

Poster Analysis during Student Protests in Niš: A Case Study of the Instagram Profile *Filfak Blokada*¹

Neven Obradović²³, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia
Ivana Mitić⁴, Associate Professor, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

Abstract

This paper analyzes posters from the Instagram profile *Filfak Blokada* related to the student protests in Niš during 2024/2025. The goal is to identify the dominant function from the perspective of political communication and analyze the linguistic means used to convey it. The corpus includes 17 posters collected from this profile between December 27 and February 6. The findings indicate that the predominant function is informational, while a notable number of posters also combine informative and persuasive elements, especially following significant events.

Keywords: Serbian language, political communication, Instagram, functions of political communication, student protest, poster.

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Introduction

This paper examines posters from the Instagram profile *Filfak Blokada*⁵ during the large-scale student protests in Serbia in 2024/2025. The primary focus is on analyzing these posters through the key functions of political communication, which, according to Slavujević (2009), include informative, educational/socializing, and persuasive functions. Additionally, the study explores the linguistic aspects, specifically the linguistic means used to convey each of these functions. By doing so, the research aims to assess how political communication functions are utilized in the context of social media while also drawing comparisons to the traditional function of political posters, as identified in previous theoretical studies.

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² Corresponding author: neven.obradovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

³ ORCID: 0000-0003-2786-2703

⁴ ORCID: 0000-0002-2347-6795

⁵ Link: <https://www.instagram.com/filfak.blokada/> (Accessed, February 6, 2025)

The topic analyzed in this paper is important from political, sociological, and linguistic perspectives. The student blockades in Niš began on December 4, 2024, with the students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš being among the first to join the blockade on December 6. The blockade was prompted by the collapse of the canopy at the Novi Sad Railway Station on November 1, 2024, at 11:52 a.m., which resulted in the deaths of 15 people and led to student protests across the Republic of Serbia. The Instagram profile analyzed in this paper was created on December 27, which we used as the starting point for extracting the poster corpus. The time frame analyzed extends to February 6, two months after the blockade at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. Our paper offers valuable insight into the functions of political communication used in creating posters, highlights events that can be considered significant historical moments, and demonstrates the use of language in political communication. Since all the posters were removed from the Instagram profile on February 16, and coverage began about the upcoming large protest on March 1, our paper is highly relevant as it emphasizes the communication strategies currently used on social media. It also shows that the fate of posters on social media is not much different from that of traditional posters – just as physical posters, as noted by Slavujević (2009), can be torn, posters on social media can be deleted. This is important because of what is referred to as postaction – with the removal of all posts, there is a chance for increased profile visits, which in the online environment boosts the profile's visibility and allows posts to reach a wider audience.

The paper is organized as follows: after a brief introduction, there is a theoretical-methodological section that examines previous research and their findings, with an emphasis on the functions of political communication and the poster. The third part is the core part of the paper, presenting the poster analysis, while the final fourth chapter provides brief concluding thoughts, followed by the references.

Theoretical and Methodological Section

The main functions of political communication

Political communication serves as the foundation for all processes necessary for the functioning of a political system. Electoral decisions, public opinion formation, and political socialization processes are all entirely dependent on political communication. When defining political communication, many authors refer to the definition by Denton and Woodward (1990). According to their perspective, political communication is “an essential discussion about the allocation of public resources (income), official authority (who is granted the power to make legislative and executive decisions), and official sanctions (what the state rewards or punishes)” (Denton & Woodward, 1990:14, cited in McNair 2003: 3; Slavujević, 2009: 22). McNair notes that while this definition includes verbal and written political rhetoric, it overlooks symbolic communication acts such as non-verbal communication, clothing, logo design, etc. For this reason, McNair broadens the concept of political

communication to encompass the entire political discourse, defining it as:

“purposeful communication about politics that includes: a) all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors to achieve specific goals, b) communication directed toward these actors by non-politicians such as voters or newspaper columnists, c) communication about these actors and their activities contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media debate about politics” (McNair, 2003: 4).

Similar to McNair, Slavujević also highlighted several limitations in Denton and Woodward’s definition of political communication, such as the lack of clarity regarding political actors and the omission of one-way and secret forms of political communication (Slavujević, 2009: 23-24). Considering this, Slavujević defines political communication as “the exchange of political messages within the scope of political activities. [...] It includes all forms of communication in the political realm, regardless of the type of government, social and political context, the forms in which content is presented, or the media used” (Slavujević, 2009: 9). In this way, Slavujević provided a timeless and all-encompassing definition of political communication in terms of both content and communication channels. The extent of this definition can be best understood by comparing it to McNair’s approach. McNair’s definition includes the notion of communication about political actors and their activities through news reports, editorials, and other forms of media debate on politics. However, since social networks are not considered media, but rather actors similar to media or, more precisely, intermediaries (Jakubowicz, 2009), this excludes one of the most significant channels of political communication today, which is the focus of this study.

