virtual political rhetoric

by Ivanka Mavrodieva

Abstract:

The term *virtual rhetoric* was established in the first two decades of the 21st century and it is used to refer to various manifestations in the fields of media, public communication, public relations, education, politics, business, etc. Virtual rhetoric expands its application at different levels: genres, means, techniques, implementations, etc. The genres of webinar, virtual lecture (Coursera, MOOCs etc.), virtual presentation (TED presentations), virtual conference, virtual press conference, virtual business meeting, podcast, virtual forums, etc. are becoming established. Virtual rhetoric creates opportunities for adapting part of the rhetorical heritage to contemporary conditions and for combining rhetorical literacy with media literacy, digital literacy, communicative literacy, etc.

Терминът „виртуална реторика“ се появи в първите две десетилетия на 21. век и се използва за обозначаване на различни прояви в областта на медиите, публични комуникации, връзки с обществеността, образование, политика, бизнес и т.н. Виртуална реторика разширява прилагането му на различни нива: жанрове, инструменти, техники на изпълнение и т.н. се Формират се относително нови жанрове като уебинар, виртуални лекции (Coursera, MOOCs и т.н.), виртуална презентация, виртуална конференция, виртуална пресконференция, виртуална бизнес среща, подкаст, виртуални форуми и т.н. Виртуална реторика създава възможности за адаптиране на част реторичното наследство към съвременните условия и за комбинация риторичната грамотност с медийната грамотност и с цифрова грамотност, комуникативни грамотност и т.н.

Etymology:

The term virtual rhetoric includes the English adjective virtual and the term rhetoric.

Rhetoric – from Old Greece - *ῥητωρική.* In Latin the term is written as *rhetorica.*

noun

rhet·o·ric | \ 're-tə-rik \

Definition of *rhetoric*

1: the art of speaking or writing effectively such as:

a: the study of principles and rules of composition formulated by critics of ancient times

b: the study of writing or speaking as a means of communication or persuasion

2a: skill in the effective use of speech

b: a type or mode of language or speech *also* **:** insincere or grandiloquent language

3: verbal communication **:** DISCOURSE

https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric

Cultural specificity:

At the genre level: these are recorded video lectures, speeches, statements, presentations. Speeches and other genres are presented in the online environment both as complete recordings and in parts. No transcriptions of the texts

are observed.

At the level of communication channels: Initially, official channels such as websites are preferred. Gradually, blogs are being created in which virtual rhetoric is presented by re-reviewing media appearances. Social networks create favourable conditions for the dissemination of virtual rhetoric in order to reach a wider audience of Bulgarian citizens.

At the level of rhetorical techniques: The analysis shows that quality video recordings are created and virtual rhetoric combines digital literacy, rhetorical literacy and media literacy.

At the same time, there are parodies of the official rhetorical statements of politicians in order to express critical attitude from Bulgarian citizens.

Therefore, virtual rhetoric in Bulgaria is not homogeneous, it is in dynamic development.

Activism of Bulgarian politicians on the sites, blogs, and social networks makes an impact on Bulgarian citizens. The main function is to give information about a new party, coalition, ideology, platform, decisions, etc. Bulgarian politicians accept sites and blogs as digital tribune and social networks as e-agora. The forms of Bulgarian virtual rhetoric in virtual environment are heterogeneous: sites, blogs, social networks, video clips, virtual forums, etc. Bulgarian politicians avoid taking part in interactive exchange with citizens using social networks and virtual forums. They prefer re-presentations of speeches, presentations, press-conferences, and debates on the Internet. Rhetorical techniques and tools have changed, the politicians combine digital literacy with good argumentative skills. The manifestations of Bulgarian political rhetoric are accelerated during the political crises and election campaigns. The Bulgarian political rhetoric has manifestations as a participation in virtual political forums and the social networks. Bulgarian virtual political rhetoric has been developed irregularly as a result of the evaluation of politicians and opportunities of the Internet.

In Bulgaria in recent years the term *virtual rhetoric* has gradually established itself and is mainly used to refer to online appearances in the fields of education, politics, media, business, etc. At the same time, during protests, variants of the term are used with a negative connotation in order to downplay the role of social networks in organising citizens and to be insulting

to particular groups. The virtual citizen was called ‘internet or virtual vagabond’ or ‘virtual/internet lumpen’. The antithesis of netizen is ‘virtual lamer’.

For example, politicians evaluate the e-citizens as ‘internet vagabonds’, ‘internet lumpens’.

But citizens present their answerers visually and virtually by posters.



Vladinir Vasilev – Smarth Graphs - Pinterest

https://www.pinterest.com/pin/504403226986364189/

This rhetorical approach, which is named *argumentum ad hominem*, activates the protesters who write on the posters and on the wall of the social network Facebook the following slogans: “I am not an Internet lumpen!” and they include emoticons, smiles and positive visual images, bright colours and multi-coloured slogans.” (Mavrodieva 2013: 93)



“The rhetorical situation is changed; the messages are sent and shared on the horizontal level among the participants independently of the environments: social networks or streets. The hierarchical communication, instructions and strict control and party coordination are not typical features of the civil oratory and virtual communication. Dialogue and interaction are specific features of social networks; the political speaker is replaced by the e-communicator. Assigning the tasks is changed by citizen’s initiations and self-organization. The traditional channels are substituted by social networks; the simple verbal messages are changed by visual elements and multimodal products. The messages created online aid Bulgarian citizens in organizing the protests offline, they reorganise the location of the groups online. The actions, events, activities organized offline are presented online as posts, photos, video clips in the Facebook groups established in favour of the protests. Some of them started in February 2012 named „Occupy Bulgaria”, , http://forum.4at.info/index.php?top; https://www.facebook.com/events/424843110925585/. During the summer protests e-citizens started to use hash tag # and some of this groups are #Оставка (#Retirement), #протест (#protest), #България(#Bulgaria), #Идвайте (#Come along).

