

# Approaches to the Typology of Youth Political Content in Social Networks

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## Abstract

The article is devoted to determining the types of youth content in social networks produced by political power subjects. The study's empirical base is the accounts of the social network Vkontakte, which are politically oriented towards young people and with the number of participants from six thousand. The statistical data analysis identified types of content and their typology according to the indicator of social engagement. Content monitoring of political posts, as well as obtaining basic statistics on social engagement, allowed to identify five main tasks of youth political Internet communication: increasing community members, identifying the needs of the target audience, building the reputation of the organization and the image of a political leader, engaging the target audience, campaigning, and also offer a set of types and forms of content for their practical implementation.

Keywords: Political communication, Internet communication, social networks, social activity, political content, Internet, youth

## Introduction

Today, young people have a low level of involvement in the state's social and political life and a significant decrease in electoral activity. They take power and politics for granted, which do cause neither delight nor any negative emotions. That is why the detachment of young people from political culture arises (Merkulov, 2015). This problem is acute not only for Russia but also for other states. Numerous foreign scientific works aim to solve significant communication issues and attract young people to society's social and political life.

Native and foreign scientists see the potential for establishing an active dialogue between youth and politics in social networks. While communicating on various social networks and forums, young people exchange opinions and share impressions. They do not realize that all these processes directly affect the formation of both self-awareness and political consciousness, especially when discussions are on political topics (Akaev, 2016). There is an increase in the political activity of young people in the virtual environment. It is explained by trivial reasons: speed, convenience, accessibility, the possibility of impersonal participation, and receiving immediate feedback (Safonova, 2015). For example, foreign scientists' work (Xenos et al., 2013) shows a positive relationship between using social networks and political engagement among youth in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Salau et al. (2015) the concept of youth participation in political life is based on the consideration of variables. The cognitive interaction theory tried to explain this phenomenon with political information on social networks, political knowledge, political interest, and political satisfaction.

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Confirmation of the topic's relevance can be the Government of the Russian Federation of additional funding in 2020-2022 to create and distribute youth content. It is aimed at strengthening civic identity, spiritual and moral values. Video content, content in the blogosphere, special projects in online media, games, and software are planned to be developed. Social networks are named the leading platforms for its placement: Instagram, VKontakte, Facebook, TikTok, Odnoklassniki (Classmates), and YouTube<sup>1</sup>.

## **Youth Political Communication in Social Networks**

The development of information and communication technologies opens up vast communication opportunities with the younger generation and political discourse and content (Lebedeva & Orlova, 2019). Ryabchenko et al. (2019) consider political content a part of the socio-political reality reflected by actors' consciousness and reproduced in verbal and non-verbal forms. It forms a continuous environment—an information and news field. This field consists of discrete messages through which social and political actors in the public sphere interact.

The features of youth political content include its social themes and engaging nature. Most social media posts are devoted to various social events, such as volunteering, charity, cultural, educational, and patriotic or sports events. Communicators use the possibilities of interactive communication in social networks to create various forms of engaging content. The aim is to receive feedback from young people, maintain dialogue and go beyond “click activism.” It is justified and contributes to the effective implementation of youth communication policy.

The political content can be conditionally divided into institutional and non-institutional actors. The first group includes governmental bodies, political parties, socio-political organizations, the media or information, and analytical agencies. The second group includes opinion leaders, bloggers, and other individual influencers, who lead political discussions. The most active accounts on social networks are pro-government pages of youth movements and organizations, for example, Rosmolodezh (115,816 subscribers on VKontakte and 7146 on Facebook), Youth Parliament under the “State Duma” (79617 subscribers on VKontakte), Molodaya Gvardia (“The Young Guards”) (56911 subscribers on VKontakte and 15820 subscribers on Facebook). Regional youth policy committees are also active in social networks. The leaders are the account of the committee on youth policy of St. Petersburg (21090 subscribers on VKontakte), the Department of Sports and Youth Policy of Tyumen (15364 subscribers on VKontakte), the Ministry of Youth Policy of Bashkortostan (10913 subscribers on VKontakte and 191 subscribers on Facebook), etc. All these accounts are directed at youth, social activity, and youth movements. This activity can be explained by state programs for the development of youth policy and additional funding.

