«Memes are a seemingly banal but ubiquitous pictorial background noise in the lives of the younger generation in the 21st century, similar to how television has been since the 1950s, and thus memes are becoming an increasingly important source of collective consciousness» [Schiele 2017].

«We live in an era driven by hyper-memetic logic, according to which almost every major event sprouts memes in the digital environment» [Shifman 2014:119].

In the era of postmodernism there is nothing complete, holistic, coherent, centralized, closed, permanent – there is only the unsaid, eclectic, fragmented, dispersed, open, fluid: «My generation (and those who are younger) does not receive information in long, coherent, autonomous units (film, album, novel), and in short bursts, in wildly different tones, when switching channels, surfing the Internet, or randomly selecting a song in a media player» [Best European Fiction 2009: 374-375]. Over the past fifteen years, infantilization, trivialization, and recreatization of social communication in general have accelerated de-verbalization and turned Internet memes (hereinafter memes) into almost universal and ubiquitous discursive units.

In the concept of memetics [Dawkins 1976], memes as cultural units («melodies, ideas, catch phrases, fashion trends in clothing, methods of making pots or building arches») are produced, multiplied and distributed in competition with each other: «Just as genes spread in the gene pool, passing from one organism to another through spermatozoa or eggs, memes spread in the meme pool, passing from brain to brain» [Dawkins 2006: 192]. Alas, attempts to use the best practices of memetics to explain the phenomena of the digital culture of complicity [Falero 2016] ended in failure: «We can declare a moratorium on Dawkins' original idea. This is an elegy for a meme... If memes [in Dawkins' interpretation] do not add up to something more than memes, then the concept is dead» [Christopher 2019: 34, 41]. Today, mass and non-stop memefication (*меморизация* in Russian) is rightfully recognized as one of the central characteristics of public discourse, but the corresponding scientific field – meme studies [Galip 2024] – is only in the formative stages. Earlier, we suggested calling this kind of comprehensive research and practical development by the more euphonious in Russian term *мемористика* [Ponomarev 2020].

Memes in public discourse

«Of course, rational debates are still possible, but they are threatened by the communicative vividness of Internet memes provided by Internet memes» [Wiggins 2019: 158].

«Instead of reproducing news as facts, Internet memes are infiltrating official discourses through carnivalization» [Heiskanen 2017:21].

According to the theory of social constructivism, the objectivity of social reality is jointly constructed by individuals in the course of interactions and adaptations to both historically established ideas and specific situations: «Culture is understood as a set of norms, institutions, practices, rituals, symbols, interpretive repertoires, scenarios of actions, narratives, discourses and meanings that shape and direct thoughts. and actions. Thus, culture is both the systematic interpretation of social actions and the making sense of events, people, and processes» [Illouz, Gilon, Shachak 2014].

Subjects arbitrarily combine concepts into cognitive structures to present social phenomena in the form of media products. Different media agents with different intentions create different interpretations, which differ both in the set of core concepts and in their connections with each other, forming numerous media versions of social phenomena. As a result, perception, evaluation, and reactions are determined not so much by objective phenomena as by interpretations that are constructed and modified by influential actors: «Truly, there are infinitely many events happening in the world at every moment, thus now. Any attempt to put into words everything that is really happening right now is ridiculous in itself. All that remains for us is to construct reality ourselves, in our understanding, to assume that it

corresponds to the truth, and to use it as a scheme, a grid, a system of concepts that gives us at least an approximate semblance of reality» [Ortega y Gasset 2003: 120].

In particular, events related to a specific social phenomenon form a multi-layered thematic discourse in the media sphere from competing media stories, which, as categorizations of this phenomenon, affect the perception, assessment and behavior of media users (partly of the relevant social actors): «Categorization is a powerful semantic and political intervention. What categories are, what belongs to a category, and who decides how to implement these categories in practice are all strong operators of control over how things are and what they should be» [Gillespie 2014:171].

Public discourse is the social practice of exchanging multimodal content with specific formal characteristics, which is carried out by social actors in a specific setting (situation) determined by social rules, norms and conventions. In public discourse, different social communities (thematic, ideological, and problematic) constantly collide, overlap, and refer to each other (dialogism [Bakhtin 1975]) because they have their own worldviews.

