Internet communication: architecture and typology of digital folklore

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Abstract. The paper discusses the interconnection of network architecture and channels of information transmission and storage in the process of the internet communication. The concept of digital folklore as compared to traditional folk culture is explained. Genre classification of digital folklore is introduced. The mechanisms of digital folklore functioning within different patterns of modern network architecture are analyzed. The idea of the research is introduced on the base of the comparative study. The article argues that the internet forms a special communicative environment that gives rise to innovative cultural and linguistic phenomena. It reflects users’ thoughts and ideas, expressed in the form of a text, synthesized with graphics, sound, and animation. The new communication medium contributes to the implementation of various language tools and stimulates users’ creativity. This way language becomes a tool for their creative personal expression. Particular attention is drawn to the evolution of folklore and its traditions in typological coverage. The focus is made on the communicative function of digital folklore, conditioned by special aspects of the internet medium.

Key words: language, internet, communication, study, knowledge, network, architecture, digital, folklore.

1 Introduction

The internet is currently playing a huge role in the process of human communication, as it transmits all kinds of information in various forms – voice, video, documents, instant messages, and files - by means of a computer with the access to the World Wide Web. The interaction between people “via the instrumentality of computers” is known as computer-mediated communication (CMC) [1, p.83]. The idea of the interactive and digital nature of CMC is widely accepted by contemporary researchers. The internet as an innovative communication channel claims responsibility for information exchange and social contacts. As a result, CMC can be effectively used to orchestrate a variety of communication situations and erases boundaries between the users. In this regard, McLuhan maintains that technological innovations have transformed communicative processes and turned them global by recreating “the world in the image of a global village” [2, p. 31]. The idea of close relation between CMC and globalization is supported by many researchers who argue that internet communication is largely based on the interdependence and interconnectedness of all the users [3], [4], [5], [6], [7].

CMC covers all types of information sources, including web magazines and newspapers, files sharing websites, electronic archives, email services, blogs, forums and social networks, thus forming
a vast knowledge base that is accumulated as a world library. Linguistically, CMC is a challenging
database, containing loads of textual data featured by the specifics of digital medium.

In his investigation into CMC for linguistics and literacy A. Bodomo shows that its an important
ground to express personal identities integrated greatly into the lives of users. He maintains that “the
language phenomenon in online communication continues to cause vital linguistic interest as new
communication technologies not only generate new forms and uses of language but also new forms of
literacy which are related to the introduction and uses of new technologies” [8].

A Russian researcher S.V. Ionova also comes to the conclusion that computer-mediated
communication is a field of linguistics influenced by new computer technologies that “allow us to
move from the exchange of ready-made texts to the modeling of natural communication” [9].

Many experts now contend that diversity of communication channels stems from CMC
architecture, i.e. network structure and topology, which determine a complex arrangement of its
elements (terminals, links, nodes, etc.) [10], [11], [12], [13].

Knowledge of the internet architecture concurs with better understanding of functional and
typological characteristics of messaging via the internet. The study of CMC is bilateral. The first focus
on technical issues (characteristics of channels, features, user options, etc.) points out the evolution of
the internet communication leading to the development of CMC. Some researchers see the internet
communication as an opportunity to improve users’ ability to adequately understand each other and
convey their thoughts using the most optimal forms and methods [14], [15]. But the internet is not
confined to a network of computers, it is seen as a community of people, a special social virtual
environment designed for communication. This fact calls forth the research of the role of computers in
day-to-day interactions and language use in CMC [34]. Thus, the second aspect of the research into the
internet-based communication is based on the adaptation of digital techniques to the tasks of social
communication [16], [17], [18], [19].

There are also a number of studies focused on the description of characteristic features of CMC. They
single out the values of virtual communication, such as anonymity, unlimited access to information,
absence of time and space boundaries, and freedom of expression, which perfectly coincide with the
proper conditions allowing the appearance of folklore-type internet communication. What is known
about digital folklore is largely based on works of A. Dundes [20], B. Kirschenblatt–Jimblett [21], D.
Crystal [22], Trevor J. Blank [23]. They insist that “technology... becomes a vital factor in the
dissemination of folklore and a source of inspiration in the creation of folklore works [20, p. 17].

Bringing people together, the web allows for rich resources, immediate feedback, and effective
communication, moderated by CMC participants themselves, which altogether turn it into a perfect
medium for the state-of-the-art folklore [24], [25], [26], [27].

The internet architecture, in return, imposes genre diversity, linguistic innovations, extreme
popularity and multifunctionality of digital messaging.

2 Materials and methods

The paper aims to summarise and systematise the knowledge of the internet communication, the
ubiquity of which has greatly transformed communication practice and modern folk culture. The focus
is made on the network architecture, which dictates the specific character of CMC. This part of
the research is based on thorough analysis of theoretic knowledge of computer science, applied to the
 cultural-linguistic study.

