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Russian-Speaking “Migrant YouTube” as a Focus of Urban and Social Studies

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Abstract. In the Russian-speaking YouTube segment, there is a large number of channels whose authors, coming to the Russian Federation from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, publish the scenes of their everyday life in the host country: searching for a job, furnishing an apartment, meeting migration services and police officers, relationships with other migrants. These videos and comments to them describe the migration experience of the author and reflect the reaction of other migrants and host society representatives to their opinions. Such digital platforms are more than just venues for experience exchange and accumulation of social capital between the migrants; they are a meeting point for “us” and “them”, the conventional migrants and the locals. The specificity of the digital platform and its daily life blog focus allows us to suppose that the studies of the “migrant channels” are an opportunity to see Russian cities through the eyes of the foreign labourers. At the same time, the “migrant segment” of the Russian-speaking YouTube has hardly ever been described. The objective of the article is to partially fill this gap by categorizing the “migrant YouTube” channels selected with the snowball principle based on the retrospective online observation method, to assess their heuristic potential for further thorough sociological and anthropological studies of migration, and, if possible, to formulate several hypotheses on the social functions on the “migrant YouTube”.

Keywords: migrant, social media, horizontal networks, YouTube, city.

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In Russian-speaking mass media, the migration as a term has always been closely associated with quite a limited scope of the spatial and social properties. They often got in the centre of the researcher's attention (Eberl et al., 2018; Kalygina, 2009; Wood, King, 2001). Focused on the way the "migrant" is presented through the eyes of the host community, the researchers remark that this image is static, with the connotation being its only changing aspect. A young tanned man in a working robe may be seen as an essential element of the daily urban life, as an invader, as an eternal source of any problems or as the hope and backbone of the Russian economy. In any situation, however, the centre of attention is the "migrant" himself, a young tanned poor man and his real or imaginary deeds. It is usually up to journalists and social media users to judge whether he is good or bad, dangerous or safe, whether Russia needs him or not; sociologists and linguists analyze the constructs that come up in the process.

The academic texts seem to be recording only a small share of the images arising around the migration process, i.e. those created by the host society representatives. The languages of describing migration in different Russian-speaking media created by the host society are well known; it is also known how the migrants are perceived by members of various social and age groups. All these studies make up a detailed map of the host society's ideas of migration translated through the media. At the same time, we have hardly found any information on whether the migrants form similar description languages in the mass media and how the host society is presented through them.

We suppose that the study of the "migrant YouTube" segment is an opportunity to fill a part of this gap. In the numerous autobiographic, entertaining or news videos

made by the migrants, it is possible to find some exclusive information about their daily life in Russia and to discover the language describing the host society. The objective of the article is to test this hypothesis on the Russian-speaking channels selected with the snowball method, which, as can be judged from the title or the content of the channel, are made by migrants.

The reasons of selecting YouTube among many other digital platforms are the following: first of all, it makes an impression that the studies of the "migrant YouTube" are relatively scarce (Malakhov, Olimova, Simon, 2018). The researchers either do not distinguish YouTube as a separate empirical category or regard it as a space presenting common statements of the host society (Horsty, 2016), not the migrants themselves. Therefore, the "migrant YouTube" is understudied to a great extent, unlike other digital platforms used by migrants (Komito, 2011; Pendry, Salvatore, 2015). Secondly, YouTube is the second most sought for source after Google, the most popular digital social network in the world. Thirdly, the specificity of this digital platform gives us a reason to suppose that there we may find open access to regular video reports of the daily lives of the migrants, and, most importantly, the reaction of other users to these translated images. Fourthly, even the most superficial search in the Russian-speaking YouTube segment shows that there are hundreds of channels created by the migrants directly focused on their migration experience.

The material for the research was collected through the YouTube search engine with the inputs containing such words as *migrant*, *migrant worker*, *expat*, *Moscow*, *Russia*, and the names of the main donor countries for the RF: *Uzbekistan*, *Tajikistan*, *Kazakhstan*: *Tajik in Moscow*, *Migrant Russia* etc. The YouTube search results included "migrant" channels in

all CIS languages. This study covered only those where at least a part of the video was made in the Russian language. We have studied the channels with the content matching the objective of the study, i.e. containing any messages on the experience of migration from Central Asia to Russia. The major part of the material was collected with the method of retrospective (Paechter, 2015) observation (Bassi et al., 2019) over the statements of the channel authors and viewers, which included both comments to the videos and the videos themselves. Then, having analyzed the content of the selected channel, the links to other “migrant channels” the authors or the users provided were used.

