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TYPES OF SELF-PRESENTATION IN RUSSIAN VIDEO BLOGS

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Abstract

The article presents a comprehensive study devoted to various types of self-presentation in Russian video blogs. The purpose of the research is to identify the features and systematize the types of self-presentation in video blogs. The aim of the research is to provide a systematic and integral representation and characterization of types of self-presentation in video blogs as a synthesis of image practices of mass communication, self-presentation in social networks, as well as self-positioning, which is typical for building intra-group relationships. Due to the convergent nature of the research object itself, the work is interdisciplinary, written at the intersection of sociology and cultural studies. Using a systematic approach allowed us to give an extensive description of the identified types of self-presentation in video blogs, to reveal their features. The video blog is considered in the article as a multi-modal project created in the new media environment, involving regular publication of video materials, based on the synthesis of the author's concept and the audience's unifying intent. In this case, video blogs are regarded as a creative product that has a certain genre structure and genesis. Typological systematization of video blogs makes it possible to identify certain dramaturgic decisions that build up attitude to nature, offline reality, reality, tradition, and "adult" culture, as well as mold ideas about status behavior. The level of dominance in self-presentation can be expressed through status consumption, demonstration of independence and aggressiveness, through charm and popularity.

Keywords: Communication, glamour, new media, self-presentation, video blogs, virtuality

1. Introduction

The article is devoted to the study of dramaturgic communication in video blogs in the context of virtualization of modern culture. This research is based primarily on the Theory of Communicative Action presented in the works of Habermas (1984) and Goffman (1959). Communicative action is considered to be focused on the desire to impress the audience (Verbilovich, 2013). Self-presentation is a form of communicative action, which involves audience-oriented creation of a public image, but not spontaneous expression of oneself. Self-presentation is resorted to in everyday social interactions, in mass media, and in Internet communication. In the context of social virtualization, the study of self-presentation in new media is of particular research interest, since it has a strong influence on the behavior and values of participants in virtual communication.

Currently, self-presentation in social networks is actively investigated. Research results demonstrate that teenagers who value peer approval purposefully share content to appear interesting, loved, and attractive. Facebook and Instagram self-presentation is the subject of research (Yau & Reich, 2019). Empirical data on self-disclosure and self-presentation in social networks are compared, the technology-based features of online communication that contribute to self-presentation are analyzed. According to A. Schlosser such featured include asynchrony of communication, splitting the audience into multiple groups, and feedback from the audience (Schlosser, 2020).

The relevance of the topic is due to the high popularity of video blogs among young people, their impact on culture, lifestyle and consumer practices.

2. Problem Statement

The aim of the research is a systematic and integral representation and characterization of types of self-presentation in video blogs. Forms of self-presentation in video blogs are considered as a synthesis of image practices of mass communication, self-presentation in social networks, as well as self-positioning, which is typical for building intra-group relationships. In this case, video blogs are regarded as a media form of communication that has a certain genre structure and genesis.

3. Research Questions

The research analyzes how the qualities of the technological environment, such as interactivity and the principle of maximizing relevance, determine the nature of discourse in video blogs. Under these conditions, user intentions and content relevance parameters play a significant role. The paper addresses the issues of interaction between the author and the audience, and provides an overview of common motives for using YouTube. The description of tactics and stylistic techniques that allow attracting the attention of the viewer and determining the place of the video blogger in the cultural space is given taking into account the genre specifics of video blogs.

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. The purpose of the study is to identify the features of self-presentation in video blogs.

4.2. Also, the purpose of the study is to systematize the types of such self-presentation.

5.   Research Methods

When developing analytical models that describe self-presentation in video blogs, it is necessary to synthesize the achievements of a wide range of social and humanitarian sciences. This is due to the convergent nature of the research object itself. The work is of an interdisciplinary nature, written at the intersection of sociology and cultural studies, and is a systematization of the principles of creating a public image typical for the discourse of Russian youth video blogs. The systematic approach is applied in order to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional description of various types of self-presentation in video blogs and to reveal their features.

6.   Findings

We consider a video blog as a multi-modal project created in the new media environment, involving regular publication of video materials and developing on the basis of the synthesis of the author's concept and the unifying intent of the audience. Initially, the video blog was a form of self-expression and self-presentation, but after activating the partner platform on YouTube, video bloggers were able to monetize the audience's interest, which turned the resource into a labor media platform.

The structural basis of a video blog is the figure of the author, who can work in different genres. At the same time, the video blog format makes it possible to use all the channels of multi-modal communication: it conveys the linguistic features of the author's speech, intonation, facial expressions, gestures, all the aspects of communication that are markers of belonging to certain age and social groups.

