

**THE SPECIFIC OF THE INTERPRETATION OF TRAGEDY
OVER SINAY (OCTOBER 31, 2015) AS A FOCUS OF
INFORMATION ATTENTION OF THE „VKONTAKTE”
SOCIAL NETWORK**

**Viktor V. Barabash, Aleksandra S. Bobryshova,
Olga I. Lepilkina, Irina S. Karabulatova**

**Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russian Federation
North-Caucasus Federal University Stavropol, Russian Federation**

Abstract: *The article uses a broad material to analyze the reaction of the „VKontakte” social network users to the crash of a Russian aircraft over the Sinai Peninsula on October 31, 2015, later recognized as a terrorist act. It presents the results of a study of the content of groups, different in thematic focus and geolocation. A conclusion is made about the dissemination of memorial information. The orientation of discussions and the specifics of trolling are revealed, using the example of particular communities. The process of interpreting the tragic event in social networks is complicated by the fact that the social subject needs to interpret the tragedy both from the standpoint of the objectivity of the presentation of the material presented and the way in which it is presented. The explorer-interpreter must have a sufficiently wide information experience in order to distinguish the objective moments of the tragedy from the subjective position of the author who compiled it. At the same time, the degree of adequacy of the interpretation will manifest itself in the process of the activity of the interpreting social subject. So, the Islamic state is a religious group with its artificially selected doctrine, in which faith takes the leading place. Religious installations of political scientists of Islamic State are based on the fact that the fighters of the Islamic State are approaching the coming end of the world. Technologies replace other forms of organization of work and activities, because when performing standard procedures, they guarantee the receipt of the planned result.*

Keywords: Social Networks, „VKontakte”, Act of Terrorism, Trolling, interpretation, Islamic State.

In Paul Anderson's book *Satan's World*, a mechanism is well described that allows predicting the future. It was a collection of computers that collected and analyzed huge information flows, finding the connections between seemingly unrelated events, phenomena and facts. It seems that the company Serendipity.Inc this is not a fantasy, but the work of the next few decades.¹

Consideration of the various systems of scientific (and not only philosophical) of interpretation of the structure and mechanism of becoming one of the key moments in the modern post-nonclassical

¹ Poul William Anderson, *Satan's World*, New York, Gardners Books, 2017, 181 p.

science. The problem lies in the fact that interpretation occurs in various spheres of social and humanitarian knowledge, since in literature interpretation is sometimes identified with giving meaning to sociocultural objects. Therefore, the presentation of the mechanism of the interpretation itself implies an appeal to more local studies, in particular, to the socio-philosophical. This „interpretation” attracted attention both in ancient philosophy and in the subsequent development of philosophical thought. In modern interdisciplinary research, among the many different approaches to the mechanism of interpretation, acts of verbal communication in which the interpretation of words between different social actors occur are the most actual and closest to the social and philosophical appeal to linguistic problems. Such a process is necessary because often the translation of the meaning of statements from one language to another is carried out not only between different social actors, but also by different social strata and groups.

Nowadays social networks are recognized as an important source of information for a large part of the population and a means of public communication.² Therefore, they are of great interest to the scientific community. Along with other issues, the specifics of information support of such emergencies as terrorist acts³ and Internet resources of terrorists⁴ fall into the field of attention of Russian and foreign scientists.

The choice of the event for the study, the results of which are presented in this article, was due to the fact that the tragedy over Sinai (a

² V. V. Barabash, M. A. Checunova, G. N. Trofimova, G. N. Lenko, „New Media in Political Communication: General Approaches//SHS Web of Conferences, 2016, t. 29, c. 1.

³ Ch. Beckett, *Fanning the Flames: Reporting Terror in a Networked World*, available at: www.cjr.org, accessed on 05.I.2017; P. Burnap, M. L. Williams, L. Sloan, O. Rana, W. Housley, A. Edwards, V. Knight, R. Procter, A. Voss, „Tweeting the terror: modelling the social media reaction to the Woolwich terrorist attack”, available at: www.link.springer.com, accessed on 19.I.2017; M. Konow-Lund, E.-K. Olsson, „Social Media’s Challenge to Journalistic Norms and Values during a Terror Attack”, available at: www.tandfonline.com, accessed on 20.I.2017; B. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, New York, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 2016, 286 p.; A. S. Bobryshova, O. I. Lepilkina, „Funkciisocial’nyhsetej v uslovijahteraktov (namaterialiesocial’nojseti «VKontakte») (Functions of Social Networks in terms of Terrorist Attacks)”, available at: www.science-education.ru, accessed on 06.III.2015.

⁴ J. Klausen, E. Barbieri, A. Y. Zelin, A. Reichlin-Melnick, „The YouTube Jihadists: A Social Network Analysis of Al-Muhajiroun’s YouTube Propaganda Campaign”, in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, volume 6, no. 1, 2012; R. Medina, „Social Network Analysis: A case study of the Islamist terrorist network”, in *Security Journal*, volume 27, no. 1, 2014, pp. 97-121.

plane crash on the Sinai Peninsula on October 31, 2015, later recognized as a terrorist act) was included in the top three most important topics for „VKontakte” users in that year: 2.030.000 mentions.⁵ According to the Brand Analytics analytical center, at that time, the „VKontakte” social network had the largest audience (46.617.000 people in November 2015) and the largest number of active authors (18.798.900) among the Russian social networks.⁶

The subject to consider was the specifics of the content thematically related to the tragedy in various „VKontakte” communities. The chronological scope of the study was determined as follows: from the moment the first posting about the incident to the end of its discussion in groups.

Materials and methods

Materials of our research have all kinds of materials published by users in the social network „In contact” for the purpose of a comprehensive analysis of public opinion.

The study shows that posts with different forms of expressing grief and condolence (or with information about their expression in various cities) could be found in a wide range of specialized „VKontakte” groups: „Politicheskaya Matreshka! Anti-Maidan!” („Political Matryoshka! Anti-Maidan!”), „Gifki” („Gif. Files”), „Lentach” („Newsfeed”), „Podslushano” („Overheard”), „CELLDWELLER-End of an Empire” (a group dedicated to an American musician), „Shedevry Literaturny/Knigi” („Masterpieces of Literature/books”), „Naukai Tekhnika” („Science and Technology”) etc.