Based on the provided definition, and noting that politics cannot be imagined “without the communication of people as political beings” (Slavujević, 2009: 27), Slavujević identifies three primary functions of political communication:

- a) the function of political information;
- b) the function of political education and socialization;
- c) the function of political persuasion (Ibid).

The function of political communication/information focused on providing information refers to “keeping the public informed about current political events, actions, and figures, as well as expressing the political interests, views, and beliefs of various political actors.” Slavujević further emphasizes that its primary role is “to deliver the essential facts needed for citizens to make informed decisions between political options, while also aiding political entities in positioning themselves within a pluralistic political environment.” It is also important to note that this function targets the cognitive, or knowledge-based, and rational aspects of opinions.

The function of political education and socialization is related to “teaching people various political knowledge necessary for their involvement in political life.” Slavujević writes that this knowledge includes “the characteristics of the dominant ideological orientation, the features and structure of the political system, the roles of political institutions and how they function, legitimate political actors, the rules

of the ‘political game,’ opportunities for political action, etc.” (Slavujević, 2009: 27–28). The primary role of this function is to “help an individual accept the world of political institutions, relationships, and phenomena, understand their role in it, and recognize their opportunities for action, thus forming socially acceptable aspirations and behaviors in carrying out their role” (Ibid).

The function of political persuasion is related to “the formation, reinforcement, and change of people’s attitudes toward various political phenomena, events, and actors, as well as encouraging people to participate in political life according to the intentions of the persuader” (Slavujević, 2009: 29). It is important to emphasize that these three functions often overlap in the practice of political communication. Slavujević explains that political information and political education also contain elements of political persuasion. Conversely, political persuasion is impossible without educational and informational content (Ibid).

About political posters and their role in the process of political communication

The political poster is one of the most important channels of political communication (Sontag, 1970; Bonnell, 1998; Vliegenthart, 2012; Lirola, 2016; Geise, 2017). Slavujević (2009: 231) argues that the traditional definition of a poster – “a sheet of paper that is mass-distributed in public places by attaching it to a surface” – becomes “too narrow” when considering the emergence of new communication mediums. As this author notes (2009: 232), even today, the poster can be considered a ‘tool of political struggle par excellence.’ When considering the political poster and its role in electoral processes, according to Slavujević (2009: 232), its advantage lies in the fact that it is both “simple” and a “complex tool of mass propaganda.” He (2009: 232) also points out that a poster can be used in mass actions, such as student protests, to: “inform the public about a specific event or issue and provoke a certain, primarily emotion-based, stance and behavior.” Tschabrun emphasizes that political posters, much like television, combine words and images into powerful messages. However, “unlike television, the poster as a medium was not easily controlled or monopolized by any group or category of people. As a result, political posters often allowed the disenfranchised to experiment with alternative styles of political discourse” (Tschabrun, 2003: 304).

When it comes to the reaction a poster can elicit from the audience, Slavujević’s (2009: 232) classification highlights the following advantages: “it doesn’t require much effort to absorb the message, it captivates with its concise and well-crafted content, and its visually appealing design.” The author also notes that while a poster “grabs the audience’s attention through its impact, surprise, and originality” (2009: 232), it may have a limited lifespan due to wear and tear or being replaced by another poster. This differs from the posters discussed in this paper, as they, being posted on Instagram, remain available as long as the profile exists, or until the profile owner chooses to delete them.

Slavujević (2009: 232–233) outlines, in addition to 1) the basic categorization

of posters into leaflet, poster, and placard (in the narrower sense), 2) a more detailed classification based on the type of content into leaflet-poster, ideological-political poster, program poster, action poster, authority poster, poster-placard, group poster, and ceremonial poster; 3) a classification based on the message carriers into personalized and non-personalized posters; and 4) a classification based on the method of display or distribution into large, small, and standard-sized posters; wall posters; roll-up banner; leaflets; banners; and sticker-posters.

