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Philosophical aspects of personal branding in the context of information culture and social nets (through the example of Instagram platform)

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Abstract

The article reveals the issue of the concept of personal branding in the context of information culture, social nets and social media. The relevance of the article is reasoned by the growing interest towards personal branding and people's tendency to turn to commodity their personality, knowledge and experience in digital world. The general definitions of the process of commodification and personal branding are given. The due consideration is given to the manifestation of personal branding on the platform of Instagram. The author emphasizes the role of personal branding under the modern market conditions, created with the help of smart and digital technologies in the context of globalized world.

Keywords: personality, personal branding, Instagram, smart-technologies, information culture, market principles;

1. Introduction

The most characteristic feature of modern society is the wide choice and abundance of commodities and services. Nowadays, the consumption of material goods is an attribute that shows an affiliation to a specific social group or culture. For that matter, people in the society of abundance are surrounded by other people as by commodities. In this context, everyday human communication is not about communicating with each other, but is about receiving goods and benefits, messages, glorifying the object in advertisements and in thousands of everyday messages transmitted from mass media. In this aspect, shop window, advertisements, producing company and brand name may play a significant role. They impose a coherent complex vision of objects as an inseparable whole, like a chain, which in this case is no longer a series of simple objects. According to J. Baudrillard, the consumer's attitude to the real world, to politics, history and culture is not an attitude of interest, participation, responsibility, but also it is not total indifference, but it is curiosity. Baudrillard wrote that curiosity and lack of knowledge denote the same cumulative behavior in the face of reality, behavior that is widespread and systematized by the practice of mass communications and thus characterizes our consumption society: it is a rejection of reality on the basis of a greedy and multiplying study of its signs and images [3]. Mass communications, the Internet, especially social networks do not give us reality, they do not reflect the actual image, they only give us an idea of reality and about an image in it. “Therefore,

we live under the cover of signs and in the rejection of reality. Divine security: when we look at the images of the world, who will distinguish this brief intrusion of reality from deep pleasure not to be in it? An image, sign or message present all that we “consume”. It is our emotional security, confirmed by a distance from the world, which is calmed down by a strong hint of reality rather than broken by it.” [3]

A commodity of certain brand or under a certain trademark turns into a super-commodity, integrated and involving a consumer in a series of complicated motivations. Under the conditions of market principles the transformation into a brand, commodification of personality and self-presentation in social nets are similar to transformation of individuality into a supermarket, a shopping mall or an advertising image. Such a process can be characterized as media deindividualization [11]. Erich Fromm believed that the achievement of success in alienated society in the market of personalities through the adaptation to a changing state of affairs absolutely excludes not only individual self-development, but also simple preservation and cultivation of any personal qualities [13]. Ulrich Beck also comes to the same conclusions: “This isolation of “individual situations”, however, takes place simultaneously with intensive standardization [2].

Such a situation occurs in all spheres of human life, where market principles work. In this article, the author focuses his attention on the Instagram platform, originally created as a photo-sharing service, but turned into an excellent platform for sales. Instagram is one of the most advanced and future-oriented social platforms, which apart from everything else present a platform for business promotion. This can be explained by the fact that the popularity of this network is rapidly growing.

Users of Instagram demonstrate high involvement in the interaction with each other. Moreover, Instagram allows publishing and consuming visual content, which is more effectively perceived rather than textual content. Instagram can be regarded as a huge shopping, entertainment or business center, where there is a huge range of goods and services: from cosmetics and clothes to legal services and plastic surgery.

Another great advantage of this platform is that the Instagram can be used literally on the move with the help of such smart-technologies as mobile devices. All of the above mentioned aspects contributed to the development of so-called personal branding.

2. Personal branding (self-branding)

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 photo and video units, which gain billions of “likes”. This article considers this social and medial platform due to the fact that it combines firstly visual and secondly textual contents and as a result it allows representing oneself to the fullest extent. The Instagram platform possesses various accounts which offer a wide range of production and services. Apart from accounts retailing items of style (such as clothes, shoes, fragrances and makeup items), health and sport production (dietary products, nutritional food and dietary food supplements) in Instagram there are a lot of accounts which modifies things and relationships, formerly untainted by commerce into commercial element. That is to say such accounts transform goods, services, ideas and even people into commodities, or objects of trades. The term commodification refers to the process of transformation into a commodity [16]. It originates from Marxist political theory and described a process by which something which does

not have an economic value is assigned a value and hence how market values can replace other social values [17]. It describes a modification of ordinary relationships into commercial relationships. The examples may include the accounts whose owners once made great efforts in order to promote their personalities (commodification of personality or branding oneself), the accounts whose owners sell their knowledge or personal experience to their followers (commodification of knowledge: accounts on weight loss/fit/beauty/business/IT/family relationships and even useful tips for sex) and the accounts focused on the formation of public (popular) consciousness (commodification of culture/art/religion). Nowadays any Instagram user who has significant amount of followers (approximately 10 thousands of followers and more) may become a media person and is considered by market representatives as a potential brand and advertising personality.

