

**“HEALTHCARE” VOCABULARY IN PRINT MEDIA: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FREQUENCY AND READERS’
PERCEPTION BEFORE AND AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
OUTBREAK**

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Abstract. This paper aims to examine the “healthcare” vocabulary in the print media, its usage frequency in the periods before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and public perception of the news containing this vocabulary. The research methodology includes comparative, content, and diachronic analyses of the news articles and the newspaper Instagram-page followers’ comments. The sentiment analysis for measuring the tone of the newspaper followers’ comments was conducted to identify the changes in the public perception of the news containing the “healthcare” vocabulary.

The study revealed a high frequency of the “healthcare” vocabulary in the news articles in both studied periods and a rapid growth of the articles containing the “healthcare” vocabulary in March, 2020 with the differential of 640 articles (12% rise). The content analysis showed a significant difference in the usage of particular “healthcare” vocabulary units. The comparative analysis of the “healthcare” vocabulary in the articles published in 2019 and 2020 revealed the most and the least frequently used words. The sentiment analysis of a random sample of the followers’ comments on the articles containing the “healthcare” vocabulary showed the general tone and polarity of opinions of the citizens of the Aktobe region. The prevailing negative tone of the comments on the news articles describing healthcare issues in both periods demonstrates the emotional significance of the topic

The significance of the study is confirmed by the fact that it contributes to developing knowledge in the field of study and understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human lives. The novelty of research is grounded on the findings of the comprehensive diachronic analysis of “healthcare” vocabulary in the print media and readers’ comments representing the collective psychology and conveying the direct perception of the COVID-19 pandemic issues.

Keywords: print media, “healthcare” vocabulary, COVID-19, pandemic, comparative analysis, frequency of usage, public perception, sentiment analysis.

Basic provisions

Considering the mass media as a crucial social institution and presenter, we agree that it not only reflects but also shapes culture, politics, and social life [1; 2; 3]. News reports recent facts, and focuses on the event itself, so news requires to be objective and true. However, media news reports and comments on the COVID-19 pandemic expose the hidden psychological messages and ideologies behind the words [4]. Thomas et al. [5] highlight that “global pandemics are likely to increase in frequency and severity, and media communication of key messages represents an

important mediator of the behavior of individuals in response to public health countermeasures”.

The high interest of people or society in the mass media reports during the pandemic is confirmed by the study of the “corona” keyword search [6]. Despite the existence of viruses throughout the history of mankind, the dynamic of the so-called “healthcare” vocabulary usage changed with the advent of SARS-CoV-2. In this regard, the literature review suggests that the concept of the COVID-19 pandemic was examined from the perspectives of various aspects: linguistic, linguacultural, axiological, sociological, lexicological, psycholinguistic, psychological, and medical.

From the linguacultural perspective, the difference in the conceptualization of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Russian and English languages is explained by 1) linguistic reasons (typological differences in word formation), 2) political and ideological factors, and 3) differences in the scenarios of the spread of diseases. The comprehensive linguistic analysis of the lexeme “COVID-19” in the English mass media discourse proves its acquisition of additional connotations and serves to form an informational picture of the world that reflects the national-cultural characteristics of worldview and the system of axiological relations [7].

The analysis of the “healthcare” discourse vocabulary, i.e. words naming phenomena, processes, objects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and spread of the coronavirus, made it possible to identify the semantic content of language units, the nature of use in speech (oral and written), the derivational features of lexemes, as well as their graphic and spelling development [8]. The 2020 year can be identified “with some paradigm that took communication stage. “If to speak in words, they were COVID-19 or coronavirus, pandemic, epidemic, quarantine, lockdown, infodaemia, zoonosis, virologist, lockdown, social distance and masks” [9].

Another key point is the tone analysis of comments concerning the COVID-19 pandemic on social networks. Kaur and Sharma (2020) analyzed the tone of Twitter messages and determined the attitude of people toward the coronavirus disease [10]. Medford et al. (2020) compiled a list of COVID-19 hashtags that were used to distribute messages on social networks and blogs, the tone analysis of which determined the emotional significance of each message and identified the prevailing emotion [11].

Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 has attracted the attention of scholars worldwide arousing the necessity to study its impact on all spheres of life [12]. In line with the attention of the mass media to the issue [1], many scholars reviewed the virus regarding its epidemiology, origin, ability to infect human cells, diagnosis and safety issues, focused on the available therapies to fight COVID-19, the development of vaccines, the role of artificial intelligence in the management of the pandemic and limiting the spread of the virus, the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on humans’ lifestyle, and preparation for a possible wave [13]. The topic of COVID-19 became central among the linguists worldwide that study

the influence of the pandemic on their language, people's reflection, attitude and perception, mass media, and human lives in general [14]. Though, there are gaps in the studies, especially from the point of view of the psycholinguistic approach.

In this respect, this research aims to study the "healthcare" vocabulary in the print media for identifying and specifying its usage frequency in the periods before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, measuring the tone of the newspaper followers' comments, and changes in their perception of the news reports containing the "healthcare" vocabulary. We hypothesize that Aktobe region citizens have a positive attitude towards the encouraging news and express negative opinions towards the distressing news.

Findings of the comprehensive study of "healthcare" vocabulary in the print media will provide insight into the specifics of collective psychology, expressed in the comments that convey the direct perception of the COVID-19 pandemic issues by the news readers. The results of the study will help to understand the public perception of the COVID-19 pandemic and the "healthcare" vocabulary related to it diachronically analyzed before and after the COVID-19 outbreak, thereby contributing to the understanding of the current situation and offering implications for overcoming it.

According to the goal of the present study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the usage frequency of "healthcare" vocabulary in the print media and are there any changes in the pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic outbreak periods?
2. Is the newspaper readers' perception of the news on healthcare issues (either encouraging or distressing) rather positive or negative?

Materials and methods

The comparative analysis of news on the healthcare issues in two synchronous periods (before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic) was conducted to study the change in the usage frequency of the "healthcare" vocabulary usage in the mass media, and newspaper readers' (citizens of the Aktobe region) perceptions of it. The newspaper of the Aktobe region "Diapazon" was chosen for the current study. The selected news articles were distributed into two groups: the first group of articles (N=3494) was published from January to December 2019, and the second group of articles (N=4419) included those published from January 2020 to December 2020.

The corpus of "healthcare" vocabulary included the lexemes *болезнь* (*disease*), *врач* (*a doctor*), *доктор* (*a doctor*), *больница* (*a hospital*), *помощь* (*aid/help*), *постановление* (*enactment*), *здоровье* (*health*), *больной* (*sick*), *вирус* (*virus*), *вакцина* (*vaccine*), *вакцинация* (*vaccination*), *вакцинировать* (*vaccinate*), *прививка* (*vaccine*), *укол* (*jab*), *эпидемический* (*epidemic*), *зона* (*zone*). The corpus of the comments provided by the followers of the selected newspaper account in the social network "Instagram" was made.

The "healthcare" vocabulary was examined by employing the content, cognitive, and diachronic analyses of the corpus. The usage frequency of

“healthcare” vocabulary in the print media was analyzed, and the tone of the followers’ comments was measured utilizing the sentiment analysis via the “Text Analyzer” mobile application.

Results and discussion

The analysis of articles selected from the Instagram page of the “Diapazon” newspaper revealed that 3494 articles were published in 2019, 164 of which contain the “healthcare” vocabulary *болезнь (disease), врач (a doctor), доктор (a doctor), больница (a hospital), помощь (aid/help), постановление (enactment), здоровье (health), больной (sick), вирус (virus), вакцина (vaccine), вакцинация (vaccination), вакцинировать (vaccinate), прививка (vaccination), укол (jab), эпидемический (epidemic), зона (zone)*. In 2020, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 4419 articles were published, 804 of which contain the lexemes under study. In 2019 the percentage of articles containing the “healthcare” vocabulary was equal to 4.7% of the annual number of articles, whereas in 2020 it made 18.2%. The differential in the studied periods proved to be 640 articles showing a rise of 13.5% in the number of printed news on healthcare issues due to the social events concerning the global pandemic.

Based on the analysis of frequency of the “healthcare” vocabulary usage in the print media, it was found that it amounted to 749 words in 2019, and 2559 words in 2020, which showed the rise in the “healthcare” vocabulary by nearly 3.5 times. The ratio of the “healthcare” vocabulary words in the newspaper articles of the two selected periods is stated in Table 1.

