FORMATION OF IDENTITY BY MEANS OF SOCIAL STEREOTYPES IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL INTERNET COMMUNICATIONS

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Abstract: Search for identity in cyberspace has a row of peculiarities, as far as a person can have several identities at a time. Identity is seen not as a property, but as a relation, a product of an open process of identification. Subjects of this identification are engaged in the process of social adaptation and its result can never be final and complete. Social stereotypes fulfil henotic and integrative function inside a community, and are one of the basic principles for formation of identity in terms of Internet communication. The process of formation of social stereotypes is characteristic for human consciousness, they can be represented both on verbal and nonverbal levels. Language, sign systems and symbols are the means of circulation of social stereotypes in Internet communication.

Keywords: Identity – Identifikation – Social stereotypes – Cyberspace – Internet Communication

1. Introduction

Nowadays the problem of formation of identity in the context of Internet communications gets a special meaning, as intercultural, interpersonal and mass communication is no more restricted by geographical boundaries, time and space frames, concentrating in cyberspace. In addition, a person still needs determination and self-determination. World full of modern information technologies gives people more possibilities, but at the same time makes them live according to new rules, acquire new values and standards. All these technological changes of last decades influenced the change of human consciousness, thinking, activity and social communication. It has become an interesting object of research in the sphere of social philosophy and other sciences. Under such conditions problems connected to social stereotypes and formation of social identity, as well as correlation between them, become increasingly essential. 'Today when the electronic and information technologies are highly developed, media are one of the most influential resources of stereotype shaping'[1].

Researches of identity in philosophy relate to discourse of existence, its identification with consciousness; to the development of category 'individuality'. The principle of identification of existence and consciousness was defended from different methodological views by Aristotle, B. Spinoza, D. Hume, G.W.F. Hegel, F. Schelling, M. Heidegger and others. Priority of identification over distinction was doubted by G. Deleuze, J. Derrida and others. Discourse of individuality is characteristic for philosophical reflection and is distinctly seen in the works of J. Locke, W. Humboldt, S. Kierkegaard and others. The meaning of symbolic sign systems (especially language) and phenomena of communication in the formation of structures of identity was stated by W. Humboldt, L. Wittgenstein, P. Ricker and others.

One of important means of transfering and formation of social stereotypes is social communication: from interpersonal to mass communication, and in current conditions, as we can see, Internet communication plays a vital role. So how can we define social communication and Internet communication?

The notion of communication can be viewed both in a narrow and broad sense: from personal interaction to correlation of all with everything. As personal interaction and dialogue this problem has been reviewed since ancient times (Plato, Aristotle). Problem of social communication as relation between two and more people was studied by J. Habermas, K.-O. Kapel and others. From the sociological point of view communication was researched by G. Mead, T. Parsons, F. Schutz and others. Research of great current interest is the problem of Internet communication, which interested J. Barlow, M. Haym, F. Hammitt and others. In our opinion, little attention was paid to the problem of influence of social stereotypes on the formation of identity in Internet communication and determination of ways of reaching a consensus under conditions of interpersonal, intercultural and mass communication. That is why we are interested to investigate peculiarities of the process of formation of human identity in Internet communication and the role of social stereotypes in this process. There are many arguments on the issue – is identification of personality possible at all in terms of Internet? This is not about digital or any other technological identification, but about social one.

2. Term 'identity' in socio-humanistic sciences

We turn our attention to the notion of 'identity', as its determination is quite a difficult task. On the current stage of scientific development this term is one of the mostly

used and has a score of meanings and interpretations. And there is nothing strange in that as the notion 'identity' is the object of research of many branches of science. Thus, Koslovets M.A. emphasizes that O. Marquard, who together with K. Stierle published an encyclopedia dedicated to the theme of identity, stated that having summarized his work on this subject (highlighted within 2500 years in philosophical and more than 100 years in sociological and psychological literature), he made a conclusion that 'identity' is the answer to the question who a man is through his unity with himself and through his distinction from other people [2].

The founder of the theory of identity is considered E. Erickson, he introduced for the first time the term "identity" which defined as feeling of accessory of the personality of belonging to a particular historical period and type of interpersonal interaction, which is inherent to this era [3].

