

Conference Paper

Youth Mass Media in the Digital Era: The Problem of Identity and Self-Presentation

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Abstract

This article considers the features of a modern young journalist's work when he / she uses digital media. The student journalists' work shows the formation of multi-identity (or poly-identity) as a way of a journalist's self-presentation. A modern young journalist is not rigidly attached to one media; the digital format makes it possible to work in various media, combining the placement of information in electronic form. The transition of the media to digital formats has made it possible to work efficiently and get rid of the border between a professional and non-professional journalism; anyone can post information in modern media using websites, special mobile applications and other means. In order to analyze the multifunctional (poly-functional) self-identification of a modern young journalist, a study of journalist students was conducted. Interviews and surveys were used, as well as an initial questionnaire, which made it possible to identify the most promising students for further study. The research has fixed that in digital reality, a journalist is not fixed in one media, his / her work is favorably distinguished by the ability to generate and select content for several media. In a number of media outlets, such as radio and television, the journalist is required to be present at the location of the recording / video recording, but in most modern mass media the generation of content is in no way connected with the presence of the media in the location. As a result, the phenomenon of the journalist's vague self-identification arises: a journalist simultaneously runs several projects, participates in various mass media, and finds it difficult to answer the question of who he / she works and what he / she does. without a permanent job and a fixed range of responsibilities. He / she cannot articulate clearly his / her identity without a permanent job and a fixed range of responsibilities.

Keywords: Digital media, youth media, self-identification, digital journalist.

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1. Introduction

The emergence of social networks and mobile applications has largely reformatted the face of modern media, forcing them to either create a digital "double" for themselves, or completely switch to a digital format [3, 4]. At the same time, modern mass media are emerging, fully existing in electronic form — information portals, video channels on Youtube, blogs, etc. [5, 8].

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Under these conditions, a young man who identifies himself / herself as a journalist assumes the function of not a generator of information, but a curator of its dissemination, making a selection and primary editing of the message. This fact changed the status of the “event” itself: in the digital world, any action becomes something new, and many young people daily share information on what happens on social networks, displaying insignificant things as a news item: a cup of coffee, beautifully shaped clouds, etc. [2].

Digital reality has also given rise to such a kind of informational occasion as “utterance about utterance”: a commentary on an event (and often a commentary on a commentary) is also displayed in the rank of news and, in turn, is updated with comments [1]. This leads to the formation of a verbal model of reality, in which the reaction to a specific informational guide itself, in turn, becomes an informational guide.

2. Methods and Methodology

In order to analyze the multifunctional (polifunctional) self-identification of a modern young journalist, a study of journalist students studying undergraduate studies and combining studies with work in one / several media was conducted. As research methods, oral interviews and surveys were used, as well as an initial questionnaire, which made it possible to identify the most promising students for further study [9]. Participation in the polls was voluntary, students reported on their work places and how to combine work and study on their own will.

Initially, the research hypothesis was formulated as follows: it was assumed that a modern journalist, unlike a journalist of the twentieth century, does not identify himself / herself through a specific mass media (“I am a correspondent for The Times”) and does not associate himself / herself with a certain specialization in the profession of a journalist (“I am a reporter / correspondent / analyst”), since multichannel representation in digital reality forces him / her to change constantly his / her identity [6].

The presence of every modern student’s account in various social networks is intertwined with his / her work in the media and forms the symbiosis of “I am a man” with “I am a journalist”: actively promoting his / her account, the journalist places links to his works on it, talks about his / her projects, thereby simultaneously increasing the attendance of the media with which a particular project or activity is associated.

3. Results and Discussion

While entering the Faculty of Journalism, all applicants undergo a creative competition, during which an oral interview is held with them. One of the obligatory questions during such an interview is the question “What information do you post on social networks?” Afterwards this question is preceded by the question “Do you have an account on social networks?”, to which the vast majority of students answer “yes”.

Further, when requesting to show their posts in the networks, applicants show the contents of the account, depending on which they can be divided into two categories: those who produce and post original content (author’s photos, poems, thoughts, etc.) and those who, in most cases, reposts from other accounts, thereby reproducing information generated by someone else in their profile.

Some applicants are already collaborating with the media and are developing their social media accounts specifically for the representation of certain projects that allow them to identify themselves as bloggers / content makers / journalists. Thus, during the 2019 admission campaign, among 129 applicants who were interviewed personally by the authors of this research, there were identified 14 people whose motivation for entering the journalism faculty was that they already identify themselves as journalists and want to learn as many “secrets of specialty” as possible at the faculty and at the same time confirm their status with a diploma. Moreover, these are not adult applicants who came to receive a second higher education, but high school students who graduated from schools in 2019.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the vast majority of students who choose to enter the faculty of journalism, unfortunately, have very vague and undetermined ideas about their future profession and the motivation for choosing this particular area for study. Thus, the vast majority of applicants cannot clearly formulate the answer to the question of why they chose journalism. They also find it difficult to answer the question of what kind of modern journalists they know and to say some names of famous journalists.

