

HUMOR AS AN INDICATOR OF GENERATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF JOKES ABOUT GENERATIONS

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Abstract

This article presents the results of a study conducted using quantitative content analysis of humorous stories about generations. The aim of the study was to identify and analyze how society perceives differences between generations. The leading hypothesis of the study was the assumption that humorous stories serve as an indicator reflecting differences between generations in various aspects of their lives. The hypothesis put forward by the author was partially confirmed. It was revealed that humorous stories most often reflect differences between generations in terms of social interaction and the system of life values. The study was conducted in five stages. The first studied the nature of relationships between generations, the second - ideas about the superiority of one generation over another and the third - differences between generations in any area. The fourth stage concerned the study of the attitude of the older generation to changes in humorous stories, the fifth - an analysis of stereotypes about generations mentioned in the text of humorous stories.

Keywords

Generation, generation conflict, alternation of generations, content analysis, anecdote, stereotype.

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1. Introduction

The problem of insufficient mutual understanding between representatives of different age groups is becoming increasingly acute over time. Differences in worldview, values and attitudes towards life between generations create serious obstacles to communication and interaction, lead to conflicts and social tension.

Awareness and understanding of these differences are important factors for establishing harmonious relations between generations and effectively solving emerging problems. Therefore, in modern society, it is especially important to study the differences between representatives of different generations and find ways to overcome the gap between them.

Differences between generations are often mentioned in scientific papers. Comparison of generations is one of the most relevant aspects of studying generations in general. The interest of the scientific community in identifying and analyzing differences between representatives of different generations is due to many factors. Among them, for example, is the need to improve intergenerational relations. Researcher E.A. Danila,

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studying the differences in conflicts between generations of different historical eras, concludes that such conflicts are becoming increasingly acute in our time. Therefore, it is necessary to create conditions for the development of conflictological competence in young people. This would make it possible to constructively resolve conflict situations with the older generation (Danila, 2021).

According to many researchers, intergenerational conflicts are a consequence of the existence of barriers between generations. For example, researcher M.V. Zaplatkin writes that differences in value orientations are insurmountable barriers:

- State or autonomous values;
- Collectivist or individualist values;
- Patriotic or cosmopolitan values.

Thus, according to the author, the key problem of interaction between generations in modern Russia are these three fault lines (Zaplatkin, 2011). P.A. Elkina comes to similar conclusions in her work, focusing on ways to improve understanding between different age groups. The author believes that one of the most effective methods is the use of cross-cultural training analogues (Elkina, 2023). Shishkareva (2023) also talks about culture: “One of the main reasons for conflicts between different generations is the cultural gap”. In her work, the researcher emphasizes that other reasons for conflicts may include, for example, socio-economic, cultural, religious differences, as well as differences in education and opportunities (Shishkareva, 2023).

Thus, it was established that differences between generations are the key cause of problems in intergenerational relations. In this regard, further study of differences is necessary to find ways to eliminate problem areas of communication.

One of the most indicative ways to study differences between generations is a method called content analysis. Many representatives of the scientific community use this method to study complex phenomena (Gulyaeva *et al.*, 2024). In our context, this phenomenon is intergenerational differences.

2. Materials and Methods

The object of the study is jokes presented on various thematic online platforms, reflecting the differences between generations. The subject is the characteristics of generations in any spheres of life, presented in humorous stories.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze how society perceives differences between generations through a quantitative content analysis of jokes.

The research method is quantitative content analysis, which is a formalized method for studying text information. Thus, during quantitative content analysis, information is transformed into quantitative indicators and their further statistical processing is carried out. In this study, the text information under study is Russian-language humorous stories presented on the Internet on thematic sites. The sample population included Russian-language humorous stories posted on the platforms nekdo.ru, anekdot.ru, shutok.ru, anekdotov.net. When forming the sample population, jokes containing elements of author's works were selected and excluded. The final sample size was 227 jokes.

