Runet Users’ Attitude to Outrageous Content in Virtual Social Environments

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Abstract

This study of the Runet virtual social environments deals with identifying and analyzing user reactions to watching a video clip containing outrageous behavior, and studying social attitudes of the respondents. The Celebrium-X platform employing the adjoint ideomotion technology for remote collection and processing of group neuro-responses was chosen as a research tool. As the empirical basis of the research, the raw data obtained as a result of the conducted survey was used. The results of the study have shown the respondents’ negative attitude to publishing of outrageous video clips in virtual social environments. The Internet audience realizes a negative effect produced by the aggressive content on people’s psychological sphere and social behavior.

Keywords: deviant behavior, public opinion, virtual social environments, Internet, Celebrium-X platform
1. Introduction

In Global Digital 2021, their annual report about the situation of the digital sphere, We Are Social and Hootsuite inform that as of January 2021, there are 124 million Internet users, including 99 million social network users, in Russia. From 2020 to 2021, Russia's number of Internet users has become 6.0 million people more (+5.1%), and its audience of social networks has had a 4.8 million increase (+5.1%). Statistically, an average Russian spends 7 hours 52 minutes daily on the Internet. This is almost one hour longer than the world average value, which is 6 hours 54 minutes. Meanwhile, Russians spend 3 hours 13 minutes for television, 2 hours 28 minutes for social networks, and 55 minutes for reading press (both online and printed mass media are taken into account) (Digital, 2021).

As a bright example of the modern communication space, the Internet can act as a means of forming the public behavior (Vasenina, Lipatova & Pronchev, 2019; Makarevich, 2021; Stolbov, Madyanova, & Novikova, 2021).

Development of modern virtual social environments and emergence of new forms of interaction with users not only contributes to the educational and socialization processes (Goncharova, Pronchev, et al., 2017; Malik, 2021; Soltovets et al., 2021) and establishment of the open society (Agapov & Pronchev, 2018; Zhebit, 2021) but also affects individual human behavior and adaptation in the virtual social environment (Pronchev, Monakhov & Kovalchuk, 2016; Pronchev, Monakhov, Proncheva & Mikhailov, 2018). The media space and effects it has on people as a new form of communication are the subject of research for many authors (Kuznetsova, 2021; Semilet, Fotieva & Ivanov, 2021; Podolian, 2021). So, one of the most curious phenomena of the contemporary media studies is that of media globalization (Pronchev, Proncheva & Goncharova, 2019; Pronchev, Shisharina & Proncheva, 2021) which allows largely accelerating the information exchange process between communicants. However, alongside its positive effects, media globalization becomes a tool for spreading deviant and aggressive behavior in the virtual environment (Vasenina, Kuleshova & Pronchev, 2018; Palmieri, Shortland & McGarry, 2021). Among the most relevant deviant behavior forms within the media space, one can note spreading fake news, computer viruses, and other processes jeopardizing the accessibility of reliable information (Mikhailov, Petrov, et al., 2018; Pronchev, Proncheva & Goncharova, 2019).

This work studies the Runet users' reaction to outrageous behavior of an aggressive type, as well as their social attitudes.

2. Literature Review

The most important research subject is concerned with the factors contributing to the development of people's aggressive behavior in the social environment. The nature of impact of aggressive information relayed via the mass media was studied by L. Hjelle and D. Ziegler (1992). Proceeding from the social cognitive line in A. Bandura's theory of personality (Bandura, 1986) as the basis, the authors explored the behavior and 10-year transformation of schoolchildren who preferred watching "aggressive" programs and shows broadcasting cruel behavior. The psychologists could find out that those schoolchildren who opted for the "aggressive" content retained their inclination to aggressive behavior up to 10 years later (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992).

As a bright example of the impact the cruel content has on human social behavior, the case taking place in the USA in November, 2020 can be cited. After watching a movie about some characters who sold dead people's body parts to earn money, A. Sharp-Jefferson, an American, killed her underage children. According to the police, the woman denied having taken alcohol or drugs, which enables one to conclude that the harsh content affects human behavior psychologically (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

On the other hand, unlike that of the conventional institutions, the effects of the virtual space and social networks are random, spontaneous, and their influence on human personality turns out to
be uncontrollable at times (Pronchev, Proncheva & Goncharova, 2019). The fact cannot but be noted that an individual's socialization in social networks relies on building a certain personal image which is a result of the individual's social creativity (Pronchev & Muravjov, 2013; Osipova, Elishev & Pronchev, 2018).

In the study devoted to modeling the spread of aggression on social networks, C. Terizi and colleagues (2021) proposed a model for the spread of aggression from one user to another, depending on the user he/she is connected with - a regular or an aggressive one.

