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### **TOXIC SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS: THE PROBLEM OF IDENTIFYING SIGNS AND CONSTRUCTING TYPOLOGIES**

*The article implements the goal in the form of constructing a characteristic of the signs and typological criteria of toxic social communications. As a result of the conducted research, it is concluded that the semantic field of the concept of «toxic communication» can be associated with both a narrower and a wider range of meanings. The polymorphism of toxic social communications is stated, their general signs are logically indicated, which are manifested both in the simplest interpersonal (dyadic) interaction and in more complex (group-mediated) communication processes.*

*It is noted that in the social space one often has to deal with toxic social communications. Some of them have pronounced signs that can be easily recognized, some have a latent and shadowy origin. Both the first and the second are recognized by the disorganizing and destructive effects on both the individual psyche, body, and corporeality, and group (socio-psychic) structures and processes.*

*It is emphasized that in a rather narrow, etymological understanding, the meaning of the concept of «toxic communication» is associated with any externally introduced content capable of causing a reaction similar to a poisoning reaction in the medical sense. In the socio-communicative aspect, toxic communication is part of destructive activity (verbal or non-verbal), focused on creating dysfunctions or destroying the mechanisms of psychophysical health or social capital. It is emphasized that the allocation of destructive effects as a key feature of toxic communication does not allow separating it from manipulative and psychodestructive communication, since it is too narrow. Toxic communication in its meaning involves both short-term and long-term destructive (verbal or non-verbal) influence of some subjects on others, but destructive effects can manifest themselves in both open and disguised (latent) forms. It has been found that hyper-controlling or hypoprotective behavior; manifestations of envy and greed, on the one hand, reactions of resentment, humiliation, stress – on the other hand, along with other destructive emotions (fear/anxiety, guilt/shame, fatigue/exhaustion and exhaustion), sadness.*

**Key words:** *communications, toxic social communications, abusive communications, offensive communications, hate speech.*

**Problem statement.** In the social space, we often encounter toxic social communications. Some of them have obvious signs that can be easily recognized, while others have a latent and shadow origin. Both the former and the latter are recognized by their disorganizing and destructive effects both in relation to the individual psyche, body and corporeality, and to group (socio-psychic) structures and processes. Those studying toxic communications have to take into account not only the diversity of toxic communications, but also numerous disguises, veils, and prosocial presentations of such. Subjects producing such communications or mediating their use by others can act both openly and behind the scenes. This circumstance, however, motivates both the former and the latter to resort to searching for social legitimacy and reasons for toxic verbal and/or non-verbal behavior. By definition, “toxicity is any interaction directed at a subject that is intended to provoke and deliberately generate counterproductive controversy.”

As R. Henscom et al. note in their publication, “... toxicity may be directed at a community, an ideal, an organization, or another entity, and not necessarily ... at a specific person. Based on the proposed definition, toxicity always opposes itself to another entity, and therefore toxicity must always have a specific goal ...” [2]. The given definition is at least controversial and overly categorical (rigorous). According to the logic of the authors’ reasoning, any participant in communication who opposes or contrasts his point of view to someone communicates toxically, which is fundamentally wrong. Not every opposition or contrast of something or someone to someone is toxic. Contrast or opposition becomes toxic when it, at a minimum, delivers a verbal blow or creates a challenge (provocation) in an indirect form that resembles a verbal blow.

The second controversial point of the given definition is the inclusion of ideals or other abstract entities among the “targets” of toxic communication, which sounds strange in itself. Ideals and other abstract entities do not experience mental pain, as well as organizations structured within themselves as complex entities. Ultimately, the consequences of toxic communication are experienced exclusively by individuals, into whose boundaries this communication invades and at whom it is directed.

The authors of the article distinguish between manifestations of toxicity and negativity (negativism), illustrating them in the form of a diagram (see diagram 1).

Manifestations of negativity include constructive criticism, expression of opinions (points of view), emotionally charged debates (arguments), satire and sarcasm. In turn, the authors attribute attacks on the personality, hate speech, cyberbullying, trolling and calls for violence to manifestations of toxicity. At the same time, the researchers believe that all manifestations of negativity, including satire and sarcasm, cannot be toxic, which is not to be agreed with. Both satire and sarcasm imply ridicule, and therefore attacks on the weaknesses of the personality, which can be accompanied

by the attacker experiencing mental pain and a number of negative feelings related to the toxic group: humiliation, infringement, shame, wounded pride, etc.