Table 1. The “healthcare” words in the print media before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic

Target words	2019 - N (%)	2020 - N (%)
болезнь/disease	95 (12.7)	356 (13.9)
больница/hospital	190 (25.4)	381 (14.9)
больной/sick	13 (1.7)	57 (2.2)
вакцина/vaccine	2 (0.3)	44 (1.7)
вакцинация/vaccination	15 (2)	21 (0.8)
вакцинировать/vaccinate	5 (0.7)	2 (0.08)
вирус/virus	6 (0.8)	569 (22.2)
врач/doctor	276 (36.8)	365 (14.3)
доктор/doctor	5 (0.7)	21 (0.8)
здоровье/health	33 (4.4)	122 (4.8)
зона/zone	2 (0.3)	278 (10.9)
помощь/aid	77 (10.3)	218 (8.5)

постановление/enactment	3 (0.4)	52 (2)
прививка/vaccine	13 (1.7)	67 (2.6)
укол/jab	7 (0.9)	1 (0.04)
эпидемический/epidemic	7 (0.9)	5 (0.2)
Total	749 (100)	2559 (100)

*Source: authors' elaboration based on the analysis of the print media

The most frequent “healthcare” words in the print media of 2019 are *врач/doctor*, *больница/hospital*, *болезнь/disease*, and *помощь/aid*, and the least frequently used “healthcare” words are *вакцина/vaccine*, *зона/zone*, *постановление/enactment*, *вакцинировать/vaccinate*, *доктор/doctor*. The most frequently used “healthcare” words in the newspaper articles published in 2020 are *вирус/virus*, *больница/hospital*, *врач/doctor*, *болезнь/disease*, *зона/zone*, *помощь/aid*, *здоровье/health*, and the least frequently used “healthcare” words are *укол/jab*, *вакцинировать/vaccinate*, and *эпидемический/epidemic*.

There is a sharp growth in the usage of the words *вирус/virus* and *зона/zone* in 2020. The notable growth is detected with the words *больница/hospital*, *врач/doctor*, *болезнь/disease*, *помощь/aid*, *здоровье/health*, *больной/sick*, *постановление/enactment*, *прививка/vaccination*, *вакцина/vaccine*. Proving the hypothesis these changes in the usage frequency of the “healthcare” vocabulary in the articles published before and after 2019 are caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its significance as a social phenomenon.

The publishing frequency rating of the articles containing the “healthcare” vocabulary is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Dynamics of publishing frequency of the articles with the “healthcare” vocabulary

