



# Studying Visual Political Irony: The Case of Russia

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## Types of identity

- Legitimizing
- Resistance
- Project

*Castells M. (1996-1998)  
The Information Age:  
Economy, Society and  
Culture. Oxford, UK*

## Patriotism

- Blind
- Constructive

*Schatz R.T., Staub E.,  
Lavine H. (1999) On the  
varieties of national  
attachment: Blind versus  
constructive patriotism //  
Political Psychology. No  
20.*

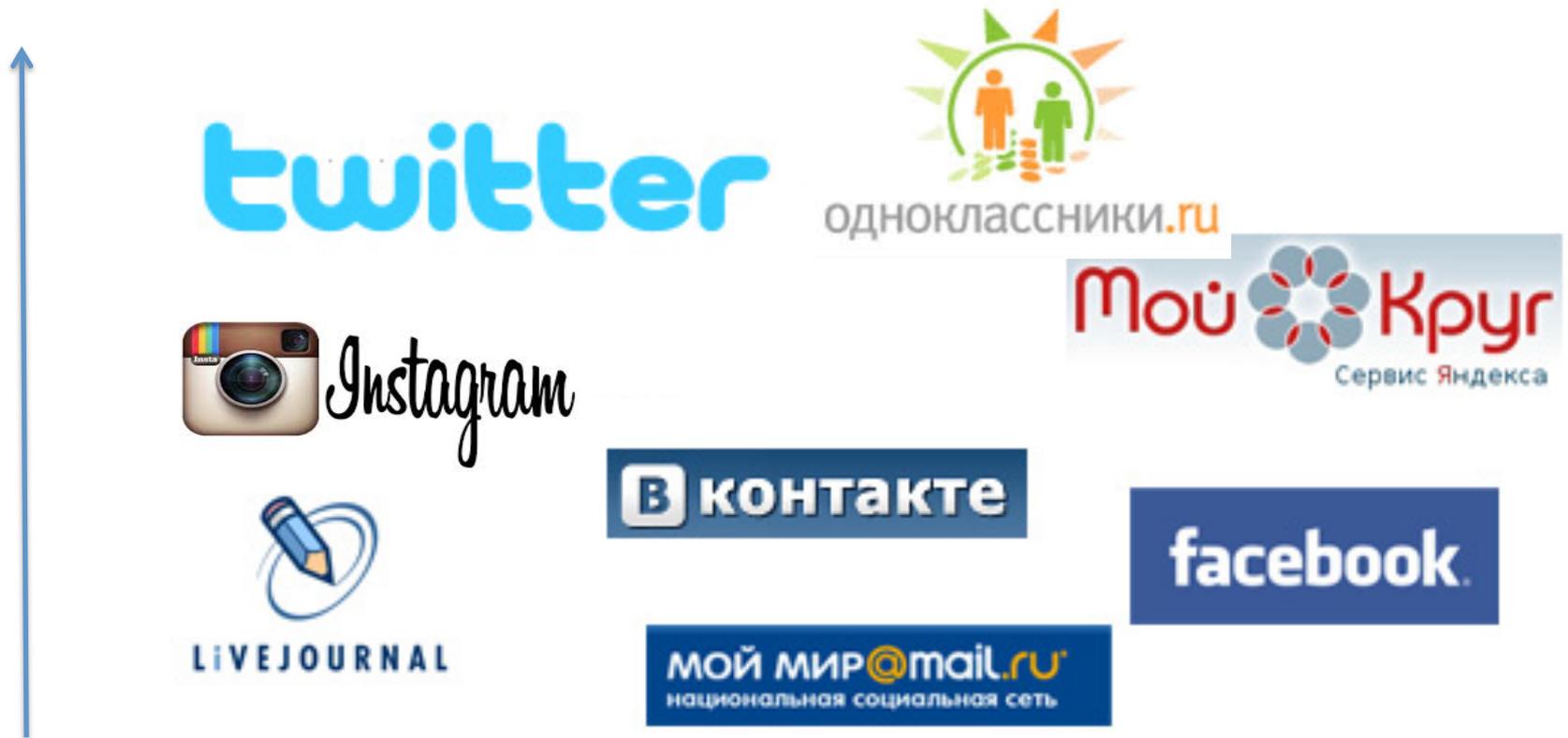
Patriotism is a clear, well-  
reasoned explanation of why  
we have to live worse than  
the others.

