

Digital Crisis Discourse and Interpretive Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies: A Sociolinguistic Perspective From CIS Countries

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Abstract—The relevance of this study stems from the growing conflict-generating potential of digital crisis communication in multilingual post-Soviet societies and from the limited development of its sociolinguistic analysis as an autonomous discursive phenomenon. The article aims to identify and describe stable sociolinguistic and discursive mechanisms that produce interpretive conflict in digital crisis communication, drawing on institutional and user-generated public discourse. The study follows a qualitative, interpretive-analytical approach and analyzes a multilingual corpus of 730 texts from open digital sources in Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The methodology integrates sociolinguistic analysis, critical discourse analysis, and qualitative interpretation, with comparative attention to strategies of nomination, subjectivity, pragmatic orientation, and language code. The study advances a conceptualization of digital crisis communication as an autonomous arena of interpretive conflict shaped by linguistic and discursive asymmetries among actors in the digital public sphere. The findings show that conflictual interpretations recur through stable strategies, including emotive-evaluative, accusatory, and framing strategies, across crisis topics and national contexts. The results highlight language code, register, and public expression strategies as key factors in redistributing interpretive power and intensifying discursive tension in digitally multilingual settings.

Index Terms—digital crisis communication, interpretive conflict, sociolinguistics, code-mixing, post-Soviet societies

I. INTRODUCTION

Under conditions of the digitalization of the public sphere, crisis communication is no longer limited to purely managerial instruments and is emerging as a distinct type of discursive interaction between state institutions and society. In post-Soviet countries, this process has a specific sociolinguistic character shaped by a combination of historical and institutional traditions, asymmetries of communicative power, and the high conflict-generating potential of the digital

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media space (Austin et al., 2012; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2016; Bakytzhanova et al., 2025). In this context, a crisis should be viewed not only as a managerial task but as a discursive event in which competing interpretations, narratives, and evaluative frames confront one another (Entman, 1993; Coombs, 2007).

Contemporary research on crisis communication is primarily focused on strategic management, reputational risk, and institutional effectiveness (Bundy et al., 2017; Lerouge et al., 2023). However, in a digital environment, the linguistic organization of a crisis message, including evaluativity, metaphorical framing, and conflict potential, becomes a decisive factor for public perception and for the dynamics of crisis processes (An & Gower, 2009; Utz et al., 2013). This is especially evident in post-Soviet societies, where official communication often enters into tense interaction with civic and media discourse, producing stable zones of discursive conflict.

From this perspective, an approach oriented toward the analysis of linguistic mechanisms of conflict and interpretive dynamics is crucial (*linguistic conflict analysis*). It makes it possible to treat crisis communication as a space of confrontation among meanings, strategies, and narrative constructions (Golub & Sergeeva, 2020; Cheng, 2020). Digital crisis discourse is characterized by high emotional intensity, fragmentation of communicative actors, and an accelerated diffusion of conflict generating interpretations. This requires shifting the analytical focus from managerial procedures to the linguistic and discursive mechanisms through which conflicts are formed, escalated, and de-escalated (Sharkov, 2020; Olsson Gardell, 2014).

The aim of this article is to identify and describe stable sociolinguistic and discursive mechanisms that shape *interpretive conflict* in the digital crisis communication of post-Soviet societies, using institutional and user generated public discourse as empirical material. Within this aim, the study examines asymmetries of communicative regimes enacted by different types of actors in the digital environment, with particular attention to strategies of *nomination* and reference, the framing of crisis events, the organization of subject positions in public statements, pragmatic orientation, and *language code*, including practices of multilingualism and *code-mixing*.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in its sociolinguistic reconceptualization of digital crisis communication as an autonomous discursive space of interpretive conflict rather than as an auxiliary tool of institutional crisis management. In contrast to dominant approaches that evaluate communicative effectiveness, trust in institutions, or conformity to normative response models, the study demonstrates that the conflict-generating potential of digital crisis communication is constituted at the level of the linguistic and discursive organization of public interaction. Empirically, it shows that interpretive conflict is systemic and reproduced regardless of crisis topic and national context. It further demonstrates that asymmetries between institutional and user-generated discourse arise less from differences in message content than from mismatched sociolinguistic parameters such as types of subjectivity, nomination strategies, pragmatic orientations, and linguistic registers. The study also operationalizes language code and code-mixing in a comparative post-Soviet context as an independent sociolinguistic parameter directly linked to the redistribution of interpretive power, symbolic participation, and legitimacy in the digital environment. Finally, it develops a parametric model for the linguistic conflict analysis of digital crisis discourse that enables the typologization of conflictual interpretations and the identification of recurrent discursive scenarios in multilingual societies.

