

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310791226>

“Soviet” in the Space of Social Networks: A Form of Political Reflection

Chapter · June 2016

DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-49700-6_6

CITATIONS

0

READS

5

2 authors, including:



Nadezhda Zilberman

Tomsk State University

8 PUBLICATIONS 2 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Social network [View project](#)



E-learning [View project](#)

“Soviet” in the Space of Social Networks: A Form of Political Reflection

Natalya Mishankina and Nadezhda Zilberman^(✉)

Tomsk State University, Tomsk, Russia
n1999@rambler.ru, zilberman@ido.tsu.ru

Abstract. In this article we review the understanding of the “Soviet” phenomenon by social network users. The scope of our analysis includes social networks that are most often used by Russian citizens: Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki and Facebook. In the course of the research, there were used methods of content analysis and linguistic analysis. Techniques of semantic and textual analysis were applied to the analysis of certain types of text: titles, slogans, descriptions of groups and user comments. Content analysis method was used to identify the key semantic categories (topics) that are relevant to users of social networks. The analysis of the information placed in groups (communities) in social networks shows a significant difference in understanding of the investigated phenomenon.

Keywords: Online communication · Social networks · Online communities · Political reflection · The Soviet Union

1 Introduction

The notion of online communication occupies the minds of researchers more and more as an active and rapidly developing phenomenon [1]. The space of the computer communications is conceptualized as an open communicative environment with specific conditions of communication with a large number of participants. Accordingly, the processes that take place in modern society and the life of an individual, as a representative of this society, are embodied in a new communication format and subjected to transformations [2, 3, 7].

The environment of online communications represents an opportunity to study social (including verbal) behavior in new communicative conditions [7]. The transformation of social norms is possible through particular discursive parameters of communication on the Internet: (1) dual chronotope, i.e. each communicant is in two chronotopes – real and virtual, the latter is common to the communicants, the real one is communicatively reduced, although it may influence the course of communication; (2) anonymity: the physical side of communicants is hidden from direct observation – a speaker is present in the form of a virtual equivalent – a sign of personality, modeled by the communicant [7]. The last parameter creates a much greater sense of social freedom and promotes a more open statement of the socio-political views [5, 6, 8].

In modern public and private life of Russians more and more attention is paid to the phenomenon of “Soviet”. It appears that this is for two reasons. First, the national community overcame that minimum temporary, historical “distance”, when anger and rejection in relation to the previous political system gave way to attempt to see it closer. The generation that was born and developed in a completely different cultural environment grew up having a natural interest in the ways of the world order and, primarily, in which their parents lived. The Russian society appeared in cultural and historical situations requiring reflection, first of all, to restore cultural and historical ties, to form of the cultural-historical identity for a new generation of Russians. Therefore, the interest in the phenomenon of the Soviet in a historical and cultural perspective is formed, from our point of view, a completely natural, spontaneous way as an attempt of cultural and historical identity. The second reason is socio-political changes taking place in the life of a modern Russian. Earlier we considered these processes in the field of virtual discourse on the material of the forums, where forms and the facts of life during the “Soviet” system were actively discussed [4], in this paper, we turn to the analysis of reflection forms of this phenomenon in social networks.

2 Reflection in the Groups of Social Networks

2.1 Material and Study Procedure

The scope of our analysis includes social networks that are most often used by Russian citizens: Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki and Facebook. In the study we examined the groups dedicated to the discussion of the “Soviet” phenomenon in social networks. In the course of the research, there were used methods of content analysis and linguistic analysis. Techniques of semantic and textual analysis were applied to the analysis of certain types of text: titles, slogans, descriptions of groups and user comments. Content analysis method was used to identify the key semantic categories (topics) that are relevant to users of social networks. Quantitative analysis of verbal units that represent certain semantic categories (topics), led to the qualitative conclusion about the interest of the users to the phenomenon of the “Soviet”. The immediate material analysis were texts posted in the news of the social network group. The selection of text posts the most large groups devoted to the phenomenon of the Soviet was made for each social network, based on linguistic analysis. We chose the topics for the analysis, in which the number of posts exceeded 100, indicating the interest of the participants. The total number of selected subjects was more than 10 thousand posts (hereafter taken as 100%).

