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Mediatized gratitude as a reputational factor: Value foundations of recognition in the hybrid public sphere*

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Abstract. In the context of deep mediatization, professional reputation is increasingly determined not only by direct interaction between professionals and clients, but also by the hybrid communicative space in which offline work practices are extended through digital reviews, recommendations and other forms of public feedback. In the applied reputation management, gratitude is typically reduced to such quantitative indicators of satisfaction, while its value-based and legitimizing role remains undertheorized. The article considers public expressions of gratitude in digital reviews of professionals, normative framework of public gratitude and mediatized conditions that make such gratitude a reputational resource, i.e., public gratitude expressed in digital reviews functions as a hybrid reputational agent, transforming individual experiences of professional interaction into a publicly validated reputational asset and contributing to legitimation of professionals in the mediatized environment. The study is based on Boltanski and Thévenot's sociology of orders of worth, mediatization theory, and actor-network theory. The empirical data consist of customer reviews of employees of home improvement retailers posted on Yandex Maps and Google Maps, and patient reviews of physicians published on the ProDoctorov platform. The authors applied discourse analysis of mediatized acts of recognition to operationalize the orders of worth framework. The findings indicate that public gratitude cannot be reduced to an emotional reaction or a mere indicator of satisfaction but operates as a reputational mediator that translates offline professional conduct into a publicly visible and value-structured reputational asset, and reveal the predominance of industrial, market and fame orders of worth, through which competence, efficiency, attentiveness, reliability, and recommendability are legitimized. The authors suggest a model of the hybrid reputational cycle: reputation is not an aggregate of evaluations but a result of public legitimation through

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mediatized user expressions — platform logic shapes regimes of visibility and orders of worth provide criteria of significance and justification.

Key words: mediatization; gratitude; professional reputation; public recognition; reviews; theory of orders of worth; hybrid communication

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In the era of mediatization, professional reputation has been increasingly determined not by direct interaction between professionals and clients but by reviews, recommendations and other forms of user feedback. These forms give rise to hybrid communications in which offline work practices and online representations are interrelated, i.e., reputation depends not only on the quality of professional activity but also on the ways of its public interpretation through algorithmic systems. One of the central elements of this hybrid communicative environment is public gratitude as expressed in digitally mediated ways. In reputation management, such expressions are typically reduced to quantitative indicators of satisfaction — rankings, average scores, and number of online mentions. However, public gratitude is not merely a digital trace but an act of recognition through which an individual experience of professional interaction is converted into a reputationally significant public resource.

Studies of online reputation and applied approaches to review management rarely consider gratitude as a hybrid social mechanism: reviews are usually analyzed either as expressions of individual opinion or as elements of digital economy, without addressing value criteria of professional worth, which are articulated through gratitude and become grounds of reputational legitimacy. We define public gratitude as a specific reputational factor at the intersection of offline professional practice and online regimes of visibility. The study is based on Boltanski and Thévenot's sociology of orders of worth, which allows to consider gratitude as a form of public justification and legitimation, on mediatization theory (transformation of public sphere) and on sociological approaches to recognition as a mechanism for reproducing trust. The research question is how public gratitude under mediatization transforms an individual experience of professional interaction into a publicly legitimate form of reputation and ensure reputational effects. We argue that in mediatized environments, public gratitude becomes a mechanism of reputational justification through competing orders of worth and digitally structured regimes of visibility. First, we conceptualize public gratitude not as an emotional by-product, a matter of communicative politeness or a simple indicator of satisfaction, but as a distinct form of reputational justification. Second, we apply the theory of orders of worth to mediatized practices of public recognition. Third, we reconstruct an analytical model of the hybrid

reputational cycle of gratitude, linking offline action, individual evaluation, public articulation, platform mediation, and reputational effect.

Reputation as a social mechanism of recognition. Reputation is a multilayered social phenomenon embedded in diverse contexts of interaction and functioning as a mechanism of recognition that ensures trust and cooperation. In broader theoretical terms, this understanding supports Honneth's idea of recognition as a foundational mechanism of social order and moral legitimation, which forms stable expectations of value and significance [7]. As social practices become increasingly digitalized, reputation ceases to be merely a symbolic evaluation and increasingly acquires the characteristics of a measurable, aggregable and capitalizable resource, closely tied to actors' social capital and networks [19].

