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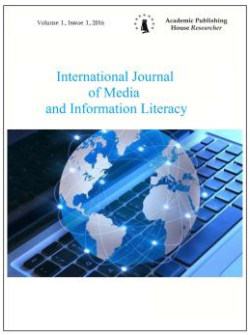

Blogger in Youth's and Adults' Social Perceptions

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Abstract

This article presents the initial results of a comparative empirical study of the specifics of youth's and adults' social perceptionsof a blogger's personality. Currently, blogosphere is showing growth in its popularity, and therefore we can say that the social perceptions (the image) of a blogger as a multi-level socio-psychological media phenomenon is one of the most significant ones in shaping a person's holistic view of mass media. The study involved students of the Chernyshevsky Saratov National Research State University and adults aged 30-45. The empirical material was collected with the use of associative experiment methods. The data obtained via the survey were processed with the prototypical analysis proposed by P. Verges, and theanalysis of individual conversations and online discussions which helped to control the outcome. The results showed that unlike adults, students evaluate the blogger's personality mainly in a positive emotional way. The representation of youth's ideas is characterized by concepts with a positive semantic connotation – the blogger is perceived by them as a young man who translates certain meanings and values providing real assistance and realizing various significant functions. Unlike young people, adults demonstrate a contradictory attitude towards bloggers – for them, a blogger seems to be an ambiguous figure pursuing their personal commercial goals.

Keywords: blogger, blogosphere, blogger social perception, blogger's image, blogger personality, analysis.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, one can observe millions of blogs, the fast growing number of subscribers all over the world, a growing interest in blogging of the public and researchers in various fields, a comprehensive discussion of formalizing the blogging profession at the governmental level, participation of bloggers as expert guests in meetings with government officials, creation of the Russian Blogger Research Agency which studies the dynamics of the blogosphere development, a demand for numerous blogging courses, schools and workshops on blog promotion, etc. It all in our opinion speaks to the graveness and large scale of the blogosphere problem nowadays.

V.D. Savenkov wrote about the place and role of the blogosphere in the mass communication system, the audience's demand for blogs is associated with "showing interest in them as resources that allow constructionof a new reality and suggest solutions to various social and professional problems" (Savenkov, 2019). Along with this, the blogosphere is an important part of the modern media space, an interactive communication platform for promoting brands and products, a virtual

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platform for communication, self–presentation, self–expression and socialization, and an integral part of a person's daily life.

2. Materials and methods

This study involved students from the Saratov State University, aged 17–23 and adults aged 30 –45. The total sample size was 2.020 people. The empirical material was collected using the free associative experiment method. The data obtained were processed with the Verges' prototypical analysis.

3. Discussion

The given the exponential growth of a popular blogger's subscribers, experts predict that by 2025, video blogging can become a classic means of communication. E.V. Lazutkina notes that, "Despite the obvious shortcomings of the blogosphere (spreading false information, rumors, manipulating news, etc.), the mass audience is increasingly turning to blogs as sources of news" (Lazutkina, 2010).

Pointing to changes in the media landscape, in particular, the dynamics of blogosphere transformation, researchers focus on the fact that today people devote the bulk of their time both to consumption and production of their own media content. "There is a peculiar turn to studying the meanings that users endow to the life in the virtual space", and communication in the media becomes "a field for constructing new cultural rituals and meanings, a marker of social changes" (Miller, 2016).

Not only is the semantic and functional load of the blogosphere a new type of social institution changing, but also are the forms and strategies of a person's media behavior in the context of the changing media environment. So, "if anonymity used to be the major value of Internet communication, now narcissism, vivid self–presentation, and benefits from constructing your own image and creating your own managed space are actively cultivated" (Martyanova, 2015).

Moreover, some authors see the reason for the blogs' popularity in implementing one of the communication trends in the context of modern media culture, which is to blur the line between the private and public spheres of life. A. Gornykh fairly observes that blogging as a postmodern historical form of a diary testifies to "emergence of a new subjectivity where the public – private topology finds itself turned inside out: publicity begins to sprout from the inside of the private life" (Gornykh, 2009).