However, CMC is not confined to technicalities. Network architecture and topology form the
starting point of the principle issue of the research, i.e. folklore-type communication via the internet.
In reliance on the works of the leading folklorists from around the world, the research offers the
rationale for the term “digital folklore” with reference to users-developed artefacts resulted from
virtual interaction.

Furthermore, the study presents the current knowledge of the digital folklore typology. Typological
and diachronic study of folklore reposes on description, analysis and classification of folklore material.
3 Results
The study provided a considerable insight into various aspects of the internet communication of folklore type, which helped us obtain the following results:

1. The correlation between network architecture and patterns of the CMC was examined. The results of the examination demonstrated immense influence of the models of computer network interconnections on technical peculiarities and typology of the information exchange.

2. Distinctive features of digital folklore were outlined as applied to the communicative processes on the web. The research has also confirmed a large-scale implementation of folklorish messages distributed among the internet users.

3. To the best of our knowledge, the first genre classification of digital folklore was represented with regard to its typological, functional, structural, content peculiarities and connections with tradition.

4. The concept of architecture of folklorish internet communication was introduced in the given research with reference to various patterns of information exchange on the web.

Generally speaking, the received results have further strengthened our confidence in the urgent need for a deeper study of the phenomenon of digital folklore in the framework of internet communication, since they reflect the realities of modern life, largely tied to modern technologies.

4 Discussion
4.1 Architecture of CMC
Traditionally, architecture is defined as a set of structures that make up a materially organized environment that people need to live and work, or as the art of designing and constructing buildings and other structures in accordance with the purpose, technical capabilities and aesthetic views of a society.

However, recently the word has acquired a new meaning, which have nothing to do with art and aesthetics.

In computer science architecture is usually understood as a concept that determines the model, structure, performed functions, and relationship of components of a complex object [13].

The combination of traditional and modern interpretations of the term is the key to broad understanding of architecture as design, structure or configuration of an object. It complies with the most widely used and simplified definition of network architecture, which qualifies it as the physical and logical design referred to the software, hardware, protocols and the media of data transmission. In other words, it describes the way computers are organized and different tasks are allocated among them.

Computer networks comprise a certain number of terminals (computers, laptops, mobile devices) connected to each other. The two main types of connections used in computer networks are wired and wireless, via a Wi-Fi router. The two types of widely used network architectures are peer-to-peer and client-server. A separate category includes broadcast, global, local, municipal, private networks and other varieties.

In peer-to-peer networks all resources are equally distributed among all connected terminals. Tasks are allocated to every device on the network. Furthermore, there is no real hierarchy in this network, all computers are considered equal and all have the same abilities to use the resources available on this network. Instead of having a central server which would act as the shared drive, each computer connected to this network would act as the server for the files stored on it. Virtual communication of this type can be illustrated by the process of downloading files using torrents and specific software installed on the computer. The file can be located on different terminals. The system uses all currently available resources on the network to download parts of the file. The more of them, the higher the download speed.

The client-server network architecture is the simplest one. Connection between computer terminals and a server resembles a library in terms of files distribution. In a client-server network, a centralized really powerful computer (server) acts as a hub which other computers or workstations (clients) can connect to. This server is the heart of the system, which manages and provides resources to any client that requests them.
Dedicated servers are designed for specific tasks. There are many examples of such servers, including mail, games, file sharing, personal pages, etc.

A local network is organized to combine a limited number of terminals into a single unit. They can serve as a means of effective team (or work) communication. In case local network architecture users must have a connection to the main administrative server. The distinctive feature of local networks is the need for registration. In addition, the access to shared information can be either complete or limited depending on settings.

Nowadays, most widely used network architectures include Ethernet, Token Ring, Apple Talk, and Arc Net. In terms of the number of installed networks and prospects for further development, Ethernet has practically no alternative.

Meanwhile, the largest network in the world is the internet. There is no single central server on the internet where all information can be stored. All information is distributed among hundreds of thousands of individual servers of different types.

With the fast development of technologies, network architecture, in particular the internet, has begun to change. Present-day computer users can easily create their own internet servers, which are able to manage network parameters, save the necessary information, and even provide access to it for other users. Cloud services and distribution of Wi-Fi are the examples of such innovative virtual networks, where users, passing authentication, set rights to access certain information, download or edit files, etc.