The leading hypothesis of the study is that humorous stories act as an indicative indicator reflecting the differences between generations in various aspects of their lives. Specific hypotheses:

- The overwhelming majority of jokes that reflect the relationships between generations contain information about the conflicts and contradictions that arise between them;
- Most jokes illustrate the superiority of one generation over another. At the same time, due to the target audience, the overwhelming majority of jokes demonstrate the superiority of the older generation;
- Jokes indicate the existence of stereotypes in the public consciousness associated with certain generations. At the same time, many stereotypes are associated with the attitude of representatives of different generations to change.

The study was conducted in five stages:

1. Studying the relationship between generations presented in humorous stories.
2. Studying the reflection of ideas about the superiority of one generation over another in humorous stories.
3. Studying the differences between generations in any area of life in humorous stories.
4. Studying the attitude of the older generation to changes in humorous stories.
5. Studying stereotypes about generations mentioned in the text of humorous stories.

3. Research results

A general analysis of jokes about generations revealed the number of jokes containing obscene words in their text. The share of jokes containing obscene language was 5.29% of their total number (12 jokes). It should be noted that 11 jokes had a pronounced sexual subtext, their share was 4.85%.

– *Stage one.*

At the first stage of content analysis, the relationships between generations presented in humorous stories were studied. A total of 59 jokes were identified that mentioned the type of relationships between generations (25.99% of the sample). The following types of relationships were discovered during the analysis: conflicts between generations, good relationships or mutual assistance between generations (Table 1).

Table 1. Mentioning the relationship between generations in jokes

Relationship	Frequency of mentions	
	absolute, things	in % of jokes that describe relationships
Conflicts between generations	43	72,88
Mutual assistance between generations	16	27,12
Total	59	100

Source: Compiled by the author

Analyzing Table 1, we can conclude that the majority of jokes in this category illustrated conflict situations (72.88% of the total number of jokes in this category). Only 16 jokes contained information about successful relationships between representatives of different generations (27.12%). The visible difference in indicators may be a consequence of the following factors:

- Jokes describing conflict relationships are more memorable and emotionally appealing. Usually, they are perceived by society as the most vivid and emotionally rich

and therefore evoke strong emotions. This factor may determine their attractiveness for the reader or listener;

- Jokes illustrating disagreements and differences in values and views between generations encourage the reader or listener to choose the side of one of the comic characters. This not only contributes to better memorability of the plot, but also stimulates a person to a deeper understanding of the differences between generations. In turn, this fact can both contribute to the establishment of positive relationships and hinder this by forming views on another generation as an outgroup;

- Jokes that reflect intergenerational conflicts visualize current social problems. Jokes on this topic are a kind of mechanism for discussing and understanding such processes in a lighter and more relaxed form.

It should be noted that despite the prevalence of references to conflictual relationships in jokes, there were also jokes illustrating positive aspects of interaction between generations. However, their number is not so colossal. As a rule, such humorous stories are devoted to the transfer of life experience from older to younger generations or the help of the younger generation in mastering technical innovations by older generations.

- *Second stage.*

At the second stage of the study, a study was conducted on the reflection of ideas about the superiority of one generation over another in humorous stories. 49 jokes were found that correspond to this category (21.59% of their total number). Jokes in this category are divided into two groups by superiority: the older generation or the younger (Table 2).

Table 2. Mentioning in jokes the superiority of one generation over another

Superiority	Frequency of mentions	
	absolute, things	in % of jokes that mention generational superiority comparisons
“The older generation is better”	33	67,35
“The younger generation is better”	16	32,65
Total	49	100

Source: Compiled by the author

The analysis of the obtained data allowed us to conclude that humorous stories in which the older generation is superior to the younger are much more common. Thus, 33 jokes or 67.35%, illustrate the superiority of the older generation and 16 jokes - the younger one. Despite the fact that humorous stories are not aimed at a specific target audience, the representatives of the older age give them the greatest preference.