Term 'identity' very often substitutes such terms as 'self-consciousness' and 'self-determination'. It can be explained by the fact that this term reflects a deeper and broader understanding of the position of individuality in social environment. But at the same time a problem arouses – how to determine the contents of the notion 'identity', as many scientists use it as something that does not need any explanation. That is why polysemy of term 'identity' is under scientific discussion of last decades, in the course of which the notion becomes less distinct. It is used to define the system of world perception, 'a feeling of membership', a range of personal self-definitions and the object of scientific reflection.

Rapid expansion and recognition of term 'identity' in socio-humanistic sciences can only be explained by the fact that 'at last a notion was found that supplies the needs of humanity – in communication, perception of the nature of world and your place in it, realization of personal origins. Each individual tends to positioning himself in the environment and comparing himself with some standards. Firstly, psychologists noticed it. Actually, the notion of 'identity' appeared in psychoanalysis at first – as a way to distinguish an individuality in society and as a way of 'self-categorization'.

If we turn to etymology of the word 'identity' (from Latin identicus – same, synonymous), we will see the combination of several meanings: firstly, identification of a man with himself, antonym of this meaning will be the word 'Other'; secondly, unique sameness with someone, something, antonym of this meaning will be the word 'Different'. Therefore, 'identity is the correlation of someone (who has existence) with himself in connection with his own alterability, mobility. Identity comes as a way to save the form of one or another person in time and space' [2]. It should be stressed that the notion 'identity' is used in other meanings as well, for example in European languages identity (French 'identite', German ' Identität'), unlike the Ukrainian and Russian equivalent, means not only 'identification' and 'authentication', but 'individual', 'individuality' as well.

Scientists differentiate two conceptual approaches to definition of the nature of term 'identity'. Existentialists see identity as a trait given to a person from birth or formed on early stages of socialization, which guarantees self-identification at all times. But the author of given article sticks to constructivist approach to definition of the nature of notion 'identity', according to which identity is seen not as a property, but as a relation, a product of an open process of identification. Subjects of this identification are engaged in the process of social adaptation and its result can never be final and complete. One more important feature of this approach is recognition of plurality of modern identities. Identity is a process, not a state, as it is built by society and changes along with it, there can be stable identity in one situation, and unstable in the other. Appearance of any type of identity needs a sample of 'another', based on which the process of self-identification takes place.

As an example, we will quote several more definitions that supplement each other and are accepted by the authors of the article:

Thus, for example, M.A. Kozlovets stated that 'identity is a complicated sociocultural phenomenon, consisting of personal, social and cultural aspects. Being formed in a definite sociocultural environment, identity is a result as well as a part of social interaction; is always a product of complicated interactions of objective and subjective, external and internal' [2].

Davis F. believes that 'identity… is a concept that neither imprisons (as does much in sociology) nor detaches (as does much in philosophy and psychology) persons from their social and symbolic universes, [so] it has over the years retained a generic force that few concepts in our field have' [4].

Bhabha H. gives quite clear definition of identity: 'Identity is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality' [5].

According to the definition of Nahorna L.P. 'identity is a product and a part of social interaction, a complicated sociocultural phenomenon, established in the process of socialization and exchange of cultural values' [6].

Experts distinguish several levels of identity. On the first level lies so called primary identity – this notion implies personal self-determination. On the second level, there is a system of sociocultural identities – age, professional, gender, ethnic, national, religious and others. Third level consists of civilizational, transnational, global identities [6]. Interaction of identities on different levels depends on the system of values of individual, sociocultural, political factors.

It must be emphasized that modern approaches to identity are based on the following theses: firstly, identity should not be taken as something static, as by nature it's a dynamic system, thus, none of the identity forms is final, complete; secondly, identity is not a monolithic unity, but a heterogeneous phenomenon (recognition of 'plurality' of modern identities).