The diversity of genre structure of video blogs is represented in the works of Tekutieva (2016), Lushchikov and Terskikh (2018). The researchers characterize such genres as reviews (games, viral videos, movies), letsplay, prank, training video, life hack, beauty video, fashion blog, lifestyle blog, travelblog, technoblog, fitness blog, footblog, vlog, show, dialogue, guide, challenge, sketch, trolling interview. This list can be continued, as the researchers note the fluidity and variability of the genre structure.

Mass communication ceases to be unidirectional in the new media. The ability to choose content and express your opinion significantly reduces the distance between the author and the audience. YouTube algorithms are configured to maximize relevance, i.e., content matching the recipient's display requests based on big data processing, including viewing statistics and the history of virtual actions: subscriptions after viewing, likes and dislikes, sharing, and playlist additions. Individually generated mass communication increases the duration of sessions and ensures the return of viewers. In turn, video bloggers that attract an audience develop successful themes and formats. Thus, the audience response becomes a structural part of the video blog as a developing project. Such communication conditions encourage the author to search for forms and themes that meet the media requests and needs of viewers.

Thus, the video blog, which is initially started as an author's project, in the process of its development acquires the features of collective creativity. Video blogs mold a variety of public discourses that are built around group needs, interests, a unifying image of the world, mythologies, desires, stereotypes, consumer and media practices. The ratio of the author's influence and the audience may be different. So, the creators

of author's video blogs, who are trusted and able to convey a personal position, gather like-minded people on their channel. Other video bloggers adapt their content to the media consumption situation, which in some cases is quite unexpected, but they follow certain laws.

For instance, videos with slimes are very popular among children and teenagers. Games with colored jelly-like material turn out to be the simplest visual attraction and gain millions of views. The main motivation for watching such videos is a relaxing observation or what film theorists call a psychological attraction, a cinematic attraction, or simply an attraction (Tomasovic, 2006). The results of surveys conducted in the course of Khan's (2017) research indicate that this is the dominant motive for passive consumption on YouTube. Video bloggers provide the audience with abundant materials for viewing, peeping, and contemplation. Relaxing observation is the basis of such video genres as videos with pets, letsplay, collections of funny moments from the lives of children and adults, etc. There is a lot of affective humor in entertainment video blogs, which is present not only in sketches, pranks, challenges, etc., but also becomes a stylistic marker of this type of entertainment virtual culture.

Another basis that unites the audience of video blogs can be common interests: games for letsplay, the use of cosmetics for beauty blogs, movie reviews for movie lovers, etc. Users can also be grouped by socio-demographic characteristics. So, in this research, we are interested in video blogs adapted to the needs of the youth audience. A video blogger of the same age is perceived by the youth audience as an equal. In video blogs, young people get the opportunity to create their own information environment.

Video bloggers create a public image by controlling the volume and quality of transmitted information. This practice can be a purposeful construction of a personal brand, work on a role, or an unconscious replication of images of mass culture: a successful businessman, a carefree traveler, a style icon, etc. In the case of video blogs, the dramaturgical action is primarily aimed at stimulating the virtual activity of the audience, from whom subscriptions, likes and comments are expected.

Video bloggers who position themselves as experts try to demonstrate independence, competence, and skillfullness. Educational and expert content on YouTube is represented by such genres as auto-blogs, foodblogs, construction and technoblogs, and other narrow-profile areas. N. Chan, describing the self-presentation strategies of youtubers who position themselves as experts in the field of driving, notes that they strive to combine their career on the Uber labor platform with the development of channels on YouTube (Chan, 2019). Lushchikov and Terskikh (2018) remark that the creators of such blogs, on the one hand, share a subjective opinion about the technical novelty, on the other hand, try to "create an objective image through facts, arguments, analysis of technical characteristics" (p. 59).

A great number of popular YouTube genres (letsplay, challenge, battle, show, sketch, viral video reviews, video game reviews, movie news, music videos) are entertainment in nature. Such video blogs have inherited the expressive and clip style of TV and music shows. Genre features of entertainment video blogs correspond to the basic property of entertainment mass culture, which involves the construction of virtual reality, illusory, but more attractive than natural reality. This feature integrates the culture of entertainment video blogs into the classic oppositions of the entertainment and the routine, the official and the carnival, the labor and the leisure concepts. Self-presentation in such video blogs should not only be status-based, but also easy to understand, funny, unusual, standing out, and cause information noise. Clowning and epatage are becoming the dominant form of self-presentation in entertainment genres. If a

viral effect is required, the behavior in front of the camera may be intentionally provocative and expressive. As an example of epatage, we can cite a provocative homoerotic video taken by cadets of the Ulyanovsk Institute of Civil Aviation that caused a heated public discussion. Miazhevich (2020) shows how such provocations can challenge or test the strength of conservative discourse.