The monitoring of social networks showed a small number among active accounts of youth branches of political parties and socio-political organizations. The number of subscribers is more than 6 thousand people. Such resources include the LDPR (Liberal Democrat party of Russia) youth organization, political party (Young Russia), the Union of Communist Youth, the Eurasian Youth Union, and the Revolutionary Komsomol.

Modern youth shows a high level of involvement in an activity in the social network. It is a natural communicative environment that can evoke emotion, increase or decrease self-esteem, strengthen relationships, or gain public recognition. The social network significantly expands communication boundaries and generates the same psychological effects inherent in traditional communication. Network resources offer an extensive toolkit

for interaction between network participants: texts, photos, videos, likes, reports, comments, etc. The use of all kinds of stickers and emojis can convey emotions, makes it possible to express your opinion and attitude to information. In modern political sociology, there is no consensus on whether such actions should be considered as a form of political participation or not. Nevertheless, it is recognized that the slactivist paradigm is becoming one of the most common signs of the digital political era (Mikhailenok et al., 2019).

### **Slactivist Paradigm—A Digital Political Era Phenomenon**

The Internet's impact on the population's civic and political activity is discussed in the modern scientific literature. Nowadays, such concepts as "slactivism," "click activism," "microactivism" are appeared. They call into question the possibility of social activity on the Web. Likes, reports, comments, and discussions have an impact on real political and social events. Critics of virtual political activism such as Bimber (2001) and Shaifele (2002) argue that the Internet cannot mobilize citizens to take real political actions. Shulman (2005) and Hindman (2009) believe that online activity creates a false idea among participants about satisfaction participation. At the same time (Morozov, 2009) introduced the concept of "weakness," which refers to political activity that does not lead to real political results but increases the participants feeling of well-being and satisfaction. The proponents of these points of view talk about the possible baneful effect of the Internet on the general level of political participation and achievement of political goals. The reason is that people are ready to participate in traditional forms of activity and choose digital opportunities.

On the other hand, virtual activism supporters prove the Internet's advantage in activating civic and political activity. Bonfadelli (2002), DiMaggio (2004), Vettehen (2004), Norris (2001), Polat (2005), and Weber (2003) believe that the network can involve those people who are already interested in political participation. It offers more convenient ways to be active in online voting or supporting petitions. Barber (2001), Krueger (2002), Weber, and Loumaleis (2003) argue that the virtual environment can mobilize the politically inactive population due to such advantages as the availability of information and convenient forms of participation. The proponents of this trend argue that the Internet's potential has a significant influence on young people's engagement (Delli, 2000). They are highly qualified and active users of this environment. Also, the Internet helps to mobilize young people into autonomous forms of political participation. It may indicate that the Internet's influence may increase over time (Stanley, 2004; Tolbert, 2004; Norris, 2005).

The supporters of this trend believe that the Network can significantly revitalize civil life. This may be held by expanding access to political information, facilitating political debate, developing social networks, and offering an alternative place for political expression and participation (Polat, 2005; Ward, 2003). They also challenge its ability to lead to the decline of civil society.

A meta-analysis of 38 studies about the impact of the Internet on civic engagement (Boulianne, 2009) concluded that there is little evidence to support the argument that the use of the Internet contributes to the decline of civil society. The findings are evidence of the positive impact of Internet use on engagement. However, the question is, "Are these effects significant?" The positive effect is insignificant.

Considering that the Internet is a natural and accessible medium of youth's communication, we can discuss its high prospects in establishing a dialogue between the young generation and politics. The main task is to overcome the barrier of "weakness" or "click activism" by increasing content involvement. It may be achieved by understanding

the principles of building scientific content and using triggers of visual attention, interest, and emotional mechanism of engaging in dialogue.

