates tend to play and what they want to achieve with their acts.

Before we proceed to the analysis, we give a brief overview of the political situation in Macedonia (in the period from 2015-2017) to explain the socio-political context which instigated people to produce hateful posts on the social media.

3 The political crisis in Macedonia (2015-2017)

The events that preceded and followed the last parliamentary elections in Macedonia held on 11 December 2016, due to their extremely intense nature, divided the rather miniscule society of less than 2 million people to its very core. Prior the 2016 parliamentary election, the VMRO (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) was in charge, and was seriously attacked and cornered by the opposition, on charges of an unscrupulous money laundering via the massive "Skopje 2014" project, which involved erecting a lot of monuments and buildings in the capital of Macedonia – the city of Skopje. In addition to this, the then-opposition, the SDSM (Social Democratic Union), led by Zoran Zaev, determined to speed up the downfall of the ruling party, set in motion the biggest ever wire-tapping scandal in our country's history, revealing private, compromising conversations of high-ranking politicians including the Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski (Neshkovska and Trajkova 2017).

Mass protests organized by the opposition ensued, with the protestors expressing their revolt by throwing paint and destroying the facades of the newly built monuments and buildings ("Colourful Revolution"). Counter protests were organized by the ruling party as a counter-measure and the political crisis was speedily getting out of control. The international community had to interfere to prevent it from escalating even further. Finally, the elections took place in December 2016, and the ruling party lost the elections, being unable to form a coalition with their long-standing partner from the Albanian bloc of political parties, DUI (the Democratic Union of the Albanians). The SDMS leader, Zoran Zaev, on the other hand, took advantage of the situation and managed to negotiate a coalition with DUI

with the assistance of the Albanian Prime Minister, Edi Rama. This caused an additional friction and tension in the Macedonian society as this act was qualified as high treason by many Macedonian citizens (Hopkins 2017).

People's dissatisfaction was further fueled by the forceful way in which the newly established SDSM-led coalition appointed the new speaker of the Parliament, Talat Dzaferi, known to the general public for taking part in the Macedonia 2001 conflict, on the part of the Albanians. This to many Macedonian citizens was a true confirmation that the new ruling party had not the country's best interest at heart. As a result, an angry mob stormed into the Parliament building, injuring MPs, among whom the Prime Minister-to-be, Zoran Zaev. The political crisis de-escalated only after President Gjorgje Ivanov finally had given the mandate to the SDSM to form the new government (Hopkins 2017).

4 Material and methods

To investigate the use of hateful political discourse on social media, instigated by the highly dramatic unfolding of political events in Macedonia prior and post the 2016 elections, the combination of critical discourse analysis and pragmatic analysis was carried out on status updates on Facebook and Twitter users' timelines. There were two main prerequisites for selecting and analysing the comments: a) they had to be directly related to some of the events that took place in the designated period (2015-2017), b) they had to be generated within the designated period.

The corpus compiled for the purposes of this research consisted of status updates[4] whose authors were either political figures - politicians and political activists (people who openly support a certain political option and take part in different activities such as public protests) or just ordinary citizens who are part of the voting body. The authors from all three groups either have publicly open Facebook and Twitter profiles or are our friends or followers on the two social networks. Nevertheless, in almost all the above-mentioned cases it was noticeable that the authors expressed their anger and discontent regarding a particular political event. Since we could not identify any specific difference in the manner in which different FB and Twitter users wrote their status messages, we considered the expected outcome (see more in Velasquez and Rojas, 2017) for all authors to be the same, i.e. to persuade the addressees or the followers (not always the addressees) that a specific political option, situation or event or a concrete politician is not good or acting right and should be changed. Therefore, we did not go further into investigating the differences among the separate groups the authors belonged to. What mattered was that the posts contained traces of hate speech.