Патриотизм -  
это четкое, ясное,  
хорошо аргументированное  
объяснение того,  
почему мы должны жить  
хуже других.

Михаил Жванецкий



# Internet underground of the Russian identity



Digital media have democratizing potential, and the use of mediated political communication is being widely cited as transformative for state-society relations in the globalization times (*Blumler, Gurevitch, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002; Mummery, Rodan, 2013*).

# Political irony in digital media (1)

## 1. Caricatures



## Political irony in digital media (2)

### 2. (De)Motivational posters (Demotivators)



## Political irony in digital media (3)

### 3. Gifs

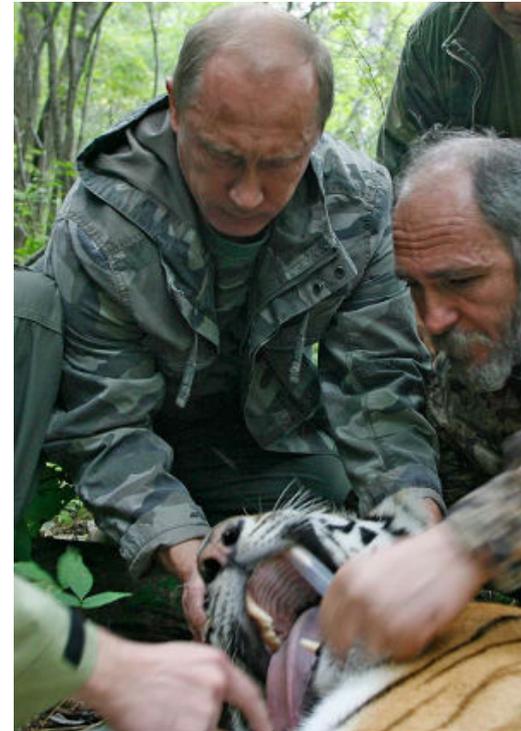


## Political irony in digital media (4)

### 4. Vernacular photos



# Visual political irony: a dialog



- (1) emotional reflection of political issues,
- (2) fixation of this reflection in the picture,
- (3) sharing and broadcasting

<http://potsreotizm.livejournal.com/1747252.html>

- Theories of verbal irony (Sperber and Wilson 1981; Haverkate, 1990;

- Hutchins

- Theo  
1994

- Theo

- Visual  
2007



ttman

Lozin,

(Müll  
2009)



lo,

ard,

- Analysis of Russian political discourse (*Shturman and Tiktin, 1985; Shmeleva and Shmelev, 2005* )

### Shared context

## Research methodology

What *meaning* is put by creators / producers and consumers of visual active political irony into their actions ? (MAXQDA)

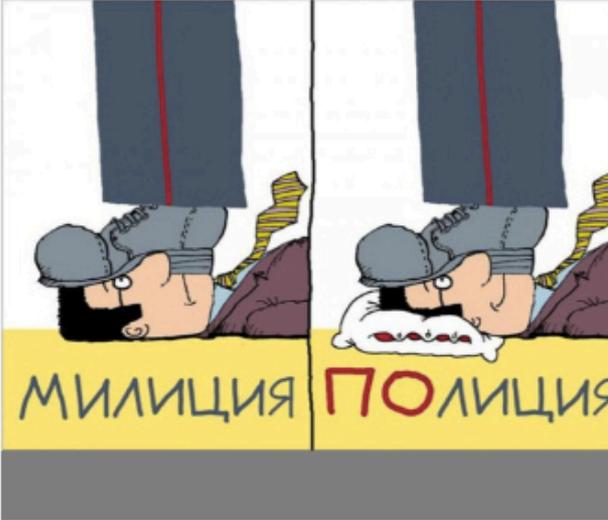
Visual analysis was carried out through solving three tasks:

- (1) objective (defining what the images reflect; n=1783);
- (2) subjective (exploring the intentions of the images creators; n=316 );
- (3) interpretative (understanding how ironic images are connected with the individuals' broader social perceptions, their political positions and actions outside the digital media; n=56 (interview)).

