



## Russian amateur critics reviews: Case of the movie *Vysotsky*

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the changing role of the amateur critic, the film fan who expends great effort to offer routine critiques of viewed films. It analyses 455 user generated texts from sites Afisha.ru and Kinopoisk.ru about the Russian movie *Vysotsky. Thank God I'm Alive* (2011). Six types of ordinary cinema reviews are described and discussed. Using a quantitative technique to analyse ordinary critical reviews, it unpacks the ways in which the roles of the amateur critic and professional critic are moving towards each other. The used technique is based on the allocation of topics presented in the corpus of texts, with the subsequent manual coding of these topics, and on cluster analysis (K-means method).

**Keywords:** amateur criticism, cinema criticism, social media, user generated content, *Vysotsky*, Afisha.ru, Kinopoisk.ru.

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The proposed article is based on the results of a quantitative analysis of texts on *Afisha.ru* and *Kinopoisk.ru*; these texts relate to the movie *Vysotsky. Thank God I'm Alive / Vysotsky. Spasibo, Chto Zhivoy* (later – *Vysotsky*), whose distribution in Russia began on 1 December 2011. This film tells us about a few dramatic days in the life of the Russian iconic actor, singer and songwriter Vladimir Vysotsky (1938-1980), who survived a near-death experience in 1979 during his tour in Uzbekistan. It should be said that *Vysotsky* was perceived quite ambiguously by the public. On the one hand, the movie received favorable reviews from the active visitors of cinemas, who are mostly young people. As a result, the film made on a 12 mln. USD budget collected more than 27,5 mln. USD (*Vysotsky. Spasibo, Chto* 2011), which is rather high for a Russian product. On the other hand, older generations in the audience, who had grown up in the Soviet Union, read the film more critically. Relatives of Vladimir Vysotsky also reacted differently, despite the fact that his oldest son Nikita took

part in the production as a script writer and producer. Vysotsky's widow Marina Vlady commented: '...I consider that this movie offends Vysotsky, his art, his memory and also our common life. <...> It is not only scandalous, but even frightening. It is immoral and unethical. And if I were a believer I would say it is a sin. I am in despair and sorrow' (Marina Vlady Osudila 2011).

Although this discrepancy in the way the film was received was one of the reasons for choosing it as the object of case study, this article does not dwell on these interpretive arguments or the story of the film. The central focus is the use of social media to deliberate over the film. Movies are a popular topic of interpersonal and online communications. Reviews written by amateurs – or users that at least do not demonstrate their professional stature – appear on various platforms such as social networks, blogs, online markets, forums on sites dedicated to concrete movies, etc.

Our attention is concentrated here on the special Russian form of 'amateur cinema critics' communications and relevant critical texts. In a broad sense, we define amateur criticism as a socio-cultural phenomenon in which representatives of the mass audiences take the position of critics of popular culture works or events (movies, music records, concerts, exhibitions, etc.). This phenomenon itself is not at all a new one. Its consideration should be directly related with the problem of professionalism and its boundaries.

In this paper amateur criticism is understood in a narrow sense. This amateur critical activity covers a swathe of activities that includes users publishing and commenting on works of art (creating user-generated content) on various social networking platforms. We realize the drawbacks of using the term 'amateur' in relation to such type of activity and texts. In particular, it carries some negative connotations that we do not want to reinforce. The analyzed texts in some cases are very well written and contain rather deep analyses. Authors of amateur reviews may or may not have a certain professional status and symbolic capital as experts in the field of cinema (special education, place of employment, the existence of scientific publications, etc.). What is more important is that in this communicative context they usually do not represent themselves as professional experts in any way.

The phenomenon of Russian amateur cinema criticism can be examined in the broader context of 'digital cinephilia', as Sudha Rajagopalan designates it<sup>1</sup>. Melis Behlil uses another term – 'new cinephilia', pointing out that 'the new breed of cinephilia feeds itself intellectually through the technology of internet' (Behlil 2005). Indeed, cinephiles have ample opportunities for home cinema content viewing due to modern media technologies. So the importance of cinema as a place of viewing this type of content has dropped significantly. At the same time, online technologies give many cinephiles new opportunities for the formation of communities and information sharing. We assume, however, that only some amateur crit-

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<sup>1</sup> Rajagopalan takes up issue with Susan Sontag, who proclaimed the death of cinephilia in 1996 because of the spread of home viewing technologies: 'But cinephilia is far from dead. Digital technologies have merely released it from its earlier dependence on the physical setting of the movie theatre and enabled it to become a decentred, participatory practice. Indeed, Runet has a rich network of websites that include cinephilic blogs, communities and forums, where cinephilia, enabled by new technological affordances, is transmedial. Digital cinephilia, a term I use to describe the passion for the movies in this age of transmedia, involves the use of the internet and personal digital media to upload, share and contribute to popular knowledge about cinema' (Rajagopalan 2011).

ics are cinephiles. Cinephiles do have specific interests and knowledge in the field of movies, and not all the members of amateur critical communities show such interests and knowledge. The range of interests of many community members does not go beyond cinema novelties and so called ‘popular classics’.

Also amateur cinema criticism can be treated as a specific form of a fandom community. Such communities have a long history. As Francesca Coppa argues (Coppa 2006), media fandom arose in connection with science fiction. In 1930 the first science fiction fanzine ‘The Comet’ appeared, and four years earlier, in 1926 there was the ‘letters page’ in the ‘Amazing Stories’ magazine, which is commonly treated as the beginning of the development of science fiction fandom. In the early 1990s the fandom movement began to pervade the online environment.