As a component of social capital, reputation reduces uncertainty in social interaction and facilitates decision-making in the conditions of limited information; serves as an indicator of the extent to which an individual or organization conforms to the given social expectations, norms and values; increasingly shapes professional trajectories, access to resources, and social mobility; functions not only as the outcome of past conduct, but also as a predictive mechanism of future behavior. Network-based and interactionist approaches emphasize the processual character of reputation: it is formed through dynamic interactions, micro-rituals of recognition and recurrent acts of evaluation, which makes reputation a constellation of interpretations circulating among network participants and continually reassembled in new contexts [17]. Thus, reputation is not a reflection of the subject's "essence" but a distributed, multiple and processual object existing simultaneously in different ontological registers [9]. Reputation is formed by a combination of social interventions, digital traces, evaluative practices and algorithmic procedures and remains inherently incomplete, fragmented and unstable. On online platforms, review systems are mechanisms that provide future participants of interaction with an idea of the actor's past conduct, thereby reducing uncertainty in anonymous and distributed markets [13]. Intensified digitalization amplifies this multiplicity, producing new forms of reputational reification in the form of narrative reviews, user recommendations, rankings, institutional indices, and visibility metrics.

In this context, reputation is understood as a dynamic networked structure formed by multiple social interactions and shaped by the values of a given society and professional culture. Its core is constituted by fundamental cultural values and the meaning-constitutive values of the profession, while the pragmatic context of interaction forms its mobile periphery. This peripheral layer (observable and communicatively formatted traces of action) becomes the principal object of platform-based capture and algorithmic processing, while the value core provides a framework for interpreting these traces by different audiences. This dual structure makes reputation especially sensitive to mediatization: relatively stable normative grounds of recognition coexist with situational, technically recordable

manifestations that are subject to digital comparison, ranking and archiving. Reputation is also unstable in the temporal sense: some of its elements quickly lose significance, while others stay in digital memory and continue to shape subsequent acts of evaluation. As a result, reputation acquires the status of a hybrid social object in the shifting regimes of social and technical inscription.

Mediatization of reputation: regimes of visibility and hybrid communications. In highly mediatized environments, reputation becomes increasingly public and mediated, since today the media no longer function as external channels of communication but become environments for constituting and transforming social practices [3; 6]. The concept of hybrid communications emphasizes that contemporary forms of social interaction can no longer be considered only offline or online [10]: hybrid communication is a mode of interaction in which physical actions, digital representations and infrastructures of circulation mutually influence each other. Correspondingly, if hybrid communication is the mode of interaction, then hybrid social object is the ontological status of reputation as an outcome of such interaction.

Reputation is formed at the intersection of professional actions, their mediatized representations and different regimes of publicness — user-based, institutional and platform-based. Offline actions continue in digital forms — reviews, comments, recommendations, rankings and indices, which operate according to their own media logic and have different legitimating force. Narrative user reviews, short recommendations, numerical rankings, institutional indices and platform metrics differ in contextual richness, abstraction and authority; yet in digital environments they constitute a reputational infrastructure. Moreover, mediatization of reputation is determined by transformation of regimes of visibility: digital platforms do not merely render reputation visible but actively structure forms of its presentation — impose formats of expression, introduce scales of evaluation, algorithmically rank content, redistribute attention, thereby determining which traces become reputationally significant.

Digital platforms are not neutral intermediaries, they organize public discourse with rules of moderation, visibility and content admissibility [5], thus turning from channels for publishing reviews into infrastructures of the platform society in which architectures of access, comparison and visibility are socially and normatively charged [14]. In this sense, mediatization entails not only an expansion of publicness but a redistribution of power according to the significance criteria: some forms of recognition acquire stability, comparability and institutional legitimacy, while others are displaced, stripped of context or rendered invisible [8]. As a result, reputation becomes oriented toward multiple audiences — users, professional communities, employers, institutional actors, and algorithmic systems, each of which activates its own evaluative criteria. This creates plural reputation regimes and potential conflicts between them. The digital archive also gives these processes a distinctive temporality: some episodes quickly lose relevance, while others are preserved, reactivated and

continue to shape regimes of recognition, trust and professional legitimacy over time. Thus, in mediatized environments, reputation does not merely reflect social reality but constitutes it by connecting offline actions and online representations, individual acts of recognition and institutional metrics, human interpretation and algorithmic processing. This allows to conceptualize reputation as an intrinsically mediatized and hybrid phenomenon essential for understanding contemporary mechanisms of recognition, trust and professional legitimation.

Sociology of orders of worth. The possibility of reputation within networked interaction is ensured by a system of value orientations shared by professional communities (internal world) and by users and clients (external world) — these are grounds on which reputation is formed, develops, circulates and is reinterpreted in mediatized environments. Boltanski and Thévenot's sociology of orders of worth provides a productive analytical approach by defining reputation not as a subjective opinion or an aggregated evaluation but as a result of public justification based on shared principles of justice [16]. In Boltanski and Thévenot's concept, *cités* are models of just social order with specific understanding of the common good and corresponding criteria for assessing worth, significance and propriety of action. Boltanski and Thévenot identify market, industrial (scientific-technical), civil, domestic, inspired and fame orders, each constituting a specific order of worth that determines which qualities, actions and forms of conduct are recognized as legitimate and worthy of public esteem: actors involved in evaluation or dispute appeal not to private preferences but to generalizable principles that can potentially be recognized by others. In this perspective, reputation is formed by the successful alignment of the subject's actions with the criteria of one or more orders of worth relevant in the given social context. Thus, reputation is not a homogeneous and stable attribute of the subject but an outcome of temporary and situational compromises among different worlds. In situations of evaluation and recognition, hybrid configurations of different criteria of significance come into tension or are balanced. It is precisely such compromise formations that become the basis of durable reputational effects.

