

Actual Reputation Technology of Individual Entrepreneurs: Personal Branding in Social Networks

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Abstract—The paper discusses one of the reputational technologies that have been actively used by individual entrepreneurs, namely, personal branding in social networks, which has not yet become the focus of special study. The impacting character (emotiogenicity) of personal posts in blogs of individual entrepreneurs is analyzed. The study material is 4 blogs of individual entrepreneurs on Instagram (2 men and 2 women) with 5.000/20.000 subscribers. The number of posts analyzed over September–October 2018 was 266. The analysis methodology employs a cognitive-discursive approach aimed at identifying emotiogenic topics and the nature of their implementation in various types of texts – descriptions, narrations, instructions, arguments, explanations and phatic dialogues. The number of likes, as well as the number and nature of comments to the post indicates its emotiogenicity. When interpreting the results of the quantitative analysis, the authors consider the gender factor and status of the blogger (the number of subscribers). The authors conclude that personal posts—descriptions and narratives that show the blogger’s daily life have the greatest emotional effect. The paper reveals differences in the speech behavior of male and female bloggers and qualitative differences in perception of posts depending on the status of the blogger. The factor of personal post emotiogenicity is of great significance in the reputational technology of personal branding.

Keywords—*brand persona; reputation technologies; personal and marketing posts; text emotivity*

I. INTRODUCTION

Reputational technologies have recently become effective marketing tools that strengthen the confidence of potential consumers both to the manufacturer and to the product. The principles of reputation management should be applied by both the company and a person who wants to be known. A brand persona (company's image or a real person) shows his unique, but important experience in one way or another, becoming a model to follow. The consumer feels involved in the life and values of brand persona and therefore has confidence in him; potential partners, customers or employers can assess their level of professionalism and the degree of influence on the target audience. The most common tools for branding are personal sites and blogs on social networks. This is how personal business stories of top managers, top translators, top

psychologists and other experts are created; these stories are analyzed by marketers [1] to develop tips [2] for promotion of new experts who want to become a brand persona. However, other business newcomers apparently start to consider these tips. Social networks are increasingly becoming the ground for blogs of individual entrepreneurs, who increase the number of their loyal customers through personal branding. Our study is aimed at identifying the specifics of the posts of individual entrepreneurs. The study model and methodology are presented in the third section of the paper; analysis and interpretation of the collected material are provided in the fourth section of the paper. Conclusions and practical recommendations are discussed in the conclusion section.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

A. Personal branding basics

Personal branding implies the deployment of individuals’ identity narratives for career and employment purposes [3]. Celebrities were the first to initiate these activities [4]. Over time, it became evident that these technologies are relevant for all managers, scientists, teachers and knowledge worker as a whole [5]; moreover, personal branding on social media is necessary for a man of today [6]. Currently, there are many companies, experts and trainers who are ready to teach people to create their own personal brands to become more employable and successful. In order to become a brand persona, experts recommend a number of operations, but the most important thing for a person is to profile himself and to market his authentic core self. At the same time, the brand remains a value benchmark for consumers, who are attracted by the opportunity to get closer to the status, social status, and values of the personality-leader, and therefore enjoy new experiences and images. It is not surprising that the reputational technology of “brand persona” is beneficial for both the individual (and the company behind it) and society.

B. Persuasive Texts

There are a significant number of approaches to increase a persuasive effect of texts; we will focus on those directly related to our analysis.

Firstly, today there is no doubt that emotions constitute powerful, pervasive, and predictable drivers of decision-making [7].

Secondly, it is important to distinguish approaches to persuasive texts. The Western scientific tradition considers emotive text-persuasion as a tool of manipulation (this text appeals to consumer's emotions, subconscious desire to dominate and to feel safe, etc., the text is aimed at subconscious seduction of the recipient [8]). Therefore, texts-descriptions, -arguments, -explanations and -instructions, which include an emotive component, are considered as effective linguistic manipulations. The exception is texts-narrations. On the one hand, C. Schreiner, M. Appel, M.-B Isberner, and T. Richter investigated how the inclusion of verbalized (rational) arguments in narrative affect the degree of its persuasiveness, and concluded that argument strength used in narration increases persuasiveness of the entire text [9]. On the other hand, any narrative is structured to make the reader experience emotional evolution. R. L. Nabi and M.S. Green [10] argue that emotion is a fundamental part of the narrative experience, and the narrative perfectly provokes the emotions of the recipient. People strive to experience emotions, this need affects not only their desire to start reading the text, but also the actions/thoughts after reading; therefore, we can talk about the narrative persuasion tools that change the emotional state and lead to emotional shift of readers. Actually, these are the changes a blogger dreams of when he seeks to increase the number of customers using his goods or services (the person does not know anything about the blogger and his proposals, then the person is about to feel sympathy and faith to the blogger and to whatever the blogger does). In terms of cognition, the change is due to mental simulation, it leads to improved ad attitudes and brand evaluations. The main reason for the ongoing process is that consumers are involved in mental simulation, especially if it is presented via narrative transportation, and therefore do not evaluate critically the discourse as a whole, do not isolate the advertising content; moreover, they experience positive emotions associated with the author of the narrative [11]. J.E. Escalas emphasizes that the experiment participants who did not get involved in mental simulation perceived the text analytically. As a result, they experienced less positive emotions and did not highly appreciate the author and the brand.