These similarities with other fandoms notwithstanding, we need to stress that Afisha.ru and Kinopoisk.ru users do not coalesce around one media product or media genre. Furthermore, Afisha.ru community members discuss not only old and new movies, but also concerts, exhibitions and other products and events of arts and popular culture.

### **Vysotsky Case Study: Methodology of the Russian Amateur Critical Reviews Quantitative Analysis**

A quantitative survey methodology was developed for the analysis of the amateur critical texts. The survey aimed to meet the following research objectives.

1. Creation of a methodology for the identification of the prevalence of different quantitative characteristics in the analyzed group of texts.
2. Noting the distinction between the quantitative characteristics of amateur reviews of a single film, published on various websites.
3. Forming of an ‘amateur critical texts typology’ based on the selected criteria.

At the initial stage a sample of randomly selected amateur reviews of 6 movies<sup>2</sup> (about 50 texts), posted on Afisha.ru and Kinopoisk.ru, were analyzed. As a result, 12 main topics were identified:

- emotions connected with the viewing of the reviewed movie;
- the viewing context (for example, the company kept during the viewing, the process of choosing of the movie, etc.);
- artistic methods (for example, the use of music, editing, camera work, etc.);
- the place of the discussed work of art in national or world cinema;
- the work of actors;

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<sup>2</sup> The following movies were chosen at this stage: *Vysotsky. Thank God I'm Alive / Vysotsky. Spasibo, Chto Zhivoy* (2011, dir. Petr Buslov; Russia); *The Girl with the Dragoon Tattoo* (2011, dir. David Fincher; USA, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain); *Firtrees-2 / Jolki-2* (2011, dir. Dmitry Kiselev, Alexander Baranov, Alexander Kott, Levan Gabriadze; Russia); *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* (2011, dir. Brad Bird; USA, UAE); *What Else Do Men Speak About / O Chem Eshe Govoriat Muzhchiny* (2011, dir. Dmitriy Diachenko; Russia); *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011, dir. Guy Ritchie; USA).

- the historical reliability of the movie;
- technical aspects;
- the director's accomplishments (discussion of the style of the particular filmmaker);
- a recommendation to view (or not to view) the movie;
- the dramatic concept;
- marketing aspects;
- the personal experience of the amateur critic in relation to the reviewed movie (for example, the personal attitude of the reviewer to Vysotsky's art, impressions of his live concerts or ordinary life in the Soviet Union, etc.).

Subsequently, the array of reviews dedicated to *Vysotsky* was coded manually. Three codes were assigned to each review depending on the presence/absence of the selected topics. The following codes were used:

- '0' – if there is no information on the topic at all;
- '1' – if the topic is somehow mentioned, but it is not analyzed in the text;
- '2' – if the topic is analyzed in the text.

During the process of coding, a database was created with a description of each review by means of codes. Also some additional information was added to this database for future analysis (e.g. name of the site, date of publication, evaluation of the movie by the reviewer, number of comments, number of 'Thank you!' button hits, etc.). For some parameters data was available only for one of two surveyed sites.

It should be said, that the array of surveys on two internet sites was voluminous. For example, there were 539 reviews available on Afisha.ru when we started the coding process. As a result, we chose to restrict the analysis to reviews published in the first week of the movie distribution. We need to mention that during this period (from the December 1 until December 7, 2011) amateur critics were most active on both sites. The sample size of the research is 455 texts – 182 of them were posted on Kinopoisk.ru and 273 on Afisha.ru.

The collected database was used for frequency analysis on various parameters. Also K-means factor analysis was conducted on 12 parameters related to topics for the construction of amateur critical texts typology. Before we present the results of this analysis, this article will discuss amateur cinema criticism as a form of online communication and a type of user generated content.

### **Russian amateur cinema criticism as a form of communication**

The scientific term 'amateur critics' has been used at least since 1898, when the article with the corresponding title by Herbert Thompson was published in 'The musical times and singing class circular' (Thompson 1898). Amateur critical discussions are a significant part of the activity of many fan groups. It is commonly argued that the spread of new media is significantly changing the role of amateurs in modern life. User generated content does not only attract significant audiences, but is now perceived as a 'key driver' of the 'creative economy'

(Amateur Media: Social 2013). Some authors argue that the growing influence of amateurs on society, culture and media is mainly negative<sup>3</sup>, however the situation appears to not be so one-sided.

In Russia the question of amateur reception of media was highlighted by the authors of the survey, conducted in 2007 by the 'Public Opinion' Fund by order of the 'Educated Media' Fund (research manager of the project – Ivan Klimov)<sup>4</sup>. This project included a series of research procedures (focus groups, in-depth interviews, electronic tests, etc.), in which respondents took the position of critics on the experimental conditions. We consider amateur cinema criticism here as a phenomenon, in which amateurs write critical texts about movies (mainly new ones in the cinemas) at their own will.

As noted above, we focus here exclusively on Russian internet platforms that allow critical discussion of films by non-professionals – Afisha.ru and Kinopoisk.ru. A third site – LookAtMe.ru – can be added to this group with some reservations. The reasons for its rejection from the analysis are cited below. These sites are popular because they encourage the forming of communities of ordinary critics.

Afisha.ru is a part of major private Russian media holding ProfMedia. At the same time this website is a part of cross media project Afisha ('Billboard'), started in 1999, that also includes print magazine published in 3 versions (for Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and 20 other Russian cities), with the audience of one issue reaching 'about 1,4 million people'<sup>5</sup> (Ob 'Afisha' – Afisha 2013). In general, Afisha.ru contains information about popular places and events in big Russian cities: movies, concerts, exhibitions, restaurants, night clubs, etc. Also it contains materials of the Afisha series of print magazines and reviews by professional authors as well as amateurs. Afisha books and magazines can be purchased at the specialized online shop.

