

Problems and prospects of studying video blogs as a channel for shaping public opinion of Russian young people

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Abstract — This article addresses the question of studying the impact of video blogs on the public opinion of young people. The study of this phenomenon requires the integration of the developments in a wide range of social sciences. The article summarizes the approaches of modern social and humanitarian sciences to the study of the impact of video blogs on young people. In particular, a discussion of the problem will be found in the context of transformations of the “network society” in the context of understanding the specifics of video blog discourse and studying the reasons for their popularity, the psychological context of user experience and audience motivation, as well as the problems of correlation of the growing popularity of video blogs and the problem of trust in this form of virtual communication. The author identifies the most promising areas of research, including the study of the degree and nature of the impact of video blogs on young people, the conventionality and trust problems in the discourse of video blogs.

Keywords - video blog, YouTube, public opinion, Internet communication, social network, virtualization, youth audience, opinion leaders, new media, discourse, trust, conventionality.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the problem of studying the influence of video blogs on the public opinion of young people. The relevance of the topic depends on the conceptual and methodological ambiguity that has developed around the analysis of the influence of video blogs on the moods and behavioral tendencies of young people. Such an influence per se seems intuitive and is acknowledged by many scientists working in the field of social sciences and humanities. At the same time, an objective assessment of the degree of influence of opinions broadcast using video blogs, and the nature of such influence is a definite methodological problem for several reasons.

First of all, the composition of this kind of an analytical model of influence requires the integration of the developments of a wide range of social and humanitarian sciences.

Secondly, the high rate of evolution of a “network society” requires the rapid transformation of analytical models.

Thirdly, the study of the degree and dynamics of the impact of virtual communications on society requires not only the timely collection of relevant data, but also the constant improvement of processing and interpretation methods.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This publication is both a review and systematization of the approaches of modern social sciences and humanities to the study of the impact of video blogs on young people, as well as the discovery of the most promising areas of such research.

III. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

European, American and Russian researchers are highly interested in various aspects of video blog communication and possess a number of notable scientific developments in this area. Research in world and domestic science can be divided into several areas: the study of video blogs as a new form of social media, the discourse analysis of video blogs, the assessment of video blogs as a source of information, the study of the impact of video blogs on society, inter alia in the context of the practical application of video blogs in the field of PR and advertising and using them as a “soft power” tool.

First of all, the study of video blogs is carried out in the context of the basic theoretical approaches to understanding social media and the “network society”. The works of Jan van Dijk (Dijk, 2005) conceptualize the organization of social relations in media networks, gradually replacing or complementing face-to-face communications. Manuel Castells (Castells, M., 2004), investigating the influence of social networks on society, puts forward a theory of a culture of real virtuality, in which “reality (i.e., the material/symbolic existence of people) is completely captured, completely immersed into virtual images, in a world of make-believe, where external reflections are not just on the screen, through which experience is transmitted, but they become experience themselves” (Castells, Manuel, 2000). The positive features of a network society are highlighted in the works of Derin Barney (Barney, D., 2004), Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler (Christakis, N. A., Fowler, J. H., 2011). Deryn Barney considers the changes in civil society under the influence of information technology, analyzes the problems of

digital democracy, identifies the potential for implementing projects of new social movements, transformations of cultural and communicative practices. Specifically the early theoretical approaches to understanding social networks were formed under the influence of the culture of users of the “first generation with its utopian, communal, libertarian undercurrents” (Castells and Manuel, 2000).

In the context of studying the impact of video blogs the particular example is YouTube, a resource that combines the capabilities of a social network, video hosting, a recommendation and search engine. Jean Burgess and Joshua Green regard YouTube as a massive “participatory culture” and point out how this resource became central in the struggle for power and control in the new media environment (Burgess J., Green J., 2009). The study of YouTube discourse is a separate area of research. Phil Benson’s extensive study contains an analysis of the structures, processes, and content of YouTube’s discourse. The author analyzes YouTube as complex, multi-authored, multimodal texts that dynamically emerge from the processes of textually-mediated social interaction.

