The aim of this research paper is to reveal and explore the negative concepts, i.e. anti-values, verbalized in the professionally compiled media texts on the topic of YouTube as they shape the idea of what YouTube is and how it functions. The authors identify anti-values in the newspaper and magazine articles, reveal linguistic means through which they are implemented, as well as define their relationship with the context. The authors attempt to rationalize the use of anti-values in the texts about YouTube and provide a commentary on both linguistic and extra-linguistic features of these entities. Anti-values reflect concepts, phenomena, ideas or notions that are deemed unacceptable or undesirable in some cases universally, and in some specifically by the users of the platform or those affected by it. The research findings can be used in both axiological and socio-linguistic studies conducted for pragmatic, scientific or educational purposes.

1. Introduction

As a social phenomenon YouTube has been and continues to be a newsworthy topic. Posting videos and reacting to them is no longer the only integration that YouTube stimulates: the social practice centered around the largest video hosting platform in the world now involves talking about it.

The narrative built around YouTube may differ depending on who creates the text, the pragmatic goal the speaker pursues, the ultimate addressee of the text, among other factors. While non-professional communication on the topic may reflect the general user-related attitude towards the platform, professionally-compiled texts of mass media communication on the topic may reflect the most prominent concepts, phenomena, ideas or notions that are addressed by the users of the platform or those affected by it. The research conducted for pragmatic, scientifi-cally by the users of the platform or those affected by it.

The authors identify anti-values in the newspaper and magazine articles, reveal linguistic means through which they are implemented, as well as define their relationship with the context. The authors attempt to rationalize the use of anti-values in the texts about YouTube and provide a commentary on both linguistic and extra-linguistic features of these entities. Anti-values reflect concepts, phenomena, ideas or notions that are deemed unacceptable or undesirable in some cases universally, and in some specifically by the users of the platform or those affected by it. The research findings can be used in both axiological and socio-linguistic studies conducted for pragmatic, scientific or educational purposes.

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The narrative built around YouTube may differ depending on who creates the text, the pragmatic goal the speaker pursues, the ultimate addressee of the text, among other factors. While non-professional communication on the topic may reflect the general user-related attitude towards the platform, professionally-compiled texts of mass media – due to the specifics of the genre – tend to address the most prominent features, events, personalities that make up the phenomenon of YouTube, both highlighting the achievements and exposing the problems of the service. When studied from the standpoint of linguistics and axiology, the latter text variety reveals lexis, grammar and style indicative of certain assessments as well as values and anti-values realized through language. Though there seems to be a plethora of studies devoted to the information technology in general, the number of research papers on YouTube is far less representative. In the article Information Technology and Moral Values published in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2012), J. Sullins gives an overview of how information technology has a direct impact on people’s value systems and thus changes the way information is perceived and handled. The author raises awareness of how information and personal data can be used in a variety of morally corrupt ways, dwelling on such aspects as moral values in information recording, organizing and accessing; on the danger of malware, spyware as well as the concerns about AI and Alife (Sullins, 2012). Yet, J. Sullins does not address the role the language has in shaping these certain values and anti-values, nor does he touch upon the instrumental function the language has in spreading knowledge and de-mystifying basic notions and rules for the general public – something that this article is set to do.

YouTube as a communicative system is present in the research of M. Dynel, where participatory roles of YouTube users are closely studied and structured – the author identifies the three levels of communication, which involve taking the roles of speakers, hearers, the roles of the senders and recipients of a video as well as those who post comments (Dynel, 2014). An extensive study has been conducted by J. Burgess and J. Green in “YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture” (Burgess and Green, 2018), where the authors of the book cover such spheres of YouTube as its relationship with the media, its popular culture and its community among other things. One of the results of this research is the revelation of the fact that YouTube today is a phenomenon which...
generates discourse, encompasses communication both on and off the platform, is co-dependent on formal media and yet is transformational in itself (Burgess and Green, 2018).

A different approach can be found in Lange (2007); the author suggests that “YouTube participation involves more than strictly public or private interaction”, “participants manipulate media to maintain social networks and intimacy amid public scrutiny”. According to the article, the definition of communication as private or public depends on the individual needs and types of social interaction on the platform (Lange, 2007). Another aspect is examined by Chau (2010): the author focuses on a certain age group— that of adolescents, and raises awareness of the ways the youth experiences the platform when interacting and participating in its various dimensions (Chau, 2010).