Similar posts could be found in communities of various geographic orientation: „EtoPiter, Detka! [Tipichnyi Piter]” („It’s St. Pete, Baby! [Typical St. Pete]”), „Tipichnyi Kiev” („Typical Kiev”), „Tipichnyi Novosibirsk” („Typical Novosibirsk”), „MamyKryma (MATERINSKII KAPITAL)” („Mothers of Crimea (MATERNITY CAPITAL)”), „Podslushano Ufa” („Overheard in Ufa”), „ILOVEPUBLIC BREST” etc. Some groups („MY HERO MILEY” (dedicated to American singer and actress Miley Cyrus), „Derzkaya Krasotka” („Daring Beauty”), „Political Matryoshka! Anti Maidan!”, „Osnovy Schastlivoi Sem’I” („Fundamentals of a Happy Family”) etc.) attached screenshots of

⁵ Temy „VKontakte” 2015 (*Topics VKontakte 2015*), see: www.vk.com.

⁶ „Social’nyeseti v Rossii, zima 2015-2016 (Social Networks in Russia, Winter 2015-2016)”, in *Kompetencii*, 20 January 2016, see: www.hr-media.ru, accessed on 05.I.2017.

„VKontakte” personal pages of those killed or their photos to the posts about the incident.

In general, the mourning posts were quite similar. The visual content included images depicting the tragic event (those of the plane and the dead), and canonical symbols of sorrow (a candle, a mourning ribbon, two carnations etc.).

The 10-month-old Darina Gromova, who was called the main passenger of the crashed aircraft, became a symbol of the tragedy both for „VKontakte” users and the media in general. Her photo was the most commonly published one in groups, regardless of their thematic orientation („Carpediem”, „Ya Vybirayu Sport” („I Choose Sport”), „Tipichnaya Devushka TD” („Typical Girl”), „Ya♥Basketbol!” („I♥Basketball!”), „FC BARCELONA”, „Shedevry Literaturny/Knigi”, „Tipichnyi Kiev” etc.). In addition, communities dedicated to this girl were created: „Darina Glavnyi Passazhir-Murmanskaya Oblast” („Darina the Main Passenger-Murmansk Region”), which was blocked later for an abrupt change of the subjects by its administrators; „DARINA-GLAVNYI PASSAZHIR-REIS 9268” („DARINA IS THE MAIN PASSENGER-FLIGHT 9268”), which is no longer functioning, all posts have been removed; „Darina Gromova-SemyaGromovykh-Vechnaya Pamyat'-Reis” („Darina Gromova-The Gromov Family-In Memoriam-Flight”), which has been deleted etc.

„Liking” the posts on the personal pages of the deceased and posting links to their accounts were frequent forms of reacting to the tragedy over Sinai in the analyzed social network. On November 3, 2015, the head of the „VKontakte” press service, Georgy Lobushkin, wrote: „It was already on Sunday, November 1, that the number of views of the „VKontakte” pages of some dead passengers became hundreds and thousands of times higher. In some cases, the viewing statistics soared to 35.000 times. This is one of the most record (but also one of the most dramatic) scores in the whole history of „VKontakte”. On the initiative of journalists searching for scoops, the number of views of one of the „VK” pages would reach 3 million in two days, -this is what the scale of the tragedy was like. „VKontakte” images had never been „liked” so many times over such a short period as the photo of the „main passenger”.⁷

Indeed, one of the most frequently visited pages was the one of Tatyana Gromova, mother of the 10-month-old Darina. The page is still functioning, and, judging by the marks, people continue viewing it. The

⁷ G. Lobushkin, „The catastrophe that occurred with the flight # 7K9268, became the most media tragedy of our time”, available at: www.facebook.com, accessed on 20.III.2018.

last entry (October 15, 2015) saying „The main passenger”, with an attached photograph of her daughter leaning against the glass and looking at aircrafts, received the greatest amount of feedback from „VKontakte” users right after the tragedy and during 2015-2016. Our observations show that by November 12, 2015, this post had received the „I like” mark 1.454.051 times, and ten days later, this number had grown by almost one hundred thousand (1.553.967). Having turned to T. Gromova’s page a year after, we saw that users continued to react to the tragedy by clicking the „I like” button: on September 20, 2016, the marks amounted to 1.726.539; on October 6, 2016 to 1.728.309; on October 31, 2016 to 1.735.972. The social network participants also reacted to other entries on the wall. For example, a photo of a pregnant Tatiana and her husband of January 26, 2015 (the 40th entry down from the last one, which means that the page had not just been visited, but carefully viewed), had 111.573 „I like” marks as of November 12, 2015, 147.912 as of October 6, 2016, and 148.969 by the anniversary of the tragedy on October 31, 2016.

Such a reaction of users can be noticed on other personal pages of the dead, although the quantitative indicators there are lower (due to a weaker coverage in the media and the „VKontakte” social network). For example, the last entry (October 29, 2015) on the wall of the deceased Victoria Sevryukova „*I never thought that #Egypt would cause me so many positive emotions*”, with pictures of her vacation had 114.075 „I like” marks as of November 11, 2015; 124.359 as of October 10, 2016 and 125.086 as of October 31, 2016. The entry with her photo of July 6, 2015 (the 64th one down from the last entry) had scored 1243 „I like” marks by November 22, 2015; on October 6, 2016, this number equaled 1552 and on October 31, 2016, it amounted to 1560.

Results

In the social and humanitarian spheres, we are dealing not with activities, but with play. Technologies were born and developed in the field of activity, where it is possible to clearly distinguish a person or a subject, on the one hand, and material converted into a product, on the other hand. Not only to distinguish, but also to oppose them to each other. The material can resist everything that is done to it. He can be very complex and stubborn, but he is never malicious. The material has no intentions at all, it does not have its own goals, all the more, and the goals are opposite to those of a person or subject of activity. And in

politics as in the humanitarian sphere, such a simple division and opposition is impossible. Politics is a game of actors pursuing different goals, and often opposing and antagonistic.