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[4] We use the terms: status update, status message and post interchangeably

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, one hundred status messages (40 from Twitter and 60 from Facebook[5]), which we considered were instances of hate speech, were selected. They were extracted through the platforms' search interface: people (either our FB or Twitter friends, or political activists or politicians whose profiles are public), then keywords or strings of words (e.g. упад во Македонското собрание (Storming of the Macedonian Parliament)) and hashtags (e.g. #ШаренаРеволуција (#Colourful Revolution), #Протестирам (#IProtest)). So, each search displayed public posts from individual accounts or accounts of our own Facebook and Twitter friends. The basic unit of analysis was one post (status message or update). The posts were used without any revision and their authors were anonymized in the analysis. They had to refer to political figures, actions and events in the selected period and contain hateful language. The selection was based mostly on the conditions proposed by Parekh (2006): a) the comment singles out an individual or a group of individuals on the basis of certain characteristics; b) the comment stigmatizes its target by ascribing to it a set of constitutive qualities that are widely viewed as highly undesirable, and c) the comment places the target group outside the pale of normal social relationships.

To validate the selection, an additional revision was done by a group of 50 respondents (of different age groups (but all above 18 - the voting age) and professions), who were asked to read and assess the status messages as to whether they thought they were hateful or not. Moreover, if they considered a message hateful, they were asked to briefly support their opinion stating the reasons for such choice. The respondents, for the most part, selected 54 (out of 60) FB status messages and 16 (out of 40) Twitter messages to contain hate speech, or 70 status messages in total. Out of these 70 posts, 9 were produced by politicians, 32 by political activists and 29 by voters. They mostly considered the usage of swear words, derogatory insulting terms and pejorative forms referring to people and political parties, irony and negative metaphor hateful. It should be noted that although our initial intention was to include, more or less, an equal number of posts generated by people who support the ruling party and those who support the opposition, it turned out that the selected posts were mostly produced by users who were attacking the Government and the then-ruling party.

Then, in the second stage, a detailed analysis of the selected 70 FB and Twitter status updates ensued. The focus was mostly on determining the relationship between the linguistic elements used in the status updates and the social implications, in view of the highly sensitive sociocultural context in which they were produced.

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[5] The number of posts extracted from the two sites is not equal because our intention was not to make any distinction between the hateful content spread on the two social networks, but solely to collect samples from hateful messages posted online prior and after the elections. In addition, the analysis focused only on the verbal content of original status messages (posts). The comments after the posts were not analysed. The length of the messages also differed (Twitter messages were shorter – up to 140 characters).

So, the main aim was to examine how social media users crafted their hateful status messages to persuade their followers in accepting their positions. More precisely, we focused on identifying the role the authors assume when expressing their position in their status updates, who they direct their message to and how they manage their language in reference to the expected outcome. Now, in order to identify the communicative function of the FB and Twitter status messages, first, a pragmatic coding analysis was made (Atifi and Marcoccia 2017) to determine the speech acts used and their illocutionary value. In the manner of Berlin et. al. (2015), Lehti and Kallio (2017) and Atifi and Marcoccia (2017), one post was considered as a macro speech act i.e. a social act in context, following Searle's taxonomy of speech acts[6]. Atifi and Marcoccia (2017) state that one macro-speech act can accomplish two distinct acts (a primary and a secondary). But our analysis, as shown in the upcoming section, revealed that when delivering a hate message, especially on Facebook because it allows for longer texts to be posted, a post can accomplish even a tertiary act as well (for instance, an assertive as a primary act can combine a directive and an expressive or commissive act). The example below is an illustration of a combination of an assertive, directive and expressive speech act. The author first explains, then negatively evaluates the addressee and finally directly addresses him.

e.g. *Еден од два-тројцата „интелектуалци" на криминалната банда на ВМРО, навидум жалосниот романтичар Русјаков, за несреќа мој колега, како и обично напишал уште еден глуп текст во којшто тврди дека тој „се' уште немал омраза во срцето". Немаш, а? Гуру на полуписмените, ова е последица од твојата омраза, од твоето хушкање.Поарно иди и пак читај му поезија на бурекот Јанко, твојата верна публика.*
[One of the very few "intellectuals" of the criminal gang of VMRO, the sad romanticist, Rusjakov, who is unfortunately a colleague of mine, has written another stupid text in which he claims that he "still doesn't feel hatred in his heart". You don't have hatred, huh? Guru of the illiterate, all this is a consequence of your hate. You better go and read poetry to Janko, your faithful fan[7].]

In line with Atifi and Marcoccia's (2017) three pragmatic functions can be identified and they correspond to three sub-categories of speech acts: 1) evaluative, as a sub-category of expressive (the expression of the speaker's/ writer's attitude towards the propositions or entities which are the topic of discussion), 2) directive, and 3) analytical, as a sub-category of assertive (the use of descriptive discourse by the speaker/ writer to interpret a certain phenomenon).