4.2 Typology of the folklore in the internet communication

Although scientists had been studying the phenomenon of digital folklore for a long time (in different sources it was referred to as internet folklore, netlore, web folklore, folknet, virtual folklore, etc.), the term “digital folklore” was first distinctly defined only in 2009 by O. Lialina and D. Espenschied, who claimed it as a pronounced user culture that arose from programs and services focused on the user–developer: "Digital folklore includes customs, traditions, and elements of visual, textual, and audio culture that arose as a result of users' interaction with programs installed on their personal computers during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st." [12]. The common understanding of digital folklore is in favour of the idea that it is represented by various folklore forms that primarily exist on the internet [28], [29], [37]. The review of the key contemporary works proves syncretic, hybridized nature of the digital folklore, which is revealed in the variety of verbal-visual folklore artefacts created by the internet users. [12], [30], [31]. The "hybridized" character of digital folklore was re-examined in 2018 by T. Blank, who emphasized the need to carefully study the processes of its creation, transmission and transformation in the network, which result in the formation of a new digital folk culture [23].

Being an inherent part of the internet culture, digital folklore is nonetheless utterly different from its traditional forbearer. It is notable for its dynamic character stemming from a high level of activity of the internet users.

However much the internet modifies digital folklore, traditions can be easily traced in it. According to A. Dundes and S. Bronner there are four main features that help distinguish folklore from other forms of art:

1. Multiple existence across space;
2. Persistence through time;
3. Poetics and projections;
4. Rationale of fantasy [20, p. 23].

The list must be completed by a set of definitive aspects traditionally pointed out by Russian folklorists: verbality, anonymity, traditionalism, vernacularity, variability, collectivity, syncretism, the presence of a performer and a listener, repeated reproduction, formality, locality, multifunctionality. As M.V. Zagidullina puts it, even the first 5 conditions from the list are sufficient to prove the folklore character of the internet communication pattern." [29, p. 89]. The current research claims the rest characteristics equally valuable, though not always attributed to digital folklore in full.
Digital folklore introduces innovative patterns of verbal expressions, which in a way follow traditions being frequently concurrent with visual and audio performance. Spontaneity of the folklore text published on the web is aligned with the oral speech, thus triggering appearance of hybrid oral–written manner of internet communication.

Most computer users effortlessly stay anonymous on the web, as they sign in with nicknames and fictitious avatars. Another reason for "authorlessness" lies in the fact that the author's name is quickly lost due to peculiarities of virtual communication [29].

Traditionalism of digital folklore is twofold. In spite of the fact that traditions are acknowledged to be its immanent feature, folklorists interpret it in different ways. On the one hand, folklore traditions can be traced in the language, genres, choice of characters, etc. On the other, it enables users to share their experiences and form new traditions applied to an internet community [3], [32], [33]. With this regard, digital folklore is a carrier of the present and the past alike, so far as new media technologies support folk expression, thus giving way to new traditions. According to M.V. Zagidullina, the internet communication of folklore type facilitates formation of local traditions within internet communities [29, p. 90]. A contrary point of view, though not very popular among researchers, is presented by Trevor J. Blank who doubts that tradition is an integral part of digital folklore [23, p. 6].

Syncretic nature, collective authorship, variability, and vernacular character of digital folklore are predetermined by the specifics of messaging on the internet: it can easily and endlessly be edited and reposted by any computer user while it remains topical. A mixture of various folklore arts (verbal, visual, musical, etc.) determines its genre diversity. Many genres of modern digital folklore are the product of collaboration. However, the life span of digital folklore works varies a lot. The fact that most artefacts are short–lived emphasizes the need to study online folklore in diachrony [23].

Formally, digital folklore is easily distinguished through the use of cliches, idiomatic expressions and recognizable images [34], [35], [36].

Overall, traditional folklore features are intertwined with some newly acquired, such as a tendency to citation, clip art manner, intertextuality and hypertextuality. Being interconnected, these characteristics are dictated by contemporary culture, which reveals in the tendency to use fragmented texts and cliches that give a very general and shallow perception of life.

Digital folklore primarily functions as a means of communication between internet users around the world. The internet erases geographical boundaries, turning folklore of the users into a global cultural phenomenon.

4.3 Genre classification of digital folklore
An underexplored but challenging area in the field of digital folklore study is its typology and genre classification. Digital folklore is diverse, complicated and dynamic, which might be a deterrent for the research of the subject [37], [38]. On the one hand, it has inherited some genres of traditional folklore, which have successfully adapted to the facts of virtual life. Legends, anecdotes, rhymes, proverbs, etc. are experiencing substantial transformations in terms of vocabulary, functions, and semantics. As a result, they are no longer treated outdated and acquire a status of popular digital folklore genres.

On the other hand, digital folklore puts into effect all the user options, thus giving rise to new syncretic folklore forms and incarnations. The most popular of them are internet memes, doctored photographs, motifakes, limericks.

When it comes to typological classification, digital folklore can be divided into poetry (folkloreartefacts that are featured by rhythm and rhyme) and prose. The latter spans various written works of the users notwithstanding their size, style and function: jokes, internet memes, pictures of all kinds containing a written message, anecdotes, legends, blog entries, etc.

