Research article

Gender differences online: self-representation and involvement in political communication on Facebook

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A B S T R A C T

The paper aims to study gender differences in self-representation and involvement in political communication in social networks. The author presents the results of the study of Facebook postings within a viral flashmob 'The Island of the '90's' devoted to a controversial period of Russia's modern history. The author offers the rationale for their attribution to an online segment of political communication. A multidisciplinary approach involving the combination of methodologies of discourse analysis and content analysis served as guidelines for the study. A discourse analysis based on the sociocognitive approach to political discourse helps identify three stages of the flashmob evolution in the three series of postings: private memories, political discussions of the 1990s, and attitudes towards the flashmob. These three series of postings form and organise a three-level structure of the flashmob. Each level is characterised by a different extent of its involvement in the political context. Comparative analysis of male and female participation in the flashmob reveals gender asymmetry in the flashmob discourse structure and at its structural levels. The results show that there are gender differences in political involvement of females and males in online discourse: women prefer less visible or less offensive patterns of political behaviour online. The results lead to the conclusion that, compared to men, women are more flexible in their self-representation and their participation in the discourse has less political involvement. No significant evidence indicating gender differences' disappearance was observed, and no evidence of gender role stereotypes weakening or disappearance in political communication on Facebook was obtained.

1. Introduction

The growth of new web technologies, such as social media, has opened new opportunities for online communication. Today, the popularity of social media is increasing, social networks have become widespread, they have united culturally and demographicaly diverse internet users (Gunter, 2019; Tifferet and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014). The purpose of social network communication is to maintain contacts and good relations with one's friends and acquaintances, as well as enhance one's own, usually positive, image (Danesi, 2016; Dąbrowska, 2018). That is why the study of online communication on social networking sites, such as Facebook, one of the most popular resources on the internet, seems especially important.

1.1. Gender differences in online communication

The interest in empirical research on gender differences in computer-mediated communication is growing (Herring, 2000; Herring and Stoerger, 2014; Herring and Kapidzic, 2015; Morante et al., 2017).

On the one hand, online communication reduces gender inequalities that are present in face-to-face communication and provides opportunities for more equal communication and information sharing without markers of status and gender-marked connotations (Herring, 1993) because males and females are liberated from the restrictions of their physical identities and confinements (Langlois, 2014). A combination of hierarchical and network principles of communication with the growing role of the latter has been observed in online communication, providing an opportunity to expect a changing/increasing role of gender differences (Herring and Stoerger, 2014) traditionally attributed to the sphere of face-to-face communication. On the other hand, the adoption of a different 'online' identity does not automatically cancel prejudices associated with gender and may often reinforce them (Nakamura, 2002). Numerous studies have shown that unless measures are taken to improve the conditions for participation, men may dominate in computer-mediated communication as they do in other communication contexts (Herring, 1996; Lee, 2002; Prinsen et al., 2007).

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The results of gender differences research in virtual communication in social networks have sometimes been controversial. There is a constant debate regarding the existence and magnitude of gender differences. Studies have confirmed that gender stereotypes and stereotypical representations of males and females are frequently found on social networking sites (Bailey et al., 2013; Glenn, 2013; van Oosten et al., 2017). Previous research showed gender differences in topics chosen for discussion (Wang et al., 2013), in motivation for using social networks (Barker, 2009; Haferkamp et al., 2012), in self-presentation (Caldeira et al., 2018; Obertst et al., 2016a). Such differences may be attributed to maintaining traditional gender stereotypes, where females are associated with private life, decorative, nurturing and supporting roles (O'Neil et al., 2016). Prior studies suggest that men tend to construct their online image of a powerful, strong, independent person in position with high social status, whole women are more prone to use social networks for self-disclosure and communication, they post more images of themselves, friends and significant others (Strano, 2008). However, there is evidence that gender boundaries are becoming blurred, people present themselves online in less stereotyped way, and this is more typical for females than males with a slight preference for masculine characteristics (Obertst et al., 2016b).

1.2. Political communication

The domain of political communication with its emphasis on power is of significant importance. According to van Dijk's definition, 'political discourse is not a genre, but a class of genres defined by a social domain, namely that of politics' (van Dijk, 1998). Political discourse refers to discourse practices used by all actors in a political process which identify the participants and organise the topic of political communication. Online political communication may be described as a specific segment of the web determined by the themes and topics discussed and the verbal means of their discussion—discursive practices with a sufficiently free choice of individual communicative strategies (Blitvich, 2010).

Notably, that the political segment of social network communication is the sphere of the most intense and emotional discussions, disputes, and conflicts, in which there is a constant identification of the participants based on the distinction between 'Us/Them' in terms of dominant subject positions of the current political discourse, as well as redefinition/production of these positions, including their gender components. Moreover, virtual communication reduces gender-linked power differences through its open access and the possibilities for communicative partners to remain anonymous (Danet, 1998), which seems to be critical for our purposes. The literature on gender gap in political communication in social media is less consistent. Despite many assumptions that internet and social media can reduce gender gap, the researchers observe gender differences in online political involvement and in participation in social networks discussions (Schöttle, 2017; Stromer-Galley, 2017; Phillips, 2019), which might result in different media coverage for women politicians (van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). A number of authors have recognized that women are less likely than men to engage in politics (Vochocová et al., 2016; van Duyn et al., 2019), while other studies suggest that gender differences in political involvement seem mush less widespread in social media (Bode, 2016).

Although such studies have focused on various aspects of virtual discourse (Herring, 2003; Jackson et al., 2001) and we have a body of literature on gender differences in political communication (e.g., Caldeira et al., 2018; Vraga et al., 2016; Theocharis and Lowe, 2016) a number of questions regarding gender differences in political communication in online discussions in social media remain to be addressed. We need to know more about who participates, who does not, and why. Thus, our study may be helpful to better understand the discourse practices in online political discussions.

Moreover, the research of gender differences in political communication in social media campaigns, such as viral flashmobs, which have become widespread and are playing an increasing role in social networking (Deller and Tilton, 2015) remains limited. Such phenomena can be described as volatile 'network sociality' ('sociality ad hoc'), the ideal grounds for social creativity (Christensen, and Jansson, 2015) and their involvement potential deserves interest.

