MIX UP THE CULTURE: CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURAL AND POP-CULTURAL CONTEXT ON THE YOUTUBE PLATFORM

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Abstract: In the era of participation culture and sharing, the most important value is communication. Every aspect of information and idea exchange is valuable, but there is one type of communication that is precious above all of the others. Taking into consideration all the aspects of the culture of participation such as: creativity, innovation, being up-to-date with pop culture trends, we can say that essential for this type of culture sharing is the idea of new content, created in the process of transforming available culture creations (mashup/remix). In other words, it is based on creating something new with new meaning and new context, using the resources of pop and mass culture. One of the possible channels of distribution for this new content is a YouTube platform. This communication medium is part of Google inc. and as a web page is representing Web 2.0 idea. This research is focused on the content published by YouTube users (youtubers, vloggers) that was creatively designed (remixed) in correlation to well know pop-culture publications. This research will try to estimate the importance of content mixing via YouTube platform and answer the following questions: What message is this kind of content sharing sending? What types of vlog formats are the most popular at the moment? How does a creative transformation of cultural and pop-cultural context work? Is there something like a community between the youtubers?

Keywords: communication, participation, content, YouTube, community, remix.

The differentiation of communication

The term communication is one of the most difficult to define. It is one of those terms that is very often used in different contexts, but, on the other hand, it is uncommonly hard to explain. Communication is far beyond definitions (Pleszczyński, 2013, p.15). With proper understanding of the mentioned term, most of the interactions between participants of the process (human or object in various configurations) can be called as a communication.

The process of communication can be seen as a social event that is able to modify itself, depending on the surroundings and the direction of the changes in the process (Luhmann, 2008, pp. 9-10). In this axis, the process of communication is a matter of choices. Which communique is important? What types of information are worth exchanging? The value of content is set by the configuration and shape that we intend to grant to our communication.

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The process of communication is able to create new tools and channels for itself. There are new practices of cognizance developed every day, and new media and Web 2.0 project is only a small part of wholeness of the modern communication process. For Warren Weaver communication is every process/possibility that helps one mind to affect the other. By that we can understand various forms of rhetoric, manipulation or interaction that is set to expand the knowledge and so on. This is the way to create opinions, points of view, facts and to share artistic and esthetic impressions.

Communication can be also defined as a social connection between people that aims for coordinated action in specified case in order to create the best possible conditions for survival (Awdiejew, Habrajska, 2010, p. 7). The survival in this point of view is not only the biological one but also cultural one, action for culture that can help to expand and create new meaning in the environment of known ideas.

There are plenty of different definitions of the communication process. Every of them is focusing on a chosen aspect of this phenomenon. Thus all of them are exploring the problem only fragmentary. The key for solving the problem is to find or create definition that shows our problem in the best all-encompassing way.

In this research communication will be composed of a few different parts: code (understood as the language and also visual code, and everything in between), channel of communication (the main channel of broadcast here is a YouTube platform, but in the matter of communication there are several other ways which complement the process as a whole), content as a remixed value and reinterpretation of accessible sources, context (the way of publication, technical requirements and the environment of the publication). Last but not least, the most vital part of communication will be its *user,* who can create or receive communique and content (he is the recipient and broadcaster/sender in different situations).

Communication can be seen as a force that is able to change the reality, it is able to imprint a lasting impact on the world. It is a type of an active relation between people, in a way that it is able to input changes in participants knowledge or attitude. It can determine the reality and every aspect of it including the sides of the process. The valorization of the world is deeply connected to the process of communication. It is the prime mover when it comes to making things happen. The most fertile ground for this *active* communication is cyberspace with social media, Web 2.0 project and platform such as YouTube. This is the place where words and communication are the most important of the forces.

The changing world of the media

We live the mediamorphosis era, the time when every way of communication is changing and evolving into something better, faster and more accurate (Gackowski, 2015). Mediamorphosis led to the process of mediatisation (political life, communication and so on). As a result of the mediatisation process, the media convergence started. One medium is changing the other, or becoming a substitute for the older version (the relation between standard television broadcast and a on-line version). New media and technologies that are attached to them are pushing out the traditional media (press, radio, television).