Communication in social networks causes the mental effects inherent in traditional connections, which has become the subject of studying the psychology of social networking. It tries to understand how social activity affects the cognitive processes and emotional states of a person. Tobin et al. (2014) found in their research stated that the ability to share information in social networks contributes to feelings of belonging to a group. Samosvat (2015) considers “like” as an indicator of social approval among adolescents. She also revealed a positive correlation with a significant connection in terms of social acceptance in networks: like –reposts by other users ( $r=0.592$ ); like –the number of virtual friends ( $r=0.427$ ); like the number of account subscribers ( $r=0.537$ ); like –the number of comments on the account ( $r=0.645$ ).

In Internet communications, there are specific approaches to assess the level of social activity of content. The most common is an indicator of social engagement (ER -Engagement Rate). It calculates the percentage of users who have shown the social network activity in various forms, as putting down likes, dislikes, reports, comments, clicks, or retweets. Each network has its account of social activity factors. This indicator can be calculated by the total coverage of the audience who had at least one contact with the post or per post a day. The work will use the analytics service formula for posts and pages of competitors in social networks popsters.ru: ([https://popsters.ru/app/faq/#met\\_er](https://popsters.ru/app/faq/#met_er)).

$ER_{post} = \text{Engagement volume} / \text{number of subscribers}$ ; where  $ER_{post}$  is post engagement rate; engagement volume is the total number of engagements (likes, reposts, comments, etc.).

## Methodology

The study's empirical base was the social network pages “VKontakte” with a political orientation. They are aimed at young people and with the number of subscribers from 6 thousand people. The monitoring of communities of the chosen direction with the use of search filters allowed us to divide the most active actors of political youth content into three groups: pro-governmental accounts of the federal and regional levels, youth accounts of political parties, and youth political organizations. one thousand five hundred posts were selected from the accounts to collect basic statistics on indicators of social activity, as well as tag text, photo, video, and audio content. Visual monitoring of the content to each post carried out tagging. Methods of descriptive statistics were used to typology content depending on the level of social involvement and political Internet communication tasks. Data processing was carried out using the SPSS statistical data analysis package and the MS Excel spreadsheet program.

## Results

Analysis of the empirical research base showed the following types of youth political content: text, photo, graphics, video, link, and audio content. Social media posts are creolized: “Texts, the texture of which consists of two or more inhomogeneous parts (verbal-linguistic speech) and non-verbal (belonging to other sign systems than natural language)” (Sorokin, 1990). The structure and behavioral indicators of youth political posts that characterize the level of social involvement are shown below (Table 1).

Table 1. The structure of posts in the social network VKontakte with youth political orientation

The structure of a political post on a social network	Quantity	Likes	Reposts	Comments	ERpost
Graphics, text	479	22.69	3.67	1.42	0.26
Photo, text	437	36.30	3.02	1.20	0.35
Video, text	222	32.96	4.66	1.40	0.4
Graphics, text, links	212	13.60	2.80	0.88	0.24
Photo, text, links	85	13.15	1.71	0.18	0.17
Video, text, links	12	8.80	3.67	0.00	0.14
Graphics, text, audio	10	11.80	1.00	1.10	0.28
Text, links	9	18.22	1.89	5.22	0.22
Text, audio	4	6.75	0.25	0.00	0.06
Photo, text, audio	3	16.67	2.00	0.67	0.64

\* Compiled by the authors. Based on the analysis of data from the empirical research base

From the above table, it is seen that the most common structure of a political post is a combination of verbal and non-verbal components. It can be text, an attached image (graphics, photo), or video. The highest indicator of social engagement (ERpost) is posted with video content (0.4).

Tagging text, images, video, and audio content made it possible to propose a typology of its forms and obtain statistical indicators. These indicators characterize youth behavioral activity (Table 2).

The content that is produced by the actors of political power about young people has a socio-political nature. Only 20% of information is devoted to political news and direct agitation messages. This form of content has the highest rates of social engagement (0.36). The most common way of text content is the description of interactive events: contests, quests, flash mobs, forums, marathons, awards, festivals, grants, sports days, etc. Such messages' main task is to involve young people in an active dialogue, stimulate comments, reposts, and go beyond virtual communication by participating in various socio-cultural political events. Another specific feature of youth communication is a high indicator of entertainment/educational content and a description in various charity, volunteering, and patriotic, cultural, or educational events.