The second website Kinopoisk.ru is a stand-alone private online project started in 2003. It is a thematic portal about cinema; in fact, it is a rich database of information about movies and their creators. Its main sections are: 'Billboard & TV' (announcements of films broadcasted on TV and distributed in cinemas), 'Texts' (news, blogs, professional and amateur reviews, etc.), 'Media' (pictures, podcasts, soundtracks, etc.); 'Communication' (amateur reviews, polls in social networks, etc.), 'Ratings' (estimations of users, box office, prizes at film festivals, etc.), 'DVD&BlueRay' (information about releases) and 'Play!' (quizzes).

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<sup>3</sup> In this context the point of view of Andrew Keen seems persuasive: '...the free, user-generated content, spawned and extolled by the Web 2.0 revolution is decimating the ranks of our cultural gatekeepers, as professional critics, journalists, editors, musicians, moviemakers, and other purveyors of expert information are being replaced <...> by amateur bloggers, hack reviewers, homespun moviemakers, and attic recording artists. Meanwhile, the radically new business models based on user-generated material suck the economic value out of traditional media and cultural content' (Keen 2008).

<sup>4</sup> The results of the 'Amateur Critics' survey are published in (Rossiiskoe Televidenie: Mezhdru 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Other activity of "Afisha" is described on the projects site as following: 'The company publishes a travel magazine 'Afisha-World', "Afisha" guides by cities and countries, as well as guides to shopping, restaurants and sights of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. Since September 2008 'the first fresh magazine about food' 'Afisha-Food' is published. // Each year the company holds a music festival 'Picnic of Afisha' and street exhibition 'Afisha-World' based on photographs from the magazine. // 'Atelier of Afisha' creates turnkey magazines and websites for leading Russian and international companies. // Site Nightparty – top Russian club portal with more than 180000 registered users" (Ob 'Afisha' – Afisha 2013).

Users get access to amateur cinema reviews at the ‘Viewers vision’ page. It contains the following announcement:

‘Visitors of our site publish daily hundreds of reviews about viewed movies. They admire, criticize, swear, hate...

User reviews help to answer the age-old question: ‘Watch this movie or not? Read on and make your choice!’ (Recenzii Pol’zovatelej na 2012).

Both websites – Kinopoisk.ru and Afisha.ru – attract rather large audiences. According to the TNS Russia ‘Web Index’ survey, aimed at ‘providing detailed information on volumes and characteristics of internet sites audiences’ (TNS: Rezul’taty Issledovaniia 2012), the monthly reach of Kinopoisk.ru is 8,79 mln. people (19,5 per cent), and the monthly reach of Afisha.ru is 2,51 mln. people (5,6 per cent)<sup>6</sup>.

The organization of amateur criticism communications on both sites has a lot in common. First, interaction of users is organized on the basis of social networking in both cases. The reading of texts is available to any guest. However persons wishing to publish reviews or make comments need to be registered in the system, and registration is free and open for everybody. Users have the ability to relate to others, to exchange messages directly with other users and also to track each other’s activity. Second, the sites contain databases of objects to which reviews can be linked. The database of Kinopoisk.ru contains information about movies only. Afisha.ru describes a wide range of objects. Third, the sites provide possibilities of rating referred objects (i.e. movies) as well as reviews. These features are implemented in different ways. Authors of texts at Afisha.ru can put a mark for movie from ‘1’ to ‘5’. Readers can press a ‘Thank you’ button if they enjoyed a review. (Just how many have pressed the button can be seen in the top right corner of a screen). Also users of Afisha.ru can post comments on reviews, but at Kinopoisk.ru this feature is not available. As for the last mentioned website, its authors can either rate a reviewed movie (from ‘1’ to ‘10’) or mark its text as positive (which is represented with a green background) or negative (pink background). Also readers can vote if the review was helpful (alternatives ‘yes’ and ‘no’). The results are open for everyone to see. It is also important to mention that amateur criticism is not the main type of information activity, but additional content, which is used for generating ‘long tail’ traffic that is not so large.

LookAtMe.ru website contains some features of an amateur criticism platform, however they are not as developed the other two observed sites. It does not contain a database of objects. In fact, it is a system of blogs, in which any record ‘falls’ into a defined thematic rubric. ‘Movies’ is one of many rubrics. Also LookAtMe.ru does not give one an opportunity to rate films, although it is possible to rate posts. It is also possible to comment on posts (as well as at Afisha.ru). We decided not to analyze texts from LookAtMe.ru because the amateur critics community is the weakest here and the number of generated texts about each film is comparatively small.

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<sup>6</sup> For population of Russian cities 100000+, age group 12-54, September 2012. See: (TNS: Rezul’taty Issledovaniia 2012).

## Russian amateur cinema criticism as a type of user generated content

Texts of amateur cinema criticism as a separate critical genre are analyzed in (Davydova 2012). We'll just mention here their main features.

First of all let us note the interdiscursivity of such texts, i.e. the 'mixing of diverse genres, discourses, or styles associated with institutional and social meanings in a single text' (Wu 2011). Mikhail Lurie calls authors of such texts 'discursive dilettantes' considering the phenomenon in a broader context of naive writing (Lurie 2012). It would be unfair to apply this definition to all amateur critics, because their cultural level and writing skills are obviously different. However the mixing of discourses in such texts is quite widespread.