In this way, the study contributes to the development of the sociolinguistics of digital media, the linguistic anthropology of crisis, and the *discourse analysis* of public communication, expanding understanding of the role of language in processes of social tension and conflict articulation under conditions of digital multilingual publicness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical conceptualization of crisis communications within the philological paradigm implies rejecting a narrowly functional understanding of communication as the transmission of information and moving toward analyzing crisis as a communicatively organized conflict. Within this approach, crisis is interpreted as a situation of disruption of habitual discursive norms, in which linguistic means acquire special regulatory and *conflictogenic* significance. To make the conceptual architecture of this literature review transparent, the core analytical lenses, constructs, and source clusters are systematized in *Table 1*.

TABLE 1
ANALYTICAL LENSES AND CORE CONSTRUCTS IN CRISIS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH RELEVANT TO THE STUDY

<i>Analytical lens</i>	<i>Key constructs</i>	<i>Typical indicators in text/discourse</i>	<i>Key sources cited in this section</i>
<i>Linguoconflictological framing</i>	Conflict reality; responsibility attribution; legitimization/delegitimation; framing	Lexical choice; modal markers; justification/explanation strategies; evaluative predicates	Entman (1993); Coombs (2007); Bundy et al. (2017)
<i>Evaluativeness & affect</i>	Interpretive frames: guilt/innocence; controllability/threat; success/failure; emotions	Affective coloring; stance markers; appraisal patterns; discussion dynamics and trust cues	Entman (1993); An and Gower (2009); Utz et al. (2013); Lerouge et al. (2023)
<i>SMCC & channel ecology</i>	Polyphony of actors; third-party effects; network diffusion; channel purposes	Cross-platform uptake; repost chains; competing ‘versions of the event’; agenda shifts	Austin et al. (2012); Panagiotopoulos et al. (2016); Eriksson (2018)
<i>Digital agenda shaping</i>	Rapidly shifting agendas; interpretive frames during crises	Semantic mapping; topic shifts; online framing transitions	Smirnova et al. (2022); Oleshko et al. (2023)
<i>Normative/official register in CIS context</i>	Minimization of conflictogenicity; impersonalization; euphemization; normativity	Impersonal constructions; euphemisms; legal-normative phrasing; institutional voice	Bakytzhanova et al. (2025)

Building on the synthesis in *Table 1*, the linguoconflictological approach treats conflict not only as a social or institutional contradiction, but also as the result of a specific linguistic representation of events (Entman, 1993). Within crisis communications, this manifests itself especially clearly: a crisis narrative constructs a “*conflict reality*”, where the choice of lexical units, syntactic structures, modal markers, and strategies of explanation/justification such as attribution of responsibility, appeal to the norm, and legitimization of decisions directly affects the intensity and direction of the conflict (Coombs, 2007; Bundy et al., 2017). In the digital environment, this effect is amplified due to the *polyphony* of discursive actors and the absence of a single center of interpretation: the state’s message, media repackaging, and civic reaction function in a mode of competition of meanings and evaluations. Evidence from semantic mapping of COVID-19 public discourse in Russia shows how rapidly shifting agendas and online discussions shape interpretive frames during crisis periods (Smirnova et al., 2022).

To clarify the core mechanism assumed in this study, we treat digital crisis communication as a multi-actor discursive system in which institutional and user registers interact and compete for interpretive authority. Institutional messages tend to emphasize governability, legitimacy, and normative framing, whereas user generated communication intensifies evaluative processing, accelerates the circulation of alternative interpretations, and amplifies conflict potential through polarization and responsibility attribution. In line with the *Social Mediated Crisis Communication* perspective, platform specific affordances and third-party dissemination contribute to the rapid diffusion of frames and to the amplification of public evaluations across channels, thereby reducing the interpretive asymmetry between authorities and citizens (Austin et al., 2012; Eriksson, 2018; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2016).