Gratitude as a form of reputational justification. Gratitude is a particular form of social relation, a mechanism through which meaningful action does not disappear once interaction has ended but is retained in social memory and continues to bind the parties involved [12]. In the social exchange theory, gratitude acquires structural significance and functions as a symbolic reward and a mechanism of reciprocity when exchange cannot be immediately balanced in a directly equivalent form [2]. Gratitude is not only an emotional response to a received benefit but also a reproduction of relations, expectations and obligations within social interaction. Contemporary studies emphasize both social and communicative aspects of gratitude — its significance unfolds not only in being felt but also in being expressed, which affects relationship quality and supports social connectedness [1]. In interactional research, gratitude is a situationally organized communicative action whose timing and form affect coordination of interaction [4].

In mediatized environments, gratitude acquires digitally mediated forms — circulates through online communities, becomes observable, repeatable and socially regulatory [11; 15]. Thus, public gratitude can be conceptualized as a specific form of reputational justification, bringing criteria of evaluation associated with orders of worth into the public sphere, thereby contributing to the legitimation of professional conduct.

Unlike abstract evaluations or numerical rankings, gratitude has a distinctly argumentative structure, indicating why an action is valuable — efficiency, attentiveness, responsibility, care, initiative, honesty, professionalism or contribution to the common good. Gratitude recorded in mediatized publicness performs the dual function: on the one hand, it is the outcome of individual experience and of an internal evaluation of interaction; on the other hand, it addresses some audience of third parties and is involved in public comparison, juxtaposition and reputational selection. In this dual status gratitude becomes a key element of reputational dynamics, connecting individual recognition with collective criteria of significance. Thus, the orders of worth framework allows to interpret gratitude not as an emotional epiphenomenon or a matter of communicative politeness but as a pragmatic mechanism of reputational justification embedded in the competition of orders of worth.

Discourse analysis of gratitude based on the theory of orders of worth. Our empirical data consist of mediatized acts of public gratitude recorded in digital communication environments and endowed with clear reputational potential: (1) customer reviews posted on the digital platforms Yandex Maps and Google Maps in 2024–2025 — out of 289 reviews, 37 were selected according to the criteria of the presence of positive evaluation, direct mention of a specific employee or specialist, description of actions for which gratitude is expressed; (2) patient reviews of physicians posted on the ProDoctorov platform from 2018 to early 2021 — we selected ten clinics in Saint Petersburg, then 30 physicians with reviews, and for each physician — ten most recent textual reviews (In total 300 texts). This sampling was not intended to ensure statistical representativeness but to produce structurally comparable data for the qualitative analysis of mediatized practices of recognition and reputational mechanisms.

Despite differences in interfaces, audiences, and moderation regimes, Yandex Maps, Google Maps, and ProDoctors function as analogous digital infrastructures of public feedback, enabling the textual inscription of interactional experience, its public circulation and incorporation into regimes of comparison and selection. The temporal gap between 2018–2021 and 2024–2025 does not compromise comparability, since the study focused not on short-term platform changes but on general mechanisms of translating individual experience into a publicly legitimized form of reputation. Methodologically, the study combines discourse analysis adapted to the study of mediatized practices of recognition with the analytical framework of Boltanski and Thévenot's orders of worth: coding was based on the categories of worth (industrial, market, domestic, civil and fame)

depending on the criteria of significance in the text (for example, efficiency as industrial worth, politeness as market worth, care as domestic worth), and coding was multiple to capture the hybrid character of texts.

Thus, gratitude is directed less to the specialist than to some audience of third parties, which transforms private experience into a public regime of comparison and choice. In reviews of retail employees, the industrial (“quickly figured it out”, “helped me choose”) and market (“polite”, “explained everything”) orders dominate, while the fame order becomes especially visible in explicit recommendations for future customers. In reviews of medical professionals, the industrial order also dominates but with a stronger emphasis on expertise, responsibility and the ability to act in conditions of patient vulnerability; the market (care, attentiveness) and reputational orders are more strongly expressed to personalize trust and shift attention from the institution to the professional. In other words, public gratitude acts as a mediator in Latour’s sense [6]: it does not simply transmit experience but transforms it. The internal complexity of professional work is reduced to publicly interpretable signs aligned with legitimate orders of worth. The platform interface (length constraints, templates) intensifies this simplification and standardization, making gratitude a node in the reputational infrastructure that forms and stabilizes expectations about “proper” professional conduct.