Problematization:

Virtual rhetoric is used together with other terms, namely *virtual speaker, virtual audience, virtual environment, virtual agora, virtual tribune, virtual forum* etc.

Its specific applications in particular fields are called *virtual political rhetoric, virtual business communication*, etc.

The definition given by Mavrodieva is: “Virtual political rhetoric includes different kinds of oratory, i.e. speeches of politicians and statesmen delivered in virtual environments as synchronous and a-synchronous computer-mediated communication, as well as the use of the Internet opportunities (in particular Web 2.0) when the political orator publishes online video-typed speeches, lectures, reports, presentations or participations in dialogue formats, e.g. conferences, debates, discussions, round-tables, press-conferences; it also includes the readiness of the orators to take part in the interactive communication spaces applying verbal, visual and non-verbal tools. (Mavrodieva 2012: 282 in Mavrodieva 2014: 757).

It is reasonable to designate new manifestations and some of new terms. Mavrodieva (2010) introduces the term virtual rhetoric in her book and she uses the terms *virtual political rhetoric* and *visual political rhetoric* (Mavrodieva 2012: 223-279).

New genres on the Internet are *video-conference, webinar, virtual forums*, *posts, podcasts* etc. The state institutions

prefer to inform citizens in an official and traditional manner but have started to participate in a virtual communication.

The citizens take part in virtual forums and many of them publish posts in social networks. The posts are verbal, visual (pictures, photos, caricatures, video clips, parody of official public speaking, paraphrased words delivered by politicians etc.) or a mixture of verbal and visual elements. The multimodality is a feature of these short messages and some of them consist of animation effects, sound etc.

Communication strategies:

Virtual rhetoric is a part of communicative strategies that are developed and implemented in different spheres.

These strategies take into account the new expectations and the attitudes of the members of the audience to receive information in a convenient way, to send feedback signals in an online environment.

Communication strategies take into account the attitudes of the virtual audience, on the one hand, to be able to watch and listen repeatedly to speeches, debates, podcasts, training lectures and courses that are interesting to them.

On the other hand, communicative strategies require the development of different kinds of literacy: rhetorical, media, communicative, digital.

Moreover, rhetoric shows a vitality in a virtual environment and is rethought by communication experts who draw up strategies.

Virtual rhetoric is expanding its application and is gaining ground in various fields: politics, business, education, media, public relations, etc.

In 2020, the application of communication skills in virtual environments is accelerating.

Video lectures at Coursera and MOOCs have a string tradition.

These are virtual classrooms in schools and universities.

Webinars create the conditions for e-learning and distance education.

Decision making in virtual meetings by managers, teams and project leaders has become established.

Election campaigns involve broadcasting speeches and debates in a virtual environment.

The promotion of courses in the online environment in the business social sphere- LinkedIn and their realization marks the sustainability.

Media is adapting to new conditions and genres including podcasts as audio. Also, video recordings have become established.

Media outlets are presenting summaries of shows alongside audio and video recordings on their websites, creating conditions for viewing and listening by a virtual audience.

Livestreaming is favoured for broadcast events by both media bloggers and public relations specialists.

Communicators in virtual environments participate in virtual forums and use arguments to support their theses and claims or present counterarguments.

Therefore, virtual rhetoric is gradually gaining ground at different levels.

At the level of genres these are *speeches, presentations, reports, lectures, speeches, addresses*, etc.

At the level of formats these are *monologues* and *dialogues*.

At the level of

rhetorical techniques, virtual rhetoric includes verbal, visual, non-verbal and multimodal means.

Subversion:

Virtual rhetoric is part of a terminology matrix that can include terms that are part of different scientific fields.

In these terms, the first word is a variant of the adjective *virtual,* namely*: virtual citizen, virtual politic, virtual politics, virtual citizen, virtual forum, virtual reality*, etc.

Digital citizen and *digital politician* are used as synonyms for *virtual citizen* and *virtual politics*, and they embed content about the use of digital tools in politics.

Netizen is used as a synonym for digital citizen and virtual citizen, and it includes civic activism in a society which uses the online environment and social networks in mobilization for protest actions or campaigns in support of causes.

Although rare, words with negative connotations are also used to name negative phenomena in the online environment. For example, *virtual lumpen, virtual / Internet political troll*, *virtual larker, virtual hater*, etc.

The word *virtual lumpen* is used to insult protesters and to present them as citizens who has not political culture.

The word *virtual larker* is used to describe passive position of members of virtual forums and groups. They prefer to read online publications but they avoid to explain their personal position and to follow the model of transparency.

The word *virtual hater* is sued to explain a behavior of people who prefer to present personal negative evaluation in connection with politicians and current event in society.

The word *virtual / Internet political troll* is used to present the behavior of people who share negative or positive evaluation in social networks. They are very active during the elections campaigns but they play the role during the political life presenting preliminary prepared messages in connection with politicians and political parties, national and international institutions.

Discussion:

Virtual rhetoric cannot be seen as a homogeneous concept and one of the reasons is that it has different manifestations. The term has expanded its meaning to include forums, webinars, meetings, conferences, podcasts etc., in addition to virtual presentations, lectures and speeches. Virtual audiences require high quality on a variety of levels: rhetoric, communication, digitization, easy access, online comments, feedback options, and more. The demands on the virtual speaker / orator / presenter / debater are increasing and they need to continuously improve their rhetorical, technical and digital skills. The study of the virtual rhetoric requires an interdisciplinary approach due to its complex specificities and new manifestations.

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