It should be noted, however, that the objective of this study does not include a thorough analysis of the “migrant channels” content; it is about the determination of the general scope of statements of their authors and viewers, classification of channels depending on the topics they focus on. Nevertheless, we will attempt, if possible, to come up with several hypotheses on the social functions the “migrant YouTube” may cater.

The YouTube search engine provides hundreds, if not thousands of channels made by migrants from Central Asia. If we choose to rely upon the search engine algorithm rating the most relevant results in the top of the list and limit the study to the first one hundred results for every search request, the results can be divided into several categories. This division is quite conventional, as the majority of authors publish a diverse content, sometimes combining sports highlights, views of Moscow streets and the author’s home town, conversations with the police and family celebrations.

The first category is autobiographic channels with reports on the days of immigration, work, accommodation etc. The second category consists of news channels with information on the changes in the migration regulations, patent prices and labour quotes. The third category covers the channels that discuss legal issues. The largest category is the entertainment channels, from the “ethnic” cuisine recipes to pranks and attempts of the young migrants to pick up a Russian girl in Moscow.

Between the motherlands: autobiographic channels

The authors of autobiographic channels tell us about their preparations for moving, reasons for their decision, how they settled down in Moscow and other cities¹, and where they found themselves in the end. Their audience may vary from a couple of people to thousands. The channels may contain information about arranging the accommodation for those who move to Moscow as well as their jobs and duties. One of the channels’ author rents a tiny room, stuffed with his belongings, that he comments on as follows: *“If anyone of your relatives or people you know has worked at a construction site in Russia, Moscow or St. Petersburg, you must have seen places like this. Not very comfortable, but there are no other options. You may rent an apartment, but then seven to eight people will be living in the same room. I’m gonna make a video about this as well. Subscribe and click like”*².

Apart from the details of their migration experience, the authors discuss the reasons the “migrant YouTube” exists, explaining their motivations. The author of the “Sunboy TV” channel attempts to debunk the stereotypes about migrants, showing what they are and what they do. As he says, the “migrant YouTube” is there for both those who leave and those who stay. Based on his logic, the “migrant channels” also include those focused on life in the country of the migrants’ origin. Those who left can follow Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz bloggers to be informed about the situation back in their motherland, and those who stay, see the atmosphere in Russia through the migrant channels.

On the “Sunboy” channel, the highlights of sports events are interspersed with videos of Hadj, weddings, various Islamic ceremonies, and describing the migrant organisations of Yekaterinburg, such as air ticket offices, medical centres, and restaurants. The author makes video tours around Yekaterinburg in his native tongue, showing markets, malls, places to buy air tickets with Tajik speaking staff. Some videos may be useful as a map of the migrant Yekaterinburg; they provide information about

¹ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIRzXYS66tM>

² Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lCkHnHBm5g>

the horizontal networks that include the author and his followers who leave their comments. The author makes recommendations on where and how to buy proper Hadj footwear³, where to bring the lost documents so that their owner can find them later⁴, where to buy dried fruits, and where migrants’ children can improve their Russian and English before school⁵.

The channel acts as a meeting point for the migrant horizontal networks. The author intensively interacts with his subscribers offline, just like most of his videos’ characters do. Moreover, many of his videos are intended to encourage offline interactions, i.e. advertising of language courses or Hadj organisation services. As we can judge from the uploaded videos, the author intention is rather to create a guide around the migrant Yekaterinburg and to help the newcomers find their way around than to promote a product or a service.

The channel shows us the migration experience of the author himself, his trips around the country and walks around the streets of Yekaterinburg, different jobs and impressions. This channel alone presents over 10 venues used by migrants and presents how the supernational horizontal networks are formed, integrating people into the city life. Another interesting point about the channel is the list of sources followed by the author. Those sources provide even more information about the migrant Yekaterinburg, such as martial art clubs, farmers who sell cows and sheep, and language schools. Such a channel may significantly ease the life of newcomers, especially those who speak little Russian. For example, there is a video introducing a clinic with the doctors speaking the author’s native language.