There are also research papers which look at how users shape their on-line identities with visual and textual tools. Some content creators draw on the discursive exploitation of the boundaries between the expert and layperson: thanks to discursive competence, professional knowledge and practice, vloggers develop a certain perception image of themselves and build their follower base (Bhatia, 2018). A thorough analysis of how YouTubers create their on-line persona and communicate their identity to the viewers can be found in Taylor (2006) and Strangolove (2010). An extensive research on the anthropology of the phenomenon of YouTube can be found in the book by YouTube’s Head of Culture and Trends, Allocca (2018), where the author explains the reasons why our interaction with videos, the ways of sharing and acquiring knowledge as well as patterns of consuming entertainment help to form a new culture, generate meanings and lead to a reality driven by individuals who share videos (Allocca, 2018).

As for communication features facilitated by YouTube, a study has been conducted by Ng (2018) where he identifies and examines such text characteristics of news broadcasts on Facebook and YouTube as coherence, intertextuality, and multimodality. The author comes to the conclusion that besides being an engaging way to process information and stimulate interaction, YouTube is effective in conveying intended meanings and promoting a system of ideals, thus forming the basis of economic or political policy (Ng, 2018). Even in the first years of the platform there were communities on YouTube that created “the environment in which new literacies, new cultural forms, and new social practices – situated in and appropriate to the culture of user-created online video – were originated, adopted and retained” (Burgess et al., 2020).

Thus, although there are social and linguistic studies on YouTube, they do not fully touch upon anti-values or examine the way they are realized and disseminated through language. Yet, it seems relevant and timely to fill the gap in this sphere as YouTube is more than ever an important news topic, both a system and an instrument, a phenomenon spoken about in a multitude of media texts.

We take into consideration the research data of previous studies and apply existing findings to extend the knowledge of axiological features of modern texts about YouTube; to decipher discursive practices of media representatives. The rationale behind this research is to uncover the meanings that are delivered to a vast readership across the globe through the medium of newspaper/magazine articles, and to explore the morale, i.e. what is considered “bad”, by the authors of the texts as expressed through anti-values. There are three main questions posed on the data gathered for the current research:

1. What are the negative concepts (i.e. anti-values) realized in the mass media texts about YouTube?
2. What language items at the level of grammar, lexis or syntax contribute to verbalizing a certain concept?
3. Why are anti-values a part of the overall discourse of YouTube?

Drawing on the studies that explore YouTube as a communicative system and the studies that look into the relationships between YouTube and formal media, we aim to a) give an overall linguistic assessment of the text features of the articles about YouTube published in newspapers and magazines b) identify and study anti-values verbalized in these texts, and c) provide a commentary on the connection between the negative social phenomena and the language means chosen to describe them. The objectives of the study include such research activities as building a corpus of texts published in formal media on the topic of YouTube; analyzing the texts for content, linguistic features, and anti-values; identifying the language means through which anti-values are realized verbally; categorizing anti-values based on their pragmatic features.

As the result of the conducted research, it has been possible to prove the hypothesis that along with values texts of the corpus contain anti-values, which represent the problems of the platform and concerns of the text authors. Moreover, it was hypothesized that certain anti-values would refer, to a certain extent, to the viewers of the videos or to the creators on the platform.

This research paper continues the methodological trend of examining discourse for implicit and explicit meanings, contributes to the study of value-based communication, reveals most prominent negative concepts that exist in the texts about YouTube and for the first time (to the extent of the authors’ knowledge) presents a comprehensive and structured system of anti-values associated with YouTube with a commentary on its implications. The importance of this study lies in its timeliness, trans-disciplinary nature, contribution to professional and non-professional awareness of social and linguistic phenomena attributed to the biggest video platform in the world.

2. Literature review

For the sake of conducting a coherent study and to clarify the subject matter of this article, it is crucial that we examine and define such notions as “values”, “anti-values”.

Cambridge Dictionary defines values as “the beliefs people have, especially about what is right and wrong and what is most important in life, that control their behavior” (Cambridge Dictionary). Generally, researchers agree that values are features of behavior based on the idea of what is good and on the criteria that allow people to justify their actions and evaluations (see Rokeach, 1979; Schwartz, 1992; Narvaez, 2019; Hart, 1971). Be it an intrinsic value (the actual universal value of something), extrinsic value (something that is good in its function of leading to something else), or a systemic value (an element in a manmade system of culturally-dependent values) (Hartman, 2014) these constructs have special meaning to people and coordinate their behavior. More than that, values guide not only action but also judgement, choice, attitude, argument, assessment, rationalization (Rokeach, 1979:2).

F. Harbour (Harbour, 1995) differentiates between core moral values shared by the vast majority of societies, and secondary (tertiary) moral values. The latter exist, according to the author, because societies and cultures build on the basic moral values in different ways (Harbour, 1995). Values “are central to the protection and on-going management of cultural heritage” (McClelland et al., 2013), an idea “accompanied by the emergence of a values-based approach to the management of cultural heritage” (McClelland et al., 2013). Finally, there are individual values, which constantly go through change and this natural change has antecedents and consequences (Rokeach, 1979) in the form of social practices, culture- and time-related patterns, mass media policies and methods as well as other outputs.

