‘Becoming a better version of oneself’: Performative discourse of self-disclosure in social media

Andrey Deryabin[1],
Novosibirsk State Technical University, Russia

To cite this article: Deryabin, A. (2026). ‘Becoming a better version of oneself’: Performative discourse of self-disclosure in social media. *World of Media. Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies*, 3, pp. 62–78. DOI: 10.30547/worldofmedia.3.2026.4

Abstract

The study investigates performative self-disclosure in a Russian-language online self-development community. A corpus of 4,032 participant texts – spanning forum posts, blog entries, and short essays – was examined using topic modelling in conjunction with discourse analysis, yielding ten thematic clusters that reveal a primarily instrumental understanding of self-improvement: one centred on self-management, efficiency, and the use of psychological or digital tools to align the Self with the existing socio-economic order. The analysis demonstrates that individuals’ disclosures about their self-development experiences are predominantly performative acts aimed at signalling self-regulatory capacity. The study explicates the rhetorical features of such performative self-disclosures and shows how confessional and didactic utterances intertwine with self-presentational tactics. It further demonstrates that archaic, quasi-magical “creational” speech remains embedded in these performances in the form of affirmations of achievements and future success. Drawing on speech-act theory and prior work on emotive performativity in online communication, we argue that performers and their audiences mutually reproduce a shared worldview, thereby constructing normalised subjects consistent with prevailing cultural norms. In this setting, not only are users’ emotional states commodified; the transformative “care of the Self” becomes subject to market logics, reinforcing a mode of self-constitution geared toward normalization.

Keywords

Social media, online community, technologies of the self, performativity, self-development, subjectivation, natural language processing.

[1] **Corresponding author:**
Andrey Deryabin, Novosibirsk State Technical University, Russia
E-mail: andred@yandex.com

Introduction

The rhetoric of self-development is central to the discourse of market-driven individualism, in which the subject is constructed as a free, autonomous, and self-reliant actor, responsible for all personal successes and failures (Rose, 1999; Weidner, 2009; Foucault, 2010). As a commodity in the labour market, such subject is expected to constantly enhance and sustain his or her value. Consequently, this framework demands relentless self-regulation and self-reworking (Walkerdine, 2006). At the same time, the modern digital environment makes personal existence dependent on the public demonstration of acquired social competencies, particularly the ability to self-regulate. Life becomes a process of constant tinkering with oneself through subjectivizing practices and continuous psychological exercises. It promises autonomy and success while producing constant self-doubt, since social existence is influenced by media images of happiness, style and productivity read as evidence of self-regulation. In this context, self-knowledge and self-improvement in the modern media environment are carried out in a performative mode through strategies of self-presentation, driven by the desire to manage impressions or meet social expectations.

The primary aim of this study is to examine how participants in online self-improvement communities discursively construct and communicate their experiences of self-development. Specifically, we analyze the thematic spectrum of self-development discourse and investigate the performative character of self-disclosure within the corresponding narratives. We hypothesize that participants' communications about their self-improvement experiences are predominantly performative acts oriented toward self-presentation and impression management rather than straightforward accounts of personal transformation.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section situates the study within work on governmentality, technologies of the self, and performativity. We then describe the corpus and the mixed computational–interpretive design, present the thematic structure of the corpus and the discursive features of self-disclosure, and discuss what these findings imply for how platform-mediated self-disclosure constitutes the subject.

Theoretical framework

Forms of social control that let people individualise and govern themselves gain importance in the 20th century with the rise of secular, rational technologies of state governance (Foucault, 2010), and it is in this period that the rhetoric

of self-development and the interest in psychology spread. Rose (1996) argues that psychology acquires its professional standing because it is effective at measuring and steering the desires of the subject in line with the goals of the state. This style of governance constitutes a person as a participant in the market economy (Madsen, 2014) whose leading mode of existence is making the right investments, economic and others. Competitive mechanisms are internalised by each individual, which makes the general regulation of society by the market an achievable goal (Foucault, 2010: 145).