It should be noted that it is not only communities and users of the „VKontakte” network but also the media that turned to pages of the dead. In the opinion of the above-mentioned G. Lobushkin, *„any new bit of information rose in to the top of the latest news amid the information vacuum. And having got their hands on the lists of the victims, journalists rushed to social networks. „VKontakte”, for obvious reasons, was at the forefront of the firing line. The media rick had no pity for anyone, be they alive nor dead. News bulletins contained references and links to both the accounts of the deceased and to those of their relatives or just people who had taken pictures against the background of a similar airplane”*.⁸

The materials „A Large Family Killed on Board the Aircraft that Crashed in Egypt” (Life News, October 31, 2016), „Flight 9268 Passengers: Victims Remembered in Social Networks” (MetroNews, November 1, 2016), „Last Photos of the Youngest Passenger of the Collapsed Liner Appear Online” (Komsomolskaya Pravda, October 31, 2016), „Yulya and Verochka Died in the Plane Crash!”, „Last Photos of the Passengers Killed in the Air Disaster” (Komsomolskaya Pravda, October 31, 2016), „Aviation Gave, Aviation Hath Taken Away” (Komsomolskaya Pravda, November 3, 2016) etc., used photos of the dead copied from their personal pages in social networks. Screenshots and citations of entries in the social network were added to some of those photos. For example, the text „An A321 passenger Sevryukova was in Egypt for the first time and wanted to be back” (November 1, 2015), contained a hyperlink to her page and quotes from her wall provided by the RIA Novosti news agency.

Thus, for both „VKontakte” users and journalists, personal pages of the deceased acted as a source of information, but there was also a significant difference, because their use by the social network members performed not so much the function of informing about the victims of the air disaster as a memorial function.

A vivid example of speculation on the tragedy over Sinai in the „VKontakte” social network is the group „7K9268/AIRBUS A321/GLAVNYI PASSAZHIR itovary” („THE MAIN PASSENGER and goods”), which had originally been positioned as a memory group (the word „goods” was added to the name later). The first entry is dated November 2. The wall contained photos of Darina Gromova, other passengers and the crew, screenshots of their personal pages, a list of

⁸ G. Lobushkin, „The catastrophe that occurred with the flight”.

those killed in the background of an image of a burning candle, a black-and-white photo of a plane with a mourning tape indicating the flight number and the date of the crash, a video „In memory of all those killed in the plane crash on October 31, 2015”, poems of sorrow, audio recordings, etc. Hashtags with the words „tragedy”, „Egypt”, „St. Petersburg”, „We mourn”, „RIP”, „airbus321” and others were also added to the posts.

The group’s orientation changed in two days-with the post „Now you can pay tribute by buying a T-shirt!”. The next two entries were just as provocative: „A T-shirt with the main passenger! Finally!”, „Our sweatshirt with the Main Passenger will warm you with this cold tragic fall!”. Six „mournful” entries on the wall were followed by another text, advertising in nature, with openly flaming offers: „DISCOUNTS FOR RELATIVES OF THE DEAD!!!”. Starting from November 10, the entries on the wall were only trolling ones („A *We mourn* pillow. To be on sale soon!” etc.). One of the posts hinted at the fact that the provocation was coming from a neighboring state: „*We reiterate that for the residents of Ukraine, we offer free delivery of the product!*”.

The trolling manifested itself in the fact that the administration created posts simulating comments of participants, who were allegedly asking about the availability of goods or leaving feedback on products received: „I bought my son a hat so that all kids at school could see him mourning. Thank you very much!”, „I had ordered myself a T-shirt, it finally arrived the other day. Everything is just great, everyone will know that I am grieving the most! And do you plan on selling panties with the *Main Passenger* image?” etc.

The analysis shows that the organizers of the group achieved their destructive goals, as the subscribers were emotionally reacting to such posts in the comments. Some users realized that this was a deliberate provocation and called for the closure of the community. They shared links with the online platform „Change.org”, where a petition „On taking measures with regard to the group that sells souvenirs featuring photos of the A321 air crash victims” was created and sent to the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Russian Federation. According to the resource, „the petition won with 3497 signatures”.⁹ The last entry in the community was made on November 12. At that time, it consisted of 968 people. Soon the group was blocked.

⁹ „O prinjatiimer k gruppe, torgujushhejsuvenirami s fotozhertvaviakatastrofy A321” („On taking measures towards the group selling souvenirs bearing the images of the A321 plane crash victims”, available at: www.change.org, accessed on 05.I.2017.

Thus, if we talk about popularity as the ultimate goal of Internet trolls,¹⁰ the group „7K9268/AIRBUS A321/THE MAIN PASSENGER and goods” achieved it to a certain extent, as its content was widely discussed in the network and received negative media coverage. In our opinion, an important marker of the trolling nature of the analyzed community is the following posting by the administration: „Look, we have been written about, too :) Order T-shirts more actively” with reference to the material „Ukrainian Nationalists Ordering Souvenirs with the Photo of the Crashed A321” by Life News.

The use of memorial resources for trolling has already fallen into the zone of public attention. For example, one of the US news websites described cyber-hooliganism on the memorial page „Remembering Isabella Grasso” in the US segment of the Facebook social network.¹¹ Trolling, according to scientists, poses a serious threat to the moral situation on the Internet¹² and information security of users.¹³

Another conclusion that can be drawn on the example of the community „7K9268/AIRBUS A321/THE MAIN PASSENGER and goods” is that Internet trolls are developing new forms of activity, thus not only invading someone else’s communicative space, but also constructing their own one in the form of a thematic group.

