

From Text to Communication Product: Transformation of Genres and Text Forms in Digital Age

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Abstract – The changes in media environment always lead to changes in media system, which reflects a different quality of communications. Researchers of mass communications start focusing on the nature of actors, channels and effects. This article aims to analyze how the genre structure of texts that function in public communications changes, and to show how the traditional instrument of influencing public opinion – a text – has undergone fundamental changes in the past decade. A new concept of “communication product” is being considered. It refers to the result of professional activity in the field of public and mass communications which results in creation of a media product, an event product, an advertising or public relations product.

Keywords – text, media text, communication product, genre, mass communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Genetically journalistic text was the main influencing text, and literary a text at a certain stage of development of the last one. The genre system of print media remained unchanged for a long time. Main genre groups reflected the key needs of the society: informational, analytical and literary journalism.

By the turn of XX-XXI centuries, due to the active influence of advertising and public relations texts on the mass audience, it is possible, on the one hand, to observe blurring of the boundaries between the textual phenomena of the three

communication spheres (which is not always explicit), on the other – a clear “mimicry” of advertising and PR-texts simulating the traits of journalistic ones, taking into account their representation on traditional journalistic platforms.

Digital communications have changed the structure, form, ways of presenting “messages-texts” functioning in public communications, as well as the degree of their interactivity and social consequences. In the XXI century communication strategies and tactics are changing, not only the expansion of traditional media sphere (printed, electronic media) with its system of texts and their genre forms is observed, but also the formation of a new media sphere, where other genres (often genroids) are formed, as well as new text forms and formats.

The transformation of media texts into polycode texts is one of the current trends in their functioning. New formats and genres of polycode products are analyzed in studies of many Russian [1] and European authors [2-5].

Polycode media texts are in turn transformed into communication products. A communication product is understood as a result of professional activities in the field of public and mass communications aimed at production of a media product, an event product, an advertising or public relations (PR) product [6].

The purpose of the article is to analyze the changes in the genre structure of texts functioning in public communications, and to show how media text (as a traditional instrument of influence on public opinion) has undergone fundamental changes in the last decade.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the active intrusion of the Internet into the sphere of mass communications, the authors observe further aggregation of traditional journalistic texts with the texts of related communication forms and the emergence of a new type of text – media text. Modern understanding of media text presupposes its paradigmatic relations, which are expressed not only in relation to a certain communication sphere, but also its network variety.

Changes in social sphere and technological platforms of traditional media texts activate changes in the nature of mass communication: nowadays the transition from information, analytics and literary journalism to blitz-informing and entertaining information is observed.

Under blitz-informing the transfer of relevant information to the consumer is understood, that is, the transfer of information in a form in which it will be most accessible to him and will have the qualities of rapid response; relevance as meeting the informational needs of the audience becomes associated with operability ("need", "consumability") of this information. The traditional genre system, which includes three groups of genres and is based on genre-forming features, is replaced by a binary system of genres and their forms, based on completely different foundations: the text's length, and, accordingly, the speed of consumption and reaction to information. The authors are talking about "long reads" and "short reads". Undoubtedly, not only the length of the text is its main differentiating feature, but also the functions, goals, linguistic and stylistic factors.

A. Visual communication product

In this context, visualized genre forms are significant. Thus, in the digital age, press photo becomes not only an additional source of information, but also its self-sufficient representative, and the active use of social media platforms such as Instagram or VK can be considered as the proof of that. On any medium (printed or electronic) the share of visualized information is increasing dramatically: since 2013, the strongest trend in the print media is infographics. All this is the result of rapid transformations of mass communications, which led to the fact that the consumer of mass information does not read this information as a whole, but looks at it. This leads to the development of clip (fragmentary) and blip (elected on the principle of attention delay) mass consciousness.

Visualization tools (photos, drawings, diagrams, videos, graphic design, logos, etc.) [7] make the content of the media text more attractive, "speaking" (focused on a specific target audience), effective, easy to understand, they also save time of the modern addressee and differentiate the presence/absence of the necessary system of values, allowing perceiving information in accordance with the intention of an addressee.

