

DOI: 10.31866/2410-1915.20.2019.172436

UDC 316.472.4:008-028.22

VISUAL CULTURE IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

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The aim of the research is to determine the specificity of visual culture in social networks in the context of social identity of the users. Research methods. Scientific provisions of the study are argued at the level of a set of general scientific methods of knowledge (analytical, source study, historical) and cultural approaches. Scientific novelty. The specificity of visual culture in popular social networks and mobile applications “MySpace”, “Instagram”, “Webrity”, “YouTube”, “Facebook”, “Snapchat”, “Tinder” is considered, and the features of social self-identification of the users are researched; it is determined that the dominant trends in the visual culture of social networks at the present stage are authenticity, originality and truthfulness of the images presented by the users, and mobile applications contribute to accelerating the identification of trends and the dominant visual means of audience attention attracting, due to the possibility of quick visual broadcasting. The positive influence of social learning practices on the development of personality by means of visual culture on the Internet has been proved. Conclusions. Building an identity in the visual culture of social networks at the present stage is a complex and continuous process, which is extremely important in carrying out critical analysis and the ability to make a meaningful choice of maintaining one’s own popularity on the Internet through image composition and other personal values, in accordance with the specificity of visual culture influence in social networks, combined with the dominant trends in the formation of identity and the means of attractive images presentation. Availability of strategies and tools for managing the use of social networks, as well as minimization of comparisons of each particular person with the objects of visual culture, will certainly have a positive impact on the development of society in general and of individuals in particular.

Keywords: visual culture; social networks; mobile applications; social self-identification of users; image.

Introduction

Visual images are becoming an important part of communication at the present stage. The central place of the visual is driven by the expansion of access to online images, since the person perceives the visual perception most often (along with the language and tactile ways of cognition), moreover, it is the main means of human thinking and communication – most of the metaphorical images are based on visual perception.

With the development of computer and interactive technologies (digital television, the Internet, social networks, virtual worlds, etc.), innovative visual means form a new language of visual culture. At the heart of social networks there is a desire to be visualized, as well as the definition of how visual allows you to think beyond one image to imagine or create something different – the process in which a person interprets the world around using own unique understanding.

Regular use of social networks facilitates the development of complex visual practices, through which the users change their perceptions and present their identity in the online world. Therefore, the study of visual culture specificity in social networks, in our opinion, will help to identify strategies used by people to attract attention, get approving reviews, save and reproduce the desired images adopting visual practices in the online environment.

Formation of the “visual” worldview of modern mankind and the rapid pace of new visual practices emergence and development, conditioned by the trends of the XXI century, actualizes the expediency of understanding the visual culture as a peculiar phenomenon, the basic principle of existence of the culture of everyday life and social and cultural space in general in the world scientific community. The multidimensional concept of “visual culture” implies its research in a multidisciplinary context. The specificity of visual culture on the Internet has repeatedly become the theme of solid works and scientific developments of domestic and foreign scientists. It is worth mentioning the research by Z. Papacharissi (“Network Selfie: Identity, Community and Culture in Social Networks”, 2010), T. Chinka (“Visual Nets in the Information Age”, 2015), R. Rogers and T. Melioli (“The Relationship between the Problems of Body Image and the Use of the Internet: an Overview of Empirical Support”, 2016), E. Salnikova (“Visual Culture in the Media Environment: Current Trends and Historical Insights”, 2017), etc. The authors analyse the relationship between visual, spectacular and everyday culture; positive and negative effects of image influences on the younger generation; the problem of idealizing the physical state through online visual effects and other aspects of the outlined question. However, the problems of visual culture in social networks require a more detailed study.

The purpose of the article

The purpose of the study is to determine the specifics of visual culture in social networks in the context of the users’ social self-identification.

Presentation of the main material

In 1950, J. Gibson, known for his own theory of visual perception, in the work “Perception of the visual world”, expressed his view on the main role played by a person’s organs of senses, helping to perceive the surrounding world and to reflect on the opportunities provided by the objects of the environment: “Our own experience of the visual world can be described as extended at a distance

and simulated in depth; in the upright position, stationary in general and without restrictions; coloured, textured, shaded and lighted; with surfaces, edges, shapes and spaces. But this description excludes the fact that surfaces are familiar, while forms are useful (...), we understand the positive effects and the dangers of their use” (Gibson, 1950, p. 198).

