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CREATIVE COMMENTARY AS A TYPE OF MEDIA LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The present study is devoted to the communicative phenomenon in modern media commentary. Online commentary turns into a constantly updated system of action-texts that implement a variety of intentions and functions. The author of the present study denotes that commentary, as a special type of text, is at the same time a relatively independent unit of discourse and part of the large meta-text that is formed out of the journalistic text and its comments. In addition, it is commentary that is the primary means of feedback. Social networks have recently become the main platform for its implementation. Creative commentary is under consideration as a type of communication based on the creative, and therefore conscious, rational and emotionally prepared action of the addressee. The issue is of a greatest interest for the media studies. The study of comments requiring time and reading, that is, comments that are not limited, for example, expressed only by verbal means, but including different sign systems (audio-visual, multimedia) is an update issue. According to Polonsky, such comments possess own language, is called a media dialect. Comments on VKontakte and Meduza public pages are analyzed in the present study, as well as the impact of visual images on the communicative and linguistic behavior of the communicators.

1. Introduction

Opinion-based journalism refers to the type of so-called commentary journalism, when through the text a recipient receives not just a message about the facts, but also the research, interpretation, assessment upon the facts. Digital technologies, that allowed combining the principles of interpersonal and mass communication, have become a kind of challenge for both the journalism and society. This new type of communication has also updated the new conversational genre, that is called a user comment. User comments are an integral part of the content, which is actively involved in organizing communication and in making up the agenda. Comments turn out to be the most popular and multifunctional way of organizing communication and expressing the position of each participant. It is on the basis of interaction with the help of commenting that the need of a modern person for the social world construction, as well as one's ideas about the surrounding reality, the real world, is undertaken.

2. Problem Statement

Online communication has turned into a unique, universal, and therefore unprecedented phenomenon in terms of its development and information and suggestive potential (Kruglov, 2017). The processes characterizing this new media space require careful study and evaluation. It is here that the rules of public dialogue are developed and tested, tested for effectiveness, the very existence of which is rather complicated in the era of endless segmentation. By what laws these rules exist, how far they can be considered already established, how traditional and innovative in media communication correlate are the issues, modern researchers are considering.

3. Research Questions

Despite the availability of a variety of ways and methods of presenting information in the multimedia era, creating a text that will be noticed and mastered remains a difficult and, of course, creative process. The problems of the transformation of traditional types of text, in particular journalism, and the formation of new speech genres are actualized (Bakhtin, 1996). Not only professional authors – journalists, publicists, PR specialists, copywriters, and others – are now participating in this process, but also representatives of the audience – recipients who have received a unique opportunity to instantly and voluntarily change their status from addressee to addressee. It is difficult to overestimate the role of text messaging tools in the circumstances – verbal, visual, multimedia.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study (supported by the Russian Science Foundation, project No. 18-18-00007) is to characterize creative commentary as a type of media language. The main focus is on considering a commentary as a method and genre of journalism; describing the tools of aesthetic impact in creative commentary on the example of the Medusa public page.

5. Research Methods

The specified goals and objectives set the choice of a comprehensive analysis technique, including a method of comprehensive analysis of the media and social networks content; context analysis method; method of genre-stylistic comparison.

6. Findings

6.1. Commentary as a method and genre of journalism

Journalism is the most important component of mass communication. It is a complex process of interaction of the participants. It involves different interaction models. If the main place in classic media is occupied by a message, then Internet communication determines, firstly, a recipient, who has acquired the right to change the position of the addressee to the addresser, and, secondly, the effect that can be changed by any communication participant, as the key elements of its model. These two elements are complex and flexible. Moreover, in the context of the issue under consideration, it is important to note that at the message effect stage, commentary acquires a particular importance.

Commentary as a method of journalism is very popular in almost all genres; in modern media, even a note often contains commentary. The method is referred in media message for different purposes:

• to involve an expert opinion as a convincing argument;

• to provide the author's concept confirmation / refutation of information by the participant or witness of the event;

• to compare of different points of view to objectify the author's position;

• to present a bright figurative and expressive means by a famous person (opinion leader) to support the content with an expressive assessment.