We chose Facebook among other social networks where flash mobs are conducted (Instagramm, YouTube) because Facebook is one of the most convenient social networks for political communication and representation of participants' political positions due to its affordances such as providing direct communication to promote political interests and enable dialogue, fostering an image of authenticity through informal interaction, and involvement through dynamic relationships with supporters (Jensen and Dyrby, 2013; Bucher and Helmond, 2018). Thus, we can expect that Facebook communication might be advantageous for the study of dynamic and informal phenomena, such as viral flashmob and its discussions associated with political discourse. In addition, Facebook is the most popular website with a reported 2603 million monthly active users that can be used for self-presentation (Barker, 2009; Obertst et al., 2016a). Moreover, unlike YouTube, which encourages more openly negative comments towards and about others, Facebook discourages them, especially in case of men (Dąbrowska, 2018).

With all that said, an online flashmob (thematically close to the segment of political communication in social media) provided the most comfortable environment for the comparative analysis of gender differences in communication practices and self-representation strategies.

Additionally, we used a flashmob as the object of this research because this phenomenon is well localised in time (it is easy to track its phases: the beginning, the development, and the decay), thematically (through the content of postings), and by the involvement of new participants (who declare their participation).

Thus, from this perspective, in a flashmob, we have a clearly defined and well-structured context of statements, and the position of each statement in this structure is easily and unambiguously determined. In this regard, we posited that a flashmob would provide the ideal material for the study of statements in the context of their production.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Data collection

This study is based on an analysis of Facebook postings within the flashmob 'The Island of the '90's' collected from September 2015 through October 2015. People posted their reminiscences and photos connected to the 1990s. The flashmob, which launched in September 2015, soon afterwards became viral and caused discussions in social networks, was devoted to a controversial period of Russia's modern history (the time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the time of freedom and survival in Russia's first post-Soviet decade).

We used purposive sampling (Elo et al., 2014) and we made decisions about who or what is sampled, what form the sampling should take and how many people need to be sampled.

To collect the data for our sample we recruited five post-graduate university students of Social Sciences, who were interested in politics and had Facebook accounts with a significant amount of friends and political bloggers they followed. Our sampling departed from five Facebook users' profiles randomly selected from the profiles of their friends and people they followed on Facebook and we expanded it through a snowball sampling technique. From each of these five users' profiles we selected on a random basis five other users' profiles, and so on. Given our theoretical interest in political involvement, participation in social media campaigns and political discussions, all selected participants were weekly active users who had more friends on Facebook than an average user, which we learned from their profile data.

From this database we selected postings, and photos while considering verbal and visual textual markers, linking postings with the flashmob, hashtags (e.g. #ostrov90, #nineties, #my90s, #nineties photos, #DamnedNineties), texts, and textual fragments with a thematic focus on

the 1990s (e.g. 'my 90-s', '90-s photo', 'here are the 90-s', 'remembering the 90-s'), photos, headlines, user's rating of popularity defined by the number of friends and followers, user's activity on Facebook, and the number of likes. We did not include children's photographs in the sample. Thus, we hope that we managed to select mostly all the active users who took part in the flashmob and its discussion.

This process was repeated until we selected a sample of 390 postings (143 by females and 247 by males).

The age of the participants of the flashmob was limited by its topic (the period of the 1990s). The average age of the participants was 40–50 years. Also, according to the profile data, the majority of the participants of the flasmob have higher education. Thus, it can be argued that our sample is homogenous in terms of demography, so that gender differences revealed in our sample can be described as differences between people with approximately equal social and demographic characteristics.

2.2. Purpose of the study

This study aimed to reveal differences in self-representation of males and females and in their involvement in political communication in viral social media campaigns.

The questions to be examined are as follows: Does the internet alter deeply rooted patterns of gender differences or do those patterns persist online in viral social media campaigns? Are there gender differences in the political involvement in social media campaigns?

2.3. Research design

A multidisciplinary approach involving content analysis combined with a cognitive discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2006) served as guidelines for this study. Although content and discourse analysis represent rather different approaches we attempted to utilise them together in the mixed method research design, which included the combination of methodologies of discourse analysis (van Dijk et al., 2001; Fairclough, 2001) based on the approach to political discourse as the process of production and interpretation of a text in meaningful political, social, and cultural context and qualitative content analysis. In our research project, both methods complemented each other, allowed both quantitative and qualitative description of the subject matter, provided direct textual analysis and interpretation of the role of the context to assess how 'gender, ethnicity, or class membership <…> determine the thematic or stylistic properties of discourse' (van Dijk, 1988).

The research was carried out in the following three stages.

2.3.1. The structure of the flashmob

At the first stage, following van Dijk's approach to discourse "as a complex communicative event" occurring in certain verbal and non-verbal context (van Dijk, 1988), we analysed the flash mob discourse as a complex communicative event composed of utterances (postings) produced and perceived in certain conditions (contexts) which should be taken into account.

A critical question arises here concerning our assumption that the selected data may be described as political communication. Notably, the 'Island of 90s' was launched on Facebook with an appeal for users to publish private memories and nostalgic photographs: therefore, the audience did not perceive it at its initial stage as a political event. However, even at the initial stage there was a latent or implicit political context in the flashmob as political messages and contexts were embedded in it the form of sub-text, such as "the creation of a positive image of the 1990s", which was later manifested openly. The situation changed dramatically when the flashmob was criticised for focusing too much on an alleged creation of a nostalgic positive image of the 1990s in Russia, and a political interpretation of the flashmob based on a political understanding of the era of the 1990s became widespread. The political interpretation triggered an online political discussion of the social and political importance of the 1990s, which was in line with nostalgic

memories and photos and could be considered as their expansion and development. As a result, private memories and nostalgic photos posted on Facebook without political connotations were perceived by the audience as political statements *post factum*. Thus, the flashmob, which seemed and was perceived at first non-political, spawned a political discussion, which later (*post factum*) politicised the flashmob.

Next, social media discussions of the role of the flashmob, its perception by the audience, and their attitudes towards participating or not participating in it were observed. As a result, the nostalgic memories of the flashmob became so interwoven with social media discussions of the controversial 1990s in Russia, the role of the flashmob, and attitudes towards it that all the postings being related to themes associated with the 1990s, the flashmob and attitudes towards it could be considered a coherent discursive whole (an online discourse of the flashmob) incorporated into the political segment of social media discourse. Therefore, we identified three stages or parts of the flashmob's evolution and development in the three series of postings: nostalgic photos and private memories; discussions of the 1990s; discussions of the flashmob and attitudes towards it. These three series of postings form and organise a three-level structure of the flashmob.

2.3.2. The distribution of the postings into three groups

At the second stage of the study we distributed the postings from our selected sample (see Section 2.1) into three levels of the above-mentioned structure of the flashmob.