In other words, the role of the demonstrative component of various spheres of a person's life is growing. The person's constant positioning of themselves and their life has become an integral element of a media user's life. Media image tends to play an increasingly important role, it manifests itself not only in a person's images and video presentations in the media space, but also in the media status that is revealed in the number of reposts, views, subscribers and comments. However, researchers note that «orientation toward such quantitative popularity provokes infantilization of communication associated with the motives for self–affirmation, self–presentation and self–identification that are relevant for young people. It translates into predominance of interests in personal communication and self–expression over business interests (Brazevich et al, 2017).

A person's attitude towards the privacy of their own life continues to change, the boundaries of the person's subjective reality expand, and social ideas about the world change. This perspective studies a number of psychological problems, including actualization of the analysis of the blogosphere's value impact on transformation of a personality's media behavior, as well as on social ideas about mass media in general.

The analysis we did has showed that the blogosphere is considered as an informational, political, social, educational, corporate and entertaining means of communication, and that depending on the implementation of certain functions, there are five main ways to use the blogosphere:

– as a news medium (information, communication, ideological, cultural and educational functions);
– as a political platform (information, communication, ideological functions);
– as a tool for Internet activities (communication, ideological, organizational functions);
– as a tool for educational activity (communication, cultural and educational functions);

– as a tool for corporate blogging (information, communication, organizational functions);
– and as a means of entertainment (recreational function) (Savenkov, 2019).

In general, the analysis of publications showed that for modern youth today, the blogosphere is viewed as leisure time, a good platform for self–realization, personal and professional advancement, a new socialization environment, a tool for marketing and advertising for promoting a business or a person. Researchers pay special attention to studying blogs as new social media and their impact on political processes in the society. In particular, V.D. Savenkov identifies the following blog functions:

– informational, emotive, referential, metacommunicative, organizational (in the field of transpersonal motivation);
– communicative, self–presenting, entertaining, social tie enhancing, reflexive, self–developing, psychotherapeutic, regulatory, evaluative (in the field of personal motivation) (Savenkov, 2019).

Also, I. Nebykov and E. Efimov described a socio-cultural portrait of a blogger (Nebykov, Efimov, 2012), L. Sabiy showed the relationship between blogging and personal motivation in the virtual space (Sabij, 2016), A. Kulminskaya in her thesis researched the blogosphere's role in the development and formation of the Russian society (Kulminskaya, 2012), E. Lazutkina reflected on the specifics of howleading Russian bloggers' opinions influenced organization and regulation of news flows (Lazutkina, 2010), N. Martyanova and M. Rubtsova in their article series analyzed the beauty bloggers' identity management practices (Martyanova, 2015), E. Gorshkova, A. Rostova and M. Kuzmina studied the blog as a form and tool of social communication (Gorshkova, 2013), I. Guzhova and L. Kukhorenko investigated the blog as a platform for self–presentation and means of transmitting image–forming information (Guzhova, Kuhorenko, 2012), and O. Echevskaya and E. Janke considered fashion blogging as part of the system of creating and broadcasting fashion standards (Echevskaya, Janke, 2014).

It is worth noting that typology of bloggers is an issue researchers pay special attention to in the context of analyzing the blogosphere problems. E.g. A. Kulminskaya pointed out the following blogger types:

– by self–presentation (specific personality of a blogger, a ghost blogger, a team blogger);
– by the type of the content and features (creator blogger, compiler blogger);
– by the resource specifics (opinion leader, expert, regular user);
– by the technical base used (dependent and independent bloggers);
– by attitude toward blogging (professional employed and freelance bloggers and amateur bloggers (Kulminskaya, 2012).

The literature on the topic shows other typologies, too:

– "hobbyists» (60 %) who do blogs for their own interest without pursuing any commercial goals. 60 % of hobbyists spend less than 3 hours a week on their blog. The main goals of such blogs are self–expression and presentation of their personal opinions and views, and the author's subjective satisfaction (72 %) is the indicator of the blog effectiveness;
– part–time and full–time professionals (18 %) who are independent bloggers working with various organizations and companies. For them, blogs are a source of additional income or their major professional occupation;
– corporate bloggers (8 %) for whom blogging is part of the main work, or those who maintain a blog created to solve issues of the hiring organization;
– entrepreneurs (13 %) for whom the blog is part of an organization or a company owned by the blogger (Brazevich et al, 2017).

