A
tive development of information
technology, including “virtual
reality” and “cyberspace”, has led to
the formation of new technical and
psychological phenomena. At the modern
stage of development of the society
number of authors have noted that virtual
communication in social network sites
is a specific society. The ubiquity of the
Internet and social networks has led to
globalization, which on the one hand,
contributes to the development of social
contacts, and violations of the rules of the
site on the other side.

Since Facebook burst upon the
virtual scene in 2004, it has become the
most popular social networking site on
the Internet, all over the world. The most
popular Russian social site vkontakte
(now vk.com) - appeared in 2006. As
noted, the impression management on
Facebook tends to be done implicitly by
having certain friends, belonging to certain
groups, uploading selected pictures and
removing tags from others, and “checking
in” at certain places or locations.

Avatars are the images shown to other
users. Together with nick names they are
considered to be the main elements of
“appearance” of the Internet user. They
are the means of self-presentation. The
results of work by Sh. Sh. Wang, Sh.
Moon, K. H. Kwon, C. A. Evans, M. A.
Stefanone (2010) indicated that both male
and female subjects were more willing
to initiate friendships with opposite-sex
profile owners with attractive photos.
Subjects also displayed comparatively
higher willingness to make friends with
profile owners who did not include visual
cues than with those who revealed an
unattractive photo. Other authors (B.
Chen, J. Marcus, 2012) noted that students
use sites such as Facebook primarily to
maintain existing personal relationships
and selectively use privacy settings to
to control their self-presentation on SNSs.

In overseas studies, there is a different
approach to perception of the Internet
space. Thus, a group of scientists (Sh.
Zhao, Sh. Grasmuck, J. Martin, 2008)
noted the research conducted earlier in
the Americas and Europe, studying self-
presentation features in an anonymous
online environment. The very aspect of
anonymity allows a person to change their
behavior and to model a completely new
identity, including antisocial and deviant
behavior. However, according to the
authors, social networks are something
entirely different. The very question of
anonymity in this environment comprises
exclusively of mediations. At the same
time, all social networks are trying to add
the control-administered questionnaires /
profiles. Thus, the authors note that social
networks are no longer the anonymous
environment, but the environment
facilitating online communication both
with the people you know in real life and
with those you have not met. This leads
to more honest questionnaire filling in.
In addition to photos it includes hobbies,
musical interests, favorite books, etc. In
another study, also on the social media
(Hum N.J., Chamberlin P.E., Hambright
B.L., Portwood A.C., Schat A.C., Bevan
J.L. 2011), authors studied the gender-
specific selection of photos and content
filling on Facebook. The authors noted
that there are no gender differences
in the choice of personal photos and
content filling in the number and quality
of images; it should be noted that in this
study profiles of young men and women
aged from 18 to 23, college or university
students were analyzed. According to the
qualitative analysis results, it was found
out that young people choose photos that
show their activity, they are correct and
truthful in about 98% of cases.

On the other hand, as shown by
a number of scholars of European
countries (A. Vasalou, A. Joinson, T.
Banziger, P.Goldie, J. Pitt, 2008), from
the standpoint of using various avatars as
means of self-presentation in the network
there are several types of people.
Participants of the study were divided
into three groups: (1) as avatar-pictures
accurately representing themselves the
group chose to display photos presenting
the personality and its social role in
the most favorable light; (2) people
who “broke free from the social rules
governing self-presentation” through
creation of the profile in the network;
and finally (3), this group of people uses
avatars to convey a meaning, a message
to a specific audience, acting on the basis
of the principle of “the one who should
– will understand”. It is important to
emphasize that the authors of this article
have used such programs as Yahoo!
Avatars customization in their study. The
program allows you to create a cartoon
character, making him a haircut, hair color, eye color, and nose shape.

However, as emphasized by A. Vasalou, A. N. Joinson (2009) of the English university, the choice depends on the avatar and the environment in which the person is. So there are three main online social media: blogs, dating websites and games. People who write blogs - choose photos that most honestly reflect their actual physical appearance, for dating they choose photos that may be most attractive to the opposite sex, and avatars for games are chosen so that a maximum transfer of intellectual abilities of a host profile is achieved. In addition, the authors of this study examined how deeply characteristics conferred by the “avatar” coincide with people who ascribing such photos to themselves. In this study researchers found out that regardless of the environment from 71 people avatars of 82% conferred the same characteristics as they had in real life.