The analysis of images (graphic and photo content) showed the highest ERpost (0.48), as well as comments (9.63) in posts containing memes. This form of content's advantages includes their ability to arouse interest, strong emotions, and active communication. It is seen from descriptive statistics (Table 1). Dawkins (2013) was the first who defined an Internet meme as "a piece of cultural information that can mutate and multiply rapidly (replication)." Shomova (2015) understands a political Internet meme as a unit of cultural information transmission. On the one hand, it is a product of the masses' creativity, and on the other, an instrument of political PR technologies. It is believed that this form of verbal-visual or mixed content can significantly impact people's behavior and attitudes. Savitskaya writes, "memes are actively used in blogs, chats, forums, emails, advertisements, radio, television, and printed produce. Millions of people use them in the speech. Memes have become a powerful, hidden factor in the formation of public opinion and modern mentality. In other words, it is a socio-cultural phenomenon that cannot be ignored<sup>2</sup>. The most common form of graphic political content is a poster, but it is significantly inferior to photography in social engagement. The poster's structure includes verbal

Table 2. Characteristics of the level of social involvement in various forms of youth political content in social networks.

The form of content	Quantity	Likes	Reposts	Comments	ERpost
<i>Political text content</i>					
Open and closed surveys	18	120.11	31.28	1.06	2.43
Feedbacks	5	29.20	2.60	1.60	0.43
Political news	232	27.80	3.00	2.38	0.36
Congratulations	139	30.95	3.59	1.20	0.30
Viral news	76	21.53	3.86	0.45	0.28
Social events	194	37.52	3.03	1.13	0.28
Entertainment/educational content	284	20.21	1.87	2.00	0.28
Interactive events	467	20.35	3.55	0.32	0.25
Reports	6	32.50	1.50	0.83	0.24
Participant stories	24	22.04	1.71	0.04	0.14
Traing cources and events	14	20.64	4.93	0.86	0.13
Interview with political leaders	17	31.94	7.00	1.06	0.13
Agitation	11	27.60	1.81	2.00	0.14
News of the organization	2	57.50	2.50	0.00	0.09
Calls to join	3	22.67	2.67	10.67	0.08
Discussions	7	8.14	1.00	0.29	0.08
<b>Average</b>	<b>1499</b>	<b>33.17</b>	<b>4.74</b>	<b>1.62</b>	<b>0.35</b>
<i>Photo, graphic political content</i>					
Memes	27	23.81	1.96	9.63	0.48
Photos political events	108	32.65	2.94	2.06	0.48
Historical photos	40	10.88	0.70	0.18	0.37
Viral photos	95	34.84	4.19	1.46	0.35
Text image	7	29.00	4.14	2.00	0.34
Photo of the team and leaders	3	62.30	5.00	1.33	0.32
Photo report from interactive events	182	26.40	2.60	0.33	0.27
Photo report from social projects	129	38.67	1.99	0.89	0.26
Photo with agitation	8	25.88	1.63	0.75	0.26
Posters	625	20.30	3.61	0.96	0.24
Infographics	7	11.29	2.14	0.00	0.13
<b>Average</b>	<b>1231</b>	<b>28.73</b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>1.78</b>	<b>0.32</b>
<i>Political video content</i>					
Video reports from interactive events	28	76.93	16.25	0.64	1.46
Video reports from political events	25	38.44	3.76	0.76	0.32
Viral videos	98	23.16	3.23	1.88	0.30
Video interview	7	19.14	2.42	2.85	0.25
Webinars	29	14.45	1.38	1.10	0.18
Video reports from social projects	7	16.29	3.71	0.43	0.17
Promotional image videos	26	19.65	2.77	1.15	0.15
Videos with agitation	16	53.44	3.25	0.31	0.15
<b>Average</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>32.69</b>	<b>4.60</b>	<b>1.14</b>	<b>0.37</b>
<i>Political audio content</i>					
Music	12	16.30	1.90	1.08	0.42
Audio massages	7	8.00	0.42	0.00	0.08
<b>Average</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12.15</b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>0.25</b>
<i>Links on political content</i>					
Links	322	13	2.50	0.78	0.20

\* Compiled by the authors. Based on the analysis of data from the empirical research base

(pictures, diagrams, font, color, photos) components. The development of modern capabilities in graphic programs makes the poster a widespread and accessible form of communication for informing, congratulating, comparing, or convincing the target audience. It is advisable to use political communication photos to present photo reports from social, interactive, or political events.

