# Creation of a Virtual Image: Digital Technology of the 21st Century

Creando una imagen virtual: tecnología digital del siglo XXI

Создание виртуального образа: цифровые технологии 21 века

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**Abstract**

The article considers social networks as a tool for creating a virtual image. The authors studied the issue of the development of social networks as markers of the information society. The article also presents the issues of self-presentation of a person in social networks.
Results. The study has revealed that in modern society, information occupies a central place and its role, as well as of the means of its processing, transmission, and accumulation, has increased immeasurably. Today, the means of computer and information technology largely determine the scientific-technical potential of the country, the level of development of its national economy, lifestyle and human activities.
Conclusion. Methods of communication of modern people are increasingly different from those that were previously used. Today, every second person is a user of the world wide web – the Internet. Communication on the Internet generally occurs through various resources:

**Аннотация**

В статье рассмотрены социальные сети как инструмент создания виртуального образа. Авторами изучен вопрос развития социальных сетей как маркеров информационного общества. Также в статье изложены вопросы самопрезентация человека в социальных сетях.
Результаты. В ходе исследования выявлено, что в современном обществе информация занимает центральное место, и ее роль, а также средства обработки, передачи и накопления неизмеримо возросла. Средства информатики и вычислительной техники сейчас во многом определяют научно-технический потенциал страны, уровень развития ее народного хозяйства, образ жизни и деятельности человека.
Выводы. Способы коммуникации современных людей все сильнее отличаются от тех, что были ранее. Сегодня каждый второй человек является пользователем

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communication programs, email, forums, and social networks. However, communication on the Internet is impossible without the formation and development of the identities of the individuals participating in it.

**Keywords:** Social networks, image, virtual image, self-presentation, digital society.

всемирной паутины - сети Интернет. Общение в сети Интернет, как правило, происходит, через различные ресурсы: программы для общения электронную почту, форумы, социальные сети. Но коммуникация в интернете невозможна без формирования и развития идентичностей участвующих в ней индивидов.

**Ключевые слова:** социальные сети, образ, виртуальный образ, самопрезентация, цифровое общество.

### Resumen

El artículo analiza las redes sociales como una herramienta para crear una imagen virtual. Los autores estudiaron el tema del desarrollo de las redes sociales como marcadores de la sociedad de la información. El artículo también presenta temas de auto-presentación de una persona en las redes sociales.
Los resultados. El estudio reveló que en la sociedad moderna, la información ocupa un lugar central, y su papel, así como los medios de procesamiento, transmisión y acumulación, han aumentado de manera inconmensurable. Los medios de la informática y la tecnología informática ahora determinan en gran medida el potencial científico y técnico del país, el nivel de desarrollo de su economía nacional, el estilo de vida y las actividades humanas.
Conclusiones. Los métodos de comunicación de la gente moderna son cada vez más diferentes de los que existían anteriormente. Hoy, cada segunda persona es un usuario de la red mundial: Internet. La comunicación en Internet, por regla general, se produce a través de varios recursos: programas para comunicar correo electrónico, foros y redes sociales. Pero la comunicación en Internet es imposible sin la formación y el desarrollo de las identidades de los individuos que participan en él.

**Palabras clave:** redes sociales, imagen, imagen virtual, auto-presentación, sociedad digital.

### Introduction

Self-presentation of a person in social networks is a manifestation of one of the self-processes, during which the purposeful or spontaneous, conscious or unconscious self-introduction of a person takes place, and the result is a formed impression of a partner in the Internet communication. Thus, it becomes relevant to ascertain the breadth of self-presentation opportunities that social networks provide.

The transformation of one's own identity may occur either partially (hiding unpleasant facts, a little lie) or through a complete change of personality (gender, another name, place of residence, background, someone else's photographs, etc.). Some users change their real identity so that it is being replaced with the virtual one.

Every day, people are increasingly complementing their reality with virtual attributes. A person loses the boundaries of reality and it is more difficult for him/her to recognize where the real identity ends and the virtual one begins.

### Methods

We used the interdisciplinary approach to analyze and evaluate the behavioral patterns of social network users, who use various tools and methods of self-presentation to form their virtual image. The study also used a set of the following methods: analysis of statistical data and the results of public opinion polls (including sociometry data).

All obtained information was categorized and structured using econometric methods, which allowed, based on scientific synthesis, to do the following:

a)       To formulate and describe the methods of virtual self-presentation most frequently used by users of social networks to create their own virtual image;
b)       To highlight the features of virtual self-presentation in creation of the image that are characteristic of adolescents registered in social networks.