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[6] According to Searle's taxonomy (1976) of speech acts there are 5 main types: **representative (or assertive) acts** (e.g., stating, affirming, describing, explaining), **commissive acts** (e.g., promising, offering, vowing), **directive acts** (e.g., ordering, commanding, requesting), **expressive acts** (e.g., avowals of emotion, evaluation), **declarative acts** (e.g., christening, firing, marrying, and resigning).
[7] this and all the other examples given in the paper are translated from Macedonian into English

What ensued was in close correspondence with the previous step of the analysis. Namely, the focus was subsequently put on ascertaining how the authors of the hateful comments position themselves, i.e. what their stance is or what roles they strive to assume with their hateful posts. Here, the analysis relied heavily on Atifi and Marcoccia's (2017) proposal that authors of Twitter and Facebook posts play three major social roles when posting: a judge, an activist and an analyst. When they play the role of a judge they mainly assess and evaluate a certain, in this case political, situation or action (they perform asserting, evaluating, assessing, stating, affirming acts). The activist's main focus is on persuading people to act, to do something about the issue at stake (they perform questioning, ordering, imploring, challenging, summoning acts). The analyst, on the other hand, mainly aims to make an analysis of the situation and clarify it so that their Twitter and FB friends, their readers, would understand it better (they explain, contextualize, enlighten, clarify, analyse, etc.) (Atifi and Marcoccia 2017). We found this categorisation rather useful as it clearly connects the speech acts the social network users perform and the social roles they intend to play. The expectations, prior the analysis, were that one social network user might perform several acts and thus assume different social roles at the same time, such as the role of both an analyst and a judge.

Finally, the research was directed at analysing who the hateful posts were directed to i.e. whether the authors were addressing their friends and followers, their political opponents, the politicians themselves etc. and what type of specific language strategies (lexis, tropes, etc.) were used to turn a particular post into hateful and demeaning. The aim was to find out who the authors intended to persuade. It was expected that this analysis will also give insight into whether there is some correlation between the intended audience and the concept of power the authors aimed to exert if any. Our general impression was that social media users who do decide to express their political opinion publicly actually aim to exert power and dominance over their followers and the politicians and at the same time attempt to regain power (as voters) after it has been taken away by politicians who make bad decisions on their behalf.

5 Results

The initial analysis of the posts done by our respondents showed that Facebook status updates were, in general, more hateful in comparison to the ones posted on Twitter (54 out of 60 FB posts and only 16 out of 40 Twitter posts were considered hateful). Although the analysis focused only on status updates, it was inevitable to notice the reactions to the posts. On Facebook, for instance, the authors' friends (or followers) tended to add comments to the posts, which were mainly supportive and in line with what the authors had originally stated. On the other hand, those who did not agree (there must have been some of those too) simply chose not to react in any way, most

probably because they were afraid of some sort of political retribution if they voice their opinion publicly[8]. The situation was quite different on Twitter. Generally speaking, the posts were less hateful; their authors (political figures or activists) appeared to be more of analysts offering their interpretation of the highly dramatic political events in the country. Interestingly, the commentators (usually hiding behind a pseudonym) of these tweets responded by writing a lot of hateful comments as a reaction to what was stated in the posts, thus, openly attacking the author or the political option they supported.

This finding goes hand in hand with Velasques and Rojas's (2017) statement that the way in which individuals perceive the effectiveness and appropriateness of their communication when they interact with others on social media influences the degree in which they express their political views on both Facebook and Twitter. Although both are social media applications they differ in a sense that Facebook facilitates a network structure of both strong and weak ties, while Twitter is less a site for making or maintaining social connections, and more for building less formal relationships and weak connections with others. These might allow for differences in the value users derive from the expression of their political views (Velasques and Rojas 2017). When it comes to Facebook, users probably expect to be supported by those followers with whom they have strong ties and feel bold to influence the others with whom they are weakly connected, while on Twitter, they just express opinions without having this expectation in mind.