As psychological assistance turned into a market, the 'disease-treatment' model was supplemented with 'lifelong learning' paradigm (Olssen, 2006), in which the individual becomes a project of continuous improvement – not changing one's model of the Self but optimizing within the existing model. As Cabanas and Sánchez González (2012: 173-174) observe, this requires constant self-work to achieve inner perfection and improved living conditions, rather than changing external conditions. Such improvement is oriented not toward knowledge that might reveal personal and social limitations but toward practices delivering well-being and success. The pursuit of happiness becomes not only a right but a moral imperative.

Where the ancient philosophical model of self-knowledge offered access to truth as moral duty, the contemporary psychotechnical "care of the Self" promises direct access to happiness. The problem arises when this care becomes preoccupation with Self in a precarious competitive environment, and self-improvement takes the form of skilful performance. In digital media environments, this tendency intensifies: the Self becomes an object of reflexive, objectifying gaze aimed at imitating simulacra of style, happiness, and achievement presented in influencer content, advertising, and social media (Rose, 1999: 242).

Manifestations of the Self and identity in modern society have been taken online. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, conceptualizing social interactions as theatrical performances (Goffman, 1959), is widely applied to analyze behavior within social networks, wherein individuals meticulously manage their public persona through strategic disclosures and concealments. Research confirms that digital spaces constitute environments of highly controlled and strategically optimized self-presentation (Papacharissi, 2002: 644) and demonstrate that users consciously curate their online personas into distinct roles: public diary, influencer, professional and educational identity, hobbies, and entertainment (Merunková, & Šlerka, 2019). Marwick and Boyd (2011) show how influencers cultivate particular forms of intimacy, authenticity

and affiliation in their dealings with audiences, and such performances can supply those audiences with models for acting, relating and transforming themselves, especially where a reader identifies with the performer (Kresovich, & Noar, 2020) or finds usable well-being advice in what is shared (Cui et al., 2024).

Judith Butler's conception of performativity significantly deepens the dramaturgical understanding by extending J. L. Austin's linguistic theory of speech acts into the realm of subject construction. Butler (1990) argues that identity is constituted through repeated performative acts, wherein subjects emerge as effects of reiterative practices rather than as inherent essences, thus extending and specifying the broader anti-essentialist perspective on subjectivity previously articulated by theorists such as Michel Foucault. Crucially, Butler distinguishes performativity from mere performance by emphasizing that performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, 1993: 2). Thus, performativity is not voluntary or theatrical but a compelled repetition within a regulatory framework of norms shaping the subject. Further aligning with Foucault, Butler thereby reinforces Foucault's notion of the subject as constituted through participation in normative practices.

Analyzing textual self-descriptions of subjects engaged in self-development practices, this study examines the discursive dimension of performative self-disclosure. We argue that subjects' disclosures on social media about their efforts toward self-transformation and the application of psychological techniques function as performative acts. These acts participate in broader normative discourses, reinforcing the production and maintenance of normalized subjectivities, thereby highlighting deeper implications beyond superficial self-presentation.

Methods

We collected texts – forum posts, blog entries and short essays – authored by participants of the international Russian-speaking self-development community *Interesno.co*, and applied natural language processing techniques to them. The site publishes 'stories of change based on personal experience' and asks its authors to 'share techniques, skills, and experiences'; it also sells '100-day challenges' – marathons aimed at achieving personal goals that provide mentoring, tools 'for purposeful action' and channels for participant communication. A total of 5077 texts dated 2013 to 2024 were processed; user profiles, service pages and site

announcements were removed, leaving 4032 documents; the total number of words in the corpus was 4216075.

To determine the spectrum of statements by community participants about their self-development experiences, exploratory topic modeling was undertaken. Analysis used standard Python libraries (pandas, numpy, nltk, Matplotlib, Gensim, scikit-learn). Texts were tokenised, lemmatised and stripped of common vocabulary. For topic modeling, LDA was applied first with coherence diagnostics across k = 2–20 but it performed poorly: the best model reached *c_v* coherence of 0.33, with several topics dominated by high-frequency general vocabulary. Consequently we used a Word2Vec vector representation model with KMeans clustering algorithm: three factors influenced the choice of this design; training Word2Vec on the corpus itself captures platform-specific vocabulary for which no pretrained representation exists; mean pooling normalises for document length, which ranges here from under 200 to over 9000 words; and KMeans returns a hard partition rather than a topic mixture – clusters served as a sampling frame for close reading, not as a model of latent structure.