Generally speaking, the above–mentioned list of studies points to the fact that currently, there is a certain interest in the blogosphere problems among researchers in various fields of science, which is due to the popularity of the blogosphere and its increasing influence on various spheres of life. Meanwhile, a theoretical analysis of the scientific works has also showed that to date psychological science has done no comprehensive research into the study of the blogosphere, which is apparently due to the dynamics of the blogosphere development which precedes the pace of the scientific research.

theoretical analysis of the vast field of scientific research has shown that to date there has been no psychological research aimed at studying empirically the young people's social perceptions of the blogosphere, and in particular, about the personality of a blogger. M. Bartl believes that

children born after the advent of YouTube in 2005 have grown up surrounded by the content of popular video bloggers, and therefore blogging is considered as a serious career (Zhurenkov, Radulova, 2018).

According to a survey conducted by Bloomberg in 2017, every third British child aged 6–17 wants to work as a video blogger, which is 3 times the number of children willing to become doctors. A significant part of the youth's time is devoted to videos of bloggers who have symbolic power, enjoy a high level of trust and loyalty with subscribers. Therefore, the blogosphere is an area whereyou can observe formation and transformation of social ideas about social phenomenaincluding mass media. It was this circumstance that served as the message to studying social ideas about the blogger's personality in the context of this extensive study of social perceptions about mass media as a mechanism for regulating a personality's media behavior in the media environment (Zhizhina, 2018).

Considering today's popularity and enthusiasm for the blogosphere, we can say that the social perceptions (image) of a blogger as a multi–level socio–psychological media phenomenon is one of the most significant phenomenon in shaping holistic views of mass media.

4. Results

This study of the blogger identity perception has yielded 358 non–repeating characteristics in the student group and 380 characteristics in the adult group. It should be noted that characteristics specified by over 3 % of the respondents were statistically analyzed. The analysis of the research materials has made it possible to identify the core zone and the peripheral system of the blogger identity perception.

The core component of students' social blogger identity perception is positive. The substantive elements of the core zone are the following blogger's personality characteristics: "charismatic" (673; 3.01); "demonstrative" (581; 2.84); "positive" (581; 2.84); "with excellent self–presentation" (461; 3.53); "creative" (222; 2.59); "modern" (270; 2.48); "sociable" (157, 2.55); "popular" (202; 2.87); "funny" (164; 2.69); "active" (109; 3.06); "bold" (225; 2.80); "young" (163; 2.57); "fashionable" (99; 2.58); "communicative" (73; 2.18); "smart" (122; 2.51); "caring" (43; 2.79); "cheerful" (71; 2.18); "stress resistant" (122; 2.51); "energetic" (955; 3.22); "emotional" (48; 3.00); "inspiring" (54; 2.61).

In other words, representation of youth's blogger identity perceptions is characterized by unambiguity and concepts with a positive semantic connotation – we have obtained a peculiar portrait of the hero of our time.

The peripheral system which plays a secondary role in the structure of social perceptions is designed with characteristics such as: "open" (3; 3.67); "brisk" (8; 3.88); "beautiful" (12; 4.67); "confident" (17; 3.94); "advanced user" (16; 14.06); "proud" (14; 4.36); "narcissistic" (12; 4.58); "informed" (9; 4.00); "savvy" (5; 4.80); "independent" (7; 5.00); "public" (9; 4.00); "financially secure" (17; 3.94); "silver spoon" (1; 5.0); "ostentatious" (5; 4.20); "advertising" (12; 4.50); "lazy" (3; 4.00).

Therefore, in the students' perceptions, the blogger personality holds mainly noticeable positive semantic meaning, both in the core and peripheral parts of the social perception. As the results of the study showed, the blogger is perceived by students as a creative and positive media person with charisma, sociability, social courage and a well–developed ability of self–presentation. He or she is a modern, young, cheerful person who is really inspiring and helpfulwith presenting useful tips and tricks. Along with entertaining, social, cognitive, and motivating functions, some respondents pointed out the blogger's manipulative, propagandistic and advertising opportunities.