The content of the specialized closed group „[CHERNYI✚☞ YASHCHIK] aviakatastrofaKogalymavia 9268” („[BLACK ✚☞ BOX] Kogalymavia 9268 air crash”), now functioning as an open group called „[CHERNYI✚☞ YASHCHIK] AviatsiyaiAviakatastrofy” („[BLACK ✚☞ BOX] Aviation and air crashes”), was studied separately. The choice of this community for analysis was due to the fact that it was not spontaneously created for the event under consideration (the first entry is dated February 29, 2012, i. e. three and a half years before the tragedy) and is aimed at collecting „*accessible Internet material connected with any air*

¹⁰ M. M. Akulich, „Trolling v social’nyhsetjah: vozniknovenieirazvitiie” („*Trolling in Social Networks: Genesis and Evolution*”), in *VestnikRossijskogouniversitetadruz’bbynarodov. Serija: Sociologija*, no. 3, 2012, pp. 30-37.

¹¹ C. Famiglietti, „Cyber-trolls vandalize Facebook page for Isabella Grasso”, available at: www.glencove.patch.com, accessed on 15.I.2017.

¹² J. Shin, „Morality and Internet Behavior: A study of the Internet Troll and its relation with morality on the Internet”, in McFerrin K. et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology&Teacher Education; International Conference*; 2008, pp. 2834-2840.

¹³ A. A. Bochaver, K. D. Hlomov, „Kiberbulling: travlja v prostranstvesovremennyhtehnologii” („Kiberbulling: Hounding in the Space of modern Technologies”), in *Psihologija. ZhurnalVyshejsbkoľjekonomiki*, no. 3, 2014, pp. 177-191.

crashes, air incidents, including UNCENSORED negotiations of crews, video and photo shooting of aviation incidents". In addition to the thematic orientation and period of existence, this community was also chosen for analysis because of its large number of members (at the time of the research (November 2015) it had 15,012 participants) and the specifics of those participants (according to the administration, among them, there are „many active pilots, employees of aviation and other structures”).

One of the characteristics of the group that is significant for the study is its non-memorial nature („not a memory group”, as said in its description), which fundamentally distinguishes it from most of the other „VKontakte” communities thematically associated with the tragedy over Sinai and representing primarily emotional feedback from users. The communities that we included in this category include: „KrushenieSamoleta 31.10.2015 Pamyat’ Pogibshim!” („Crash of the Aircraft on October 31, 2015. Memory to the dead!”) having 55 subscribers, which is currently functioning under the name „DevochkiAngely” („Girls Angels”), „Lyudi, Kotorye Pogibli v Aviakatastrofe” („People who Died in a Plane Crash”) with 22 subscribers, „AIRBUS A321 METROJET-REIS 9268” („FLIGHT 9268”) with 240 subscribers, „KrushenieReisa #7K9268 Sledovavshego is Egipta” („Crash of the flight # 7K9268 en route from Egypt”) with 1806 members etc. There were practically no comments left below their posts.

The chronological scope of the study is limited by the time of postings on the topic under study: October 31-November 23, 2015 in the group. According to our calculations, over that period, the administration made 59 posts related to the tragedy. The greatest number of them were made on the first day of the tragedy (22 posts), followed by November 1 (5 posts), November 2 (9 posts), November 3 (6 posts), November 4 (1 post), November 6 (3 posts), November 8 (2 posts), November 9, 12, 13, 16, 17 (one post per day), November 18, 19, 23 (two posts per day). All of them were informative, in accordance with the principled intention of the administration not to create „senseless volatile posts, as done by many other communities. We post only when there is an information occasion”. Compare: in September, the administration published one post.

The position of the group is characterized by the message „admins <...> welcome the plurality of opinions. And your opinion, based on information from certain sources or on analysis or guesses, also has the right to exist”. Nevertheless, the administration tried to monitor the order in the

community, it considered „*insulting interlocutors as inadmissible*”, asked to delete such comments or blocked users.

Our calculations show that over the analyzed period (October 31-November 23, 2015), users left 4875 comments (with an average of 203 per day), and the „I like” button was clicked 3788 times (with an average of 158 per day). The group did not have a „Share” button at that time, so it could not be used. The majority of the „I like” marks (201) were received by the post „Ekipazh” („Crew”) of November 1, containing photos of the crew members. The biggest number of comments (882) were left to the video post „Meeting on the Results of the Investigation of the Causes of the A321 Crash over Sinai” (November 17, 2015), where the head of the FSB, A. Bortnikov, said: „*It can be unequivocally said that this is a terrorist act*”.

The analysis shows that the first post about what had happened was „URGENT! The Russian passenger plane A 321 en route from Egypt to St. Petersburg disappeared from the radar screens” was published at 10:59 a. m. with no to the source and that an identical message was posted on the website of the RBK news agency at 10:35, which allows us to acknowledge the prompt work of the community administration.

Performing the function of informing about the event, the group posted lists of the passengers and crew, communicated the flight history with reference to the Flightradar24 service, the number of bodies extracted from the debris, the time of the departure of the Cairo-St. Petersburg flight with the passengers’ bodies, posted photos of Airbus A321 , the infographics „How old are Russian airplanes?”, a photo report from Pulkovo airport with relatives of passengers, a screenshot of the website of the American CNN news channel with the data provided by NASA EOSDIS Worldview on the weather over the Sinai peninsula, photos and videos from the site of the crash, a video of the press conference of representatives of the Kogalymavia airlines etc.

It was noticed that the administration reacted to user reports on behalf of the group and provided comments on various issues: when and on what grounds black-box recordings can be published, where the sources of information are from, why the pilots did not transmit any distress signal or did not contact the air traffic controllers, whether a dash camera can be installed on board, whether there could be a thermal flash from an engine explosion, etc.

The study found that the sources of information used by the group often included other media („Gazeta.ru”, „Novaya Gazeta”, „RBK”,

„RIA Novosti”, „Interfax”, „Argumentyi Fakty”, „Lenta.ru”, „Vesti.Ru”, „Life News”, „Novosti Mail.Ru”, „Ekho of Moskv”, „Chastnyi Korrespondent”, „Nasha Gazeta”, „Krym”, „Forbes”, „Komsomolskaya Pravda”, „Moskovsky Komsomolets”, „Politonline.ru”, „yaodessit.com (social and information site of Odessa)”, „UralPolit.Ru (district news agency of the Urals and Western Siberia)” etc.).