If we look at the classifications provided by Slavujević (2009) and apply them to the posters we are analyzing, we can conclude that, based on the basic classification, the posters in question fall into the category of placards – “a combination of image and text” (Slavujević 2009: 232). In the more detailed classification based on the type of representative content, the posters analyzed belong to the group of program posters – “which express a position on a specific issue” (Slavujević 2009: 232). When it comes to the classification based on message carriers, the analyzed posters fall into the non-personalized category – “featuring images of one or more anonymous individuals, unsigned statements, slogans, etc.” (Slavujević 2009: 233); and according to the distribution method, they belong to the first group, that of placards in large, small, or standard sizes – “which are posted in designated areas for posters (advertising boards, billboards, special advertising panels, etc.)” (Slavujević 2009: 233).

Subject, goal, hypothesis, and corpus description

This study analyzes posters from the Instagram profile *Filfak Blokada* through the lens of political communication functions and linguistic analysis, focusing on the student protests of 2024/2025. The objective is to identify which linguistic tools are used to convey political communication functions and which functions or combinations of functions are present in the posters. Our hypothesis is that the posters will primarily feature a blend of informative and persuasive functions, as the purpose of political posters is to inform the public about upcoming actions and encourage participation in these actions (Dezelan & Maksuti 2012).

The poster corpus was gathered from the *Filfak Blokada* Instagram profile, starting from December 27, the date the profile was created, up until February 6, two months after the blockade of the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš and three months after the canopy collapse in Novi Sad. Only posters with information about the organization of the student protests were included. In total, 17 posters were collected, labeled as POSTER01 for the first poster, with numbers assigned based on the publication date, from the oldest to the most recent.

Analysis of Posters During the Student Protests in Niš Using the Example of the Instagram Profile *Filfak Blokada*

In this section of the paper, we analyze the posters from the student protests in the Republic of Serbia, specifically focusing on the Instagram profile *Filfak*

Blokada, while taking into account the functions of political communication and the linguistic tools used to convey them. The analysis revealed that the posters primarily employ either the informative function alone or a combination of the informative and persuasive functions (see the quantitative data in Table 1). Therefore, we conclude that our hypothesis is only partially supported.

Table 1: Quantitative analysis

Type of function	Number of posters
Informative	8
Informative + Persuasive	8
Persuasive	1

The informative function is represented in examples 1–8. In examples 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8, the exact time and location are provided, indicating when and where the protest will take place. In example 4, only the time is given, while in example 7, only the location is mentioned. Information about just the time or place is provided when the action is already known and the location has been established (the previous case), or when the poster is part of a post containing multiple posters, and the time has already been mentioned in the previous one (the latter case). In terms of information about the location, this can be explicitly conveyed using specific urban toponyms (Crveni Pevac, Dr. Zoran Đinđić Boulevard, Dušanov Bazaar, Most Mladosti), which are “names of location that are integral parts of a city and refer to parts of the city (neighborhoods, districts), squares, or streets” (Trajković, 2021: 11), or, less commonly, the use of oikononyms – as in example 7, where the name of the settlement Merošina is mentioned. Location information is also given implicitly, such as “the intersection near the Court and Law Faculty,” “the bridge near Roda,” “the bridge near Delta,” or “the bridge near DIS,” when there is no specific urban toponym. Regarding the structure of location names, only one example uses a noun (see example 7, Merošina), while the rest feature noun phrases. Temporal localization is done through nouns – Sunday (example 3), Saturday (example 7) – or prepositional-case constructions and phrases (at 11:52⁶, at 4 p.m., until 8 p.m., 2 p.m., January 17). These examples provide citizens with information on current political events and actions. All of the information shared targets the rational component of the audience’s attitude, which is a key characteristic of the informative function of political communication.

In a number of cases, the reason for holding the protest is also mentioned (examples 2, 5, 7, and 8). In most cases, the sentences are elliptical and typically contain noun phrases (e.g., example 1 – NEW YEAR, NEW PROTEST, COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY, rather than NEW YEAR IS HERE, NEW PROTEST IS HERE, THIS IS A COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY – examples 3, 4, 5). A small number of examples

⁶ In many of the extracted examples, 11:52 is mentioned as the time, which holds symbolic meaning, as the canopy in Novi Sad collapsed at that very time.

in the posters, besides elliptical sentences, also contain complete sentences – as in example 2 – YOU CANNOT TRAMPLE US BECAUSE THE JUDICIARY IS NOT WORKING – and in examples 6 and 7 (ENOUGH SILENCE; DEMANDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET).