The purpose of commodification of personality is creating an emotional connection between providers of services/goods/ideas and their potential consumers, in other words – creating a sense of affinity. The owners of such accounts in Instagram try to attract attention of more followers by uploading fascinating, interesting and even provocative posts in their profiles. This category of accounts may include celebrities, famous musicians and public figures. But nowadays this category is usually presented by young men and women, or even teenagers with extraordinary appearance and behavior. These people usually have undergone plastic surgery in order to become authentic and popular, but in fact they commodify their faces and bodies. Commodification here means that a personality acquires the status of a “thing” (commodity), which can be managed by its owner or sold. The transformation of personality into commodity which can be consumed or used strengthens the homogeneity of values and leads to the loss of unique character and identity, and even to the loss in value of human life [5, 12]. Accordingly, the process of personal branding is characterized firstly by ghosting of personality and secondly by the desire to make money out of nothing, that is to say by the desire to promote one’s account and to have passive income. One of the best ways to articulate your skills, experience, knowledge [1], and overall worth in modern competitive employment market is to create a personal brand that helps you stand out in the crowd [8].

There is no general definition of personal branding (self-branding). In this article the author uses the definition given by Erik Deckers and Kyle Lacy in their book “Branding Yourself: How to Use Social Media to Invent or Reinvent Yourself, Second Edition”. According to E. Deckers and K. Lacy personal branding is an emotional response to the image or name of a particular company, product, or person. [7] People have emotional responses when they meet you for the first time. These responses can be presented by feelings of joy, pleasure, love, dread, fear, or anger. When they hear your name again, they will either have new experiences and emotions, or they will relive the old ones. The kinds of emotional responses they have depend on you.

Relying on the information mentioned above, it is possible to make an attempt to trace common characteristics personal branding. Firstly, this process is characterized by the desire of a person to make easy money. Secondly, it is based on the search of target audience. Thirdly, it presupposes the creation of attractive image of a person in social net, which usually does not correspond to the image of this person in real life [14, 6]. Within the scope of Instagram knowledge and experience are treated as commodities. The owners of Instagram accounts with informative content make easy profit by sharing their knowledge or personal experience. The offered knowledge or experience may be devoted to business, travelling, marriage, cuisine, healthy eating, pets, children, weight loss and etc. Usually the content of such accounts are presented by daily posts containing an image and detailed description of an issue and reflect the author’s attitude to it.

Nowadays the elements of the functioning of society are expressed in the relationships between individuals. Speaking in the economic language, we are all beneficiaries, acquiring benefits in the process of communication. Such values are not only material in nature; they are also intangible, such as emotions, feelings, ideas, etc. As results it is possible to say that people are consumers of each other within the frameworks of our society [4].

The creation of a personal brand as a phenomenon plays a significant role in the situation of market competition and market orientation. Under the market orientation, Erich Fromm proposed that the main way of relations between people is similar to the relationship of commodities in the market. E. Fromm said that we want to change our own personality or how it is called sometimes our personal luggage for something else [11]. And here he was not talking about physical labor. A “blue collar” worker should not sell his personality, as he does not sell his smile. However, those who are called “white collars”, e.g. the persons who deal with figures, papers and people, who manipulate people, knowledge, signs and words - today all of them should not only sell their services, but also they should enter into a deal and sell their identity to various extents. Thus, the sense of self-importance should depend on how much the market is ready to pay for it. Like handbags that are not sold because of a lack of sufficient demand and, therefore they are useless from an economic point of view. If the bag could feel, then it would be a feeling of inferiority. Nobody buys it, which means it is useless. The same goes for a person who considers himself a thing (commodity). If he is not so successful to “sell himself”, then he feels like a failure.

3. Conclusion

To conclude with it is necessary to focus on the role of personal branding in modern society. Personal branding plays a significant role under the conditions of market relations. Nowadays in marketing sphere the term “attractive packaging” is used; in this context it “packaging” denotes a way to make a profit by turning oneself into a product, a commodity. In this connection, it is correctly to assume that under the conditions of the consumer society even a person acquires the characteristics of commodity. The key to the successful personal branding in social nets is the attractive packaging of an individual as an instrument of influence on the target audience and creating the right impression of virtual image. Knowing one’s potential consumer, his needs and interests, a person is aware of means and resources to arouse interest in his virtual image, his brand with the goal of strengthening his position at virtual market.

Today, a vivid example of virtual market is social platform Instagram, initially created as a photo-sharing service, but turned into an excellent site for sales, in the field of which there are many accounts presenting personal brands (commodified personalities). Their consumers are their target audience, measured by the number of followers.

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