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## **Manifest Yourself. Interpretation of Internet Advisory Accounts on Polish Instagram as an Example of Image Design**

**Uzewnętrznij się.**

**Interpretacja kont poradniczych na polskim Instagramie jako projektowanie wizerunku**

ABSTRAKT

Instagram przypomina arenę cyrkową — istniejącą w wirtualnym świecie współczesnych mediów. Osoby, które na tej arenie występują wykonują zróżnicowane akrobacje, aby skupić na sobie uwagę widza. Dostarczają rozrywki, uczą i bawią próbując przekroczyć kolejne granice w wirtualnym świecie. Aby robić to jak najlepiej, muszą bezustannie ćwiczyć i być aktywni w mediach społecznościowych. Przyciągają widza wysyłając między innymi zdjęcia pokazujące efekty nowych zmian w swoim otoczeniu. Działania użytkowników kont poradniczych Instagrama wiążą się z doskonaleniem przestrzeni domu, twórczym i niekiedy zaskakującym jego przekształceniem. W istocie ważna jest nie tylko przemiana domowego otoczenia, dużo bardziej ważna jest przemiana jednostki, która doskonaląc przestrzeń doskonalą siebie.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Instagram, konta poradnicze, projektowanie wizerunku, przestrzeń

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## Introduction

Access to social media is exceptionally easy – everyone can set up an account and be active on a social media portal. Instagram is a social networking service intended primarily for sharing photographs. Posting photos on Instagram (usually with a short comment or description) is an indispensable element of daily life for many users. The content sent with the use of a smartphone may be either spontaneous or carefully planned and made more attractive by means of filters, retouch or stickers. Instagram allows for interpersonal communication, creating identities and individual expression in the network by sharing photographic images. What seems to be an important motivation for being active on this social networking portal is not only an individual's desire to mark one's presence or earn a living, but first of all it is the possibility to model one's image. The majority of Internet accounts of advisory character devoted to home interiors have the content related to different aspects of human life, including advice on, for example, cooking, plant care, upbringing and education of children, health and even travel<sup>2</sup>.

A well-known semiotician of culture Umberto Eco notices that "the world of emotions is filtered through images once seen"<sup>3</sup>. The images seen in the past remain in the memory of an individual, have an impact on their present and future as well as their way of thinking and acting. The Instagrammers running advisory profiles imitate the modes of imaging observed in the media, but also try to demonstrate their own creativity. It is worth pointing out that one of the most important elements of daily and family life is the process of creating pictures and viewing them. Instagrammers and users of other social media share photos to wider audiences and care about an attractive and interesting form of communication.

The object of reflection in this work will be interpretation of Internet advisory accounts on Instagram as image design with particular consideration given to the accounts dedicated to interiors and broadly-understood home space.

## Media spectacle

Photographic recording of daily life is present in social relations existing in the Internet space. It serves communication, sharing experience and knowledge. The photographs posted on Internet accounts allow the Instagram user for self-presentation. It is closely connected with the way we function in the striptease and peep culture. According to Douglas Kellner: "an individual becomes an actor of the

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<sup>2</sup> Instagram users do not limit themselves to sharing content closely connected with the profile. What has been mentioned here are only the examples of advice offered.

<sup>3</sup> U. Eco, *Semiologia Quotidiana*, Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, Bompiani, Sonzogno, Etas S.p.A, 1973, 1977, 1983.

contemporary cultural spectacle”<sup>4</sup>. Photography is not only a tool used to create memories and assist memory, but also to create attractive images of life and media stories. At the moment of taking a photo a photographed person has an influence on, for instance, the emerging photograph by striking an appropriate pose and arranging the surrounding space in detail. They create an image compliant with their own self-concept.

Guy Debord says: “In societies where modern conditions of production prevail all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation”<sup>5</sup>. The world images become more important than the very reality. In a sense we may talk about resignation from direct experience where engagement is necessary. Instagram users offer a non-committal “invitation to their space”. At any moment one can use or equally easily “leave the interiors”. What is significant here are the attractive photographs thanks to which one may obtain more approval of their image and attract the attention of the audience.