At the present stage, humanity is experiencing the peak of the digital visual revolution. The high speed of the Internet and converged devices have greatly contributed to the development of visual culture, as much of the communication takes place through visual forms (Cinque, 2015, pp. 16–28). The users are constantly practicing creation and support of personality, including through the use of photos and videos on social networks. For the younger generation, individuals who have grown up in direct contact with digital and computer technology, supporting a real and attractive online personality is an ongoing and important process that takes a lot of time. In line with the development and popularization of social networks, the new generation has witnessed a new wave of visual trends online. The availability of low-cost converged digital tools allows you to document life in an unprecedented way.

The research by Australian scientist H. Grace (2014) has proven that the most popular media and popular social networks, such as Flickr (a photo hosting, designed to store and further use digital photos and videos), YouTube (a video hosting site that provides users the services of storage, delivery and showing videos), Twitter (a social network for publicly-shared messages via the web interface, SMS, etc.), Instagram (an application for shooting and sharing photos and videos with some elements of a social network which allows to share them via own service and other social networks) contributed to the creation of a new worldview, the so-called “particle vision”. It includes a different attitude to reality and better reflects the automation or fragmentation of modern experience, the most evident in social networks.

A spontaneous decision to capture with a camera some objects and events that are considered worthy of attention as a visual image, creates a certain routine, far from senseless or superficial. The researcher refutes the idea that accidental photography and photo sharing is a form of attraction of attention, instead, it identifies a captured digital image as an opinion or impression of a user about feelings and senses at a certain point in time, on the basis of which we can imagine a much more meaningful world (Grace, 2014, p. 46).

Physical attractiveness in social networks is becoming a leading tactic of self-presentation and behaviour in online cultures (Frew, McGillivray, 2005, pp. 162).

J. Sappey, G. Maconachie (2009) state that physical attractiveness is the main concept of self-identification. It is often formed through social networks in which a beach-ready body and attractive personality form the basis of identity and self-esteem for many people.

Determination of these criteria can be positioned as a kind of social learning – the users determine the “success” of visual images and their positive perception on the World Wide Web by tracking the likes and comments under the photos. Permanent communication using visual forms is definitely

combined with social learning, so the users follow well-known and successful personalities and present themselves in social networks in compositions that show their physical and intellectual traits in a stylized form, most appealing to the desired audience.

Instead, the opportunity to make a living using social networks Webrity, Instagram or YouTube encourages the younger generation to make efforts to create online presentations and communicate with a wide range of people. In turn, the opportunity to “be friends” or “follow” famous people, representatives of modern music culture, cinema and theatre art, or people who are in state leadership positions, creates a sense of connection between the followers. This illusory proximity promotes the development of visual culture, as most followers take on visual techniques that are used by well-known personalities in social networks, and also to a large extent, their professionalization – images shared by pop and show business stars typically created by professional teams.

The ability to communicate continuously in visual forms has contributed to the formation of a new generation of media bricolers, which rely on these creative tools to create identity in a variety of evolving ways. Previously, users used the basic encoding of multimedia elements, such as MySpace (an international social network working since 2003, a networking community site and a blog platform, which provides an opportunity to create communities of interest, personal profiles, blogging, posting of photo and video content with a possibility of listening to popular audio tracks), in order to form a creative approach that contributed to accelerating the trends thanks to rapid reposting in the online community.

According to D. Boyd (2008, pp. 119–142), the popularity of MySpace and its significance for musical subcultures became a significant moment in the Internet culture, in turn, leading to the emergence of a subcultural photographic style that quickly developed and became mainstream. The users experimented with a digital photo in the style of “emotional punk” (a musical genre associated with dynamic section sound, emotional vocal, sometimes screaming. – *Auth.*), creating aesthetic photos with a high angle and pleasant frame, which became a kind of autograph of MySpace visual image, and, subsequently, were accepted on other sites.

In 2010s, Internet culture moved from anonymity to reality, because “people began to view the Internet as a tool for positioning their own identities, ideas and actions” (Jones, Hafner, 2012, p. 32).