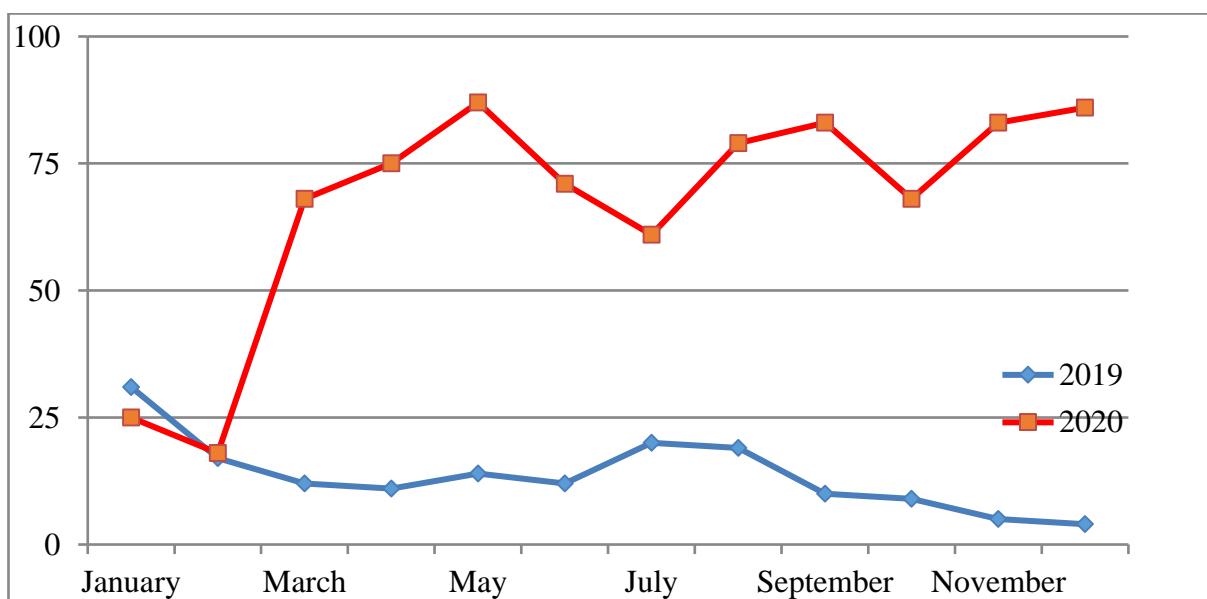


Figure 1 shows the growth of news articles in January 2019. The notable rise is also seen in July and August 2019. These articles contain the lexemes

больница/hospital, болезнь/disease, больной/sick, врач/doctor, доктор/doctor, помощь/aid, здоровье/health, постановление/enactment, and укол/jab.

There is an obvious difference in the number of articles containing the “healthcare” vocabulary in 2020. A rapid growth is seen in March 2020 with a stable rise in April and May due to the coronavirus outbreak. The 2020 diachronic curve line tracks the coronavirus outbreaks in the Aktobe region. The rising point in August testifies to the new outbreak of the coronavirus, limitations and a lockdown caused by it.

The content analysis being a research tool for determining the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data, i.e. text, and “that can be used either independently or in conjunction with other forms of inquiry to analyze data, verify and underpin claims that arise out of analysis” [15] was conducted with the corpus of seventeen randomly selected news articles. The articles with the “healthcare” vocabulary were graded into those describing the distressing news, and those describing the encouraging news. It was revealed that 47% of the news articles describes the distressing news, whereas 53% of the news articles state the encouraging news.

Using a random sampling one hundred comments on the news articles in each of the periods under study (50 comments in 2019 and 50 comments in 2020) were selected from the newspaper Instagram page. The tone of comments was proved by a sentiment analysis via the “Text analyzer” mobile application. The sentiment analysis of the selected comments showed the general tone and polarity of the Aktobe region citizens’ perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic issues described in the print media. The sentiment analysis results demonstrated the prevailing negative tone of the comments on the news in both periods demonstrating the emotional significance of the published articles with the “healthcare” vocabulary. The negative comments on the news articles on healthcare consider the COVID-19 pandemic metaphorically as an enemy or threat, the image of war with the enemy due to the use of the words denoting swearwords, denials and negations:

“Теперь все актюбинцы поняли на сколько они не защищены никакими законами 😞” / Now all Aktobe residents understand how much they are not protected by any laws 😞;

“Кошмар какой-то, а облздрав в курсе что творится в ЖД больнице, отвратительное отношение к больным, и какая там у них антисанитария, и за что люди платят мед страховки?” / It’s some kind of nightmare, is the regional health department aware of what’s going on in the Railway hospital, the disgusting attitude towards patients, and what kind of unsanitary conditions they have there, and why do people pay medical insurance?;

“Сволочи. Нужно поголовное тестирование. А эти «врачи» приходят к больным и говорят, нет, нет, это у вас не корона, просто похоже на корону.” / Bastards. Total testing is needed. And these “doctors” come to the sick and say, no, no, it’s not corona, it just looks like corona.

There was a sharp increase in readers’ interest in articles on the COVID-19 pandemic issues in connection with the vaccination of the population. Words related

to the “COVID-19” pandemic began to cause a negative relation among most readers as they formed a certain level of fear, as well as the fear of infection or vaccination:

“Да, действительно, ненужная вакцина” / Yes, indeed, an unnecessary vaccine;

“Вакцина- то некачественная, ее запретили. Вот что самое интересное, раз запретили, то значит было что-то серьезное, о чем умалчивают” / The vaccine is of poor quality, it was banned. That’s the most interesting thing, since it was banned, it means there was something serious that they are silent about;

“Не верю в их вакцины, и она не казахстанская скорее всего” / I don’t believe in their vaccines, and it’s most likely not from Kazakhstan;

“Сильно болят руки, нехватка воздуха бывает вслед и зевота” / Hands hurt a lot, a lack of air happens after and yawning.