Hans Belting, the author of *An Anthropology of Images* points to the fact that the photography viewer is more keen to observe the reality which has been meticulously arranged<sup>6</sup>. An inspiration for those representations became the mass culture with memorable images from blogs or Instagram accounts. They are a source of inspiration or a model which may be copied and then interpreted. An essential motivation for repeating it is the desire to be seen and manifest a created identity. The Internet offers its users anonymity, but coming out of hiding seems to be very tempting. We can also see the tendency to look for a novel way of showing oneself and one’s surroundings to emphasize one’s creativity. Not everyone can work in television; not everyone may become a film star, but every individual may share one’s image and mark one’s presence by images which efficiently catch the viewers’ eyes. Everyone can become an author of a media spectacle with the use of appropriate means. Facebook, Instagram and other social media become a stage on which any repertoire may be played as intended by the actor and director in one. Also, virtual ovation is possible – popularity is not measured by the tickets sold, but the number of followers, sharing numbers or approval in the form of “likes” or comments.

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<sup>4</sup> D. Kellner, *Media Spectacle*, Routledge, 2002

<sup>5</sup> G. Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York: Zone Books, 1994 and *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, transl. by Malcolm Imrie, Verso, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> H. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, transl. by T. Dunlap, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2014, p. 265.

## Images of home

Family is of central importance in the life of Polish people. A natural environment for this basic social unit is a home<sup>7</sup> which, when built and created, becomes a separate space which gives protection to people against the dangers of the outside world. In the 1980s Tadeusz Rojek observed that:

“When we turn up at the door of a Polish house and ring the bell, we may be sure that we will be welcomed by friendly smiling faces, even when we decide to drop in uninvited.(...) It is obvious that the nicest are the homes which kept the most relics of the old Polish hospitality. You can come there at any time of day or evening and be welcomed as if they waited for you (...) You do not need to call this kind of home to ask if you can come. However, these are sinking islands. It is not because the hospitality is dying, but because lifestyles have changed”<sup>8</sup>.

In fact, the transformations of contemporary world brought new ways of practising hospitality in virtual reality. Instagram users invite us to watch their homes space, resolve problems together and experience daily life understood as a series of repeated actions and practices shared by a given community. It is rarely verbalised since there is a belief that this kind of knowledge is shared by everyone<sup>9</sup>. This everyday life shown through images becomes interesting and inspiring.

The Instagram users running profiles of advisory character and dedicated to interiors place information in the description thanks to which one can determine what kind of content is presented there. Apart from the terms related to home space the majority of them also mentions others, accompanying them, such as: design, lifestyle, plants, DIY<sup>10</sup>, interests or those defining social roles. The people running interiors advisory accounts are usually women. Most of them reveal their names, even surnames and places of residence.

It is worth emphasizing the fact that the names of accounts are intended to attract the attention of viewers. They refer, for example, to a flat size, specify particular features of interiors or a house location<sup>11</sup>. The photographs posted on a profile have appropriate hashtags<sup>12</sup>, thanks to which a large number of viewers may be reached.

Ryszard Tadeusiewicz notices that:

„This form of random and (what is more important) non-returnable news spread is noteworthy also on account of the fact that it has no direct equivalent in any communication situation which took place

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<sup>7</sup>A. Bisko, *Polska dla średnio zaawansowanych (Poland for Intermediate Learners)*, Universitas, Kraków 2014, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup>T. Rojek, *Polski savoir –vivre (Polish Savoir-Vivre)*, Wydawnictwo Interpress, Warszawa 1984, p. 20-21.

<sup>9</sup>A. Bisko, *Polska dla średnio zaawansowanych (Poland for Intermediate Learners)*, Universitas, Kraków 2014, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>DIY - Do It Yourself.

<sup>11</sup> Examples of Polish advisory accounts on Instagram: @jaklubimy,@ trzecie\_ piętro, @piątypokoj, @wnętrzazewnętrza, @na\_ czwartym, @\_parametry,@ martyna\_nas\_urządzi,@aletuladnie, @66m\_kwadrat.

<sup>12</sup> A hashtag – an expression preceded by symbol # (hash), which helps to find and group elements, a key word.

before the invention of Internet"<sup>13</sup> (own translation).

The accounts users want to convey a message to a large number of viewers, whereas the followers want to satisfy their natural needs of contact with other people and group affiliation. The position of a user and their account is to a large extent characterised by a number of followers and relationships. Therefore, they strive to make numerous friends in the virtual world, which will result in an extensive network of Instagram friends.

The portal also allows for posting photos and short audiovisual recordings within the framework of Stories, that is live video broadcasts, which may be watched and commented for twenty four hours with no access to them after the expiry of that period. They attract the attention of followers with their informal character, showing interiors or objects from a different perspective. The accounts' users point their telephone cameras at themselves and talk about their life, experiences, problems and observations. You can see various types of self-presentation: from a casual one with messy hair and faces uncovered with make-up, worn-out and not necessarily fashionable clothes to a perfect make-up and outfit. In the home, which often enough is a presentation of disorderly environment they encourage to choose certain products, give advice, but also ask followers for tips on various matters. They refer to their followers in a very direct way. They recommend solutions which have made their daily life easier and may be useful for others. They show imperfections on their furniture, damaged walls or broken vacuum-cleaners. They show objects they are proud of and also those they would like to have. Those virtual, often exhibitionist and narcissistic gatherings may give the impression of being natural. They are supposed to be evidence that the follower sees images originating from a real human life and not an artificial and created world.

