Dr Anna Gumkowska pursues research on new media, the forms of Web communication and multimedia texts. She edited the volume *Tekst (w) sieci. Literatura, społeczeństwo, komunikacja* (The Text of/on the Web: Literature, Society, Communication, 2009).
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Anna Gumkowska, Maria Czarkowska

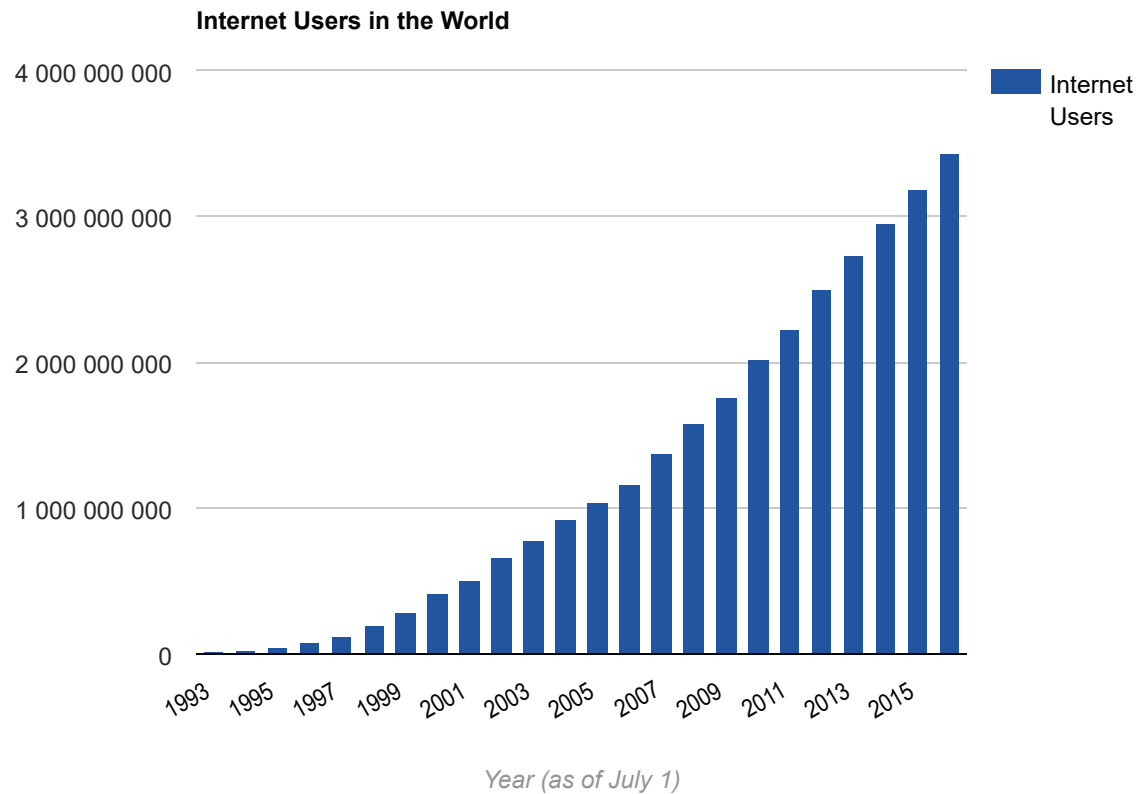# Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest: New Study Perspectives

The world has fallen in love with the Internet and, in the course of time, in social media and Web communication. The multitude of social media platforms and tools developed to enable fast and convenient online communication resulted in an increasingly greater impact of the Internet not only on writing practices, but also on social, economic, cultural or even civilisational processes. Indeed, the Internet is a powerful tool that – along with such devices as the laptop, the tablet and the mobile phone – enables widespread production and distribution of different content. In other words, the Web is a technological system of large-scale text distribution.

Internet users are an integral element of this system, as they disseminate content using emails, smartphone applications or social networking accounts. As can be seen from the chart presented below, the number of Internet users worldwide is constantly growing.

Internet Users in the World

Internet users in the world; source: www.internetlivestats.com

What happens online in sixty seconds?

The expansion of the Internet involves not only a growing number of communication participants, but also an increasing amount of content they generate. Online services analysing data on the use of the Internet release infographic visualisations of what happens online in sixty seconds. The figures for 2014 were astonishing: Internet users logged on Facebook 600,000 times, uploaded 67,000 photos onto Instagram, sent 433,000 tweets, added 3,400 pins on Pinterest, entered 4.19 million Google searches, uploaded 306 hours of YouTube content, downloaded over 50,000 apps from App Store, generated 80,000 Amazon sales and sent over 136 million mails (Majchrzyk, 2015). In 2017 it was revealed that Facebook has over two billion active monthly users, with 900,000 active logins a minute. Apart from this, every sixty seconds means 452,000 tweets sent, over 46,000 posts uploaded onto Instagram, 1.8 million snaps created on Snapchat and 15,000 GIFs sent via Messenger (Desjardins, 2017).