**Results and Discussion**

1. **Development of social networks as the information society markers.**

F. Webster noted: "It is not possible to find out how information took a central place in society, it is so important that actually it became a factor in creating the new type of society" (Webster, 2013).

The American economist Fritz Machlup was the first to introduce the concept of "information society" in his work "The Production and Distribution of Knowledge in the United States" written in 1962. He examines the concept of the information society, starting from the concept of post-industrial society, which considers not only all changes in the society but also shows the vector of social development from pre-industrial through industrial to post-industrial society.

In the scientists' works dedicated to this phenomenon, the following features of the information society were highlighted:

- growth of the implementation rate of innovations;
- volume and speed of communication growth;
- growth of useful information;
- acceleration of data processing;
- the dominance of the service sector over the goods production sector;
- prevalence of intellectual technologies;
- transformation of information into the source of profit.

The growth of the value of information has contributed to the development of technologies aimed at its preservation, distribution, and dissemination.

In the modern world, a person cannot imagine his/her life without the Internet. More than half of the world's population is now "online"; the latest data show that in 2017, the number of the Internet users reached almost a quarter of a billion, and in 2018 – 4.021 billion people, i.e. constitutes almost 53% of the planet's population (We Are Social, & Hootsuite, 2018).

Earlier, the Internet was not accessible to everyone, while nowadays, anyone turning on a smartphone can get access to a huge data amount. On the Internet, one can not only see the most relevant news but also study scientific articles, read books, watch movies and listen to music. The Internet gives people almost unlimited possibilities in the world cognition. Many prefer to do daily shopping online, not in a store, because it is much easier and faster. By virtue of the Internet, it has become much easier to be engaged in self-education. On the Web, one can find many sites offering online courses, webinars, etc. According to VCIOM – Russian Public Opinion Research Center, Russian users access the Internet mainly for news, information, communication, and music (VCIOM, 2012).

By virtue of the Internet, people have reduced the distance not only among cities but also among countries. The world wide web allowed people to become closer to each other and now they can communicate at any time and place. Currently, a social network is not only the way to communicate with old friends and relatives, but also the way to find new acquaintances, soulmates, friends of interests, loved ones or find a job and join the soulmates group.

The term "social network" was introduced in 1954 by the sociologist John Barnes from the "Manchester School" in his work "Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish". He developed and supplemented the approach invented in the 1930s to study the relationships among people using sociograms, i.e. visual diagrams where individuals were represented as points, and the connections between them – as lines. Barnes came to the conclusion that the size of the social network around one individual was about 150 people (Barnes, 1975).

The perception of social networks has certainly changed since that time; the development of technologies has played a significant role, due to which online networks appeared and the term "social network" took on a different meaning.

To sum it up, a social network on the Internet is an interactive multi-user website with a number of mandatory qualities (Vinnik, 2012):

- users are content creators;
- a site is an environment where users interact independently with each other and create thematic groups;
- users have access to communication functions with other users and social objects.

The following functions of a social network are distinguished (Sadigova, 2012):

Communicative function. People in social networks exchange messages, photos, discuss the latest news, unite by interests groups.

Informational function. Information sharing is one of the communication components. Users exchange various information when communicating with each other. Besides, with the increasing popularity of social networks, all news publications register pages on social networks to share the latest news.

Socializing function. This function is very important for the younger generation, as they can get, for example, the experience of communication on social networks. After all, the social network communication barriers are overcome much easier and faster than in real life.

Self-presentation. By means of social networks, the user can not only show him/herself as he/she is but also correct his/her own drawbacks, turning them into virtues.

Identification. The function is important, since when comparing oneself with others, one's own "I" is formed.

Entertaining function. Social networks are filled with music, video, games and interest communities, i.e. all that can distract the user from the surrounding reality.

The phenomenon of social communication is closely related to social networks. Social networks have become an integral part of everyday life. Virtual communities become an objective reality and influence the systemic properties of society (Gubanov, Novikov, Chkhartishvili, 2015).