The relationship between the news articles’ tone and the tone of the readers’ comments is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation of the comments’ tone and news articles’ tonality

Tone of comments	2019		2020	
	Distressing news N (%)	Encouraging news N (%)	Distressing news N (%)	Encouraging news N (%)
Positive	74 (4.3)	539 (30.4)	345 (13.4)	691 (37.5)
Negative	1411 (82)	1071 (60.4)	2038 (79.1)	999 (54.2)
Neutral	236 (13.7)	163 (9.2)	193 (7.5)	153 (8.3)
Total	1721 (100)	1773 (100)	2576 (100)	1843 (100)

*Source: authors’ elaboration based on the analysis of print media

The distressing news in 2019 made 49.3% while the encouraging news made 50.7%. In 2020 the amount of distressing news (58.3%) was much higher than the amount of encouraging news (41.7%). The study revealed that in both periods the negative tone of the comments was high and amounted to 82% on the distressing news and 60.4% on the encouraging news in 2019, and 79.1% and 54.2% respectively in 2020.

The correlation in the percentage of negative comments was approximately equal. The number of negative comments was stable throughout both periods regardless of the tone of the news. A higher percentage of the neutral tone of the comments on the articles describing the distressing news was stated in 2019. Comments on the articles describing the distressing news were mostly negative and neutral in 2019, whereas in 2020 they were mostly negative and positive. The

comments on the articles describing the encouraging news were mostly negative and positive both in 2019 and 2020. The positive tone of the comments in 2020 on both distressing and encouraging news was higher than in 2019.

Conclusion

The current study revealed the high frequency of the “healthcare” vocabulary in the news articles selected from the “Diapazon” newspaper Instagram page in periods before and after 2019, the year of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rapid growth of the articles containing the “healthcare” vocabulary in March, 2020. The content analysis showed a significant difference in the usage of particular “healthcare” vocabulary units in the print media. The amount of distressing news in 2020 was much higher than those in 2019.

The sentiment analysis exposed the prevailing negative tone of the comments on the news in both periods demonstrating the emotional significance of the published articles on healthcare issues. Notably, more than 50% of all comments on the articles describing both distressing and encouraging news are negative in both periods, consequently the “Diapazon” newspaper Instagram-page readers tend to express negative feelings more likely than positive ones on the pandemic issues. The comments on the news articles on healthcare consider the COVID-19 pandemic metaphorically as an enemy or threat, the image of war with the enemy due to the use of the words denoting swearwords, denials and negations in all the comments selected and evaluated as negative. A sharp increase in readers’ interest in articles on the COVID-19 pandemic issues was noticed related to the start of the population vaccination. The “COVID” lexis caused negative feelings in most readers forming a certain level of fear of infection and/or vaccination.

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БҰҚАРАЛЫҚ АҚПАРАТ ҚҰРАЛДАРЫНДАҒЫ COVID-19 ПАНДЕМИЯСЫНА ДЕЙІНГІ ЖӘНЕ ОДАН КЕЙІНГІ КЕЗЕҢДЕРДЕ ДЕНСАУЛЫҚ САҚТАУ ЛЕКСИКАСЫНЫҢ ЖИІЛІГІН ЖӘНЕ ОҚЫРМАНДАР ҚАБЫЛДАУЫН САЛЫСТЫРМАЛЫ ТАЛДАУ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл мақаланың мақсаты – бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарындағы денсаулық сақтау лексикасын, оның COVID-19 пандемиясының басталуына дейінгі және одан кейінгі кезеңдердегі қолданылу жиілігін, сондай-ақ осы лексиканы қамтитын жаңалықтарды қоғамның қабылдауын зерттеу. Зерттеу әдістемесіне газеттің жаңалық мақалалары мен Instagram парақшасына жазылушылардың пікірлерінің салыстырмалы, диахрондық және контенттік талдаулары кіреді. Денсаулық сақтау лексикасы бар жаңалықтарды қоғамдық қабылдаудағы өзгерістерді анықтау үшін газет оқырмандары пікірлерінің көңіл-күйіне талдау жүргізілді.