Numerous examples of epatage and outrage can be found in the challenge genre. A challenge is like a game of "truth or dare" and it suggests a challenging task, for example, participants eating unappetizing foods appear before the public in a ridiculous way, etc. Challenges are offered by video bloggers or audience in the comments. Petrenko (2017) explains that the participant is afraid of losing respect if the challenge is failed, that "they will stop giving him instructions, he will get sarcastic comments, which, in the end, can poison his life" (p. 190). Challenges use the practice of hazing to entertain the audience. There are challenges that provoke self-harming and suicidal behavior. Researchers emphasize the fact that these types of videos have a negative impact on vulnerable populations by means of the socially viral effects, which occur when self-harming behavior is modeled and positioned as acceptable through video content. These effects are called suicidal infection, which teenagers and young adults are most susceptible to, especially when they see others using this behavior to achieve an attractive goal, such as attracting the attention of others (Khasawneh et al., 2020). Such practices are international in nature. The study by Brazilian scientists describes that challenge participants drink boiling water, inhale deodorant and hold their breath, entering apnea for an indefinite period, experiment with inhaling and setting fire to the alcohol gel on the skin that has become publicly available due to the spread of COVID-19 (Deslandes & Coutinho, 2020). All this is considered by the participants of the discourse as a joke, a media guide for creating a publication and gaining popularity. In the value system of the online universe, self-harm is a mutually beneficial practice: the audience gets a spectacle with elements of abuse, and the video blogger improves the visibility of their channel.

Video blogs have inherited some elements of postmodern journalism: in such genres as prank, reaction, and trolling interviews, provocations are used, and total irony is the basis for organizing discourse. The provocation is based on a nihilistic conflict of world pictures: the provocateur's mobile world picture is opposed to any formed and established model. Irony is appropriate in reviews of mediocre film productions and viral videos, political video blogs, and many other genres. This type of self-presentation based on the clownish manner, rising to the archetype of the trickster.

The authors and audience of youth video blogs are, due to their age and cultural background features, carriers of a "mobile" picture of the world that is particularly sensitive to discursive transformations of social norms. For this age, protesting against the rules set by adults is natural. Often, self-assertion occurs through forms of dominance that are characteristic of destructive leadership: self-assertion due to opposition to adults, encouraging peers to illegal actions, disorganizing forms of self-expression, "discharge motivation", i.e., the encouragement of the group to rest and idleness. In the space of new media devoid of normative restrictions, sophisticated postmodern irony often acquires the characteristics of destructive social practices and degenerates into trolling, haterism, fleming, and prank turns into telephone terrorism. Youth video blogs are characterized by the use of obscene vocabulary, the spread of jargonisms, slangisms, and colloquialisms. This type of self-presentation is based on demonstration of independence; it allows creating an image of "a person without prejudice", "a rebel and nonconformist".

Self-presentation of video bloggers is a combination of the behavior patterns of high-status members of microgroups and the behavior patterns of celebrities. The most striking aesthetic of star dramaturgy is presented by glamour. The book by O.I. Pimenova (Pimenova, 2018) reveals the universal content features of glamour that are frequent in beauty and lifestyle vlogs, travel vlogs, video reviews and unpacking of goods. These features include: idealization; sign-symbolic nature and ritualism; orientation to the "other" (reference groups that are the source of ideal role models for them, and the surrounding community of "viewers", whose attention should be attracted and recognition or envy gained); status nature, which is manifested mainly through conspicuous consumption and hedonism as a basic value setting; simultaneity and illusory behavioral practices. The video blogger himself becomes a prosumer – a professional consumer who generates media content to promote products and services. Public consumption when there are a lot of subscribers and views attracts advertisers and makes it possible to convert audience recognition into money.

7. Conclusion

The considered models of self-presentation can be regarded as one of the aspects of the new virtual culture that builds up attitude to nature, offline reality, the system, and "adult" culture, as well as reflects perceptions and reinforces stereotypes about status behavior. The level of dominance in self-presentation can be expressed through status consumption, demonstration of independence and aggressiveness, through charm and popularity. The models of self-presentation in Russian video blogs analyzed in this article are one of the aspects of the new virtual culture. A promising direction of further research is to investigate the influence of the models of self-presentation and the associated dramaturgic decisions on everyday actions of the audience, the perception of the behavior as acceptable, the formation of images of the world and "I-images", individual and group identity. The study of the unacceptable and radical practices in public discourse as a factor of dehumanization of society is of particular research interest as well.

Acknowledgments

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