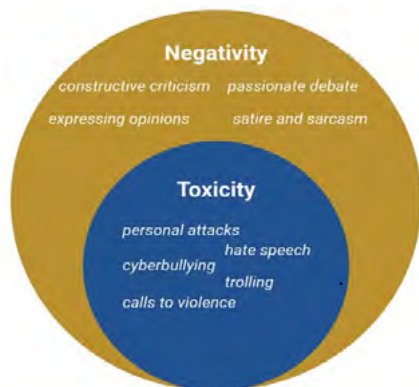


Diagram 1 [2]

**Analysis of the latest research and publications.** A. Shrestha et al. in their article on harmful (toxic) communication mean by toxic communication “a general term for a wide range of communication that causes harm, suffering or negative consequences to individuals or groups. Toxic communication can include, from the authors’ point of view, «toxic language, hate speech, trolling, cyberbullying, dissemination of misinformation or disinformation, shaming and threats to individuals and groups» [7, c. 624-630].

Researchers take a criteria-relativistic point of view in assessing the toxicity or non-toxicity of communication, pointing, firstly, to a certain “instinctive” understanding of it and the absence of a definition, and secondly, noting the pluralistic understanding of toxic communication and “different levels of tolerance for what is classified as toxic communication» [7, c. 625]. To the above, the authors also add the relativity of perception of what is perceived as toxic or non-toxic, depending on the personality of the perceiver.

Pavlopous et al. [5] describe toxic language as an umbrella term that includes several different types of language, including offensive, abusive, and hateful. For researchers, “there are also taxonomies for these phenomena based on their directness (e.g., whether the insult was explicitly intended/intended) and their purpose (e.g., whether it was a general comment or directed at an individual/group).” In the context of Pavlopoulos’

classification, there are distinctions between offensive and abusive language. Abusive language involves concealing the intention of toxicity, hiding toxic intentions, and playing with time, which creates the effect of devaluing the latter. In this sense, certain actors voice vague thoughts or demands (promises), often using the pathetic and moralistic rhetoric of high value models.

We are talking about declared obligations (honesty, trust, solidarity, altruism) with a pronounced discrepancy with actions. Communication is superficial and uninvolved, obsessive repetitions may be observed in communication with a lack of feedback. Abusers can also operate with incomprehensible words and phrases, voicing one-sided demands without the desire to hear the opposite side.

Offensive language involves the use of the rhetoric of confusion, attempts by actors to give opposite and confusing orders, conduct long and meaningless conversations (discussions, meetings). Relationships with communication partners are built asymmetrically, using insults in the absence of feedback and the necessary cultural inhibitions. The use of offensive language is accompanied by an atmosphere of fear, obsessive surveillance, moral bullying.

As you can see, the use of the language of abusive communication tends to smoothly transition to the use of the language of toxic communication. Where there is superficiality, lack of involvement, detachment, where communication actors use vague and/or pompous words and expressions, where there is no positive motivation to promote common rules and frameworks for interaction, open dialogue, there are clearly evident signs of toxic communication, which expands the scope of its functioning.

In other words, sabotage and hidden opposition to the language and practices of abusive communication do not develop into the dominance of toxic communication where communicative relations are symmetrical. In the case of asymmetrical relations, markers of increasing emotional tension appear in communication (shouts, threats, contradictory demands, lack of active listening, lack of regular contact and dialogue. Expanding the scope of toxic communication contributes to the formation of the identity of an abuser, offender or hater.

A. Shrestha et al. [7, c. 625] classifies toxic communication into «profanity, identity attacks, disparagement, insults, threats, sexually explicit content, derogatory language, language inciting violence, and hostile and malicious language directed at individuals or groups».

It is important to use a lot of vocabulary to avenge taboos, such as sexual, bodily-functional and religious topics. This taboo vocabulary can be considered vikoristic as language of hatred.

This point of view is benefited by the vision of R. Purba «Every “taboo word” or “linguistic taboo” – any word associated with bodily organs, sex, supernatural light, sights of the human body (excrement), religion, food of life, etc. Death» [6]. Jay reveals hundreds of taboo words and phrases. This obvious fact is created by using the socio-communicative boundaries

of different types of taboo lexemes for the purpose of “filtering” their selection from the splice.

Z. Ningue [4] classifies taboo vocabulary into 5 types, namely like, profanity, obscenity, bad language and sexual advances. In Jay’s opinion, the vikoristan curse can be equated with the vikoristan evil for inflicting mischief on another person through the vikoristan of sung words or phrases [3, c. 153-161].