Genres are types of media products (in particular, texts) that are necessary to solve the communicative tasks required for a specific discourse: «Each sphere of language use develops its own relatively stable types of such statements, which we call speech genres... The richness and diversity of speech genres is immense because the possibilities of diverse human activity are inexhaustible and because each field of activity has a whole repertoire of speech genres that differentiate and grow with the development and complexity of this field» [Bakhtin 1979: 237-238]. There are genres representative of this discourse and media products (texts) representative of this genre. The regular appearance in a specific discourse of media products (texts) characteristic of other discourses, without standard verbal and visual markers of genre change, generates a parasitic discourse [Hayden-Roy 1990]. For example, commercial advertising as a parasitic discourse imitates artistic, religious, educational or scientific discourses, thereby masking the actor's bias and minimizing the psychological resistance of the audience: «The real consumer, whom we annoy and seduce, turns – depending on the circumstances – into a reader of a fairy tale, a play partner or a theater-goer, in a word, into a genuinely desirable interlocutor» [Adam, Bonhomme 2009: 144].

In other words, public discourse as a whole is an interdiscourse [Fairclough 1992] with multiple layers that intertwine and overlap, and memes themselves are interdiscursive, since they connect various references into a compact semantic network transmitted from one media user to another.

Memes as verbal-visual frames give meaning to current events or actions: «Memes work on an individual cognitive level... and become powerful tools for the public to form a popular discourse around a candidate or controversial issue» [Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, Dobusch 2017]. From time to time, viral memes introduce interpretations into public discourse that challenge mainstream media assessments.

Memes as peculiar reference slogans, the production and distribution of which does not require special skills and resources, are used to involve citizens in a discussion and encourage citizens to take collective action. Memetic politics [Carter 2016] as a communication strategy creates a sense of political engagement among «couch potato activists» and «Internet warriors» without having a significant impact on the real socio-political situation.

Memes in a digital participation culture

«Today's audience doesn't listen at all – it participates» [Gibson 2005].

«New communities are defined through voluntary, temporary, and tactical memberships, re-established through shared intellectual projects and emotional investments, and connected by co-production and knowledge sharing... Activists create powerful images, often appropriating and transforming elements of a common cultural mythology with which individuals feel a direct

emotional connection and which pushes them to share» [Duncombe 2007].

In the digital culture of complicity, any media user has the right and the available opportunities at their discretion (solely for self-expression) not only to evaluate others, but also to create their own content of any quality: «Participatory interactions are based on disinterested activity, usually by non-professionals and people who are not directly interested in material or other benefits from their own actions» [Denikin 2018: 65]. The media user chooses the degree of involvement in group interactions, from spontaneous sharing to formal membership with a set of responsibilities and rights for solving tasks together, alternately playing the role of a producer of their own and a consumer of someone else's content: «Today, the audience is activated by new technologies and turns into active users for whom content is an unfinished product, rather a resource a product that needs to be worked with, rather than a product that just needs to be consumed» [Baym, Shah 2011: 1019].

Meme construction is possible for any media user with an elementary level of meme literacy [Prochazka 2014] as part of the collective knowledge that is necessary for socialization and consolidation. The speed and scale of the spread of a meme are weakly dependent on the status of the anonymous author. The opportunity to publicly express one's opinion through memes without legal, moral or other risks is perceived by media users as involvement in solving a national problem as much as possible. Manipulations with memes as products of a digital culture of complicity, where they are produced, reproduced, transformed and retransmitted, contribute to the continuous reconstruction of the social system, in particular, specific meme cultures [De Leon 2017] and meme communities based on general literacy as learned rules for creating, perceiving and evaluating memes: «There is a close connection between memes... and online communities mean that they serve as indicators of belonging to a group, distinguishing its members from ordinary passers-by» [Nissenbaum, Shifman 2018: 485]. At the first stage, memes spread as jokes-for-their-own in spaces of affinity, associations of individuals with common interests, concerns, lifestyles, occupations, and cultural artifacts in a digital culture of complicity: «An affinity space is a place or set of places where people connect with others based on common pursuits, interests, and goals, rather than a common race, class culture, ethnicity, or gender» [Gee 2004:67].

Any memes that are clearly meant as in-person jokes or seemingly meaningless to outsiders at least mark a group identity: «Knowing that you are laughing at the same meme as many other people creates a sense of community and correctness of your opinion, since laughter is socially acceptable if others they're laughing too» [Ferrari 2016]. Moreover, literacy as knowledge and skills of handling memes is cultural capital: «Subcultural capital is acquired by being aware of a topic, using little-known slang, and using subcultural features to stand out from mainstream culture and mass society» [Nagle 2017: 96].