Digital folklore differs greatly in content, structure, and function. Taking into account these core characteristics, the following genre categorization can be presented for consideration:

1. Content-based classification. With respect to the content, digital folklore artefacts are divided into textual, visual, audio and hybrid (the most frequent one).
2. Structure-based classification. Structural peculiarities of digital folklore artefacts are contingent on whether they belong to minor or major folklore forms. The structure of folklore works within the two groups can differ greatly, since they include a number of folklore genres with specific structural peculiarities. In other words, this type of classification is rather conditional and approximate as it relies on a vague idea of the size of the artefact.

3. Function-based classification. Functioning of digital folklore is definitely the most objective criterion of its classification. Several groups can be distinguished in accordance with its functions:
   a. entertaining (e.g. memes, jokes, demotivators);
   b. informative (e.g. legends, rumours, status in social networks);
   c. educational (e.g. tutorials, blog entries, proverbs);
   d. ritual (e.g. chain letters, superstitions);
   e. communicative (all the above, if used in communication process).

   An attempt to work out a comprehensible taxonomy of immense works of digital folklore roots in the tradition of scientific research. Meanwhile, computer users have already created an efficient classification system - folksonomy (folk + taxonomy), which is practically more convenient for organizing the internet content in multiple categories by adding tags. It is typically applied in public websites as they are non-hierarchical communities, allowing their users to categorize the data themselves. Overall, folksonomic model of the internet content marking produces quite accurate results, thus making it a really helpful tool for tracing the necessary information.

4.4 Architecture of folklorish internet communication

Major distribution of digital folklore as well as its global coverage are explained by the fact that it is plunged in a huge communication system, the World Wide Web, the central idea of which is messaging.

The users around the world no longer face a problem of space and time: absolute simultaneity of the internet communication process has transformed the information exchange pattern and contributed to the creation of a global community.

The internet access and computers with proper settings and applications force the users’ proactive position and creativity thus stimulating emergence of new genres of digital folklore. The development of digital folk art, represented on the web in various communicative forms and genres, endows the internet communication with folklorish features [39], [29].

Digital folklore translates various elements of traditional folk culture into the virtual format. Gossip, legends, private blog entries have become major sources of information on popular websites, since they are visited, read and commented by millions of users.

Digital folklore is constantly copied and processed, taking root in everyday life of the globe as well as smaller communities. In this regard, the process opposite to globalization occurs. It is known as glocalization which designates formation of multiple small communities of internet users united by common ethnic, professional, social, and other concerns. Small internet communities form their own culture, rules, traditions, language, and folklore [3], [40], [33]. In this case information exchange is confined by the members of a community, but follows the same distribution patterns referred to the globalised internet communication.

Regarding the above mentioned patterns, the following types of architecture of folklorish internet communication can be pointed out:

1. User 1 to User 2, User 2 to User 1 (That applies to private correspondence between two people via email and public messengers.).
2. User 1 to multiple users, repeated N times (This type is a replica of the traditional communication process of a pyramid shape, at the top of which there is the source of information. The messages sent within this architecture are addressed to multiple readers of blogs, forums, social networks, public accounts, etc.).
3. User 1 to multiple users (This type of architecture is similar to the previous one. However, communication based on this architecture is confined to a small community of users.).
4. Multiple users to User 1: (It can be referred to users’ comments to someone’s post. Besides, the inverted pyramid type is often a result of the information overload when it is impossible for all the users to read everything posted on the web. In other words, the message will either reach an addressee with some delay, or will not be received at all).

5. User 1 to User 1: (This is the case of private posts made by a user, which are not meant for public coverage).

All in all, architecture of the internet communication is an important aspect in the research of digital folklore, since it defines its specific features and genre diversity.

5 Conclusion

The major focus area of this paper was to study and summarise theoretical knowledge of network architecture applied to the folklore-type internet communication.

The analysis of the main types of computer networks and their compliance with typical CMC patterns allows us to draw some positive conclusions.

Firstly, there is a close relationship between network architecture and CMC features. Parallel description and comparison of the internet communication channels and different real-life examples of information transmission demonstrate this interconnection. Thus, the research reveals the need to adapt the term “architecture” to the internet communication of folklore type.

Secondly, modern network architectures make internet communication competitive, comprehensible, and more attractive to computer users due to diverse channels of information storing and sharing.

Thirdly, thanks to technological progress, computer users have the opportunity to realize their creative potential in the form of folklore artefacts. In other words, they are free to choose the forms, genres, and language of their messages addressed to their counterparts. It gives them an incentive to act as developers of the internet content. Artistic freedom and free expression mark the internet communication and, thus, give rise to a great variety of new folklore genres and forms.

Overall, modern folklore preserves and develops traditional culture in the internet medium, tending to bring the best features of the old and the new folk art into perfect unison. Such a combination improves reflection of the reality, allows for social recognition of the described events and ensures communicative significance of the digital folklore.

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