A complete opposite to values is the concept of anti-values, “the negative foils... against which positive value notions are conceptualized and calibrated” (Sluiter and Rosen, 2008). These are constructs that are repellent to self and in relation to others, things to avoid or to refuse to accept as true, good, or reasonable. According to E. Husserl, all values and anti-values originate in the consciousness (Husserl, 1922). Whether it is a value that we are perceiving, or an anti-value, can be judged by the feelings that these psychological, moral and language phenomena evoke – we either feel “a sentiment of approval or disapproval; there exists a matching, persistent, intercultural pattern of positive or negative affect.
toward the general category of behavior or character represented” (Harbour, 1995).

We believe that, as it is the case with values, anti-values may be shared vastly by the majority of nations and cultures or be dependent on the ethnic group mentality or a professional group policy or an individual. What is considered as shameful, unacceptable or generally intolerable for a certain social organization, might be a norm with another. For instance, being mainstream in real life is not the same as being mainstream on-line if you are a content creator aiming to grow the follower base. Any on-line platform policy may be viewed as an improvement or even ignored or, vice-versa, considered a hindrance depending on whether there are authors of videos or just consumers of the digital content on the perception end of the policy.

Though predominantly a philosophical term, anti-values are an important text feature within the discourse on YouTube and as such they stimulate a thorough linguistic research. Being the cognitive and psychological opposites of values, anti-values acquire a certain language form and are connected, on the one hand, with eternal fears and antagonistic concepts that are inherent in human beings across the majority of cultures, and on the other – based on culture-specific and historically-defined phenomena typical of the Western society. Studying these elements through the lens of axiology and linguistics allows for an in-depth understanding of the connection between the mass media rhetoric, current social issues and the language that caters for certain beliefs and ideas.

3. Data, methodological tools and research procedure

3.1. Data

As one of the oldest mediums for spreading information and covering issues for mass readers, traditional media possess the ability both to shape public’s opinion and to express it in the form of videos, images, texts, etc. On the one hand, reporters, producers, media representatives have to be aware of the on-going social, political and cultural situation and logics when presenting ideas (Gingras, 2014); on the other, they still have room for choosing one type of content over the other, formatting and structuring it. A relevant study aimed at defining the instrumental power of mass media belongs to H. Van den Bulck, who, after analysing Flemish public television programs and their content in the middle of the 21st century came to the conclusion that by means of organizing programs and carefully deciding on their content, Flemish government aimed to shape cultural emancipation of Flemish citizens [Van den Bulck, 2001]. According to the author, media had tools to exercise educational imperative, the promotion of culture and identity, policy option in the entertainment programs, and even implement programs that strived to educate viewers into good citizenship.

J. Stuart Smith has given a thorough account of existing research findings of different authors within sociolinguistics in an attempt to establish whether television as means of mass communication influences language and behavior [Stuart-Smith, 2007]. Although there seems to be not enough empirical data on whether language of the viewers is dramatically influenced on the level of core systems of the language, phonetics and grammar, many researchers agree that mass media (televison, in particular) have the potential to influence behavior and certain language aspects, adding models shown by the media into their own discourse (see Rogers, 1995; Brandt, 1984; Muhr, 2003; Holly, 2001).

The mobility of text today is even higher due to the technical ability of online representation of mass publications. The facilities available to media today determine the speed, the format and the features of news circulation. It is due to these reasons that we have chosen the genre of a newspaper/magazine article – it is both traditional and innovative, influential and omnipresent.

This research paper presents the results of a linguistic, discursive and pragmatic analysis of 40 articles published in the period between 2016 and 2020 in long-established technology magazines and newspapers (the oldest text source in the corpus dates back to 1877 – The Washington Post). Thus, we examined only professionally compiled texts aimed at non-professional readers and published in editorial press and on-line sources reporting about YouTube. The following text sources were used when compiling the corpus: www.computerworld.com, www.wired.com, www.theguardian.com, www.forbes.com, www.nbcnews.com, www.washingtonpost.com.

3.2. Methodological tools

In order to reach the aims of the study, we had to employ methods and ideas of several approaches.