Secondly, and equally, the task at the intersection of cultural, sociological and psychological disciplines is to study the phenomenon of the popularity of video blogs. Many researchers highlight the benefits of video blogs over traditional media. These include simplicity, emotionality and informality of style, which reduce the distance between viewers and authors and inspire credibility (Werner E.A., 2012., Shifman L. 2012). At the same time, as Werner states, video blogs can broadcast information of public interest, which is ignored by traditional media. Video blog researchers describe the genre system (Tekutieva I. A. , 2016), as well as techniques and technologies for promoting social projects on YouTube (Lushchikov V. A., Terskikh M.V. , 2018). At the same time, the study of video blogs requires new approaches taking into account their interactive nature. From this perspective, the object of study is both the features of the internal structure of the video, turning it into a “meme” (Shifman L. 2012), and external indicators of social influence (rating, for example) that determine the status and behavior of the audience. The researchers of user experience also note the important role of comments, which have more impact on the perception of the topic than the main content (Khan M.L., 2017).

Within the framework of the new conditions of communication, the psychological context of user experience determining motivation, degree of involvement, and the satisfaction level of the needs of the audience, becomes an important influence factor. The user motivation and satisfaction studies conducted by Paul Haridakis and Gary Hanson analyze possible needs and record differences in the use of this media channel from traditional media: users can choose from millions of videos and share with others (Haridakis, P., Hanson G., 2009). Leyek Khan studies motivation taking into account the typology of users: passive consumers, active participants in discussions and video producers. Surveys from Leyek Khan’s study suggest that the dominant motive for passive consumption on YouTube is relaxing entertainment, then searching for information. The

identified motives also include the need to share information, social interactions, the search for personal status (e.g., the need to impress others) (Khan M.L., 2017).

In terms of the stated topic, studies of the direct impact of video blogs deserve special attention. A number of studies focus on the marketing potential of video blogs. Mikhailova E.V. , while analyzing beauty blogging, states that “the level of trust in the video review, in which the blogger personally, straight to the face of his viewers, shares thoughts about the product, is higher than for text and photographs” (Mikhailova E.V., 2018: 76). The ability to publish an informal personal video message sharing emotions, intonations, facial expressions, gestures, on the one hand, and the possibility of an active audience response, on the other hand, change the conditions of mass communication, require the ability to work at an interpersonal level, to interact with the audience. In this regard, researchers talk about the convergence of mass and interpersonal communication in video blogs.

The impact of video blogs on the socio-political life of society is particularly interesting. Today YouTube has already become a platform for political speeches, a means of political propaganda or fight against political opponents, a tool in information wars. Dementieva K.V. shows how video blogs become a way of expressing public opinion of young people and an alternative to official media (K. Dementieva, 2017). Studies show that the audience is moving into the sphere of social media: “The daily audience of one “new media” resource, which shares the activities of any single person, is a little less than ten percent of the daily audience of the largest central television channel of the Russian Federation, which has a huge structural and material base” (Dolgov M.I., 2016). The attention of domestic researchers has already been attracted by video bloggers popular in the Russian segment of YouTube: Shariy (Dolgov M.I., 2016), Soloviev (Dementieva K.V., 2017, Zagidullina A.R., 2018), Yuriy Dud, 2018, Dmitriy Ivanov, known as kamikadze_d (Dementieva K.V., 2017).

Since their inception social networks were perceived as important tools for democratic participation, strengthening the foundations of civil society. However, as it developed and spread, the “network society” became the object of commercialization, control and manipulation, which gave “real virtuality” many problems, such as creating individual communication filters, distributing fake news, inciting hatred, cheating, creating fake user accounts, various cyberbullying practices (Lushchikov V.A., Terskikh M.V., 2018). In the modern world social media are used by manipulator actors to compromise socially important information (Kazakov M. Yu., 2013), switch public attention, share misinformation and organize internal conflicts. In order to maintain information security, authorities of different countries take various measures: from blocking YouTube in the PRC to using this resource in order to conduct foreign and domestic policy (Fedorov A.P., Chernov K.S., 2014).

A contradiction arises between the powerful communicative potential of the video blog genre and the risks associated with the spread of misinformation.