Due to the specifics of the group members, the main topic discussed was that of the causes of the tragedy and the people responsible for it. Prior to the official announcement of the terrorist act, the cause of the crash put forward by the users had three main versions: „Technical problems with the aircraft”, „Actions of ISIS (a terrorist organization banned in Russia)”, „Terror act”. None of these answers was unanimously supported or strongly denied.

Among the technical problems, engine damage and issues with the aircraft’s tail were mentioned, with detailed explanations given concerning the possible development of events and similar examples provided. As a rule, discussions of a technology failure were accompanied by the advancement of one of the two versions of its causes (poor repair or insufficient pre-flight inspection of the aircraft) and identification of the perpetrators (the airline was mentioned the most). In turn, opponents in the group provided counter-arguments for each stance.

In the first days after the crash, the second cause of the tragedy presumed by users, i. e. „Actions of ISIS (a terrorist organization banned in Russia)”, appeared in the version that ISIS members could have shot down the plane from the ground. Such guesses were also criticized in an argumented way.

The statement that the cause of the incident was a terrorist act appeared in the group on the very first day after the crash of the aircraft. This version also had supporters and opponents. Discussing it, users stated with the same frequency claimed that the authorities „*would benefit from admitting that it was a terrorist act*” and that they „*would not benefit from admitting that it was a terrorist act*”. In our opinion, such a position was a consequence of zero confidence in the very possibility of revealing the true cause of the tragedy.

Among those responsible for the tragedy, the group members also listed the security service at Sharm El-Sheikh International Airport, where the blown up Russian plane had departed from, and shared stories about inspections at Egyptian airports. In most of the reviews, the level of inspections was evaluated negatively.

The results of our study show that 55 texts negatively characterized the activities of the USA and its president in connection with the tragedy. Users claimed, „*All the evil in the world comes from America*”, „*ISIS is the work of the US. It is sponsored by it*”, „*it can directly indicate the involvement of the US special services in the tragedy (including Obama himself*” etc.

The general array of the posts retrieved included an insignificant amount of texts on Syria (102 entries, i. e. 0.2%). Most often it was mentioned as the site of Russia's military actions. Part of the users spoke disapprovingly about this fact and considered it the cause of the tragedy. Another part of the users expressed support for the Russian president's decision to intervene in the military conflict („*As for the military actions, we are doing everything right, at least, refugees from Syria do not come to us in crowds*”).

In connection with the topic of Syria and some others, users mentioned the Russian president V. Putin (122 comments in total, which is 0.25% in the total array of the selected entries in the group). In general, the interest in his personality is natural and fits into the overall trend, since in 2015, by the number of personal references (7.903.000) the Russian president was the leader in the „VKontakte” social network. In the array of the selected posts, the attitude of users to his activities can be divided into three groups: 85 approving mentions, 29 disapproving mentions, 8 neutral or vague mentions. One of the users composed a poem that ironically portrayed those who accuse the head of the country of every misfortune: „*Here comes the hail and rain-Putin is the one to blame! Kittens left behind by cat-Putin is to blame for that! Lucy Locket lost her pocket-Who is guilty?... Yes, you've got it!*”.

The second most important topic in the group was that of grief and sympathy for the relatives of the deceased. Those feelings were expressed in the canonical formulas of condolence: „*Rest in peace... We mourn*”, „*How horrible! Lord, help your loved ones cope with the pain of loss. We grieve*”, „*May they rest in the Heavenly Kingdom. Now all these angels are in heaven*”. Another option used in such situations in social networks is the indication of the geolocation („*Karelia mourns*”, „*Surgut mourns*”, „*I am writing from Almaty. Dear residents of St. Pete, may peace be with you... May the sky no longer cry where you are. Kazakhstan is with you*”), although in the general array of the selected texts, such cases were not numerous.

This topic was developed in poems reflecting the emotional state of users („*Only a few minutes in the air...*”, „*Gone! They were all such different people...*”) or characterizing the causes of the incident („*ISIS put an end to*

this vacation...”, „It so happens that people’re nothing but a coin. All for the sake of global goals to be achieved...” etc.).

To express grief, participants of the group posted photos of the dead passengers and crew from the „VKontakte” personal pages of the latter or shared links to their accounts. Despite the fact that the Gromov family, especially Darina, was mentioned in the community multiple times, links to the page of the child’s mother were not found during the research. The administration also used photos of the dead in five posts.

Some users considered such an expression of mourning irrelevant and criticized the administration of the group and other participants. This position caused an argument in the group, but the administration promised, *„there will be no such posts anymore”*.

The theme of mourning was also expressed in the multimedia content. As their profile pictures, users set photos of a burning candle, a mourning tape; edited photos of Darina Gromova (e. g., a picture of the girl as a little angel with wings and a halo looking at a plane in the sky), images or photos of an airplane with a candle and inscriptions *„We remember. We mourn”* or *“# 7K9268. We grieve”*. The inscriptions often included emoji or stickers expressing grief, images of an airplane, a falling star, an angel, hands folded in a prayer etc. The attached soundtracks corresponded to the general mood (songs *„PosledniiVzlet”/The Last Take-off* by S. Tychinsky, *„Samolet”/„Airplane”* by Zemfira, *„Etovse, chtoostanetsyaposlemya”/„This is all that I will leave behind”* by „DDT”, *„Ty znaesh’, takkhochetsyazhit”/„You know, I want to live so much”* by Rozhdestvo, *„#GlavnyiPassazhir”/„#TheMainPassenger”* by PitCH etc.), homemade slideshows with photos and names of the deceased and video materials.