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Characteristics of “Soviet” Groups in Social Networks

At the first stage of analysis, a number of communicative spaces (groups) were revealed in the framework of these social networks dedicated to the phenomenon of the Soviet. Through search systems, queries were typed, aimed at the identification of the thematic groups associated with the notion of “Soviet”: “Soviet Union”, “USSR”. There was formed a query associated with the name of the major political

leader of the Soviet Union – “Stalin”. Odnoklassniki is the leader among the number of resources associated with the memory of the Soviet, which is quite understandable from the point of view of age composition of network users. However, V Kontakte social network shows a significant number of the studied thematic groups, which supports the hypothesis of the search for identity among the youth. The meaningful analysis of the identified resources demonstrated a significant difference of the discussed issues from earlier results based on the material of forums [4]. The main difference is a significant dominance of political issues. The materials of the forums show that the basic problem is the evaluation of the phenomena of the Soviet reality: negative with respect to the family-raising and types of family interaction, everyday life and ways of the household organization, the principles of grooming, education, politics and power. The positive assessment focuses on the Soviet gastronomy, the rationality of housekeeping, principles of socialization, culture in the aspect of innovative aesthetics [4].

2.2.2 Group in V Kontakte Social Network

The material for the analysis was the posts in the discussion of the “SOVIET_UNION_IN_OUR_HEARTS” group. Most of the discussions are on political topics (about 71% of posts). The following countries and regions that are referenced directly in the titles of topics came in sight of the participants: the USSR, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Germany, the USA, China, North Korea, Japan, South Korea, Libya and Caucasus (general category). The most discussed country is Ukraine (4%). The discussion of countries often takes place in the context of military topics. It should be noted that the topics that are somehow related to the concept of war, containing such lexemes as *war*, *weapon*, *armed*, *army*, *battle*, etc. take about 10%. In the framework of the political subject, there are discussed the ideology of communism and socialism (3%), the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the United Russia (2%), elections (2%, overall negative assessment of the events). A large number of topics (31%) touch upon the personalities of politicians. Individual topics concerning Vladimir Putin (13%), I. Stalin (11%) and Vladimir Lenin (3%) are open for discussion; there are also separate topics about M. Gorbachev, N. Khrushchev, Zyuganov, Kolchak.

In addition to political topics, science/education/philosophy (4%), religion (4%) culture (2%), sports, demographic problems, health care, economic problems (less than 1%) are also discussed. In most topics, modern Russia is opposed to the USSR (4%). Reflection of the past through the culture is presented not so wide, only 0.7% of certain topics are dedicated to the Soviet cinema and animation. The participants consider the possibility of return of the Soviet political system, which is reflected in the following topics (10%). As a rule, the participants consider revolution as a way for the revival of this regime. Interestingly, along with such plans, the group has sections devoted to thoughts about the future, which mainly relate to the future of Russia (1%). However personal aspects of life are not discussed, the future takes its way across the country or the world, but not the individual.

2.2.3 Group in Odnoklassniki Social Network

Users of Odnoklassniki social network, in contrast, are focused largely on socio-cultural aspects. What is more, posts in the news feed are, as a rule, graphics: photos, demotivators, etc. The text component of the post is accompanying remark and comments from the participants of a discussion. By the number of reposts and comments (100 posts on the social group the wall is 100%), the most relevant topics are those related to the facts of social inequality (34%), the Soviet way of life and the world of artifacts (incl. gastronomy (16%), the Soviet childhood and school (15%), the Soviet cinema (15%). However, this feed contains obviously advertising material, for example, advertising of cosmetic products (10%). It is curious that the feed has almost equal number of posts (3%), dedicated to Soviet cosmonauts and religious artifacts – images of icons with a call to repost for better living conditions.

In this communicative space, there is also the obvious juxtaposition of modern Russia and the Soviet Union, but social and ethical norms of life are opposed. Modern Russia is perceived as immoral in relation to the Soviet Union – the space of love and friendship. However, during the discussions of the individual positions (we considered those with more than 100 comments), there are lively discussions related to the evaluation of the facts of Soviet life. Despite the positive beginning, the topic of ethnic relations is unfolding as a discussion of contemporary political relations between former Soviet republics and Ukraine is in the center of it. It is revealed in the discussions of complex issues relating to the understanding of the Soviet as a social and as a political system. In addition, as in the case with users of Vkontakte social network, it is clear that for the members of groups in Odnoklassniki Soviet topics are closely connected with the modern state of Russia, they are comprehended through the prism of modern negative events.