Opinions and judgments that are acceptable on social media differ in content and style from statements on government or corporate websites. Arising, circulating and transforming, memes are woven into serious discourses and blur the boundaries between serious and frivolous, essential and secondary, sublime and base.

Memes can express values, beliefs, and norms by serving as compact and anonymous cultural texts that have traditionally been created by institutional authors as authorized, professional, and few guardians of cultural norms and etiquette, who are now constantly lagging behind viral online content from obscure sources and unnamed amateur producers of instant content [Nagle 2017]: «Memes they are imbued with the experience of consumers, because only those with good life experience can understand their message» [Deus, Campos, Rocha 2022].

Memefication [Bulatovic 2019] as a strategy for primarily converting news content, brand content, or entertainment content into memes and memeplexes accelerates both the

democratization and vulgarization of public discourse [Karasik, Slyshkin 2021].

Memes as remixes of digital folklore

«Every concrete statement finds the subject to which it is directed, always already agreed upon, appreciated. This subject is riddled with points of view, other people's assessments, thoughts, accents. The utterance enters this dialogically intense environment of other people's words, weaves into their complex relationships, merges with one, pushes off from others, intersects with others» [Bakhtin 1975: 89-90].

«Remixing is not something we do in addition to everyday life; it's how we make sense of the world, transforming the shelling of stimuli into a seamless experience» [Markham 2013].

«If we compare information or media objects with a train, then each recipient can be compared with a railway station. The information arrives, mixes with other information [the remix], and then the new package is sent to another destination, where the process is repeated» [Manovich 2015: 145].

«Currently, every media product, right at the moment of its release, becomes an archive that needs to be plundered [plunder], and an original that needs to be remembered, copied and used for its own purposes. In other words, a media product becomes a starting point or a springboard for the recipient's creativity rather than an end in itself» [de Kosnik 2016: 4].

The authors of memes are digital aborigines [Prensky 2001], who focus primarily on the production of netlore (digital folklore) [Lialina, Espenschied 2009] through remixing (bricolage) [Levi-Strauss 1962] as a reuse, processing and combination of content: «People become performers of texts and producers of texts, weaving elements from the transformation of consumed media into new narratives and artifacts that can be demonstrated in the construction of specific forms of sociality» [Peterson 2005].

In the history of writing in general and visual art in particular, memes have many predecessors, from puzzles as coded puzzle pictures or pictographs to ready-mades as representations of everyday objects in the form of detached works of art. In the digital culture of complicity, folk art as daily (optional) amateur creative practices (storytelling, family photography, photo album design) are undergoing digital remediation [Bolter, Grusin 1999]. Previously hidden from outsiders, everyday practices (e.g., keeping a diary), thanks to the availability of simple and publicly available technologies, have become public media products: «The appeal of memes lies in their collectivity: everyone can be a creator and at the same time feel a sense of belonging to a group, which is enhanced by the understanding of a joke-for-their own. Complicity can take a more passive form than creativity, but sharing a meme and liking a meme increases its reach and inspires others to play with the same idea and change an existing meme» [Bulatovich 2019:251].

Recall that memes as communicative remixes (judgments and jokes) can become templates for future memes (meme templates in meme generators), cultural media products, or pop culture artifacts as they spread. Some even believe that art memes are «a new art form that conceptually harks back to Dadaism, surrealism, and related art forms» [Wiggins 2019: XVI].

A meme as a product of continuous remixing is an anonymous orphan: «Questions about copyright and authorship... they become very vague... In addition to the appropriation of existing texts, there are appropriation of appropriations, remixes of remixes, and much more» [Highfield, Leaver 2015: 54]. Thus, the meme never takes on a complete form, but exists as «a baton that is passed on to others so that they can contribute to the production process» [Campanelli 2015: 68].

Memes as intertexts

«A text lives only by coming into contact with another text... only at the point of this contact does light flash, illuminating both backwards and forwards, attaching this text to a dialogue» [Bakhtin 1979: 364].

«Obsessive intertextuality is one of the main characteristics of cultural production in a postmodern society. It has become a common feature in everyday life» [Torres 2015].

