

The Nature of Strategic Narratives

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Анотація

Ефективність стратегічних комунікацій значною мірою ґрунтується на застосуванні відповідних наративів. У статті аналізуються походження та визначення наративів як соціального явища, розглядається структура наратива. Головна увага зосереджена на вирізненні рис, притаманних власне стратегічним наративам як основі стратегічних комунікацій. Доповнюються форми стратегічних наративів, а також наводяться приклади їх застосування у публічному управлінні. У висновку наводяться основні характеристики стратегічного наративу, пояснюється його місце в державно-управлінській діяльності. Загальне значення статті полягає у тому, що в Україні вивчення стратегічних наративів ще не здобуло поширення, в той же час впровадження стратегічних комунікацій на законодавчому та інституційному рівнях уже відбувається.

Ключові слова: стратегічні наративи, мета-наративи, стратегічні комунікації, публічне управління, повідомлення, аудиторія.

Abstract

The effectiveness of strategic communications is largely based on the use of appropriate narratives. This article analyzes the origin and definition of narratives as a social phenomenon, and is considered narrative structure. The main focus is on distinguishing characteristics of strategic narratives as the basis of strategic communications. The form of strategic narratives and examples of their

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use in public administration was complement. Finally are the main characteristics of strategic narrative explains its place in the state management. The total value of the article is that in Ukraine studying strategic narratives have not have wide-spread, while implementing strategic communications at the legislative and institutional levels already is started.

Key words: strategic narratives, meta-narratives, strategic communications, public administration, message, audience.

New mechanisms for achieving important social and economic transformations are initiated in public administration of Ukraine, strategic communications are among them. On September 22, 2015, the Road Map of Partnership Program on Strategic Communications was signed between National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine and NATO International Staff.

According to the “NATO Strategic Communications Policy” (NATO, 2009) Public Diplomacy, Public Relations, Military Public Relations, Information Operations, and Psychological Operations are the components of the strategic communications. To implement its functions constituents should base on the vision of their place in the overall picture of communication influences.

This means that, for example, the informative operation is been carried out not as a separate action, but according to the public policy tasks for its implementation. In this case, the concept of informative operation has a wider platform (narrative), which is based on a certain idea of the public policy. There are not enough researches of this phenomenon in Ukrainian science.

French philosopher J. - F. Lyotard considers the concept of narrative as a form of knowledge in the postmodern era. The scientist identifies a narrative function as a great hero, great dangers, great voyages, and great goal (Lyotard, 1987, p. 74). In general, this work reflects the relationship between society, science, and knowledge not referring to applied problems.

However, in the context of the theme of this article, the following philosopher's statement of the question is interesting, "to find out the name of the hero as responses to problems within the narrative naturally ask the question: who has the right to decide for society? Who is the subject whose prescriptions are norms for those they obligate?" And he gives an answer that can bring us to the characteristics of the strategic narrative: "The name of the hero is the people, the sign of legitimacy is the people's consensus, and their mode of creating norms is deliberation" (Lyotard, 1987, p.81).

Foreign researchers W. Labov, J. Waletzky, H. White, M. Bal studied the nature of narrative. Scientist A. Nünning compares classical and postmodern approaches to narratives. S. Tatham provides characteristics of strategic narratives.

American linguist W. Labov examines narratives as "one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred" (Labov, 1972, p.359).

The scientist's focus on linguistic, historical, and cultural aspects of the issue is quite noticeable, but we are interested in the management capacity of the phenomenon.

The distinction between narratives and strategic narratives, origin, and characteristics of strategic narratives including their application in the public administration are among the issues that need to be solved.

That characteristic is embodied in the concept of narrative. We can see the beginning of the narrative in folklore and its development due to the emergence of writing. For this reason, works of literature are expressive narrative mediums (all cultural works are aimed at the delivery of senses). We will focus on narrative as a component of the strategic communication in the public administration.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the nature of narratives to identify the distinctive features of strategic narratives and to base forms of strategic narratives

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in the public administration of Ukraine.

To express an idea to the public members as to the participants of communicative processes (also for the formation of their attitude to the idea) one should build a proper communication so that the message was directed to support and implementation of national goals. This direction of the message should demonstrate the unity of position and have a common conceptual framework.

One of the most respected foreign researchers W. Labov structured narrative model as follows: 1. Abstract; 2. Orientation; 3. Complicating Action; 4. Resolution; 5. Evaluation; 6. Coda (Labov, 1997).

Studying the interpretation of historical events chronicles, H. White calls the past “certain textual simulator interwoven events” (White, 2010). That means that it is not necessary to perceive narratives as an objective reflection of the facts.

Thus we approach to understanding the narrative as a structured story, which answers the questions about the origin, participants, circumstances, essence and results of the event, forms the attitude to it, and explains the meaning. However, the strategic narrative, as military personnel notice, is not just a set of words but more complex phenomenon using symbols and images, creating a holistic view of the events that are the foundation of the narrative. We can use the narratives of the US government in the war against terror as an example (Tatham, 2008).

For Ukraine, strategic narratives are, for example, protection against Russian aggression, the safety of citizens, fight against corruption, and reforms. Such strategic narratives are focused on national goals and embodied in different forms of communications. Messages unite, agree the impact of all the components of strategic communication and are available for understanding of the target audiences. V. Horbulin defines strategic narrative as “the key component of strategic communications, “a metanarrative, to the establishment of which all activities of strategic communications of the target audience and directed” (Horbulin, 2016).