With regard to this, the authors believe it essential to study the attitude of the audience to aggressive and unethical behavior broadcast through public opinion leaders. One of the ways to build image in the social communication space is provocation – a deliberately scandalous trick or provocative, shocking behavior exhibited for drawing attention to oneself and clashing with legal, moral, social, and other standards adopted in the society (Vlasov & Lukina, 2005).

3. Methodological Framework

The object of this study is a video clip by the blogger Mellstroy broadcasting outrageous behavior of the aggressive type. The video clip shot in October 2020 recorded a fragment of the blogger's communication with Olesya Efremova, a model. Within the exchange, the girl provoked the blogger in every possible way by such phrases as: "Just accept you've lost", "Show me you are top. Not in words, but in action, show your body". Another girl in the same video frame adds to heating up the situation with her words: "Yeah, come on, come on". After which the popular video blogger grabs his peer by the hair, hits her face on the table, and then pushes her away from the frame at all (TV, 2020). This video clip was demonstrated to respondents during the survey and was accompanied by questions about their attitude to the blogger and his actions.

The research was conducted with the help of a mobile application created on the basis of the adjoint ideomotion method, Celebrium-X. This technique, almost cognominal to its developer, the international scientific research company Celebrium Labs, is basically a method for remote collection and group processing of mental and physiological responses to the presentation of various information (CL, 2021).

The Celebrium-X platform technologies are a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative sociological surveys and neuro-marketing, which enables researchers to conduct studies on rather small samples, without requiring massive material and time consumption; meanwhile, the representative and verified character is guaranteed.

This technique allows assessing the attitude of the audience (respondent sample) to the advertising materials (video, images, text) presented, as well as measuring some qualitative characteristics when they are perceived – trust, attraction of attention, speed of recognition, wish to buy, etc. (Rodionova, 2020a; Rodionova, 2020b).

Such a method allows analyzing all stages of reaction to the information, beginning with preparation to decision making and finishing with selecting an answer option. The sensors used in modern mobile devices and the application grant the opportunity of qualitative analysis of the information perception and evaluation process. Before the survey start, respondents are asked to calibrate their applications for controlling their individual reactions to the information. As the information to be studied by means of Celebrium-X, various images, video clips, and text excerpts are used; for higher quality exploration of the reactions, they are placed in a specially developed sequence. The principal advantage of such a technology is respondents' staying in their habitual environment, which allows minimizing researcher's influence on the decision making process and selecting the convenient time to complete the survey (the survey takes up to 15 minutes, on balance) (CL, 2021).

In this survey, only 2 options were offered to the respondents: they could either agree or disagree with statements accompanying the video clip and its scenes. Meanwhile, the Celebrium-X platform not merely took down the formal answer but it measured the respondents' confidence of
their answers, too.

A Celebrium study can register human reactions at 5 levels: the biological, emotional, cognitive, associative, and assertive ones. In this case, confidence is measured as a combined result of both conscious and unconscious brain mechanisms at work. It is important to note that unconscious mechanisms cannot be controlled by respondents (CL, 2021).

The obtained confidence index allows forecasting at the probability of up to 87% that the respondents’ real-life reaction and behavior will coincide with their reactions to the survey items. The index ranges from 0 to 100, where: 0-20 means the very low confidence level in agreeing with the statement; 20-35 – the low one; 35-50 – the one below average; 50-65 – the one higher than average; 65-80 – the high level; and 80-100 – the very high level of confidence.

The survey involved 459 people: 297 (65%) of them were women, and 162 (35%) – men. The respondents belonged to various age categories over 18, including those aged 55 and over. Their distribution according to age groups was as follows: 29% were those aged 18 to 24, 31% - 25 to 34 years old, 29% - 35 to 44 years old, 7% - aged from 44 to 55, and 4% were older than 55.

Most respondents live in the country’s largest cities, Moscow and Saint-Petersburg – these are 225 (49%) people, and 90 people (19%) live in million-plus cities. There are also 73 residents of larger towns (16%) which count some 100 thousand to 1 million population; 71 respondents (16%) come from rural settlements or small towns, with the population not exceeding 100 thousand people.

279 respondents (61%) have a higher education, and 136 people (30%) note they have not completed a higher education yet. Those having a secondary and secondary vocational education number 44 people (9%).

According to their marital status, 216 respondents (47%) are married, 108 people (24%) are engaged in serious relationships, with others being either not in serious relationships or divorced.

Thus, although the sample was small enough, the survey covered respondents with the most diverse social and demographic parameters.