Thanks to the digitization, new media are always in motion of changes, they are trying to become something better or more advanced in technological sense. New media are non-linear, inter and hypertextual, transcoded and evolutionary. This is the view of content, information and idea sharing.

In the new media family the most influential is the internet with all of its secondary aspects. The internet is the main source of entertainment, knowledge and information (knowledge and information are two separate categories because of difference in epistemic sense). Internet is something more than just a tool, it is a vital part of everyday routine, with connection to most of the important spheres of life. It can be described as a lifestyle (Gackowski, 2015). It can be perceived as an axis of reality (online reality) with specified style of cooperation and understanding of surrounding world. It is the environment that is changing its users. In order to use the power of the internet, one needs to gain certain abilities and is obliged to reject outdated and useless ones.

The internet changed the communication and created a quasi-communication (communication with assistance of different new media). It helped to create an illusion of face to face communication (various apps and programs like Skype or FaceTime) which also is close to the idea of YouTube platform thanks to such formats as *vlogs* or *live stream transmission*. This has created an extraordinary opportunity to establish new types of sociological relation (e-friendship). Hence the conclusion that information exchange and communication on the internet is a very specific type of interaction. At the same time it is important to acknowledge that the internet is a fidgety reality, where changes are applied literally in every minute.

The creation of a new content or the quest to get connected with a selected pop-cultural phenomenon is an operation that can be performed on different platforms such as: quasi-comment, the change of the context, reinterpretation and so on. The set of tools that is needed for this (the publication of remixed content), is widely available thanks to multiple tutorial, and online guidance. Everybody can participate in this type of culture and exclusion is very rare.

The YouTube platform

The YouTube platform is a communication and broadcast tool. It is a very diversified community created in 2005. It was brought to life by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim (Majorek, 2015, p. 19). The main idea was to create a space, where uploading videos was possible, just to share moments of life with people who were far away. In 2006 Google inc. bought the platform and this was the main event that helped to fully develop the idea of video sharing community.

YouTube web page is available in 76 different languages, which is the sign of the global spectrum of the platform. In every minute there is 72 hours of material uploaded to the YouTube. One month of this kind of transmission of data generates more multimedia data than any television broadcaster can produce.

There are a few rules that the creators of the YouTube are trying to incorporate to the embodiment of the platform community. First of them and probably the most important is about mutual respect between users and inside the YouTube community (Majorek, 2015, p. 28). There cannot be any creativity or growth without cooperation and understanding inside the society (in this case *youtubers* community). There are certain types of movies that are banned from the platform for their illegality or because of moral issues. There is no tolerance policy for any manifestation of bullying, discrimination (racial, gender, religion), or for the hate speech.

One of the advantages of the YouTube is the simplicity, that can help even new users to fasten get the grip on the basic and primary functions of the web page. The main YouTube page is very intuitive and perspicuous, and this is one of the things that helped with gaining popularity

by the portal in the Web 2.0 environment. The idea behind this type of design was to help people to make searching for the content that they are interested in as easy as possible.

One of the creators of YouTube Jawed Karim has identified four main sources of the success and popularity of the project site on which to share audio-visual. These sources include:

- A system of recommending the publications available through the portal (related videos);
- The combination of platform with e-mail;
- Providing the function of comments, internal messages and other elements specific to social networking sites;
- The ability to use the html code by which specific content from YouTube is available on other sites (Gannes, 2006).

YouTube as a part of Web 2.0 project is connected in every sense of this term: there is possibility to send videos via e-mail, dedicated web site, blog or other social media (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr etc.). YouTube is a versatile tool of development with plenty room for improvements. From the space where people shared moments and memories from their lives, it evolved into a place where almost everything can be found from a new form of blogging (video-blogs in form of personal diaries or professional formats focused on one topic) to music videos, and, what is most important for this research, remixed culture texts.

YouTube as a company dealing with the media is not a content creator, it only creates an environment to share products of specific senders; users create its essence and content thus attracting more users. The platform creates a network of contacts and provides wide coverage to the audience. At the same time its activity is based on aspects of communication and exchange of information relating to the generated content as well as contact information and media exposure of individual messages (Burges, Green, 2011).