Other channels⁶ also demonstrate the life lines of newcomers to various cities of Russia; their authors have come to Russia for different purposes, they are of different age, sex, and status. The first ten “migrant YouTube” channels prove that it makes no sense speaking of a unified “migrant YouTube”, as it presents

lots of different “migrations”, with every one of them creating their own social and spatial images.

A master’s degree student of the Higher School of Economics representing one of the Central Asian countries describes his first days at university, tells the viewers about how he found a part-time job, shows his dormitory, his working place and his duties. We find out that digital media becomes a tool of social capital gain. In one of the videos, the author tells about how he found a part-time job by asking for help in his Instagram stories⁷.

In the video about his first day at a Moscow construction site, the author tells about how he found the way to the site, the people he worked with, the details of the working process, and the amount of money he earned. Another author picks migrants in the Moscow streets crowd and interviews them about the reasons that made them move, their activities, and whether they are happy about their lives. It is not only the answers but also the reaction of the respondents to the questions that are of the greatest interest⁸. In the third video, the author visits a tea house where the Higher School of Economics masters’ students normally go. The author shows the menu and prices. In other videos, the author expresses his attitude to Russian stereotypes about migrants from Middle Asia and comments on the insulting phrases of a Russian TV host concerning Kyrgyz people.

The “migrant channels” allow observing the everyday life of female migrants from Middle Asia. The opportunity is unique, considering the gender disproportion of immigration to Russia⁹, and the unwillingness of women to contact with unfamiliar interviewers, frequently detected during the field researches. So, the author of the “I am a Tajik woman” channel tells in Russian about her tailor shop business, her family, and everyday life in both Tajikistan and Russia¹⁰. The author shows the places where she has breakfast, menus, prices, and how she and her children celebrate family holidays. Be-

³ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWfc8T-32GE>

⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqOpCy2A28k>

⁵ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEs4E_h-1SI

⁶ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMxOeZ-vq97s>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVbrbzgVURg>

⁷ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shF5_mu4RKY

⁸ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHDH3yAF7nM>

⁹ Source: <https://ac.gov.ru/files/publication/a/16766.pdf>

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpMDTVEcmQ>

sides her everyday life, the author focuses on responding to the questions of her followers. From these monologues, we get to know the target audience of the channel, the reason why she makes her videos in Russian, and how her business started. The purpose of the channel is not only to present her lifestyle but also to sell the hand-made clothes she makes¹¹. The author tells about her customers and their preferences. In particular, we find out that many of her customers are migrants, ordering national dresses.

The channel is interesting for both migrants from Central Asia living in Russia and people staying in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. For them, it is a bridge connecting Russia and their country, a way to satisfy their need for nostalgia watching videos from Tajikistan or to learn more about Russia. The followers ask the author to make video reviews of Russian and Tajik cities, to tell the story of her business. According to the author, she uses Russian for two purposes: to widen her potential audience using Russian as a lingua franca, and to prevent the storm of reproach from the orthodox-thinking fellow citizens.

The authors of autobiographic channels do not only tell about their everyday life but also share their professional skills, let those be specific aspects of curing proctologic deceases¹² or the basics of butchering. The videos posted by migrants cover diverse aspects of their lives not necessarily united by any common narrative, but it is not a disadvantage. A channel of a new migrant employed as a taxi driver has only one subscriber, but its videos guide us through several nights of the author driving around the streets of Moscow. In the video, he tells about the company he works for, discloses his nightly income and the destinations of his passengers¹³.

Another “migrant channel” with several dozens of subscribers has a video where an old man makes a strange massage to a patient, lying on the floor, while the people around are laughing and cheering¹⁴. We can also spectate a

young migrant wearing work clothes performing a breakdance right at the construction site¹⁵, or two other migrants roaming the streets of Samara to some music¹⁶.

The video diaries of the migrants are important not only for their content, but also for the difference in situations experienced by authors living in different cities, working at different places, and having different statuses. In terms of mental geography, fragments of the videos make up a migrant map of Russia, with details that can hardly be picked during offline field surveys. This is a great opportunity for a benchmark analysis of the individual migrant experience and the self-reflection presented in the videos. The variety of the everyday life stories, which have become accessible due to the “migrant channels”, lets us see the transboundary movement beyond the spectrum of values set by journalists and academic literature.