Throughout the entire analyzed period, the keynote topic in the user entries was that of distrust of the media. The mass media (in general or their particular types) were accused of bias (*„If you stop perceiving television as a reliable source of information, Jesus will smile at you”, „media hoax”*) and of using the tragedy to improve their position in rankings. At the same time, there were polar opinions in the group. Some participants considered it necessary to find out the official version of events, and on the other hand, journalists were accused of deliberately distorting information in favor of the authorities (*„They will tell us what they are ordered from above”, „...they publish only what the „supreme people” allow them to”).* Realizing with displeasure the power potential of the media (*„television is a way to control the crowd”, „Our world is governed by the media, after all. They will*

make everything be their way. And it is like that in every country”), users gave a negative characteristic to the audience as well („*We are just a flock, we believe what we are told by the media!*”). According to some opinions, one can trust only independent media or only foreign ones.

The topic of distrust was developed in various versions of the statement „*Nobody will know the truth anyway*”. Throughout the analyzed period, phrases carrying the same meaning were found in the comments 58 times.

Thus, the study of the contents of the specialized closed group „[BLACK ✚☞ BOX] Kogalymavia 9268 air crash” allows us to draw a conclusion about the absence of unanimity among its participants on virtually all the issues discussed, starting from the causes of the tragedy and ending with acceptable forms of expressing sorrow for the dead.

There were other types of discussion of the tragedy over Sinai. Thus, the group „Netipichnaya Makhachkala” („Non-typical Makhachkala”), established in 2012, having 533.164 participants in November 2015 and described as „*the most popular Dagestan community*”, accounted for five posts on the catastrophe during the events under consideration. Four of them were of a memorial nature (on a black background, one could see the inscription „*St. Pete, we are with you. Flight 9268*” and an attached audio recording „NON-TYPICAL MAKHACHKALA-WE REMEMBER” (entry of October 31) etc.). The last post with the inscription „*If a plane crash deserves a minute of silence, the death of the children of Syria and Palestine deserves an eternal silence*” on the gray background (entry of November 8) stands out among the rest. This entry made by the administration continued the discussion started by users as early as October 31.

In total, 5493 comments were left to five posts, the „I like” button was pressed 17.450 times, the „Share” function was used 1041 times. Upon the review of the community, it was noticed that all the indicated posts had been deleted, and the first entry of the group was dated March 10, 2016.

The study of the thematic space of the retrieved texts shows that the topic of the causes of the tragedy and those responsible for it, significant formembers of „[BLACK ✚☞ BOX] Kogalymavia 9268 air crash”, was barely raised by the „Non-typical Makhachkala” community. Besides, only a few users shared links to materials about the tragedy in

the media. Sometimes they left links to the „VKontakte” personal pages of the killed, but such entries were not numerous.¹⁴

The theme of mourning and discussions about condolences were of paramount significance in the group. We have divided all materials of this block into four thematic branches. The first one is expressing sorrow and condolences: „*May Allah forgive them of their sins, Insha Allah they are in paradise*”, „*Allah, give patience and strength to the relatives of the deceased. This is very painful*”, „*May the soil cover them ever so lightly*” etc. It should be noted that condolences were often accompanied by religious formulas, which is explained by the specifics of the region having strong Muslim positions. Condolences also came from other cities in Russia and neighboring countries: „*Nizhny Novgorod mourns with the residents of St. Petersburg*”, „*Baku Mourns*”, „*Krasnodar MOURNS! WHAT A HUGE TRAGEDY!*”, „*Yerevan mourns with you*”, „*Asbkehabat mourns with you guys!*”. Some members of the group remembered or pointed out Darina Gromova („*a terrible tragedy #themainpassenger was Darinochka Gromova... The baby had just turned 10 months...*” etc.) and posted various versions of her photo.

The theme of grief was developed in poems posted by users (a total of 13) on the crash of the aircraft, which at that time were popular on the Internet: „*Only a few minutes of flight*”, „*The plane lost speed for 9 minutes*”, „*We are flying home... So they thought, they were waited for*”, etc.

Like in other groups, users were expressing grief, added emoji to posts, including those representing an airplane, hands folded for a prayer, a broken heart, etc.; posted down images expressing sorrow (a black-and-white photo of an airplane with a mourning ribbon and the inscription „*#7K9268. We Mourn*”, drawings of an airplane with a burning candle, photos or screenshots of personal pages of the deceased on „VKontakte” etc.).

The entries of the second branch, in our opinion, were of a flaming nature and were intended to reflect the irreconcilable position of some of the subscribers to the group. Those were accusations of those who sympathized with the victims of the plane crash, but did not mourn the dead Muslims in Syria and other countries. Some users posted photos of wounded or dead Syrian children, accompanied by various inscriptions (for example, „*Syria. Flight 9268 happens there every day*”).

The third branch arose in response to the second one and was opposite to it, „*it is necessary to grieve for all the dead*”. Authors of texts with

¹⁴ Temy „VKontakte” 2015 (*Topics VKontakte 2015*), see: www.vk.com, accessed on 05.I.2017.

such a position asserted, „Your aggression has reached the point that in your opinion, no one else, except Muslims, deserves pity”, „where does Syria have to do with this, dumbheads? there is a war going on there! there will be someone dying, but in this case, whole families died just like that, for nothing, without no idea, no war, no religion involved” etc. One user posted an illustration with two people (a skinhead wearing a T-shirt with fascist symbols and a bearded man wearing a „Caucasus is power” vest) and the inscription „There are no bad nations, there are sick people”.

The specific feature of the fourth thematic branch selected by us lies in the reinforcement of the position advocated in the second and third thematic branches by means of religious views. It manifested itself in the posted opinions explaining what it means to be a true Muslim and whom a Muslim can or should mourn.¹⁵ The discussion was accompanied by mutual accusations of misinterpreting the Koran.¹⁶

An important feature of the lack of unanimity in the group regarding the crash of the aircraft is also the fact that these posts sometimes involved entries on other topics (football match, sale of baseball caps etc.) and that participants reacted to the event in question by adding inappropriate emoji (emotions of joy etc.). A number of illustrations mocking the tragedy (a photo of a crashed airplane with the inscription „This is <...> what a vacation in Egypt looks like”, a „VKontakte” notification icon „A new gift” with the inscription „Egypt sent you a gift” and a photo of a burning aircraft etc.) were illustrative. Pictures/photographs with obscene inscriptions, posted with a view to offending the opponent, were part of the prominent content.