It should be said that 'an endless combination and recombination of genres and discourses' (Fairclough 1993) is manifested here in a series of resistant forms. For instance, amateur authors of reviews combine *consumer* and *artistic discourses*. In other words, they cannot define unambiguously whether they are a consumer of an entertainment industry product or a critic of a piece of art. So the consumer experience of the author can be used as an argument to confirm the artistic merits of the analyzed movie. And on the other hand, elements of art studies can be used to demonstrate the high quality of the 'product of mass culture industry'. In turn, the consumer discourse 'splits' into the *discourse of direct consumption*, when the author refers to his/her or someone else's experience of movie consumption, and the '*industrial*' *consumption discourse*, which involves discussing the media product in marketing categories.

Analyzing the system 'text and I', we should note, that Russian amateur critics do construct *a figure of the author* in their reviews. Moreover, the reader is invited to *identify himself with the author*. We can recall the figure of the author in the classics of literary criticism (e.g., 'Contre Sainte-Beuve' by Marcel Proust (Proust 1997)). However, modern professional criticism in Russia is certainly characterized by the detached, impersonal discussion of art. The figure of the author brings to amateur reviews personal emotions associated with film viewing. In such cases, *recommendations* to view or not to view the movie appear. On occasion, recommendations can be given in a fairly unequivocal manner. ('The film is strictly recommended to viewing for all ages!!!' 'My verdict – must be seen!') Such comments are not popular among the users, though they are widespread in the corpus of texts.

A second factor is the *self-description* of authors in the observed reviews, something untypical for Russian professional critics. It can be, for example, a description of what the author wore, what his or her mood was before, during and/or after the viewing or what the weather was outside, etc.

Materials of Afisha.ru, where users comment on both professional as well as amateur critical reviews, show that requirements and expectations of the two types of texts are quite distinctive.

For instance, the famous professional film critic Jury Saprykin ended his review of the film *The Limits of Control* (2009, dir. Jim Jarmush) in the following way: 'So, I mean it's cool, but confusing and unclear' (Saprykin 2012). Such phrases are quite typical for amateur reviews published on this website. However comments show, that the audience does not relish such usage by the specialist. Another example of the rejection of the professional critical

text by audience is the article by Anna Sotnikova dedicated to *Sherlock Holmes: the Game of Shadows* (2011, dir. Guy Ritchie) (Sotnikova 2011). Readers comment that professional reviews should be less emotive and more analytical; there is no room for ‘effusive’ speech. According to this position, professional film critics must analyze the performance of actors, the skills of directors and cameramen, etc. Also such a review should not be based on personal preferences and partialities.

On the other hand, the amateur review by a user named koStrik of the movie *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011, dir. David Fincher) (koStrik 2011) engendered comments of a different nature. This text was marked as the most helpful, but the comments show that some readers were not so satisfied. They found that the review contained obscure expressions and it was not obvious if its author had enjoyed the movie or not.

The examples above suggest that readers treat professional and amateur critical texts with different criteria. In essence, interdiscursivity is not welcome in both cases, but it can be excused in the case of amateurs. The criteria here are milder. People expect that the amateur critic should be ‘one of us’; he or she employs common and understandable lexica. At the same time, professional critics need to show their special skills while publishing their review, be convincing, impartial and objective. The perceived value of amateurs opinion is closely connected with the fact that this unprofessional text does not try to present itself as something else.

Some words are due on the language of amateur criticism. Overall, we have to conclude that it has an eclectic nature. Deliberate vernacularisms are mixed here with bureaucratic words and ‘expressions labeled as intellectual’ (Zvereva 2006). Among other features of amateur critical texts are emoticons and pejorative lexica; both are typical for user generated content. The abundance of pejorative language is connected in part with the ban on unprintable language – a rule of discussions of such a kind, its observance is guaranteed by moderators.

In addition, we should mention one more rule of amateur criticism communications. It is related to so-called spoilers – texts that reveal details, the knowledge of which can diminish the interest of the audience and the possible pleasure of the first viewing. Spoilers are not deleted from the sites, but marked by users in comments or by clicking on a special button that exists on both analyzed sites.

So, amateur critics’ reviews are eclectic texts that emerged on the boundaries of different discourses, professional and non-professional, private and public, spoken and printed. Some features of such texts are noted above. However despite this eclecticism of created textual ‘products’, the rules of amateur critical communication are outlined quite clearly and unambiguously.

### **Results of frequency analysis of the amateur critical content**

Generally, the marks the audience gives to the movie make it possible to conclude that members of the two online communities liked the film. For example, users of Afisha.ru evaluate the movie on a scale from ‘1’ to ‘5’. Also they do have an opportunity to press the ‘Thank you!’ button. The average rating of *Vysotsky* at Afisha.ru is 3,6. Authors of 35 critical texts