The point of reference for photography should be anchored in the space of an ordinary apartment in a block of flats or even a new house in a fashionable district, but what is more and more valued is showing both bright and dark sides of human life. What is really significant for the followers and users is a change and enhancement of space, adjusting it to a changing family or financial situation. One can notice a trend connected with restoration of the furniture or everyday objects which were created before the year 1989. A successful metamorphosis of an old element of interior furnishing is often shown on the profiles of the portal users. The current trend in the contemporary Polish society towards the times of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) is marked by a personal, subjective perspective where a positive view of the past era products dominates. This phenomenon especially

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<sup>13</sup> R. Tadeusiewicz, *Spółeczność Internetu (Internet Community)*, Akademicka Oficyna Wydawnicza "Exit", Warszawa 2002, p. 49-50.

concerns the people who do not see themselves as beneficiaries of the political system transformation, therefore those who in the majority are Instagram users and know how to appreciate the aesthetics of the past era.<sup>14</sup>

The images of homes on Instagram are manifold. Some people open their doors wide apart to showcase the interiors in a Scandinavian or eclectic style, others – in a rustic style. The Instagram users present their household life in photographs: play of children dirty in mud and chocolate, a sink with dirty dishes or a bedroom being tidied. We will see the whole family inviting us to enter its world where the welcomed audience may see a bedroom, bathroom, pantry or even a chicken coop. One can also ask about anything and satisfy their curiosity. The contact mediated through media efficiently shortens distance between people strange to each other. In the media space the boundaries between private space of people and the external world disappear.

It is worth pointing out that there are profiles where the identities of a users and their families are not revealed. These are the accounts whose users limit themselves to posting only one photograph of interior without disclosing their personal image. They do not establish relations with their followers and do not encourage to express personal opinions. They usually have a small number of followers. Their accounts are not often recommended as interesting profiles to watch.

One can also distinguish the accounts of users who invite followers to see the interiors designed in cooperation with an architect. These are the houses where the costs of furnishings significantly exceed the financial possibilities of the majority of Poles, the houses where a coach and table are replaced once a year and where a family life is one long success story. The family does not experience any serious problems.

Followers may quickly and without a problem “visit the houses” of Instagram users without the need to leave their safe space. They do not have to engage personally in establishing relations, nor will they suffer a big loss when a profile is closed. Then they will quickly find some other interesting accounts to follow.

All these practices of everyday life posted on Instagram have some things in common. The users cooperate with manufacturers of different products. Therefore, they show objects, furniture, clothes, toys and groceries, even cars and talk about their good points. All this has an impact on the imagination of an individual follower who watches photographs and relations on a selected profile, associating it with the promise to transform their humdrum reality into a picture of a better life. Advisory accounts on Instagram suit different kinds of marketing ploys.

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<sup>14</sup> See M. Brocki, *Nostalgia za PRL-em. Próba analizy (Nostalgia for the PRL. Analysis Attempt)*, “Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, 2011, year LXV no. 1 (292), p. 26-33.

## A human as a project

There is one more common denominator uniting all Instagrammers. The majority of users try to reinforce their image as that of a creative person with numerous interests and passions as well as competences related to different disciplines of knowledge. There is no place for lethargy and stagnation in their life. We have a picture of an individual who “exists on the mere condition that they are in the public eye, and also subject to evaluation, praise and consumption by a possibly highest number of people, exposed to meet the needs both of the closest people and strangers”<sup>15</sup>. The image of home is a proof and assertion that its owner is a person full of life and passion who has a lot of ideas to arrange their closest environment in an attractive way. At the same time this person is empathetic and generous as they are willing to share their exceptional skills with others. They can show in an interesting, attractive and also simple way how a successful metamorphosis may be shared by followers<sup>16</sup>.

In his book *You Must Change Your Life* a German philosopher Sloterdijk writes about the changes taking place in the contemporary culture. An individual is compelled to do different kinds of exercise. It is connected with “constant work on ourselves”<sup>17</sup>. These are all human actions undertaken from the moment of birth to the moment of death: “Exercise is defined here as each operation which helps to maintain or raise qualifications of an actor to conduct the same operation regardless of the fact whether it is declared as exercise or not”<sup>18</sup>.