Of particular importance in crisis discourse is the category of *evaluativeness*, since evaluative constructions form dominant interpretive frames and consolidate typical scenarios of ‘guilt/innocence’, ‘controllability/threat’, and ‘success/failure’ (Entman, 1993; An & Gower, 2009). Studies of digital crises show that audiences’ emotional reactions depend not only on the fact of the crisis, but also on the medium, the type of crisis, and the affective coloring of messages, which is reflected in discussion dynamics and the level of trust (Utz et al., 2013). For governmental crisis management, communication can reduce anxiety by decreasing uncertainty and offering coordinated interpretations; however, in the presence of topic dissonance and a sense of loss of control, it can intensify fear and tension (Lerouge et al., 2023).

Thus, crisis communications in the digital environment of CIS countries should be analyzed as a discursive field of conflict in which linguistic strategies function not only as a means of describing a crisis, but also as an instrument of its development or containment. This perspective enables a transition from normative models of ‘effective communication’ to the analysis of real linguistic practices that shape crisis dynamics in the public space.

In the contemporary scientific paradigm, crisis communications are regarded as an interdisciplinary phenomenon at the intersection of crisis management, strategic communications/PR, studies of trust and legitimacy, public administration, and digital governance (Bundy et al., 2017; Coombs, 2007; Eriksson, 2018; Jiang & Tang, 2022; Al-Omouh et al., 2023). To clarify how the field’s major strands map onto governmental crisis communication and where a linguoconflictological angle contributes, *Table 2* summarizes the key research streams and their typical emphases.

TABLE 2
MAJOR RESEARCH STRANDS INFORMING GOVERNMENTAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND THE LINGUOCONFLICTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

<i>Research strand</i>	<i>Core focus</i>	<i>What it explains (for this study)</i>	<i>Representative sources cited</i>
<i>Crisis management & organizational communication</i>	Uncertainty/risk; strategy selection; reputational threat	Why strategy choice matters; linkage between responsibility and response	Coombs (2007, 2019); Bundy et al. (2017); Austin et al. (2012)
<i>Risk-management and early warning</i>	Scenario modelling; monitoring; communication risk identification	Why monitoring and pre-crisis planning are required in public institutions	Sharkov (2020)
<i>Digital governance, trust, and compliance</i>	Transparency; participation; contradictions; platform access	How social media governance practices influence trust and compliance	Al-Omouh et al. (2023); Jiang and Tang (2022); Porumbescu (2016); Hong (2013); Zhu et al. (2020)
<i>Institutionalization, legitimation and public-sector crisis communication</i>	Public accountability; resilience; operational vs strategic dimensions	How power legitimacy is negotiated under crisis; containment vs escalation	Olsson Gardell (2014); Frandsen and Johansen (2009); Svenbro and Wester (2023); Heath and Johansen (2018)
<i>Social media dynamics & network models</i>	UGC, emotions, mobilization; big-data analyses	Why crisis discourse becomes polycentric and fast; how group behaviour emerges	Grigorieva (2024); Khetselius (2019); Startsev and Grishanin (2018)
<i>Public health and infodemic research</i>	Polarization; message pathways; misinformation management; integrated response	How infodemic risks reshape trust and public reaction during large-scale crises	Malecki et al. (2021); Akturan (2025); Eismann et al. (2021); Lerouge et al. (2023); Zhu et al. (2020)
<i>Field reviews & mapping (Delphi, bibliometrics)</i>	State of the field; thematic clusters; theory–practice gap	Where the discipline is growing; why cross-cultural work is needed	Manias-Muñoz et al. (2019); Upadhyay and Upadhyay (2023); Cheng (2020); Cheng et al. (2022); Shahbazi and Bunker (2024)

Taken together, the reviewed approaches substantiate the necessity of integrating regulatory and linguoconflictological analysis into the study of crisis communications in public administration. This framework provides the basis for the subsequent empirical analysis of digital crisis discourse in CIS countries, enabling the identification of typological models of linguistic conflict, features of institutional manageability, and the limits of discursive regulation in the digital environment. It is within this logic that further case analysis of crisis communications in a number of CIS countries is conducted, aimed at identifying stable discursive effects and mechanisms of forming conflict narratives under conditions of digital interaction between the state and society.

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A. Empirical Material

The empirical basis of the study is a corpus of digital crisis communication texts circulating in the public space of post-Soviet societies. The total volume of the material is 730 communicative units, including:

- official statements issued by public authorities and affiliated institutional actors and published on digital platforms (official websites, verified social media accounts);
- user-generated content produced in response to these statements in social media (comments, replies, secondary interpretations, reposts accompanied by evaluative framing).