3.2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

Firstly, because we deal with a highly disputed topic closely connected with social and political features of the western society, we have turned to the methods of CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis). Although there is a plethora of definitions for the term discourse, within this research we take up the notion and explanation of discourse suggested by T. van Dijk, who views discourse as a combination of linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural factors [Van Dijk, 1997]. According to the author, discourse should be considered across different language levels, such as syntax, semantics, style and rhetoric; certain processes of interlocutors need to be taken into consideration – the ways they produce, perceive and understand speech and language; special role is given to contextual setting, within which definite actions and acts take place in society and which determine the way people use language [Van Dijk, 1997]. Instrumental power of a discourse and the control over discourse lies in the ability to penetrate different spheres of life and have immediate influence on the personal and societal knowledge, sets of beliefs, norms and social rules, etc. (Van Dijk, 1993: 258).

A similar idea is expressed by N. Fairclough: social institutions have the power to influence communication, define and shape certain images as well as values (Fairclough, 1995). We believe that YouTube as a public domain generates communication which can be influenced and directed through the use of discursive resources.

Secondly, as R. Wodak and M. Meyer point out, it is part of CDE to de-mystify “power through the systematic and retroductive investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)” (Wodak and Meyer, 2008). Thus, we turn to CDA for its explanatory critique tradition. In case of YouTube, as the research has shown, a range of negative meanings is attributed to its practices. The latter include the platform’s recommendation mechanism and its policy, its reoccurring inability to create a safe and comfortable environment for the viewers and creators, its limitations on tracking and handling harmful content, among other practices that attract attention of the media and cause controversy. Yet, we gather all this from the narrations of media representatives, who may or may not be entirely correct or objective in their observations, fears and interpretations. It seems to us that CDA contributes to making the recipients of the texts more aware of the “discursive practice in which they participate when they use language and consume texts” (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 88); as a result, the power relations between text producers and text consumers may undergo certain changes: readers might not be able to change the modality of a newspaper or magazine entirely, but the change may come in the way of perception and further dissemination of cultural and social meanings related to YouTube and technology in general.

We believe, a comprehensive analysis of the texts about YouTube may come from understanding the links between ‘micro’ structures (i.e. texts/verbal interaction) and “macro” structures (Fairclough, 1995). According to N. Fairclough, establishing the relationships between text and society is instrumental: text does not only have a “local significance”, but inevitably leads to changes in social structures, power relations and value systems. As the author puts it, complex study of all three dimensions (discursive practice, text and social practice) provides an understanding of how people – within the scope of this research – YouTube
text authors and text consumers – actively participate in creating a rule-bound world in everyday practices (Fairclough, 1992).

For the reasons above, we have studied linguistic characteristics of texts (their structure, style, modality, metaphors, wording, grammar, etc.) so as to shed light on how the discourse is activated on the textual level, how ideas are verbally sustained and backed up, how they lead to certain interpretative conclusions. We have also taken into consideration extra-linguistic concepts that helped us interpret the language data. Drawing on the political, economic, social and historical reality of the American society, we have been able to establish the connection between the language practice and the reasons behind certain linguistic tradition as well as novelty. As R.H. Jones puts it, it is important to be mindful of “the broader global contexts in which technologies and information are produced, circulated, and valued” (Jones et al., 2015: 10).

3.2.2. Axiology

Within this research, the study of values and anti-values plays a crucial role in deciphering both social and discourse-specific codes. As N. Fairclough puts it, social practices include (among other elements) beliefs, knowledge and values of social subjects, meaning that if the aim is to reveal underlying issues of a discourse, one has to look at values as an element with distinct properties which falls into the field of study of distinct disciplines. According to the author, “the dialectical character of relations between elements underscores the value and importance of working across disciplines in a ‘transdisciplinary’ way” [Fairclough, 2001, 3]. Values and anti-values are foundational to CDA because the “workings of value and valuative processes are at the heart of systems of specific mental representation” [Sowińska, 2013, 792]. In other words, values and anti-values of different discourses are promoted to create certain systems, beliefs, behavior modes and patterns, and CDA “constitutes a resource for investigating, and intervening in, issues of language and power” [Fairclough, 1995, p. 227].

As anti-values fall under the study of axiology, it was crucial to address basic notions and principles of this branch of social sciences. Axiology as the study of values has been incorporated into the study of discourses and employed alongside linguistics in an attempt to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of a variety of language and social phenomena (see Thibault, 1989; Cap, 2010; Sowińska, 2013). Current research is based on the idea that value theory aims “to cover such areas of critical analysis and debate that includes truth, utility, goodness, beauty, right conduct, and obligation” (Hiles, 2008, p.52), as well as concepts that fall into the category of “bad” or “wrong”.