1. NEW YEAR, NEW PROTEST... COMPLETE BLOCKADE OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY... 14. 01. 2025. 7:00 a.m. (POSTER05)
2. Due to today's attempted murder of a colleague in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. URGENT BLOCKADE OF THE INTERSECTION AT THE COURT AND FACULTY OF LAW. YOU CANNOT TRAMPLE US BECAUSE THE JUDICIARY IS NOT WORKING (POSTER06)
3. PROTEST MARCH. CRVENI PEVAC. FRIDAY, JANUARY 17. AT 11:52 a.m. MAIN COURT BUILDING (FIFTEEN-MINUTE SILENCE). DUŠANOV BAZAR. DR. ZORAN DJINDJIĆ BOULEVARD. MEDICAL FACULTY (POSTER07)
4. SUNDAY (POSTER13)
5. URGENT SUPPORT ACTION to the students of the University of Novi Sad from the students of the University of Niš. Blockade of the roundabout near Delta until 8:00 p.m. Tuesday, January 28. Basic Court Building at 4:00 p.m. (POSTER14)
6. FOUR AT FOUR. SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2. ALL AT 4 p.m. YOUTH BRIDGE. DELTA BRIDGE. RODA BRIDGE. DIS BRIDGE. ENOUGH SILENCE. (POSTER15)
7. FIFTEEN VICTIMS. ZERO RESPONSIBLE. YOUTH BRIDGE. DELTA BRIDGE... RODA BRIDGE. DIS BRIDGE. DEMANDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET (POSTER16)
8. MEROŠINA. SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2025. 2:00 p.m. Protest in support of targeted students and professors. (POSTER17)

The combination of the informative and persuasive functions is observed in posters 9–17. The informative function in these examples is demonstrated through spatial and temporal identification (in examples 9–12, and in examples 13, 14, and 16), while example 15 only provides temporal information. Regarding spatial information, urbanonyms are used (for instance, in example 9 – King Milan Square; in example 12 – Banovina; in example 13 – Faculty of Law; in example 16 – Red Cross camp, Knjaževačka, Nitex, King Milan Square, Appellate Court, Palilula Ramp, Medical Faculty). Most urbanonyms are noun phrases (King Milan Square, Appellate Court), while a few examples use a single noun – Banovina, Nitex. Evidently, various types of urbanonyms are involved, from names of squares and streets (Knjaževačka) to faculties (Faculty of Law, Medical Faculty), companies (Nitex), and parts of the city (Palilula Ramp). In several examples, location identification is given descriptively using noun phrases – Basic Court building (examples 10 and 11), intersection at the Court (example 13), intersection Office, roundabout Jagodina Mala, roundabout Trošarina (example 14). Temporal identification in these examples is expressed by dates, such as January 3 (example 10), January 10 (example 11), and by using days

and dates – Sunday, January 12 (example 12), or just days (examples 15 and 16: Friday and Sunday), with exact times provided (example 9 – 11:00 p.m., example 10 – 11:52, example 11 – 11:52, 12:07, example 12 – 4:00 p.m., example 13 – 7:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m., example 14 – 4:00 p.m., example 15 – 11:52, example 16 – 4:00 p.m.). The persuasive function, identified in nearly all of the examples, represents a call to action and unity, achieved through the use of:

1. Negations of the verbs “*to have*” and “*to meet*” in the 3rd person, and the noun “*action*” (example 9);
 2. 1st person plural imperative of the verb “*to stop*” (examples 10, 11), and 2nd person singular imperative of this verb (example 15), as well as the verb “*to see*” (examples 11, 13);
 3. Use of the 2nd person singular imperative of the verb “*to show up*” (example 12);
 4. Use of the 2nd person singular imperative of the verb “*to go*” and the personal pronoun “*you*,” inviting the reader to be part of the action (example 14);
 5. Use of the noun “*rush*” (example 16).
9. NO NEW YEAR’S EVE. DEMANDS HAVE NOT BEEN MET! ACTION ON NEW YEAR’S EVE. KING MILAN SQUARE, 23:00 (POSTER01)
 10. LET’S STOP. STUDENTS FOR THE VICTIMS IN NOVI SAD, CETINJE, AND ARILJE. MAIN COURT BUILDING. FRIDAY, JANUARY 3. AT 11:52. SEE YOU! (POSTER02)
 11. LET’S STOP! MAIN COURT BUILDING. FRIDAY, JANUARY 10. FROM 11:52 TO 12:07. SEE YOU! (POSTER03)
 12. PROTEST. SHOW UP AT BANOVINI. SUNDAY, JANUARY 12, 16:00. PROTEST MARCH OF STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NIŠ AND CITIZENS (POSTER04)
 13. From 19:00, we block the intersection by the court! At 20:00, we head to the Law Faculty. DEAR STUDENTS AND CITIZENS, SEE YOU! (POSTER09)
 14. The hunt has begun. SUNDAY, 16:00. ROUNDOABOUT JAGODIN MALA. ROUNDOABOUT TROŠARINA. URED INTERSECTION. START YOURS TOO! (POSTER10)
 15. PROTEST MARCH. 11:52, FRIDAY. STOP. (POSTER11)
 16. SUNDAY, 16:00. RED CROSS CAMP. KNJAZEVAČKA. NITEX. KING MILAN SQUARE. APPELLATE COURT. PALILULA RAMP. MEDICAL FACULTY. RUSH TO THE SQUARE! (POSTER12)