In the context of social semiotics, memes are products of multiple collective recontextualization (as a transfer from the original to a new social and cognitive context) and resemiotization (as a reinterpretation in a new context) [Iedema 2003] Already existing cultural artifacts, media products, and meme substrates initially possess referential ambiguity (polysemy) and evaluative ambiguity (irony). The allusions to cultural artifacts or historical facts contained in the meme and recognized by the interlocutors are enjoyable, as they confirm the commonality of the interlocutors and deepen their mutual understanding. The meme may contain references to other, already viral memes: «Parodic reproduction of a meme means two-voice repetition and inversion. It consists of a transformation of the text [of the meme] with a modification of the theme [of the meme] (often vulgarization), but while maintaining the style [of the meme]» [Rochat 2019: 148].

Memes are initially constructed by authors and a priori perceived by addressees as intertexts: «Any text is built as a mosaic of quotations; any text is an absorption and transformation of another text» [Kristeva 1986: 37], therefore, «meaning becomes something that exists between the text and all other texts to which it refers and with which correlate, moving from an independent text into a network of textual connections» [Allen 2000:1].

In a broad sense, intertext is «the transposition of one (or several) sign systems (systems) into another» [Kristeva 1986: 60], or transmedia intertextuality (transmutation [Jakobson 1959]), which is realized in various forms.

Firstly, it is adaptation as a creative transformation of the primary literary text recognized by the recipient into another format (film adaptation, novelization, gaming). Secondly, it is recycling as «the reuse and adaptation of old forms and styles to a new context, often with an ironic attitude towards an earlier style» [Sim 2005:297].

Thirdly, it is appropriation as an «act of borrowing, stealing, or appropriating other people's meanings for their own purposes» [Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 350]. If the author of the adaptation admits that he used the primary text, then the author of the appropriation does not. Strictly speaking, «copying, forgery, plagiarism, borrowing, reproduction and other practices related to appropriation… have been the main practices in art throughout its existence» and «no artist starts from scratch – every artist draws material from the past» [Sartwell 1998: 68]. Paradoxically, the advocates of appropriation, who actually belittle the merits of the original author, insist on their copyright: «They will prosecute anyone who steals Andy [Warhol's] images, even though it was Andy who infringed copyrights on everything and everyone» [Schwartz 1996:246].

Fourthly, it is a parody as an ironic imitation of an identifiable genre, style of an identifiable work of art or an identifiable character. Fifthly (and sixth), this pastiche is an explicit and undisguised (unlike plagiarism) copying and combining styles, motifs and fragments from famous works, without banter, ridicule or satire: «Pastiche is an empty parody, a statue with blind eye sockets» [Jameson 1982: 3]. Seventh, it is a simulation as the creation of a pseudo-reality by imitating only the external qualities of real reality: «The whole of Los Angeles and the surrounding America are no longer real, but belong to the order of the hyperreal and simulation» [Baudrillard 1983:25].

The memer forms the intertextuality of a meme from an actual and accessible set of artifacts and media products, i.e. he acts not as an ideal creator, but as a bricoleur with limited resources: «The world of his [bricoleur's] tools is closed, and the rule of the game is always to arrange oneself with the help of improvised means, that is, at each moment with a limited set of intricately selected tools and materials, since the compilation of this set does not correlate with any project. at this time, neither, however, with any other project, but there is a result due

to all the possibilities for updating and enriching cash reserves., as well as using the remains of previous buildings and ruins» [Levi-Strauss 1962: 127]. Thus, the construction of memes is a bricolage in social media.

The meme game and viralization

«Boredom is counterrevolutionary. Political resistance must be fun, otherwise no one will want to participate» [Ferrada Stoehrel, Lindgren 2014: 252].

The digital culture of complicity blurs the boundaries between rational content about serious, public, non-trivial and emotional content about frivolous, personal, trivial. Strangely enough, in social communication, which has undergone emotionalization and gaming (ludification) [Raessens 2006] and where «everyone wears masks» and «nothing should be taken seriously» [Thibault 2016], serious public discussions are still possible.

Humor protects participants in discourse from negative experiences (anxiety, fear, suffering) and provides at least temporary psychological relief: «Humor is not just comic relief, it is a form of ideological liberation, a means of deconstructing social realities and at the same time creating, imagining, and suggesting alternative realities» [Kingsmith 2016:289]. Affiliative and self-reinforcing humor is used to provoke positive emotions from «one's own», while aggressive humor is used to denigrate, humiliate, or belittle «others».