Russian philological tradition practices a different attitude to conviction using an emotive component. It is assumed that emotion and cognition are inseparable, there are research directions as linguistics of emotions and emotive linguo-ecology that employ their own theoretical and methodological basis [12]. This approach implies that all discursive passages [13] (description, narration, explanation, instruction, argumentation) may deploy an emotive component; emotiveness is not considered as a means of black rhetoric. We adhere to this point of view [14].

A constructive approach to emotional communication seems to be possible in the framework of pragmatic research

and involves a combination of rhetorical, stylistic, psychological and linguistic points of view [15].

III. RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

We proceed from the fact that personal branding is the basis of the current reputation technology in activities of individual entrepreneurs who plan to promote their goods through individualization of a product or service. Individualization of a product or service occurs through recognition of its manufacturer, in our case, a private entrepreneur. Sympathy for the most private entrepreneur is transferred to the attitude to the product or service. In this case, it is the relationship not product–manufacturer, but manufacturer–product that works. The greater the credibility of the manufacturer, the higher the popularity of the product is. Traditionally, branding is understood as “the process of forming a brand image over a long period through formation of added value, an emotional or rational “promise” of a brand or non-brand product that makes it more attractive to the end consumer” [16]. Personal branding technology is used in social networks allowing personal blogs. The main goal of such pages in social networks is to create their own target group, which reposts information about the product disseminating it from person to person. Personal branding is allowed to tell about oneself and the product from the first person point of view and to establish a direct emotional contact with a potential consumer (through likes and comments made by recipients of posts). The image of the author becomes an integral part of a product or service and is used by a blogger/entrepreneur as a tool to gain trust of readers/customers. The analysis of posts in terms of the nature of the information transmitted and the method of transmitting this information will identify the tactics most suitable for the target audience when creating a blog within the framework of the brand-persona technology.

Within the information posted, emotiogenic topics are analyzed: a personal story (family, home, hobbies, recreation), its share in the blog information field (the ratio of personal posts to posts about products).

The intentional component of posts is analyzed: the goal of some posts is to tell about what happened or what is happening in personal life (description and narration) that shows the blogger's daily life; the purpose of other posts is to interpret events (comment/explain/reflect on the events of personal and external life, their assessment). A separate type of posts is represented by posts addressed directly to subscribers: tips, recommendations (these posts indicate awareness of the value of their experience for others).

Virtually all the texts analyzed can be characterized as discursive passages by the type of the text dominating in them; each of them includes an emotive component (even if it is not found in the text, it can be seen in the visual component, which is crucial for the Instagram network). The exception is several posts that consist entirely of questions that bloggers ask their subscribers; we classify such posts as phatic dialogue.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

To create a model of verbal behavior for a blogger-independent entrepreneur, two blogs in the Instagram social network were chosen with about 5.000 subscribers and two blogs with about 20.000 subscribers, including two man and two woman blogs to identify gender characteristics of creating personal branding. The posts were analyzed within August-September 2018 (we assumed that the topics and regularity of the posts over the period of active leisure and work may be different). Both the posts themselves, including non-verbal information (photos and videos), and the number of likes and type of comments (positive or disapproving) of subscribers were analyzed. The study material included 266 posts; the 4 blogs were selected after initial analysis of 60 blogs of individual entrepreneurs in the Instagram network (bloggers offer services in such areas as male and female haircuts, beard design, sewing, car driving, room design, confectionery, mountaineering, diving, skating, restoration of furniture and interior items, photography, organization of events, sewing, car repair, etc.).

B. Data Analysis

Brief information about bloggers whose posts were taken for analysis.