5.1 Positioning of the authors

The analysis has showed that the authors' hateful messages normally combined several speech acts, which, consequently, implies that the authors, apart from assuming a single role (analyst, judge or activist) per post, very frequently opted for assuming more than one role within a single post. As can be seen from Figure1 below, in most of the posts, 65%, they play two roles: as analysts and judges, in 11% they appear just as analysts and in exactly the same number of posts just as judges. In 6.9% of the posts they assume all the three roles (analysts, activists and judges), in 4.2% they play two roles: as analysts and activists and in 1.4% as activists and judges.

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[8] Macedonian people have very often been witnesses of cases when people lost their jobs or suffered repercussions for agitating against the ruling party (whichever it was at the time).
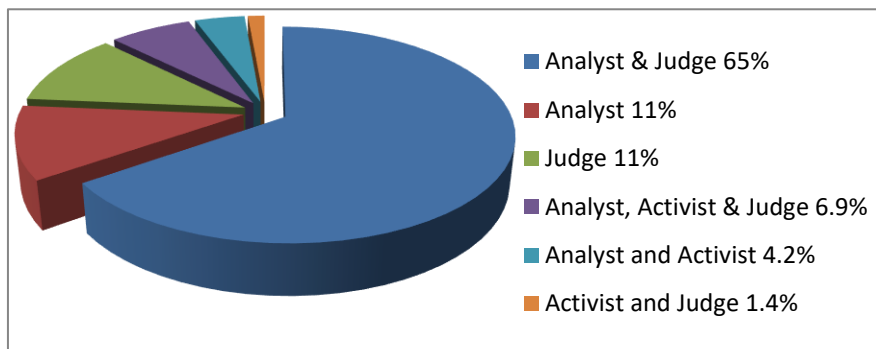
Figure 1: Positioning of authors.

As shown in Figure 1, there are several communicative or social roles that authors take when they post hateful political discourse and they depend on the expected outcome or the aim they want to achieve with what they say. They seem to analyse and judge very often, without suggesting any action. When they do, they never appear as simple activists who would just urge their followers to do something about a certain political situation or activity, but before they summon others to act, they first either make a negative analysis of the situation or they execute a judgment against a political party or member, or both.

As for the roles that each category of authors played, the analysis revealed that politicians mostly played the role of analysts and judges (in 67% of the posts), then analysts, judges and activists (in 22% of the posts) and analysts (in 11% of the posts). So, they mostly analysed the political situation or a specific event or politician, and then expressed a judgmental opinion about it. Political activists also mostly played the role of analysts and judges (in 72% of the posts), analysts and activists (in 9%) and analysts, judges and activists (also in 9% of the posts). They assumed the roles of judges and analysts in fewer posts. Therefore, it can be concluded that although called political activists, this category of people mostly analyse and judge and only a small number call for action. Finally, the analysis showed that voters, too, mostly assumed the role of analysts and judges (in 58% of posts), then analysts (17%), judges (10%) and also fewer other roles. Overall, the analysis, as it was previously concluded, reveals, to some extent, the tendency of Macedonian social sites' users to mainly analyse and judge political situations, events and figures.

A. Authors as analysts and judges

As indicated above, in most cases the authors assumed two roles with their status messages: that of an analyst and a judge. By using assertive speech acts, they first

analyzed and clarified a certain situation, enlightening their followers by giving them the key to understanding discourse and then they made a judgement by using mostly expressive speech acts. In some cases, expressives were followed by assertive speech acts. This finding overlaps with Carr et al.'s (2012) one of the uses of speech acts within Facebook status messages, which showed that the most frequently used speech acts are expressives followed by assertive speech acts.

For instance, in (1), the author analyses the situation and states that the then-prime minister defends those who entered the parliament forcefully and physically hurt MPs, with the aim to enlighten their followers in case they have not come to this conclusion. In addition, the author assumes the role of a judge, making their followers aware that the prime minister cannot be justified for doing this and because of that he can be rightfully considered "a bastard who deserves to burn in hell".

(1)   *Грујо ги брани насилниците... Копиле ќе гориш во пеколот!!!*
        [Grujo defends the tyrants… Bastard! You will burn in hell!]

What can be extracted from this hateful message from a linguistic point of view, is definitely the extremely negatively charged lexis or hate speech: "tyrants", "bastard" used to refer to the then-prime minister and his supporters. In addition, the use of epistemic *will* , which functions as a direct translation equivalent of the Macedonian particle for expressing futurity – *ќe*, as a booster in his hateful comment helps the author make a prediction about a very likely future act. This is a persuasive strategy used very frequently by authors to boost the confidence and belief of their followers into the truth of what they are stating (Hyland 1998, Hyland 2005).