Thus, we divided the postings into three groups (Group 1, Group 2, Group 3) in accordance with the topic of each posting ('what it is about') and its broader theme (nostalgic memories, discussion of the 1990s, discussion of the flashmob, and attitudes towards it). Such division reveals three levels of the discursive political context of the flashmob: (1) politically neutral context (nostalgic photos and private memories, Group 1), (2) political context of the 1990s (discussions, Group 2), and (3) contemporary political context (attitudes towards the flashmob, Group 3). We paid attention to macrostructures, headlines and other semantic markers with which the authors emphasized the topic and their speech intention (it was not infrequently that the authors explicitly declared the purpose and motives of their participation in the flash mob) in accordance with the method proposed by van Dijk (van Dijk, 2006).

The first group (Group 1) comprises 'politically neutral' postings —private memories. These postings are predominantly nostalgic photographs of the 1990s with brief user commentaries. They usually have two components—verbal and visual. The main connotative function of the message is performed by its visual component, and an author's commentaries on the photograph serve as denotates. The topic of such statements is the author's 'Self'; the statements are about oneself, and it is usually a visual self-representation.

The second group (Group 2) comprises postings in which political generalisations about the 1990s in Russia are made and an attitude towards this period (positive or negative) is expressed. The topic of the postings is the 1990s in Russia. For further analysis, Group 2 was subdivided into two subgroups according to the presence or absence of a private story (or a nostalgic photograph), confirming the author's opinion or interpretation of the period: postings expressing general political opinions based on private stories (Subgroup A) and postings containing general statements (generalisations) without private stories (Subgroup B). Unlike the postings from Group 1, the main idea of the postings of Group 2 is usually expressed in their verbal part (narrative), and a visual component illustrates the message of a verbal element.

The third group (Group 3) comprised postings where an analysis of the flashmob as a political action was conducted and an attitude towards this action (positive or negative) was expressed. The topic of the statements is 'the flashmob and its discussion in the social media'.

2.3.3. Exploring gender differences

The aforementioned division of postings into three groups should be considered as the judgement sampling (Fairclough, 2001) for our further

analysis of gender differences in self-representation and political involvement which we carried out at the third stage of our research. We carried qualitative content analysis for each group of postings.

The choice of the given sampling is determined by the fact that it corresponds to the purpose of our research (self-representation practices depend on the position of postings within the flashmob discourse) and it also reflects the structure, evolution, production, and the shaping of the flashmob discourse as a coherent whole.

In addition, some conclusions on gender asymmetry can be made on the basis of the sampling before conducting content analysis. These conclusions support and supplement the conclusions made on the basis of content analysis, which we carried out for each group of postings. Thus, the representation practices own specificity depending on the position of postings within the flashmob discourse: their theme, topic, or subject-matter; and their aim and intention. In the study of gender asymmetry, such specificity can be considered by choosing the proper content analysis variables for each group of postings. The procedure and detailed choice of content analysis variables for each group of postings would be described in Section 3.

There were two people who did the coding. The inter-rater reliability was 0.96–0.91. Statistical analysis of the results was carried out. We used the binomial distribution with continuity correction. The observed difference was considered statistically significant if U observed in absolute value was greater than U critical = 1.96, and P observed was less than 0.05 (level of significance).

3. The study and results

3.1. Male and female participation in the flashmob

As shown above, the initially nostalgic flashmob resulted in the politicisation of the discourse. However, the involvement of the constitutive elements/components of the discourse (nostalgic photos and private memories, discussions of the 1990s, and the discussions of the attitudes towards the flashmob) into the political context may be different for different elements/components.

As we have shown in Section 2.3.1, schematic structures and macrostructures of the flashmob discourse were the basis for the division of the postings from our sample into three groups and two subgroups. The distribution of the postings into groups reveals three levels of political context: politically neutral postings; political opinions and generalisations; analysis, attitudes, and interpretation of the flashmob.

Following the methodological procedure proposed in the paradigm of the cognitive processing of discourse (van Dijk, 1988), we distinguished common schematic structures determining the development of the general structure of the discourse and its type (texts with verbal and visual components, private stories, memories and narratives, argumentative and polemical texts, discussion and analysis) and common macrostructures (i.e., topic, theme, main idea, main message) to provide global and local coherence on the flashmob's discourse. We also revealed narrative schemes similar to those of T. van Dijk (van Dijk, 1985).

A preliminary comparative analysis of male and female participation in the flashmob was conducted for all participants (i.e., men and women). The flash mob provided equal opportunities to speak out, but men and women used these opportunities in different ways, which is illustrated in Table 1.

As we can see from Table 1, statistically significant difference between male and female participation was observed in Subgroup B of Group 2. The percentage of males (21.5% of all male participants) here is significantly higher than the percentage of females (9.8% of all female participants), U observed = -3.08289 > U critical, P observed = 0.00205 < 0.05.

In addition, statistically significant difference between male and female participation was observed for all postings of Group 2. The percentage of males who provided political opinions, analyses, and interpretations of the 1990s (38.1%) is significantly higher than the percentage of females (25.9 %). U observed = -2.60907 > Ucritical, P observed = 0.00907 < 0,05.

The results show the prevalence of political generalisations in postings made by males. In addition, statistically significant difference between male and female participation in postings of Group 2 suggests the conclusion that men are more politically involved online than women.

The results from Table 1 also indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the percentage of politically neutral postings (Group 1) made by males and females. However, the percentage of women who gave political opinions based on private stories (Subgroup A) was higher than the percentage of women who provided general opinions (Subgroup B), while men, on the contrary, offered more general opinions than gave private details. Thus, we can conclude that women showed greater tendency to associate their opinion with their personal experience, while men provided more political generalisations of the period.

3.2. Gender differences in self-representation

Self presentation is the process by which individuals represent themselves to the social world, usually motivated by a desire to please others and/or to meet the needs of self. Self-presentation can be used as a means to manage the impressions others form of oneself (Goffman, 1959). Although visual content has become central resource for online self-representation (Kapidzic and Herring, 2014) textual descriptions are also used for self-expression. We understand self-representation in the tradition of media studies as a practice of symbolic creation of media texts (Rettberg et al., 2017; Caldeira et al., 2020). Such perspective takes into consideration everyday experiences of the people who make conscious creative choices selecting and sharing special moments of their lives (Thumim, 2012). As scholars differ in their classification of self-representation strategies, we follow the approach of J.W. Rettberg who differentiates modes of self-representation in social media: visual (selfies and other images that people use to express themselves such as the photos they share on FB), written (blogs, online diaries and written status people share on social networking sites or in comments) and qualitative (Rettberg et al., 2017).