A few audio recordings expressed a certain ideological position of users („You forgot about Allah!”, a fragment of the speech of a Muslim from the film „Kandahar” etc.); in some cases, grief for the dead (Zemfira’s song „Airplanes”) etc.

Thus, the results of the study show that users of the „VKontakte” social network, having chosen the tragedy over Sinai on October 31, 2015 as a focus of information attention, primarily stuck to the context of the mourning theme and posted textual, illustrative, audio and video content of a memorial nature. As a resonant event the tragedy served as a source for trolling. In some communities, the air crash became the

¹⁵ Yu. Ebzeeva, N. Dubinina, „Discursive Practices of Contemporary Radical Islam in the Countries of the European Union and Eurasian Customs Union”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 26, 2017, pp. 109-116.

¹⁶ Yu. Ebzeeva, I. Karabulatova, „Transcultural Language Personality: statement of the problem and conceptual space”, in *Man in India*, no. 97 (23), 2017, pp. 255-262.

subject of discussions, the orientation of which depended on the specifics of the group.

Discussion

The term „*social network*” was introduced in 1954 by a sociologist from the Manchester School, James Barnes, in *Classes and meetings in the Norwegian island parish*, which was included in the collection „*Human relations*”. He developed and supplemented the approach, invented in the 1930s, to the study of interrelations between people using sociograms, that is, visual diagrams in which individuals are represented as points, and the connections between them are in the form of lines.¹⁷ However, the idea of a social network as a structure, whose elements are actors (individuals or organizations), was anticipated by scientists in the late eighties—the French sociologist David Emil Durkheim and his German colleague Ferdinand Tönnis practically described the nature of this phenomenon in their theories and studies of social groups.

Understanding of the social network has, of course, changed since that time, a significant role in this was played by the development of technologies, thanks to which online networks appeared. In this paper, we will understand the social network as a platform (online service or website) for building social networks or social relations between people who, for example, have common interests, experience, real-life connections or belong to one area of activity. A social network consists of the personal channels of each user (usually they are called profiles), their social connections, as well as a number of additional services.

Interpretation forms a certain level of a person’s worldview, which allows him to navigate in the world at the level of which he is a social subject. It is legitimate to assert that such a world correlates both with direct perception of it by every person, and with the fact that a concrete person „overcomes” this world, since the process of cognition is dynamic and this perception is complicated and enriched. That is, the discourse is about some theoretical concepts that will not only state the intuitive perception of the world by consciousness, but that such perceptions will lead to the formation of some stable scientific picture of the world.¹⁸

¹⁷ V. L. Silaeva, *Specificity of communication on the Web. M.*, 2010.

¹⁸ I. Mkrtumova, I. Karabulatova, A. Zinchenko, „Political extremism of the youth as an ethnosocial deviation in the post-soviet electronic information society”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, volume 17, no. 4, 2016, pp. 79-87.

Political technologies with a high probability guarantee the result in standard situations, and in an unconventional situation, even those who have no idea about any technologies, but act simply, primitively, situationally.

We are wrong about the nature of the Islamic State in at least two things. We interpret jihadism as a monolithic phenomenon and try to apply Al-Qaeda's logic to an organization that completely eclipsed it. Supporters of the Islamic state, with whom I have communicated, still call bin Laden the honorary title „Sheikh Osama”. But jihadism has changed dramatically since Al-Qaeda's heyday (from 1998 to about 2003), and many jihadists frankly despise its current leaders and their goals.

Bin Laden saw terrorism as a prologue to the Caliphate, which he did not expect to see in his lifetime. His organization was flexible and worked as a network of geographically dispersed autonomous cells. The Islamic state, on the contrary, needs territory in order to remain legitimate, and is administered centrally, from the top down (the bureaucracy there is divided into military and civil, and the territory into provinces).¹⁹

We are mistaken in one more thing: in our conscientious, but not quite honest attempts to deny the religious medieval nature of the Islamic state. Peter Bergen, the author of the first interview with bin Laden, published in 1997, named his first book *The Holy War Incorporated*, including to emphasize bin Laden's belonging to the modern, secular world. Bin Laden treated terrorism as a corporate franchise. He demanded certain political concessions—for example, the withdrawal of USA troops from Saudi Arabia. His infantry confidently oriented in modern world.

The losing generals are familiar with the standard situations from past military experience, from the history and lessons of military art. And successful commanders standardize also those situations which can build in the imagination, to dream up. They just simply come up with new situations, think through them to the sequence of all their moves and possible enemy responses.

It is known that the engagement of the media lies on the surface, it is simply evident. The same thing happens with other social institutions:

¹⁹ P. Burnap, M. L. Williams, L. Sloan, O. Rana, W. Housley, A. Edwards, V. Knight, R. Procter, A. Voss, „Tweeting the terror: modelling the social media reaction to the Woolwich terrorist attack”, in *Social Network Analysis and Mining*, June 2014, available at: www.link.springer.com, accessed on 19.I.2017.

the police, the prosecutor's office, even with business. For the needs of political technology began to buy any organization, institution and entire institutions. However, the very situation of the tragedy associated with the death of people has a great emotional message, it actualizes the primary basic fears, and therefore has a huge potential for impact on society. All this controversy around the „right” and „wrong” Islam causes associations with the preparation of the use of poisonous fish fugu. A bit mistaken, and good, poisoning. So can already go on eating sturgeon, cod and bull-calves in tomato sauce? But no, the army of „cooks” and traders from religion is too big.²⁰

There is a temptation to spread this picture-jihadists as modern secular people, covering modern political aspirations with medieval costumes-on the IG. But everything that the Islamic state has been doing so far would have looked comical, had it not been for a sincere, deliberate intention to restore civilization back to the legislative atmosphere of the 7th century, and then bring humanity to the apocalypse.²¹