The research procedure included several stages. So, first the respondents watched the 70 second video clip subdivided into 3 scenes:

1. The beginning of the conflict, as the girl provokes the young man verbally;
2. The point when the young man grabs the girl, shakes her head from side to side, and then hits her face on the table;
3. The point when the young man pushes the girl out from the video frame.

For each scene, the respondents were offered 5 similarly worded options creating correlation with 10 principal statements:

1. I feel respect for the actions of the young man from the video clip.
2. I get the feeling of aggression toward the young man when watching this video clip.
3. I get the feeling of aggression toward the girl when watching this video clip.
4. I feel disgust for the girl from this video.
5. I feel disgust for the young man from this video.

The list of 10 principal statements referring to the entire video clip and not to particular scenes is given below:

1. Fight is a good way of conflict resolution.
2. A situation as a young man raises a hand against a girl is normal.
3. The girl in this video “got as she deserved”.
4. I feel compassion toward the video clip girl.
5. I feel joy when watching this video clip.
6. This video made me laugh.
7. I feel fear when watching this video clip.
8. I was indignant at this video.
9. This video left me indifferent.
10. Such video clips are appropriate on the Internet.
4. Results and Discussions

Based on results of the analysis conducted, a number of trends has been found.

As for the respondents’ attitude to the video record in general, they feel compassion toward the girl; in particular, aggression toward the young man is noted in the first scene, and disgust – in the third one.

The indignation level (index) at watching the video clip is rather high, being above average in men and 93.9 – in women. Meanwhile, the respondents note they feel disgust toward the young man in the second scene; the third one and the blogger's behavior evokes aggression in them altogether.

Similarly, the respondents cannot say they feel joy when watching this video clip or that it has caused any positive emotions. This is associated with the fact the young man’s actions inspire respect neither in men, nor in women.

For the survey participants, fight is not an acceptable way of conflict resolution, just like the fact of cruel and violent behavior of men toward women.

Curiously enough, the lowest level of compassion for the girl was expressed by the female respondents. Meanwhile, the respondents note they do not feel any aggression toward the model.

The survey participants say this video has not left them indifferent but they point out such clips are not appropriate on the Internet because the young man’s actions do not inspire respect.

Figure 1 shows the results of the gender-specific study of the respondents for 10 general statements.

![The index of consent for 10 statements for the entire video](image)

**Figure 1:** The results of the gender-specific study of the respondents for 10 general statements  
**Source:** The authors

The following findings have been obtained in the survey of women.

The confidence index in compassion for the video clip girl is high: in scene 1, women feel aggression toward the young man.

The female respondents express the low level of agreement with the statement about fight being
an acceptable way of conflict resolution. However, in young girls, this index is higher than in women of other ages. They also note cruel behavior toward women is unacceptable.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that women aged 35 and over largely believe abuse of the model corresponds to her provocative behavior. Given that, the female respondents note the girl's behavior does not cause any feeling of aggression or disgust in general.

The girls' index "I feel fear" is higher than the average, with top results registered in the girls aged 25-34, which is also associated with aggression on the part of the young man.

Alongside this, the female respondents agree that this video is appalling. They note the feelings of aggression and disgust evoked when watching scenes 1 and 3. Girls aged 25-34 said they felt disgust toward the model in scene 2. Moreover, the survey participants confirm this video clip does not evoke any joy and laughter whatsoever.

On the other hand, the female respondents state that although video has not left them indifferent – as the young man's actions inspire no respect, – they do not feel aggression toward the girl. Meanwhile, they note that is also the reason why similar content should not be published.

The results of the survey conducted with women of various age groups are given in Figure 2.

Figure 2: The results of the survey among women of various age groups
Source: The authors

Similarly to women, the male respondents consider fight to be an unacceptable way of conflict resolution, sharing the point that behavior of men must not be violent toward women. However, the consent index is higher in this group. This is indicative of the fact that men are more forgiving to fights and can even justify physical assault toward women. The male respondents believe, too, that such video clips should not be published on the Internet.

They demonstrate the high extent of compassion toward the girl while registering the feeling of aggression emerging toward the young man; its top level was found in the respondents aged 26-30, while their 22-25-year-old peers marked the lower than average level.

As for the situation of getting positive emotions after watching the video record, the trend is the same: the respondents say the record brings them no positive emotions, associating it with the fact the young man's action inspires no respect, while the girl's actions evoke no aggression in them.

Men do note they were indignant at the video, too, but to a lower extent than women do. This is associated with their disgust for the blogger's behavior. Further on, the presented video clip has not
left men indifferent, either, yet this applies to a part of them only: the representatives of the group aged 22-25 have remained more indifferent than the participants of other age groups. These male respondents report the feeling of aggression toward the young man they get when watching the video.

What is more, this age category turned out to be the only one to express only partial agreement with the fact such clips should not be published on the Internet.