Modern media texts are mainly illustrated by photographs. Along with video materials, they remain one of the key tools of attracting the audience's attention. Having the ability to carry a certain emotional coloring and semantic load, photos are also an excellent means of influence. The effectiveness of the use of photographic material usually depends on the peculiarities of the organization of the web environment, types of content and types of photos: illustrate the main meaning; act as case texts; explain text information, make it easier to understand; emphasize the presence of different points of view in the material, the paradoxicality of information, etc.; enhance the emotional impact of the verbal text; help to understand the meaning of the verbal component when the iconic and verbal elements are inseparable; "choose" the recipient, segmenting the audience; exclude the possibility of incorrect interpretations of the material, etc.

The main fields where photography is applied are advertising, public relations and journalism.

In advertising photography, according to A.V. Grigorieva, informing as a goal fades into the background, and the need to stand out becomes a priority. The authors also note that photography in the advertising sphere acts as a mirror of contemporary culture, as "on the one hand, it reflects the current trends in society, and on the other – creates settings, models new orientations" [8]. Indeed, a consumer of information today seeks not just to learn about something, but to compare, evaluate, choose, etc. In this regard, photos should help the modern media text to arouse interest, to be remembered, to set a trend (or to become a trend).

In public relations, photography helps to implement the image and aesthetic functions, as in this case staged portrait or collective photos are used, as well as "live" ones, allowing conveying the atmosphere of an event, which is referred to PR-text. The authors also agree with the opinion of A.V. Buzinova that the job of a PR specialist does not require complex operations with images as the main objective usually is to disseminate reliable, credible information, and positively influencing the image of the PR subject [9].

In the field of journalism, photography is used to improve the efficiency of media text functions in general (informational, influencing, cognitive, entertaining, educational, social and other functions) [10].

These features of the use of photos determine the general functions of visual media texts, competent operation of which will allow influencing the mind of a consumer of information more accurately, quickly and effectively and form a loyal attitude to the object of communication through a media text.

B. Communicational tainment-product

One of the most important characteristics of the modern media text is its tainment-function being activated. "Entertaining" (and sometimes distracting) information gives rise to a whole body of separate areas with its own text structures: in addition to infotainment there is sciencetainment, edutainment, politainment, businesstainment.

In Russian television broadcasts, infotainment often replaces informational and analytical programs, claiming to

take their place. At the same time, there is a certain repertoire of genres in the TV-infotainment, being popular among the audience of TV recipients. The number of views of each material published on the Internet portal of a Television channel, allows determining the popularity of a format/genre. Statistical analysis of the "LifeNews" portal, for example, allows concluding that the following formats are the most popular among the target audience: trash, horror, "yellow" news, to a lesser extent a special report.

Such genre as "trash" has appeared in cinematography, these films had the following distinctive features: low budgets, non-professional actors, and specific storylines in which the conflicts were based on sex and the feeling of fear. The viewer's psychological empathy to the "victim characters" was caused by the similarity of the hero and the recipient. The sense of catharsis arose out of experiencing animal terror and physiological disgust [11].

Most of the TV trash products are collages and clips compiled from scenes of various origin, for example, official speeches, fragments filmed with hidden or amateur cameras, short synchrons with event participants and victims. The clip composition presupposes a very rapid change of scenes, it is impossible to focus even on visualization, spectator reflection is impossible at all. The calculation is done solely on the emotional impact on the recipient that is created by using the constant change of the shocking details, intonations and evaluations by narrators or journalists.

Horror for many decades remains one of the most popular audiovisual genres of mass communication [12]. Other formula genres (comic formula, melodrama, action – thriller or detective) in different periods of time are "consumed" by the audience in different volumes (more or less actively), but horror is always popular, both in its cinematic and mass media variations.

Meta-plot of a horror movie, as well as plots of other formula genres, represents constantly changing ideas about the boundaries of good and evil in society, while exploring the cathartic possibilities of the human psyche. Today, horror formulas have become content for the study of moral and ethical issues about the amount of permissible violence in real life and mass communication [13].