Z. Ningue supports Jay’s sullen point of view, where like like hatred means throwing negative curse words at someone. According to the investigator, under the hour of liking, both the one who speaks and the one who hears, understand what is going on. The communicator expands my hatred, and the recipient of this message is aware of his role as a target of many taboo words [4].

Forberg in his research [1, c. 291-317] on the topic of gender ethnography offers to consider four types of patterns of toxic communication: disinterest, rejection, humiliation and hate [8, c. 6-7].

Disinterest [8, c. 6] is manifested as a conscious disregard (in the author’s study, women, although it could be anyone), built on the assumption that another person or group of people is simply a distraction. Among the illustrative examples, the author cites situations of seduction and disregard (in videos, men show disinterest in women trying to seduce or harass them); men play video games, look at the screen and wear headphones (thereby emphasizing the idea of isolation); men express their interest in cars at a car show, ignoring the woman introducing them; men work out in the gym, ignoring women who attract their attention (seductively or by walking in short clothes) in order to maintain concentration; men do not respond to women’s touch directed at them, sometimes pushing them away when this is staged by dancing or attempts to approach.

Rejection [8, c.6] manifests itself as a notice-and-rejection of gestures of affection, which includes the following examples: women trying to attract men’s attention or even seduce them by smiling at them on the escalator, while men demonstrate a lack of response, wiping their hands, washing their hands, or showing off their wedding ring.

Humiliation involves comparing a person or group of people with others, instrumentalizing (using) others, and causing physical harm. Videos are provided as examples [8, c.6] a clip from a Donald Trump political rally in which he snaps at a woman that she will earn as much as men if she works as hard as they do; situations in which men approach women with a bouquet, hand it to them while they are tying their shoes, then take it back when they are finished and continue on their way, thereby humiliating the woman; a boy hastily stops in front of girls to kiss them while proudly looking at the camera; a woman tries to get her boyfriend’s attention by pouring herself hot water for a cup of tea. To tease him, the woman places her hand on the cup the man is about to pour his tea into, and without thinking, he deliberately pours hot water on her [8, c. 6].

Hate involves overt threats of violence or violence directed at one or another subject. Examples include excerpts from the film *American Psycho*, ... in which the main character, Patrick Bateman, openly threatens one or another character in the film; a boy is bullied at school, followed by photographs of the victims of this "school shooting» [8, c. 6-7].

**Presentation of the main material.** Noting the polymorphism of toxic social communications, it is logical to outline their common features, which manifest themselves both in the simplest interpersonal (dyadic) interaction and in more complex (group-mediated) communication processes.

1) Toxic social communications have a disorganizing or destructive intention. Both the first and the second can manifest themselves in a wide range, starting from the primary reactions of mental displeasure (pain) in interpersonal interaction and ending with the deconstruction of the communicative architectonics of group and organizational actors (the latter may involve the erasure of organizational/group identity, reputational and other losses and costs of the economic and socio-cultural spectrum).

2) Toxic social communications involve a wide range of «third parties» in both the format of reactive and active participation in their implementation. A generator or mediator of toxic communications, regardless of his subjectivity, seeks either to enlist the active support of other subjects, or, at a minimum, to be satisfied with the recipient (reactive) and/or background role of the latter. Both generators and mediators of toxic communications are interested in individual or group multipliers of toxicization, who either actively invest their resources (time, cultural, organizational, etc.) in the escalation of toxicization, or "offer" reactive and/or background participation as recipients, observers, audience or "crowd". Thus, the implementation of shaming or bullying presupposes the active generation of aggressive and toxic contents of verbal or behavioral content by the initiators of one or another form of bullying. At the same time, bullying is impossible without the participation of the public, which is drawn into such communication voluntarily or involuntarily (e.g., during shaming on social networks).

3) Toxic social communications (including those that occur in children's or adolescent groups) can have a cultural or socio-structural origin and corresponding direct or indirect strategizing. In some cases, structural factors are also hidden both from awareness and from any influence (e.g., environment-forming negative selection, which has institutional strategizing in the space of educational and correctional or penitentiary institutions). On the other hand, in the public space, structural factors can acquire prominence and be quite transparent (as, for example, scientific and academic banditry or teenage bullying based on inclusion in certain gender or deviantophile groups).

4) Toxic social communications involve the use of body-oriented expression, expression in body language, and construction/construction of spaces and environments. Toxicity can take on both an inactive expression (e.g., environmental-spatial neglect, litter, lack of necessary space), and an

active-constructive one (inappropriate, inconvenient, non-ecological/unhygienic spaces and environments, etc.).