The corpus includes texts in Russian and Kazakh, as well as hybrid statements (about 40 percent of the total empirical material) containing elements of language code-mixing. The presence of code variability is treated not as a side effect but as a sociolinguistically significant parameter that reflects the specificity of digital public communication under conditions of post-Soviet multilingualism and asymmetrical linguistic resources.

The unit of analysis is a communicative text functioning in the context of a crisis situation and oriented toward interpreting, evaluating, or normatively regulating public perception of a crisis event. The material was collected exclusively from open sources; personal data and closed forms of communication were not included, which conforms to ethical standards for the analysis of digital public discourse (Eriksson, 2018; Olsson Gardell, 2014; Svenbro & Wester, 2023).

B. Methodological Foundations of the Study

The methodological strategy is qualitative and interpretive in nature and is aimed at identifying stable sociolinguistic regularities in the functioning of crisis discourse in a digital environment. The study integrates approaches from crisis communication theory, media discourse studies, and *linguistic conflictology*. The conceptual basis of the analysis is Coombs's (2007, 2019) *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (hereafter SCCT), which makes it possible to identify discursive strategies of institutional actors aimed at redistributing responsibility, legitimizing managerial decisions, and stabilizing reputation. The use of SCCT provides an analytical link between institutional messages and observable reactions in user discourse, which is crucial for explaining the mechanisms of *interpretive conflict*.

To analyze the construction of crisis reality and competing interpretations, the study applied frame analysis based on Entman's (1993) concept. This approach made it possible to identify how cause-and-effect relations, evaluative dominants, and normative interpretive schemes are highlighted in digital discourse and to establish divergences between institutional and user frames of the crisis (An & Gower, 2009; Smirnova et al., 2022).

The interactive dimension of crisis communication was examined within the paradigm of *Social Mediated Crisis Communication* (Austin et al., 2012; Cheng, 2020; Cheng et al., 2022). This approach allowed digital crisis communication to be treated as a dynamic process in which official messages are not merely transmitted but are actively reinterpreted, emotionally processed, and conflictually transformed in user discourse.

C. Methods and Analytical Procedures

Methodologically, the study is implemented as qualitative discourse analysis with a focus on linguistically conflict-generating parameters of digital communication. The analysis covers the following groups of indicators:

- strategies of *nomination* and reference (designation of actors, events, responsibility);
- framing of the causes and consequences of the crisis;
- the subject position of the statement and the type of agency;
- the pragmatic orientation of the message (regulative, evaluative, accusatory);
- stylistic and genre characteristics;
- *language code* and forms of *code-mixing*.

The use of this set of analytical parameters ensured a systematized analysis of asymmetry between institutional and user discourse and formed the methodological basis for identifying mechanisms through which *interpretive conflict* is reproduced in the digital environment (Eriksson, 2018; Oleshko et al., 2023; Lerouge et al., 2023).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. General Characterization of the Empirical Material and the Analytical Approach

The analysis of the corpus of digital crisis texts ($n = 730$), compiled from institutional and user messages from CIS countries (Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), was conducted in accordance with the stated methodological foundations and analytical procedures. The corpus included official messages by state and quasi-state actors as well as user responses in digital public spaces (comments, replies, reposts), selected according to criteria of thematic relevance and temporal alignment with crisis events.

The results are structured in accordance with the parametric model of *linguistic conflict analysis* of digital crisis discourse, which makes it possible to relate empirically identified communicative strategies to typical scenarios of *interpretive conflict* in a multilingual digital environment. The results are presented as stable sociolinguistic and discursive patterns identified through systematic qualitative coding across a set of parameters: strategies of *nomination* and reference, framing of the causes and consequences of the crisis, subject position and type of agency, pragmatic orientation of the utterance, stylistic and genre characteristics, and *language code*. This parametric approach makes it possible to register structural differences between the institutional and user segments of digital crisis communication and to compare them in an intercontextual perspective.

B. Interpretive Instability and Frame Divergence

Frame analysis showed that institutional and user messages referring to the same crisis events systematically represent different interpretive frames. These divergences were recorded during coding through comparison of cause-and-effect relations, evaluative dominants, and modalities of expression.