Actually horror tradition is represented in television content mainly by "shooter events" (the atmosphere of horror in this kind of genre is not primary: dynamics and shooting are more important) and action horror (emphasis is placed on the fight against an enemy and his destruction). News editors often do not just sell news, they try to find a unique video, but its uniqueness is primarily in savoring the terrible details, bloody physiological moments, etc. The features of the content on the "LifeNews" portal, for example, are as follows: a video is attached, verbal information about an incident is provided, but does not draw any conclusions, there are no analytical generalizations, except a rhetorical question in the title of the publication and user opinions and views expressed in comments. Thus, horror stories are nothing more than informational entertainment, presented in short verbal texts or videos, which is in demand among a wide target audience.

Special report is one of the most deployed formats of television infotainment nowadays. A special reportage is based on a simple idea, filed to cause an emotional response from audience. At the same time, the original meaning of an event, which became the subject of a report, is practically lost. Backlash (sequence of video footage, where there is no voice recitation or Synchron, but only a video sequence, with background music or without it), live video (unedited shooting) and action (shooting actions, extreme or "live" events) are now actively used in creating not only news stories, but also special reports, built on the principle of trip (immersion).

All the variety of the television production can be classified according to a number of formal and substantive features that allow identifying a certain number of genres/formats used by modern media. At the same time, the repertoire of genres/formats of infotainment is constantly changing and developing, there are new formats that are popular among public and therefore especially cultivated when creating content for television.

C. Prosumer communication product

A consumer himself, immersed in online communication, has other characteristics. He is not just a reader, listener and viewer. In the network space he is a friend, a trendsetter, a follower, a blogger, and most often a prosumer – a person who creates texts for himself (such communication products as "Instas" and selfies can be considered as examples of that).

The authors understand an image-based communication product in new media as a verbal and visual text initiated by public relations subject, functioning in the space of public communications, serving the purposes of forming, maintaining and correcting the positive image of a subject, addressed to a potentially mass audience and distributed through new media channels. These texts are always initiated by the subject of activity and contain selective and optimized information.

Today, almost every owner of a mobile device with various mobile applications of social networks, among which Instagram is the leader, is the author of a number of selfies. Selfie is a photo-portrait, the essence of which is to capture oneself on the camera.

The authors consider selfies as a kind of media text genre such as "Insta". When analyzing a text, the authors rely on a system of genre-forming features that characterize journalistic genres. Genre-forming features of media text are: subject, method and function.

If the authors transfer the system of genre-forming features to Instagram content, they can consider Insta as a genre of media text belonging to the groups of news genres, genres of rational journalism and genres of emotional journalism. Insta is a news genre, because it captures an event (subject), in the image and in the text description it answers questions objectifying this event (method), tells about this event, presenting its details (function). Insta can be also treated as a genre of rational journalism if it contains infographics. In this case, it indicates the connection of an event with other events, its causes and possible consequences (object), analyzes an event or phenomenon (method), puts a known event into the context

(function). Insta also acts as a genre of emotional journalism due to the fact that it can contain an image of a person (object), this image can capture any emotionally colored moment of a personal life (method), cause an emotional reaction of a social network user (function). In the latter case, the authors deals with selfie, which is a kind of “Insta” genre.

The subject (an individual), imprinting himself on a selfie, acts as a public person or as an ordinary person. Based on the typology of subjects of modern public communications, we can talk about selfie as a basic and adjacent image text. Being a basic image text, selfie can be defined as follows: selfie – an image media text, serving the purpose of formation or increment of public capital of the basic subject of public relations (or a public person), distributed in social networks. As an adjacent image text it is possible to define selfie as a media text, which has a sign of publicity, but does not serve the purpose of formation or increment of public capital of the basic subject, since this individual is not a public person.

The important discursive characteristic of a selfie is its polycode character. The very nature of the content in Instagram is to connect two non-homogeneous parts: verbal (hashtag) and non-verbal (image).

The verbal part of a selfie (hashtag) performs the following functions: inclusion in the general context (trends), actualization and expression, self-presentation and promotion.