Thus, commentary can be denoted as a multifunctional method of obtaining information and mastering reality in a journalistic text. Commentary is known to be a tool of explanation, interpretation. Accordingly its most important characteristic is the dialectical interaction of subjective and objective principles. Subjectivity is due to the fact that the appeal for clarification to someone is based on the assumption that this person possesses some kind of exclusive knowledge that is interesting to the audience and socially significant. The inclusion of different comments in one journalistic content ensures its objectivity.

Access to commenting for any communication participant leads to the fact that journalistic statements, can be transformed by "situational opinion leaders" in media communications. And in this aspect, Tan's transaction model (Tan, 1985) seems relevant, as it focuses on the quality of information. That is: the effectiveness of communication depends on the degree to which the amount and meaning of the information sent matches the volume and meaning of the information received. This is especially true when it deals with to comments, as its system of argumentation is based on subjective ideas and personal socio-cultural experience of a commenter. And it should be obtained and mastered by other participants and subjects of communication.

In Tan's model, the key in the context of the issue under consideration is the statement about communication as a system: addresser, addressee, channel, message. At the same time, the scientist states

the "transactional nature" of communication, when both the addresser and the addressee turn to be equally active participants. This is becoming a critical feature of the communication process for online media.

The start of the commentary genre is due to the fact that "in the modern information society, not only new knowledge, ideas, facts, but also different views, assessments, opinions take an important part" (Fomina, 2018, p. 147). Traditionally, the commentary belongs to the group of analytical genres (Raspopova, 2017; Tertychny, 2001); in the classification of Kroychik (2000), it is included in the group of research and news texts (p. 138). The main genre-forming elements of journalistic content highlighted and justified by Tertychny are an object, a goal, and a method. The subject of the commentary genre may be an event, phenomenon, process, situation, requiring prompt authoritative assessment and explanation. Moreover, the subject can be absolute news, and facts already known to the audience. The purpose of the commentary is to present, in the form of a complete, integral, coherent text, a reasoned point of view on the actual fact (facts) of modern reality, socially significant and, as a rule, provoking different assessments and reactions in society. The method coincides with the name of the genre, it's worth adding that when characterizing the text of a comment, such concepts as point of view, opinion, assessment, interpretation, version, forecast are significant.

In modern media, comments are written by both journalists and experts, but always from the position of a journalist, as performing the journalist's professional functions. However, comments stand out in a special section, which indicates the relevance of the type of journalistic text. Examples of such headings / sections can be found in most authoritative media sections: Mnenie (*Opinion*) in the newspaper Vedomosti (https://www.vedomosti.ru/rubrics/opinion), Mnenie in such media as Izvestia (https://iz.ru/blog), Novaya Gazeta (https://www.novayagazeta.ru/views), Argumenti i Fakti (*Arguments and Facts*) (http://www.aif.ru/opinion), Gazeta.ru (https://www.gazeta.ru/comments/), Osoboe mnenie (*Own Opinion*) on the radio station Ekho Moskvi (Echo of Moscow) (https://echo.msk.ru/programs/personalno/), etc.

6.2. Commentary as a means of modern media feedback

Feedback can be called the most important generic characteristic of journalism as an information and mass activity. The peculiarity of feedback with online communications is that communities created on social networks or on websites turn into a new subject of communication - a community organized on some principles.

Thus, the number of levels of interaction increases: community representatives enter a dialogue not only with the media, but also with each other, and with other communities. Kruglov (2017) writes about organization of feedback in such a community. The researcher notes that it is in social media that the possibility of instantly organizing a reaction to a message from a large group of people appears (p. 95). The scientist entitles such communities as "organizational and communication hybrids." At the same time, the researcher emphasizes that "communication within communities cannot be fully attributed to mass, group or interpersonal – it is something else" (Kruglov, 2017, p. 95). According to the present study, this is especially important from the standpoint of personification of the addressee entering into a dialogue with the addressee, and the comment text turns out to be just a means of such personification.