Analytical model of hybrid reputation. If gratitude is a mechanism of reputational justification, then it is necessary to describe how a single professional action is transformed into a publicly meaningful statement and then into a factor of reputational selection and trust. In other words, the research task is not only to identify the orders of worth activated in gratitude but also to reconstruct the entire chain of transformations linking offline interaction, individual evaluation, digital publication, platform processing, and the subsequent reputational effect. The proposed analytical model of the hybrid reputational cycle of gratitude presents it not as a static text but as a mediatized reputational production (seven stages):

1. Individual’s gratitude as an internal evaluation of the interaction based on value criteria.
2. Translation of individual experience into public gratitude — a digital review, recommendation or comment.
3. Articulation of one or more orders of worth in the gratitude, coded according to legitimate evaluative criteria (industrial, market, fame, and so on).
4. Mediatized representation: publication on a platform whose interface and algorithms structure and amplify the reputational potential of the text.
5. Reputational effect: specific audience’s associations (trustworthiness, competence, reliability) that shape choice and contribute to the professional’s symbolic capital.
6. Return to the offline sphere: materialization of the reputational effect through an increased influx of customers, favorable institutional decisions such as promotion or a bonus, and changes in professional status and position.

7. Return to the offline sphere — materialization of the reputational effect (increased influx of customers, favorable institutional decisions (promotion, bonus), changes in professional status and position).

In practical terms, the study argues for a strategic shift from managing quantitative metrics such as rankings or reviews toward a deeper analysis of the value structure of public recognition. For specialists in reputation, communication and customer-experience management, this means, first, identifying the dominant and deficient orders of worth in reviews; second, understanding which aspects of activity receive public legitimation and are translated into reputational capital; third, working not on an abstract increase in the number of reviews but on supporting those forms of professional action and representation that correspond to the most important criteria of significance for relevant audiences. In other words, what matters is not simply the fact of positive evaluation but its discursive form and grounds for recognition. From this perspective, gratitude becomes a central object of reflexive reputation-building. Its analysis allows to move from reactive risk management to the proactive formation of a durable reputational core based on a combination of values of professional action, mediatized formats of recognition and social expectations. Thus, working on reputation shifts from superficial monitoring of feedback to managing the very grounds of public legitimation.

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Медиатизированная благодарность как репутационный фактор: ценностные основания признания в пространстве гибридных коммуникаций*

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Аннотация. В условиях глубокой медиатизации профессиональная репутация во все большей степени формируется не только в непосредственном взаимодействии специалиста и клиента, но и в гибридном пространстве, где офлайн-практики труда получают продолжение в цифровых отзывах, рекомендациях и иных формах публичной обратной связи. В прикладных практиках управления репутацией благодарность обычно редуцируется до количественных показателей удовлетворенности, а ее ценностно-легитимирующая функция недооценивается. Объект исследования — публичные благодарности, зафиксированные в цифровых отзывах о профессионалах, предмет — ценностные основания публичной благодарности и медиатизированные условия ее превращения в репутационный ресурс професси-

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онала, т.е. авторы определяют публичную благодарность, выраженную в цифровых отзывах, как гибридного репутационного агента, переводящего частный опыт профессионального взаимодействия в публично валидируемый репутационный ресурс, обеспечивающий легитимацию профессионала через артикуляцию порядков величия (социология градов Л. Болтански и Л. Тевено, теория медиатизации и акторно-сетевой подход). Эмпирическая база статьи — отзывы клиентов о работе сотрудников магазинов инженерной сантехники на платформах Яндекс.Карты и Google.Карты и отзывы пациентов о врачах, опубликованные на портале «ПроДокторов». Дискурс-анализ медиатизированных актов признания выступил способом операционализации теории порядков величия для выявления градов. Показано, что публичная благодарность не сводится к эмоциональному отклику или индикатору удовлетворенности, а выступает репутационным медиатором, преобразующим офлайн-профессиональное действие в публично наблюдаемый и ценностно структурированный репутационный ресурс. Анализ выявил доминирование индустриального, рыночного и репутационного порядков величия, через которые легитимируются компетентность, эффективность, внимательность, надежность и рекомендационная значимость профессионала. Предложена модель гибридного репутационного цикла, в которой профессиональная репутация предстает не как агрегированная сумма оценок, а как результат публичной легитимации в медиатизированных практиках пользовательских высказываний, где платформенная логика структурирует формы видимости, а порядки величия задают критерии значимости и оправдания.

Ключевые слова: медиатизация; благодарность; профессиональная репутация; публичное признание; отзывы; теория градов; гибридные коммуникации

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