Social networks take up more and more space in people's lives, not only the number of users but also the number of different social networks grow. Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) conducted research on the popularity of social networks on the Russian Internet. VKontakte and Odnoklassniki among the social networks proposed for evaluation are the most frequently visited. VKontakte is used almost daily by 42% of Russian Internet users (78% are 18-24-year-olds in youth groups, 54% are 25-34-year-olds), Odnoklassniki – by 27% (40% are 60-year-olds and older ones). The most popular groups are dedicated to news, health (they have 41% of users) and humorous communities (43% of users join such communities) (VCIOM, 2017).

Although social networks are similar to the newly emerging trend, sites such as Facebook are the natural outgrowth of the long-term development of social networks as one of the many components of social media.

Social media (Eng. social media, social networking services) are services and applications that allow users to interact with each other through the content exchange (in the form of text, audio, photos, and video). Social media include as follows:

Communication tools:

Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, VKontakte, etc.);
Blogs (Blogger, Medium, Tumblr, Livejournal);
Microblogging (Twitter);
Review sites (Yelp, TripAdvisor, Yandex Market);
Dating sites (OkCupid, Loveplanet);
Geosocial services (Foursquare)
Content Co-Creation Tools:
Wiki (Wikipedia; PBWiki, Google Docs);
Social Bookmarks (Pinterest, Flipboard);
News sites with the possibility of adding news;
Multimedia tools:
Photo hosting (Flickr);
Video hosting (Youtube, Vimeo.com, RuTube);
Audio hosting (SoundCloud)

The first wave is the social networks of 1997-2001. These are social networks with the simplest functionality: 1. Users independently found friends and the information of interest to them. 2. The information was disseminated only through public messages.

The second wave is from 2001 to the present day. Social services that emerged in this period of time are characterized by the division into niches, one of which was business.

The third wave is nowadays. Today social networks are divided according to the functional: photos, videos, games, etc. At the moment, society is in the transition from the second stage of development of social networks to the third one – users become content creators. This content is getting so much that it is divided by interest. For example, accounts on the same topic (animals, books, travel, etc.) appear in the social network Instagram.

Classmates.com can be called the very first prototype of a social network. It was founded on November 17, 1995 by Randy Conrads. Initially, the idea of the site was simple: to find those with whom the users studied, went to kindergarten, worked or served. The first users could not create profiles, but they could identify the location of long-lost school friends. It became a hit almost immediately and even today it has about 57 million registered accounts.

In 1997, SixDegrees.com was created. It was one of the first to allow its users to create profiles, invite friends, organize groups and navigate through the profiles of other users. SixDegrees promoted itself as a tool to help people communicate and send messages to others. Although SixDegrees attracted millions of users in 2000, the service was closed. Looking back, its founder thinks that SixDegrees was just ahead of its time.

In the same year, the first social networks appeared, aimed at the ethnic audience. These are the social networks AsianAvenue.com, BlackPlanet.com, and MiGente.com.

The first mass blog site that captured Russian users was Livejournal.

MySpace was founded in 2003 and became a platform for self-presentation of musicians. It allowed not only finding friends according to musical preferences but also communicating with one's favorite musicians and even adding them to friends.

Facebook is a prominent representative of the social network of the second wave. This social network appeared a little later than the rest of the representatives of this wave. The site was launched in 2004, and the main goal was to connect college students. Initially, only Harvard students used Facebook, since M. Zuckerberg, the founder of the social network, studied there. Initially, one could get into the social network only by invitation. The status of "exclusivity" bore fruit. In the first month, more than half of Harvard students registered on the site. Only two years later, the site was accessible to everybody. In 2008, Facebook surpassed MySpace and became the leading social network with over 150 million users worldwide.

On July 15, 2006, a microblog called Twitter was launched for the first time. It has gained extraordinary popularity and today virtually every active user has a Twitter account: from an ordinary person to a politician. This social network combines topics that are not found in everyday life: someone shares the everyday joys of life, someone follows celebrities, and someone subscribes to a scientist and is the first to learn about great discoveries. The ability to instantly transmit information and allow users to have a finger on the pulse helps the microblog to beat all popularity records.

The Instagram social network can be rightfully considered a kind of socio-cultural phenomenon. Having appeared in 2010, it instantly gained immense popularity among users from around the world. Here they can share hundreds of photos, change them as they like. This social network has become a platform for self-presentation, which is important for the youth. The extraordinary success of Instagram is confirmed by a recent report by the Pew Research Center, which indicates that photos and videos have become key social online currencies (Rainie, Brenner, Purcell, 2012).