It should be noted that the studied generations have their own strengths in various areas of life. The most noticeable are the following differences described in the jokes:

- Areas of superiority of the older generation: social relationships, financial literacy, possession of life experience;

- Areas of superiority of the younger generation: modern technologies, physical education and sports, physical and psychological health, flexibility of thinking, educational activities.

Thus, it was concluded that generations are superior to each other in certain aspects of activity. This balance is a consequence of the fact that society has different

points of view on the specific characteristics of generations, with a slight bias towards the older generation.

– *Third stage.*

At the third stage, the authors focused on studying the differences between generations in any sphere of life. 202 jokes were found or 88.99% of the total number of jokes in the sample, which correspond to this category (Table 3).

Table 3. Mentioning generational differences in any area of life

Type of differences	Frequency of mentions	
	absolute, things	in % of jokes that describe differences
Social differences	56	27,72
Life values and priorities	37	18,32
Psychological differences	33	16,34
Economic differences	29	14,36
Differences in educational activities	22	10,89
Differences in professional activities	21	10,4
Total	202	100

Source: Compiled by the author

The data analysis showed that humorous plots do indeed reflect generational differences in some way. The greatest attention in jokes is paid to social differences between generations. By social differences we mean differences in behavior in the sphere of career, family and upbringing. Such differences are mentioned in almost a third of the jokes that make up the sample, which indicates that public perception and expectations differ between different age groups. The second most frequently mentioned were differences in life values and priorities. Jokes of this type account for about one fifth of their total number.

Psychological differences, such as self-esteem and motivation, are also often a common topic for jokes, although to a slightly lesser extent. Economic aspects, including attitudes toward material things, food and housing, are also quite common. The existence of many stereotypes about economic differences was noted.

Differences in educational and professional spheres of life are mentioned less often. Despite this, the presence of such jokes indicates a continuing interest in educational and professional trajectories as factors differentiating generations. The existence of jokes on these topics may serve as an illustration of public interest in changes in the socio-professional structure of society and the adaptation of various age groups to such changes.

Thus, this stage of the study allowed us to conclude that humorous stories most often reflect generational differences in terms of social interaction and the system of life values. This result is indicative, since it demonstrates what issues and topics concern people when they discuss differences between generations.

The study hypothesis was confirmed, humorous stories can indeed act as an indicator reflecting generational differences in various aspects of their life.

– *Fourth stage.*

The fourth stage of the study was devoted to studying the attitude of the older generation to change. The analysis showed that 29.52% of all jokes included elements related to the perception of the older generation of the ongoing changes (Table 4).

Table 4. Mentioning in jokes the older generation's attitude to change

The older generation's perception of change	Frequency of mentions	
	absolute, things	in % of jokes that describe the older generation's attitude to change
“It was better before”	32	47,76
“Nothing changes with time”	20	29,85
Innovations help, it has become better	15	22,39
Total	67	100

Source: Compiled by the author

The data obtained indicate that the most common opinion is “It was better before”. Such views are represented by 32 mentions, which is 47.76% of the jokes that touch on this topic. Such views emphasize the tendency to preserve traditional views among the older generation. The second most common opinion is “Nothing changes over time”, which is contained in 20 jokes (29.85%). Such views may also indicate that in public perception, the older generation is still seen as not predisposed to accepting change. It is important to note that in modern society, the older generation is not always an ardent opponent of innovation. In the modern world, there is an increase in the interest of the older generation in learning new technologies: computer courses for pensioners and advanced training and professional retraining programs are opening everywhere and older people are being trained in computer literacy. Such areas of study are becoming more and more popular from year to year. Less popular are references from the category “Innovations help, they make the world a better place”. An illustration of such a view is contained in 15 jokes (22.39%). Jokes of this type reflect a positive perception of innovations by older people, however, such a view is significantly inferior in popularity to others. This fact can also serve as an indicator of the existence of a stereotypical image of representatives of the older generation as adherents of conservative views.