Unfortunately, it should be recognized that in this case, apparently, there is motivation “according to the residual principle”: the applicant himself / herself (or his / her parents), choosing the future field of work, comes “from the contrary”: for example, he / she considers himself / herself poor in sciences like maths, and for this reason, immediately rejects all professions associated with it, also believes that he / she does not know a foreign language well, and does not choose a humanitarian-philological orientation, and as a result decides to enter the faculty of journalism, since a journalist of the humanitarian specialties is the most prestigious (to public opinion) and slightly related

to teacher's job (in contrast to, for example, historical faculty graduate which can work as a teacher or as a researcher of history).

During the first academic year, students socialize, make new friends and new parameters for self-identification: relatively speaking, previously a student compared himself / herself with his classmates, now a student compare himself / herself with classmates, some of whom are already actively collaborating with the media and, importantly, for a modern young man, talks a lot about it in his / her social networks.

Modern mass media provide the widest opportunities for internships and part-time jobs, actively using part-time employment [7], which is quite consistent with the student schedule. Digital reality changes the "student / employee" state, putting an equal sign between them: if previously the student transferred to the status of a worker by graduating from a university, or combining studies and work, separated by time (classes ended at 17-00, at 17-30 student began to work, for instance), then digital reality allows him / her to exist in a unique space — one can simultaneously study and work, that is, listen to a lecture and, for example, post on social networks some content.

Due to the extensive development of the PR sphere, many student journalists find themselves in this area and begin productive cooperation with various brands and / or public organizations, thereby turning into employees in outsourcing format. One student can conduct several projects of this kind, that leads to a mosaic of not only his / her representation on social networks, but also a mosaic of self-identification in society.

The simplest diagnostic context for identifying this mosaic is an attempt to explain to an older generation of relatives and acquaintances what a person is doing and how he / she makes money [2]. Among the representatives of the older generation, as shown by the responses of students during interviews, there are a lot of people who have mastered social networks, actively communicating and posting both authorial and other people's content. However, a negligible percentage of modern parents of students (who are mostly older than 35 years old), and an even smaller proportion of grandparents (55+) perceive the profile on social networks as a working tool or personal brand. As a rule, the older generation has entered digital reality, perceiving it as a kind of entertainment and using social networks, figuratively speaking as a search engine: a way to find movies, music, photos, any information of interest, etc. The perception of a social network as a communication tool is secondary, and even more insignificant is the attitude to digital reality as a new way of representing and living the world.

As a result, a young person self-identification is radically different from his / her mother / father self-identification and the self-identification of his / her grandparents. A young man born in the 2000s, was born already "in the presence of the Internet",

he / she does not know the times when there was a lack of the world wide network. It is not an augmented reality for such a person — it is a reality itself, in which people enter into the same forms of communication as in ordinary reality: they buy, sell, clarify information, and work [10].

For a person born in the pre-digital era who is learning new technologies as they become available, a more familiar identification is a reference to the place of work / study, profession, social status, and at the same time this identification is perceived as unshakable and constant (although in fact, it can change). A person of the digital age, accustomed to using gadgets from childhood, takes digital reality for granted, and the “patchwork” self-presentation in it is part of his perception of the world by default.

For a more detailed understanding of this composite self-identification, students were asked to answer several questions regarding their work, internships, and practices related to their education (facts such as work not related to their education were not considered). As a result, it turned out that students prefer not to think about their social identity, and a direct answer to the question “who are you?” in their case it usually sounds like “I am a person” or “I am “a name”. It is significant that in a similar situation, an older person is more likely to call his / her status “I am a professor” or identifies through another person “I am your student’s mother”.

The most significant achievement that most students consider in this surveys is their work in their specialty, while they are not confused by the lack of a clear result and even pay for this work. To certain extend, they are more attracted to activity as such than the money received for it, and this is logical from the point of view of their social status: most undergraduate students, despite trying to earn some money, continue to live with their family and at the expense of their parents.

For the student community itself, the most successful classmates and / or senior students are those people who simultaneously participate in several projects, constantly communicate online, often pose tasks to their friends, attracting them to help, and at the same time those who cannot clearly distinguish a specific place of work as the main one. This style of work leads to a chaotic organization of the process of work / study, and a typical “successful student” is either in a state of constant working, or, on the contrary, is practically not busy with anything.