The Polish Internet is also characterised by vibrant social media activity. According to the Gemius/PBI survey report for August 2017, there are 26.4 million Polish Internet users (12.8 mil-

lion females and 13.6 million males), whose average time spent online is two hours and nine minutes a day. Mobile Internet access is becoming increasingly popular: with mobile broadband penetration at 114.6%, Poland is above the European average (93.9%) (Grabiec, 2017). 70% of Polish Internet users are active on social media every day, and over 21.5 million Poles are Facebook users (Kuchta, 2017); almost three million use Instagram (Szewczyk, 2017), and about five million – Twitter. According to the Gemius/PBI survey report for May 2016, Pinterest, in turn, is relatively the least popular social platform in Poland (about two million active monthly users).

An immense quantity of text – understood as a combination of particular linguistic, audio or visual elements which refer to extralinguistic reality and thus have a referential and communicative function (cf. Dobrzyńska, 1993, pp. 283–304) – generated by Internet users amounts to a thicket of information that needs to be carefully navigated in search for valuable content. Indeed, anyone can publish whatever they wish. The above data indicate that the most popular outlets are social platforms, such as Facebook, Polish networking sites and Web portals, as well as Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest, which are used particularly on mobile devices.

Each popular Internet platform requires its users to follow a particular visual pattern and sets the limits of complexity of content and its modification. In spite of these technical limitations, texts published on the Internet display a considerable variety of forms based on different relations between textual and visual content. An increasing popularity of audiovisual forms stems from the policy of networking sites: they offer a number of functionalities that particularly favour photo and video materials as well as livestreaming (e.g. the visibility of posts with such content, extra messages). A common feature shared by different forms of Internet content is their multimedia character.

Measurability of the medium and its impact on the structure of content

The Internet is the most measurable of all the media. Almost every move of the users can be traced, revealing information about the Web browser used, preferred content, time spent on particular websites, place of residence, and even the income per household member. General data on the use of the Internet are accessible in the form of published reports and listings that can be easily downloaded and stored. The users of microblog profiles on Facebook and Twitter, as well as business profiles on Pinterest, have access to statistics

panels which enable them to analyse the published content. The use of analytical tools is a standard online practice.

The users' awareness of the existence of such metadata has an impact on Internet texts they produce, since the data indicate what the receivers search for and what content they find interesting. Such data also make it possible to almost instantly capture a change in trends, showing what topics have been exhausted and are no longer in demand. As a result, the figures indirectly stimulate rapid changes in communication. Indeed, it can be very quickly assessed whether or not a particular form works, making it possible to immediately adjust both the topic of content and its structure.

A change in the form of content representation is often coupled with a change of the place of its publication, and thus involves a new technological (editorial) framework. In the last ten years some social platforms gained popularity, while others went into decline. Suffice it to mention the case of the nk.pl service (originally nasza-klasa.pl), which became immensely popular in 2006–2010. However, following its rebranding (2010) and a wave of interest in Facebook, the platform gradually slipped down the rankings of the most often visited websites in Poland; according to one of them (alexa.com), in September 2017 the service was ranked No. 203. Migration of users between different platforms is a constant process, and participants of online communication see this option as a major advantage.

The most popular social media platforms

As a social media microblogging platform, Facebook is a relatively new service. Opened to everyone in 2006, it launched its Polish-language version in May 2008 and after nine years of expansion it is currently Poland's largest social networking site. According to the Gemius/PBI report for August 2017, the platform is visited by 21.5 million Polish users. With its penetration at 81.6%, Facebook is only second to Google services (excluding YouTube) and is in a position to challenge the leader. Increasingly more Internet users begin their online sessions on Facebook, which automatically opens not on their own profile but on News Feed, a stream of posts of their friends and updates of observed profiles, in other words – Internet texts. This can be explained by the fact that Facebook enables them to immediately assess the value of information on the basis of recommendations of other communication participants.