Mix up the culture: remix

Media culture is a crucial part of globalization processes. Everything is accessible at every moment and almost at every place. The exchange of ideas, images, information and creations is not bound to specified geographical region. This is a natural way of culture mixing itself. The force that is driving this process is communication between representatives of different cultures. Culture formats are being distributed from many countries (movie industry form USA, technological devices from Japan and so on). Identity of individual is being built in a hybrid way in part by local and in part in global influences (Kraidy, 2003).

This type of connection provides us with a variety of storytelling, role models, information and data, lifestyles from other cultural environments, pop and mass cultural productions. Thanks to media, there is a place to discuss every received information in all of above mentioned forms (Radosinska, 2015, p. 17). Media culture is processual, it is a process of production, distribution in different media channels, perception process and content exchange and recreation (remix). This connection with circulation of information and points of view different from our native culture creates many situations in which cultural order undergoes verification. That access to various cultures is precious for globalization process, culture of participation and remix movement (Radosinska, 2015, pp. 22).

Hard information carriers and new technologies changed the basic form of the culture (Lessing, 2006, pp. 5-6). Culture was no longer trapped in one form forever but it was open to

changes and redistribution. Digital technologies introduced culture to new era of recoded and remixed information. Together with changes in culture, a different change in the recipients of the culture occurred. Everything that has changed culture, has changed the people and the way of cultural participation. Nowadays those new technologies are something natural and very much needed, they are becoming essential parts of our lives (Lessing, 2009, pp. 53-55).

Lessing in his book *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* connected the term with copyrights issues. This understanding of the topic is too shallow. Nowadays remix is focused on digital media and the circulation of culture and its products between the recipients. It can be used to describe the viewers/receivers tactics for cultural participation and reception of remixed content (Gulik, Kaucz, Onaka, 2011). Our participation in culture is closely connected to remix logic and theory.

Remix can be used to describe different manifestations of practical aspect of participatory culture. The urge to act and perform is inscribed into remix or mash-up that is often interchangeably used as a substitution for remix in nowadays understanding (new media remix/digital remix). Definition of mash-up as presented by Stefan Sonvill-Weiss explains that mash-up is a combination of data from two different sources that is inducted in order to create new service/possibility. In the case of YouTube it could mean the different formats of publications or the functionality of the platform itself. It means that materials published on YouTube can be rooted in different localizations in the digital world (Sonvill-Weiss, 2010, pp. 8-10). The main difference between the two (remix/mash-up) is the issue of copyright that is included in the remix contemplation and is not included in mash-up theory.

Remix can be seen as a looking glass for participatory and visual culture in different aspects, also for publications distributed through the YouTube platform.

To create a remixed content is to create a text composed of different quotations, paragraphs and parts in order to compose something new with new content, context, and, in most of the cases, meaning. Remix can be compared to collage but instead parts of different materials, parts of culture are being used. With spread access to digital technologies and with all the free digital and internet space, almost everybody can create a remixed content and in the next step share it with the world. Those works can be really simple or very complex, depending on the skill of the creator.

Remix is a powerful tool that can affect culture more than original picture/movie/music (Lessing, 2009). It has the power to represent our point of view, our thoughts with greater precision than words (especially in the visual culture aspect). The main idea behind the remix process is reference, its connection to the original source or sources. This is the part that holds emotional attachment for people. Everything is important and everything matters but by combining different parts, we can create something new, a new quality. That new quality is created by the references to the culture.

If there is a pop cultural phenomenon, it is destined to be remixed. There are a few things that are important in that case: up-to-date material, well known, recognizable and with emotional value attached. That was the case for one of hit songs *Hello* (the promotion single of the CD album entitled *25*) performed by international star Adele. The renewed song was recreated using scenes of movies to perform the lyrics of the song. Every important movie picture of the last decade was included. The remixed video was uploaded (01.12.2015) by youtuber *Matthijs Vlot* and was played over 3,5 mln times.