W. Labov and J. Waletzky differentiate two functions of narrative: (1) referential and (2) evaluative. Moreover, these functions are inseparable, otherwise narrative does not make sense (Labov, Waletzky, 1967).

In other words, the narrator grounds on the conditions under which communication takes place. That takes into account previous events, the interest of the audience and so on. Narratives describe the real situation in order to make the reality more accessible to understanding as a result (Ozhevan, 2016). This has a positive effect on the perception senses by the audience and brings us to the understanding of the strategic narratives not as sociolinguistic sector phenomena but as public management ones. The features of the strategic narrative are that is not fixed in the form of a particular slogan or any text, image, action. It is also much more complicated phenomenon than the slogan that it presents. That metanarrative is not an instrument of operational action.

Then strategic narrative is a certain amount of unity of meanings, focused on a platform of ideas for national development.

G. Pocheptsov distributes narratives by function: counterstrategy, the strategy of maintaining, implementing a new, strategy of excuses, rebuttal strategy (Pocheptsov, 2008). Consequently, the state as a narrator may have enough opportunities to achieve strategic goals. For example, deny the view of other countries about its history (educational, informative discourses), encourage citizens to support the army (PSAs discourse), argue the reasons for low level of economic development (press conferences discourse, speeches, first officers' interview).

We can supplement these forms of strategic narratives and organize it by conventional principles: offensive, defensive, and binary. This division does not seem quite fundamental because during the implementation of specific communicative impact different approaches may be applied depending on the case:

- Counterstrategy – a reaction to the strategy pursued by opponents (symmetri-

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cal or asymmetrical);

- Maintaining – support of positive changes in the society (changes can be planned or situational);

- Implementation of new – the need to start a new line of conduct;

- Justification – an explanation of the reasons that influenced the emergence of a negative situation;

- Refutation – the denial of the existence of certain phenomena;

- Clarification – guidance information that allows revealing specific details of events;

- Advance – a reaction to the narrative which is predictable but not made public by the opponent;

- Silence – no visible action on physical, informational and virtual spaces, or such action, that will not be regarded by the opponent for some reason;

- Provocation – creating a situation where the opponent will have to respond quickly;

- Distortion – repeating the others' narratives with previously made corrections that alter meanings, not in favor of their opponents.

Forms Strategic narratives:

Offensive

Implementation of new; Provocation; Advancing

Defensive

Counterstrategy; Acquittal; Refutation

Binary

Curvature; Keeping; Specification; Silence

As examples of Ukrainian strategic narratives may be the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine as of July 16, 1990, and the Declaration of Independence of

Ukraine as of August 24, 1991, that declared conceptual changes in the country, explained the reasons for independence declaration, and pointed to the importance for the future (narrative of introducing a new). These documents summed narratives of Ukrainian dissidents, patriots, intellectuals about the long history of our country, and became the impetus for the narratives that have sustained and developed the idea of independence.

Despite the fact that Russia adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty as of June 12, 1990 (more than a month ahead of this step was made by Ukraine), Russian parapolitical groups constantly blame Ukraine that it “left Russia, illegally withdrew from the USSR”, and so on. This is a vivid example of counterstrategy as narrative, which aims to convince RF citizens of illegality in Ukrainian actions, betraying fraternal relations, and so on.

Today one of the most powerful strategic narratives is the protection against the military aggression of Russia. This metanarrative is featured by forms of counterstrategy, proactive denial, introducing of the new, and specification.

It is embodied also in the facti of the meetings of the state leadership with representatives of international organizations, leaders of other countries, appeals to citizens, posts of officials in social networks, monuments, production of books, films etc. For example, the State Agency for Filmmaking of Ukraine allocated UAH 24 million for the partial financing production of the film about the defense of Donetsk airport from Russian forces and illegal armed formations on occupied territories in 2014.

Another example of a metanarrative on this subject is the statement of Parliament of Ukraine “On repulsion the Russian army’s aggression and overcoming its consequences” dated April 21, 2015 (Supreme Council of Ukraine, 2015). The document consistently described the events of the occupation of Crimea, aggression in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, pointed to the violation of international

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acts claims by Russia, announced requirements for Russia to cease hostile action.

The annexation of Ukrainian territory by Russia in 2014 (Crimea, parts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions) was accompanied by narratives of historical justice, the protection of Russian citizens.

Conclusions

Having considered the nature of strategic narrative we can name the differences between narrative and strategic narrative (metanarrative, grandnarrative).

As narrative should be understood the content created and/or spread by anyone to describe or interpret certain social phenomena. Such narrative is directed at achieving personal and group objectives or goals of society and may not be consistent with other narratives. Each person is free to interpret the pervasive narrative or create an own one.

The strategic narrative is a multiform content designed by the state to implement strategic communications for achieving national goals. The government can be the only formal interpreter of the strategic narrative.

The common features include approaches to structuring narratives aimed at the interests of the recipient, the impact on its assessment of the information received.

The audience sees the strategic narrative through specific messages (state embodies them in the form of news media, public speaking of officials, and other). Only the agreed amount of messages generated by the state to achieve the objectives can be called the national strategic narrative. Thus, citizens operate at the level of discrete messages in physical, informational, virtual spaces. One of the effects of this phenomenon is that the strategic impact of reports is not necessarily understood by most of the publics. It is considered to be in compliance with practical tasks of public management.

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