Quantitative and qualitative annotation revealed that institutional texts are oriented toward a limited set of recurring frames, whereas user discourse demonstrates diversification and competition among frames. In order to make this contrast explicit, the dominant frames and their interpretation patterns are summarized in *Table 3*.

TABLE 3
DOMINANT INTERPRETIVE FRAMES IN DIGITAL CRISIS DISCOURSE

Discourse type	Identified frames	Interpretation pattern
Institutional	Manageability, procedurality, necessity	Crisis as a controllable process
User	Blame, injustice, threat	Crisis as a consequence of specific actions
Cross zones	Uncertainty, distrust	Competition and divergence of interpretations

The identified frames were not specified a priori but were derived inductively on the basis of recurring meaning patterns. Their reproducibility is observed across all national subcorpora, which makes it possible to treat interpretive instability as a systemic rather than situational feature of digital crisis discourse. Within the developed parametric model, this type of utterance is interpreted as a recurrent scenario of *interpretive conflict*.

C. Asymmetry Between Institutional and User Discourse Across Sociolinguistic Parameters

Comparative analysis showed that the institutional and user segments of digital crisis communication operate within different communicative regimes. The asymmetry manifests not at the level of individual linguistic devices but as a set

of stable sociolinguistic differences recorded across all analytical parameters specified in the section Materials and Methods (*Table 4*).

TABLE 4
SOCIOLINGUISTIC PARAMETERS OF ASYMMETRY IN CRISIS DISCOURSE

Parameter	Institutional discourse	User discourse
Nomination	Abstract, generalized	Specific, personalized
Subjectivity	Implicit, depersonalized	Explicit, personal
Modality	Normative, directive	Evaluative, accusatory
Emotionality	Minimized	High
Communicative goal	Stabilization and control of interpretations	Evaluation and mobilization

Thus, the asymmetry is manifested not only in linguistic choice but also in differences in communicative rationality. These differences were recorded through comparison of parallel communicative situations (official message and user responses), which allows the asymmetry to be interpreted as a structural characteristic of digital crisis communication reproduced regardless of the thematic specificity of the crisis.

D. Linguistically Conflict-Generating Strategies of User Discourse

Coding the pragmatic orientation of user messages made it possible to identify a limited yet consistently reproducible set of linguistically conflict-generating strategies activated in response to institutional texts in digital crisis communication. The identified strategies were recorded across all national subcorpora (Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan) and did not depend on the genre of the message (comment, reply, repost, quotation), which indicates their systemic rather than situational character. The analysis showed that user discourse in crisis conditions is oriented predominantly not toward interpretive stabilization but toward evaluation, attribution of responsibility, and symbolic opposition to institutional actors.

The most representative and most frequently reproduced strategy in the user segment of digital crisis communication was the *accusatory strategy*, which manifests itself in direct or indirect nomination of specific actors as responsible for the crisis situation and its consequences. During qualitative coding, this strategy was identified in all national subcorpora and demonstrated the highest stability regardless of message genre and platform of dissemination.

In the Russian and Kazakhstani subcorpora, the accusatory strategy is predominantly realized through explicit personalization of responsibility directed at public authorities, specific agencies, or an abstract but unambiguously interpretable actor—the authorities ("the authorities again shift responsibility onto people", "officials do not explain but demand compliance", "the government made a decision without thinking about the consequences", "what are they even doing there", "they invent something every day", "they have made a mess", "they will be held accountable for this"). Linguistically, this strategy is shaped through direct agent nominations, active verbal forms, and evaluative lexis, which creates a clear causal link between institutional actions and negative crisis outcomes. The inclusion of this type of utterance in the parametric model makes it possible to typologize it as a stable conflict scenario of digital crisis discourse.

In the Kyrgyzstani and Uzbek materials, the accusatory strategy more often takes the form of indirect attribution of blame realized through rhetorical questions, implicit comparisons, and ironic constructions ("who will be accountable for these decisions", "apparently, again no one is to blame", "it is interesting who came up with such measures", "so what will happen now"). Despite a less direct form of nomination, the pragmatic effect of these utterances is preserved: responsibility is symbolically assigned to institutional actors, and the official version of crisis interpretation is placed under doubt.

Across all analyzed subcorpora, the accusatory strategy intensifies *interpretive conflict* by shifting the focus from a normative explanation of crisis measures to the search for a culpable subject. In this way, accusatory nomination functions as a key linguistically conflict generating mechanism that transforms an institutionally managed crisis into a space of public attribution of responsibility and symbolic confrontation.