The number of clusters was selected with reference to silhouette diagnostics computed across k = 5–20. Values were uniformly low (0.077–0.103), as expected for mean-pooled word embeddings of prose varying widely in genre and length: documents occupy a continuous rather than sharply partitioned semantic space. The coefficient nonetheless peaks at k = 10 and falls by roughly 13% at k = 11, remaining lower for all larger values; inertia declines smoothly and yields no elbow. The diagnostics are therefore consistent with k = 10. For visualization of the topic modeling results the t-distributed Stochastic Neighbor Embedding (t-SNE) method was used. Cluster labels were assigned by reading ten documents nearest the centroid and proposing a label describing what the accounts are about.

Following the computational clustering, we employed discourse analysis to interpret the thematic structure of the corpus and examine the discursive practices through which participants constitute themselves as self-developing subjects. This methodological choice is warranted by the study's focus on the discourses of self-development, making the analysis of discursive patterns, subject positions, and rhetorical strategies essential to understanding how self-development communities produce and reproduce particular modes of selfhood (Fairclough, 2003; Wodak, & Meyer, 2009).

For qualitative analysis we drew a proportional random sample of 7% from each of the ten clusters, yielding between 3 and 58 texts per cluster (N = 282). This sample size proved sufficient to achieve theoretical saturation

– the point at which additional texts yielded no new discursive patterns or subject positions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Topic 9 contributed three texts, too few to interpret, and we do not discuss it separately below. After reading the texts it was decided to filter out first-person accounts of the author's own experience from instructional, expert-commentary, editorial, review, and translated material; only self-disclosures were coded further (n = 139), since the hypothesis concerns this genre. The topic model describes the community's discourse as a whole, while the coding findings are applicable to self-disclosures subsample as a residue of proportional sampling (49.3% of 4032 documents); we do not report coding results broken down by cluster.

The analysis proceeded through three iterative stages. Holistic reading identified recurring discursive patterns, rhetorical structures and subject positions, and yielded four binary self-presentational features. *Personal growth through technique* (F4) records whether a change in the self is attributed to a named practice – a 100-day challenge, freewriting, a habit tracker, etc. *Status assertion* (F2) records whether professional position, credential, or achievement as a ground of authority is claimed within the narrative body or byline derived from user profile. The features F1 (*Rupture with wage labour*) and F3 (*Mobility*) occur only in 6.5% and 12.2% of texts and almost always alongside the features F2 and F4 rather than instead of them; they are reported in Table 2 but are not analysed further.

A performative utterance was defined here by two properties: the speaker enacts rather than reports, and the utterance is oriented towards uptake – it constructs an addressee and offers something for that addressee to take up. The second property concerns the design of the utterance, not the response it received; whether uptake occurred is outside the scope of this design. Two further variables, one for each property, were scored on a three-point scale. This graded design was adopted because binary coding could not separate performative from non-performative self-description in this corpus: a present/absent coding assigns almost every text to the same value and discriminates nothing. *Declarative self-predication* (P1) captures three degrees of completion in changes to the author's property of Self, capacity or identity. *Audience appeal* (P2) records the second property: whether the text constructs an addressee, and whether it hands that addressee a practice. Alongside the coding, the texts were systematically annotated for self-presentational tactics; performative speech acts (declarations, affirmations); markers of instrumental rationality (goal-orientation, efficiency language, self-optimization vocabulary). In the

theoretical integration stage, coded patterns were interpreted through the lens of Foucauldian governmentality and Rose's (1996, 1999) framework of "governing the soul".

Consistent with interpretive methodology, validity was established through systematic coding, theoretical triangulation, and attention to negative cases. The Results section provides the coding frequencies and extensive quotation from primary sources, making the evidentiary basis for interpretive claims.

The corpus consists of texts published openly and collected in accordance with the site's terms of use. Individual consent was not sought, since the study concerns discursive patterns rather than individuals; we recognise that public availability does not by itself settle participants' contextual expectations. Authors and third parties are replaced by initials to limit re-identification, quoted passages are translated from Russian, and no usernames, profile links or contact details are reported.