# Event-oriented images

Document Browser: 113

- ..2011
- ..Caricature
- ..Event-oriented
- ..2011-Police Refor



Document Browser: 403

- ..Event-orient
- ..2012-Presid
- ..Demotivational po
- ..2012



Simple query (OR combination)

Document Browser: 1449

- ..2013-Putin\_Devo
- ..Routine-oriented
- ..Religiosity/Church/Priesthood
- ..Officials
- ..2013\_Sobianin\_Elected
- ..2013
- ..Copyrighted/Official
- ..Event-oriented
- ..2012-President\_Elections



Document Browser: 1344

- ..2014-Ruble\_Collap
- ..2014\_Sanctions
- ..Event-oriented
- ..2014
- ..Vernacular



Simple query (OR combination)

Simple query (OR combination)

## Routine-oriented images (1)



## Routine-oriented images (2)



## Routine-oriented images (3)

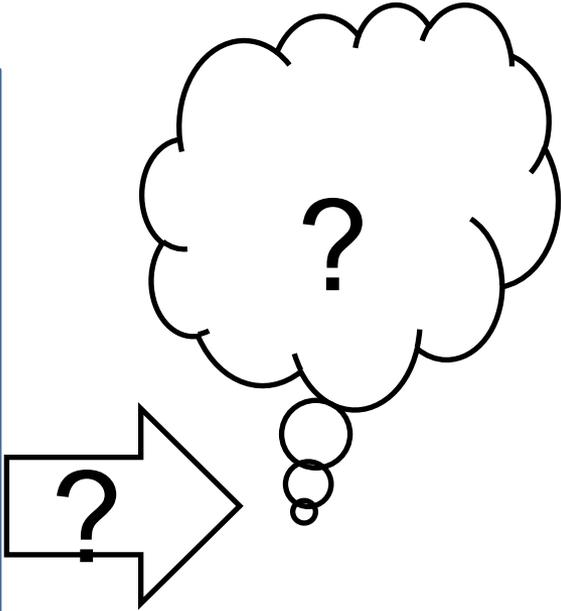
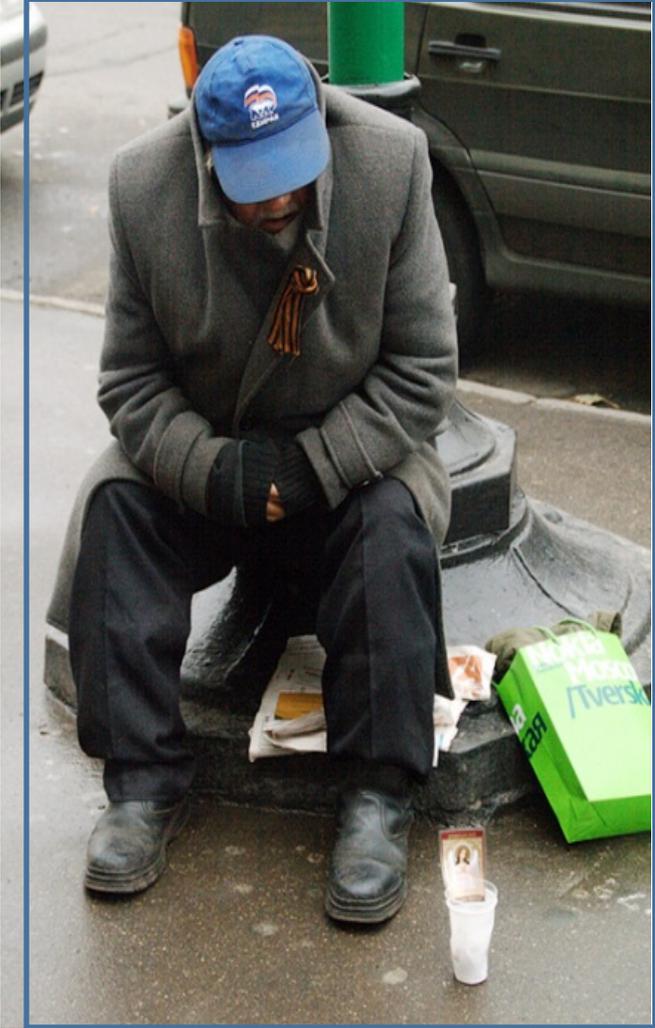