Table 1. Distribution of postings into three groups.

Groups of postings	Female		Male		U observed	P observed
	Number	%	Number	%		
Group 1. Politically neutral postings	73	51.0	107	43.3	1.37008	0.17066
Group 2. Postings expressing political opinions, analyses, and interpretations of the 1990s						
a) Subgroup A. Political opinions based on private stories	23	16.1	41	16.6	-0.30331	0.76165
b) Subgroup B. Political generalisations without private stories	14	9.8	53	21.5	-3.08289	0.00205
Group 3. Postings with attitudes, analyses, and interpretations regarding the flashmob	33	23.1	46	18.6	0.92378	0.03555
Total number	143	100	247	100		

3.2.1. Self-representation in private memories/photos

We now more closely examine the first group of postings (Group 1), which contain nostalgic memories/photos without political connotations. Their schematic structure can be described as a combination of a visual image (author's photo in different settings and different roles) which performs the main connotative function of a message with brief (often standardised), verbal commentaries on the photograph, which serve as denotates, for example, '*And here are our 90-s', 'So, the 90-s', 'Here are some more 90-s…',* and '*There go my 90-s'*. Such online publications have structural similarities with visual advertisements in the form of posters where, as many studies have shown, traditional gender roles and stereotypes are perpetuated (Maximova, 2005; Goffman, 1979; Grau and Zotos, 2016a; Grau and Zotos, 2016b; Signoretti, 2017; Lawton, 2009).

We employed a content analysis of the visual components of Group 1 to reveal gender differences in visual self-representation strategies. The coding categories were determined by the structural similarity of postings from Group 1 with visual magazine advertisements (postings have two components—visual and verbal—with the main function of the message delivered by its visual component). The coding procedure was similar to the procedures employed in the studies of gender stereotypes in print advertisements (Courtney and Whipple, 1983; Rudy et al., 2011; Goffman, 1979). We coded the gender roles, activities, and status indicators of the characters portrayed in the posted photos. Although all the postings of Group 1 have the common goal of 'positive presentation of self' by means of the visual component, the focus of self-representation may differ. These differences could be found in the roles and activities chosen by the authors for their self-portrayal in photos, for example, a family role versus an occupational/professional role; in settings and surroundings chosen for representation, for example, a photo in a mixed-sex group versus that in a same-sex group, or a photo in a high-status setting versus a neutral setting; and in the degree of emphasis on physical attractiveness. Thus, eight coding categories of content analysis were selected: self-portrayal in a role of a decorative and sexual object, self-portrayal in a family role, self-portrayal in a professional/occupational/student role, self-portrayal in a role of a high-status consumer, activity in the same-sex group, and activity in a mixed-sex group. The results of the content analysis of the visual components of the postings of Group 1 and the coding categories of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

As we can see from Table 2, gender role asymmetry in self-representation in photos was found in the following categories: women more often represented themselves in a role of a sexually attractive object (34.2 % female photos vs 22.4% male) and a family role (19.2% female photos vs 11.2% male), and men preferred to represent themselves in an occupational/student role (19.6% male photos vs 8.2% female) and same-sex groups (23.4% male photos vs 5.5% female). Statistically significant difference was observed in the representation of professional, occupational, or student role. Men were more prone to such representation. The percentage of males here is significantly higher than the percentage of females, U observed > U critical, P observed <0.05. In addition, statistically significant difference was observed in the representation of activity in a same-sex group. The percentage of males who represented themselves in the activity in a same-sex group is significantly higher than the percentage of females.

3.2.2. Gender differences in interpretations and opinions of the 1990s

The second group of postings includes opinions, assessments, and interpretations of the 1990s in Russia.

We employed a qualitative content analysis of the textual components of postings of Group 2 to reveal gender differences in opinions, assessments, and interpretations of the 1990s in Russia. All the postings from this group are devoted to the controversial 1990s and are therefore polemical, they reveal authors' subjective positions with positive and negative attitudes towards the period whether they included private stories or not. Thus, what may be appropriate is to identify the attitude (positive or negative) towards the 1990s for the whole group without further division into subgroups. Thus, the attitudes towards the period (positive, negative, neutral) expressed in postings were chosen as the coding categories of our content analysis of Group 2.

The results of the content analysis show that gender asymmetry is present: women provided their positive opinion of the 1990s in 19 of the 37 female posts, namely, in 51% of all cases. Regarding the men, a positive opinion of the period was expressed in 28 of the 94 male posts, namely, in 28% of cases. The predominance of analytical male statements (21.5% vs 9.7%) can be explained by a greater number of direct negative statements about the 1990s expressed by males while females were inclined to perceive the times through the lens of their life stories. When expressing their opinions on the 1990s in Russia, women extrapolated their personal memories (not infrequently awoken by old photographs), and it is typical for individuals to remember good things. Thus, compared with the males, the females tended to be more positive in their interpretations of the 1990s.

Having identified the differences in male and female attitudes towards the 1990s, the next focus of our study was an assessment of how these attitudes were expressed: as verbal forms of their expression and as emotional and semantic markers describing the period of the 1990s.

For this purpose, the texts of Group 2 were analysed to find connotative markers (positive or negative) for typical words associated with the period of the 1990s, for example, the 1990s, time, country, Russia, generation, people, period, and epoch.

According to our data, male postings with positive attitudes towards the 1990s contained the following emotional and semantic markers and connotations: '*the important years', 'the years of discoveries', 'the years of hope', 'youth and victory', 'the times of opportunities', 'the best times',* and '*the times of the young'*.

We found out that women expressed their attitudes towards the 1990s in the following manner: '*the most adventurous period in my professional biography', 'a small but a very bright period of my life', 'it was the best time of my life',* and '*There was everything. And we were young'*.

The results of the analysis of the words with emotional and semantic markers and connotations show that men expressed their positive attitude towards the 1990s in terms of freedom, victory, achievement, hope,

Table 2. Visual component of Group 1: gender differences in roles and activity.

Role/Activity	Female		Male		U observed	P observed
	Number	%	Number	%		
Role of a decorative and sexual object	25	34.2	24	22.4	1.57831	0.11449
Professional, occupational, or student role	6	8.2	21	19.6	-2.31699	0.02050
High-status consumer role	11	15.1	8	7.5	1.38057	0.16740
Activity in a same-sex group	4	5.5	25	23.4	-3.41119	0.00064
Activity in a mixed-sex group	6	8.2	6	5.7	0.38542	0.69992
Family role	14	19.2	12	11.2	1.27628	0.20185
Undefined	7	9.6	11	10.2	-0.29518	0.76784
Total number	73	100	107	100	1.57831	0.11449

and opportunities with a certain degree of detachment: They spoke of the times rather than themselves. By contrast, women made positive statements in terms of personal happiness, success, and well-being; they spoke of themselves rather than the times.

