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From the sense of affinity to liking: transformation of forms of interpersonal communication on the basis of social networks

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Abstract

The article touches upon the issue related to the role of social networks and media in the context of interpersonal communication. The relevance of the work is reasoned by the growing interest towards the transformations which take place in modern interpersonal communication. With the appearance of informational and communicative technologies as well as with the globalization of all the informational processes the major part of communications, both of business and personal nature, is carried out in a virtual environment, in particular on social platforms as Vkontakte, Instagram, Facebook, etc. In this article the author focuses on such a social platform as Instagram due to the fact that nowadays the audience of Instagram is rapidly growing and this platform is carrying a significant impact on it. The author reveals the nature of the phenomenon of “like” and its role in the interpersonal communication based on Instagram social platform.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, social nets, virtual world, Instagram;

1. Introduction

The establishment and the maintenance of contacts between individuals are the most important factors of socialization. Communication involves more than just the transfer of information and the interaction with other people. It involves the exchange of ideas, interests, feelings, etc. The interaction is mediated by communication, and that is why people can interact. Nowadays it is impossible to ignore the fact that social networks present an active space for group and interpersonal interaction. At the same time, there is a transformation not only of the process of interpersonal communication into the virtual world, but also of its social characteristics. There is a change in the semantics of the description of virtual communications and as the result such neologisms in the field of interpersonal relations as virt (virtual love - flirtation), friending (virtual friendship), trolling (virtual hostility), liking (virtual affinity), following (virtual following) etc emerge. These processes present markers for more profound processes - an explicit fundamental shift in the formats of interpersonal communication in virtual space under the influence of new opportunities and constraints provided by the social media.

Many works of national and international authors (F. Nietzsche, S. Freud, C.G. Jung, A. Camus, E. Fromm, and M. Foucault) are devoted to the issue of interpersonal communication. These authors paid special attention to psychological aspect of interpersonal communication.

But the issue of interpersonal communication and its social peculiarities in the Internet and especially in social media is insufficiently studied. Moreover, nowadays such modern and popular phenomenon as “liking” as the mode of expression in social media is the most understudied. In this regard the purpose of this article is to investigate the changes in the form of interpersonal communication in the context of integration into the Internet space and particularly into social media. Interpersonal communication is one of the forms of interaction of two or more persons, who are engaged into contact with each other. Apart from social and psychological factors, an emotional factor plays a significant role in the process of interpersonal communication.

This factor contributes to the formation of interpersonal relationships, the expression of emotions towards the subject of communication and it helps to choose the mode of interpersonal communication (affinity, friendship, rivalry).

2. Social platforms and their influence on interpersonal communication

The coverage of Internet in all life spheres of society is extending with the appearance of informational and communicative technologies as well as with the globalization of all the informational processes.

As the Internet develops, the major part of communications, both of business and personal nature, is carried out in a virtual environment, in particular on social platforms as Vkontakte, Instagram, Facebook, etc. According to “Mediascope”, the monthly Internet audience during the period of October 2016 - March 2017 reached 87 million people aged from 12 to 64 years that accounted for 71% of the total population of our country. Among them 44, 2% are users of such social network as "Vkontakte", 30.1% are users of «Facebook" and only 12.3% are users of "Instagram". The process of interpersonal communication in the "virtual world" is transforming. A few works that are devoted to the identification of characteristics of virtual interpersonal communications are based on the premise that communications transmitted through the electronic channel will have its own specifics in comparison with interpersonal "face-to-face" communication.

A national researcher, E.L. Avdeeva, reveals a number of characteristics of interpersonal Internet communication associated with new modes of verbal and nonverbal expressions:

- The language of the Internet communication has the attributes of written and spoken language;
- Communication may be synchronous (in real-time mode) and asynchronous;
- Oral and written communication between two people is not so close as immediate communication;
- The translation of emotional states of a person acquires a new character (kineme - facial expressions, gestures, etc. are replaced by emoticons).

3. Liking

Affinity as a form of interpersonal communication also acquires peculiar characteristics in Internet communication. The people’s need for showing affection and receiving the signals of affinity was adopted by the designers of social networks. As a result, "Liking" was introduced.

The idea of “Like” was originated in 1998 and it was implemented by the programmer, Van der Meer, in social network called “Surfbook”. He patented this invention. In 2010 this button appeared

on Facebook (finger up), and later in Vkontakte, Instagram and other social platforms (in the form of a “heart”).

One of the most popular and profitable social platforms is Instagram, on the basis of which it is possible to create any personal or commercial accounts and to promote them regarding to the interests of a core audience or intended and targeted followers. The Instagram as a social net was launched in 2010 and became extremely popular. The monthly audience of Instagram is more than 500 users from all over the globe. Every day Instagram users post more than 95 million of photos and video units, which gain billions of “likes”. Instagram posts combine firstly visual and secondly textual contents and as a result it allows representing oneself to the fullest extent.

"Like" is a tool that helps an Internet user to express the approval of content posted on social networks and other Internet resources. The main advantage of “Like” is the ease of its usage. It is enough just to "like" a post, i.e. to click a special endorsement button and your opinion will be taken into account without additional emails or comments.

"Like" as the form of manifestation of affinity and communication in social networks has a "double" meaning. Firstly, it is the opportunity to express approval to a person for posted photos, text, etc. Secondly, it is quick and convenient way to declare or remind of yourself, thereby indicating your presence, complicity, without entering into correspondence.

4. Conclusion

For active users of Instagram “like” is the way of recognition or the ability to track the popularity of the account. For many users, "like" is an expression of interest towards the person or the issue that he touches in his/her post. As for the emotional aspect, users who get "like" on their content, experience feelings of joy and satisfaction. Many people give "likes" when they want to get it in return. It is impossible not to recall the so-called "reciprocity effect": people feel being under an obligation to those who once rendered them some kind of assistance (in this case, the give "like").

The effect of reciprocity also takes place in social networks. Every time you get a "like" to your post, you feel the need to "like" in response.

Moreover, the structure of social networks is such that in order to get love ("like"), approval, praise or to attract attention, it is necessary to make an action: "to post" a funny picture, to write an interesting post, to "share" the news or to show new photos. When a user makes posts, it shows that he exists, that he can be loved and interacted with.

In addition, special attention should be paid to the psychological aspect: an insufficient number of likes may cause user’s discomfort. If his/her published post, photo or his/her opinion on any issue did not receive approval, then the user feel unsatisfied and disappointed. By all means the rush toward "likes" and the desire to get their portion of approval is not the most useful addiction.

“Liking” can be considered as one of the "network" formats of social interactions. "Like" plays the role of an expressive tool by means of which users may show their approval, liking or antipathy ("dislike"). In fact, it has the same semantic properties as it has in real communication. Giving "like", we thereby come into contact with other users, i.e. interact. We also set goals, which we want to achieve from the subject of communication: to declare or to remind about ourselves, to express approval, affinity, as well as in real interpersonal communication.

Thus, with the transformation process of forms of interpersonal communication from real environment into virtual one, there are no significant changes in socio-psychological characteristics of communication. "Like" is a kind of smile only in virtual world.

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