Facebook accounts may be set up not only by private individuals and groups of persons, but also by commercial entities, brands or institutions, which treat the service as a channel

of direct communication with potential customers and an effective marketing tool. In spite of great variety in terms of subject and use of multimedia materials, all texts produced on particular types of profiles have a similar construction dictated by the technological design of the service. Guided by the principles of usability and user experience, the format is designed by teams of developers working in cooperation with research departments testing each new feature before it is officially launched. Facebook is constantly being developed and upgraded. As in the case of other social platforms, the behaviour of content receivers is monitored in order to meet their needs and create a sense of attachment to the service. Such attachment of Internet users to a particular platform is really important, since participants of communication who return to use it again are ones that can be monetised. To put it bluntly, contact with such users can be sold to commercial enterprises seeking channels of access to consumers. Consequently, the platform is developed to generate a synergy effect by answering communication needs of both ordinary communication participants and commercial enterprises. To achieve this, it is profiled and evolves according to their needs. The basic text form encountered on Facebook is multimedia microposts produced on individual profiles.

Twitter, a social networking site also based on microblogs and profiles, features content generated by private individuals, groups of persons, commercial enterprises and institutions. The service enables its users to send the so-called tweets, short text messages of up to 140 characters. As a result of this size limit, the content must be concise and brief. Twitter plays an important role in citizen journalism. Information sent using tweets often reaches the users faster than in the case of Facebook and other similar services. In Poland, following a few years of fluctuation in the number of users (2008–2016), the platform is now dominated by males above the age of 35 (Hupa & Niżnik, 2016).

On the other hand, most Instagram users are young women up to 24 years (Hupa & Niżnik, 2016). This mobile application enjoys increasing popularity among people readily sharing photo images. Young Instagram users value the quality of visual content made available on the platform and the creativity of its producers. Launched as an iPhone application in 2010, Instagram was the first to offer its users filters designed to enhance their images, often giving them a stylish look of analogue photographs. In the following years the service rapidly expanded in terms of both its functionalities (more filters, new forms of content, e.g. short videos, known as instastories) and accessibility (mobile versions for other operating systems and laptop users). Pinterest, in turn, is a service and platform that

features visual content (photographs, graphics, pictures) categorised ("pinned") on multiple thematic boards of particular users (individuals, groups and business entities).

Why is it these rather than other platforms that have become popular around the world and in Poland? Why is it there that a vast number of Internet texts are published every minute? One advantage of Facebook, the leader of the rankings, is that it satisfies the natural human desire to remain in constant contact with friends, to observe and comment on events relating to both ordinary people and public figures, as well as to commercial brands. Thanks to its functionalities, such as the "Like" button, which can be placed on third-party websites, Facebook became an integral part of the Internet environment. Twitter, in turn fulfils the need to send and receive particular information, to exchange knowledge both between people who know each other and between strangers. Instagram enables its users to easily share their photographs; their publication by means of this mobile application is really quick and simple. Apart from this, the images can be enhanced using several available filters; the users can also add brief descriptions and hashtags (a word or unspaced phrase preceded by the hash character: #), which make the content they upload easier to find by those interested in the subject. Finally, Pinterest users create thematic boards devoted to trips they would like to make, places they would like to visit, or cars that they might never be able to buy but keep dreaming about them. This creation of dream life is one of the reasons behind the popularity of the service.

Possible classifications

Is it possible to order and classify this overwhelming mass of content? Is it possible to talk about common features of Facebook and Twitter microblogs, or similarities between the visual elements of Pinterest and Instagram, apart from their multimedia character? It has been about a decade since the first proposed classifications of blogs. In one of such examples, they were categorised according to their purpose (Zając, 2007):

(1) personal: the most popular form of blogs, one most closely resembling a personal diary;

(2) professional: written for professional or academic purposes;

(3) describing reality: written in order to express the author's opinions and describe current topics of his/her interest;

(4) relational: written in order to maintain contact with friends or make new acquaintances;

(5) advertising (*fake blogs*): created by commercial entities for advertising purposes;

(6) splogs (spam blogs): including content generated by spam bots.

Considering the type of materials, blogs can be divided as follows:

(1) blogs: the main medium of communication is the written text;

(2) photoblogs: the predominant communicative function is performed by photo images;

(3) vlogs/video blogs: the predominant communicative function is performed by video images;

(4) MP3 blogs: the predominant communicative function is performed by music;

(5) linklogs: containing mostly external links to other websites or services;

(6) tumblelogs: resembling notepads, they enable users to publish only short posts containing textual or visual material (individual photo images, short films).