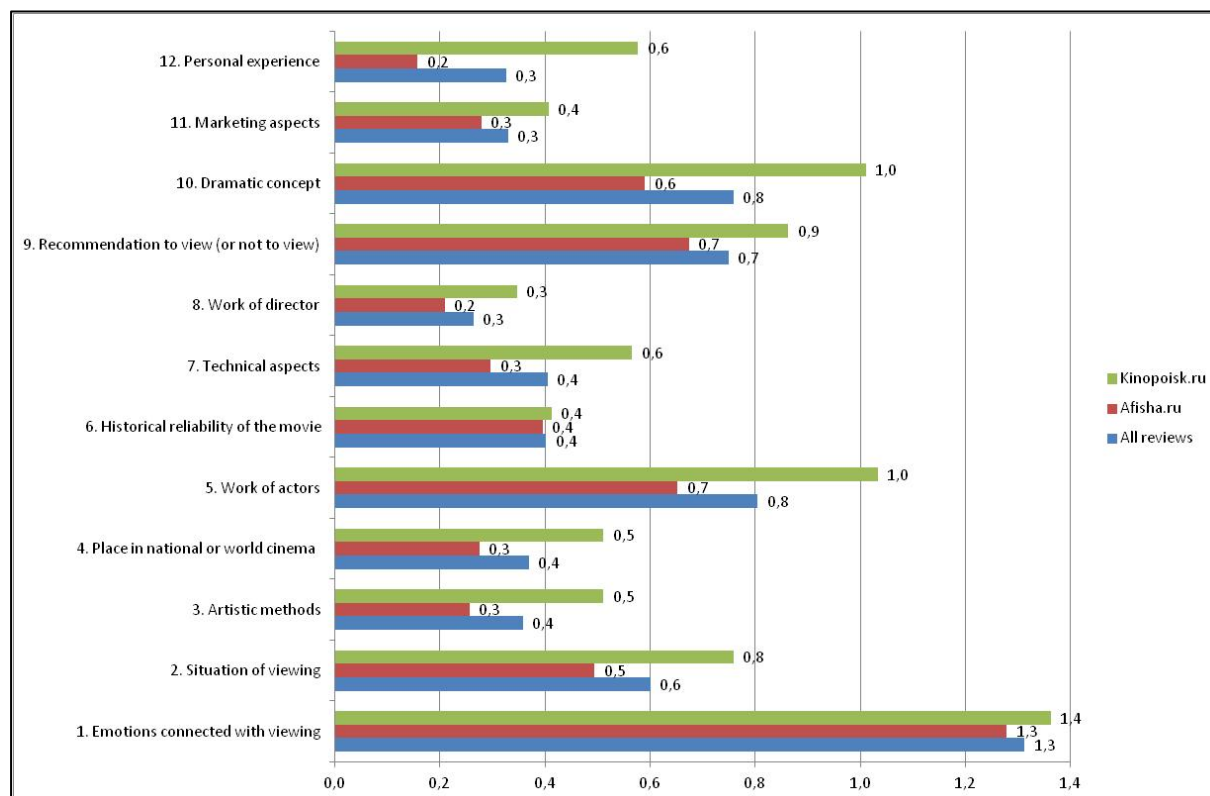


gave it '1' (12,8 per cent), 26 (9,5 per cent) – '2', 44 (16,1 per cent) – '3', 75 (27,5 per cent) – '4', 93 (34,1 per cent) – '5'. However we shall notice that the readers appreciated negative reviews more often than positive ones. Reviews that gave the movie a rating of '1' or '2', received significantly more 'Thank you!' points, than those with marks '3', '4' or '5'. On an average, each analyzed review at Afisha.ru received 2,4 comments. However it is necessary to emphasize that 144 texts were not commented on at all. The remaining 129 posts have received on an average 5,1 comments. The reviews, whose authors gave *Vysotsky* a low rating (=1) on average received more comments compared with more favourable reviews.

The review published on December 1, 2011 by the user Akitaro is the absolute leader among the analyzed texts in terms of 'Thank you!' points (157) and comments (120). This amateur critic gave the movie the rating '1'. The key idea of his review is that the makers of the film *Vysotsky* relied more on product marketing than on the quality of the film. The exploitation of Vladimir Vysotsky's image for commercial purposes disappoints the amateur critic. It is curious that answering the comments Akitaro states that he did not watch the movie. What he is criticizing is not the product, but its packaging: 'People like Vysotsky, and it is not necessary to 'sell' him to us' (Akitaro 2011).

Let us move to an analysis of the 12 coded topics, and the frequency of their occurrence, in users' reviews. A summary of the results can be found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The frequency of occurrence of different topics in amateur critical reviews on the film *Vysotsky* on websites Afisha.ru and Kinopoisk.ru



Source: Sergey Davydov and Maria Davydova

As we can see from Figure 1, the emotions of authors (amateur critics) are the most common topic of the analyzed texts. These emotions are not only mentioned in reviews, but become a subject of analysis quite frequently. The second most prevalent topic is the performance of actors, drama is at the third place and the recommendation to watch or not to watch the movie comes fourth. Note that texts published on Kinopoisk.ru are more substantial than those on Afisha.ru. Amateur critics of the first site discuss more frequently and thoroughly all topics, particularly the drama, personal experiences connected with the movie, the viewing context, the work of actors and technical aspects.

For a more comprehensive analysis of the relevant issues we shall use such indicators as the share of reviews with the topic mentioned, and the so called ‘coefficient of analyticity’ (CA) (see Table 1). CA is calculated as the ratio of the number of reviews in which the topic is analyzed to the number of reviews where this topic is at least mentioned (analyzed or not analyzed), multiplied by 100. For example, our sample is 100 reviews. In 65 of them the topic N is mentioned. In 45 reviews it is only mentioned without any analysis (code ‘1’), and 20 reviews contain its analysis (code ‘2’). In this case  $CA = (20/65) * 100 \approx 31$ . It is obvious that CA can be set from 0 to 100. CA=0 means that there are no texts in which the topic N is analyzed. CA=100 means that the particular topic is analyzed in all the texts where it was mentioned<sup>7</sup>.