Bureaucracy for dummies and arrest school: channels on legal issues

The content related to numerous bureaucratic procedures is one of the most common to find. It can be found on the entertainment, news, and autobiographic channels, but it is mostly concentrated on the special channels of the migration lawyers¹⁷ and legal advocates. They are valuable for presenting local law enforcement practices and making references to the practising lawyers in different regions. For example, one of the authors published a big video explaining why registration with the migration bodies should not be done through the Russian post offices¹⁸, and another provided a thorough description of the procedure of exclusion from the Russian Federation¹⁹.

The channels of the second group are more specific; their authors may teach the viewers talking to officials, illustrating every situation with the videos of their personal experience. Another trend is presenting the cobwebs of the Russian labour legislation, teaching migrants

¹¹ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=473&v=8P-yPjz04Oo

¹² Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjxB8Fc1rcw>

¹³ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heclZUaxrE>

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPKm73AUjBk>

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4fANju4CDs>

¹⁶ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAiyTcmfVRE>

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAiyTcmfVRE>

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z1MbrQ6lfw>

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zET0Vuf4-y8>

how to communicate with their employers and landlords.

The channels where their migrant authors publish videos on the offences committed by the Russian police stand out as a special group. Ungrounded searches, demands for bribes and physical violence are demonstrated to the public, and, according to the comments, the channel viewers consider those as a “beginner’s course”. Analyzing the documented conversations with the police, the users learn how to respond in different situations, how to behave and what laws to refer to. Other videos provide the list of documents a migrant should carry not to cause any suspicions of the police²⁰.

These channels are also interesting for presenting the shadow economy exploiting the migrant traffic. The channel of Karimjon Yerov, for example, is a real school of labour migration. Besides other things, the author publishes the videos of disputes with the Moscow police officers on the illegal demands they make. For example, in a discussion that took place near the migration centre in Sakharov Street, the author asserts his right to request the police officer to present the grounds for checking his documents²¹. It reveals some interesting details of the interaction between the Moscow police and the migrants; for example, the “anti-riot regiment” of the police is known for its cruelty and negligence of the written regulations. In another video, the author begins a discussion with the police officers, persuading them to release two migrants detained in the Moscow underground, and finally succeeds²².

The most interesting part of the study is the comments posted by the video viewers. For example, in one of the videos, a man begins a dispute with the police and gets beaten²³. Below, we find the comments of the migrants who do not only express their attitude to the Russian police but also criticize the “friend and foe” dichotomy created by the host society, suggesting the media projects alternative to the Russian mass media mainstream.

One of the viewers recalls the identity of the “Soviet people”, referring to it as to the beautiful past: *“This is unbearable for me to see. It has been going on for 30 years and there is no hope it would ever be over. I have been living and working in Russia for over 15 years, I’ve been to different cities, and everywhere you can find such rascals who, I am sure, don’t even the laws of their country, or use our ignorance to make money or to get any other profit. There are lots of us in Russia, and by saying “us”, I mean Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, who have to come here to win their bread. We are everywhere, at the construction sites, markets, transport, and plants. This is not our fault that we happened to live in Central Asia. We used to live in the same state as you, under the same red flag for over 70 years, and we have to find the right way in the end. We are not your enemies; we are your friends. We may be poor, but we are true friends of yours, though we feel no friendly attitude from you when everyone sees what is going on but does not say anything. We are in a great need for well-educated people with a good command of the Russian language and the expertise of Russian law, let those be 100 people from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Let the migrants and the embassies of our countries give them financial and diplomatic support so that they could work for the people coming here so that all the offences people make were revealed and made public on all the channels. Then, I believe, it will be alright”*.

In other videos, the author shows a lecture given in a small auditorium about the basic skills the migrants need to avoid getting scammed in Moscow. The lecturer organizes roleplays with the listeners, simulating a morning visit of the police, a search in the street or a document check. In every game, the lecture participants and the lecturer play the roles of a police officer or an employer, and the others act as themselves.

Thus, in the house search role play²⁴, the lecturer teaches the migrants to ask the police officers to present the grounds for the search and the suspect profile if the police refer to a crime committed on the premises. The listeners make notes, tell funny situations from

²⁰ Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeLQQB-8bA58U_YiT-nz9ptw/featured

²¹ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBC2k6izJFE>

²² Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IKJAwUvaUg>

²³ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JymVelkanEA>

²⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1yopMjyRu0>

their experience, and the lecturer shares life-hacks they may use to avoid prosecution in the future.

