



Politicized mediatization of a sports incident in conditions of information confrontation

UDC 32.019.5



PhD, Associate Professor **I.A. Baykova**¹

Dr. Philology, Professor **E.V. Bykova**¹

Dr. Sc.Soc., Professor **D.P. Gavra**¹

Dr. Pol., Associate Professor **S.V. Oleynikov**²

¹Saint Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg

²Pridnestrovian State University, Republic of Moldova

Corresponding author: i.baykova@spbu.ru

Received by the editorial office on 24.01.2024

Abstract

Objective of the study was to identify the speech means of defense rhetoric in Russian state media in line with the mediatization of a sports incident using the example of the Kamila Valieva doping scandal during the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

Methods and structure of the study. The empirical base included media texts of Russian federal media from 10.02.2022 to 20.02.2022, collected by the Semanticforce.net system using the keyword “Kamila Valieva” in the text, title or subtitle. In the selected texts, metaphors of war are highlighted, since “metaphoricality is one of the most important features of modern propaganda and political speech”.

Results and conclusions. The authors found that during the information confrontation, Russian state media used communication strategies largely based on military rhetoric. The media strategy of the domestic mass media was to formulate in the audience an idea of the war declared by the Western world against Russian sports and the country as a whole. The authors conclude that in the context of global political confrontation, any incident involving athletes of the opposing sides is highly likely to be mediatized using a communication algorithm similar to that discussed in this article.

Keywords: *politicization, mediatization, information confrontation, military metaphor, mass media, Olympics, sports incident.*

Introduction. In conditions of international tension, local incidents, the actors of which are not associated with political activity, are drawn into the process of mediatization and become subjects of the political agenda, and the event, as a result of public resonance, acquires socio-political consequences.

Researchers characterize the phenomenon of mediatization as a two-way process in which media become part of other social institutions and change the norms and methods of their activities [12, 13], and have a determining and formative mutual influence on each other [4]. D.P. Gavra rightly clarifies the characterization of mediatization as “the process of expanding the social area of awareness and complicating the discourse of an event with the simultaneous expansion and complexity of the audiences involved in this discourse” [3, p. 60].

The multimillion-dollar media influence puts sporting incidents on the international agenda, and the athletes themselves become media actors in the confrontation between powers and blocs. In sociology and political science, the concepts of “sport” and “war” are often placed side by side [11]. L.V. Balashova argues that in the arsenal of metaphors, the association “sport/war” is the most representative” [1, p. 778]. The politicization of sports is updated in conditions of global instability, cold or hot confrontations and permanent value transformations [14]. Therefore, world sports competitions are symbolized in the media environment, reflect international conflicts, turn into a platform for economic, political and mental confrontation between the “forces of good and evil, and become a tool for suppressing representatives of the parties to the conflict with



the help of personal sanctions, disqualification and non-admission to high-status international competitions under a variety of prepositions [2]. Information about the technicality of the execution of a sports program becomes a tool for manipulating public opinion to discredit athletes by media strategists of international confrontations.

The goal of information warfare of an offensive or defensive nature is to ensure the interests of the subject in the information-psychological sphere [7] through psychological manipulation, propaganda, ideologization, and disinformation [6]. In ours, a media actor (sports commentator, journalist, expert, sports official) can impose on the mass audience his vision of the course and results of a sports competition in line with the rhetoric of confrontation.

Objective of the study was to identify the speech means of defense rhetoric in Russian state media in line with the mediatization of a sports incident using the example of the Kamila Valieva doping scandal during the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

Let us note that this incident and its media reflection took place even before the start of the Special Military Operation on February 24, 2022. This means that the influence of the SMO factor on the nature of media discourse during this period can be excluded.

Methods and structure of the study. Achieving the goal of information warfare in the digital environment is carried out in full accordance with the principles of cognitive combat information influences [8]. The cognitive impact strategy consisted of generalizing the interpretation of the incident. The goal of the information attack was to discredit the potential champion of the 2022 Olympics and discredit Russian sports, Russia and its leadership. The strategy included a number of tactical stages: to involve public opinion leaders on social networks in criticism of what is happening [1]; circulate accusations against the leadership of Russian sports of corruption and promotion of doping [2]; introduce into media discourse suspicions of mass sanctioned use of prohibited substances by Russian athletes [3], turn to biasedly selected experts [4].