3. Results of research and poll

Social nature of a man involves the tendency of belonging to a social community as well as highlighting the individuality. Thus, identity is a feeling, realization and

experience of one's belonging to such human communities as small group, class, family, territorial unity, ethno-national group, nation, civil movement, state, mankind at large. The result of identification of individual with different communities is the presence of numerous identities, whose actuality and significance depends on time and situation, and their sum composes social identity of individual.

So universalization of the notion 'identity' can be explained by the fact that it successfully combines controversial at first sight feelings of belonging and individuality, stability and mobility. Indeed, there is a constant competition for personal living space and opposition to external interference in the soul of every person, in a group, in society. At the same time, an individual searches for community on the principle of emotional bond. As Nahorna L.P. states, scientists revealed and proved that with the help of the notion 'identity' it is quite easy to feature the sphere of dominant orientations in the consciousness of a separate person and in public consciousness, which in sum define their stereotype or motto [6].

Turning to the main aim of this article, we should note that some scientists 'propose that there are two realms to social stereotyping. One, associated more with social cognition research, refers basically to knowledge activation and application processes' [7]. We think that the cognitive component in the approach to learning a stereotype has an important meaning, as far as lately we observe an overload of information and knowledge. In order to be informed about all the events and to feel confident in the outside world, human brain tries to save the efforts more and more often [8]. It means that the time for cognition processes reduces (according to the increase of information volumes) and thus a lot of information and knowledge reaches people in the form of social stereotype, that has a straight connection with reality, but simplifies it greatly.

'The second realm involves the perceiver in relation to the stimulus and implications social comparison between groups. This approach is more associated with social identity and self-categorization theories' [7]. Thus, we can see that understanding of social stereotypes proceeds through categories of identity as result of identification process as well as through self-categorization as perception of identity by individuals and a way of engagement of individuals into the social structure of society thanks to intergroup interaction. 'Social identity and self-categorization theories, with their common theoretical tradition, have had much to say about how we extract and develop the meaning that forms the basis for group identity and social stereotyping' [7]. A great contribution into study of social identity and stereotypes was made by H. Tajfel, and self-categorization was studied by J. Turner .

'Classification of identity into personal and social allows justifying the advisability of depersonalization and stereotypization of group members as a basis for categorization of external groups' [9]. This suggests that stereotypization is a natural frame for categorization of other groups, to which an individual does not belong, and depersonalization acts as an additional characteristic of personal qualities thanks to formation of social stereotypes.

In the result of the process of formation of social identity, an individual acquires values, norms, paradigms and stereotypes that are common to his social group; in addition, they begin to regulate his behavior and perception of reality in the framework of definite social and philosophical categories. That is why with the help of a definite set of social stereotypes an individual identifies himself with one social group, at the same time distinguishing himself among other groups.

There is quite a different situation on the Internet, because cyberspace itself has many peculiarities and the same thing can be already a social stereotype, something common, standard, sometimes it even be an automated set of actions and acts of thinking for one person, and – something mysterious and strange for the other. Therefore, in this case stereotypes act as socially important information spread in cyberspace, with its rules, traditions etc.

Social stereotypes that form independently in the network or thanks to the network area natural and normal process, because in their basis lies an entitative thing, phenomenon or process, not necessarily a social one. Stereotype can be viewed as a property of consciousness. 'Being a part of consciousness, stereotype has all its characteristics, namely: it is objective in terms of its origin (outside world), in terms of its background (historical practice), and in terms of its subject matter at last' [10]. The outside world is an objective source of stereotype origin. 'Stereotype is a unity of the outside world and behavior. Stereotype of consciousness cannot exist without stereotype of behavior and vice versa…' [10]. So social stereotypes are formed with reference to the outer world, though there are some threats, and the biggest one is manipulation with consciousness. Everyone understands that Internet is not only a means of spreading information and a comfortable way of interpersonal communication, but also an environment for political arguments and conducting business. That's why these spheres of influence are extremely interested in formation of new social stereotypes and usage of the existing ones, which can help them reach their aims. We can take our survey regarding the closure of popup window as an example. It's a very simple question on the one hand, but it shows the tendency of formation of stereotypes regarding the usage of network on the other hand. The question was: how the sign for closing the popup window looks like and where it is located. 100% of interviewed (29 out of 29 students) imaged X and said that it is on the right, 7% out of them (2 out of 29) added that it is in the top right corner. Nevertheless, advertisements on different websites use a trick based on this stereotype. To make a user stay on the page with advertisement, a closure sign is put not on the right, but on the left, not in the top, but in the bottom, and it does not necessarily look like X. On the contrary X sign can be used to mark the function that activates an advertisement. As this example shows us, stereotypes formed on the Internet can be used to manipulate with automated, stereotyped perception of popup window contents, in other words with technical filling. But it is fair to admit that positive stereotypes can also be used for