Generation of memes as collective operations with memes – construction, distribution, evaluation, and secondary remixing – is a meme game with an unlimited number of participants, a specific episode of which continues until a specific meme turns from an actual ironic judgment into a meaningless picture-for-its-own, a vague emoticon sticker, an abstract meme template. or (which is unlikely) into a cultural artifact.

The meme game allows individuals to satisfy their needs for entertainment, self-identification, belonging, imaginary worlds, etc. Humorous memefication softens the drama of social reality and turns fierce face-to-face arguments into collective and nameless online association games where seriousness and playfulness, sincerity and pretense are indistinguishable from each other, truth and falsehood (online disinhibition [Suler 2004]). Ironic memefication frees memers from responsibility for their own critical judgments about an accomplice as a target of irony or ridicule: «When Mozart, after hearing Salieri's new work, replies, 'I never thought such music was possible,' this statement can be seen as an ironic comment conveyed under the guise of sincerity... where the line between them is blurred» [Lymarev 2023]

The participants of the meme game compete to spread the most sticky ones as attention-grabbing, original, and memorable; fluid (fluid) as provoking emotions and encouraging sharing, and identifiable (relative) as evoking familiar associations of memes, the mass distribution of which is due to such motives as making impressions about oneself, exchanging emotions, maintaining relationships, receiving information and encouraging action: «Most would prefer to be known as those who share optimistic stories and cheer others up, rather than as those who sadden and upset others [with their reposts]» [Berger, Milkman 2011:2]. Next, the mechanisms of social contagion are activated [Aral, Walker 2011], thanks to which individuals take on faith other people's knowledge, opinions, adopt behavioral patterns, or repost memes (meme diffusion mechanisms [Spitzberg 2014]): observing the reactions of «beacons» (early adopters) (views, likes, comments, reposts), others media users unknowingly (or intentionally) commit similar actions (most importantly – reposts with commentary and remixes), unwinding the HYPE spiral as the opposite of the spiral of silence [Noelle-Neumann 1974]: «People adapt, transform, and redo messages on the fly, responding to local conditions and personal needs... Consumers are more likely to play the role of active distributors of content rather than passive carriers of the virus [as in memetics]» [Jenkins et al 2010].

Memes in visual and subversive rhetoric

«We live in a society where perception is guided by representations to the same extent as reality» [Lash 1990: 24].
«Words are censored more easily than pictures» [Walker 2003: 20].
«Fake news is created consistent with what we know about the real world: it concerns real people, often acting in accordance with their real motivations and in a completely possible way» [Levy 2017].

Memes as products of the digital participative culture in public discourse are used by social actors (media users) as expressives (1) (emotions and assessments), directives (2) (arguments and motives) and assertives (3) (statements) (illocution [Austin 1962; Searle 2002]) to make people laugh or to intimidate, to praise or ridicule, to urge or convince, to enlighten or deceive.

Mostly visual memes are expressive and provoke such diverse emotions as joy, fear, hatred, and pride due to their connotations.

Mostly visual directive memes are used as a means of visual rhetoric, which, together with LOLitics [Tay 2014], caricature, comics, advertising, and photojournalism, attract more attention, are easier to understand, and are perceived as more reliable than exclusively verbal texts: «When you travel through a dense information jungle and come across beautiful graphics or beautiful data visualization, you feel relieved. It's like coming across a clearing in the jungle» [McCandless 2010]. While the premises and the conclusion are poorly labeled, the conclusion requires a lot of effort from the addressee. In this respect, a persuasive meme resembles an enthymeme [Poster 1992] as a syllogism in which presumptive but omitted premises lead to well-defined conclusions. Thus, a series of memes can be considered as a series of affective enthymemes: «[Memes] change... interpretations of [social phenomena because] they change the perspective..., forming chains of successive [user] reactions and [own] alterations [by adding] references to new current events, fashion trends, fads, etc» [Dancygier, Vandelanotte 2017: 568].

Predominantly visual assertive memes are ideally suited for the role of cascading distributors of fake news [Allcott, Gentzkow 2017]. Fake news is initially constructed by PR specialists in the interests of influential actors, then distributed by journalists as reliable news from reliable sources, commented on by experts as topical events, reposted by media users as entertainment content, and discussed by political actors as arguments for decision-making. In the process of intensive circulation, the fake original becomes overgrown with fake derivatives and evolves into a serial fake narrative (fake narrative), which is perceived by citizens and used by politicians as a causal political narrative [Stone 1989]. Since fakes as news media products are either initially created or further distributed in the media sphere, fake generation partially overlaps with generation of memes, which generates meme fake news as misleading news memes and memetic narratives. Consequently, monitoring of memefication makes it possible to understand how «fake news and disinformation are woven into the fabric of political discourse and, ultimately, into political discussions» [Burroughs 2020: 191].