Due to the calculation of the two parameters mentioned above it becomes possible to divide all the topics covered in amateur reviews into four groups. The first one contains topics that frequently appear in the texts, and their CA is comparatively high as well. In the second group the topics are those that are frequently mentioned, but rarely analyzed. The third group includes topics with a low share of mentions but with high CA. And finally in the fourth one topics appear that are rarely mentioned and poorly analyzed (See Table 1 below).

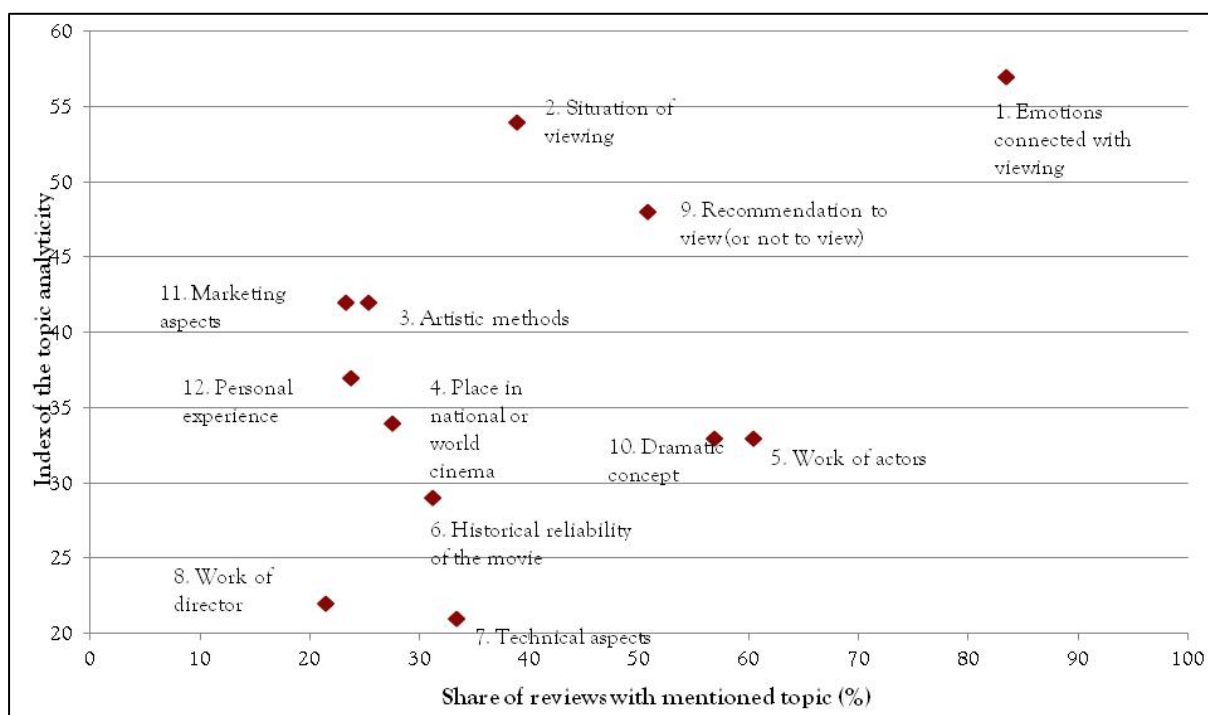
The obtained results make it possible to conclude that the most common topic in the observed amateur critical texts is the emotions associated with the movie. Recommendations to view or not to view the movie also figure in this group. Such topics as the viewing situation, artistic methods and marketing aspects have a low share and high CA. Authors write often about the dramatic concept and work of actors, but they quite rarely turn to the analytical level here. The remaining five topics (the personal experience of critics, the place of the film in world or national cinema, the historical reliability, the work of the director and technical aspects) are mentioned infrequently and are characterized by weak analytical elaboration in the observed corpus of texts.

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<sup>7</sup> It is obvious that in our example the share of reviews with the topic mentioned equals 65 per cent.

**Table 1.** Parameters of the mentioning and analysis of 12 basic topics in amateur critical reviews at Afisha.ru and Kinopoisk.ru

Topic	Share of reviews where the topic is at least mentioned (%)	Share of reviews where the topic is analyzed (%)	Coefficient of analyticity (CA)
1. Emotions connected with viewing	83,5	47,7	57
2. Viewing context	38,9	21,1	54
3. Artistic methods	25,3	10,5	42
4. Place in national or world cinema	27,5	9,5	34
5. Work of actors	60,4	20,0	33
6. Historical reliability of the movie	31,2	9,0	29
7. Technical aspects	33,4	7,0	21
8. Work of director	21,5	4,8	22
9. Recommendation to view (or not to view)	50,8	24,2	48
10. Dramatic concept	56,9	18,9	33
11. Marketing aspects	23,3	9,7	42
12. Personal experience	23,7	8,8	37

**Figure 2.** Topics of the amateur cinema criticism in the conditional space ‘Share of mentions – CA’

Source: Sergey Davydov and Maria Davydova

## Results of clusterization of the amateur critical content

The array of codes obtained at the field stage of the survey was clusterized by K-means method. This approach is one of the most popular mathematic methods of cluster analysis together with hierarchical clusterization. It suggests that the number of groups into which the objects are divided should be given in advance. K-means cluster analysis is a standard feature in SPSS software and it includes the following procedures.

- A selection of variables for clustering. In the observed case 12 variables were taken, which indicate the presence of different topics in the texts.
- The number of clusters and the maximum number of iterations is specified. The process of clustering was performed 7 times; 4 to 10 clusters were allocated. Each time the maximum number of iterations was 20.

6 clusters were selected for further in-depth analysis. Let us consider the obtained clusters in order of increasing share in the overall texts array.