One of the examples contains only a persuasive function – example 17. In this example, the function is realized through the use of the 1st person plural imperative of the verbs “*to rise*” and “*to see*,” as well as the number one and the pronouns “*all*” and “*we*.” These linguistic elements are used with the aim of prompting action and creating a sense of collective unity.

17. LET’S RISE AGAINST ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND ATTACK.
An attack on ONE of us is an attack on ALL of us! SEE YOU THERE!

(POSTER08)

This method of communication via online posters motivates citizens to engage in political activities according to the intentions of the persuaders, or the poster creators. Brief and clear messages like: “*stop*,” “*join us*,” “*see you*,” “*the hunt has started*,” and “*action*” encourage action and collective involvement. The subject who does persuading frequently evokes emotions such as fear, anger, or, in this case, hope and pride during the persuasion process and connecting with the audience. Additionally, a key feature of persuasive tactics is the repetition of core messages – in several cases, we observe the repeated use of phrases like “*stop*” (poster02, poster03, poster11) and “*demands not met*” (poster01, poster16). The analyzed set of posters clearly demonstrates the intentional selection of textual elements meant to stir emotions in citizens and drive them toward political action.

Conclusion

This paper examines posters extracted from the Instagram profile of Filfak Blokada between December 27 and February 6. These posters were created during the large-scale student protests in the Republic of Serbia in 2024/2025, which were organized after the tragic deaths of fifteen people caused by the collapse of a canopy at the Railway Station in Novi Sad. The aim of the paper is to explore how political communication functions are applied in the creation of posters in the online environment and which linguistic tools are used to achieve these functions.

The research indicates that the dominant function is informative, and it appears either on its own or combined with the persuasive function. This partially confirms our hypothesis that most posters will feature a combination of informative and persuasive functions. The informative function is usually conveyed through nominal words that inform citizens about the time and location of the gathering. When paired with the persuasive function, the aim is to encourage citizens to take action. As a result, alongside nominal words, verbs are used, typically in the imperative form of the second-person singular or first-person plural, to create a sense of unity. Since this research is one of the first empirical studies examining the structure of posters within a specific sociological, historical, and political context, it contributes in two key ways: 1. empirically, it is important as it provides insight into the linguistic tools used and how political communication functions are implemented; 2. theoretically, it is valuable as it sheds light on the process of creating posters in the online environment, thereby expanding the role and fate of posters as discussed by Slavujević (2009). When considering Slavujević’s definition of political communication as the exchange of messages between actors, this research also contributes on a broader scale – in the field of examining strategies used in political communication. The poster, as one of the major tools of political communication throughout history, takes on a new dimension in the online space, with the key participants being the protest organizers – students – and the intended audience – the citizens of the Republic of Serbia.

Since the research focuses on a single segment – the Instagram profile of Filfak

Blokada – and a specific time period, this represents the main limitation of the study. Nevertheless, the results and analysis clearly suggest that this pilot study and its methodological approach should be considered for more comprehensive research to capture the current political and linguistic landscape during the major student blockades, an area the authors plan to investigate further in the future.

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Analiza plakata tokom studentskih protesta u Nišu na primeru Instagram profila Filfak blokada

Neven Obradović, Docent, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija
Ivana Mitić, Vanredni profesor, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Nišu, Srbija

Apstrakt

U ovom radu analiziraju se plakati sa Instagram profila Filfak blokada koji prate studentski protest u Nišu 2024/2025. Cilj je da se iz perspektive funkcija političkog komuniciranja utvrdi koja je dominantna funkcija, te koja su jezička sredstva iskorišćena kako bi se ta funkcija realizovala. Korpus čini 17 plakata ekscerpiranih sa pomenutog profila u periodu od 27. decembra do 6. februara. Rezultati sprovedenog istraživanja pokazuju da je dominantna funkcija informativna, a da se na nemalom broju plakata javlja i kombinacija informativne i persuazivne funkcije, i to onda kada prethodni neki značajan događaj.

Ključne reči: srpski jezik, političko komuniciranje, Instagram, funkcije političkog komuniciranja, studentski protest, plakat

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