– *Fifth stage.*

In addition to the stereotype about the conservatism of the older generation, other stereotypical ideas were found in jokes. Thus, elements of stigmatization were contained in 32.6% of jokes (74 jokes). The most common stereotypes are those presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Stereotypes about generations presented in jokes about generations

Theme of stereotypes	Older generation	Younger generation
Attitude to others	do not understand younger ones	do not respect elders
New technologies	do not understand technology	live in a virtual world
Obtaining information	newspapers, TV channels	Internet, social networks
Method of communication	personal communication	social networks, messengers
Responsibility	overly responsible	irresponsible
Purposefulness	patient, purposeful	lazy, unmotivated
Attitude to the new	opponents of innovation	change the world “for themselves”
Degree of conformism	conformists	nonconformists
Planning for the future	plan far ahead	live in the present
Stability of interest	constant in hobbies	quickly lose interest
Degree of patriotism	high degree	low degree
Image of a girl	modest, inaccessible	overly relaxed
Image of a man	gallant, caring	ill-mannered, rude
Professional stability	in one place all life	constant changes

Source: Compiled by the author

An analysis of the stereotypical idea of the older and younger generations allowed us to create a portrait of their typical representatives:

- A typical representative of the older generation is a person who adheres to traditional values, is extremely responsible and purposeful in relation to his life. Such a person always plans his future far ahead and remains true to his hobbies and professional activities throughout his life. He prefers personal communication and reads newspapers and watches TV news to get new information. A representative of the older generation masters modern technologies with great difficulty, is wary and often negative about any changes, adhering to conservative views on life in general. Such a person is patriotic, inclined to conformism, in his mind the images of girls are associated with modesty, the images of men - with gallantry;

- The image of a typical representative of the younger generation is a person who exists entirely in the virtual world, actively using the Internet and social networks for communication and obtaining information. He is not inclined to respect his elders, is irresponsible and lacks motivation, quickly loses interest in things and seeks to change the world for himself. Such a person often changes his field of activity, is a nonconformist and has a low level of patriotism and the images of girls and men in his mind can be associated with emancipation and rudeness, respectively.

The designated stereotypical images of typical representatives of generations do not correspond to reality and significantly simplify the diversity of individual characteristics of modern people. In real life, each person, regardless of his generation, is endowed with a unique set of characteristics, life attitudes and behavioral features. We can agree that there really are individuals who correspond to the stereotypical image. However, it is inappropriate to identify all representatives of a generation with a certain image. Moreover, modern research shows that the boundaries between generations are becoming increasingly blurred.

4. Conclusion

As a result of our study, the following conclusions were formulated:

1. A review of the scientific literature on the topic under study allowed us to conclude that quantitative content analysis of humorous stories is a representative method for studying differences between generations.

2. A study of the nature of relationships between generations showed that most jokes illustrate conflict situations, which is associated with their memorability and emotional appeal. Conflict jokes encourage readers or listeners to choose sides and comprehend the differences between generations and they also reflect current social problems. Despite this, there are also jokes that reflect positive interaction. Such jokes emphasize mutual assistance between generations in sharing life experience and helping to master modern technologies.

3. In the process of analyzing the idea of the superiority of one generation over another presented in jokes, a conclusion was made about the superiority of generations over others in some aspects of activity. Such a balance is a theory according to which different points of view on the features of phenomena are observed in society, with a slight advantage in favor of the older generation.

4. A study of generational differences in various spheres of life showed that humorous stories most often reflect generational differences in the context of social interaction and value systems. This result is significant, as it illustrates what issues and topics concern people when they discuss generational differences.

5. An analysis of jokes about the older generation's attitude to change revealed that jokes most often correspond to the opinion that things used to be better, which reflects the older generation's tendency toward traditional views. In addition, there is a widespread belief that nothing changes over time. Despite this, the older generation is increasingly interested in studying new technologies and learning, although a positive attitude toward innovation is expressed less frequently and is inferior to the dominant stereotypes about conservatism.

6. A study of stereotypes about the older and younger generations made it possible to create a portrait of their typical representatives. However, it was concluded that the identified images do not correspond to reality and significantly simplify the diversity of individual characteristics of modern people.

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