Value-based world view is not a homogenous structure. Values can be shared, associated, changed; patterns of moral evaluations and codes of behavior differ from culture to culture [Harbour, 1995, p. 170]. Both values and anti-values range depending on their affiliation to certain cultural, ethnic or professional groups. We believe that anti-values are vastly predetermined by the social and circumstantial factors, such as the co-ordinates of time and space of a given narrative, the tradition as well as new reality, by the individuals involved in the process of communication and valuation. This conception has allowed for a differentiation between anti-values relevant for YouTube creators and for YouTube viewers (see Table 1), as these two categories of people are mostly affected by YouTube practices and the narratives built around it.

3.2.3. Identifying and naming anti-values

In order to identify anti-values in the texts about YouTube, we have analyzed the context, paying attention to evaluative words, negative connotations of words, modality of the texts, and monitored articles for recurring concepts, ideas or notions with negative assessments or meanings. Employing the principles of semantic analysis, we have looked into such relations as synonymy, metaphorical and associative connections between words and meanings, studied representative features of words which eventually constituted the set of verbal means of an anti-value. Awareness of a particular organization of the physical and social world [Gillmore and Atkins, 1992], together with interpretative analysis facilitated creation of lexical-semantic sets, which included the key word, or dominant lexeme, as well as other language items used in naming negative concepts.

The key work reflects the most precise and all-encompassing meaning of an anti-value, while the rest of the lexical set may convey additional meanings and is represented by verbs, adjectives, adverbs, nouns or phrases. In the process of determining the name of an anti-value, we employed monolingual dictionaries to dissect different shades of meaning of the words that denoted anti-values and chose the word that best described the semantic features of an anti-value. In some cases, the most frequent language choice of the authors gave the name to an anti-value as the unit that commonly denotes a certain notion due to an established language tradition.

It is important to mention that, as D. Geeraerts points out, not all elements in the group are equally representative of a particular idea or notion [Geeraerts, 2017]: some words have direct semantical connection to the key word and others are included into the set based on the contextual or conceptual relevance. These systems are dynamic and subject to change, yet stable because of the existence of key meanings supported by certain words and word combinations which are generally accepted and used by language speakers.

3.2.4. Linguistic analysis of the texts about YouTube

Before turning to the discussion of anti-values identified in the texts about YouTube we believe it is important first to look at the context which allows their full “functioning”. In our opinion, the genre of a newspaper or magazine article is one of the most useful for realization and dissemination of axiological meanings. A lot of factors influence this viewpoint: firstly, the length of the article allows for a diversity of ways to express certain ideas. We are not saying that it is only through lengthy texts that a value or anti-value can be realized – in specific cases only one or a few words are enough to get assessments across to the readers. Yet, because there is this chance to expand on any meaning, a more thorough and methodical approach may be and is taken by the authors of the texts. Moreover, as the research shows, there are cases when anti-values, negative assessments or warnings are present only implicitly – the format of the article offers subtlety and efficiency at the same time.

Secondly, and here we cannot but agree with Burgess and Green (2018), traditional media (including their on-line versions) frame YouTube – the way it is perceived, the way it should be perceived and the way users of the platform can engage with it and each other, among other things (Burgess and Green, 2018). This instrumental power that has been inherent in news media for decades is still present today – this can be traced by the circulation statistics and views count of the technology magazines and general media covering technology topics used for this research. Hence, thanks to the reach of the traditional media, text authors are put in the position of discourse makers, they are allowed to set trends, to voice concerns, to inform, to assess and to generally manage and direct rhetoric.
Another feature of the analyzed articles is concise and comprehensive headlines, which in 60% of the cases transfer the negative or positive attitude or assessment of the author towards the issue under discussion, i.e. headlines themselves present values or anti-values. This clarity influences the opinion of the readers even when they do not proceed to read the whole article. Moreover, 96% of the headlines are phrased as full sentences rather than shorter phrases intended to provoke interest of the readers (e.g. YouTube Disables 210 Channels That Spread Disinformation About Hong Kong Protests (Conger, 2019)). As Dor (2003) has pointed it out, headlines “direct readers to construct the optimal context for interpretation” (Dor, 2003). We also agree with the author on the point that a lot of work of the journalists goes into developing “an understanding of the readers—their state-of-knowledge, their beliefs and expectations and their cognitive styles” (Dor, 2003).

Thus, articles about YouTube possess the features traditional for the genre of a newspaper article, are aimed at non-professional readers, are optimized to reach the widest audience possible and carry axiological meanings in the headlines as well as in the text.