In dyadic communications, the variability of toxic manifestations is realized from one-time and impulsive actions to strategically-oriented projects of disorganization and deconstruction of addressees.

1) Impulsive toxic actions (e.g., toxic emotional expression of one stranger towards another) are usually characterized by lack of direction and non-selectivity, as well as the absence of a strategic time perspective in such actions.

2) Organized toxic strategies and programs (e.g. shaming, bullying, bossing) directed against individual and group subjects and having a strategic time perspective (e.g. loss of a positive image and reputational costs of a corporate structure).

3) Impulsive toxic omissions (e.g. failure to provide assistance under the influence of situationally arisen fear or silent observation of bullying), as well as impulsive toxic actions, are characterized by lack of direction and non-selectivity, as well as the absence of a strategic time perspective in such omissions.

4) Strategically oriented toxic omissions (e.g. ignoring), which assume a long-term behavioral-disorganizing, demoralizing effect on both the individual and group subjects.

**Conclusions.** The semantic field of the concept «toxic communication» can be associated with both a narrower and a wider range of meanings. With a fairly narrow, etymological understanding, the meaning of the concept «toxic communication» is associated with some externally introduced content that can cause a reaction similar to a poisoning reaction in the medical sense. In this aspect, we are talking about the damaging ability of social communication to cause destructive effects in the individual or group psyche. In the socio-communicative aspect, toxic communication is part of destructive activity (verbal or non-verbal) associated with the creation of dysfunctions or the destruction of socialization, psychophysical health or social relations.

Isolating destructive effects as a key feature of toxic communication does not allow us to separate it from manipulative and psycho-destructive communication, since it is too narrow. Toxic communication in a broad sense involves both short-term and long-term destructive (verbal or non-verbal) influence of some subjects on others, but destructive effects may manifest themselves not in an open, but in a disguised (latent) form. Thus, hyper-controlling or hypo-protective behavior, manifestations of envy and greed, on the one hand, reactions of resentment, humiliation, stress, on the other hand, can, along with other destructive emotions (fear/anxiety, guilt/shame, fatigue/exhaustion, sadness/despair, etc.) be indicative of toxic communication.

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### **Романенко Ю. В. Токсичні соціальні комунікації: проблема визначення ознак і побудови типологій**

*В статті реалізовано мету у формі побудови характеристики ознак та типологічних критеріїв токсичних соціальних комунікацій. В результаті проведеного дослідження зроблено висновок про те, що семантичне поле поняття «токсична комунікація» може бути пов'язане як з вузьким, так і ширшим колом значень. Констатовано поліморфність токсичних соціальних комунікацій, логічно позначено їх загальні ознаки, що виявляються як у найпростішій міжособистісній (діадичній) взаємодії, так і у складніших (групо-опосередкованих) процесах спілкування.*

*Відзначено, що у соціальному просторі часто доводиться стикатися з токсичними соціальними комунікаціями. Частина з них має виражені ознаки, які можуть легко розпізнаватись, частина має латентні і тьнюве походження. Як перші, і другі розпізнаються за дезорганізуючим і деструктивним ефектам як щодо індивідуальної психіки, тіла, і тілесності, і групових (соціо-психічних) структур і процесів.*

*Наголошено, що при досить вузькому, етимологічному розумінні значення поняття «токсична комунікація» пов'язується будь-якими зовнішньо-привнесеними контентами, здатними викликати реакцію, подібну до реакції отруєння в медичному сенсі. У соціокомунікативному аспекті токсична комунікація є частиною деструктивної активності (вербальної чи невербальної), орієнтованої на створення дисфункцій чи руйнацію механізмів психофізичного здоров'я чи соціального капіталу.*

*Наголошено, що виділення руйнівної ефектики як ключової ознаки токсичної комунікації не дозволяє відокремити її від маніпулятивної*



та психодеструктивної комунікації, оскільки є надто вузьким. Токсична комунікація у сенсі передбачає як короткочасний, і довгостроковий деструктивний (вербальний чи невербальний) вплив одних суб'єктів на інших, але руйнівна ефектика може виявлятися як у відкритій, так і в замаскованій (латентній) формі. Констатовано, що гіперконтролююча або гіпопротективна поведінка, прояви заздрощів і жадібності, з одного боку, реакції образи, приниженості, стресованості – з іншого боку можуть, поряд з іншими деструктивними емоціями (страхом/тривогою, почуттям провини/сорому, втоми/виснаженості та виснаження), печалі.

**Ключові слова:** комунікації, токсичні соціальні комунікації, аб'юзивні комунікації, образливі комунікації, мова ненависті.