In the group of adults, the general background of blogger perception is contradictory and contains characteristics with both positive and negative connotations. The content of the core zone of social perceptions of this group is based on conflicting characteristics such as "advertising" (555; 2.47); "earning" (248; 2.10); "demonstrative" (216; 2.17); "different" (398; 2.60); "lazy" (178; 2.21); "dissatisfied" (122; 2.51); "promoting" (461; 3.53); "communicative" (122; 2.51); "compensated" (55; 3.22); "partial" (99; 2.58); "artistic" (109; 3.06); "brave" (157; 2.55); "media" (222; 2.59); "young" (132; 2.40); "ambitious" (164; 2.69); "public" (178; 2.21); "ostentatious. (138; 2.01); "unprincipled" (225; 2.80); "active. (71; 2.68).

A blogger is perceived ambiguously by adult audience–respondents' opinions and assessments fall under three group categories: with positive, negative and contradictory ratings. To

be specific, the respondents say that the conflicting assessments of the blogger's personality are related to the blogger's personality, his or her professionalism level, and the blog's substantive topics. Adult respondents think that bloggers (as well as their blogs) are different: they can broadcast their content with reliable, trustworthy and respectful information, or, on the contrary, a blog may not have high social significance and may not have cognitive, developing potential, but meanwhile pursuing advertising and commercial purposes.

Adults perceive the image of a blogger as a demonstrative, lazy, unprincipled, ambitious young man craving for fast big money, fame and popularity, a person who broadcasts himself and his life to an unfamiliar virtual audience at the same time loving publicity, increased attention to his own self, striving for constant self-presentation, socially brave, whose main goal is to promote himself, as well asgoods or services.

The peripheral presentation system is formed by the following concepts: "corrupt" (8; 3.88); "trendy" (7; 4.57); "forward–thinking" (13; 3.92); "sociable" (9; 4.44); "truthful" (12; 3.67); "IT savvy" (16; 4.06); "selfish" (11; 3.09); "developing" (8; 3.25); "filming" (31; 3.71); "famous" (20; 4.30); "proud" (9; 3.56); "resourceful" (12; 4.58).

It is worth noting that the differences in the views of the student group and the adult group are not only in the poles of assessments, but also in the fact that in the student group,blogger perceptions are full of subjective experiences, which indicates students' greater involvement in viewing blogs, and the fact that blogs for the young audience are certainly a trendy topic.

The blogger's personality in the respondents' social perceptions includes a system of knowledge, ratings and attitudes towards their media behavior based first of all on their individual experience from watching video blogs, as well as their experience in creating and promoting their blog. Interestingly, only 8 % of all study participants host their own blogs, 24 % of respondents had a personal negative experience in creating a blog, 14 % noted that in the future they would like to become a blog author, but so far they understand that it requires free time, interesting ideas, and quality content.

5. Conclusion

The study has once again confirmed the idea that blogosphere is especially popular among young people and it occupies a significant place in their free time. It is the youth audience that actively realizes itself not only as a spectator, but also as the blog author. Moreover, some students (as a dream) would like their future professional activities to be associated with blogosphere.

Social perceptionsof the blogger's identity are based on personal media experience, as well as on ideas that exist in the society's social perceptions, above all, in perceptions of a social group that is significant for an individual. The phenomenon of the blogger's image in social students' perception includes the following components:

– information as summed knowledge about who the blogger is and what types of bloggers exist, which is determined by ideas and formed under the influence of macro environment factors (opinions of social groups and communities);

– a presentation field based on subjective assessments, which is formed under the influence of individual media experience in terms of viewing bloggers' content or maintaining their own blog;

– attitude as a result of categorizing the blogger's image in a media environment.

In our opinion, the multimillion number of bloggers cannot be reduced to a single portrait, and the blogosphere representations lie not only in its quantity and heterogeneity, but above all, in the particular person's social perceptionsof the blogosphere, which are formed under the influence of a complex of factors –first of all, person's individual psychological characteristics, his media behavior, and specifically on the choice of his or her of favorite bloggers.

Each new media practice enteringinto the context of modern media culture actualizes new strategies and tactics of media behavior and on the whole changes in the person's media behavior, at the same time actualizing changes in the person's social perceptions of mass media. All in all, the problematization of the blogosphere expands the subject of mediapsychology as a science on personality included in the context of media culture, and it indicates an increasing trend in changes in the functioning of media behavior.

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