No principal differences were found between males and females in their statements expressing a negative attitude towards the 1990s. Both genders used almost the same means of expression. In particular, men expressed their negative sentiments in the following manner: *'the most shameful period', 'damned times', 'garbage generation',* and *'dark times'*. The women expressed their attitude in the following manner: *'I hate the NINETIES', 'the horror of the 90-s', 'The 90-s? No, thanks',* and *'those times were rotten, thievish, muddy'*.

3.2.3. Gender representations in private life stories

Next we focus on the two subgroups of Group 2, which comprise opinions and interpretations of the 1990s.

As aforementioned, Subgroup A comprises postings with private life stories with connotative commentaries/generalisations. In private stories we revealed narrative schemes similar to those of T. van Dijk (van Dijk, 1985). Our analysis showed that the postings of Subgroup A are life stories told in accordance with the narrative scheme that includes a private story 'My 1990s and I' (predominantly from the author's point of view), an opinion (or a generalisation) about the 1990s in addition to a private story, and a conclusion.

The private stories (with or without a visual component) included in Subgroup A significantly differed from the private stories attributed to Group 1, although they were formally constructed according to the same scheme. In Group 1, the stories were published for positive self-representation purposes, and in Subgroup A, the stories were argumentative and added persuasive strength to the opinions on the 1990s and provided arguments for the positive or negative attitudes expressed in the postings. In one case (Group 1), people talked about themselves to represent their personality, in the other case (Group 2), they provided a portrayal of the epoch through their examples. Thus, the private stories of Group 2 always had an additional meaning. For example, a personal photograph in an office with the commentary *'The 90-s. Building a career – it was quite a trend then'* may symbolise new opportunities for career development that emerged in the 1990s, and was attributed to Group 2. By contrast, a photo in an office with the commentary *'Look! How gorgeous I am!'* provided nostalgic memories with a positive self-image and no opinion of the epoch and thus was attributed to Group 1. Consequently, the plots and roles revealed in such stories and photographs may be perceived as typical plots and typical roles which can be extended to the whole society and the 1990s rather than private life stories (although they initially were intended as such).

We employed a qualitative content analysis of the textual components of postings of Subgroup A of Group 1 to reveal gender differences in private life stories. We coded gender roles chosen for author's self-representation in narrations. The following coding categories of content analysis were selected: self-portrayal in a role of a decorative and sexual object, self-portrayal in a family role, self-portrayal in a professional, occupational, or student role.

The results obtained through our analysis of gender differences in textual components of postings of Subgroup A are presented in Table 3.

The results obtained through our analysis point to the presence of gender role asymmetry. As we can see from Table 3, statistically significant difference between males and females was observed for family roles representation. Women were more prone to such representation. The percentage of females here is significantly higher than the percentage of males, U observed = 2.18593 > U critical, P observed = 0.02882 < 0.05.

Unlike visual representations from the previous group of postings (Group 1) emphasising traditional gender roles, private life stories (Group 2) provide a more flexible and wider repertoire of female gender roles including such positions as a 'working woman', 'mother', and 'wife'. Approximately 36% of female postings emphasised roles associated with career and professional activity, and 40% of female stories represented women in traditional gender roles, such as a mother, a wife, a daughter, a housewife. Such female representations can be described as 'androgynous' (Bem, 1981), blending both feminine and masculine typical roles. The plots of 37% of stories told by males were connected with employment, career, and combining work and study; 15% of male stories were related to political topics; and in 13% of male stories, men represented themselves in family roles (e.g. father, husband, son).

The private stories (Group A) have two levels (macro- and microlevel): They combine a personal life story (microlevel) with a generalisation or a conclusion associated with a semantic cluster 'country, period, people' (macrolevel). Moreover, although the macrolevel information in female stories tends to be in harmony with that of the microlevel (a general conclusion about the 1990s period followed from a private story), the connection between the macro- and microlevels in male stories is not as simple, definite, and straightforward, for example, *'I have three bright memories of the 1990s. At nine I got to know my father. At fourteen I began to work. At fifteen – I started falling in love, drinking and listening to the music. But for the most part the nineties in Russia are hell, squalor and degradation'*.

3.2.4. Gender differences in themes of expert opinions (Subgroup B)

We now examine the postings providing general opinions of the 1990s without references to private stories (Subgroup B). The differences in argumentative strategies can be revealed, namely, in the sphere of expert competence.

We employed a qualitative content analysis of the argumentation of analytical statements about the 1990s in Subgroup B to reveal gender differences in expert opinions by spheres of competence. We coded the microthemes of expert opinions (e.g. law, demography, culture) which were later arranged in larger thematic blocks based on the traditional male and female spheres of competence according to gender stereotypes to expose gender differences.

As a result, the following thematic blocks of expert opinion were selected as the coding categories:

1) Opinions on the issues associated with traditionally male spheres of competence: politics, economy, and management.
2) Opinions on the issues associated with traditionally female spheres of competence: culture, mass media, appearance, fashion, demography, and ethics.

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 3. Gender differences in role representations in private life stories (Subgroup A of Group 2).

Role/Activity	Female		Male		U observed	P observed
	Number	%	Number	%		
Professional, occupational, or student role	8	36.0	15	37	-0.41569	0.67763
Traditional family gender roles	9	40	5	13	2.18593	0.02882
Role not emphasized	6	24	21	50	-2.94428	0.00323
Total	23	100	41	100		

Table 4. Gender differences in expert opinions by spheres of competence.

Thematic blocks	Female		Male		U observed	P observed
	Number	%	Number	%		
Block 1. 'Male' spheres of competence						
politics	6	37	32	60		
economy	-		2	4		
law, management	-		2	4		
Total number (Block 1)	6	43	36	68	-2.0355	0.0417
Block 2. 'Female' spheres of competence						
demography	1	7	3	5.5		
culture, mass media	1	7	4	7.5		
appearance, fashion	1	7	1	2		
ethics	4	29	2	4		
Total number (Block 2)	7	50	10	19	2.0356	0.04179
Undefined	1	7	7	13		
Total number	14	100	53	100		

As we can see from Table 4, statistically significant differences between genders were found in the themes of expert opinion by spheres of competence. Men more often expressed opinions on the issues associated with traditionally male spheres of competence: politics, economy, and management then women: the percentage of males here is significantly higher than the percentage of females (68% vs 43%), U observed = -2.0355 > U critical, P observed <0.05. Women in their turn more often expressed opinions on the issues associated with traditionally female spheres of competence: culture, mass media, appearance, fashion, demography, and ethics then men. The percentage of females here is significantly higher than the percentage of males (50% vs 19%), U observed > U critical, P observed <0.05.