In other videos the migrants are taught selecting employment ads, making agreements with insurance companies²⁵ and other useful skills. Based on the examples of the ads from Moscow newspapers and recruiting websites, the migrants are taught distinguishing fair employers from scammers. According to the lecturer, a good ad must feature: the address of the company, obligations of the worker, salary, applicant requirements and the work schedule²⁶.

The channel and the users' comments contain a great deal of updated information on the fraudulent practices of Russian companies and the shadow economy they develop. For example, one of the Moscow companies advertises a job with very attractive conditions but requires the applicants to present a health permit. If the applicant fails, the employer offers the service of a "friend" company, which is, of course, not free. After that, many other services may be imposed on the applicant, such as the uniform, the security service etc. This way the company collects up to 18 thousand rubles from each applicant and rejects him or her, for example, referring to the negative results of the security check. The author advises the migrants to avoid the companies that demand prepayment of a part of the future salary in exchange of the search for the suitable vacancies, as well as any other places that require any forms of payment for employment.

The head of Tong Zhakhoni, Moscow organization advocating the migrants' rights, runs training courses where he demonstrates the cases from his legal practice, presents the agreements concluded by the scammed migrants he had to defend. Based on these examples, the lecturer teaches newcomers to distinguish the suspicious symptoms that may indicate the fraudulent intentions of the employer. Those include the agreement articles stipulating the liability of the employee for damage of any property at the employer's site, or the obligation to purchase the working

robes, inventory or expendables at the worker's expense. The lecturer made a special emphasis on multilevel marketing, explaining the audience how to distinguish the ads of the MLM companies among others.

The lecturer makes it obvious that even large contractors, working with such famous companies as Megafon, sometimes do not mind using such techniques. The lecture mentioned many large and famous companies exploiting the labour of Central Asian migrants. For instance, according to the lecturer, a contractor of Megafon, a cleaning company from Moscow, forced its cleaning staff to work for 15 hours per day, buying detergents from the employers for the money exceeding the market price by several times. Moreover, the staff bears full liability for the damage of all the equipment used in the offices.

The channels on legal issues help to evaluate the level of uncertainty the migrants have to face and to learn the ways this uncertainty may be overcome. Publishing another piece of current information on the cost of patents in Russian regions, quotes²⁷, and the most recent changes in the migration legislation²⁸, the necessary documents²⁹, the authors make immigration to the RF a much more predictable matter, therefore expanding, though to the smallest extent, the planning horizon for their subscribers.

The legal advocates' channels provide several arrays of useful research material. First of all, those are videos themselves. They provide the material for a thorough study of the contacts between the migrants and the police officers that are hard to reproduce but can be used to study the microsocial interaction structure. The video records of the words, facial expressions, gestures and actions create the canvas of the social scenes, attractive for application of a dramaturgic metaphor.

The comments to them, presenting the reaction of the migrants to the depicted situations, are just as valuable; that is the material impossible to collect in the field, through in-

²⁵ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2Dg0wXpN00>

²⁶ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1yopMjyRu0>

²⁷ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJrZB56fUls>

²⁸ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEW6TW_OSaA

²⁹ Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeLQQB-8bA58U_YiT-nz9ptw/featured

interviews or questionnaires. This is the pool of the potential respondents, authors and actors of the videos, migration legislation experts, familiar with the reality of the shadow economy exploiting the migration traffic, as well as the migrants themselves.

Pranks, sports and the Red Square pickup: entertainment channels

For obvious reasons, the content we classified as entertainment is more common and popular among the audience than the law-related and autobiographic ones. It includes channels with sports highlights, pranks, music etc.

These channels are interesting not only for their content but also for the comments to the videos. For example, the video of an Uzbek (?) rap artist about the fight at Khovanskoye cemetery³⁰ in Moscow³¹ collected over one and a half thousand comments, in which the users discussed the event. The author blames the Chechens and Russians for their aggression to “simple Tajik labourers”; comments are left by representatives of both of these communities and many others. The major part of the discussion is in Russian; it focuses mainly on the acceptability of a money conflict between Muslims. Then the parties touched upon the employment of the migrants to the least prestigious jobs, such as cleaning, discussing the acceptability of such jobs for a Muslim.

Entertaining content also encompasses multiple videos of social campaigns run by the authors of the channels, migrants living in Russian cities. Many migrant communities such as “The Kind Tajik”³² specialize in such videos. In their live broadcasts, the authors help a random migrant to buy a ticket to his motherland³³, give presents to children in the streets of Yekaterinburg, visit orphanages etc.