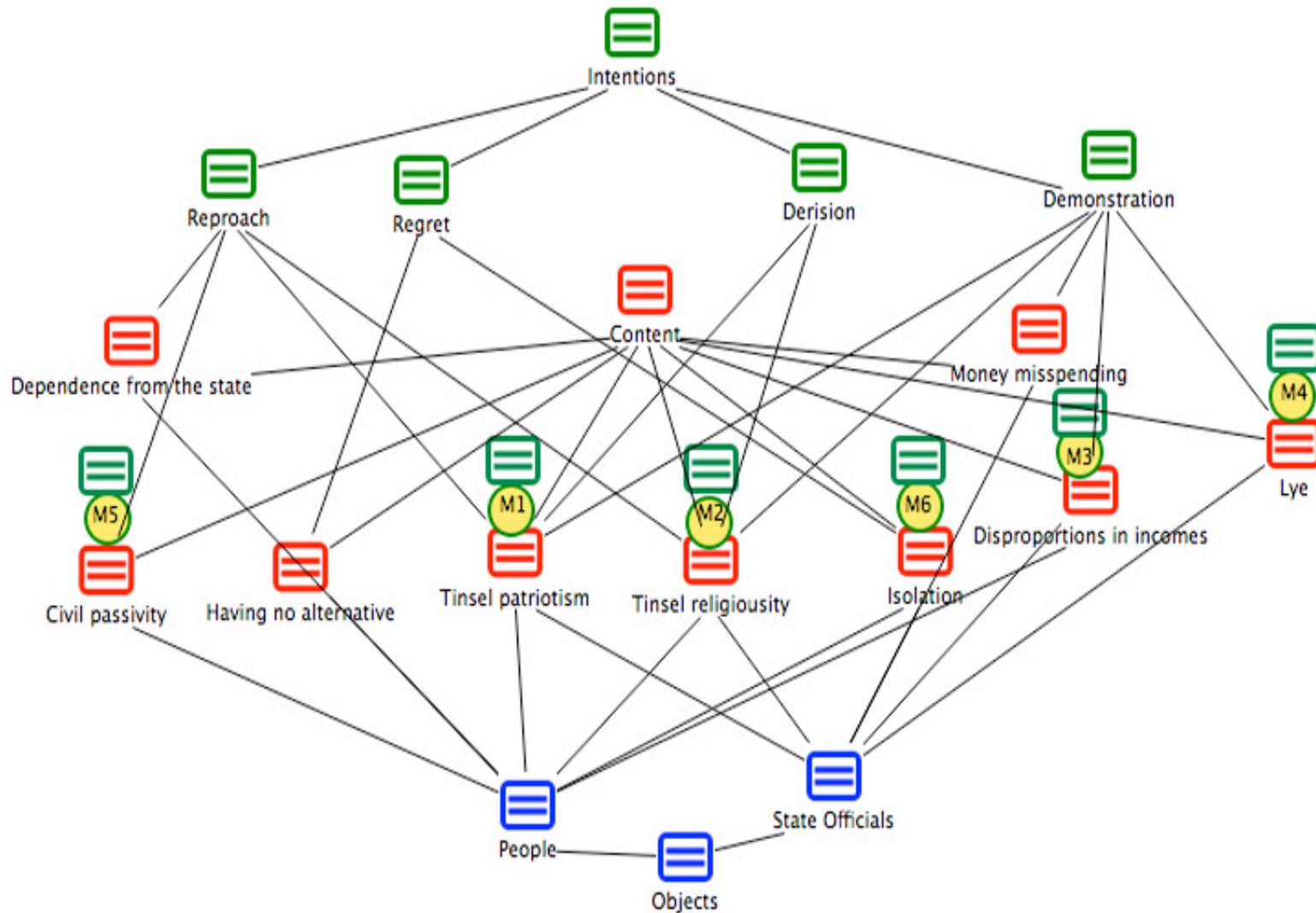
## Routine-oriented images (5)