In accordance with the genre features of a selfie two functions of its non-verbal components can be distinguished: illustrative-informative and expressive (attractive and emotional-evaluative). It can be argued that the informative and illustrative function helps to ensure the accuracy of a message and/or clarify its subject, while expressive functions provide attracting the attention of audience and the transmission of emotional content evaluation.

After analyzing the genre-forming and discursive features of a selfie, it is possible to state that a selfie is an image-based prosumer polycode communication product functioning mainly in Instagram social network.

D. Network communication product

In contrast to traditional media text, inscribed in the broadcasting grid or speech structure of printed edition, the network communication product is more independent: through repost or copying it can be easily removed from context, distributed separately from it, which determines the possibility and feasibility of promoting a text itself to increase coverage on the site where it is located, and beyond. This has a significant impact on online text: creating it, one should take into account the priorities of the social network; a text should contain keywords and phrases that match search queries; it should be adapted for the perception of both subscribers of a resource (blog, community, portal) and external audiences who are not familiar with the style of the resource and do not have background knowledge – which is especially important when paid promotion (for example, through the advertising office of the social network) is used. Thus, a network communication product not only changes its communicative status after some

time, but also can have several statuses at a time from the moment of publication.

A “network” reader is active; he seeks to demonstrate his reaction to a text and is ready to participate in the production of content, so organizations and brands that interact with their audiences via the Internet should be ready for dialogue with consumers, as well as greater speed, spontaneity and informality of communication. The ability of an advertising and PR specialist to choose the appropriate tone of communication and to respond flexibly to changes in the behavior of the addressee becomes vital.

Since the algorithms of social networks take into account likes, reposts, and comments when ranking communities and forming user’s own “custom ribbon”, a successful network text should stimulate the activity of users and provide viral coverage. Viral media texts use communicative and psychological techniques to engage and motivate, appeal to recognizable emotiogenic situations and leitmotifs. The most important element of this text is a hashtag that sets the direction of user activity that supports communication initiated by original media text. The life cycle of a virus continues in the texts-followers (including parody communication products), the presence of which can be considered a marker of the success of a virus.

The increase in the share of native advertising materials, thematically and genre close to non-promotional content of media, which are placed, should be recognized as an actual trend of network promotion. Native media texts are focused not on the object of advertising, but on what is interesting to the addressee, and this brings them closer to journalistic texts. However, unlike it happens with hidden advertising in media, advertising intention is not camouflaged. In an effort to meet the reader's needs for information or entertainment, native advertising can overcome the so-called “banner blindness”: native material looks almost no different from other editorial publications. But, unlike frankly manipulative traditional advertising, native materials do not cause irritation, their impact is based on a peculiar consensus: the addressee of a text is grateful to the advertiser for the opportunity to consume quality content free of charge, in exchange for which he readily agrees to accept advertising information [14].v

Speaking about the prospects, the authors also note that as advertising becomes more expensive, the attractiveness of interaction with target audiences within purposefully formed network communities grows, and therefore community management technologies become more popular than ever – from choosing a platform, community design, developing content plans and attracting participants to the formation of a sustainable ecosystem that allows working with interested audiences as efficiently as possible, increasing loyalty and simultaneously implementing many other tasks. As noted by I. A. Shchekina, the intensity and volume of necessary work in social networks should be determined depending on the size of a company and its future objectives. In some cases, a rather limited presence of a company on the Internet is preferable (it is enough to perform basic PR-tasks), in others it makes sense to create a full-fledged brand platform or (the most expensive, but also the most effective option) to gain leadership in the

industry or topic [15]. It is reasonable to assume that each of the mentioned options (levels) of a company's representation on the Internet will correspond to the optimal communication technologies and techniques, scientific research of which is one of the promising tasks.

III. CONCLUSION

Nowadays traditional text becomes a media product or a communication product due to the conditions of its generation in a convergent communication environment, where journalistic, PR and advertising communications function quite closely. If by communication product the result of professional activity in the field of public and mass communications is meant, such text can be considered as a polycode and multimedia text.

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