In the context of the accelerated militarization of social media (SM weaponization [Singer, Brooking 2019]) (and, accordingly, the weaponization of memes [Peters, Allan 2022]), political actors organize automated and algorithmic computer propaganda in the media sphere [Howard 2020], focused primarily on the destruction of hostile discourses. A significant component of this kind of cognitive warfare [Orinx, Struye de Swielande 2022] is the troll meme [Suryawanshi et al 2020] as an «epistemological companion to fake news, alternative facts, false rumors, misconceptions, prevarications, hyperbole, illogic, nonsense, exaggeration and hate speech» [Berghel 2018]. Disruptive expressive memes cause psychological discomfort and provoke inappropriate emotional reactions (aggression, anger, rage), assertive memes are disorienting, and directive memes reduce intra-group discussions to verbal sparring. This

disruptive rhetorical [Welsh 2020] how the «agonistic discursive politics of silly memes, deception, and playing on feelings» [Burroughs 2013] turns public discourse into continuous meme wars [Yankoski, Scheirer, Weninger 2021] and destroys the ideals of deliberative democracy [Barton, Stein, Church 2020].

Memefication of political discourse

«From the point of view of political rhetoric, Internet memes are tools for crystallizing an argument in an easy-to-share, concise and often visual form» [Hakokongas, Halmesvaara, Sakki 2020].

«Political memes are a powerful means of generating innovative meanings through selection, recombination, mixing or hybridization and combining elements of politics with other spheres of life» [Rochat 2019: 143].

«Rather than complaining about how democracy will be destroyed by such phenomena as memes, the traditional political sector should accept the new reality and find a mode of operandi convenient for communication, taking advantage of memefication» [Bulatovich 2019: 252].

The number of memes provoked by a specific trigger can be considered either as an indicator of the popularity of this event or problem, or as a criterion of the media effectiveness of interested actors. The more memes there are about a specific target, the stronger their influence on her media image and public opinion. Generation of memes as an effective strategy for setting the media agenda and media framing has become an essential component of at least informal political communications, which has accelerated the flow of political discussions from serious institutional arenas into the gaming discourse of mass culture and back [Penney 2020]: «Memes cause paradigm shifts and influence the ways even politicians communicate... More and more politicians are posting and producing memes, becoming followers of satirical accounts (or at least putting likes) on social networks» [Bulatovic 2019: 250, 251].

Since the generation of memes and memetic narratives (меморатив in Russian) aimed at achieving specific illocutionary goals not only encourages addressees to concrete conceptualizations of actual triggers and targets in the context of already existing values, prejudices, fears, precedent and conspiracy narratives, but also strengthens group solidarity, we consider this strategy as «visual rhetoric in a simple package» [Huntington 2017 186] have mastered protest and extremist groups: «Various extremist movements use memes to delegitimize dominant practices and legitimize the actions of group members» [Haköngägas, Halmesvaara, Sakki 2020]. Although «the discursive practice provided by Internet memes replaces knowledge and facts with charm and spectacle» [Wiggins 2019: 69], the «joke encoded in the meme» not only «entertains the public», but at the same time «challenges power structures, boldly pointing out inconsistencies between official and ideal political representations» [Rochat 2019: 181]. This kind of «carnival form of political participation» [Rochat 2019] is quite acceptable to youth groups: «Whether we like it or not, the young audience learns about government programs, legislative acts and political events mainly from public posts on social media» [Shomova 2019: 34]. As a result, generation of memes, as a «fleeting rebellion against social realities» [Bulatovic 2019], has turned into a popular discursive technique used by ordinary media users to express their opinions about political, economic or social problems, without bothering with any special skills to create remixes [Nowak 2016].

Memefication of social media (and the media sphere as a whole) is impossible without viralization as a mass repost and remixing of memes. The growth in the number of passive re-posters and active remixers is explained both by the viral potential of the meme as entertainment content (recreatization) and other factors.