Results

As a result of data processing and modeling, 10 themes were clustered, as depicted in *Figure 1* and presented in *Table 1* below:

Table 1

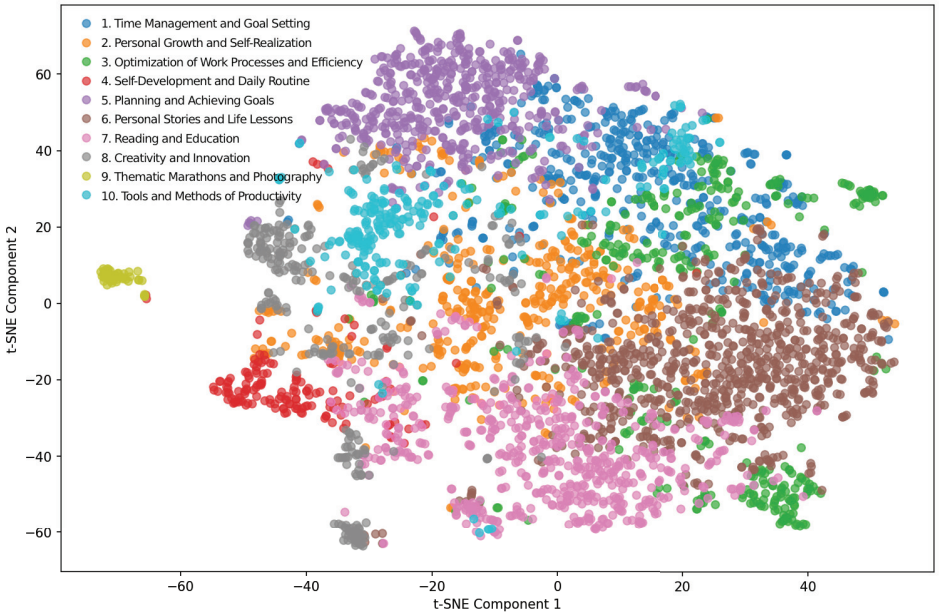
Topics derived from the corpus with correspondent number of documents

Topic	Number of documents
1. Time Management and Goal Setting	515
2. Personal Growth and Self-Realization	434
3. Optimization of Work Processes and Efficiency	368
4. Self-Development and Daily Routine	154
5. Planning and Achieving Goals	517
6. Personal Stories and Life Lessons	832
7. Reading and Education	601
8. Creativity and Innovation	311
9. Thematic Marathons and Photography	43
10. Tools and Methods of Productivity	257
Total	4032

Source: Author.

Figure 1

Thematic clusters of the online community texts



Source: Author.

The analysis yields two principal findings. Our *first* conclusion concerns the instrumental character of self-development discourse: participants in this community predominantly understand ‘self-development’ as mastering tools and techniques to align the Self with existing socio-economic demands. This reductionist attitude aligns with the broader critique of instrumental rationality associated with the names of M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno within critical theory and related philosophical traditions, where individuals are valued primarily for their utility in economic and social systems rather than their intrinsic human qualities. Themes such as ‘1. Time Management and Goal Setting’, ‘3. Optimization of Work Processes and Efficiency’, ‘5. Planning and Achieving Goals’, and ‘10. Tools and Methods of Productivity’ focus on self-management, which perfectly aligns with the ideal of the self-constituting economic subject.

Topics 2, 4 and 8 illustrate the strengthening of one’s existing virtues and abilities: healthy lifestyle and daily rituals in topic 2, routines for personal efficiency in topic 4, techniques for releasing creative potential including the use of digital platforms in topic 8. Topic 7 contains texts about techniques of reading, and book selection in the service of professional and personal goals.

The second conclusion is that the texts of self-disclosure in this corpus are predominantly performative. Performative communicative actions are speech acts in which the speaker enacts an action through the utterance itself rather than describing or narrating it; the speaker is not a witness to an event or a narrator but performs the action by the very act of speaking. It makes little sense to ask whether the speaker accurately depicts her psychological reality; the value of the performance is measured by the success of the utterance – whether a declaration, assertion, commitment, etc. is successfully performed (Searle, 1976: 10–13). In the corpus examined here the labour of social media performance is pursued through a further move, described by Romanov and Romanova (2019) as the transition from I-media to We-media, in which the audience is invited to join the author's transformation and to be transformed likewise.