Other classifications of blogs consider such criteria as the number of authors (individual and collective, i.e. written/edited by more people, e.g. Slashdot, http://slashdot.com; Ohmynews, http://ohmynews.com; iThink.pl, http://ithink.pl; the latter often play a considerable role in the development of citizen journalism); the type of content (text blogs: current affairs, how-to, personal diaries, book reviews, etc.; video blogs/vlogs: containing video images; photoblogs: containing photo images; linklogs: containing external links); the type of device used for blogging (traditional: edited on a computer; moblogs: edited using mobile devices, such as smartphones and palmtops) (cf. Gumkowska & Maryl, 2009, pp. 286–309).

Attempts at a new classification

Classifications proposed so far do not capture the entire mass of content published on the Web and neither do they comprehensively address the variety of its forms, which are subject to constant evolution. Consequently, the study of new media texts requires a different approach, particularly considering the fact that

> texts and documents are not randomly created. They reflect the conventions of human communication in a certain time and in certain community. Genres help us formalise these conventions. Since conventions change over time, genres are not static either. They change according to cultural, social and technological advances (…). (Santini, 2014)

On the one hand, Internet texts evolve towards speech genres and, as such, are both vulnerable to change and short-lived. On the other, however, they are indelibly recorded and permanently retrievable, since "the Internet never forgets".

Technological design has an impact on the communication situation in an Internet medium, as it provides a technical framework of communication. Even though new genres may resemble pyrotechnic shows, they still need to rely on a certain structure since all genres require a pattern and repetition. Over the centuries, literary studies have developed the most precise tools for the study of linguistic communication. Indeed, even under the complex circumstances of the emergence of new media and new technologies, the analytical categories and tools used for the study of literature can prove the most precise, enabling researchers to capture the phenomena that are elusive to sociological or media studies approaches.

Although poetics offers more refined tools for text analysis than, for example, media studies, it needs to be stressed that the Internet is an entirely new environment (both in terms of experience and field of study). Consequently, the study of Internet texts requires developing new research tools: the ontology of the object of study is completely different, as it involves not only language but also multimedia, and, as such, is based on relation between word and image. Considering this challenge, Mieczysław Porębski writes:

> constantly made to confront words with images (…), constantly guided, encouraged, warned and urged by the entire systems of visual and audio signs (…), we cannot avoid an attempt to analyse these phenomena using one methodological platform and one system of reference. The question of how to achieve this remains open. (Porębski, 1986, p. 87)

New approaches

The study of genres develops focus on new dimensions, reflected in the proliferation of new terms referring to particular aspects, such as media genology (*genologia medioznawcza*) (cf. Ptaszek, 2007, pp. 191–202), transmedia genology (*genologia transmedialna*) (Branny, 2007; Pisarski, 2007), intermedia genology (*genologia intermedialna*) (Wysłouch, 2005, pp. 97–113), cultural genology (*genologia kulturowa*) (Drabikowska, 2008, pp. 173–186) and integrated genology (*genologia zintegrowana*) (Dobrzyńska, 2006, pp. 71–75). Each of them attempts to

tackle also user-generated Web content and, consequently, the question of Internet genres and forms of communication. It is particularly cultural studies – linguistic anthropology and the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) – that foreground writing practices and situate genres in the context of such practices in action (Rodak, 2014, pp. 70–81). Their main focus is the situational context – who writes to whom, in what situation, when, where, whether the text is private or public, whether it is concealed, revealed, published or displayed; the material context – all physical elements involved: material, medium, look, mode of storage; textual context; historical context in terms of available technology: materials, tools, writing media, forms of public and private life, institutional forms of organisation, social circulation (Rodak, 2014, p. 78). What also becomes important is paratext: titles, intertitles, prefaces, forewords, notices from the publisher, terminal notes, advertising inserts, dust jackets and "many other kinds of secondary signals (…) provid[ing] the text with a (variable) setting" (Genette, 1997, p. 3).

Facing the demands of research on Internet texts, genology is becoming an interdisciplinary field of study. Multimedia genology (*genologia multimedialna*) aims to grasp the complex intertextual relations that underlie genre understood in much broader terms – not only as literary or communication genres, but also cultural ones, involving close links to social, cultural, ideological and political-economic factors (Briggs & Bauman, 1992, p. 132).

Analytical studies of Internet genres make a frequent use of the concept of remediation proposed by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, who define it as "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 273). In this approach, all new media forms rely on the transformation, modification and technological enhancement of their predecessors. Every new form, then, is a representation of one medium in another.

Heated discussions concerning the genres of Internet texts are conducted also among Web users themselves. In American literature on the subject, definitions of genres developed by participants of communication are known as "meta-genre" (Giltrow, 2001). From the point of view of literary studies, however, neither the term "meta-genre" used in this sense, nor the idea of defining a genre solely on the basis of the awareness of its users seems acceptable. In fact, there are certain rules of such models which operate even though their users may not be aware of their existence.