First, media users are focused on phatic communication [Jakobson 1960], and sharing assertive memes and expressive memes helps maintain and strengthen social connections: «The exchange of personal thoughts and feelings activates the same areas of the brain that respond

to food, money, and attractive members of the opposite sex» [Berger 2014].

Secondly, the spontaneity and anonymity of memes, coupled with the effect of online disinhibition [Suler 2004], removes moral and legal responsibility for the social consequences of spreading someone else's unreliable, offensive, and even obscene content: «Freed from the attributes of the author's reputation or intent, they become the collective property of culture... No one should be held accountable for anti-norm or hateful ideas [that are expressed in memes]» [Donovan 2019].

Thirdly, the ambiguity of memes, provided by extensive intertextuality and vague connotations, allows them, if necessary, to be interpreted retroactively as unsuccessful, but only jokes: «The creators [of memes] are free to express their political and other views and share perspectives in a digital culture of complicity. At the same time, they are offered protection when spreading controversial, unpopular, and even offensive messages, without any concern for negative consequences or fear of being held accountable, even if ideas, claims, or statements are not supported by any factual evidence» [Ross, Rivers 2017: 7].

Having become accustomed to everyday memefication, citizens have become more vulnerable to marketing and PR by economic and political actors, who, in order to improve the media metrics (views, links, comments, reposts, likes) of brand content, increasingly resort to capturing/hijacking other people's popular memes (meme jacking [Huntington 2017]) as a visual substrate for their own memes. In general, this is one of the technologies of viral marketing [Carrigan 1989], aimed at encouraging the mass, voluntary and rapid distribution of media content. Moreover, since memes are not perceived by citizens as propaganda content in someone's interests, the effect of intrusive advertising [Riedel, Weeks, Beatson 2018] does not work and directive memes turn out to be effective means of persuasion. Political actors resort to meme generation at least to set the media agenda and media framing [McKelvey et al 2021], as well as to mobilize ordinary voters during election campaigns [Chagas et al 2019]: «The space for sophisticated discussions is shrinking. The traditional political sector [should take advantage of] the benefits of memefication. This is the only way for traditional politicians and civil society to reach a wider audience and avoid their own echo chambers» [Bulatovic 2019: 252].

Meme construction and deconstruction

«A meme is not a meme unless it turns into something else and goes beyond its original idea» [Markham 2018: 51].

«The very heterogeneous compositional structure of an Internet meme makes it difficult to systematize, categorize, and present its linguistic and non-linguistic properties» [Rochat 2019: 56].

«Humor can be dismembered like a frog, but in the process it will die, and its insides will confuse anyone except a true scientist» [White 1941: xvii].

Memefication is a strategy for primarily converting news content, brand content, or entertainment content into memes, memeplexes, and meme clusters [Segev et al 2015] (including meme series [Shomova 2021]): «The rapid creation of a meme or gif is becoming an increasingly normalized way to respond to political news, events, comments, etc» [Dean 2019: 259].

Let's try to formulate the simplest and most working definition of a meme based on the principle of family similarity (Ludwig Wittgenstein).

A meme is a (1) topical (2) ironic and/or humorous (3) judgment (4) by a media user about a social phenomenon (5) in the form of a compact (6) remix (7).

A trigger topic is a social phenomenon, artifact, or media product that has prompted the user's media approach to generation of memes (news story, social event, subject's action, pressing issue, popular meme, cultural plot, social scenario, social value, advertising plot).

The target of a meme is a social phenomenon that is the subject of judgment as a

statement in the digital culture of participation (subject, group, deed, action, event, problem, value, idea).

A remix is content that results from the reuse, recycling, and combination of previously created artifacts and media products.

The frequent viralization of memes is expressed not so much in the voluntary, prompt and mass dissemination (mainly) of primary memes (reposts with or without comments) on social media, but rather in the generation of secondary meme and further various meme clusters (a family of memes [Segev et al 2015]) associated with triggers or targets: «The initial visual artifact... It acts as a kind of condensation core in discourses. Images connect with each other, build on others, and relate to other images. The universe of visual content associated with the original meme is slowly expanding» [Seiffert-Brockmann, Diehl, Dobusch 2017: 7].

Some meme clusters become components of specific event, personal, or problematic memegraphy, which includes other related visualizations (artistic artifacts, visual folklore, ideological symbols, cartoons, comics, photographs, cartoons, posters, and movies).