Self-disclosure is not confined to any one cluster: it accounts for 49.3% of the sampled texts and occurs in nine of the ten. Topic 6, the largest cluster, is where it is densest. In the following text, we observe how confessional and didactic utterances are combined with vivid elements of self-presentation. The self-disclosures are frequently manifested as dramatic narratives of personal transformation, carefully crafted to demonstrate one's acquisition of competencies such as emotional resilience, effective communication skills, productivity optimization, and self-regulation, which lead to the attainment of enviable lifestyles and success. For instance, M. writes on October 12, 2021 (*Interesno.co*):

"In April 2017, I wrote an article for Living Is Interesting titled 'Things Are Just Things', where I explained how and why, at 37, I left my excellent job at a bank, took a year off, and moved to New York to pursue my dream of writing a book. I greeted J.N. and J.L. (Hey Jude) at book presentations, got caught by the police with a fashion model from Russia, and had heart-to-heart conversations with a New York rock guitarist from the seventies. Jumping out of a warm nest and flying across the ocean is, in a way, a 'leap of faith'; if you get scared halfway, that's it. But you also have the chance to change your fate and start living on a new level: to become better, to find new meanings, like-minded people, and friends, all while preserving the most important and precious things from your past life. For example, I was a lawyer at a bank; now I write essays for Snob magazine. Ahead of me are raising children, lots of work, and a world without borders".

This and other accounts, though differing in specific motifs, exhibit the following self-presentational features inherent to the entire topic:

(1) Declaration of the courage to forsake daily wage labor. This involves pursuing existentially important values, quitting a prestigious high-paying job

for a journey in search of meaning while implying the possession of the financial means that make such a step possible.

(2) Assertion of status, without which self-presentation loses meaning: a lawyer in a bank; a high-profile professional, mother, wife, and property owner – in other words, successfully performing often prestigious social roles.

(3) Emphasizing the status of a frequent international business traveler and tourist *('I met my future husband in Sri Lanka. We decided to make our first joint trip to Madagascar, simultaneously visiting Burma and Thailand')*.

(4) The motif of personal growth and subjectivation resulting from the application of special skills or overcoming previously existing social predeterminations *('I overcame burnout and I set off on a road trip through the endless pampas… without that overwhelming guilt towards my clients or fear for my reputation')*.

Across all four features, the underlying demonstration is one of self-regulatory capacity: the ability to make consequential life decisions (feature 1), to successfully manage multiple demanding social roles (feature 2), to navigate complex logistical and financial arrangements (feature 3), and to apply psychological techniques for emotional and behavioral self-management (feature 4). In other words, not merely success or status is performed but the competence to govern oneself, precisely the capacity valorized within neoliberal rationality (Rose, 1996). *Table 2* reports the number of documents each coded property occurs across the self-disclosure subsample.

Table 2

Coding results for the self-disclosure subsample (n = 139), n (%)

Feature	Score 0 (absent)	Score 1	Score 2	Of these (score 2), transmitting a practice (P2 = 2)
F1 Rupture with wage labour	130 (93.5)	9 (6.5)	–	1 (11.1)
F2 Status assertion in the narrative in the byline	104 (74.8) 25 (18.0)	35 (25.2) 114 (82.0)	–	9 (25.7) 36 (31.6)
F3 Mobility	122 (87.8)	17 (12.2)	–	2 (11.8)
F4 Personal growth through named technique	13 (9.4)	126 (90.6)	–	45 (35.7)
P1 Declarative self-predication	2 (1.4)	57 (41.0)	80 (57.6)	21 (26.2)
P2 Audience appeal	19 (13.7)	73 (52.5)	47 (33.8)	47 (100)

Source: Author.

No text in the subsample carries all four features. The M.'s account quoted above is therefore a maximal case rather than typical instance, and the list derived from it describes an idealisation that no single text fully realises.