Hypothesis. To repel information aggression, the Russian media updated the mathematics of military discourse to form public opinion for a patriotic audience: Russian sport is a victim of the aggression of Russia's enemies.

The empirical base included media texts of Russian federal media from 02/10/2022 to 02/20/2022, collected by the Semanticforce.net system us-

ing the keyword "Kamila Valieva" in the text, title or subtitle. In the selected texts, metaphors of war are highlighted, since "metaphoricality is one of the most important features of modern propaganda and political speech" [9, p.4].

Results of the study and discussion. Russian patriotically oriented media presented the sports incident of Kamila Valieva in the context of a military confrontation with the actualization of value narratives: Kamila Valieva became an object of aggression and a victim of a behind-the-scenes anti-Russian conspiracy. To implement a defensive strategy, Russian media used metaphors to influence the cognitive and behavioral activity of the addressee [5, 10]. Let's consider the main means of influence.

1. Labeling: *"but there are also those who harshly criticize WADA for the "anti-doping circus." (NG, 02/16/2022); "So far, the grandiose doping scandal around the strongest figure skater on the planet...has acquired new detective details..." (RIA, 02.17.2022); What is happening now... can be described in only one word: madness (RIA 02.12.2022); "Now, probably, even the most stubborn people have realized that there was no doping... officials from the IOC, WADA and their inspirers and supporters decided to deprive us of our character (RIA, 02/15/2022).*

2. Humiliation: *"the war on doping and other chants that are carried across the American, British and pan-European media fields. But this chatter, this "white noise" can no longer mislead us. (RIA, 02/15/2022).*

3. Binary opposition: *us - them, ours - strangers: "There has always been a struggle, because we are competitive, we are strong, rivals. And everyone is waiting for us to go beyond some line somewhere, fall somewhere or make a mistake" (KP, 02/10/2022); "After all the doping scandals, many years of humiliating deprivation of our athletes of the anthem and flag, the Russians never give up" (RIA, 02.12.2022); "What's great for a Russian is death for a German!" (RIA, 02/15/2022).*

4. Generalization: *"Stop Camila. Stop Russia" (RIA, 02/15/2022); "As always, not knowing the essence, everyone started screaming left and right" (RG 02/10/2022); "Everything is obvious: the Russians are sure that the rumors about Valieva's doping test are an ordinary provocation (CP 02/10/2022).*

5. Historical and subject analogies: *"It is worth noting that practically the same thing and in the*



same expressions the most rabid wrote about Russian ballet. They say that Grigorovich, with his dictatorial habits, does not take into account the mood and preparedness of the dancers for the rehearsal marathon" (RIA 02/15/2022); "Sporting competitions have been turned into gigantic shows like in Ancient Rome. But even the Romans could not imagine children as gladiators. This did not harm anyone's professional career among those people who trained with champion Lipnitskaya" (KP 02/16/2022).

6. Appeal to emotions: "Poor child. Hold on, girl, the world is so unfair" (KP 02/10/2022); "A positive doping test...now, like the sword of Damocles, hangs frighteningly not only over the heroic victory of our skaters in the team tournament of the Olympics, but also over Kamila's entire future career" (RIA, 02.12.2022); "to take hostage a young girl who is not even sixteen" (RIA, 02/15/2022).

7. Irony, sarcasm: "Having received a postcard, so to speak, from the grown-ups from the IOC, they, with difficulty hiding their dissatisfaction... hastened to declare that... the award ceremony will not take place" (RIA, 02/15/2022); "What a coincidence" (RIA 02/12/2022); "Now IOC officials will hang medals on their own necks and give each other bouquets... an excellent motivation for fighting for prizes, to say the least" (RIA, 02/15/2022).

Federal media formed the perception of the incident with Kamilla Valieva as an episode of a complex hybrid war of the generalized West against Russia, which proves the use in the texts of lexemes that form a military semantic field: aggression, attack, provocation, battle, fighting spirit, fighting character, partisans, heroic victory. Separately, we should highlight the verbs used in the texts with a military meaning: take up arms, torpedo, take hostages, storm, conquer, fight, survive the battle, take revenge, win, etc.