Facebook and Instagram, gaining popularity among users, provided widespread platforms for reposting of selfie photos made by themselves, usually with a smartphone or webcam and downloaded to a social networking site, soon a megapopular visual means of personification and transfer of experience, among the well-known varieties of which are “helfie” (hairstyles selfie), “werfie” (selfie on training), “drelfie” (selfie in the state of alcoholic intoxication), “bookshields” (selfie made for literary self-promotion), etc. These personal portraits allow a person to capture their own image and present their own life experiences in the necessary form, focusing on the aspects of identity that they seek to emphasize. For example, the well-known “Mavens” demonstrate on the Internet specific individual skills – knowledge and artistry.

Personal values, in accordance with the specifics of visual culture influence in social networks, are combined with the dominant tendencies of identity formation, the means of attractive images presentation.

It should be noted that branding of identity in different social networks is excellent, formed according to what types of visual presentation are privileged. For example, Instagram creates trends, certain “hipsters” of food, design and culture images, while Snapchat (a mobile app to exchange messages with attached photos and videos – *Auth.*) allows users to share “private” visual observations with a selected contact list distribution, which disappears in 24 hours, and in the popular mobile application platform Tinder (it works exclusively with Facebook social network accounts) designed for romantic dating in accordance with the specified parameters and geolocation, the users are interested in drawing attention using a visual context, minimizing the text. These apps are predominantly used on smartphones, providing an opportunity for a quick visual broadcast of everyday affairs, helping to accelerate the detection of trends and the dominant visual means of attracting the audience’s attention.

Permanent interaction with these tools allows users to develop visual skills creating attractive online characters that rely on image capabilities when creating a brand identity in order to attract the desired audience. Images are grouped and organized using appropriate hashtags (keywords or phrases used when posting to a social network, a characteristic feature is the # character. – *Auth.*). Note that sometimes a special hashtag is used to re-post selected images, but new material has to be added regularly. It encourages users to participate in the ongoing process of personality formation and development.

Some impact of social education provided on the Internet can be observed directly in the reproduction of images by the users themselves. However, although most of this reproduction is a standard practice for the development of personality in visual culture, it is worth noting the danger of normalizing extreme behavior through the re-viewing of some images that promote excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages or life-threatening behaviors.

No less dangerous, according to researchers, is the aspect of visualizing the desired physical state, which is demonstrated through the “desire for forms that are most often mediated” (Frew, McGillivray, 2005, pp. 161–175). Often, affinity online groups portray the images of dangerously thin people, positioning them as a form of inspiration, for example, the well-publicized group with the hashtag “#Thinspo” (from English “*Thinspiration*” – weight loss mania) was eventually banned in Instagram and other social networks.

With changes in visual culture and the spread of online social education, trends are changing extremely quickly, and authenticity and truthfulness are becoming increasingly problematic concepts. The history of social networks has a number of outdated trends, from the “*duckface*” (selfie, in which users, mostly women, are snapped with bubbled lips) to the “*planking*” (photos on which a person lays on their stomach, stretching hands along the body, as a rule in the most unpredictable places, for example, on a roof, a curb, a wardrobe, etc.), but the modern visual culture rewards images that are specially designed to look

reliable. They are often made by so-called “*Insta-boyfriends*” – a plot designed by the user dictates the content and action, and the photographer (a boy friend or a girl friend) is instructed to catch these moments as natural fragments of private life, rather than a skilful media artefact. A number of images taken at one time can be systematically posted to the audience for several weeks in order to continue interaction and maintain a positive perception.

Authentication makes it even more difficult to change images using filters and photo editing tools (like Photoshop). Existence and, in some cases, overwhelming popularity of applications that can change the physical shape of the user, put some make-up and eliminate visual imperfections have led to the emergence of a special “#nofilter” hashtag in order to emphasize the authenticity of the image as well as the talent of its creator. In any case, social networks users of are currently using critical approaches to visual culture when determining the authenticity of a given image.