The first cluster contains reviews where authors pay attention primarily to the performances of actors and the drama. To a lesser extent they are interested in technical aspects of movie making. At the same time the emotions of amateur critics and the situation of viewing are almost never touched upon in such texts. This cluster is the smallest one; its share is 7,7 per cent, and 25 of 35 identified texts were published at Kinopoisk.ru. Authors on Afisha.ru gave the movie 3,5 on a scale from 1 to 5; the average number of ‘Thank you!’ points is 4,2. Not a single person posted comments on these reviews. The average score of *Vysotsky* at Kinopoisk.ru is 7,8 out of 10. This cluster can be termed the ‘*discussion of the story and actors without emotions*’ (See Table 2 below).

40 reviews (8,8 per cent; 22 at Afisha.ru and 18 at Kinopoisk.ru) form the second cluster – ‘*detailed analysis of the movie*’. Such texts contain practically all of the selected topics simultaneously, and often at an analytical level. The most discussed topics here are emotions, connected with viewing, artistic methods used, recommendations to watch (or not to watch) the film and the performance of actors. The personal experience of the author and work of the director find less frequent mention here. It is necessary to note that both topics are rarely discussed in other clusters; however, they find more mention in this cluster. Such reviews are the most successful in terms of communicative effects. They have received 17,0 ‘Thank you!’ mark and 5,5 comments at Afisha.ru on the average – these figures are the highest among all the clusters. At the same time evaluations of the movie are the lowest in this case (2,8 at Afisha.ru and 5,8 at Kinopoisk.ru).

The name of cluster No. 3 is ‘*personal emotional experience and situation of viewing*’, where these two topics are analyzed in texts. The work of actors and the dramatic element can be included as well. The share of this group is 12,1 per cent (25 of 50 reviews are published at Afisha.ru and 30 at Kinopoisk.ru). Texts of the third cluster are in second place in terms of users’ interest. On an average they received 7,2 ‘Thank you!’ points and 2,6 comments at Afisha.ru. The average rating of the movie is 3,4 at Afisha.ru and 8,3 at Kinopoisk.ru.

**Table 2.** Basic quantitative characteristics of the identified clusters of amateur critical reviews

	Discussion of the story and actors without emotions	Detailed analysis of the movie	Personal, emotional experience and situation of viewing	Emotional discussion of the story and actors	Emotional recommendations	Poorly reflected emotions
No. of reviews	35	40	55	73	104	148
At Afisha.ru	10	22	25	27	59	130
At Kinopoisk.ru	25	18	30	46	45	18
Share of cluster in sample (%)	7,7	8,8	12,1	16,0	22,9	32,5
1. Emotions connected with viewing	0,2	1,7	1,4	1,9	1,4	1,1
2. Situation of viewing	0,2	1,5	1,8	0,1	0,5	0,3
3. Artistic methods	0,4	1,6	0,5	0,5	0,1	0,1
4. Place in national or world cinema	0,6	1,3	0,4	0,3	0,4	0,1
5. Work of actors	1,4	1,5	1,1	1,1	0,8	0,3
6. Historical reliability of the movie	0,4	1,1	0,7	0,3	0,5	0,1
7. Technical aspects	1,0	1,0	0,6	0,3	0,4	0,1
8. Work of director	0,7	0,9	0,3	0,1	0,3	0,1
9. Recommendation to view (or not to view)	0,5	1,6	0,3	0,3	1,7	0,4
10. Dramatic concept	1,2	1,4	0,9	1,4	0,6	0,3
11. Marketing aspects	0,7	1,4	0,4	0,3	0,1	0,1
12. Personal experience	0,4	0,8	0,4	0,5	0,3	0,1

Source: Sergey Davydov and Maria Davydova

The fourth cluster (16,0 per cent of cases) is constituted by 73 reviews – 46 on Kinopoisk.ru and only 27 on Afisha.ru. It is quite similar to the first cluster in terms of content, however there is one significant difference. Authors are interested here chiefly in their own emotions, play of actors and dramatics are just an addition. So the proposed name for this group of user generated content is ‘*emotional discussion on the story and actors*’. Such texts do not get much comments (0,4 replies per review), average number of ‘Thank you!’ scores – 5,0 (relative low value). Average marks of the film are: at Afisha.ru – 3,4, at Kinopoisk.ru – 8,3.

The next cluster – the fifth one – is formed by amateur reviews that contain mainly the recommendation to watch or not to watch *Vysotsky* along with the description of personal emotions aroused by visiting the cinema. The share of such texts in the array is 22,9 per cent and the number of them in absolute figures is 104. 59 of them were identified at Afisha.ru and 45 at Kinopoisk.ru. On an average reviews from the ‘*emotional recommendations*’ cluster at Afisha.ru received 0,8 comments and 5,4 ‘Thank you!’ marks. The authors of such re-

views were very complimentary in evaluating the movie. The average ratings are 4,1 at Afisha.ru and 9,1 at Kinopoisk.ru.

Finally, 32,1 per cent of cases formed the last – sixth cluster, named ‘*poorly reflected emotions*’. Basically these reviews are devoted to emotions of amateur critics, connected with the viewing of the movie. This type of texts is typical for Afisha.ru – 130 examples of the 148 in total were found on this site. Authors of the reviews of this type give *Vysotsky* a 3,6 (Afisha.ru) or 9,3 (Kinopoisk.ru). Readers of such texts are not so active in pressing ‘Thank you!’ button (4,7 times on the average) and post 1,2 comments per review.