The formation of new types of mass media – Internet media, as well as consolidation in the online space and traditional media led to fundamental changes in the organization of feedback: the dominance and active development of interactive methods of communication have transformed both the media space and the media discourse. Previously, feedback was considered primarily as a reaction of representatives of a mass audience to a news release, but now it is a much more complex and multi-level system: "Interactive communication as a verbal form of communication has become the main way to organize media discourse" (Vovkula, 2015, p. 32). Feedback in an interactive format is complicated by the fact that not only the main text created by the journalist can be interpreted and evaluated conditionally, but also each of the comments that appeared.

6.3. Creative commentary

Comment in online communication can be attributed to the type of "free genres", because it relies on the type of text fixed in the system of journalistic genres and at the same time it turns out to be very flexible, and capable of easy transformations. Commentary flexibility in online communication is manifested at all levels of a text: at the level of sign code - verbal, visual, audio, iconic signs; at the composition level; at the level of copyright intentions and style. In this aspect, the concept of "journalism 2.0" introduced by Zagidullina (2018a) is especially relevant. The scientist characterizes the phenomenon of media aesthetics of communication, in the formation of which user comments play a special role (Zagidullina, 2018b). The journalistic potential of professional opinion-based journalism is decreasing (due to an interest decrease of online users in opinions), and the potential of journalism 2.0 (presented as news discussions online) is increasing (Zagidullina, 2018a).

The user, the author of the comment, possesses the right to choose the means of expression: verbal, iconic, visual, audio, it can be emoji / emoticons, likes, gifs, etc. The influence of various visualization methods on the content perception is studied by (Simakova, 2018a; Simakova, 2018b; Simakova, 2019). Internet commenting complicates the communication process, so the comment itself turns to be an assessment of the assessment, interpretation of the interpretation, the result of the thought process and emotional reaction, as well as a start for the next commenter.

In this sense, online commentary turns out to be a speech genre that destroys traditional notions of the text as a complete and whole statement: no journalist today who posts in can predict how the post will be perceived, since perception will be affected and comments supplementing the initial text, the quantity and quality of which are unpredictable.

Comments as an indicator of the dynamics of user engagement are the most important characteristic of the editorial work efficiency in general and feedback in particular. The demand for this type of feedback and its activity in modern media makes it possible to single out comment types. By intentional meaning, comments can be: approving, refuting, critically evaluating, reflecting, encouraging, etc. By the method of coding information: verbal, iconic, visual, audio, graphic, symbolic. In terms of volume, comments range from minimally fixing ratings (likes, gifs) to expanded text. By the way of expressing attitudes to information, by the method of assessment, comments can be divided into two groups: those based on explicit means of assessment and containing implicit methods of assessment (Topchii, 2019b). The second one is proposed to be designated as creative: "By creative commentary is

meant complex (multicode) comment forms, which include visualization elements (photos, cartoons, memes, freeze frame shots of films and videos, print-screens, emoticons, gifs, videos), audio content, various forms the design of the commentary itself, artistic elements requiring time, emotional costs from the user "(Topchii, 2019a, p. 340). It is creative commentary that plays a special role in the process of communication, as it involves co-creation, complicity in the discussion.

6.4. The role of the visual component in comments as a way of organizing feedback

Researchers of the specifics of feedback transformation as a traditional way of exchanging information between the editors and the recipient (Bigaeva, 2015; Lukyanova, 2018; Vovkula, 2015) agree that the most effective and multifunctional way of feedback in modern media was commentary (Karpoyan, 2015; Koroleva, 2019; Vovkula, 2015).