In the comments to the videos, there are numerous calls for help: to pay for a patent, to find a lost relative and event to buy a hoverboard for a child. Some dialogues form threads in the migrant horizontal networks

when a call for help from one migrant attracts others ready to share their resources and information.

An interesting kind of videos presents the social campaigns that illustrate the relations between “us” and “them” in Russia at the microsocial interaction level, when, for example, a young Tajik man is trying to start a conversation with Russian girls on the Red Square under a candid camera. Such videos encourage the audience to discuss the “us-them” dichotomy as well as the relations between Russians and migrants. These discussions represent the “migrant” agenda through the eyes of the migrants. The image formed by Russian mass media and often quoted by academic texts is being often reflected upon by the migrants themselves. Comparison of the dialogues with those that occur on the channels of the major Russian digital media may form a topic for a separate study.

A large share of the entertainment channels covers highlights of sports, such as martial arts, football, sports bets. Sometimes they include some educating content, for example, the reasons why migrants take microloans³⁴. In the comments underneath, there begins a discussion on the acceptability of loans for a Muslim migrant and what ends justify the means.

The numerous channels, publishing videos about the national language and culture of the country of origin³⁵, may also be to some extent classified as entertaining content. These channels may equally contain information on the “migrant locations” of the Russian cities. Those may be the places³⁶ where the authors interview their respondents, the venues where ethnic music concerts, language courses, or weddings are organized³⁷. In some videos, the authors are directly asked about places where, for example, a Kyrgyz could have a good time in Moscow; as a response, the author provides some guidance about the Kyrgyz clubs of the city³⁸.

³⁰ Source: <https://www.rbc.ru/story/573997819a79471d09a146ad>

³¹ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3dtjfWHXNM>

³² Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCPgiwtA-aX_efCZ1Ez9r3rw

³³ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q09Ua96mspE>

³⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmfvRywydZc>

³⁵ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hscaG4IY_E

³⁶ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ci1tIBTiduo>

³⁷ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HU0HruqyWEc>

³⁸ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BjgvYHLxqo>

The entertainment channels often react to the newsworthy events related to migration issues of both regional and federal scale. From such posts, we can learn more about both the “migrant locations” in this or that Russian city as well as about some local problems. For example, in one of the entertainment channels, there was a video, where a middle-aged man spoke about a criminal group backing foreign dealers at the Novosibirsk market.

From the context, it is understandable that this is a video of questioning a witness to a massive fight at the market between the market dealers and the criminal group members³⁹. Under the video of the fight itself, there are dozens of comments from the migrants on how the situation can be settled and whether it is worthwhile dealing with the Russian police. The comments are valuable for presenting the opinions of migrants on such urgent issues as shadow economy and powerful groups exploiting the migrants that the respondents usually refuse to discuss during regular interviews.

Just like the autobiographic content, the entertainment channels mark different migrant locations, such as companies, assembly spots, public spaces, entertainment sites, on the city map. In one of the videos of “The Kind Tajik” channel, the author decided to give out free food near a mosque; besides other migrant bloggers, the video mentioned some halal food catering cafes⁴⁰. The entertainment channels make it possible to trace the migration history of their authors through the autobiographic interview, questions and answers videos etc. But their greatest value is the narrations of the most typical problems of the migrants, such as the issues of self-identification in the host country, interaction with the host society and other migrants etc.

Conclusion

One of the key functions of the “migrant YouTube” segment is introducing various aspects of the host country and the migrants’ daily lives to those who are moving or planning to move. The authors of the channel may present

the information in various forms, such as humorous videos of what Russian ladies think of Tajiks⁴¹, how Russians distinguish between Tajiks and Uzbeks, or those may be serious videos on legal matters. In any situation, whether the author is recording a conflict with the police⁴², speaks about arrival and departure procedures⁴³, or reviews the Kyrgyz hospitals in Moscow⁴⁴, this is an opportunity for the viewer to get an idea of one of the numerous segments of the migrants’ daily lives.

The fact of the existence of the “migrant YouTube” segment as such may prove the developing request of the migrants for a language to describe their host country, the social and physical space they found themselves in. The videos that serve as presentations of the migrant life in the Russian Federation come up because of the growing need to formulate and present the migrant identity in the media. It needs to be presented both to the host community and the people looking at the migration to the Russian Federation from the donor countries. Perhaps, this is why there are so many videos presenting Uzbeks in Russia or Tajiks in Russia as positive characters and an example to look up to.