We observed gender gap in expert opinions by spheres of competence, which is in line with prior studies (van Duyn et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2013) demonstrating that women tend to share more personal topics (e.g., family matters) and are more likely to comment on local news, while men discuss public topics, comment on state, national or international topics.

Gender differences in strategies of affiliation/non-affiliation with other participants and with the dominant positions of the political discourse can also be revealed in this Subgroup. Our analysis shows that women employed the strategies of affiliation more actively than men did, often referring to opinions of other participants (men) as expert to support their position, for example, 'As it was brilliantly put by Anton Dolin, we lived cheerfully, we were hungry, but we lived before those times of consumption!'; men were more inclined to be confrontational and organised their lines of arguments in a polemical form and by using the strategy of downgrading their opponents' images (van Dijk, 2006): 'So I can understand those who are feeling nostalgia. But I can't understand those old fools who want to bring the 1990s back, only a psychiatrist is able to understand them.'

3.2.5. Male and female strategies of (non-)affiliation: demonstrating solidarity and non-conformism

We now focus on the postings of Group 3, comprising all contributions related to the bloggers' analysis of the flashmob. This group includes postings containing the analysis/interpretation of the flashmob

and its meaning, guesses about its aims, and beneficiaries. Such postings, as a rule, are accompanied by a certain opinion (i.e. positive or negative) and express the author's position of affiliation/non-affiliation/ confrontation with or without arguments for it, for example, 'I also join the flashmob' (affiliation); 'You know, I really like this flashmob about the '90s. Let it be like this for a few more days' (positive opinion, affiliation); and 'And can I change settings so as not to see this orgy of dull old photos?' (negative opinion, non-affiliation).

We employed a qualitative content analysis of the textual components of postings of Group 3 to reveal gender differences in strategies of (non-) affiliation. We identified the attitude (positive or negative) towards the flashmob. Thus, the attitudes towards the flashmob (positive, negative) expressed in postings were chosen as the categories of the content analysis of Group 3. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 5.

As we can see from Table 5, statistically significant difference between genders in the attitude to the flashmob was observed. Women expressed positive attitude to flashmob more often than men. The percentage of females here is significantly higher than the percentage of males, U observed = -4.13765 > U critical, P observed <0.05.

Our analysis of the postings shows that the percentage of men's positive and negative opinions on the flashmob was almost equal (47% 'in favour', 53% 'against'), whereas the majority of women (84.5%) spoke in favour of the flashmob. Moreover, many women admitted that they participated in the action against their beliefs and political position. In such a case, the arguments in support of the flashmob were the following: to neutralise its political connotations and thus withdraw from the political context by combining the strategy of affiliation to the flashmob viewed as a collective (non-political) action with the strategy of non-affiliation to the flashmob as a political action. Another option for participation was an opportunity to present oneself in a positive role, to create a positive image of self, to engage in the collective narcissism.

These results are consistent with the findings where gender gap in the tone of communication was documented, with males posting more negative comments (Vochocová et al., 2016).

A substantial number of female expressed predominant support for the action, for example, 'I do not know the origins of the discussion about the nineties, but it is always funny to view the old photos' and 'A wonderful

Table 5. Positive and negative attitude to the flashmob.

	Female		Male		U observed	P observed
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent		
Positive attitude	28	84.5	22	47	2.47914	0.01316
Negative attitude	5	15.5	24	53	-4.13765	0. 00350
Total	33	100	46	100		

flashmob'; by contrast, men expressed their negative attitude by denouncing and criticising the 1990s: *'I have banned everybody who posted their nineties photos'* and *'I will not take part in this event. Those times were terrible and evil … '.*

Additionally, the reactions of men were predominantly political. They accompanied their negative opinion of the flashmob with negative interpretations of the 1990s. The negative attitude of the men revealed their position of confrontation and non-conformism. Notably, the same position was found in some positive interpretations of the flashmob made by males confronting the position of the opponents of the flashmob, for example, *'It took three days for the opponents to the 'revenge-obsessed' community to understand: the flashmob with heart-warming photos of the 1990s is the most powerful blow to their mythology of the turbulent nineties'.*

4. Discussion

4.1. Male and female participation in the flashmob

Facebook users' participation might be different in motivation at different stages of the flashmob's evolution and development. In particular, posting personal photographs online could be explained by collective narcissism legitimisation (de Zavala et al., 2009) and the tendency to 'preserve face' in an awkward situation (Goffman, 1959) and delegate authority and responsibility for privacy limit violations to all participants of the flashmob. Many users shared their personal photographs online with various remarks in a deliberately awkward manner, for example, *'All right, I am falling for the pandemic charm of "my 90-s"'*, *'OK, I have been keeping it a secret. But let's go for it…'*, *'Geez, I have also joined your flashmob'*. There could be additional motivation factors for participation in the flashmob (i.e., postings with the opinions about the 1990s and the flashmob) such as an expression of solidarity/support and affiliation/non-affiliation with the reference group or a manifestation of a particular political position towards the role of the 1990s in Russia.

4.2. Gender gap in political involvement online

Focusing on the distribution of male and female postings into three groups differing by the extent of their involvement into political context in the flash mob discourse (see Table 1), we can draw certain conclusions about gender-based gap in political engagement.

Firstly, we can assume that women's participation in the flashmob is less politicised. Lesser degree of political involvement of females in online discourse was observed in the lower percentage of female postings expressing political opinions, analyses, and interpretations of the 1990s: the percentage of males who provided such opinions (38%) was significantly higher than the percentage of females (38% of male postings vs 25.9 % of female postings in Group 2, Table 1).

This finding is supported by our analysis of postings containing bloggers' attitude to the flashmob (Group 3). Contrasted with the approximate parity of the relative proportion of male and female postings in Group 3, there is a significant prevalence of negative attitudes towards the flashmob expressed by men (15.5% of female postings vs 53% of male postings in Group 3, see Table 5). On the one hand, the observed difference may signify that the narcissistic motivation for participation in social media campaigns is more likely to be applied to females than to males. Women to a greater extent than men were susceptible to the influence of the flashmob as a narcissism-legalising event because of the collective character of this action. On the other hand, women's predominant support of the flashmob may be connected with a demonstration of group solidarity. In any case, the predominance of negative male and positive female opinions points to a greater degree of political engagement of male postings: The negative opinions of the flashmob are definitely and intentionally political, whereas the positive opinions and support of the action expressed mostly by females are not only of a

political nature. Women supported the flash mob emotionally, and thus pursued the goals of their positive self-presentation.

