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Carnivalization in virtual space

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Abstract: This article explores the impact of new information technologies on individual and social consciousness. It examines the features of virtual space and the subculture of social networks, focusing on their carnival discourse and processes of carnivalization. The study highlights interaction in virtual communication, issues of anonymity, laughter, and freedom.

Keywords: Information technologies, virtual space, social networks, carnivalization, laughter, subculture, anonymity.

Introduction:

The development of new information technologies has significantly impacted both individual and social existence, as well as consciousness. It has opened up new opportunities in areas such as communication, searching for and organizing various types of information, and self-expression. A new reality—a virtual network space—has emerged, one that has been assimilated by millions of people and has become a daily object of mass consumption thanks to the global internet.

This reality is regarded as a distinctive socio-cultural phenomenon, demanding special attention and research. Anyone from anywhere in the world who has computer skills can participate in internet communication. A communicator interacts with many people and, even if they do not know the individual personally, forms an impression of them based on a one-time encounter with their verbal behavior. The unique conditions of virtual communication and the language expression methods employed help establish friendly and trustworthy relationships among participants on an equal basis [1, 25].

In online interactions, communicators do not manifest themselves through social status or nonverbal behavior; there is no real recipient present. As a result, the recipient reconstructs the addressee based on imagination and personal experience [2]. Furthermore, internet communication is secure: with a fabricated name, an invisible external appearance, and a personal history unknown to anyone, people often reveal themselves here because there is always the possibility to vanish without a trace and reappear at will without fear [3].

The global network is appropriating functions such as socializing, organizing, and mobilizing society, claiming the status of a single reality. These processes are accelerating in parallel with the emergence of new gadgets, services, and online opportunities. Things that seemed like science fiction ten years ago have now become a reality. The subculture of virtual social networks has its own unique characteristics. On one hand, it has a local nature, with its existence dependent on the features of the virtual environment, user activities, and technological capabilities. This subculture is not constant: it only manifests when needed and can vanish at any moment.

On the other hand, this subculture has a global character, as it is not confined to a specific geographic area like traditional culture. Its primary realm is the concept of a "global village" that spans the entire world. Consequently, social networks create an alternative cultural space where ideas that do not conform to or are even opposed to traditional culture are freely expressed.

Some aspects of this subculture are provocative, controversial, or flamboyant, and they are formed in opposition to the dominant culture. This contradiction appears in a rejection of systemic norms, similar to earlier countercultural movements (for example, hippies, punks, Goths), as these norms are seen as

factors that limit personal freedom of expression and creative independence. Tarmoq submadaniyati ishtirokchilarning jamoaviy ijodi natijasida shakllanadi va onlayn yoki oflayn muhitda boyitilib boradi. Bu uning dinamik, ochiq va kommunikativ xarakterini ta'minlaydi. Umuman olganda, bu submadaniyat o'ziga xos diskursga ega bo'lib, uni "karnaval madaniyati" sifatida tasvirlash mumkin.

The virtual presence of social networks is imbued with theatricality, spectacle, festivity, humor, and laughter. If the popular culture of medieval folk humor described by M. Bakhtin existed in physical spaces, its carnival essence has shifted to the virtual realm in modern times while preserving that very nature. It manifests all the "classic features" characteristic of the carnival forms of folk culture:

1. Freedom – as a mode of existence;
2. The presence of a concrete-emotional character and a strong element of play;
3. A closeness to art, particularly in theatrical and exhibition forms;
4. The absence of a barrier between performer and audience;
5. Participation of the masses;
6. A festive atmosphere;
7. The nullification of all hierarchical relationships;
8. Special forms of speech that disregard distance and are free from etiquette and moral codes;
9. A unique language of carnival forms and symbols [4].

According to Bakhtin, the essence of carnival lies "in subverting the meaning of binary oppositions" [4]. In the generally accepted definition, a binary opposition is "a universal tool that provides a rational description of the worldview, in which two opposing concepts are simultaneously considered: one affirms a particular quality, while the other negates it" [5, p. 72].

The method of binary oppositions first appeared in linguistic analysis and later began to be widely applied in the humanities, being recognized as a universal tool for understanding and describing various phenomena. It can be encountered in nearly every discourse—philosophical, political, informational, and in the texts of virtual social networks. Relying on the methodologies of Bakhtin and other scholars who have studied carnival culture (Yu. Kristeva, U. Eco, R. Genon, V. N. Toporov), we analyze the discourse of network subculture.

The essence of carnival is freedom, which is manifested by subverting the "determining constructions" of an individual's real existence. According to E. P. Pyanykh, the main binary oppositions in carnival discourse are defined as follows:

• Ontological opposition: "real existence" — "virtual existence";
• Epistemological (gnoseological) opposition: "truth" — "falsehood";
• Social opposition: "slave" — "master";
• Anthropological opposition: "face" — "mask";
• Aesthetic opposition: "spectator" — "actor";
• Linguistic opposition: "language" — "antilanguage".

The "carnival" in the network begins with the "subversion" of the existence of the real person by the existence of the virtual person. Real existence is a bio-social reality that adheres to certain laws of the physical and social worlds, is bounded by space and time, and is often emotionally constricting, among other limitations.

The carnival "I" possesses a unique history that is reflected on the timeline (or "wall") of the social network. This history is often random and playful, and may not correspond to reality at all. While the carnival has a utopian quality [4], network subculture is characterized by imagination, fabrication, and illusion. The virtual space allows for a blending of reality and fantasy, and the laws of carnival blur the lines between truth and falsehood, substance and fabrication.

In the carnival of the mind, truth is accepted as relative, conditional, and even of little importance. There is no need to identify what is hidden behind virtual masks—avatars—since that truth may be unpleasant. Virtual existence is anonymous and bold, yet completely irresponsible, which fosters all kinds of mockery, irony, satire, sarcasm, aggressive statements, challenges, as well as the spread of rumors and gossip.

The subversion of real and virtual existence takes place alongside an exchange of the "slave"—"master" oppositions. The "slave" is the socialized form of a real person's life. A person who has assimilated into society is invariably positioned within a certain hierarchy, acquiring the rights and responsibilities of corresponding statuses and social roles, and lives bound by numerous rules, social needs, and interests. Thus, a person lives in dependence on various social institutions, obeying them and assuming various obligations. However, the carnival nature of social networks rejects conventional social roles and transforms the "slave" into a "master" in the virtual world. This form of existence is free from any utilitarian needs, bureaucratic formalities, or moral admonitions. The network existence possesses a "jovial relativity" and incompleteness, completely subordinated to its owner. The owner is free to multiply, modify, or erase it. Such existence is almost free from state and social control, operating only within the bounds of network etiquette. This etiquette is, in turn, the result of an unwritten consensus.

The network subject is one who already possesses a

virtual "double" and the unconditional right to own the network space freely.

The carnival characteristic of network subculture manifests itself in freedom, which is demonstrated through creativity, attracting attention, and rejecting traditions. This essence is mainly connected with humor and parody. Modern technologies, especially photographic tools, enable the alteration of any image and representation, allowing the "clown" to become a "queen" and vice versa. Ascents and descents, jokes and parodies are the key features of carnivalization.

Therefore, a social network user has two forms of existence: in real life, they perform roles as a "slave"—a citizen, taxpayer, worker, or family member; in the virtual space, however, they are the "master," with the ability to determine their own personal identity and choose their path of "network existence." According to Bakhtin's theory, carnival is devoid of all hierarchical structures, where everyone is considered equal. In the carnival realm, free and equal relationships typically arise among people who, in conventional society, are separated by social status, position, property, and age [4].

The "mask" is the author's distinctive personal symbol, and unlike the concept of the "face," it appears as a unique "designer creation." It is a personally crafted structure that serves as the symbol of one's existence in the virtual world. The main components of the "mask" are the avatar (a user's photograph or other image) and the status. These elements often reflect the author's emotional state, personal worldview, or lifestyle, and are regularly updated. Particularly on open social platforms like "Odnoklassniki" and "VKontakte," users and groups tend to choose humorous, unique, or sensational images and phrases to attract attention. Within the framework of the network, only those images that correspond to the user's unique freedom and worldview are placed.

"Masks" are unlimited in number, just like the profiles on social networks. Existence in the network is variable and multifaceted, revealing different clones of the same person. A network user has the opportunity to freely manage their "masks" and create information—composed of words and images that trace their network presence—that corresponds to them. The user can independently select the audience that follows their "masks," receive their feedback, and interact with other "masks."

Anonymity offers users the ability to create and use various masks, including those constrained by the moral rules and conscience of real life. To adapt Shakespeare's words for today: virtual communities form a stage on which users act out any roles they wish. The theatrical element brings great popularity to social networks. Here, if nothing else, one can do a great

deal—live someone else's life, experiment with different relationships, or change one's "mask." The "person on the network" is essentially a "playing person," because play is a free activity that does not obey directives from above.

Laughter on the network is both verbal and visual, non-purposeful, and boundless. Its object is nearly everything, especially topics that are considered "upper" or "lower." Carnival culture has typically stood in opposition to official culture and state propaganda, with those in power historically becoming the targets of ridicule. In carnival laughter, nothing is sacred; cultural and religious taboos are deliberately broken.

The lack of hierarchy makes intimacy the norm in ordinary communication. A superficial analysis of virtual social networks indicates that this form of communication is essentially based on the language of the people, where, aside from censorship, elements such as slang, swearing, immoral jokes, and similar features appear. Portraying serious matters in the form of jokes or simple folk songs softens the severity or tragic nature of an issue.

Thus, the development of new information technologies has significantly impacted individual and social existence by creating a virtual network space. This space emerges as a distinctive socio-cultural phenomenon that demands dedicated research.

The subculture of virtual social networks possesses both local and global characteristics. Although it is influenced by the nature of the virtual environment, it is not constrained by geographical boundaries. While the virtual space allows for a blend of reality and imagination, the laws of carnival blur the lines between truth and falsehood, substance and fabrication. The laughter in this environment is both verbal and visual, non-purposeful, and boundless.

Overall, network subculture is an important socio-cultural phenomenon in modern society that, unlike traditional culture, provides new forms of communication and methods of self-expression.

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