Creating an emotional backdrop that makes the self-presentational event attractive plays a crucial role in this process. The text is built to be recognised and endorsed: it positions the reader to understand the speaker's intentions and to respond in kind. The culmination of this performative discursive interaction is exemplified by the following call to action: 'Subscribe to me – follow my example – do as I do – stand out like me – achieve success as I have!' (Romanov, & Romanova, 2019). Such calls are captured by the feature P2, summarized with P1 in *Table 3:*

Table 3

Cross-classification of performativity features (n = 139)

P1 Declarative self-predication	P2 Audience appeal			
	0 – No addressee	1 – Reader addressed	2 – Practice transmitted	Total
2 – Change in Self declared as accomplished	8	51	21	80 (57.6)
1 – Result claimed with qualification	9	22	26	57 (41.0)
0 – No result claimed	2	0	0	2 (1.4)
Total	19 (13.7)	73 (52.5)	47 (33.8)	139 (100)

Source: Author.

Both performativity properties are met at least minimally by 120 texts of self-disclosure (86.3%) and fully by only 21 (15.1%); just two texts (1.4%) meet neither (Table 3). A named practice appears in 126 of 139 disclosures (90.6%), but only 45 of those (35.7%) hand it to the reader in usable form (Table 2). The dominant form in the subsample is therefore a declared completion of self-transformation addressed to a reader, with the practice that produced it withheld more often than passed on. This form is dominant rather than obligatory, and the residual documentary register survives in a specific shape – the serial log published in instalments.

Seven authors position themselves against a norm operating in this discourse – against motivational content, the cult of early rising, the demand to settle on one calling, the norm of extraversion. Nevertheless, six of the seven are coded as highly performative, and each closes by transmitting something to the reader: a numbered list of exercises, a reading list, an invitation to join a

group, etc. Dissent is available here as a game position, and occupying it leaves the performative form intact. For example:

"Hi everyone, my name is A., and I'm a motivation-holic. […] It may be "off-format" for this site, since Interesno.co inspires people to change, but I'm going to write about the harm motivators do […] A positivity overdose had happened. I began to notice that I couldn't concentrate, […] I had to achieve success at any cost, become stronger, higher, faster. Build a global company, get in shape by summer, write a novel, learn to draw, travel, master yoga and meditation, become enlightened, invent a smartphone, launch a startup, run a seminar, play with the kids, love my wife. And the motivators kept shouting that I must, must, must be successful, driven, ambitious, and hurry up and live […] A great deal of anxiety had accumulated inside me because of this […] Have you felt anything like this? Motivators are a very good thing, but when there are too many of them, they do harm. If you're tired of them too, I'd like to offer a few recommendations. Take action – without real action, motivators are useless […] You need to set a goal, your own goal […] Take a motivational break – use your willpower to close the motivational pages in your feed […] Take care of yourself […] Divide motivators into "practical" and "empty" […] Love yourself!"

A. narrates a decade of engagement with motivational literature as having produced not competence but neurosis, and opens by warning that the text may not suit the site. He rejects not self-development but its heteronomous form: the incoming stream of injunctions, the obligation to be improving, the reaction to whatever call arrives next. What he installs instead is the same practice conducted autonomously listen to yourself, identify your own goal, act deliberately rather than in response. This is the transition liberal governance prefers, narrated by a subject who was worn out and has repaired himself through a self-regulation circle he then prescribes to others. A. enters the text as a consumer of motivational material and leaves it as a producer, with a list of recommendations and a final affirmation, transmitting a disposition towards being governed. Thus, the demarche of the 'motivation-holic' is not a counter-conduct, quite opposite – it is quintessential for the neoliberal self-governance cultivating a subject as entrepreneur of himself.

Genealogically, as Tyupa (2012) notes, the performative is among the most ancient forms of speech, resting on a belief in the world-making power of the word – oaths, blessings, curses, prayers. Its descendants in these texts are affirmations, positive statements that take speaker and audience as their joint object:

a) *'You have a chance to change your destiny and start living on a new level';*

b)*'Almost all problems can be solved, difficulties overcome, and complex situations exited from; the main thing is to do it deliberately, consistently, with a cool head and a warm heart';*

c) *'I simply have no right to be unhappy! My dream has come true – I am married, I have a wonderful husband and a beautiful child; millions of women dream of what I already have';*

d)*'I feel myself in the 'flow': moving toward my goals, albeit slowly, stumbling, with stops and slips, stepping on the throat of my innate procrastination – but I keep on moving*'.

