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VIRTUAL IDENTITY OF RUSSIANS AND TATARS: FEATURES
OF THEIR MANIFESTATION

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Abstract

The relevance of the article is specified by the increased role of the virtual environment in the formation of modern ethnic identities. Researchers identify a virtual identity that is openly appeared, for example, in their profile and another one that manifests itself via participation in virtual communities. The first is called an explicit virtual identity, the second is called an implicit one. If the explicit identity is based on the presentation of oneself, the second one, which is less explicit, manifests itself through the real interests of the user. Its study requires an analysis of the names and the content of the groups in which the user is a member, and also the analysis of the communications in them. The popularity of virtual ethnic communities is also specified by the fact that they replace one of the markers of ethnicity – "unity of the territory". In the era of Web 2.0 users are not only the consumers of content, but also become producers of a separate medium of meanings and manifestations. The purpose of the work is to compare the audience of Russian and Tatar groups in the social network "VKontakte" based on the "big data" processing tools. The article presents the results of the conducted research, which identifies the features of communities, describes a generalized "personal profile" of a typical participant. The article is intended for researchers who study ethnicity, network communities, and the information society, in general.

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1. Introduction

An unprecedented jump in the development of information technology, observed at the turn of the XX-XXI century, resulted in a new form of identity – virtual. It is also called "cyber-identity", "network identity", "online identity", "meta-identity", "repost-identity". Researchers identify a virtual identity that is openly appeared, for example, in their profile and another one that manifests itself via participation in virtual communities. The first is called an explicit virtual identity, the second is called an implicit one. If the explicit identity is based on the presentation of oneself, the second one, which is less explicit, manifests itself through the real interests of the user. Its study requires an analysis of the names and the content of the groups in which the user is a member, and also the analysis of the communications in them.

The phenomenon of a new form of identity has aroused the interest of psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. The relevance of this topic for psychologists is designated by the influence of the Internet on the processes of socialization of representatives of the "Z-generation" (Soldatova, 2018), for sociologists – the replacement of social interaction by the network forms of communication, the emergence of communities not based on the territorial principle, the creation of representative images of network structures (Castells & Cardoso, 2005), for anthropologists – the emergence of new actors and institutions for the reproduction of ethnicity (Makhmutov, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

Central to the interdisciplinary research of virtual identity is the main question: "to what extent can virtual identity be correlated with real identity?". A number of modern studies confirm that social network users mostly provide reliable information about themselves, and this applies not only to formal socio-demographic characteristics, but also to personal characteristics (Yurchisin, 2005), and ethnicity is less subject to falsification in the virtual space than such categories as name, age, marital status, appearance, hobbies, etc. (Back, 2010).

Speaking about the phenomenon of virtual ethnicity, Mark Poster notes that it is a historical variation of "real ethnicity", but, unlike the so-called "old tribal ethnicity", it does not have deep connections with the heritage of the past (Poster, 1998). The authors of the collective monograph "Ethnicity, Place and Communication Technologies" emphasize that modern virtual ethnicity in most cases has the property of contextual conditioning, expressed in the connections of the ethnic identity of users of social networks with a complex set of factors surrounding them in offline space: a specific place and time of stay, the ethnic-racial neighbourhood and individual features of the socio-economic situation (Kim, 2007).

3. Research Questions

The most numerous Russian and Tatar network communities were studied on the social network "VKontakte". The main question that we are trying to answer in our research is the following: what are the main differences and similarities in the Russian and Tatar virtual space?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our research is to conduct a comparative analysis of the Russian and Tatar implicit virtual identity, through the study of online ethnic communities in the social network "VKontakte".

5. Research Methods

The constructivist paradigm of ethnicity was chosen as the leading methodological principle of the study, according to which it is understood as a form of the social organization of cultural differences (Barth, 2006).

We refer to ethnic virtual communities as public places with ethnic identity in their names. The methodological basis of the work was "big data" (a series of approaches, tools for processing and analyzing huge amounts of data). The analysis of the number of communities, its dynamics, and the calculation of active users was carried out using the ad targeting service "Adspoiler" (<https://adspoiler.com/>). To identify individuals who belong to several communities at once, we used the "Media-VK" application (<https://media-vk.ru>) and "Compare_groups" (https://vk.com/compare_groups).