manipulation. Manipulations can also be performed with the subject matter of a message, with visual perception of images, with other sign systems, including language.

The process of formation and circulation of social stereotypes has changed considerably with the introduction of Internet, and with the possibility to use it anywhere and anytime. Thus the comprehension of space and time has changed thanks to the introduction of cyberspace. For example, if we take into consideration the youth, especially students, 75.9% of interviewed (25 students out of 29) use it all the time, 20.7% (6 students out of 29) – several times a day, 3.4% (1 student out of 29) – once a day. The obtained results allow us to make a conclusion that formation, self-determination and development of the individuality of a modern student takes place with account of Internet communications and cyberspace, and especially information that they find there. The youth and students are the most active participants of Internet communications, but not the only ones. As is known social stereotypes are built on the basis of received information, which can be full or not full, genuine or false. That is why we can agree with Peng S.-Y. on the fact that all types of mass media, including the Internet, are a strong force in forming social stereotypes. And social stereotypes in their turn are tightly connected with formation of human's identity.

One of the important parts of formation of identity in interpersonal communication is the visual perception of interlocutor that allows to analyze external, nonverbal characteristics and form the first impression. In the result of identification, one forms his ideas about the individuality of a person and classifies the person into a definite category. A central place in this process belongs to standards and stereotypes, especially standards and stereotypes of visual interpretation of individual (according to his appearance) [11]. However, visual perception of interlocutor is not always possible on the Internet. There is a lack of perception of gestures, mime, in other words nonverbal characteristics. Sometimes you will be able to see a photograph, but you cannot be 100% sure that it belongs to the author of a message or comment; moreover, very often avatars are used instead of real photographs. Under such conditions, it is difficult to say how to identify an interlocutor and what methods to use for self-identification. Search for identity in cyberspace has a row of peculiarities, as far as a person can have several identities at a time. In this context comes into action a stereotype of the off-network reality. Although Judith Donath does not use the notion social stereotype, it is tightly connected with this phenomenon and conceptually corresponds to it, as we can observe on the example proposed by the author: 'The norm is: one body, one identity' [12]. A stereotypic norm for people in the off-network reality is the existence of one identity only. But conventional division of social reality into network reality (cyberspace) and off-network reality splits human identity, let alone that there can be many identities in cyberspace. It should be noted that social reality is single, and cyberspace is its continuation and not the other reality. Therefore, when we talk about network and off-network reality we only highlight some difference and contrast inside one system.

Judith Donath made an important contribution into the study of identity in virtual communication. She considers physical and virtual world as different spheres for human self-expression, and namely the difference in the process of formation of identity in these two dimensions. But in our opinion not everything is virtual in cyberspace, it is reality, but not a physical one. However, the author distinguishes physical world not in order to contrast it to cyberspace, but to differentiate Internet communications among other. According to Judith Donath, body in the virtual world: 'It is composed of information rather than matter. Information spreads and diffuses; there is no law of the conservation of information' [12]. In positivism theory, specific character of a body or thing involves the possibility to empirically research it, touch it, etc. – to reassure its physical existence. That is why, when we deal with cyberspace and Internet communications, we face a problem – people stereotypically perceive any item as a physical phenomenon, if it is not physical, then it is virtual, imaginary. It follows thence that everything in cyberspace seems to be virtual. But in our opinion, a body (thing) is real even in this environment, although there are some branches in Internet communication that have more connection with virtual reality (for example, games). On the other side, in Internet communication we can exchange information only, not knowledge and real physical things, what influences the quality of communication. It should be also noted that information we can find on the Internet has a connection with physical world, as far as physical things appear to be primary (microcircuits, technology through which we surf the Internet). This example shows us how stereotypes from off-network reality influence the perception of network reality. Thus, on the one hand Internet communication gives us more possibilities to share information in time and space, but on the other hand it cannot reproduce the primary off-network communication (for example – passing some real object itself, and not only information about it).