Kamilla Valieva's nominations are updated in line with military rhetoric in ascending order from the victim of aggression to the winner who overcomes the enemy: a victim of execution, a tormented young girl, a Russian partisan taken hostage, a hero and a winner.

Conclusions. The analysis of media texts confirmed the formulated hypotheses. The case of K. Valieva became a forerunner, a kind of harbinger of the war of narratives and information aggression against Russia, which took place even before the start of the Northern Military District. This confirms

the thesis that, unfortunately, in a divided world, political actors continue to use sport as another channel of global confrontation, which contradicts the basic philosophy of Olympism as an institution that unites and not divides peoples. Analysis of media materials confirms the thesis that in the current conditions of political confrontation, any incident in which athletes of the opposing sides are involved will be mediatized according to a similar scheme. This means we must be prepared for such challenges.

References

1. Balashova L.V. Militarnaya metafora kak sposob formirovaniya kontsepta KOVID-19 v rechi V.V. Putina. *Kommunikativnyye issledovaniya*. 2020. Vol. 7. No. 4. pp. 777-800.
2. Gavra D.P., Bykova E.V. Sportivnaya industriya v kontekste strategicheskikh kommunikatsiy: bazovyye kharakteristiki. *Rossiyskaya shkola svyazey s obshchestvennostyu*. 2017. No. 9. pp. 26-34.
3. Gavra D.P., Bykova E.V. Mediatizatsiya i demediatizatsiya v tsifrovoy srede: keis konservativnogo manifesta K. Bogomolova «Pokhishcheniye Yevropy 2.0». *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriya 10. Zhurnalistika*. 2022. No. 3. pp. 60-86.
4. Gureeva A.N. Teoreticheskoye ponimaniye mediatizatsii v usloviyakh tsifrovoy sredy. *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriya 10. Zhurnalistika*. 2016. No. 6. pp. 192-208.
5. Kopnina G.A. *Rechevoye manipulirovaniye. Study guide*. 6th ed., ster. Moscow: FLINTA publ., 2017. 170 p.
6. Leushkin R.V. *Informatsionnoye protivostoyaniye v kontekste informatizatsii i virtualizatsii obshchestva: sotsialno-kommunikativnyy podkhod*. *Sotsiodinamika*. 2018. No. 12. pp. 122-134.
7. Roshchupkin V.G. *Mezhdunarodnyye informatsionno-psikhologicheskiye konflikty. Study guide*. Samara: Samarskiy universitet publ., 2023. 168 p.
8. Russtrat. *Institut mezhdunarodnykh i politicheskikh strategiy Kognitivnaya voyna: voyna novogo pokoleniya*. *Ofitsialnyy sayt*. 2021. Available at: <https://russtrat.ru/analytics/24-dekabrya-2021-0010-7763> (date of access: 13.01.2024)
9. Chudinov A.P. *Rossiya v metaforicheskom zerkale: kognitivnoye issledovaniye politich-*



- eskoy metafory (1991-2000). Ekaterinburg: UrGPU publ., 2001. 238 p.
10. Balakhonskaya L.V., Gavra D.P., Beresneva I.V., Sadirova K.K. Markers of Manipulation in the Electoral Communication in a Digital Environment. Proceedings of the 2020 IEEE Communication Strategies in Digital Society Seminar, ComSDS. IEEE, Saint Petersburg: Electrotechnical University «LETI». 2020. pp. 91-98.
 11. Gerald R. Gems (1999) Sports, war, and ideological imperialism, *Peace Review*, 11:4, 573-578, DOI: 10.1080/10402659908426309 Chapter «Patriotism in sports and in war» By Paul Gomb-erg Book Values in Sport Edition 1st Edition First Published 2000 Imprint Taylor & Francis.
 12. Hjarvard S. (2008) The mediatization of society. A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordicom Review* 29 (2): 105-134.
 13. Hjarvard S. (2012) Three forms of mediatized religion. Changing the public face of religion. In M. Lövheim, S. Hjarvard (eds.) *Medialization and religion: Nordic perspectives*. Göteborg: Nordicom. pp. 21-43.
 14. Jacques Defrance & Jean Marc Chamot (2008) The voice of sport: Expressing a foreign policy through a silent cultural activity: The case of sport in French foreign policy after the Second World War, *Sport in Society*, 11:4, 395-413. DOI: 10.1080/17430430802019342.