Nowadays, video is the most expensive and preferred type of content among young people. It evokes strong emotions, engages in the subject, and holds lasting attention and interest. Table 1 shows that posts with video content have the highest social engagement role, and viral video can be called the most common form of video content.

The history of video content in politics has shown its powerful influence on election results and the rise or fall in political leaders' careers. Before B. Obama's team posted about 1,800 videos on YouTube and J. McCain's team - over 300 (Qwen)<sup>3</sup>, a viral video can attract millions of Internet users by influencing public opinion. Nahon and Hemsley (2013) point out four most important characteristics that describe the virality of video content: social process (information exchanges between network participants), diffusion speed (speed of information that spreads in a short period), coverage (number of people, who are covered by information), network prevalence (the content of various segments in a virtual environment). These characteristics distinguish a viral video from another. Most scientists point out that viral political video results from a complex and multidirectional interaction between the actions of Internet users, bloggers, campaigners, and journalists. Utami (2018) notes that political videos are based on resonant and robust narration. The author also points out that a viral video is not just a message. It opens up opportunities for new values, interpretations, and new forms of political participation.

An empirical research base analysis showed that video reports from interactive events have the highest indicator of social involvement ERpost (1.46). It happened due to the possible participation in the described events and emotional participation in the post. This involvement is expressed in likes, reposts, or comments.

The attractiveness of a post (likes) affects its virality (reposts). It was indicated by the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r=0.808$ ,  $p=0.0001$ ). The types and forms of political content should be considered within political communication functions to actualize their fundamental and practical significance.

In the scientific literature, the main functions of political communication on the Internet include the dissemination and storage of information, PR, advertising, initiation of discussions and discussions on solving socio-political problems, the organization of the intercommunication process (Morozova, 2011). Political communication is a symbiosis of traditional and specific functions. The first group includes cognitive, aesthetic, communicative, culture-forming, or expected functions. The second group (Asmus, 2005) considered as an environment of persuasive linguistic influence: beliefs, argumentation, and propaganda to achieve individual goals". Sokennikova (2007) also noted the importance of the suggestive function of the political Internet. It shows itself in the following interpretations: "political-integrative and political-mobilization functions, political socialization function, political marketing, political advertising, political image, manipulative function, control function." The implementation of Internet communications' specific functions contributes to the most outstanding political communication achievement's vital goal. It means the impact on the target audience and the formation of the desired public opinion.

The analysis of the empirical base of social media accounts with youth political orientation. The above analysis of youth behavioral activity indicators on political content showed several specific features. Based on the general and particular functions of political Internet communication, youth political content's following tasks can be distinguished.

- Task 1. Increase of community members;
- Task 2. Identification of the needs of the target audience;
- Task 3. Formation of the reputation of the organization and the image of the political leader;
- Task 4. Involvement of the target audience;
- Task 5. Agitation.

The forms and types of youth content in implementing political communication tasks are presented in Figures 1-5.

One of social media’s primary tasks is the formation, continuous growth of community members and identifying their needs. It is usually achieved by using targeted, contextual advertising, distributing viral content, posting useful and valuable information, and studying the needs of the target audience (Tasks 1,2).