1M: male. Master of ceremonies, organizer of extreme events and shows. Producer. Director. Extreme scooter. The blog was started in March 2013. In September 2018, there were about 5,000 subscribers. <https://www.instagram.com/k1rp14/>

2M: male. Children and family photographer. Shooting, workshops and individual training. The blog was started in August 2016. In September 2018, there were about 20,000 subscribers.

https://www.instagram.com/gosha_kamaev/?hl=en

3F: female. Serial entrepreneur, organizer of festivals. The blog was started in October 2014. In September 2018, there were about 8,000 subscribers.

<https://www.instagram.com/tobekoroleva/>

4F: female. Handmade craftsman. Tailoring. The blog was started in August 2014. In September 2018, there were about 18,000 subscribers.

https://www.instagram.com/block_print/

Data presented in Table I show that the activity of female bloggers in personal posts is much higher; the ratio is 1: 6. The ratio of personal and marketing posts varies for men and women: it can range from 1: 4 to 1: 1 in men's posts, and it varies from 1.5: 1 to 5: 1 in women's posts that indicates a significant shift towards personal posts. Despite a clear tendency of female bloggers to use personal posts on product promotion blogs, the number of likes received by male bloggers is much higher (Table II). Ten personal posts of blogger 2M got an average of 1,597 likes, while the posts of female blogger 4F

with a comparable number of subscribers had an average of 584 likes, i.e. 2.7 times less than that received by blogger 2M. The emotiogenicity of personal posts by men and women correlates with the number of likes in the number of comments left: from 1:3 to 1:39 for men and from 1:1 to 1:22 for women. This indicates greater emotiogenicity of men's posts in personal branding (or, perhaps, greater restraint of female bloggers. Maybe women are more strict about posts and appreciate their likes and comments more highly).

TABLE I. PERSONAL AND ADVERTISING (GOODS/SERVICES PROMOTION) POST RATIO

	Blogger 1M		Blogger 2M		Blogger 3F		Blogger 4F	
	08.2018	09.2018	08.2018	09.2018	08.2018	09.2018	08.2018	09.2018
Personal posts/ mainly advertising posts	6/19	7/21	3/7	7/5	35/4	31/10	38/26	27/20
Total number / personal/ advertising	53 24%/76%		22 46%/54%		80 83%/17%		111 59%/41%	

The number of likes and comments to men's posts does not depend on the number of subscribers (comparable number of likes) in contrast to women's posts where likes and comments directly depend on the number of subscribers.

Some general trends characterizing the relationship between the text type and the emotional effect can be identified. Bloggers with more than 18,000 subscribers receive the highest number of comments to posts-explanations (1:24) that can be attributed to a blogger's reputation and interest in his expert appraisal. Instructions have the least emotional potential: in women's posts the number of comments to posts-instructions is 1:0.5, 1:1, and in men's posts it is 1:6, 1:11, which indicates greater confidence in each other in the male community. Posts-descriptions and posts-narratives get lots of likes: posts-descriptions (1:400 in men's posts, 1:28 in women's posts) and posts-narrations (1:450 in men's posts, 1:44 in women's posts).

The average number of likes and comments to different types of texts does not always reflect the true state of affairs. So, the greatest number of likes in blogger F3 was due to professional advice (177) and explanations of the motive of professional activity (481) with a call to support the project. Blogger F4 gained a lot of likes on posts-descriptions and posts-narrations telling about a newly born son (1: 809 and 1: 1,134), which is due to the specifics of the female audience. Another emotiogenic factor is a blogger's sincerity (the post of blogger G4 "I love when ..." received 868 likes, and the post of blogger 2M "How I'm developing" received 75 comments), provocative posts (the post of blogger M1 about benefits of hard boxing got 16 comments), and blogger's personal photos. It is not surprising that, videos attract subscribers more than photos; it is also predictable that high-quality artistic photos actively

promote the brand, as evidenced by the success of blogger 2M (after 2 years, the professional photographer had more than 20,000 subscribers after 2 years of the blog operating) and

blogger 4F (after 4 years, the professional artist had about 18,000 subscribers after 4 years of the blog operating).