Conclusions

At the present stage identity building in visual culture of social networks is a complex and continuous process, which is really important in carrying out a critical analysis and the ability to make meaningful choices for maintaining own popularity on the Internet through the image composition, etc. Personal values, in accordance with the specifics of visual culture influence in social networks, are combined with the dominant tendencies of identity formation and the means of attractive images presentation. The availability of strategies and tools for managing the use of social networks, as well as minimizing the comparisons of each individual with the objects of visual culture, will definitely influence positively the development of society in general and individuals in particular.

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The article was received in editors office: 25.02.2019

ВІЗУАЛЬНА КУЛЬТУРА В СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖАХ

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Мета статті – визначити специфіку візуальної культури в соціальних мережах у контексті соціальної самоідентифікації користувачів. Методологія дослідження. Наукові положення дослідження аргументовані на рівні сукупності загальнонаукових методів пізнання (аналітичного, джерелознавчого, історичного) та культурологічних підходів. Наукова новизна. Розглянуто специфіку візуальної культури в популярних

соціальних мережах та мобільних додатках «MySpace», «Instagram», «Webrity», «YouTube», «Facebook», «Snapchat», «Tinder» та досліджено особливості соціальної самоідентифікації користувачів; визначено, що домінуючими тенденціями у візуальній культурі соціальних мереж на сучасному етапі є автентичність, справжність та достовірність презентованих користувачами образів, а прискоренню виявлення трендів та домінуючого візуального засобу привертання уваги аудиторії сприяють мобільні додатки, завдяки можливості швидкої візуальної трансляції; доведено позитивний вплив практик соціального навчання на розвиток особистості засобами візуальної культури в мережі Інтернет. Висновки. Побудова ідентичності у візуальній культурі соціальних мереж на сучасному етапі є складним і безперервним процесом, надзвичайно важливим у якому є здійснення критичного аналізу та здатність робити осмислений вибір підтримки власної популярності в Інтернеті через композицію зображення та ін. Особисті цінності, відповідно до специфіки впливу візуальної культури у соціальних мережах, поєднуються з домінуючими тенденціями формування ідентичності, засобами презентації привабливих образів. Наявність стратегії та інструментів для управління користуванням соціальними мережами, а також мінімізація порівнянь кожної конкретної особистості з об'єктами візуальної культури, безумовно позитивно відобразяться на розвитку суспільства загалом та окремих індивідуумів зокрема.

Ключові слова: візуальна культура; соціальні мережі; мобільні додатки; соціальна самоідентифікація користувачів; зображення.

ВИЗУАЛЬНАЯ КУЛЬТУРА В СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЯХ

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Цель статьи – определить специфику визуальной культуры в социальных сетях в контексте социальной самоидентификации пользователей. Методология исследования. Научные положения исследования аргументированные на уровне совокупности общенаучных методов познания (аналитического, источниковедческого, исторического) и культурологических подходов. Научная новизна. Рассмотрена специфика визуальной культуры в популярных социальных сетях и мобильных приложениях «MySpace», «Instagram», «Webrity», «YouTube», «Facebook», «Snapchat», «Tinder» и исследованы особенности социальной самоидентификации пользователей; определено, что доминирующими тенденциями в визуальной культуре социальных сетей на современном этапе являются аутентичность, подлинность и достоверность представленных пользователями образов, а ускорению выявления трендов и доминирующего визуального средства привлечения внимания аудитории способствуют мобильные приложения, благодаря возможности быстрой визуальной трансляции; доказано положительное влияние практик социального обучения на

развитие личности средствами визуальной культуры в сети Интернет. Выводы. Построение идентичности в визуальной культуре социальных сетей на современном этапе является сложным и непрерывным процессом, чрезвычайно важным в котором является осуществление критического анализа и способность делать осмысленный выбор поддержания собственной популярности в Интернете через композицию изображения и др. Личные ценности, в соответствии со спецификой влияния визуальной культуры в социальных сетях, сочетаются с доминирующими тенденциями формирования идентичности, средствами презентации привлекательных образов. Наличие стратегии и инструментов для управления использованием социальными сетями, а также минимизация сравнений каждой конкретной личности с объектами визуальной культуры, безусловно положительно отразятся на развитии общества в целом и отдельных индивидуумов в частности.

Ключевые слова: визуальная культура; социальные сети; мобильные приложения; социальная самоидентификация пользователей; изображение.