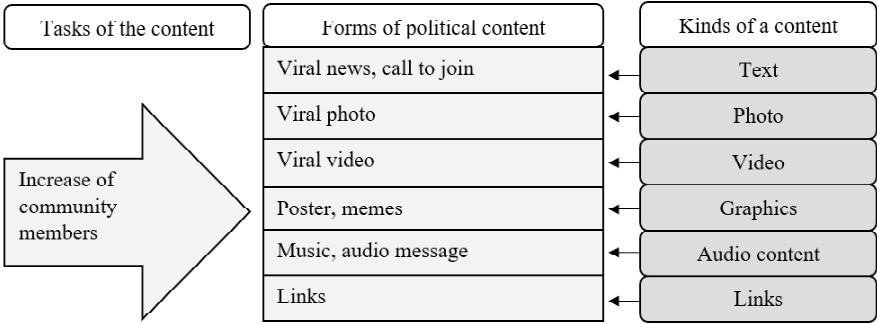


Figure 1. Forms and types of youth political content in social networks in the increase of community members.

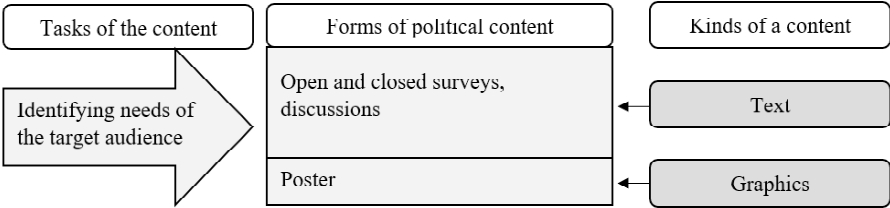


Figure 2. Forms and types of youth political content in social networks in identifying the needs of the target audience.

The next step is to strengthen and maintain the political organization or leader’s image and involve participants in all kinds of interactive events, like concerts, festivals, quests, flash mobs, marathons, and sports days. Their tasks are to increase their loyalty and stimulate various forms of feedback. Well-structured and engaging content can overcome the barrier of “click activism” and lead to online and offline political activity. It is expressed in creating and distributing the political content required, participation in blogs, chats, forums of political organizations and their leaders, development of the legislative initiatives, political programs, or political decisions projects (Tasks 3, 4).



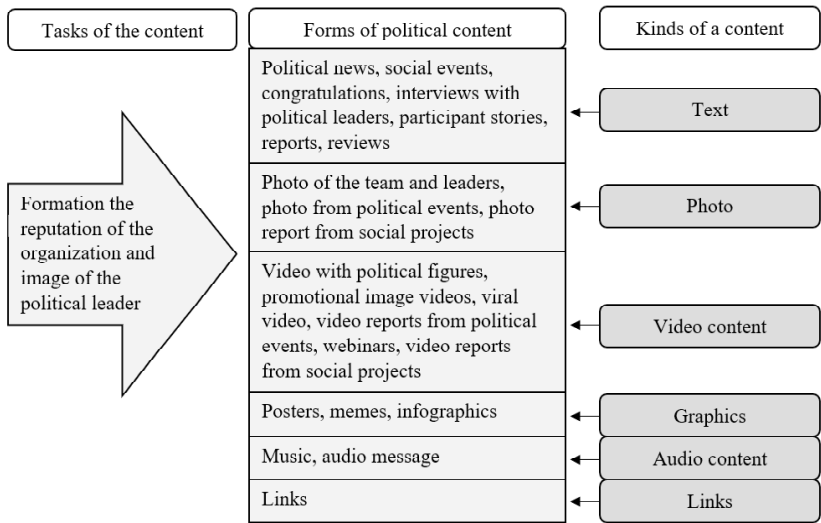


Figure 3. Forms and types of youth political content in social networks in the formation of the organization's reputation and a political leader's image.