An analysis of student activity in social networks has shown that, in terms of students’ attitudes to their work, most students show photos of the “work process” on a social network (photos from a TV program, a selfie at a work computer, etc.), if a person carries out his / her work activity in some well-known media, in the photo he / she tries to emphasize this by placing objects with the logo of this media in the frame. Also, a

popular type of content is the placement by students of links to, conditionally speaking, a “finished product” of work such as interviews, articles, reports, television programs, radio broadcasts, etc., created with their direct participation. And only a small part of students use their account as a working tool, and in this case, mainly we talk about those who have already used it in this capacity before entering the university.

An interesting case in this situation is the case of a girl student who from the first year was actively involved in the work — initially she was attracted to volunteer projects that involved supporting PR events, covering events in the cultural life of Moscow, in particular, publishing reviews of theater shows and performances. Actively participating in volunteer projects in parallel with her studies, the girl achieved that she, as a part-time employee, was hired and paid, and this gave her the opportunity to attend classes and actively participate both in student’s life and in the work process. Further, the indicated student married and gave birth to a son, which led not to the rejection of the existing work, but to a different organization of the work process: if earlier she mainly took part personally and wrote reviews and press releases, then after the appearance of her son, she began to edit and post content written by other employees on a social network. At the same time, the student began to actively develop her blog on the Instagram platform, appealing not to her working experience, but to her maternal experience: almost every day since the birth of her son, she posts short videos devoted to issues that concern young mothers. In fact, the development of the channel began even before birth, as the first videos were devoted to the experience of going to the hospital, “what to bring with you to the birth”, etc. In her videos, the student explicitly speaks of the desire to monetize her channel, potential cooperation with various brands of accessories for children, etc.

Regarding social self-identification, this student has a kind of multiplicity, while, on the one hand, provided by the diversification of social networks — for example, on the VKontakte platform, she mainly posts information related specifically to her professional activities, and on Instagram she posts something for young moms, but at the same time, on the other hand, there are cross-references, allowing content consumers to link two accounts with the same person.

A survey of students in the same group as this student has shown that her activity is perceived as successful, there is even a kind of envy about her activity, and on the other hand, many students ironically perceive this network “split personality”. The debate that unfolded between the students showed that part approves of such a diversification of content, while another part, on the contrary, considers it redundant, condemning not

so much diversification as such, but the excessive activity of this student on social networks.

4. Conclusions

Interviewing modern undergraduate students of the Faculty of Journalism studying (average age — 18–22 years old, mostly receive their first education and entered immediately or a year after school graduation) has revealed a number of trends in the development of a modern student self-identification studying in the conditions of active development in digital reality.

Firstly, the profession of a journalist allows you to actively work on the Internet without leaving your place of study and sometimes even synchronously with the study itself, which develops multitasking among students and allows them to put into practice what they have learned during the classes. At the same time, if a journalist is involved in the production of content, he / she has to win in the competition: with the development of social networks and mobile applications, the production of text and visual content has ceased to be the exclusive prerogative of a journalist and has become available to anyone.

Secondly, the availability of opportunities to work on a social network or in the electronic media leads to the emergence of a students' community working with certain projects: as a rule, such students do not have a permanent job, but lead several projects simultaneously or sequentially, sometimes very different one from another. As an example, such projects can be, for example, PR support of a particular show or another one-time promotion. There are also long-term projects related to the ongoing support or maintenance of an organization's account on social networks. Since activities of this type, as a rule, are paid little and do not require full-time employment, a student often takes several projects and deals with them simultaneously.

Our study has shown that a modern student has a vague self-identification: unlike a person who identifies himself / herself through a certain social status or a certain place of work, he / she cannot clearly identify who is he and where he works, since there are several projects in his portfolio at the same time, and it's hard to say which one is the most important or, conversely, less significant. Conventionally, the identity of such a student is sort of divided into sectors, and at the time, for example, of conducting one of the projects, he is in one sector, then goes to another, etc. Such self-identification can be called multifunctional (polifunctional), and it leads, for example, to the appearance

of extensive CVs: coming to a new project or getting a new job, a person lists almost everything that he managed to do before.

Digital self-presentation, in principle, implies the existence of multilateral self-identification, which a person can vary as he or she wishes, diversifying the content and, as it were, turning the personality at a certain angle. The profession of a journalist is interesting because a journalist can use digital self-presentation as a working tool, which determines the interest appeared in young journalists.

For further research deals with the question referring to young representatives' self-identification of other specialties seems extremely interesting. Preliminarily, it can be assumed that due to the lack of professional interest in social networks and their perception as a tool for creating a personal brand or searching for information, representatives of specialties not associated with the media have less diversified accounts.

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