Besides that important are such characteristics of Internet communication as possibility of anonymousness, evaluation of authenticity of information and trustworthiness of the communicant's identity, attention to your own identity. It is necessary to define the means that will allow to identify individuality in Internet communication and will become the base for formation of its identity. 'Identity cues are sparse in the virtual world, but not non-existent. People become attuned to the nuances of email addresses and signature styles' [12]. In our opinion, social stereotypes are these cues or keys to defining identity. They can be encoded in verbal (written language and audio or video record of language) or nonverbal (other sign systems, including images, symbols, etc.) process of Internet communication as a separate part of social communication. Signs can be linguistic and extra linguistic. 'Idea that emerges in consciousness thanks to a sign is the meaning of a sign; idea that merges with its meaning into some internal unity is a symbol' [13].

We should also note that it can be stereotypes formed on purpose or natural ones, formed on the ground

of reality. For example, in terms of a semiotic analysis students were offered to do an imitation task – 'to prepare a painting, poster, collage that represents stereotypes of any media genre, supported by definite symbolism' [14]. Thus, creative approach will allow to define stereotypes of some genre on the basis of definite symbolism in this example, and afterwards they (stereotypes) will become the main socially important information, that will be contained on the painting, poster, etc, which will become the product of student's creative activity. Spread of these posters through media (including Internet) will be a reproduction of social stereotypes, documented in a form of a painting.

If a user posts any message on his page in social network or on forum, in chat or in blog, addressed to other person or people, attention should be paid to the contents of this message. 'The contents of the posting can reveal a great deal more about the writer. It may include overtly identity-related data: name, age, etc. More importantly, it provides a chance to get a sense of the writer's ``voice'' and to see how he or she interacts with others in the on-line social environment' [12].

New social environment coins new notions and new words, and new stereotypes as well, that were created by network activity. With the help of these words, language, style of writing one can identify different Internet communities, and form one of his identities on the Internet. 'Language is also an important indication of group identity. … New words are coined and ordinary words gain new meaning: flame, spam, troll, newbie. Using these phrases expresses ones identification with the online community - it is akin to moving to a new region and picking up the local accent' [12]. Hence, for successful communication on the Internet, one should go through socialization in cyberspace, one of the main functions of which is acquiring social stereotypes characteristic for the given environment.

4. Conclusions

For the modern society where human life is in condition of social and economic transformations which in result can destruct "old system of values", those values instructions on which socialization is based, current research is the identity of personality. Social identity of personality is a complex multifaceted process and theoretical understanding of its nature and laws should consider all facets of his deployment.

We should note that cyberspace remains a projective model of reality that cannot totally absorb social reality; it is only its special part based on social stereotypes, that was transformed in the process of development of modern technologies and develops in the form of social functions. We would like to emphasize that social stereotypes fulfil henotic and integrative function inside a community, and are one of the basic principles for formation of identity in terms of Internet communication. As far as the process of formation of social stereotypes is characteristic for human consciousness, they can be represented both on verbal and nonverbal levels. Language, sign systems and symbols are the means of circulation of social stereotypes in Internet

communication. Mankind creates new technologies and new possibilities to provide itself with a more balanced and creative life, however sometimes in order to achieve harmony, one should not forget the aim of creation of technology. A man should always act as a man, search for different ways of formation of his identity, that is to widen his possibilities, as far as it is identity that remains an important characteristic not only of an individual, but of the whole social community. The fact of belonging to a definite social community and type of culture gives people confidence, forms a sense of security and social protection. Thus, formation of identity with the help of social stereotypes in terms of social Internet communication is one of the central problems of modern age, solution of which will positively influence the recreation of human universality, meaning the change of the nature of human activity, structure and character of personal values, revival of spirituality.

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