Let us summarize the conclusions of the section. Six clusters of amateur critical reviews are identified and described. The group with the most reach in terms of content – ‘detailed analysis of the movie’ – has a 8,8 per cent share in the total amount of posted reviews. Texts in this cluster are the most discussed and demanded by the audience. In second place, in terms of demand, is the ‘personal emotional experience and the viewing situation’ group (12,1 per cent). Two clusters of texts are associated with the discussion of the dramatics of the movie and the work of actors; the main difference between them is that in 16,0 per cent of cases people write about their emotional experience of watching the movie, while in 7,7 per cent of cases emotions are not described. In 22,9 per cent of cases (the second cluster in terms of prevalence) the amateur review writers give more or less well-founded advice to watch or not to watch the discussed movie, also mentioning their emotions. After all, the most common cluster – ‘poorly reflected emotions’ – combines 31,2 per cent of texts from the sample.

### **Comparison of topics of amateur and professional reviews on the *Vysotsky* movie**

How does the thematic structure of the content generated by amateur critics of the *Vysotsky* movie correlate with the topics of articles written by professional cinema observers?

We have chosen 11 professional texts for this part of analysis. These reviews were written for both print and online media; some critics are well-known and some are not. All of the selected critical texts were published in popular media and so are addressed to the mass audience. The same coding criteria were used for this type of reviews as in case of amateur critical texts. The results of coding are reflected in Table 3 below. It shows that professional reviews are very diverse in their themes. The average rating for this group of texts is rather different from the ratings of any of the 6 amateur cinema critics clusters. Professional critics are, as expected, less predictable in the form and topics of their reviews.

However, it is possible to mark out some common features of professional reviews. Not a single professional critic addresses his/her personal experience in relation to *Vysotsky* and his time. Also none of the professionals have offered a direct recommendation, positive or negative. References to the personal emotional experience of viewing are detected in 2 cases. Three authors write about the personal situation of viewing as well as about the historical reliability of the film. At the same time all the critics without any exception mention the dramatic elements of the film. In the vast majority of cases the artistic techniques of the authors and the work of actors are analyzed as well.

**Table 3.** The occurrence of 12 topics in professional reviews on the *Vysotsky* movie

	Yuri Bogomolov (RIAN)	Andrey Arkhangelsky (Ogonek)	Larisa Yusupove (Izvestia)	Mikhail Trofimenkov (Kommersant Weekend)	Valery Kichin (RossijskayaGazeta)	Roman Volokhov (Factorkino.org)	Roman Volobuev (Afisha.ru)	Igor Kamirov (Utro.ru)	Veronika Khlebnikova (Odnako)	Mikhail Bondarenko (Sibdepo.ru)	Maxim Eidis (Gazeta.ru)	Average
1. Emotions connected with viewing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0,3
2. Situation of viewing	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0,5
3. Artistic methods	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	0	2	1	2	1,5
4. Place in national or world cinema	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	0,7
5. Work of actors	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	0	1,5
6. Historical reliability of the movie	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0,6
7. Technical aspects	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	0	0	0	2	1,4
8. Work of director	2	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	1	2	0,8
9. Recommendation to view (or not to view)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0
10. Dramatic concept	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1,8
11. Marketing aspects	1	2	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	1,0
12. Personal experience	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,0

Source: Sergey Davydov and Maria Davydova

In this context it is appropriate to pay particular attention to one of the analyzed professional reviews. The text by Mikhail Bondarenko is posted under the heading ‘Film Distribution With Mikhail Bondarenko’ at Sibdepo website. The author should be treated as a professional because he writes for his own column dedicated to cinema on an online platform. The observed review has some features of both professional and amateur critical texts. The latter include the story told in the first person, emotions that in some cases substitute for analysis and popular language. ‘Yes, I confess, at first I peered at the face of Vladimir Semionovich, trying to find imperfections and finding them. But by the fifteenth or twentieth minute of the movie this critical focus fades easily, as the film draws you into it. Atmosphere! It is reconstructed to the smallest detail. The creator does not appear to have worked in a slipshod way.

From the Moscow of the late 70's, the airport of the Socialist republic to the poet's car and a ballpoint pen' (Bondarenko 2011). Other critical texts of this author at Sibdepo website are written in the same manner.

The text cited above is published on a little known site, and its author is not one of Russia's, famous and venerable critics. However this example shows that Russian professional critics (or authors at least pretending to be that) can choose some elements of amateur criticism to better meet the expectations of their audience.

## Conclusions

In the age of digital media there are significant changes in the processes connected with watching and reflecting on movies. Audiences of films use new media actively while choosing a movie, organizing its viewing and in the creation of communities to reflect on viewers experience. Russian groups of amateur critics are an example of such communities.

It is obvious that non-professional critical reviews existed long before the emergence of online communications. During the print era amateur critics were active in fan communities. Our case study shows that in the new media such a community can be organized purely around the critical activity. The status of amateur critics is fixed in a specific online community. Such a status is valuable within these groups and its retention can be a long-term strategy, not connected in any way with the further acquisition of professional status.

Modern Russian professional criticism is represented typically by depersonalized texts. At the same time the consumption of the film product is largely the experience of emotions provoked by the movie. The most successful amateur reviews contain, however, not only descriptions of emotional experiences, but also skillful film analyses. Thus, Russian amateur critics are finding a niche that is not covered by professionals.

The text of Russian amateur criticism can be divided into several clusters, as we have seen. We also would like to note a certain movement of professional critics towards amateur reviews. It is possible that in future these two types of texts will come closer; however, at present they still have distinctive forms and styles.

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