3.3. Research procedure

The procedure for this research included a number of steps listed below in the chronological order:

1. Selecting sources of the corpus materials and conducting content analysis (based on such criteria as the topic of the article, authors of the articles (professionals), the genre of the articles)
2. Identifying linguistic features of the corpus texts
3. Analyzing the texts for axiological meanings and recurrent ideas criticized or negatively valued by the authors of the articles
4. Conducting semantic analysis of the lexical-semantic set of an anti-value, identifying language means on the level of grammar, style, lexis, which help to verbalize certain meanings
5. Systematizing words and word combinations with certain semantic features into sets that comprise the verbal realization of an anti-value
6. Rating anti-values based on their relevance/frequency of use in the texts
7. Categorizing anti-values according to the social group of the anti-value recipient/holder
8. Analyzing the connection between social processes and language forms of anti-values

3.4. Results and discussion anti-values in the texts about YouTube

The conducted research has enabled us to identify the following anti-values in the texts about YouTube published in technology magazines and general media: addiction, backlash, censorship, competition, data misuse, fragmentation, greed, loneliness, mainstream, risk, YouTube policy, harmful content. However, this list of anti-values may be expanded if a bigger number of texts is analyzed (Chart 1).

3.4.1. Rating anti-values

We have looked into the way anti-values are realized in the texts via the English language and stylistic devices. The study has shown that anti-values are verbalized through the key word and a lexical set. The former is a word which fully reflects and transmits the semantic features of the anti-value, i.e. it is its name, while the latter is a set of words or phrases which are synonymous to the name of the anti-value or carry additional shades of meaning. Based on the number of recurrences of anti-values in the form of their key words as well as their lexical-semantic sets we have created a rating of anti-values – from the most prevalent to the least common ones as presented by the authors of the texts about YouTube.

As it can be seen from the chart, the most undesirable notion for the authors of the texts and presumably for their readers is the notion, the idea and the fact of the existence of harmful content, while the least covered issue is that of being mainstream on the platform. We need to point out that when gathering data about the extent to which anti-values are spread in the analyzed articles, we have counted the number of instances anti-values were present in the context, rather than the actual words which denote these meanings. Such method allowed us to engage with the context when anti-values were expressed implicitly but never-the-less available for perception and interpretation, and avoid increasing the statistics for certain anti-values in the cases when the authors used the same words multiple times for one reason or another.

3.4.2. Language representation of the anti-value ‘harmful content’

Let us examine linguistic representation of the anti-value harmful content and dissect the cultural and societal repercussions of the notion:

The video platform has been under pressure from experts and watchdog groups for years to address its role in hosting and spreading hateful content, as researchers showed that its algorithm tended to drag users from mainstream videos toward extremist political content through the use of its autoplay feature and recommendation system.

YouTube said its new policy would aim to “prevent our platform from being used to incite hatred, harassment, discrimination and violence.” (Collins, 2019).

In the discourse fragment above, it is possible to identify the realization of the anti-value harmful content. Although the key word that denotes the concept is not present in the text, the author infers the negative meaning through the lexical-semantic set: “hateful content”; “extremist political content”; “to incite hatred, harassment, discrimination and violence.” All of these notions generally cause conflict, hurt feelings and disharmony in almost any society, so here the author explicitly names all of the issues the platform has with the content that gets posted there. There are also means of showing that harmful content is a problem – the author uses such expressions as “The video platform has been under pressure from experts and watchdog groups for years” to show the urgency of the matter, and states that the platform’s algorithm “drags users” from what is considered to be a mainstream video (i.e. oriented at the general public) to

![Chart 1. Instances of language presentation of anti-values in the texts about YouTube.](chart1.png)

ANTI-VALUES
specifically designed propaganda of culturally and socially disapproved phenomena – possibly despite their will. Thus, by analyzing the language representation of the anti-value, we arrive at a broader, macro-level, which involves making conclusions about the opportunities that technologies possess in reinforcing content upon consumers by using default settings and mechanisms that cannot be influenced or adjusted.

Another example of harmful content can be found in the passage below:

With 400 hours of video being uploaded to YouTube every minute, the company has struggled to stay on top of every video that violates its policies against hate speech, harassment, and other harmful content. It has struggled even more with the question of whether and where to draw those lines in the first place (Lapowsky, 2018).

This time the name of the anti-value is present in the text along with other words and phrases that sum up its notion: “hate speech, harassment, and other harmful content.” Similarly to the first fragment cited earlier, the addressee of the text illustrates that this kind of content is unacceptable and undesirable by providing the details on how YouTube is fighting against such videos: “the company has struggled to stay on top of every video that violates its policies”, while the scale of the problem can be perceived through the factual information also provided for the readers: “With 400 h of video being uploaded to YouTube every minute”. The urgency of the problem and the ongoing attempts to limit harmful videos can be inferred through the use of the Present Perfect tense in both text fragments, with dubious results for the company (“the video platform has been under pressure … for years”; “the company has struggled”; “it has struggled even more…”).