That being said, if we take into account the parity of male and female postings in Group 1 (politically neutral participation) and general politicization of the flashmob discourse as a whole, it is important to note that male and female participation differs in the nature of political involvement (qualitatively) rather than in the extent (quantitatively). In particular, we found out that women's participation supported the political meaning of the flashmob, which was originally attributed to it by the participants: creating a positive image of the 1990s, while male participants endeavoured to modify and reverse this meaning.

Thus, we can make a conclusion that the gender gap in political online involvement still remains (women are less likely than men to engage in political discourse), but it is narrowing and depends on the specific context of online communication, notably (in the case of our study), on the conditions of a viral flashmob.

Our results show that women prefer less visible or less offensive patterns of political behaviour online, which is consistent with the previous findings that gender differences are most likely to appear among the most visible political behaviors (Bode, 2016).

Why are women, despite their prominent position among Facebook users (of all the people on the internet, 83% of women and 75% of men use Facebook), less likely than men to engage in political discourse online? A possible explanation is that women tend to avoid behavioural patterns most likely to damage personal relationships and thus refrain from posting about politics and ignore controversial issues with which they disagree (Bode, 2016).

It is also worth mentioning here that women's political involvement in our study resulted to a large extent from the 'politisation' of their personal, private experience. Women preferred to draw on their personal experience in their opinions of the 1990s. According to our data, 16.1% of female political opinions were based on private stories vs 9.8% of political generalisations without private stories (see Table 1). It can be posed like that: women perceive the 1990s through their life stories.

The results may indicate that women are more likely to identify their life story with the historical period, to perceive the epoch through the lens of their own life story, to extrapolate from their personal experiences, and to apply it to the interpretation of the times. By contrast, men do not associate their biography with political opinions as closely; they attempt to distance themselves from their personal experience when they express their views. Male postings with harsh criticism of the 1990s accompanied by a report that the author of the posting was doing quite well in those times were not infrequent during the flashmob. As a rule, women in their stories of success identified their 'Self' with 'We' and avoided using 'I', which shows their focus on cooperation and partnership. For example, they preferred to use such phrases as 'we obtained an opportunity' or 'these opportunities were opened to us by the historical period' rather than 'I achieved something'.

Female opinions and interpretations of the period of the 1990s primarily reflect their individual experiences, for example, *'Why is everybody so concerned with the nineties? I didn't have to survive. Absolutely. Neither did I have to feed seven hungry children'*. The difference was that men perceived the 1990s through the lens of an outsider, namely, from their current perspective, and women positioned themselves inside that epoch, mainly in its bright and positive domain.

All in all, we can say that the flashmob discourse promoted the involvement of 'non-political' content and private motivations into the political sphere: private stories and non-political motives acquired political significance in the discourse. Such 'politisation' of non-political is applicable mainly to women's online participation. This is consistent with the previous findings of the study of self-representation in Instagram demonstrating that the political and the private are highly interwoven. It is in the context of everyday representation practices that political topics are embedded (Caldeira et al., 2020).

4.3. Gender role asymmetry

We have identified gender role asymmetry in self-presentation. In particular, the results of the less politicised group (Group1) of our sample show that the women often emphasised their appearance and body as significant attributes of their gender image to create a positive image of their personality. The men emphasised their professional status, shifted the focus from themselves and to the settings, and provided group photographs.

On the one hand, our results show that males and females of our sample constructed their online identity using traditional codes of masculinity and femininity, practiced their self-representation through traditional gender stereotypes. This is consistent with stereotypical codes of femininity and masculinity, in particular the self-objectification of women (de Vries and Peter, 2013). However, in contrast to the previous results (Barker, 2009) we failed to find confirmation that women use social networks mostly for visual self-presentation (there is no statistically significant difference between the percentage of male and female postings in Group 1).

On the other hand, the analysis of gender role representations carried out on a more politicised group of private stories containing political attitudes (Subgroup A) revealed that private life stories provide a more flexible and wider repertoire of female gender roles including such positions as a 'working woman', 'mother', and 'wife'.

Gender asymmetry is also manifested in the strategies of positive self-representation revealed in private stories. First, male stories emphasised struggle, victory, initiative, the independent overcoming of obstacles; men preferred to depend on themselves than on others, for example, *'I studied at school in the afternoon, went to the university in the evening, at night I wrote course papers on a by-order basis to earn money for my studies.'*

By contrast, women who positioned themselves through typical male strategies in terms of victory, success, and achievement scarcely associated their success with struggle and overcoming the obstacles; they frequently succeeded because of a happy combination of circumstances (*'And, suddenly, when I was a first-year university student, I was employed by the editorial board of some Munich journal in Moscow and my salary became bigger that the salary of my father-in-law'*) and the support of family, relatives (*'And my friend took odds and ends from her dog (from her reserves) so as my child was not hungry. Although my husband worked like a dog doing his utmost. And our relatives helped'*) or strangers (*'And so I suggested a meeting with then-general Director Ruben Asatryan, told him about our newspaper and he gave us a 'Moskvitch' car for our readers' lottery'*).

Female stories of the 1990s could often be described in terms of 'victory without struggle'. By contrast, male stories contained the plots of 'struggle without any victory', for example, *'Indeed, I had to work because I was a third-year student. <...> I wouldn't wish that on my children. Full time work instead of students' freedom'*, and self-defeating motives emphasising negative features of the times, for example, *'And I also remember that we bought a slice of meat once a week, as a gourmet item. And what was most - it was that awful sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach as if in a lift which was falling down and the whole country was just like that lift'*.

Our results suggest that women in our sample (Group 2) employed masculinity-stereotyped personality for their self-representation alongside with feminine features while men adhered to typical masculine self-representations. Our findings here are consistent with the previous observations that in social networking sites almost 60% of the sample behave according to more flexible gender roles and female group behaviour can be classified as more androgynous than that of male (Rondán-Cataluña et al., 2017). The possible reasons for such behaviour is the influence of the cultural changes, the working mothers and their daughters attach value to masculinity. Furthermore, our sample is composed of people with higher education who may have acquired 'masculine' cultural traits (such as personal success in the professional field, pursuing career, and ambitions) in college.