The accusatory strategy serves as the dominant mechanism of *interpretive conflict* in digital crisis discourse because it enables personalization of responsibility and moves the institutional message into the domain of moral evaluation. In user comments, this strategy is realized through direct nomination of public authorities, officials, or the generalized actor "the authorities" as the source of the crisis, which produces a stable opposition between the official interpretive frame and the user understanding of the situation. The recurrence of such utterances indicates that accusation functions not as a situational reaction but as a reproducible discursive scenario with pronounced conflict-generating potential.

The *polarizing strategy* is revealed through the stable reproduction of binary oppositions such as *we versus they*, *the people versus the authorities*, *ordinary people versus officials*, *ordinary citizens versus those in power*, *the lower ranks versus the upper ranks*, and others. This strategy is recorded across all national subcorpora and is accompanied by collective identification of the user community. Linguistically, the polarizing strategy is realized through personal and demonstrative pronouns, generalized nominations, and evaluative lexis, for example: they will not understand us; we have to endure; they up there do not listen; they are detached from people; they are all like that; why do they need us; does anyone think about us, and similar formulations. Such forms of linguistic representation of the polarizing strategy construct a symbolic boundary between institutional and civic actors and reproduce a stable model of social distancing.

The *delegitimizing strategy* in user digital discourse is characterized by the systematic use of irony, sarcasm, allusions, and meme-based forms aimed at undermining the authority and pragmatic persuasiveness of official messages. Empirical analysis showed that in the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyzstani segments of digital platforms this strategy is predominantly realized in a polycode format combining textual comments with visual elements such as memes, ironic screenshots of official statements, and GIF animation ("the situation is under control" accompanied by an image of empty shelves; the ironic "thank you for your care" against footage of street protests; sarcastic remarks such as "we can teach them how to run elections", "do they communicate with each other without emojis", "stocking up on popcorn", "tell us at once how many seasons and episodes there will be").

In Russian and Uzbek user discourse, the delegitimizing strategy more often takes the form of textual ironic reinterpretation of official formulas, based on a semantic mismatch between the stated institutional assessment and the perceived social reality ("there are no grounds for concern except all of them"; "measures have been taken, but by whom and for whom"; "and who are the judges"). Such utterances typically preserve the lexical form of official discourse but reframe it through quotation marks, rhetorical questions, and contextual sarcasm.

Regardless of the media form in which it is realized, the delegitimizing strategy produces a similar interpretive effect: it reduces the symbolic and pragmatic authority of the institutional message, undermines its claim to normative dominance, and transforms digital crisis communication into a space of symbolic competition of interpretations in which the official statement functions not as a point of stabilization but as an object of reevaluation and ironic distancing.

The *emotive-evaluative strategy* in user digital discourse is manifested in a high concentration of expressive lexis, intensifiers, and affective markers that serve to strengthen the evaluative stance and to involve the addressee in a collective experience of the crisis. Typical linguistic means of this strategy include emotionally marked adjectives and adverbs ("shameful", "terrible", "impossible to endure any longer"), reinforcing particles and degree adverbs ("completely", "absolutely", "really"), as well as expressive verbal forms ("outrages", "infuriates", "fed up").

Empirical analysis of comments on official messages issued by public authorities during the introduction and implementation of epidemiological measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that *emotive-evaluative* utterances statistically significantly more often accompany messages oriented toward regulating public behavior and appealing to collective responsibility. In the digital discourse of Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, typical user reactions were those in which emotional evaluation preceded or fully replaced reasoned discussion of the introduced restrictions ("how long are we supposed to endure these bans", "maybe stop feeding us nonsense", "the circus has left but the actors stayed", "these are no longer measures but mockery", "hello, how long are you going to string us along"), thereby forming an affectively saturated frame for interpreting institutional decisions.

Regardless of national context, such utterances were recorded predominantly in response to messages about the extension of restrictions, the introduction of mandatory sanitary requirements, and the tightening of control measures. The emotional intensity of comments served as a marker not only of individual dissatisfaction but also of collective frustration, which contributed to shifting the interpretation of the epidemiological situation from a rational normative plane into a space of affective and conflictual sense-making of the crisis.