Important contributions to the discourse on new genres come also from the field of sociology. In one of such examples, Marina Santini from the University of Brighton conducted a study aiming to establish which new media genres are recognisable in Web

users' perception. She determines three levels of recognisability: transparent "easy web genres", less recognisable "ambiguous web genres" (including blogs), and "difficult web pages", the most controversial in the users' perception. The Internet genres and forms of communication analysed in the study (blog, microblog and meme) are ones that belong to the general class of computer mediated communication.

Classification of texts according to their genres is important not only for theoretical but also practical reasons. There are ongoing research projects aiming to develop search engines which will automatically identify genres in Web pages. This task, however, is not going to be easily accomplished owing to insufficient standardisation of websites and an increasing level of digital competence of their users.

Conclusion

The Internet enables us to adopt new research perspectives of both the content and the way it functions in the communication space. This requires combining knowledge from different disciplines, since the synergy of their research tools makes it possible to capture the entire complexity of these phenomena. The study of Internet communication is not possible without the knowledge of basic analytical tools applied by Internet users or without basic sociological knowledge. With its long tradition in literary studies, genology, the study of repetitive patterns of constructing messages and conveying meaning, seems to be another promising field.

The study of new forms of communication in the online world needs to consider two types of factors: (1) external, i.e. the history of a particular genre, its technological structure as the editorial framework, and the patterns of social circulation, which all create a social bond, imply mutual understanding and sometimes even common action; (2) internal, understood as the internal organisation of the text in the context of its communication situation; the implied sender, receiver, message, code, context and contact determine the communication situation inherent in a particular genre, as well as its attendant style. In this perspective, then, Internet genres can be analysed considering their extratextual factors (pertaining to the technological characteristics of particular Internet platforms and the mode of content distribution) and intratextual factors (which depend on language or a combination of language and image).

Moreover, in the case of each genre under consideration it is possible to notice features that characterise digital texts in general: they are multimedial, dialogic (resemble familiar conversation), spontaneous, situational, (referential) and involve an immediate relation between the sender and receiver. This, however, does not change the fact that such genre forms are distinct, since both the text and the system design communication factors differently.

This begs the question of how to explain the intratextual genre differences. The answer lies in the gradability of common features and features particular to a certain individual genre. Consequently, the study of Web texts would benefit from the terms "genological gradation" (*gradacja genologiczna*) and "degree" (*stopień*), which make it possible to distinguish between different genres. A scale of features ranging from "strong" to "weak" provides a clearer picture of hybrid e-genres and enables researchers to develop models that explain reality more accurately.

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Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest: New Study Perspectives

The article aims to address the issue of a vast range of content emerging on social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest) and analyse how it can be classified. It offers a review of available interdisciplinary methods and factors that should be taken into consideration when studying the genres of user-generated content. The Internet has changed the shape of social communication and highlighted processes that have not been apparent before. Researchers face a challenge of analysing an enormous amount of content and developing a system of its classification. Above all, what requires analysis is messages posted on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. Previous attempts to systematise user-generated content did not correspond to the reality of the Web. Research on Internet genres and forms of communication demands the use of appropriate analytical tools and interdisciplinary approaches.

Keywords:

genre, genology, classification, communication competence, text, social media platforms

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest – nowe perspektywy badawcze

Celem publikacji jest zaprezentowanie ogromnej liczby różnorodnych treści, które powstają w ramach platform społecznościowych: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram i Pinterest, oraz analiza dostępnych sposobów ich klasyfikacji. Chodzi zatem o przegląd dostępnych interdyscyplinarnych metod i czynników, które warto brać pod uwagę przy badaniach genologicznych tekstów, które powstają w sieci. Internet zmienił oblicze społecznej komunikacji. Uwypuklił procesy, które do tej pory nie były tak widoczne. Wyzwaniem dla badaczy jest analiza ogromnej ilości treści i ujęcie ich w system klasyfikacji. Analizy wymagają przede wszystkim komunikaty powstające w ramach mediów społecznościowych, takich jak Facebook, Twitter, Instagram i Pinterest. Dotychczasowe próby systematyzacji nie odpowiadały realiom sieci. Badania form gatunkowo-komunikacyjnych internetu wymagają wykorzystywania przynależnych sieci narzędzi analitycznych oraz podejścia interdyscyplinarnego.

Słowa kluczowe:

gatunek, genologia, klasyfikacja, kompetencje komunikacyjne, tekst, platformy społecznościowe