6. Findings

Russian and Tatar ethnic virtual community names use nationality as a key element of the name, for example, "I AM RUSSIAN" (URL: <https://vk.com/pysskie>), "We ARE RUSSIAN" (URL: https://vk.com/are_we_russian), "Tatars and Tatar Girls" (URL: https://vk.com/tatar_vk) or serves as one of the components of the structure. The latter is quite typical for Russian communities. The slogan "Russians don't give up!", which is popular among the target Internet audience, is often used by administrators separately or in combination with such state concepts as "GREAT RUSSIA!" (URL: https://vk.com/russ_great), "THIS COUNTRY CANNOT BE DEFEATED!" (https://vk.com/rus_improvisation).

Administrators of Tatar public sites are more likely to use components for naming communities whose semes are associated with autostereotypes that form the image of "We", for example, "Дәрәтле Татарлар" (Lively Tatars) (URL: <https://vk.com/tatarsila>) or "OYATSYZ TATAR" (A Dishonest Tatar) (URL: <https://vk.com/otatarin>).

Russian groups are the most numerous in the social network "VKontakte", which unites users with a common identity. The biggest of them is "THIS COUNTRY CANNOT BE DEFEATED! The Russians don't give up! " (URL: https://vk.com/rus_improvisation) has over 400,000 users. Tatar groups are on average more than two and a half times less than Russian groups in terms of the number of participants, but the share of active users in them is higher (see Table 01 and 02).

Table 1. The number of Russian communities according to the "Adspoiler" service as of August, 5th, 2020

Group name	Quantity	Growth over the last month	Percentage of active users
THIS COUNTRY CANNOT BE DEFEATED! The Russians don't give up!	400,223	218	60 %

GREAT RUSSIA! The Russians don't give up!	294,913	717	76 %
I'M RUSSIAN	282,058	47	50 %
Russia is everywhere where there are Russians!	199,441	315	66 %
The Russians don't give up!	154,385	327	73 %
We are RUSSIANS	98,404	-199	59 %
Average indicators	238,237.3	237.5	Keywords: %

Table 2. The number of Tatar communities according to the "Adspoiler" service as of August, 5th, 2020

Group name	Quantity	Growth over the last month	Percentage of active users
Татарлары (Tatars)	195,836	-909	90%
Tatars and Tatar Girls	119,194	304	62%
A TYPICAL TATAR	83,901	28	52%
Дәртле Татарлар (Lively Tatars)	74,160	565	62%
ОЯТСЫЗ ТАТАРИН (A DISHONEST TATAR)	57,259	124	60%
ТАТАРЫ.RU	51,544	2,474	88%
Average indicators	96,982.33	431	69%

The increase in new users over the past month indicates that almost all the studied communities are developing.

The following Russian famous people present Russian virtual communities: Russian statesman and politician, Deputy of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Vitaly Valentinovich Milonov (from the community "THIS COUNTRY CANNOT BE DEFEATED. Russians don't give up"), Soviet and Russian film and television actor, film director, Ivan Ivanovich Okhlobystin (from the community "I am RUSSIAN"), Russian professional boxer Dmitry Alexandrovich Kudryashov (from the communities "I am RUSSIAN", "GREAT RUSSIA! Russians don't give up"), sambo wrestler, Sergey Nikitin (from the community "GREAT RUSSIA! Russians do not give up"), Russian rap artist Roman Vyacheslavovich Voronin (from the community "We are RUSSIANS"); among Tatar singers are Radik Mukharlyamovich Yulyakshin (Alvin Gray) and Saida Mukhametzyanova, also Mufti, chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan Ildus Akhmetovich Faizov (from the community "Tatars and Tatar Girls").

Russian and Tatar groups have been followed by the following users: entrepreneurs Maxim Mernes (communities "Tatars and Tatar Girls" and "We are Russians"), Alexey Kornelyuk (communities "Tatars and Tatar Girls" and "GREAT RUSSIA! The Russians do not give up!"), who consider these sites as a place for promoting their commercial interests.