2.2.4 Group in Facebook Social Network

Communities devoted to understanding of the Soviet phenomenon by Facebook users primarily consider the USSR as cultural space – 42% of the information in the news feed is devoted to cultural content – Soviet films, television, and art in general (100 posts on the social group the wall is 100%). 17% of posts contain information about important world events, achievements of the Soviet people. It should be noted that in groups of this social network, the posts dedicated to the artifact world of the Soviet are very rare, primarily, there is information about personalities: actors, writers, scientists, military, etc. who created the reputation of the Soviet state. However, directly in the news feed, messages about current political events (12%) are posted, associated with the actions of the president, the comprehension of political events etc. In addition, the commenting is done in a much more restrained manner compared to other social networks. And probably due to the fact that the area of culture is perceived as more holistic and unambiguous, the discussions rarely pass into debates, interlocutors usually agree in the evaluation of the event.

3 Conclusion

The study of forms of reflection of the Soviet phenomenon in Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki and Facebook social networks showed that the reflection concerning the past political system is expressed in the form of active discussion of various aspects of the Soviet. The users of different social networks conceptualize these manifestations in different ways. On the one hand, we observe an obvious similarity between users of Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki in active reflection – they form a lot of communicative spaces for a discussion. Facebook users are less active in this respect – the number of created communities is much less. At the same time, in a meaningful aspect, the members of the Vkontakte groups are rather concentrated on the problems of contemporary policy and issues related to the Soviet become an occasion for intensive discussions about the problems of the modern world. The users of Odnoklassniki are focused on nostalgia for the material world and the world of their childhood. In this community, the problems of modern social inequality are comprehended especially crucially, there is a constant comparison with the social structure of the Soviet Union. The users of Facebook, on the contrary, are aimed at the socio-cultural sector – most of the information is formed by the texts about culturally significant events and persons. The obtained results allow to draw a conclusion about a significant difference of reflection of the modern user of social networks from participants in similar discussions on the forums: in the spotlight of social network users, there are socio-political and socio-cultural issues. It is possible to trace the differences in the phenomena evaluation: as a rule, Soviet culture, education, the social structure of society, gastronomy are evaluated positively, but the same phenomena of contemporary reality have a negative assessment. As a political system the Soviet is conceptualized primarily from the perspective of the integrity and importance in global politics. The users of social networks, sometimes covertly, sometimes quite openly, declare the illegality of the collapse of the Soviet Union, about the negative consequences for all objects of the former Soviet Empire and announce intentions on its reconstruction.

References

1. Bell, D. (ed.): *Cybercultures: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies: Cyberculture, Cyberpolitics, Cybersociety*, vol. 3. Routledge, London (2008). 471 pages
2. Maximova, O.B.: Social aspects of Internet communication: virtual community and communication personality. *Bull. Peoples' Friendship Univ. Russia. Ser. Sociol.* **1**, 24–33 (2011). Publishing House of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow
3. Mirloy, L., Gordon, M.: *Sociolinguistics: Method and Interpretation*. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford (2003). 261 pages
4. Mishankina, N.A.: Motherland or Sovok? Reflection of the “Soviet” life style in virtual discourse. In: Rezanova, Z.I. (ed.) *Nostalgia for the Soviet*, pp. 126–139. Publishing House of Tomsk State University, Tomsk (2011)
5. Diaghileva, N.S., Zhuravleva, L.A.: The essence of sociocultural identity of young people in the environment of online communications. *Bull. Chelyabinsk State Univ.* **42**, 152–153 (2009). Publishing House of Chelyabinsk State University, Chelyabinsk

6. Kalimullin, D.D.: The space of Internet communications as a tolerant environment. *Bull. Kazan State Univ. Cult. Arts* **1**, 135–138 (2009). Publishing House of Kazan State University of Culture and Arts, Kazan
7. Mishankina, N.A.: Social norms in Internet communication: sociolinguistic aspect. In: Mozhaeva, G.V. (ed.) *Humanitarian informatics*, vol. 7, pp. 72–78. Publishing House of Tomsk State University, Tomsk (2013)
8. Morozova, O.N.: Political Internet communication: its role, functions and forms. In: Chudinov, A.P. (ed.) *Political Linguistics*, vol. 1, pp. 156–161. Publishing House of Ural State Pedagogical University, Yekaterinburg (2011)
9. Social Networks in Russia: Figures, trends and forecasts. In: *Brand Analytics: Monitoring and Analysis System of the Brand in Social Media and Mass Media*, Spring 2015. <http://brand-analytics.ru/blog/socialnye-seti-v-rossii-vesna-2015-cifry-trendy-prognozy>