B. Authors as analysts

Authors also assume the sole role of analysts by writing analytical posts in which they reveal their opinions and personal judgements (as in example (2)). They aim to contextualise the discourse and assume the identity of experts in politics.

(2)   *Дваесет и пет-шест албанези во Собрание ќе одлучуваат дали јас и ти ќе останеме Македонец или Македонка!! Алоооо, @SDSMakedonija имате ли барем малку мозок во черепот бре? Инаку, албанезите ги заболе стапот дали сме Македонија, Нова Македонија или Северна Рајна Вестфалија.*
        [Approximately 25-26 Albanese in the Parliament will decide whether you and I will remain Macedonians! Helloooo, @SDSMacedonia, do you have any brain in your skull, you idiots? By the way, the Albanese don't give a fuck whether our country will be called Macedonia, New Macedonia or North Rhine Westfalia.]

The comment in (2) is used in reference to the same bloody event when an angry mob stormed into the Parliament to express their dissatisfaction with the way in

which Mr. Talat Dzaferi (an Albanian) was appointed the new Speaker of Parliament. The author's position is very clear – they are defending the attackers and are putting the blame on the newly established SDSM-led Government, which, by allowing Dzaferi to become the speaker of the Parliament, puts the destiny of the country in the hands of the representatives of the Albanian minority and their political party. Obviously, the author is convinced that the Albanians in Macedonia do not feel strongly about preserving the country's name (having in mind the long-standing name dispute between Macedonia and Greece) and national interests. Moreover, the author of the post tends to intensify the negative tone of the message by inventing a neologism to refer to Albanians – "Albanese". The attack which is directed to SDSM is reinforced with additional derogatory words and swear words ("you idiots", "don't give a fuck"), and a rhetorical question. In addition, the author comes up with a nonsensical coinage in reference to the country's possible future name: "North Rhine Westfalia".

C. Authors as judges

In exactly the same number of posts (11%), the authors, by using evaluative-expressive speech acts, assumed the role of judges. The function of these posts was to evaluate, assess, assert and draw a conclusion. In our corpus, these posts were usually the ones in which the authors drew negative conclusions or gave negative assessments of a particular political situation or party (party members). The author of comment (3) threatens the members of a political party by making a negative prediction that something bad will happen to them (they will all pay for their deeds). The use of epistemic *will* (the particle *ќe*) as a booster, an interpersonal metadiscourse marker, (Hyland 1998, Hyland 2005) was again used to express the negative assumption or prediction.

> (3)   *Ќe висите одделно!!!*
>   [You will be hanged, all of you separately!!!]

Although this is the author's personal evaluation and opinion, by writing such negative status updates, they take the role of foretellers or even executers of judgement.

D. Authors as analysts, judges and activists

Some authors (mostly politicians and political activists) assumed all the three separate social roles: as analysts, judges and activists, with their posts. First, by using assertive speech acts they produced analytical posts in which they expressed their personal opinion and judgment of a specific situation or activity. For instance, in (4) the author explains what they understand the reason of the government's arrests is.

At the same time, they judge them by using an evaluative-expressive speech act - government officials are compared to fascist swine, which is a metaphor[9] depicting the targeted politicians as uncompromising, smelly, dirty and greedy individuals, who, according to the author deserve to burn in hell. The use of hate speech to insult and threaten politicians is obvious. The author produces a directive act with which they address their Facebook or Twitter friends directly urging them to act, i.e. to punish the responsible politicians ("People, please get mad!"). Note the usage of "please" as a politeness marker within a directive. The author is obviously aware that they are not in a position to exert any real power on and to impose anything on their Twitter or FB followers so they use a politeness marker, as a hedge, to soften the illocutionary force of their directive and thus to preserve its persuasive effect.

(4)   *Ова се фашистички свињи. Апсат затоа што не смее да се "искврнави" роденденот на ВМРО и говорот на фирерот. Аман бе луѓе, налутете се!*
[These are all fascist swine who should burn in hell. They arrest people just because they don't want VMRO's birthday or the führer's solemn speech to be ruined. People, please get mad!]