TABLE II. EMOTIOGENITY OF PERSONAL POSTS OF DIFFERENT TYPES

Post type / emotional respond (like/comment)	Blogger 1M 5,000 subscribers	Blogger 2M 20,000 subscribers	Blogger 3F 8,000 subscribers	Blogger 4F 18,000 subscribers
Description	24% - 3 posts 1.213 likes/11+	10% - 1 post 1.908/39+	30% - 20 posts 134/12+	36% - 23 posts 660/20
Narration	24% - 3 posts 1.217 likes/10+	40% - 4 posts 1.570/32+	26% - 17 post 91/ 6+	21% - 14 posts 617/27
Instruction (advice, recommendation...)	7% - 1 post 1,186 likes/6+	10% - 1 post 962/11+	17% - 11 posts 95/5+	14% - 9 posts 478/12
Explanation	15% - 2 posts 1.218 likes/8+	20% - 2 posts 2.144/48+	9% - 6 posts 157/20 only 09.2018	3% - 2 posts 668/45
Argumentation	30% - 4 posts 1.180 likes/12+ and 2-	20% - 2 posts 1.403/16+	9% - 6 posts 121/5	17% - 11 posts 650/24
Phatic dialogue (post states a question only)	no	no	9% - 6 posts 121/4 only 08.2018	9% - 6 posts 431/19

C. Analysis of recipient response

Analyze the comments and likes to the most emotiogenic personal posts.

As mentioned above, in women's blogs, posts covering personal topics (the birth of a son) receive the largest number of likes. So, the post “And we multiplied” displayed by blogger 4F on September 3 received 1,064 likes and 127 comments-congratulations. A request for advice in the post of blogger 4F “How do you put your baby to bed” collected fewer likes (623), but received 91 comments. Comments in women's posts depend on the proximity of the topic discussed to the blog subscribers. At the same time, the family matters are not always emotiogenic for the subscribers of blogger F3. So, photos with a daughter or an 8-years-old daughter received 0–1 comment. The narrations showing the White T-shirts project development from the idea (Day 1) to the day of its implementation (Day 17) from blogger 3F received the largest number of comments. A question at the end of the post and/or request to support the blogger increases the number of comments.

According to the number of likes, the subscribers of men's blogs exhibit the strongest emotions when the blogger opens up as an individual and not as an entrepreneur. A blogger- athlete gained many likes when he posted photos of himself (1.276) and acquaintances (1.241) and described the day or place. Most of the comments (18) were made to a personal post-narration about his grandmother, her fate and role in the blogger's life. A blogger-photographer gained a significant number of likes by explaining his life philosophy (2.537) and telling the story about the trip to his hometown (2.052); many comments were devoted to the message about his arrival from the trip (61) and the already mentioned story about his personal development (75). Both bloggers in almost all posts pose questions to the subscribers, and blogger 2M responds to each answer that keeps

subscribers interested in the blog (when counting, we considered the comments of subscribers only).

V. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this paper, we indicated that personal branding technology in social networks is relevant for a wide range of people and has become a new and significant element of the virtual space. As a relatively new phenomenon, personal branding requires more careful study in order to better understand it and determine how it works in a social, cultural and economic context.

We assumed that this technology is effectively used by independent entrepreneurs (at least in Russia). As shown by our study, in the Runet the reputation technology of a brand persona of microbusiness exists and actively develops in various fields.

When creating a blog as part of the brand persona technology, the tactics that are effective for different target audiences can be identified through a comprehensive analysis of posts, which has been initiated in the present study.

As bloggers seek to increase reputation, they create persuasive posts; all texts involved in the analysis contained emotive components. Female bloggers post mostly texts-descriptions and narrations; narrations also occupy an important place in the texts of male bloggers, however, their blogs present almost equal number of text of all types, except for instructions. Unlike women, male bloggers do not use tactics of phatic dialogue. Our study suggests the importance of the emotiogenic factor in personal posts for the reputation technology of personal branding.

The analysis performed raised interesting questions for future studies.

How does the brand persona technology attract customers, retain them, and turn them into fans? Is it possible to say that the technology is suitable for any field of microbusiness, or

there are some limitations (according to our observations, the entrepreneurs from certain fields still publish informative and advertising posts only)?

Which types of texts are most effective in the context of product/service promotion? Does the success of a particular type of text depend on gender, age and other social characteristics of the target audience? Does the rhythm and alternation of text types contribute to success?

A post in social networks is a creolized text, and if we mean the Instagram network, a visual component plays a crucial role. What kind of photos and videos should be placed on the brand persona blog? We have noticed that readers actively respond to the photos of the entrepreneur himself or his family members in the marketing blog. This reaction seems to be a strong argument in favor of the fact that personal branding is an effective technology for independent entrepreneurs. Are there certain topics that personal photos should be devoted to in these blogs?

What is the most effective balance between personal and marketing blog posts? Does this depend on the specifics of the proposed products/services or on the target audience only?

These and other related questions formulated above can be solved through systematic, comprehensive and interdisciplinary studies of the phenomenon of a brand persona – an independent entrepreneur.

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