The results of the survey conducted with men of various age groups are given in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The results of the survey among men of various age groups
Source: The authors

Proceeding from the analysis of the findings according to the region of residence, it can be concluded that citizens of smaller towns are less forgiving, particularly as for statement No. 3 (“The girl in this video clip got as she deserved”) to the blogger’s actions in the video record. These respondents note they do not feel aggression toward the girl while the young man’s actions evoke disrespect and condemnation in them.

The respondents’ level of compassion for the girl is higher than the average, too. This is characterized by the fact that the surveyed ones have the attitude of disgust and certain aggression to the blogger’s behavior.

This video clip does not evoke any positive emotions in them, either. The level of fear has been found to be at the “higher than average” mark in residents of the metropolitan cities only (the young man’s behavior inspires aggression in them), while for other urban settlements, the figure was “below average”. The index of indifference to this video is not high, as the young man’s actions did not seem respectful to the respondents.

All respondents mentioned they were indignant at the video. According to them, such a video clip evokes disgust and aggression toward the young man.

Similarly, the respondents note such video clips should not be published on the Internet because the young man’s behavior inspires disgust and provokes aggressive behavior.

Figure 4 shows the survey results according to the size of the respondents’ region of residence.
According to the survey results, the married respondents believe fight is not a way of conflict resolution, unlike those having not registered their relationships or having none at all. However, all respondents express an extremely low level of agreement with the statement that a man can raise a hand against a woman.

On the other hand, notably, the highest consent with the statement that the way the girl was treated corresponded to the type of her behavior was voiced by the married surveyed ones. Nevertheless, all respondents say the young man's actions do not inspire respect while the girl's actions probably evoke an insufficient quantity of aggression to justify physical assault toward her.

With regard to this, their level of compassion toward the girl is as high, and the blogger's actions inspire disgust and aggression in them, too.

The highest level of fear was marked by the respondents engaged in serious relationships (their fear level was "higher than the average"). The respondents having no serious relationships as of the point of the survey rated their fear level as "below average".

The research results according to the respondents’ marital status criterion are given in Fig. 5.

**Figure 4**: The results of the survey according to the residence region size
**Source**: The authors

**Figure 5**: The research results according to the respondents’ marital status criterion.
**Source**: The author
Our research results are confirmed by the studies with a similar focus.

For example, according to the study results of teenage aggression in social networks V.S. Sobkin and A.V. Fedotova (2019) approved that when showing scenes of aggression, 66.1% of respondents noted that they "do not like" seeing scenes of violence in social networks. At the same time, 25.4% of respondents pointed that they are "indifferent" to such scenes. Almost one in ten shows a positive attitude: 6.3% indicate that they "like" watching such scenes, and 2.3% “specially select” pages that show violence scenes.

G.U. Soldatova, S.V. Chigarkova and E.L Lvova (2017) investigated online aggression among schoolchildren in Moscow and Moscow region. The respondents indicated “entertainment” and “power” (the desire to show strength and prove own superiority) as the main motives for cyber aggression. According to 31% of teens, online bullying can also be a way to maintain reputation. All age groups agreed that the responsibility for regulating the digital environment and aggressiveness in the network rests with the moderators of online communities.

In the analytical report of the study “Cyberbullying: the scale of the problem in Russia” conducted by VCIOM on June 11, 2021 it is noted that 42% of Russian Internet users believe that over the past five years, there have been more offensive posts and comments in the domestic segment of the Internet. 27% believe that their number has not changed, and 9% answered that “there are fewer of them”. Almost half of Russian Internet users (40%) believe that the best way to solve the problem in the event of insults and aggressive behavior in the Internet is to block the offender and remove him/her from contacts. 23% believe that it is necessary to report what happened in support, 22% answered that the situation should be ignored, 19% advise to contact the law enforcement agencies, and 7% - to stop using social networks for a while (VCIOM, 2021).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Thus, the following conclusions can be worded in the course of the research:

- neither social group of the respondents felt respect for the young man’s actions;
- mainly, the respondents got the feeling of aggression toward the young man, as well as disrespect for his actions;
- it was extremely rarely that the respondents noted the girl’s behavior to evoke aggression;
- the respondents were not indifferent to the video clip they watched;
- the majority of the surveyed believe such video clips cannot be allowed for publishing on the Internet.

Alongside direct correlations, the research involved cross-analysis of social and demographic characteristics, too.

Importantly, the research results have shown the respondents’ negative attitude to publishing of such video clips in the media space. Such an attitude of the audience to the aggressive content is indicative of the audience’s realizing the negative effect produced by the aggressive content on people’s psychological sphere and social behavior.

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