As the data obtained using the Media-VK app shows, a significant part of the audience of Russian communities simultaneously consists of political virtual associations, such as "Anti-Maidan" (URL: <https://vk.com/adekvatnik>), "Right" (URL: <https://vk.com/rus.prav>), while Tatars are mainly registered in ethnocultural communities, such as "Иң шәп татарча жырлар" (URL: <https://vk.com/tatarchamusic>), "We learn the Tatar language!" (URL: <https://vk.com/tatarbelem>), "КЫЗЫК-МЫЗЫК (Tatar humour)" (URL: https://vk.com/kizik_mizik).

The majority of users of ethnic communities indicated Russia as their region of deployment (residence). About 14% of users of Russian and 7% of Tatar associations live outside the country, mainly

in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Studying the socio-demographic features of ethnic virtual communities, we should note that according to a large research centre "Mediascope", the audience of the social network "VKontakte" is dominated by people aged 35 to 64 years, in gender parameter – women (URL: <https://popsters.ru/blog/post/auditoriya-socsetey-v-rossii>).

The age and gender characteristics of the participants of the Russian and Tatar communities are presented in Tables 03 and 04.

Table 3. Age and gender composition of Russian communities according to the "Adspoiler" service as of August, 5th, 2020 (in %)

Group name	Gender		Age							Age is not specified
	male	female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	
THIS COUNTRY CANNOT BE DEFEATED! The Russians don't give up!	75	25	19	13	6	6	8	16	14	18
GREAT RUSSIA! The Russians don't give up!	79	21	2	3	3	5	20	31	27	8
I'M RUSSIAN	83	17	3	8	16	19	18	13	8	15
Russia is everywhere where there are Russians!	80	20	23	8	4	5	17	21	16	7
The Russians don't give up!	78	22	3	4	4	6	21	30	25	8
We are RUSSIANS	81	19	3	4	12	16	24	16	9	16
Average indicators	79	21	9	7	8	9	18	21	17	12

Table 4. Age and gender composition of Tatar communities according to the "Adspoiler" service as of August, 5th, 2020 (in %)

Group name	Gender		Age							Age is not specified
	male	female	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+	
Татарлары (Tatars)	68	32	45	28	9	3	2	2	9	2
Tatars and Tatar Girls	55	45	3	5	9	13	26	16	12	17
A TYPICAL TATAR	58	42	7	16	17	11	14	13	13	10
Дәртле Татарлар (Lively Tatars)	48	52	4	7	11	11	17	18	27	7
ОЯТСЫЗ ТАТАРИН (A DISHONEST TATAR)	62	38	7	8	7	7	8	23	22	18
ТАТАРЫ.RU	46	54	6	5	6	9	24	23	15	12
Average indicators	56	44	12	11	10	9	15	16	16	11

The data presented above shows, if the age parameters of the public participants are similar in general to the audience of the social network "VKontakte", then the gender parameters are different. Both in Russian and Tatar communities, there is a numerical predominance of men over women. The higher actualization of virtual identity in men can be explained by the fact that conservative traditions are still strong in modern society, where the female role is reduced to "private life", home, family and children, and the male role is largely extended to the "public sphere" (Osmanova, 2017), of which ethnicity is a part.

7. Conclusion

Analyzing the results and general trends that were considered in the framework of this study, the following aspects can be identified as the most significant differences and similarities between the Tatar and Russian parts of the World Wide Web:

- the ratio of the real number of Russians and Tatars and their network associations indicates that the virtual ethnic identity is more manifested by the latter;
- virtual identity is more politicized, which is evident both in the names of groups and in the membership of members of associations in political publications. The Tatar one has a significant cultural orientation. Many members of Tatar communities are members of ethnocultural groups;
- ethnic virtual communities in the "VKontakte" network generally unite representatives of quite diverse age and social groups (from ordinary users to well-known personalities) living both in the Russian Federation and abroad;
- -a typical representative of Russian and Tatar groups in the social network "VKontakte" is a man aged 30 to 35 years from the Russian Federation.

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