3.4.3. Language representation of the anti-value ‘YouTube policy’

Both fragments of discourse analyzed earlier mention one more anti-value – YouTube policy, although it does not appear as such in the contexts above. All the reader can gather from these texts is that YouTube policy is relevant – the authors talk about “new policy” and “violating its policy”. Yet, if new policies of the platform are designed to be beneficial for the viewers, they present an obstacle for the creators who may have difficulty publishing and keeping content on the platform:

But could this change have any negative consequences? Lauren Rearick brings up one possible affect:

Hopefully YouTube’s review of content aligning with policies doesn’t mean an infringement on creativity. Last month, YouTube came under fire when numerous LGBTQ videos were censored as a result of “community flagging.” The platform has since apologized for the miscategorization, but has yet to announce how future material would be deemed sensitive. As they...begin taking a closer look at creators, perhaps they’ll arrive at a more definitive answer of what content will fall under the platform’s “Restricted Mode.” (Linke, 2017 (a)).

Although such phrases as “infringement on creativity”, “videos were censored”, “apologized for the miscategorization” seem to be exempt of a personal assessment and merely inform the readers, there is still a distinct attempt to voice the fears and criticism of the platform’s management – “could this change have any negative consequences?”; “one possible affect”, as well as to express doubt: “hopefully…”, “perhaps they’ll arrive at a more definitive answer”.

Due to the fact that this research covers the materials for the period of several years, it has been possible to follow the way a certain discussion unfolds over the years and to keep track of whether an anti-value loses its negative component for the communities in focus (i.e. for the viewers and for YouTube creators) as seen through the lens of magazines and newspapers. The research has shown that anti-values discussed in 2014 were still verbalized in the discourse on YouTube in 2019, and such is the case with harmful content and YouTube policy. We believe that these two anti-values are co-dependent: as insulting, discriminatory and hate videos are continuously published on the platform, YouTube’s management continues to change and review their policy so as to eliminate or restrict harmful content. Yet, if the new policies of the service are designed to be beneficial for the viewers, they present a hindrance for those who create content, as it is increasingly harder to interpret the guidelines of the service, as it can be seen here:

The YouTube moderators said the rapid hiring growth and frequent policy changes created a disorganized and stressful environment, which sometimes made policing content confusing, forcing managers to make one-off decisions to interpret them (Dwoskin, 2019).

In the article, the author sums up the explanation of YouTube’s moderators who experienced hardships with drawing the line between harmful and sensitive content, causing confusion and turning YouTube, according to the article, into “a disorganized and stressful environment”.

3.4.4. Categorization of anti-values according to a social group

Although perceived by the general public, all of the identified anti-values can be categorized according to a person or a group of people for whom a certain notion is (more) undesirable than for others (Table 1). Such distinction exists due to the fact that values, and we believe that anti-values also, “are capable of being structurally organized within the individual and the society not only in terms of priority, but also in terms of extensiveness, universality of application, and consistency” (Rokeach, 1979). While some of the revealed notions may not disturb certain readers or users of the platform on a personal level, these same notions may be interpreted as negative by the others. However, it is important to note that in the analyzed texts all anti-values are linguistically designed to be perceived as such – through the use of the context, negative assessment words (“which is bad enough when directed at adult women, horrifying when directed at a 10-year-old” (Ellis, 2019)); negative connotations (“all these companies…prioritize growth over anything else. …if growth is the goal, then user experience is not the goal” (Swisher as cited by Popken, 2018)); and style (They suck you in (metaphor), and systematically learn how to manipulate your brain, so that you spend hours every day descending into a rabbit hole (metaphor) of unproductive dissatisfaction” (Elgan, 2017)).

Below, all of the identified anti-values are grouped according to their relevance to a certain community:

Of course, such categorization of anti-values according to the subject is conditioned by the context which “hosts” these notions, and is relevant for this particular discourse. It may be argued, that greed or loneliness are universal anti-values, not limited to YouTube viewers, and YouTube policy is not something that is designed to do any kind of harm. But because we are dealing with texts of certain topicality and modality, we believe such classification to be possible and even necessary for better understanding of the meanings realized in these texts.