In Russian digital discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic, the *emotive-evaluative strategy* was often realized through a combination of expressive lexis and rhetorical questions ("do you even understand what is happening", "is this care or mockery"), which intensified the effect of distrust toward institutional messages. In the Kyrgyzstani and Uzbek segments, similar utterances were frequently accompanied by collectivizing markers ("people are tired", "the people no longer believe"), which moved an individual emotional statement into the domain of generalized social affect.

Empirical data also indicate that the *emotive-evaluative strategy* rarely functions in isolation. In most of the analyzed cases, it is combined with an *accusatory* or *polarizing strategy*, amplifying their conflictual effect (emotionally marked nomination of those responsible; expressive opposition of *we versus they*, upper ranks versus lower ranks). This layering of strategies contributes to the growth of discursive tension and accelerates the escalation of *interpretive conflict* in digital crisis communication.

The consolidated results of the analysis of linguistically conflict-generating strategies are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5
LINGUISTICALLY CONFLICT-GENERATING STRATEGIES OF USER DISCOURSE

Strategy	Typical pragmatic linguistic markers	Observed communicative effect
<i>Accusatory strategy</i>	Direct nomination of those responsible, rhetorical questions	Escalation of <i>interpretive conflict</i>
<i>Polarizing strategy</i>	<i>We versus they</i> oppositions, generalized nominations	Social and symbolic distancing
<i>Delegitimizing strategy</i>	Irony, sarcasm, memetic elements	Undermining of institutional authority
<i>Emotive-evaluative strategy</i>	Expressive lexis, intensifiers	Increase in discursive tension

The recurrence of the strategies listed in Table 5 across all national subcorpora and their independence from message genre allow linguistically conflict-generating strategies of user discourse to be treated as a structural component of digital crisis communication. The empirical findings indicate that the conflict potential of the user segment is formed within stable pragmatic models reproduced in the digital environment of post-Soviet societies.

The set of identified strategies and sociolinguistic parameters forms a parametric model of *linguistic conflict analysis* of digital crisis discourse, within which *interpretive conflict* is treated as the result of interaction among pragmatic, framing, and linguistic factors.

E. Language Code and Code-Mixing as a Sociolinguistic Parameter of Crisis Communication

Analysis of *language code* in digital crisis discourse showed that language choice and forms of *code-mixing* in user messages have a functionally motivated character and are directly related to the pragmatic orientation of the utterance. In this context, language functions not as a neutral channel of information transfer but as a sociolinguistic resource for interpretation, evaluation, and symbolic mobilization.

In the institutional segment of crisis communication across all analyzed cases, a stable orientation toward monolingual normativity is observed. Official messages by public authorities and officials are published predominantly in a single institutionally established language (Russian or the state language), with minimal variability and an absence of code-switching. This strategy correlates with the tasks of standardization, legal unambiguity, and manageability of interpretations.

In the user segment, by contrast, a high degree of language variability and systematic use of *code-mixing* is recorded. Qualitative coding showed that language switching and hybrid forms (Russian and Kazakh, Russian and Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek) are reproduced not randomly but depending on the pragmatic and evaluative orientation of the message.

The empirical material demonstrates the following stable regularities:

- Rational and argumentative utterances aimed at formulating complaints, demands, or logical arguments are predominantly realized in Russian, which in digital space functions as a language of universalization and public legitimation. Thus, in comments on official messages of the ministries of health of Russia and Kazakhstan during the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian language replies more often contain extended cause-and-effect constructions, appeals to normative documents, and references to institutional responsibility.
- *Emotive-evaluative* and mobilizational utterances are statistically significantly more often realized in national languages or in a mixed code. In Kazakhstani cases related to the January 2022 crisis, comments with pronounced emotional expressiveness, appeals to collective identity, and moral evaluation of events show a shift to Kazakh or the inclusion of Kazakh lexemes in a Russian language text. A similar pattern is recorded in Kyrgyzstani digital discourse during political crises, where the use of Kyrgyz correlates with protest and solidarizing pragmatics.
- Hybrid language code (*code-mixing*) performs the function of symbolic rapprochement and group identification. In user comments, code-mixing is used to mark an in-group addressee while simultaneously distancing from institutional discourse. Such messages are often accompanied by ironic or sarcastic elements and are aimed at undermining the official interpretive frame.