The representatives of the Islamic state and their supporters are the most readily informed about this. They speak of „modernity” with disgust. In conversations, they insist that they do not want-and can not-deviate from the foundations laid down in Islam by the Prophet Muhammad and his first followers. They often express themselves with quotations and hints, for non-Muslims that sound strange and pretentious, but refer to the traditions and sacred texts of early Islam.²²

For example, in September, Sheikh Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani, the main speaker of the Islamic state, appealed to Muslims of Western countries, such as Canada and France, to call a pagan and „smash his head with a stone”, poison him, crush him, or „poison him crops”. For the western ear, these Old Testament punishments-stoning, poisoning of fields-are comically combined with a very modern proposal to hit a pedestrian (as

²⁰ SmehSmeh.Comments. Blog Eduard Urazaev: Counterpropaganda IS-this is not political technology, and knowledge of Islam primarily, see: www.kavpolit.com, accessed on 20.III.2018.

²¹ E. Ermakova, M. Jilkisheva, G. Fayzullina, I. Karabulatova, Kh. Shagbanova, „The media end fiction: postmodernist discourse of contemporary terrorism in the context of apocalyptic rhetoric”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, volume 17, no. 2, 2016, pp. 61-69.

²² Ch. Beckett, „Fanning the Flames: Reporting Terror in a Networked World”, in *Center for Digital Journalism*, 22 September 2016, available at: www.cjr.org, accessed on 05.I.2017.

if wanting to show that the infidels can be razed and in a word too, Adnani also declared Secretary of State Kerry „*an uncircumcised old man*”).

It's not just a scold. Adnani's speech is full of references to theological and legal disputes, and the demand to destroy the crops of the enemy directly refers to Mohammed's orders not to touch well water and crops, unless the soldiers of Islam are on the defensive; and just in this case the Muslims in the lands of the infidels, kafirs, should shrink and use poison.²³

Here is the reality: the Islamic state is Islamic. Very Islamic. Yes, it attracts psychopaths and adventurers, mostly from unsettled Middle Eastern and European Muslims. But the religion professed by his most fanatical supporters is a coherent and even skilful interpretation of Islam.²⁴

Almost all important decisions and laws of the Islamic State refer to the so-called „*methodology of the Prophet*”, which in practice means following the prophecy and the example of Muhammad to the smallest detail. A Muslim can reject an Islamic state; most of them do so. But there is no point in pretending that an Islamic state is a non-religious, multi-party group with its theology-a theology that needs to be understood and that it is necessary to combat. Attempts to ignore the religious nature of the Islamic state have already forced the US to underestimate the threat and to support several stupid plans to fight it. We must understand the intellectual genealogy of the Islamic state and act so that it does not strengthen it even more, but on the contrary - let it burn in the fire of its own immoderate fanaticism.

Control over the territory is the foundation of the authority of the Islamic state in the eyes of its supporters. Where the Islamic state has power, it collects taxes, sets prices, arranges courts and offers the population services-from medicine and education to telecommunications.

²³ I. S. Karabulatova, B. Z. Akhmetova, K. S. Shagbanova, E. Loskutova, F. Sayfulina, L. Zamalieva, I. Dyukov, M. Vykhrystyuk, „Shaping positive identity in the context of ethnocultural information security in the struggle against the Islamic State”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, volume 17, no. 1, 2016 pp. 84-92

²⁴ S. Lyausheva, I. Karabulatova, Z. Zhade, N. Ilyinova, „The Islamic Ummam of Russia and ISIS”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, volume 19, no. 1, 2018, pp. 90-96.

Conclusion

The most popular at the moment can be called social networks like „VKontakte”, „Odnoklassniki”, „Maile.ru”, „FaceBook”, „Twitter”, „LiveJournal”. Social networks in PR-promotion now play a big role.

A permanent stay in the network can lead to information overload of the brain and adversely affect the mental and physical health of adolescents.²⁵ In addition, often young people, accustomed to getting acquainted „in absentia”, have difficulty in making real acquaintances. Since the process of communication occurs at a distance, interpersonal contacts are significantly impoverished. This leads to a decrease and underdevelopment of communication skills, the ability of adolescents to understand and read nonverbal signs of communication, it is more difficult to determine the emotional state of the interlocutor in a live communication and therefore it is more difficult to choose the right line of behavior.²⁶ The politicians of the Islamic state acting use these features of modern consumer social networks with the purpose of enhancing the impact on the audience and recruiting into their ranks. Fragmentary nature of communication in social networks, the ease of interrupting disagreeable contacts does not allow the teenager to learn to solve complex conflict situations of communication. Often conflicts that arise in online communication (for example, due to negative comments of photos, statuses, etc.) are transferred to real life.

Social networks have become a voluminous tool for getting information from users about events. With the help of „Instagram”, the events were exchanged with the eyes of not only the participants, but also the fans. It is with the help of social networks that the greatest scale of involvement in events is produced. The causes and consequences of these communication processes constitute a broad research field.

Acknowledgment: The authors performed this work within the framework of the grant RFBR 17-04-00607 „Ethnolinguistic and Cultural Screening of ISIS Technologies during Work on the Protest Behaviour of the Russian Youth”. This paper was financially supported

²⁵ I. Karabulatova, S. Galiullina, K. Kotik, „Terrorist threat in Russia: Transformation of confessional relationships”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, volume 18, no. 3m 2017, pp. 93-104.

²⁶ Yu. Ebzeeva, I. Mitrofanova, N. Avsineeva, „The Image of a Migrant in the Contemporary Russian TV Journalism Discourse”, in *Man in India*, no. 97 (23), 2017, pp. 525-532.

by Ministry of Education and Science of Russian Federation on the program to improve the competitiveness of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR University, RUDN-university) among the worlds leading research and education centers in the 2016-2020. This publication was supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Russian Federation (the Agreement number 02.A03.21.0008).