The Instagram social network is very massive and, according to the statistics provided by the service administration, the number of its users in the world has reached 700 million users. By the end of 2018, their number reached 1 billion people. In Russia, this social network is used by 10% of the population or, more precisely, 14.4 million people (We Are Social, & Hootsuite, 2018).

What helped to gain such popularity among users? A simplified photo sharing process. Built-in filters and various tools allow processing a photo without using third-party applications, which is very important for some people. Filters helped earn such popularity among users. Even the most ordinary shot after adding filters becomes almost a work of art in the users' eyes.

Initially, the application was available only on Apple gadgets, which not many people could afford. Thus, an image of certain elitism and inaccessibility for the majority was created.

Not only Instagram but also other social networks are developing at an increasingly rapid pace, increasing their impact on people. There are several aspects of what awaits social networks in the future.

First, the audience growth. Every day, more and more users register in social networks. Globally, the number of users of social networks more than doubled from 2010 to 2.3 billion and will reach almost 3 billion by 2020 (We Are Social, & Hootsuite, 2018).

Second, the development of social networks devoted to specific topics. Facebook and Vkontakte are platforms for bringing people together for a wide variety of interests.

However, there are platforms, on which users join together within the same topic. For example, the music fan community prefers buzznet.com, while academia.edu brings together scientists from around the world.

Third, personalization. Social networks are increasingly paying attention to working with a specific user. By collecting data, social networks can offer users music, groups, friends that might be of interest.

Fourth, mobility. With the advent of smartphones, the growth of mobile traffic is increasing every year. So there is a need to adapt sites to applications and mobile versions of sites.

Fifth, social networks as an advertising platform. It is no secret that at the moment they are the most effective platform for promoting products. In the near future, promotion tools in social networks will only be improved.

Social networks have become a platform where people can present themselves. Each publication shows the surrounding reality. However, there is a problem – this publication can depict only part of real life or a completely new image designed by a user.

## 2. Self-presentation of a person in social networks.

A person very often tries to control the information that others receive about him/her. When a person consciously tries to make an impression, he/she thinks about every detail: how clothes fit, behavior control, even what friends surround him/her and what he/she eats.

Almost every public appearance can be carefully thought out in order to manage an impression, and people can behave in a totally different way than the way they would behave alone with themselves. "What is important is not how people approach these idealizations, but rather the fact that they strive towards this" (Bogdanova, 2012).

Currently, there are no common approaches to the study of self-presentation. Therefore, the following are several different theories.
In the "Psychological Atlas of Human Behavior", self-presentation is a process, by which a person tries to control impressions that other people have about him/her; its synonym is impression management.

The term "self-presentation" has entered the English-language scientific vocabulary since the 1970s. With the beginning of the 21st century, the relevance of the study of the topic of self-presentation of a person only increases, since this phenomenon becomes an integral part of human life.

One of the first works devoted to the study of the term "self-presentation" was done by a sociologist E. Goffman. This work became the basis for research on self-presentation. E. Goffman introduced the concept of "self-presentation". In his opinion, all social interaction is a theatre play and people are actors. E. Goffman believed that there were several "I"s in each person:

"I" – for myself;
"I" – for others;
"I" – "pure" (Kovalev, 2013).

G. Mead and C. Cooley have supported the theory that it is typical for a person to present different models of behavior to others, exposing him/herself in the best possible light and making an impression, and a self-image is formed on the basis of reactions and opinions of others. In their opinion, the knowledge of a person about him/herself is a reflection of the knowledge of others about him/her.

B. Schlenker and M. Weigold believed that it was human nature to strive to create an ideal self-image not only in the eyes of others but also in their own eyes. An individual uses various tricks to preserve his/her image. However, it all depends on the situation; in a familiar environment, a person does not make much effort and making a favorable impression in an unfamiliar environment becomes especially important.

According to R. Baumeister and A. Steinhilber, self-presentation is self-disclosure in interpersonal communication through the demonstration of one's thoughts, character, etc. This is an unconscious process; it reflects the social nature of man, his need for recognition by other people.

There is also a theory that the basis of self-presentation is the pursuit of power. On this ground, they distinguish 5 types of self-presentation:

Try to please. An individual with his/her charm tries to present him/herself attractive in the eyes of others.
Self-display or self-promotion – the way to prove one's competence in something and command respect.
Bullying – an individual demonstrates his strength, proves that he is "dangerous".

Exemplification – the demonstration of excellence, proof of the significance of his/her personality.
Plea – the demonstration of weakness in order to evoke sympathy (Jones, Pittman, 1982).