3.4.5. Discussion

But what is the pragmatics of the professionals who work on writing articles about YouTube which reveal and disseminate certain anti-values? We believe that their primary goal is to inform and to raise awareness of the issues that the platform faces today, which, in essence, reflect the general negative trends in the sphere of information technology. Harmful content is a problem that can be present across platforms and not only exclusive for youtube.com; loneliness has been a topic for discussion ever since the Internet and social networks began building communities on-line; greed of the producers and content creators today is both a driving force behind their creations and a drawback that leads to numbers dominating over quality on the platform and in any digital sphere. It appears that the narrative around YouTube, which is created to a great extent through the media, is aimed to stimulate public interest and keep the conversation going about such spheres of modern life as online image and presence, on-line safety and privacy of data, false claims and fake news, emotional awareness and mental health issues affected by on-line experiences, etc.
However, it is not “talking” for the sake of “talking” – the discourse under study is also a way to express concern for and on behalf of millions of people around the world. The instrumental power of the articles lies in the ability of the authors to shape the ideas of morality in the ever-growing sphere of information technology. They do not only show what is “wrong” with on-line social platforms, and YouTube in particular, but also demonstrate ways to influence the situation. Throughout the texts readers may encounter detailed explanations, useful links, facts that may be hard to get if one does not know where to search, as well as instructions and advice. Whether this happens more out of genuine care and concern of the media or their desire to monetize on hot topics, it is hard to measure, but we do allow for a mixture of both.

4. Conclusion

The study of the YouTube discourse has allowed us to come to the conclusion that valutative concepts are aimed to guide actions, judgements, rationalization – the idea supported by Rokeach (1979). Discourse on YouTube realizes both moral anti-values and tertiary/secondary ones [Harbour, 1995], all of which have negative affect towards the category of behavior.

Following van Dijk’s proposition [Van Dijk, 1997] that discourse should be considered across different language levels, we have investigated the discourse on YouTube at the level of syntax, semantics, style and rhetoric, i.e. looked at micro- and macro-levels [Fairclough, 1992] in order to see how exactly discourse on YouTube is activated.

Having examined the corpus of texts about YouTube, we have been able to reveal major anti-values – notions or phenomena that cause criticism, expanded discussion and explicit and implicit assessment on the part of the texts writers. Language and discourse analysis has shown that 12 anti-values that have been identified in the texts are expressed through the key word and a lexical-semantic set, which, together with extensive context of a newspaper/magazine article, comprise a powerful language tool for shaping ideas of what is “bad” behavior, “bad” management, “bad” people or anything “bad”, for that matter. We have been able to confirm D. Geeraert’s point [Geeraerts, 2017] that not all words in the compiled sets are equally representative of the anti-values: some words have direct semantical connection to the anti-value, others refer to it contextually or conceptually. The instrumental power of a news piece is not only to define anti-values, but also to show how to speak about them, and how to act on them. Based on the pragmatics of the texts, it has been possible to conclude that all of the anti-values fall into two categories – there are anti-values related to the viewers (5 anti-values) and those related to content-creators (7 anti-values). The overall analysis of the texts in formal media on YouTube revealed that in the majority of cases (60%), headlines of such texts already convey axiological meanings that prepare the readers for certain assessments and evaluations. Overall, we have confirmed Burgess and Green's theory that traditional media frame the user's attitude towards YouTube and stimulate certain forms of engagement with it [Burgess and Green, 2018].

This research paper provides theoretical and practical data to increase the level of critical awareness of both content creators and content consumers about the way we interact with YouTube, the way we are expected to perceive the changes on the platform and generally deal with negative concepts generated by and around YouTube. Certain anti-values are promoted within the discourse on YouTube and are its integral part. Going from micro-level analysis of the texts to macro-level analysis offers a more elaborate model of interpreting information and revealing socially relevant trends, phenomena and ideas. The data of this research may be applied in sociolinguistic and axiological studies which rely on both linguistic and extra-linguistic parameters of communication, while the findings about YouTube in particular may be used as a starting point for conducting studies of the new media and value systems.

4.1. Research limitations

However, this research has its limitations. As it is with any form of discourse research, there is a lack of a corresponding empirical research of the ways the texts are consumed by the recipients (despite the fact that CDA views text consumers as active in their interpretation processes). In other words, both CDA and axiological analysis need to be continued with a consecutive social and anthropological studies which will track the changes in the readers’ value systems and measure the extent to which their interpretations coincide with discourse research findings; it will also help to establish whether addressees would demonstrate negative response towards the issues disputed in the articles about YouTube. These procedures seem to be a fitting goal for further work on the topic. Moreover, we feel the research would benefit if a comparative view is taken to find out whether negative talk is more present in the news about YouTube or about some other on-line platforms (e.g., Facebook is another social network that faces challenges and criticism in mass media); or to establish whether the issues mentioned in the press are culture-specific.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

T. A. Shiryaeva, N. M. Mekeko: Conceived and designed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data.

A. A. Arakelova, E. V. Tikhonova: Performed the experiments; Wrote the paper.

Funding statement

The publication was prepared with the support of the 'RUDN University Program 5-100'.

Data availability statement

Data associated with this study has been deposited at =https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V6DuEw9V9+r4KKnNvmsfFw7krC8/view?usp=sharing.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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