The results of functional comparison between *language code* and the pragmatic orientation of user messages are presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6
FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE CODE IN USER DIGITAL CRISIS DISCOURSE

<i>Language code</i>	<i>Dominant pragmatic orientation</i>	<i>Sociolinguistic effect</i>
Russian	Argumentation, rationalization, appeal to norms	Universalization of claims
National language	Emotional evaluation, mobilization	Value and identity foregrounding
<i>Code-mixing</i>	Solidarity, irony, distancing	Polarization of interpretations

As the analysis shows, *code-mixing* in digital crisis discourse operates as an independent parameter of *linguistic conflict analysis* that intensifies interpretive fragmentation. Different language regimes create parallel spaces of crisis sense-making, within which institutional messages are interpreted in non-identical ways and often come into conflict with user narratives.

Thus, the empirical data confirm that multilingualism and *code-mixing* in the digital crisis communication of post-Soviet societies perform not an auxiliary but a structuring function, influencing the dynamics of *interpretive conflict* and the degree of symbolic participation of different social groups.

F. Summary of Empirical Findings

Comparative analysis of digital crisis discourses in post-Soviet countries makes it possible to argue that *interpretive conflict* is formed on the basis of a limited set of recurring strategies regardless of the specific national crisis context. Accusation, ironic delegitimation, and rhetorical problematization of institutional messages are reproduced as stable ways of transforming official information in the user environment, which indicates a structural rather than event driven character of conflictual interpretations.

At the same time, differences between national segments manifest primarily at the level of the formal realization of strategies, whereas their pragmatic function remains invariant, namely the intensification of the gap between institutional and user interpretive frames. This confirms that digital crisis communication in multilingual societies functions as an autonomous discursive space with its own conflict generating mechanisms that are only weakly amenable to institutional control.

The analysis of the empirical material confirms that institutional messages across all national subcorpora are oriented toward normative framing of the crisis, reduction of uncertainty, and the demonstration of situational manageability. This communicative logic is consistent with the propositions of *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (Coombs, 2007, 2019), according to which official actors seek to minimize reputational risks and retain interpretive control over the crisis narrative. At the same time, user discourse is characterized by a high degree of subjectivization, evaluativity, and

conflictual interpretation of events, which supports findings from research on *Social Mediated Crisis Communication* and digital crisis communication (Austin et al., 2012; Eriksson, 2018; Cheng et al., 2022). The comparability of these results with prior studies suggests their empirical reliability and reproducibility.

Particularly important for establishing the credibility of the findings is the identification of a stable set of linguistically conflict-generating strategies in user discourse, namely *accusatory*, *polarizing*, *delegitimizing*, and *emotive-evaluative* strategies. Their recurrence across all analyzed national segments and their independence from genre characteristics indicate the systemic nature of these strategies. Similar mechanisms of personalizing responsibility, binary framing, and ironic delegitimation of institutional discourse have previously been documented in studies of digital conflict and public crises (Panagiotopoulos et al., 2016; Papacharissi, 2015; Henman & Graham, 2020), which further supports the validity of the proposed interpretation.

The practical significance of the results lies in their applicability to the analysis and forecasting of conflict dynamics in digital crisis communication. The proposed parametric model of *linguistic conflict analysis* enables the typologization of conflictual interpretations and the identification of recurrent discursive scenarios in a multilingual environment. This makes the findings relevant for specialists in public communication, crisis management, digital sociolinguistics, and media *discourse analysis*, as well as for institutional actors seeking a more accurate understanding of the logic of user interpretations of crisis events and of the limits of institutional control in the digital environment.

V. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated that digital crisis communication in post-Soviet societies functions as a structurally asymmetrical and conflict generating discursive space in which institutional and user actors consistently enact different pragmatic orientations and interpretive strategies. Institutional discourse is oriented toward normative framing of the crisis, redistribution of responsibility, and the retention of *interpretive control*, whereas the user segment shows a tendency toward personalization, evaluativity, and conflictual reinterpretation of official messages. In this way, crisis communication in the digital environment appears not as a linear process of informing but as an interactive zone of competing narratives.

A key result of the study is the empirical confirmation of the systemic nature of linguistically conflict-generating strategies in user discourse. The recurrence of *accusatory*, *polarizing*, *delegitimizing*, and *emotive-evaluative* strategies across all analyzed national subcorpora indicates that the conflict potential of digital communication is not formed situationally but within stable pragmatic models. These models are reproduced regardless of the specific crisis case and the genre characteristics of messages, which allows *interpretive conflict* to be treated as a structural property of digital crisis discourse.

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