The cultural remix phenomenon is a part of process that creates a sense of continuity and novelty of certain texts of culture. In this case (digital art) recurrence and regularity are even more important for digital remix as an art than uniqueness and innovation (Bolz, 1997, p. 352). Using the example of YouTube platform remix can be used to re-invent some visual art info videoblogs as a general concept or as a parts of the broadcast. The more "fresh" and up-to-date content, the better it is for the broadcaster and the recipient.

For many people the most important year for digital remix is 2005 with the growing popularity of social media (and creation of YouTube platform). Social media created equality in distribution of created content and remixed culture and YouTube constructed a place for broadcast of video-related remix (Manovich, 2006, pp. 105-110).

YouTube is a space for culture media participation. One of the manifestations of this culture can be discussed here the phenomenon of remix culture content. Culture participation refers largely to the competence of users distributing digital new media content and to change the balance of power between the media industry and its customers, at least in certain aspects (Jenkins, 2006). YouTube platform can be considered as a place of self-expression, a symbolic struggle for meaning and the reference of popular and mass culture (Hall, 1981). For Hall, popular culture was important because of its creative space of struggle for culture, currently the mainstream struggle for culture (and meaning) is part of the movement of digital remix presented through the YouTube platform.

One more important thing about the remix culture is that it is able to create communities of creators and recipients of its products (Lessing, 2009, p. 84). Those groups are global, and can have various sizes. They are presenting their work to each other in order to exchange experience and produce feedback. This is very fruitful cooperation even if the content itself is not very valuable. The learning process is important in those types of communities, but the community itself with connection to people with similar interests is something special. Every user has a different agenda (one mentioned - learning), but they can create in order to present their talent, to gain popularity or fame (attention in different forms) or simply to bring to life a beautiful idea.

Remix cannot be seen as simply a copying practice. It is an important way o cultural participation, learning, giving a way to express ones' creativity. Doing something with our surroundings (culture included), can help to create new meanings and new values and what is most important it can help to educate and to learn about oneself and the world. The one thing that needs to be remembered it that remix needs to be something new in the content, context, idea or form.

Remix on YouTube platform

YouTube is a storyteller of digital age (Kavoori, 2011, p. 5), the main problem is to read those stories in the right way with proper key in order to fully understand them. YouTube videos can be at times heartwarming or aggravating, even provoking. Remixed content can be presented as:
- dialogue with the source material;
- reinterpretation of the given material;
- change of context;
- commentary and quasi-commentary;
- smash of different material in order to highlight similarities or differences;

All of above mentioned types of remix (the most popular forms), can be performed jointly or in optional configuration. There are new forms of remix that are created every day. This creativity and vibrant process of making something out of culture is the core of the remix culture.

Bad-lip reading

One of the creators of remixed content is YouTube channel called *Bad-lip reading.* The channel published 64 short remixed movies and it has over 5 million subscribers (5 235 017 - data collected on 15.06.2016). The author of the channel describes his work in one sentence: *I put words into other people's mouths.* The main idea behind this work is based on dubbing or redubbing process of well know movie productions, TV series, cultural and political phenomena. In some of the works, additional graphic remix was used in order to amplify the intended purpose. This channel is trying to create content with comic tinge, clever humor and with references to the most recognizable text of culture. Some of the remixed titles included: The Star Wars Saga, Hunger Games, The Walking Dead, The Game of Thrones, Twilight Saga, Spider-Man Saga, NFL, Hillary Clinton speeches, Barack Obama speeches, Coldplay, Gotye and Beyonce songs, Joe Biden sound bites and so on. The most successful one is a bad-lip reading from National Football league published 15.01.2013 with over 66 million view (66 567 059 - data collected on 15.06.2016).

The work of this broadcaster is highly creative, he does not only create new dubbing layer, but he creates new music pieces, songs and so on. He is constant with his work which is performed on high level. This channel has a strong fan base and is capable of good communication habits (commentary section communication), and is in touch with needs and request of the fans. Those are the main reasons behind the popularity of the channel.

Miranda Sings

Miranda Sings is a fictional comedian character created by musician and an actress Colleen Ballinger. She started her broadcasting carrier in 2006 and now her channel is subscribed by 6 591 581 people. Since 2006 she uploaded 527 movie productions. Her work is connected to video blogs experience, musical remix, music videos remix. Outside the YouTube platform Miranda Sings is using other social media channels like Twitter, Facebook, Google +, Tumblr, Spreadshirt.