Performative discourse also works to reproduce a worldview shared by the speaker and the audience. Romanov and Romanova (2019: 175) stress that the author and the reader are not only united as 'We-media': by joining together and declaring their transformation, the two then collectively circulate their shared values to the wider audience.

Discussion

The findings reveal a discursive field in which self-development is framed almost exclusively in instrumental terms, and where self-disclosure operates performatively to signal self-regulatory capacity. Theoretically, we can distinguish two modes of subjectivation: normalizing practices that reproduce subjects aligned with prevailing demands, and counter-practices that foster agency and new forms of action (Foucault, 1982; Horkheimer, 1975). The empirical material examined here falls decisively within the first category. The thematic structure of the corpus supports this reading: the four clusters devoted to time management, efficiency, goal achievement and productivity tools comprise 41% of the documents, and the clusters that appear oriented to personal growth turn out to describe not radical self-transformation but incremental optimisation within existing frameworks. Read through Rose's (1996, 1999) account of "governing the soul", what participants experience as personal growth is a form of self-regulation that reproduces rather than challenges existing structures of power, and that leaves unaddressed the class exclusions and blocked opportunities such discourse renders invisible (Smail, 2009).

The Butlerian-Foucauldian reading suggests that the subject is produced through the reiteration of practices, within a regulatory frame that determines which utterances are legible at all. From that perspective, what matters for one's self-constitution is the range of self-description that the platform makes available and rewards. The author is not pretending: the author speaks the only

language this site makes expected, supported and approved. Sincerity is not the operative axis: the declarative, reader-directed form is a condition of appearing in this discourse at all, and it shapes what can be said about Self here largely independently of what any author intends.

Platform-mediated environment give self-disclosure a specific character. Research on digital self-presentation has shown that online spaces are environments of highly controlled and strategically optimised identity performance (Papacharissi, 2002), in which users curate their personas into distinct roles (Merunková, & Šlerka, 2019). Digital technologies tempt individuals with the idea that they can individualise themselves by staging a socially approved yet unique Self (Nygren, & Gidlund, 2012: 514), and under the business logic of platform capitalism the choice is between showing an imperfect actual Self and staging one that performs better. Under these conditions, not only manifestations of self and identity but the very intentions toward subjectivation and practices of self-transformation, however intimate they may appear, become objects of staging and self-disclosure in a performative mode.

The staging of practice does not, however, put practice into circulation. The platform asks its authors to share techniques and experience, and the genre is nonetheless not predominantly instructional. The proof of self-work, rather than the means of doing it, circulates in this discourse. The platform thus pre-formats the range of legible self-narration: some accounts of oneself are readily sayable here, while others find no available shape. This is a claim about generic legibility rather than about editorial selection, and the subsample bounds it – two texts meet neither performativity criterion and were published nonetheless. The analysis shows that not every utterance here is performative, which would be unfalsifiable, and that one narrative form is strongly institutionalised, to the point where even a critique of self-optimisation is articulated through it.

Conclusion

This study yielded two principal findings. First, participants frame self-development in predominantly instrumental terms. The thematic structure of the corpus – dominated by topics such as time management, productivity optimization, and goal achievement – reveals an understanding of self-improvement as adaptation to existing socio-economic demands rather than critical self-transformation. Second, self-disclosure within this community operates primarily performatively: an author declares a change in Self, and the utterance is built for readers – though far more often to be read than to be acted on.

These findings refine rather than confirm the accounts from which the study sets out. Studies of digital self-presentation treat the staging of the self as the construction of a role model. The notion carries an assumption inherited from social learning theory that showing a way of acting makes it available to be taken up. Public exhibition of a transformed Self and the transmission of knowledge about how to arrive at it are thereby held together in a single term. Our study suggests that this assumption does not hold for the genre of self-disclosure in the social media. Approaching the sharing of Self through the concepts of performativity rather than through the sociology of role models, we find that staging and the circulation of knowledge about self-transformation come apart. Nearly every account is organised around a particular technique, yet only a third hand that technique over: the capacity for self-regulation is displayed as self-attestation rather than passed on for others to take up – exhibited as an asset, not shared as a method. The study thus shows that the intimate practice of "care of the Self" becomes commodified within platform-mediated environment.