Moreover, social media, whose mechanics are based on intertextuality and reposting, encourage spontaneous and deliberate serial narrative [Kustritz 2014], displacing descriptive, explanatory and argumentative content [West 2013]. It is this digital hypernarrativity [Wagener 2020] that transforms meme clusters into memetic narratives as massive and endless networks of narratives. Moreover, some memes are initially created as visual micronarratives [Calixto 2017], or as nuclear scenes [Porter et al 2002] of partial 'stories-for-their-own': «A meme often presents us with a scene or situation, and we, as viewers, must understand what this means based on collective knowledge» [de Saint Laurent, Glaveanu, Literat 2021].

Memes as user-generated content (UGC) are generated, modified, and grouped in social media, where they are formed from components of existing memes, digital media products, and cultural artifacts. Further, selected memes penetrate into public discourse as forms of visual rhetoric [Huntington 2013] and (if possible) into visual culture, but already in the status of cultural artifacts [Garda Lopez, Martinez Cardama 2020].

Although the thesaurus of memoristics concepts is in its infancy, we can still present a draft version of an expanded (and possibly redundant) «Meme Deconstruction Algorithm»:
1. The author and the target group.
2. Categories: mainly verbal (screenshot of the post, gif with text), mainly visual (image macro, gif), executable (executable/performative) (challenge, musical), financial (meme token/meme coin (meme NFT/memecoin), meme stock;
3. Trigger topic: news story, social event, subject's action, pressing issue, popular meme, cultural plot, social scenario, social value, advertising plot;
4. Meme target: subject, group, deed, action, event, problem, value, idea;
5. Layout: simple meme, memeplex, meme template, memetic phrase, meme character, meme landscape, telescopic meme, zoom-in/out, meme comic, art meme;
6. Elements: character, visual background, inscription, comment, sound background, symbol, replica, voiceover, embedded meme, meme template, custom image, sound index, song, hashtag, sticker, emoticon, survey;
7. Styles/genres of verbal communication: meme speak, LOLspeak, catspeak, memetic phrase, catchphrase, aphorism, idiom, slogan/motto, cliche, phrasal pattern (snowclone), proverb, riddle, wordplay, counting, rhyme, lines in dialogue, monologue, joke, quote, the lyrics of the song;
8. Styles/genres of visualization: portrait, cardboard character, speaker character, meme character, symbol; household scene, natural landscape, social landscape, cult image, canonical image, symbol, infographic; art meme, photograph, film frame, icon, splint; cartoon, comic, cartoon frame, poster, stock image; vine/TikTok, gif, emoticon sticker,

photo clip (maniphoto), preview;

9. Styles/genres of sonorics: mashup, remix, popular voice, popular melody, musical quote, stock sound;

10. Family: single meme, meme donor, original meme, derivative meme, memegraphy, meme series, orphan meme, memetic sphere; cluster by trigger, cluster by target;

11. Status: proto-meme is a dead meme; hack-work meme, ephemeral, stale meme; niche meme, primitive meme (normie meme), meaningless meme (nonsensical meme); forced meme, cool meme (dank meme), cult meme (iconic meme), a cultural artifact; popular meme, hijacked meme, brand meme, meme token;

12. Rhetoric (meme rhetoric): irony, sarcasm, friendly humor, aggressive humor, oxymoron, allegory, parody, metaphor, antithesis, hyperbole, litotes;

13. Counterpoints: character vs. replica, character vs. graphics, character vs. song, character vs. symbolism, character vs. landscape; character1 vs. character2; character vs. subject, character vs. value, character vs. event, character vs. problem; inscription vs. font, inscription vs. voice acting, register humor, trigger event vs. value, comment vs. hashtag, comment vs. symbol, comment vs. sonorics, trigger subject vs. value, pun, neologism;

14. Connotations/allusions: actor/character, event/narrative, object/artifact, intertext, intermemetic reference;

15. Emotion: surprise, joy, pride, sympathy, admiration, fear, sadness, disgust, hatred, anger, contempt;

16. Function: expressive meme, directive meme, assertive meme; laugh, intimidate, urge, incite, enlighten, deceive (meme fake news), inspire, undermine (disruptive/subversive meme), praise (brand meme, meme jacking), mock (troll meme), convince, dissuade, advise, forbid, approve, condemn (hateful meme), fatal signal (nonsensical meme).

Obviously, the presented algorithm can be used not only for interpretation, but also for the generation of memes, memeplexes and memetic clusters.