Furthermore, the author is evidently extremely upset with the leader, the Prime Minister Gruevski, of the then-ruling party, VMRO, and his actions towards people disagreeing with his policy. He dares to arrest people for no good reason and because of that he deserves to be punished adequately by the people. The author uses a metaphor comparing the Prime Minister to the notorious Adolf Hitler by calling him "führer".

E. Authors as analysts and activists

Authors, mostly political activists, seemed to take on the role of both analysts and activists in not very many posts (only 4.2%). Example (5) is an illustration of such posts, where the author first asserts and assesses a situation (the people who were involved in the "Colourful Revolution" protests choose not to voice their opinion about the coalition that the current Prime Minister Zoran Zaev is about to make with the Albanian party, DUI, although such coalition would not be good for the country).

(5)   *Шарена револуција никаде ги нема... Ги прифаќате ли условите од Ахмети за коалиција со него? Туфекџичу, Павле клукајдрвецу изјаснете се...Револуционери ли сте што ли сте?*
[Colourful revolution is silent... Do you accept Ahmeti's conditions for coalition? Tufekdzicu, Pavle, why don't you state your position now? … Are you revolutionists or what?]

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[9] See Lesz (2011) and Burkholder and Henry (2009) for a more detailed discussion on metaphors in political discourse.

The author proceeds to question and challenge specific political figures that took part in the Colourful Revolution, by using engagement metadiscourse markers (Hyland, 2005) – direct address and (rhetorical) questions. The use of the interpersonal metadiscourse helps them to establish a direct dialogue with the addressees, while at the same time they use it as a persuasive strategy to influence the opinions of the readers, their followers, and to instigate them to act accordingly.

F. Authors as activists and judges

Finally, in just few of the overall status messages analysed, the authors assumed the role of both activists and judges. In (6), by using directive acts, they first urge the readers, their FB and Twitter followers to act - join the protests against the Government's policy and then they give their evaluation and assessment of the situation, which is at the same time the reason why people should act (the foulness has to go away!).

(6)   *Дојдете. Овие црнила мора да си одат*
       [Come and join us! This foulness has to go away!]

The Government is metaphorically represented as "foulness", which the author believes that the country needs to get rid of immediately.

5.2 Who do the authors address?

In a normal everyday conversation, it is expected that a speaker speaks and an addressee, who is in close proximity, listens and responds. But things are obviously not that straightforward when it comes to politics-related interactions that take place on social media. Our results showed that authors of hateful posts on social media either address: a) politicians directly, or b) their Facebook or Twitter friends and followers (directly or indirectly) (see Figure 2).
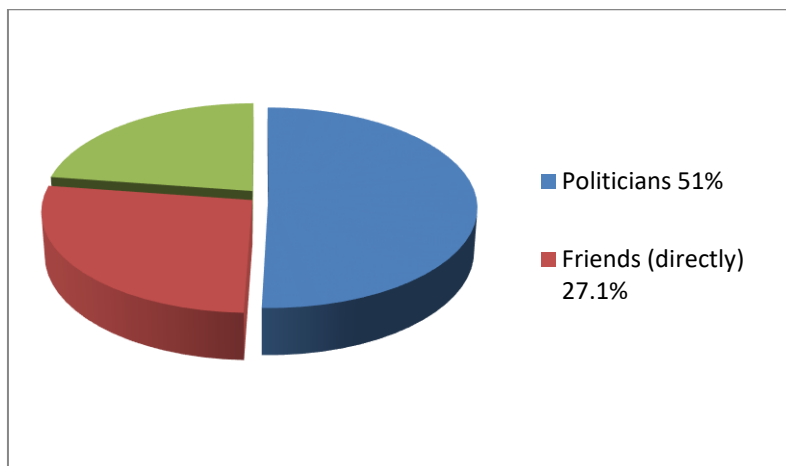
Figure 2: The addresses.

In half of the posts the authors addressed politicians directly, normally, to criticise them and to point out some of their misdeeds and wrong decisions. In the other half, the authors address their Facebook and Twitter friends and followers, either directly or indirectly, in order to persuade them in the validity of their political viewpoint and thus to gain their support.

A.   Authors address a political figure directly

The analysis showed that in 51% of the analysed posts, authors address Prime Minister, the President, or some specific member or members of a party directly. They mostly use engagement metadiscourse markers (Hyland 1998, Hyland 2005) such as direct address (personal names, nicknames, second person pronouns *you, your*) and directives. In most of the cases the addressees, i.e. the political figures they addressed, were not even their Facebook or Twitter friends and therefore were not able to even read their post. Obviously, this is how they strive to assume power and present themselves as someone who, for a change, has the steering wheel in their hands and knows more than the person they are addressing. For instance, in (7), the author is addressing the then-state public prosecutor directly by using a nickname ("Zvrle" which is derived from his surname – Zvrlevski). The author of the post also uses a derogatory term ("wrinkled face") in reference to the public prosecutor's physical appearance and makes a negative deduction about his future by means of swear words ("fuck you") and epistemic *will* as a booster to intensify their confidence in the truth of the proposition that something bad will happen to the prosecutor.

(7) *Фак ју, Зврле, и ти ќе идеш у затвор, а и твоето згужвано фациче ќе го има по учебници како пример за неправда.*
[Fuck <u>you</u>, Zvrle, <u>you</u> are going to end in prison too, and <u>your</u> wrinkled face <u>will be</u> shown in textbooks as an example for injustice!]

The authors of such posts also use a lot of rhetorical questions and exclamations as an expression of their anger and hatred, as in (8).

(8) *[...]ееееј!!! Имате мозок во главата бе?*
[(…) Heeey!!! Have <u>you</u> got brains in <u>your</u> heads?]

In this example, the author, being evidently very upset with the-then right-wing government which did nothing to prevent people from storming the Parliament and attacking and seriously injuring MPs, poses a rhetorical question ("Have <u>you</u> got brains in <u>your</u> heads?"). The question is very demeaning and belittling as it implies that the government officials have lost their reasoning power completely, and consequently act very unreasonably in the given situation.

B. Authors address Facebook or Twitter friends and followers

a) directly (in 27.1% of posts)
When authors address directly, they either use the inclusive "we"[10] as an interpersonal metadiscursive strategy which helps them to engage their FB or Twitter followers into the discourse and persuade them in the truth value of their propositions (as in example (9)) or they use a summoning phrase – "my dear friends", as in (10).

(9) *Утре во 8.45 сабајле сум пред Беко. Дојдете да им покажеме на мафијашките силеции дека не им се плашиме и дека сме обединети како никогаш досега.*
[Tomorrow at 8.45 in the morning I will be in front of Beko. <u>Come join me</u> so that <u>we</u> can show these mafiosos that <u>we</u> are not afraid and that <u>we</u> are united as never before!]

In (9) above, the author, enraged by Gruevski's government, raises his voice and tries to organize his Facebook and Twitter friends to take an active part in the mass protests organized to topple the government.

(10) *...овој створ свикува лидерска средба за утре, ЗА УТРЕ драги мои, а вечерва што?! Вечерва* очи да си извадат?!
#<u>ни</u>ПодПретседател#СеСрамамОдТебе #ТиСиЕдноОбичноНиштоХорхе

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[10] Includes the author and their followers

[…this creature summons the leaders for a leaders' meeting tomorrow, <u>my dear friends</u>**!** What about tonight? Is he going to let them kill each other tonight? #IAmAshamedOf YouHorhe! #YouAreNothingHorhe!]

Example (10) presents a hateful post referring to the President, who according to the author does nothing to stop the bloodshed in the Parliament, after the speaker's appointment.

b) indirectly (in 22.9% of posts)
Authors address their friends indirectly when they are usually trying to make them aware of the negative aspects of certain politician or party's ideology. In examples (11) and (12) the authors address their friends and followers indirectly, talking about a politician in the 3rd person. They aim to inform them about the assessments they have made regarding the character or behavior of certain politicians. In (11) the comment refers to the then-prime minister who has been depicted with highly negatively charged lexis – "murderer" and "psychopath". We consider such lexis as instances of hate speech[11], and not metaphor as these are actual accusations against the then-Prime Minister[12]. In (12) the president is very unfavorably compared with a plant which has no reasoning power and intelligence – *ficus[13]*, because obviously, in the author's view, the president himself acts foolishly in the stated situation and cannot make any reasoned judgments. By using such negative metaphor, the author tries to diminish and devalue the integrity of the President.

(11) *Груевски е убиец. Толку. Психопат и фашист.*
[Gruevski is a murderer. That's it! A psychopath and a murderer!]

(12) *Овде крв падна а Фикусот бара лидерска средба ...со крвници и убијци нема преговори #ДаЖивејЗоранЗаев*
[They shed blood here and the Ficus calls for a leaders' meeting …. There can't be negotiations with murderers. #LongLive Zoran Zaev]

Metaphors add to the ironic effect of some of the posts. For instance, in (13) the author ironically compares the president to "a tsar", because allegedly he assumes more authority than he rightfully has.

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[11] Whatever the author accuses the then-Prime Minister of, it has not been proven by the court yet to be the truth.
[12] The then-Prime Minister was accused by the general public and the opposition to be directly responsible for the death of a well-known journalist. As psychopath is defined as "a person suffering from chronic mental disorder with abnormal or violent social behaviour" in the Oxford online dictionary, the author obviously used it because they believe this to be the truth.
[13] The metaphorical usage of the term 'ficus' to refer to a stupid person in Macedonian is a culture-bound phenomenon and is used to seriously offend the target's feelings.

(13) *"Царов" наш меѓу редови кажа дека пратениците сами се криви за*
      состојбава, што добиле ќотек. Фикусе царе!
      [Reading between lines, **our tsar** said that the MPs are to be blamed for the
      situation and for having been beaten. Oh, what a **ficus tsar**!]

The author of this post also calls the president "a ficus", as he believes that the
president lacks intelligence and reasoning capacity, which is highly unexpected and
unacceptable for someone holding such a high-profile position.

6 Conclusion

Election campaigns are a particularly conducive ground for breeding hate speech.
Hate speech has become a common emblem of political discourse. As political stakes
are normally high for both those who aspire to preserve their power and those who
wish to come to power, fierce verbal assaults become an integral part of almost all
political interactions not just among professional politicians but their supporters as
well. Social media present a perfect platform for posting hateful political discourse.
This was particularly the case with the last parliamentary election in Macedonia in
2016.
     This paper focused on identifying how politicians, political activists and voters
(ordinary citizens) exert power when expressing their position in their status updates.
More precisely, it aimed to identify the roles they assume when stating their
positions, the addresses and the language they employ in reference to the expected
ultimate outcome. The overall analysis showed that unfortunately all the involved
groups of social media users (politicians, political activists and voters) exert power
through negativity. Their posts were abundant with hate speech in which they insult,
demean and demonize certain politician, political party or political ideology. What
was striking was that we could not really find any solid evidence for voters, ordinary
people, behaving different from politicians and political activists. They accuse
politicians of their aggressive and insulting behaviour but they also manipulate their
own stance by exerting power through negativity i.e. hate speech.
     The pragmatic analysis showed that authors take different social roles when
posting hateful status messages. By using mostly assertive and expressive speech
acts, they appear most frequently as analysts and judges. They never assume the role
of sole activists, not even political activists, but summoning people to act is usually
done after analysing or judging. It was also interesting to discover that the authors
mostly address political figures directly although in most of the cases they are not
their FB or Twitter followers. This, we conclude, is their attempt to regain and
assume power over the politicians who did not appreciate their vote and made bad
decisions on their behalf, and over the readers of the message - their followers, in
order to appear more in control and therefore more persuasive. They also address

their FB and Twitter friends directly, when summoning them to act or urging them to realize the negative aspects of some political situation or event and act in accordance, or indirectly, usually when talking about certain politicians in 3rd person. The language they use to spread their hate propaganda is burdened with negative lexis, metaphors, irony and intensifiers or boosters.

This investigation, we believe, has very clearly depicted a new trend in politics and participatory democracy in Macedonia – using hate speech on social media to influence the electorate and exert power and dominance during election campaigns. However, in order to provide even more solid pieces of evidence for the issue explored here, a further analysis on a larger corpus of social media posts should be carried out. In addition, a separate analysis of status updates posted on different social media sites could be done to detect any differences in the manner authors address political issues and express negativity and hatred. Finally, we find a valid confirmation that the issue of online hate speech is worth addressing even further and deeper in Chen's (2017: 5) claim that it is an "evil", which does "a real harm to society by damaging people's self-esteem, increasing their anxiety, destroying social relationships and reducing the quality of public debate" (in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2017).

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