To identify the patterns and characteristics of the commentary phenomenon in social network accounts, an analysis of the posts created by the editorial office a day is performed. Medusa online content, posts and comments are under consideration for June 7, 2015–2018 (for more details see: (Topchii, 2019a, p. 340)). Surprisingly, the prevalence of textual (verbal) comments is over 90%. Nevertheless, the visual component is of particular interest for the present research in the context of a visual turn (Vyrovtseva, Raspopova, & Simakova, 2017). The visualization of the media space as a whole and the commentary, as its active element in particular, is caused not only by a change in the paradigm of perception, but also by digital technologies, which provide the opportunity to most quickly, vividly and emotionally express attitude, present point of view, which is the main task of any comment.

At the next stage, the visualization tools in the comments of the Medusa official public page on VKontakte are analyzed and systematized. Based on the study of 237 posts published in seven days (April 30 – May 6, 2018), a classification is compiled, the main criterion of which is the way the author's statement is visualized. Five types of information visualization are identified. 1). Photographic – portrait, reportage, collage, altered image. 2). Video – video clip, collection of videos. 3). Graphic – video graphics, infographics, visual quote. 4). Art – drawing, illustration, cartoon, comic book. 5). Alternative - memes, gifs, stickers. At the same time, all visual elements contain an emotional assessment without exception. An additional evaluative effect is often achieved by combining of image and text. Often, it is the multicode principle that turns out to be the most effective, since the combination of verbal and visual elements enhances the game principle of communication, allows to use different means, build different relationships between the verbal and visual components.

The processes of creativity for the addressee and co-creation of the addressee are the most important typological characteristic of creative commentary. Of course, a creative commentary can also be stated an active participant in the formation of media aesthetics, which Zagidullina (2016) writes about: "in this case, media aesthetics is also a consequence of these processes: in the bowels of the masses who have gained the opportunity to include their voice in the chronicle of the language of their era, the main development trends related to mental transformations and immediately reflected in the language. It is not so much about "language fashion" or linguistic taste, but about the sensitivity of native speakers to these mental transformations. We can observe here phenomena characteristic of the present moment that defines the features of media aesthetics" (p. 50).

The text of a creative commentary turns out to be more complex both at the level of its "production" and at the level of its perception, which is due to the trends of poly-coding and visualization and is provided with the capabilities of digital and multimedia technologies. The latter turns the game into a universal means of communication. The precedently "impressive" (Klochko, 2018) text allows not only updating the piece of news and attitude to it, but also undertaking a variety of functions, including aesthetic.

Each creative commentary possessses its own "language", called by Polonsky "media dialect" (Polonsky, 2018b). A media dialect is a form of the national luguage, its particular variety, goals, objectives, functions, grammatical structure, vocabulary, the combination of stylistic means of which are motivated by the conditions of the media environment, diverse social media practices associated with the person. A media dialect provides a multi-format, multi-purpose, socially and personally determined informational interaction of different social actors in the media environment (Polonsky, 2018a). As the researcher denotes, a feature of the functioning of the media dialect is its immersion in the flow of visual images, visual symbols, infographics and, relatively speaking, visual interjections, that is, drawings, emoticons, various kinds of images that serve not only to convey the feelings and mental states of a person, but also to create a special emotional context for utterance, to reduce the psychological distance between communicative subjects (Polonsky, 2018a).

7.   Conclusion

Social media is a continuously evolving type of communication platform mastered by media editions: social networks have become the main feedback channel. Interactivity and multimedia as the main generic characteristics of social networks allow journalists / recipients and addressers / addressees to create and disseminate information, and most importantly – to comment on it. Moreover, media events, media images, and objects of reality are critically evaluated, subjectively interpreted, and reasonably explained (to a lesser extent). Thus, comments provide simultaneously two main functions: to have an impact and to inform, with domination, of course, of the first. That allows to consider commentary a type of media language. And as a special conversational journalistic genre based on the author's assessment, and the commentary itself as the result of creative activity with an aesthetic component that is obligatory for this kind of expression.

Acknowledgments

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