# Meanings of visual political irony: the problem of “translation”



# Code theory model in MAXQDA



(M1) Patriotism in Russia has a flashy character and therefore cannot lead to a constructive perception of the state as one’s own state;

(M2) In the same way, ostentatious religiosity cannot be considered as the true religiosity, especially if it is associated with the affairs of the secular nature (e.g. a broadcast by state politicians, who were radical atheists just a few years ago);

(M3) The disproportion of earnings of the political elite and the general population, as well as the voluntarism of power in the financial and political sphere, is primarily a consequence of the civil passivity of people. Yet, it is also due to the personal characteristics of those who are in power;

(M4) The official media knowingly present false information, though most people perceive this information as true;

(M5) Civil and political passivity together with the government’s voluntarism leads to real tragedies: wars, murder and poverty;

(M6) Isolation from the rest of the world and a return to the Soviet past is quite a real prospect for Russia.

## Evidence from the interview (1)

- 41 of the 56 interviewees at least once took part in the actual protest actions;
- “revolutionaries on the sofa”, as opposed to “revolutionary in life”, did not agree with the third maxim (that civic passivity in Russia is the cause of voluntarism power). They associated the last one with the personal characteristics of those in power

Code	Participation = yes	Participation = no
M3	<p><i>People are not responsible for what is happening in their backyard, but they love their country. But their state begins with this backyard. When there is responsibility for the yard, then it will not be allowed to spoil.</i></p> <p>(Man, 30 y.o., Moscow, teacher)</p>	<p><i>The people organized, they could do it and that happened, and the people won. But then people immediately lost and it was getting no better. Historically, someone is at the trough, and some does not. And who at the trough, they can't not to live decently, it is their essence.</i></p> <p>(Man, 29 y.o., St. Petersburg, programmer)</p>

# Evidence from the interview (2)

- Strengthening of emotions was associated with talking about events that are taboo for ironic images

The image displays four screenshots of a 'Document Browser' interface, each showing a different image and its associated metadata tags. The interface includes a search bar, navigation icons, and a list of tags on the left side of each window.

- Document Browser: 1606**: Shows a man walking past a building with a sign that reads 'Что дальше?... Да хоть КАМНИ с НЕБА! Мы на РОДИНЕ!'. The tags include: ..Event-orient, ..2014-Crime, ..Vernacular, and ..2014.
- Document Browser: 1653**: Shows a map of Crimea with handwritten text 'Россия!!! Крым. Да!!!'. The tags include: ..2014, ..PrtScr, ..Event-oriented, ..2014-Crimea, ..Routine-oriented, and ..Celebrities.
- Document Browser: 1691**: Shows two bottles of 'Новый Свет' vodka with a Russian flag ribbon. The tags include: ..2014, ..Event-or, ..Vernacular, ..Potsreotic Objects, ..Routine-oriented, and ..2014-Crimea.
- Document Browser: 1598**: Shows a young child sitting on a hospital bed. The text above the image reads 'НЕ, НУ КРЫМ-ТО ДААА' and below it 'КУДА ВАЖНЕЕ'. The tags include: ..Common, ..Routine, ..Poverty, ..2014-Crimea, ..Demotivational po, ..2014, and ..Event-oriented.

## Evidence from the interview (3)

- no plans to take any real political action

*It was, yes, inspiring, when the people came (in December 2011 – A.S.), it smelled of unity, it was ... I can't say that there was hope. No, there wasn't, just as it happens in any crowd, there was a contamination of delight. But then, we came home, and there were those anti-protests, and they were shown on TV. But there was no any result. Those who came to that anti-protests, they actually do not care, Putin or Navalniy?.. Everybody knows they were paid. But it is offensive for me, if I go there by my will, and they are paid. So I will not go. Here (in the Internet – A.S.) I see what happens, and I do understand everything right. And it does not even matter for me that I get 'likes'. No, it is important for self-esteem and sometimes it 'made my day' (laughs).*

(Man, 29 years old, Moscow, programmer).

**Thank you for your attention!**