Some of the channels become real mechanisms for identity edition and production⁴⁵, especially when a video about an urgent problem gathers migrants from all over the CIS to decide how to treat each other and Russia, whether they have something in common or something that separates them. The studied channels demonstrate that migration becomes an international CIS myth, which in some situations serves as an integrating frame for those who move around it and those who say goodbye or welcome. Some of them can be regarded as platforms collecting the political opinions of the migrants⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrLJ2SM-339RKFcf2CqhLnQ>

⁴² Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCobfSEJ3m-wDkU1N3L9L_CGQ/videos

⁴³ Source: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_WL5U-W9AL5M_p1GKlaZjg/about

⁴⁴ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i94YU-WtCNt4>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rca-2XTtrzk>

⁴⁵ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HE5DPMvhVJE>

⁴⁶ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_wfSdKNG0Q

³⁹ Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRenGGMOj_k

⁴⁰ Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esOD8sEGtOo>

These channels are of great value for social science. They present an almost unlimited array of information on how the migrants use the Russian language as their lingua franca, how it transforms in the environment of the migrants, and how it develops the professional migrant slang. Such channels are a tool of mythologizing migration, of transmitting these constructs over the national and regional borders, causing them to transform. These channels present a rich material for the migration visibility research: how it looks both to the one who hosts and the one who moves. There are short report videos about one day of men and women of different status, income and occupation living in different cities.

The "migrant channels" may be used to study the religious practices of the migrants, the "migrant medicine", education, entertainment. They can make up a "migrant map" of many Russian cities including food and beverage services, education institutions, informal meeting places and hostels. The "migrant channels" open access to the "migrant world", disclosing the names and contacts of the potential respondents aware of the specificity of the migrant world in this or that region of Russia.

Even the most superficial analysis allows formulating several hypotheses on the "mi-

grant digital space". The "migrant YouTube" serves as a means of the social capital accumulation both by the authors and their audience by involving the horizontal network resources. It may happen, for example, at the moment when the author requests the audience for a resource to redistribute in favour of other migrants (for example, like the video of "The Kind Tajik" channel calling for help for a girl who got hit by a car), or when the author shares his or her own migration experience, knowledge of the city where he or she lives.

Such interaction would be almost impossible without a certain level of trust, which should be quite high. The users do not only take the risk of transferring their money without any formal guarantees from the channel authors but also listen to their opinions on such serious matters as employment or communication with the police. It raises the questions on how this trust is formed and how the users can determine whether this author or audience can be trusted. Where is the borderline between "us" and "them"? Perhaps, the "migrant YouTube" facilitates the development of the self-description language to articulate these borders and meeting points, building the borders between the migrants and the locals in certain places and crushing them in other.

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Русскоязычный «мигрантский» YouTube как объект социальных исследований города

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Аннотация. В русскоязычном сегменте YouTube существует множество каналов, авторы которых, приезжая в РФ из Кыргызстана, Таджикистана, Казахстана, Узбекистана, выкладывают в открытый доступ зарисовки своей повседневности в принимающей стране: поиск работы, обустройство жилья, общение с миграционными и полицейскими чиновниками, взаимодействие с другими мигрантами. Эти видео, а также комментарии к ним отражают авторский миграционный опыт и реакцию на высказывания со стороны других мигрантов и представителей принимающего сообщества. Данные цифровые пространства становятся не только площадкой для обмена опытом и накопления социального капитала между мигрантами, но и местом контакта между «своими» и «чужими», условными мигрантами и местными. Специфика цифровой площадки, ее ориентированность на публикацию видеодневников повседневности позволяют предположить, что изучение «мигрантских» каналов дает возможность буквально увидеть российские города глазами приезжих. При этом «мигрантский» сегмент русскоязычного YouTube практически не описан. Цель статьи в том, чтобы частично восполнить этот пробел, категоризировав отобранные методом снежного кома «мигрантские» YouTube-каналы, используя метод ретроспективного онлайн-наблюдения, оценить их эвристический потенциал для проведения качественных социологических и антропологических исследований миграции, а также по возможности сформулировать несколько гипотез о социальных функциях «мигрантского» YouTube.

Ключевые слова: мигрант, социальные медиа, горизонтальные сети, YouTube, город.

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Научная специальность: 22.00.00 – социологические науки.