There is no voluntary action, but the necessity to survive. An individual will survive only if they agree to join the obligation. Currently, the ways in which contemporary societies are organised are connected with exploitation of an individual performance-wise, which induces people to practise and be active even more for self-improvement. Consumption, which is a driving force of fashion and newly created needs of people, also has an influence on the actions of an individual. A person chooses a set of exercises available on the contemporary market.

Instagram resembles a media-mediated contemporary circus arena. The users perform various acrobatics to focus the viewers’ attention. They provide entertainment, educate and amuse in an attempt to cross new boundaries in the virtual world. To do it the best they can, they need to practise constantly and be active in social media. This is a revolving stage and virtual in addition, so sometimes

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<sup>15</sup> Rosen Ch., *The Overpraised American*, Policy Review, October and November 2005

<sup>16</sup> The people observing an account on Instagram are called “followers”. In English the expression means a supporter, someone who passively follows others.

<sup>17</sup> P. Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, transl. by Wieland Hoban, Polity Press, 2013

<sup>18</sup> ibidem

the actors swap seats with the audience. "Come see my house" the person owning the account seems to say and the follower confirms "I see your house" and stops watching passively; by giving tips on how to do tasks even better they confirm that they have seen the individual's efforts. They also send photographs showing the effects of their actions in their environment or invite to see their profile. The actions of Instagram advisory accounts' users are connected with improvements to the home space and often its creative, and sometimes surprising transformation. In fact, it is not only the transformation of home environment that is important, but what is more important is the transformation of an individual who by improving the space improves oneself. The interior designs we can see in the photos are also evidence of an internal fight of an individual for a better version of themselves. They are a demonstration of their skills, talents and predispositions. This is a picture of a rich and creative interior of a house-dweller ready for change.

## Conclusion

Privacy has become a product thanks to which one may gain popularity. Virtual identity of a human being is incessantly created thanks to the tools offered by social media. An individual may express oneself in a selected way. The obligation of constant self-improvement is implemented through designing images showing those changes. It gives a lot of opportunities for moderating one's image.

The photos regularly posted on an Instagram account become a metaphor of a family photo album and a story of changes taking place in life. The moved furniture, painted floor or plant cultivation reveal a picture of human design. Quoting Janusz Krupiński I understand design in the following way: "(...) this is not only an image of a real object, the subject which the object shows itself in the image, but the subject as a portrayal of meanings, cultural content, goals, values, as a portrayal of how the sense of life and human existence are understood. In other words, design is a portrayal of a human"<sup>19</sup>. The culture of excess is associated with the excess of content and messages, therefore to be noticed an individual must present oneself as an authentic person, the one who is brave to be oneself, strong enough to show weaknesses, but at the same time demonstrate that mistakes are necessary and inevitable on the path to success as they help to programme oneself. All the stages of image design take place before the eyes of viewers and with their support since this kind of work is more effective and even impressive. The planned activities do not preclude a search for the right image of oneself through experiment. Thanks to digital technologies, entering the space of

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<sup>19</sup> Krupiński J., *Co to jest design? Sens pytania, znaczenie odpowiedzi*  
[https://krupinski.asp.krakow.pl/pdf/janusz\\_krupinski\\_co\\_to\\_jest\\_design\\_WASP\\_70.pdf](https://krupinski.asp.krakow.pl/pdf/janusz_krupinski_co_to_jest_design_WASP_70.pdf) (20.06.2021).

exchange is possible right away if necessary.

The Instagram user is more anchored in the imaginary representation of one's home than in a real space. Shaping their virtual, creative and attractive identity is linked to the constant change and drive to perfection.

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### Manifest Yourself.

#### Interpretation of Internet Advisory Accounts on Polish Instagram as an Example of Image Design

##### Summary

Instagram resembles a circus arena existing in the virtual world of contemporary media. The people who perform there do various acrobatics in order to draw their viewers' attention. They provide entertainment, educate and amuse in an attempt to cross the newly established boundaries of the virtual world. To do it well, they need to practise constantly and be active in social media. They

attract viewers by e.g. sending photographs showing the effects of new changes in their surroundings. The actions of Instagram advisory accounts' users are associated with making improvements to home space and its creative, and sometimes surprising transformation. In fact, it is not only the transformation of the home environment that is important. What is more important is the transformation of an individual - who by improving the surrounding space – improves oneself.

Keywords: Instagram, Internet advisory accounts, image design, space