The next gender difference observed in Subgroup A is that compared with men, women more often appealed to 'typical' female values of mutual help, support, agreement, sympathy in their stories: *'Three mothers united to buy buckwheat in turns. One, with a sleeping baby out in the street, two others in the queue'*. According to our data, women are more likely to present themselves in *'We'* rather than *'I'*, for example, *'But it was just US'*.

The results of the analysis of analytical statements about the 1990s (Group 2, Subgroup B) show that traditional gender differences persist in the choice of themes of expert opinions by spheres of competence. Compared with women, men speak out more frequently on issues associated with traditional male spheres of competence. Compared with men, female voices can be distinctly heard when traditional 'female' topics are discussed. Such results are consistent with our previous conclusions made on the basis of bloggers' political opinions analysis (Maximova and Egorova, 2016).

We failed to find a confirmation to a traditional stereotype that men are more inclined to give expert opinion than women (Worell, 2001). Although we observed significant gender gap in the sphere of expert opinions which is in line with the previous findings (van Duyn et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2013) that women are less likely then men to comment on public topics (state, national, or international politics, sports, etc.) there is no significant difference for males and females in the use of expert opinion for argumentation: both genders are likely to represent themselves as experts.

It can be summarized that women participating in the politicised area of the flash mob discourse chose more flexible, 'androgynous' patterns for their gender role representation, while traditional stereotypes were manifested mainly in the non-politicised segment of female discourse (Group 1). Men, on the contrary, turned out to be more inclined towards traditional masculine self-representation.

5. Conclusion

We now summarise the results. First, we failed to find significant evidence of gender asymmetry disappearance in the social network segment of political discourse; by contrast, we found obvious and contrasting gender differences in the discourse of the 'Island of 90s' flashmob in the distribution of male and female postings throughout the elements of flashmob structure, in self-representation and involvement in political communication in each element of the given structure.

Thus, the comparative analysis of male and female participation in the flashmob's discourse development, with its elements differing in the degree and character of their involvement in the political context, reveals evident gender asymmetry. The analysis shows that female postings are located in less politicised domains of the flashmob discourse: Women speak out more about themselves than participate in the dispute about the 1990s or the discussion of the flashmob as political communication; their opinions of the 1990s are mostly based on their subjective experiences: Women generally express support for the action while paying no attention to its political dimension. Thus, compared to the men, we conclude that the women in the sample were less politicised.

The study of gender role representations in the plots of the private stories of Group 2 shows that both women and men demonstrate their commitment to traditional gender roles but that women are more flexible than men are in their self-representation. This is especially true in regard to women who participated in more politicised domains of the flashmob discourse. Women who took part in the political discussion often represented themselves in plots associated with success and personal achievement and appealed to values the of self-actualisation; by contrast, men were more conservative in their gender representation strategies. In some cases, women used a wide repertoire of both male and female

typical strategies; thus, their strategies can be described as 'androgynous'. The men adhered to typical male strategies.

Gender asymmetry was found in the political opinions: Men were committed to abstract analysis generalisation in their opinions, and women's judgements were more convincing when they were associated with their subjective experience.

In summary, the discourse analysis of male and female flashmob participation combined with the content analysis of male and female contributions to each discourse position revealed neither significant evidence of gender patterns weakening/disappearance nor androgynous model manifestation for both genders. Both male and female construct their identity using traditional gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

Some evidence of an androgynous model of self-representation might be found in female contributions to the discourse. As a rule, women combined traditional femininity patterns with self-representation in terms of struggle and victory, freedom and independence associated with masculinity. Notably, subgroups of postings emphasising positions in the flashmob discourse structure where women's self-representation mostly diverged from traditional gender role patterns can be at the same time characterised by the fewer number of female contributions into the discourse.

In conclusion, an analysis of online flashmob discourse is promising for further development of studies of gender aspects of online communication on social networking sites. Notably, an online flashmob may be described as an elementary form of online discourse. Thus, an assumption can be made that a wide range of political (and not only political) flashmobs organise the structure of online political discourse and that their dominant subject positions and topics are actualised online. Notably, any newsworthy information, important political news, and socially important and urgent topics might generate a peculiar flashmob when they are within the sphere of a social network discussion. In many cases, the discussion of the event becomes viral, and the blogosphere is said to be 'blown up' by the news. The scope may be different; however, the general principles of the involvement/inclusion of a topic into the discourse of a flashmob and the generation of subject positions of the opinions within its structure will be almost the same as in the flashmob, which we have analysed. We propose that the stages of the development of an online discussion are as follows: the news *(informative stage),* its discussion *(analytical stage)*, and the expression of attitudes *(summing up or reflection stage)*. The discourse of an online flashmob is discourse *par excellence*, and it creates *per se* its meaning, organises its political focus, and constructs political subject positions of the statements within its structure. Thus, the procedure for the study of a particular online flashmob may be useful not only for the study of gender aspects of political communication on Facebook and other social networking sites but also facilitate the analysis of online political discourse as a whole; the procedure is of universal nature because the structure of a flashmob is to a greater degree determined by the laws of the communication space where it was launched than by its topic or users' sociodemographic characteristics.

5.1. Delimitations of the study

This study is, of course, not without limitations. It is worth mentioning here that the researchers delimited data collections to Facebook only although other modes/media of CMC and SNS are also available. In the present study gender differences have been measured in a viral social media campaign. However, gender differences can be measured in other spheres of Facebook.

The data was collected from the flashmob in the Russian segment of the Facebook. This study extracted the results from a significant sample, with 390 postings; one limitation is the lack of diversity in the sample, which was composed of postings of Russian baby-boomers and Generation X. The question can be posed like this: Is it possible to generalize the findings we observed on the whole group of female users of Facebook or

on all Russian women? It is hardly so, it seems more possible that the women with a negative attitude to the era did not speak out in the flashmob, which was reflected in our sample. There were more men than women (247 men and 143 women, that is, 65% and 35%, respectively) among the active participants of the flash mob in our sample. This is a significant difference, if we take into consideration that both the literature and the studies of the gender composition of Facebook users give advantage to women versus men and suggest that they are more likely to use Facebook and use it more frequently. We believe that the research should be extended to other groups of people with different demography and to other countries to extrapolate our findings to them.

The comparison of gender stereotypes found in online communication with a similar research of gender stereotypes in off-line communication should also be explored more deeply as that is beyond the scope of the research.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

O. B. Maximova: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

G. O. Lukyanova: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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