As a character she is remixing well know social stereotypes in order to create amusing effect. She is involved in public matters like animal rights, minority rights, charity work. As a remix content creator she is focused on music and music videos remix.

She created parodies of Tylor Swift, Adele, Nicki Minaj, One Direction, Lady Gaga, Justin Timberlake, Ariana Grande, P!ink, Miley Cyrus, Michael Jackson, Katy Perry and so on. She created 111 remixed music videos (covers and creative redistributions works).

She is recreating music videos by using the most simple tools, simply she is putting her person in original picture, and she performs the song lyrics in her manner and style. Sometimes she is changing the surroundings/ the place of the video in order to create new context to well know picture (*Nicki Minaj Starships*- remixed video shot at Los Angeles beach). The pastiche style of the YouTube star is helping her comedian status and gives her remixed videos individual aspect.

This is an example of one of the broadcasters that are able to create a stronghold of fans, and even started a community centered around their work. The Miranda Sings YouTube community is composed of fans, collaboration partners, other YouTube stars, and also real life celebrities

like Ariana Grande (personal connection to the comedian Colleen Ballinger). The content that she is creating (remix included) has its own receivers base (community form), so it can be personalized and customized following the generated feedback. The main difference between this channel and the other ones mentioned is that Miranda Sings is using remix tools in specified fields of her work, it is not her main broadcasting profile to create that type of publications.

The HillyWood Show

The Hillywood Show is a YouTube channel created by sisters Hannah and Hilly Hindi in 2006. They have uploaded 169 remixed parodies (data collected 28.06.2016), as their slogan tells they are creating *epic parodies of your favorite movies, TV shows and more.* Each parody features songs & dance parodies of blockbuster films and TV series or celebrity profiles, their work is highly professional in the matter of camera shoots, postproductions, sound, acting and location choice. The performed remixed parodies of such titles as: Harry Potter Series, Hunger Games Series, Twilight Series, The Vampire Diaries Series, The Lord of The Rings Series, Hocus Pocus The Film, Supernatural, Doctor Who and Lady Gaga music videos and more. In the analysis of their work this spectrum was widened by format like Got to Dance and other popular TV talent reality shows.

They are performing a brand or remix production called mash-up. They are mixing blockbusters movies or TV shows with hit songs (pop cultural based) like The Twilight movie and *Hot N Cold* song by Katy Perry. This way every one of their productions is a unique representation of the most popular pop or mass cultural phenomenon of specified time or is an attempt of creating new context for well know movie picture. Other examples of this type of work: The Vampire Diaries series mashed-up with *Show me Your Teeth* by Lady Gaga, The Lord of The Ring series and *Let it go* song from Disney original picture *Frozen*. In the last case to the music of Disney song a new text was created in order to give the narration to the publication.

Some of the parodies are focused on generating new context for the movie picture that they are remixing. That was the case for The Hunger Games Parody, the hit movie was mashed-up with the original song *Fashionista* by Jimmy James (lyrics were recreated in order to create more references to the Hunger Games original movie). *Whether you're a Capitol fashionista seeking an entertaining chuckle or a District citizen yearning for a smile, The Hillywood Show's® Hunger Games Parody delivers!* That was part of the message that was published in the describe box.

Conclusion

Creative transformation of cultural and pop-cultural context on the YouTube platform is a vital part of YouTube community that is the main force of communication. Remix in different form can be a way to participate in the culture alongside with expressing personal opinion and thoughts.

There are many different forms of remix that are published via the YouTube platform and most of them are using sound and video alterations. Different levels of advance and different styles make this community very diverse in the sense of broadcasted materials.

In the aspect of sound alterations there are dubbing changes, music rewrites, additional effects and so on. When it comes to the visual part, the possibilities are even more diverse with every studio effect, location changes, editing manipulations and mash-up.

The remix is just the outcome, the effect of the participation and remix culture. The main component is all about the people, community and communication inside of the community.

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