Thus, we see that on the one hand a certain anonymity can be achieved in a mediated communication via the Internet through the changing of profiles and by creating a virtual identity different from the real one. On the other hand the very nature of implied social networks is to communicate with people known in real life, so the mediated communication is not fully anonymous and can be filled in by some characteristics creating the necessary aspects of the image, as the prototype of a real appearance.

12791 profiles participated. From among 6691 profiles 3337 were male and 3354 were female profiles presented in the space of the social network vk.com; the age was from 14 to 18 years with an average age of 16. And 6100 profiles (3100 male and 3000 female profiles presented in the space of the social network vk.com) were aged from 18 to 25 (average age - 21). Profiles were randomly selected, age limits have been set in advance, the selection of profiles was made using a filter.

So, the profiling was carried out by analyzing the content of the avatar (photo of the profile owner, visible to all users), and the name of the proprietor’s profile. We have identified a group picture and analyzed the percentage of use of a certain group of images.

At first we analyzed the Russian profiles; the data is shown in Table 1. Despite the fact that the website has a rule assuming that users with unreal names and photos would be banned, over 15% of the analyzed profiles have violated this provision. Among these about 3% of users used unreal names in this aspect. It should be noted that this percentage is represented equally by men and women. The majority of men and women have used the names of fictional characters (Lilianna Dreamfull, Sunny Cat, Macho Man, Tiger Tigeroff, etc.), historical characters, names of movie stars, singers, sportsmen (Roberto Baggio, Julia Roberts, Madonna, Fiona, Mrs. Shrek).

We also examined other frequently violation leading to the ban - the use other people’s photos on the avatar (over 12%). It is interesting to note that men are more likely (than women) to use other people’s photos: 8% of men and only 4% of women use other people’s photos. All photos not belonging to the owner were divided into 3 groups by us: the picture (landscape, still life, berries), animal and other people.

In the “picture” group men are more likely to use landscapes and still life images. Still life images included photos with money, weapons, alcoholic beverages; landscapes often include image of auto-mobiles. At the same time, female users in this category often depicted fruits and berries (apple, cherry, strawberry), and landscapes are more classical examples of art, including works by Van Gogh, Ivan Aivazovsky, etc.

In the “animal” group there are also differences in the self-presentation through the animal manifested by men and women. So men use images of large predatory animals (tiger, lion, wolf), while women are used pets (cats, dogs) and animals such as snakes, horses, mice, etc.

In the last group, “other people”, represented by about 5% of the analyzed profiles, we see virtual pages of people who have used pictures of other people. It is interesting to note that if men use pictures of famous people (actors, sports shift, musicians), women often use photographs of little-known models of advertisings and photos taken from photo-stocks (internet resources containing images that could be borrowed not for commercial use).

As a result, we can say that the Russian adolescents more often distort information about themselves on the level of distortion of the name and avatar. In our opinion this can be explained by the desire to create a different image, not corresponding to a real one. The data output is justified by the choice of images for avatars on the basis of content, as well as the use of other people’s photos (in particular photographs of stars of world-known movies and sports). This phenomenon may also indirectly indicate dissatisfaction with own appearance, however, in order to confirm this statement we must conduct a relevant study (which will be a further step in our research aimed at management of experience in cyberspace).

Any way, it is also important to note that there is such a pattern as a misrepresentation. And the reason for the moment is not developed. In this regard, the question arises on how to consider this phenomenon as in modern Russian psychology there are no developed questionnaires. At the same time, there are specific procedures to assess people’s appearance, the ability to control the first impression and the attitude to social networks, as well as the Internet. In
future we are planning to conduct more in-depth study on the causes of distortion of own information. When considering this question, we also plan to include the questions offered in the paper by Strano M. M (2008) (e.g. Why did you choose this photograph or image? When you post a profile image who do you imagine when viewing that photograph?). Self-analysis of the avatar should help analyzing the characteristics of impression management in cyberspace.

References:


Information about author:

1. Daria Pogontseva – Candidate of Psychology, Associate Professor, Southern Federal University; address: Russia, Rostov-on-Don city; e-mail: expert37@inbox.ru.