Зерттеу екі кезеңдегі жаңалықтар мақалаларындағы денсаулық сақтау лексикасының жоғары жиілігін және 2020 жылдың наурыз айында денсаулық сақтау лексикасы бар мақалалар санының 640 мақала айырмашылығымен (12% өсім) жылдам өсуін анықтады. Мазмұнды талдау жеке лексикалық бірліктерді қолдануда айтарлықтай айырмашылықты

көрсетті. 2019 және 2020 жылдары жарияланған мақалалардағы денсаулық сақтау лексикасының салыстырмалы талдауы жиі және сирек қолданылатын сөздерді анықтады. Парақша жазылушыларының денсаулық сақтау лексикасы бар мақалаларға жазған пікірлерінің көңіл-күйін талдау Ақтөбе облысы тұрғындарының пікірлерінің жалпы реңі мен полярлығын көрсетті. Екі кезеңде де денсаулыққа қатысты жаңалықтарға түсініктеме берудің жағымсыз реңктері тақырыптың эмоционалды маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Зерттеу кезеңдерінде алаңдататын және жігерлендіретін жаңалықтарды сипаттайтын мақалаларда жағымсыз реңк жоғары болды.

Зерттеудің маңыздылығы оның COVID-19 пандемиясының адамдардың өміріне әсерін зерттеу және түсінудегі білімнің дамуына ықпал ететіндігімен расталады. Зерттеудің жаңалығы баспа басылымдарындағы денсаулық сақтау лексикасын және ұжымдық психологияны айқындап, COVID-19 пандемиясының мәселелерін тікелей қабылдауды білдіретін оқырман пікірлерін кешенді диахрондық талдау нәтижелеріне негізделген.

Тірек сөздер: баспа БАҚ, денсаулық сақтау лексикасы, COVID-19, пандемия, салыстырмалы талдау, қолдану жиілігі, қоғамдық қабылдау, көңіл-күйді талдау.

СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ ЧАСТОТЫ И ЧИТАТЕЛЬСКОГО ВОСПРИЯТИЯ ЛЕКСИКИ ЗДРАВООХРАНЕНИЯ В ПЕЧАТНЫХ СМИ ДО И ПОСЛЕ ВСПЫШКИ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19

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Аннотация. Целью данной статьи является изучение лексики области здравоохранения в печатных СМИ, частоты ее использования в периоды до и после вспышки пандемии COVID-19, а также общественного восприятия новостей, содержащих данную лексику. Методология исследования включает сравнительный, диахронический и контент-анализы новостных статей и комментариев подписчиков Instagram-страницы газеты. Сентимент-анализ для измерения тональности комментариев читателей газеты проводился для выявления изменений в общественном восприятии новостей, содержащих лексику области здравоохранения.

Исследование выявило высокую частотность лексики здравоохранения в новостных статьях в изучаемых периодах и быстрый рост количества статей, содержащих лексику здравоохранения в марте 2020 г. с разницей в 640 статей (рост на 12%). Контент-анализ показал существенную разницу в употреблении отдельных лексических единиц. Сравнительный анализ лексики здравоохранения в статьях, опубликованных в 2019 и 2020 годах, позволил выявить наиболее и наименее часто употребляемые слова. Анализ настроений случайной выборки комментариев подписчиков страницы к статьям, содержащим лексику здравоохранения, показал общий тон и полярность мнений жителей Актюбинской области. Преобладающий негативный тон комментариев к новостным статьям, посвященным вопросам здравоохранения, в оба периода свидетельствует об эмоциональной значимости темы. В исследуемых периодах негативный тон был высок в новостных статьях, описывающих как тревожные, так и обнадеживающие новости.

Значимость исследования подтверждается тем, что оно способствует развитию знаний в области изучения и понимания влияния пандемии COVID-19 на жизнь людей. Новизна исследования основана на результатах комплексного диахронического анализа лексики

здравоохранения в печатных СМИ и читательских комментариев, репрезентирующих коллективную психологию и передающих непосредственное восприятие проблем пандемии COVID-19.

Ключевые слова: печатные СМИ, лексика здравоохранения, COVID-19, пандемия, сравнительный анализ, частотность употребления, общественное восприятие, анализ настроений.

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