Despite the popularity of video blogs and the high activity of various actors, the question of the extent, to which ideas spread through video blogs can go beyond the virtual space, remains controversial. The emergence of terms such as “slacktivism” and “clicktivism” (M. Halupka, 2014; Kozinets R.V., 2019) reflect the inefficiency of the practice of supporting political or social movements via the Internet using such means as social networks. A number of researchers share the opinion that Internet mobilization is an extremely mythologized topic, that “political activity on the Web is passive, it is imitative and brings only moral satisfaction” (D. Bereznyakov, 2013). It can be safely said that two main approaches in assessing the political influence of the Internet exist - “cyber-optimistic and cyber-pessimistic, according to which digital technologies do not have a progressive influence on politics in general and on political consciousness in particular” (Pikula N.N., 2015).

A number of recent surveys indicate high presence, but at the same time, low level of trust of Russian young people in social communications in the virtual space. 74.6% of young people admitted that in their experience there was a case (cases) when important information on the Internet turned out to be false (fake, dump, simulacrum) (Novikov V. G., Kovaleva S.V., 2019). According to a survey of Russian young people, 43.2% admit the possibility of deliberate distortion of information by the social network Facebook (Novikov V. G., Kovaleva S.V. 2019). The topic of confidence of Russian young people in video blogs has not yet been explored.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Our review of scientific research makes it possible to identify the most promising areas of research on the impact of video blogs on the public opinion of young people.

First of all, the problem of the confidence of Russian young people in video blogs as a channel for disseminating information requires study. Studying the influence of video blogs on young people requires to take into account the cultural context, where contact with ideas is carried out in the context of post-modern pluralism, offering a choice of a continuously expanding list of sources of information, world views and points of view. Reliance on theoretical approaches to the study of the mechanisms of formation of world outlook and trust in such a culture is necessary. In that respect, in our opinion, the approach of a number of researchers, who propose using the theories of Yu. Habermas in digital sociology deserves special attention (Kazakov M. Yu., 2013; Gostev A.N., Belous O.V., 2019). The theoretical approaches of Yu. Habermas, such as the “public sphere”, the separation of the “life world” and the “system world”, his typology of communicative actions, will help:

- analyze the nature of the influence of individual channels on YouTube within the context of the clash between an intuitively reliable world image and instrumental informational activities;
- explore the imitation of naive communications and the discourse of the life world in video blogs;

- consider the problems of trust and perception of the truth and correctness of discourse in video blogs.

Studying the nature of the interest of young people in video blogs will also advance understanding of the nature and extent of their influence. Surveys show that entertainment is the dominant motivation for YouTube users. The consumption of entertaining content may contain game elements, be a manifestation of idle curiosity, wandering in the virtual manifestations of the personal and collective unconscious, a search for pleasures and strong emotions, a form of escapism and a cure for boredom. In this context, the study of video blogs in the context of studies on the impact of gaming practices and mass culture products on public consciousness seems to be promising.

From this perspective, it is necessary to systematize and actualize the ideas of modern social and humanitarian science about the impact of virtual discursive practices (language games, clip art, virtual person mythologization, constructing spaces of artificial everyday life, virtual social connections, ratings and statuses, provocative behavior and hater phenomenon, etc.) on the thinking, values, style and models of young people life.

At the same time, the difference of the video blogs should be taken into account: against other products of mass culture, their convention is the least obvious, close to everyday communications, the video blogger gains credibility by positioning itself as an “ordinary person” who talks about his “private life”.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, based on a review of social and humanitarian studies, a conclusion is drawn on the prospects of research on the degree of awareness of the conventions of video blog discourse by Russian young people, the problems of trust and perception of the truth and correctness of discourse in video blogs, the degree of sensitivity of public opinion to information broadcast via video blogs, and its level of critical perception. In order to understand the nature of the impact of video blogs on a youth audience, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive analytical model that takes into account the mutual influences of a number of factors: digitalization and virtualization of society, transformation of leisure practices, impact of virtual communication practices on youth lifestyle and behavior, issues of trust and perception of the truth and correctness of video blog discourse, study of the features of video blog discourse. Studying the degree of influence of video blogs requires the use of sociological technologies, web analytics and discursive analysis methods, as well as improving the methods of complex processing of the results.

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