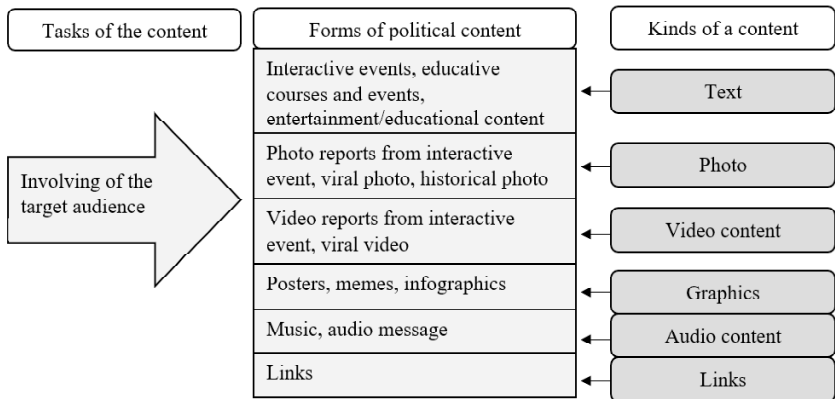


Figure 4. Forms and types of youth political content in social networks in the involvement of the target audience.

The final task of youth political content is to stimulate real political actions and influence political processes. This can be different online actions, like supporting the petitions, participating in Internet voting, elections, and referendums, attending a virtual meeting of parties, congresses, and offline participating in strikes, protests, political and social actions (Task 5).

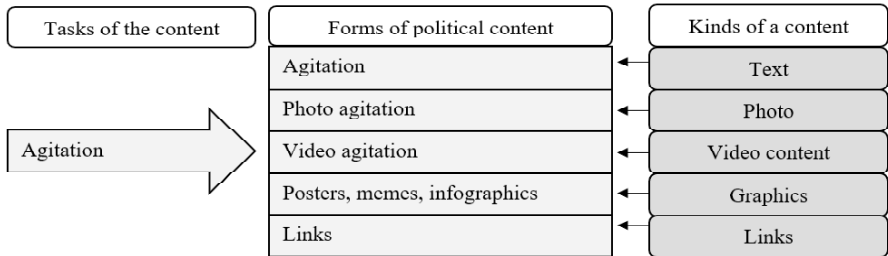


Figure 5. Forms and types of youth political content in social networks are used to agitate the target audience.

Content is the key to successful social media promotion. That is why it is essential to obtain and analyze behavioral data on the characteristics of its perception, typologization of forms, and types of content. It will further form the basis for forming an effective strategy for promoting political accounts of social networks in the youth segment. Pictures 1-5 show the key objectives of the promotion policy in social media and selected the most popular types and forms of content to achieve them.

## Conclusion

In general, relatively insignificant volumes of political information can be noted. It is focused on the youth segment with a small number of participants and a low level of social activity. The typology of the types and forms of youth political content according to the level of social involvement and understanding the specific of using various structures and content of the post in the implementation of specific tasks of Internet communication will make it possible to more effectively build a general content strategy by actors of political power and quickly to achieve their goals.

Further research can be relevant in applying new forms of political communication and obtaining new knowledge about the features of the visual, auditory modality of perceiving the content of the message itself. New forms of communication that are practically not used in politics have significant potential for involvement. They can be classified as games, humorous content, films, cartoons, music, videos, life hacks, comics, streams, challenges, collages and parodies, an insider in information, anecdotes, or long reads. An interdisciplinary approach using research methods of neurophysiology, psychology, and sociology will provide new objective knowledge about the peculiarities of youth perception of a communicative message in a virtual environment, detect triggers of attention and interest in visual, auditory political symbols among young people and contribute to an increase in the effectiveness of the communicative process in social networks.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> TV channel RBC. Society 23.12.2019. URL <https://www.rbc.ru/society/23/12/2019/5e00c11c9a79476cb09593e6> (accessed 20.08.2020)

<sup>2</sup> Savitskaya T.E. Internet-memes as a phenomenon of public culture URL: [http://infoculture.rsl.ru/donArch/home/KVM\\_archive/articles/2013/03/2013-03\\_r\\_kv-m-s3.pdf](http://infoculture.rsl.ru/donArch/home/KVM_archive/articles/2013/03/2013-03_r_kv-m-s3.pdf) (accessed 02.09.2020)

<sup>3</sup> Qwen D. The Past Decade and Future of Political Media: The Ascendancy of Social Media URL: <https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/articles/the-past-decade-and-future-of-political-media-the-ascendancy-of-social-media/> (accessed 10.08.2020)

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