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GLOSSY MAGAZINE AS A PRODUCT OF SOCIAL PERCEPTION OR "I'M HAPPY TO DELUDE MYSELF"

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This article analyzes the glossy magazine as a product of social perception, which is the central component of the interaction of the reader with glossy magazines. The study is held in the context of sociopsychological ideas, symbolic interactionism, social perception; empirical methods are the focus groups and the semantic differential. The mechanism of causal attribution, through which the "glossy effect" is created, is the key to social perception of glossy magazines. It happens at the deepest levels of the psyche, is not reflected, and is the main force in the influence of glossy magazines on their readers.

Keywords: glossy magazine, "a glossy effect", mechanisms of social perception.

ГЛЯНЦЕВЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ КАК ПРОДУКТ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ ПЕРЦЕПЦИИ ИЛИ «Я САМ ОБМАНЫВАТЬСЯ РАД»

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Статья посвящена анализу глянцевого журнала в качестве продукта социальной перцепции, которая является центральной составляющей процесса взаимодействия читателя с глянцевыми журналами. Исследование выстроено в контексте социально-психологических идей, символического интеракционизма, социальной перцепции, эмпирическими методами выступают фокус-группа и семантический дифференциал. Механизм каузальной атрибуции, за счет кото-

рого создается «глянцевый эффект» является ключевым в социальной перцепции глянцевых журналов. Происходит это на глубоких уровнях психики, совершенно не рефлексировано и в этом заключается основная сила во влиянии глянцевых журналов на своих читателей.

Ключевые слова: глянцевый журнал, «глянцевый эффект», механизмы социальной перцепции.

According to RBC.research, there are 2.5 thousand magazines regularly published in Russia. And the number is constantly growing, including the post-crisis time. The peculiarities of their perception, psychological mechanisms of reader-magazine interaction are now of particular interest, especially after “prophecies” about the imminent death of glossy magazines and their complete transition to the online versions.

The analysis of publications and researches that are focused on the aspects of the glossy magazines’ impact on the audience shows that the topic has almost never been studied by psychologists, being mostly in the view of sociology, philology and journalism. Until recently, the glossy magazine was considered as a specific media outlet, rather than as a phenomenon possessing its own sociopsychological content that distinguishes it from other media in general, and the print media in particular (10). The conducted researches mostly focused on the analysis of the influence of the glossy magazine content organization on the magazine audience, namely the specificity of the text information, selected topics, etc. At the same time, the way perception of a magazine (as a form of social perception) is determined by the way it is manufactured (printing, paper quality); as well as the interplay of these two factors were left outside of the examination.

The facts left behind the scenes that the reader of a magazine does not just accept the provided information, he **is actively involved in the selection of this information for the magazine** (and in the choice of the type of the magazine), in its processing, trying on the proposed norms, values, samples, etc.

"Social perception is perception, understanding and evaluation by people social objects: other people, themselves, groups, social groups and so on." The concept of the social perception is largely determined by the concept of an image, because the essence of the social perception lies in imaginative perception by a person themselves, other people and social phenomena of the world.

The notion *socal perception* was coined by J. Bruner in 1947(3), the author of the perceptual hypotheses theory. For him, perception is a process of stimulus categorization, their classification to a certain category. Procedurally perception is organized as an extension of "perceptual hypothesis" (expectations, attitudes), derived from the continuously updated categories and their subsequent validation (sometimes multiple) with the help of "perceptual actions".

Social perception, the mechanisms of which are the attraction, reflection, empathy, identification, and causal attribution(1) is a central component of the interaction of the reader with glossy magazines.

Since one of the key roles of a magazine is to relay a lifestyle perfect in understanding of its readers, such a mechanism of social perception as **attraction** is revealed at the forefront. A desired lifestyle essentially cannot be unattractive. Attraction is both a process of forming of appeal, and a product of this process, that is some feature of an attitude(1).

L. Gozman considers attraction as a special kind of social orientation towards another person, which is dominated by the emotional component (4), when the "other" is assessed mainly in terms typical for positive evaluations.

Quite often, descriptions of magazines are emotional descriptions by a person, they are rarely evaluated neutrally. In many ways, the reason for this is the deliberate intention of the publishers to necessarily release an attractive product that would endear the reader (13). In the process of manufacturing a glossy magazine a big job is done making it look perfect in many ways (photos are very beautiful and thoroughly retouched, texts are deliberately simplified, the subjects used put the emphasis on status characters of the story, etc.) (12).

As written by L. Gozman: "We can assume that attitude for someone with admiration, attributing to them various extraordinary merits serves the satisfaction of some important human needs. As considered by T. Reik, ...a person has three possible responses to the awareness of their imperfections – look the other way, fall in love with an ideal, and to hate an ideal. The ability to to admire another person, which is an important component of the ability to love in general, helps a person to walk the second of these three ways, which is undoubtedly more productive response than the first and the third ones. That is, the ability to idealize is a prerequisite for personal growth "(4, p. 116).

It can be assumed that the reader in the interaction with a glossy magazine, according to the mechanism of attraction, does not necessarily wrongly perceive existing therein; rather he considers himself to be in this ideal space, believing it possible, at least someday. Many women fashion magazines are successfully exploiting this idea, trying to present the cover girl (as well as the most of the characters inside the magazine, though) as attractive as possible (9, 11). Beauty, benefits of which do not need to be stated, is an absolute positive reinforcement.

Identification mechanism (the term literally means identification of oneself with others) expresses an established empirical fact that one of the easiest ways to understand another person is likening yourself to them.

L. Gozman describes the role of art (to which the most outstanding examples of modern glossy magazines can be certainly attributed) in influencing people: "... The art enhances the alphabet of emotional experiences and sets the rules for its use. This can be achieved, for example, through the identification of the reader or viewer with the hero, the very possibility of which is, obviously, one of the hallmarks of a true work of art... Identification furthermore gives opportunity to feel the same that the hero does, i.e., in the language of two-component model, learn a specific method of interpreting their states "(4, p. 139). Publicistics is able to transfer patterns of behavior sanctioned by the society to which subject can identify themselves under various kinds of circumstances.

Mechanisms of social perception are also *empathy* and *reflection*. Empathy is understood as the ability to an emotional response to the challenges and experiences of others, and reflection in social psychology - individual awareness of how they are perceived by the partner in communication. These two mechanisms are complementary to each other. On the one hand, empathy manifests itself in attributing feelings and emotional states to the heroes of publications, in actual "kind-of-experiencing" of these states (as a consequence of identification). It is this sympathetic emotional response, that the publishers count on. On the other hand, reflection shows itself in an important supplement that the reader carries into their self-image - "I am the one addressed to in the publications." In this way, the reader gains the additional importance in their own eyes.

As for the *causal attribution*, it is difficult to overestimate the power of this mechanism of social perception with regard to glossy magazines. Perhaps it reveals the most - at a very deep level of the world image of the subject - the effectiveness of of glossy magazines as a means to influence the general reader. They, first of all, are given the opportunity to invent acting forces for the characters and for the the publisher that stand behind the beautiful (rich, meaningful, deep) life, reflected in the publications - whether it is hard work, luck, meeting people, qualifications, etc. This is achieved by a fragmented presentation of the material, which requires an additional activity for its assembly into a set of images, which will be then operated by the reader.

It is appropriate to cite the idea of the founder of Bibliological Psychology N. Rubakin: «... *We know not the books and not someone else's speeches, and not their content - we know our own projections of them, and only that content that we've givem to them ourselves, rather than that which the author or speaker has given to them. Hence we accept ours as someone else's.* A book has as many contents, as there are readers.»(7, p. 59). The author stated these provisions almost a century ago when there were no glossy magazines in the traditional sense, so we believe that in this case the analogy between them and the books is appropriate.

In the study of social perception of glossy magazines researchers ignored the counter activity of the subject, which is most clearly represented in the mechanism of

causal attribution: in attributing the causes and consequences of their behavior, or some more general characteristics. This phenomenon occurs when there is the lack of information about the ideal way of life, that a subject wants to lead and to which it "approaches" by reading the magazines.

Results of the research.

1. Focus groups – the study of different general ideas about glossy magazines.

In 2006, we had recorded a socio-psychological phenomenon that was named the "**glossy effect**". It occurs while interaction of the reader and the glossy magazine. Its verbal indicators are readers' stories about their mental state: an effort to try something presented in the magazine, desire to try it for themselves. Glossy magazines actualize the mechanism of identification with the events taking place, with transferring oneself into an ideal future. Reading a magazine, people feel like they are "wearing" they liked, the clothes "driving" luxury cars, "enjoying" excellent accessories, "communicating" with the well-known (and loved by them) people, "implementing" their hidden potential (in the form of visualizing the desired result) (5).

The quality of the polygraphy of the magazine is interpreted by readers as a **metaphor for the content of the magazine** (about a luxurious, shiny and alike life), which provides matching and mutual strengthening of assessments in different modalities.

2. Semantic differential to identify features of interaction between readers and glossy magazines.

Descriptors for the modified semantic differential were gathered during the focus group research. The study involved four groups of respondents fifty people each - men and women between the ages of 18 and 30, and between the ages of 30 and 45. The obtained data were processed by methods of factor analysis, followed by Varimax-rotation (Statistica 6.0).

As a result, the following factors were obtained (see Table 1).

The most significant factor in the evaluation of glossy magazines is "**competence**". Assessing a magazine the readers first of all pay attention to how the maga-

zine can be trusted in terms of its awareness in some selected topics. Triggering the mechanism of causal attribution is evident. As a result readers themselves assign high intellectual level of awareness of personally important topics to the chosen magazines.

Table 1

Summary table of factors for all groups of subjects

Group of respondents	Resulting factors
Women under 30 years	Factor 1. «Competence» (61%) Factor 2 «Popularity - ordinariness» (12,86%) Factor 3. «Attractiveness - boredom» (10,28%) Factor 4. «Activity - passivity» (5,32%)
Men under 30 years	Factor 1. «Cheerful - boring» (56,4%) Factor 2. «Popularity - ordinariness» (14,57%) Factor 3. «Competent - stupid» (10,15%) Factor 4. «Emotional attractiveness» (5,50%)
Women 30 to 45 years	Factor 1. «Romance» (60,22%) Factor 2. «Popularity - commonplace» (13,09%) Factor 3. «Competence - stupidity» (10,76%) Factor 4. «Activity - boredom» (5,04%)
Men 30 to 45 years	Factor 1. «Competence - stupidity» (58,80%) Factor 2. «Popularity - simplicity» (14,23%) Factor 3. «Activity - passivity» (10,27%) Factor 4. «Emotional attractiveness» (4,77%)
All subjects	Factor 1. «Competence» (61,83%). Factor 2 «Popularity - ordinariness» (13,30%). Factor 3. «Emotional attractiveness (Attractiveness - boredom)» (10,62%). Factor 4. «Activity - passivity» (3,99%).

The marked factors "*popularity*" and "*emotional attractiveness*" (as opposed to boredom and commonplace, ordinariness) reflect existing in the minds of the subjects contrast between the world of fame, as well as the ideal way of life, expressed in glossy magazines and themselves in reality. In this contrast the respondents are getting aware of themselves as ordinary, while the glossy magazines correlate with fame, popularity and so on. In this case, we note the presence of such a mechanism of social perception as attraction.

Interesting is that in all the four factors as a description of the negative pole of the factor descriptors "boring", "commonplace", "simple", "stupid" are used. Whereas positive poles of the factors are described by the sufficiently differentiated concepts. The positive poles of the factors are as though describing some "bright", "other" reality, whose brightness in different factors appears differently, which indicates the work of the mechanism of causal attribution, where a counter-activity of the subject shows itself while interacting with glossy magazines.

Socio-psychological mechanisms that ensure the emergence of the "glossy effect" are the processes of social perception: a comparison and identification of the reader with the characters of magazines, a positive evaluation of socially significant events and phenomena (goods, symbols, services, etc.), as well as the processes of subjective construction of the lifestyles portrayed in glossy magazines, the explicit or implicit comparison with their own way of life.

Conclusion

When interacting with the glossy magazines the publishers are like giving the reader an opportunity to "get tempted" to include the print quality of the magazine into implicit arguments used in causal attribution. This temptation is organized at least on three levels. *On a conscious level*, the reader is able to speculate on the content of the materials, answer the researcher's questions, in terms of usual stereotypes. *On the implicit level* of the reader (often uncritically) makes the implicit conclusions that "everything is true" here. The main argument is all fits together : solid content, beautiful design, rich printing. The fact that this argument does not stand a conscious evaluation of the critical thinking does not eliminate the ordinary processes inherent in ordinary consciousness - polarization (attraction to the strict binary output scale "right" - not "right"), insensitivity to conflicts etc. (8). *At the level of the nuclear structures of the image of the world* (E. Artemyeva, S. Smirnov, V. Petukhov, E. Dotsenko) the reader makes one more implicit conclusion (in the spirit of Bruner's perceptual hypotheses) - about their belonging to something very important for them!

It is like mother's stroking, like tenderness of nappies, as all the best in their life - because the feeling in their fingers and the eyes are "fascinating" This is not something that is realized, this is what is denied, but it works!

That is why we believe that the mechanism of causal attribution is a key in social perception of glossy magazines, as the *reader as a result of interaction with them attributes the positive kinesthetic sensations to the characteristics of the magazine itself (including images and text), attributing positive properties to it.* In this case, the "glossy effect" is created by the reader themselves through this mechanism. It happens at deepest levels of the psyche, is absolutely not reflected, and this is the main force in the influence of glossy magazines on its readers.

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