Studies of the concept of self-presentation of a person in Russian social psychology are not too numerous.
Yu.M. Zhukov considers two types of communication: secular and business ones. The concept of self-presentation is considered within business communication (Zhukov, 2013).

G.V. Borozdina writes that "self-presentation is a situation where an individual intentionally draws attention to his/her particular appearance, behavior and situations" (Borozdina, 2017).

The transition to the information society is due to the emergence of technologies penetrating into all spheres of human life. This process is called the virtualization of social reality, i.e. reality is replaced by virtual simulation. Due to the rapid development of the media, even those moments of a person's life that were previously concealed and considered personal, intimate, are accessible to everyone. "We feel and observe how the semantic space of private life is reproduced in qualitatively new types of everyday practices that are governed by rapidly changing cultural standards" (Sergeeva, 2011). The distinction between the concepts of "personal" and "public life" is erased.

The Internet space gives the greatest opportunities for constructing the personality. It cannot be denied that social networks are still important in the life of every modern person. The development of the Internet, in particular, social networks, leads to the transformation of social identity. However, the transformation became possible only due to technical progress. Previously the Internet represented pages that were filled out by professionals, while nowadays users produce the content themselves and they are also its consumers. Users become not only the authors of the new material but also harsh critics.

Anonymity is one of the most important things that a user searches for in social networks. Some researchers attribute this to the fact that anonymity helps users create ideal images, by means of which they can present themselves, as well as try to take new qualities that are not typical of them in real life. However, a person very often becomes dependent on the virtual personalities created by him/her. Based on this

assumption, a little study was conducted, which addressed the issue on two criteria:

Perception of a self-image by participants.

Perception of this image by observers (Back et al., 2010).

The results only confirmed that the users of social networks really represent those images in social networks that they would like to see in reality.

It can be noticed that each time users spend more and more time on the virtual personality. Each user has standards of behavior that they are trying to meet by filling out an account on social networks and prove it to other users.

Users spend much time on profile promotion, earning "likes" and writing comments, instead of doing something really necessary.

As previously mentioned, an important feature of virtual social networks is invisibility, anonymity. In the authors' opinion, this property helps not only to correct one's image for the better but also to completely modify it. By completely changing the online image, a person can completely control the impression that he/she makes on the interlocutor. The virtual image reflects the need for recognition, popularity, it replaces a user's real "bad" image.

An important role in the process of creating an image is played by a user picture on a social network page, since one of its main functions is to draw the attention of other users, present a person in a favorable light, show the best sides.

Such type of photography as a selfie is gaining popularity. This photograph is a method of self-presentation, a "photographic self-portrait". The word "selfie" was even entered into the Oxford University Dictionary in 2013 as the word of the year. The American art critic Jerry Salz wrote a book about this type of photography. The author supposes that today's popularity is only the start of a path, and he fantasizes about the future that awaits this direction (Saltz, 2014).

A critic Alicia Eler reflects on the fact why selfies are so popular. She thinks that the popularity of a selfie is that today everyone can get a share of popularity, and a correct and beautiful selfie can help with this. However, selfies are also popular among celebrities. Nowadays, selfies are becoming part of major PR companies (Eler, 2013).

On this wave, the philosophical-literary magazine "Logos" publishes an issue, in which a whole section is devoted to the topic of the selfie. Kirill Martynov writes on the history and meaning of a selfie. Considering the role of a selfie in Russia, he says that young men make "duckface" only for an ironic photo that shows up girls taking such photos. Through this example, he argues that young women can do something that is not allowed to young men (Martynov, 2014).

Over the past year, more than 34 million photos with a hashtag "selfie" were posted on Instagram. Everybody from teenagers to pop stars and politicians post them. Almost every social network user has at least one self-portrait.

Scientists note that the number of teenagers registered in the networks is increasing and the age of registration is decreasing.

**Conclusion**

The study on self-presentation in social networks is of interest mainly among people themselves, they like to talk about and reflect on this. Analyzing these processes from both negative and positive sides helps to have a more constructive attitude to people's enthusiasm for communicating in social networks. In this way, it is possible to more effectively find adequate forms of interaction that contribute to the development of positive, socially approved personal qualities.

To date, there are very few studies that would focus on a person's self-presentation in social networks. However, the understanding of this phenomenon is very important, since these photos help to study a person's behavior and his/her social and cultural values.

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