For journalism and media studies, this analysis suggests that self-development content circulating on social media should be understood not merely as user-generated self-expression but as a discursive regime that reproduces subjectivity in particular political and economic contexts. This has implications for research on influencer culture, lifestyle media, and the platformization of everyday life, where similar performative logics may operate.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The topic modeling was exploratory, and the sample is drawn from a single Russian-language community, limiting generalizability. The coded subsample is a residue of proportional sampling rather than a designed one, and the design does not observe the audience's response to the performative discourse. Future research could refine thematic clustering, compare self-development discourse across cultural and linguistic contexts, and trace longitudinal shifts in subjectivation discourse in relation to evolving socio-political conditions.

References

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. Routledge.

Cabanas, E., & Sánchez González, J. C. (2012). The roots of positive psychology. *Papeles del Psicólogo*, 33(3), pp. 172–182. URL: https://www.papelesdelpsicologo.es/English/2136.pdf

Cui, B., Yang, X., & Li, R. (2024). Makeup as a postfeminist masquerade: Understanding the impact of beauty tutorial engagement on young Chinese women's appearance satisfaction. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 34, pp. 248–262. DOI: 10.1080/09589236.2024.2348484

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. In: H. L. Dreyfus, & P. Rabinow. (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (pp. 208–226). University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (2010). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978–1979* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), pp. 59–82.

Horkheimer, M. (1975). Traditional and critical theory. In M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*. Continuum Press.

Kresovich, A., & Noar, S. (2020). The power of celebrity health events: Meta-analysis of the relationship between audience involvement and behavioral intentions. *Journal of Health Communication*, 25, pp. 501–513. DOI: 10.1080/10810730.2020.1818148

Madsen, O. (2014). Governmentality. In T. Teo et al. (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology* (pp. 814–816). Springer-Verlag.

Marwick, A., & Boyd, D. (2011). To see and be seen: Celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 17(2), pp. 139–158. DOI: 10.1177/1354856510394539

Merunková, L., & Šlerka, L. (2019). Goffman's theory as a framework for analysis of self presentation on online social networks. *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology*, 13(2), pp. 243–276. DOI: 10.5817/MUJLT2019-2-5

Nygren, K. G., & Gidlund K. L. (2012). The pastoral power of technology: Rethinking alienation in digital culture. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 10(2), pp. 509–517. DOI: 10.31269/triplec.v10i2.388

Olssen, M. (2006). Neoliberalism, globalization, democracy: Challenges for education. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 4(3), pp. 249–266. DOI: 10.1080/14767720410001733665

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The presentation of self in virtual life: Characteristics of personal home pages. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(3), pp. 643–660. DOI: 10.1177/107769900207900307

Romanov, A., & Romanova, L. (2019). Selfi kak emotivnaya performativnaya praktika v setevyh kommunikaciyah [Selfie as an emotive performative practice in network communications]. *Bulletin of the Volgograd State University*, 1(134), pp. 171–178. URL: https://www.elibrary.ru/item.asp?=&id=37009418

Rose, N. (1996). *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*. Cambridge University Press.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the Soul*: *The Shaping of the Private Self*. 2nd ed. Free Association Books.

Searle, J. (1976). A classification of illocutionary Acts. *Language in Society*, 5(1), pp. 1–23.

Tyupa, V. (2012). Genealogiya liricheskih zhanrov [Genealogy of lyrical genres]. *Bulletin of the Southern Federal University, Philological Sciences*, 4, pp. 8–31. URL: https://ln.run/VM_8i

Walkerdine, V. (2006). Neoliberalism, female subjectivity and therapeutic culture. In S. Avis, M. Bloch, & B. Davies (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, (pp. 351–363). Routledge.

Weidner, J. (2009). Governmentality, capitalism, and subjectivity. *Global Society*, 23(4), pp. 387–411. DOI: 10.1080/13600820903198719

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage.