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INTERNET AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF TIME CONSCIOUSNESS

Kochesokov Robert Khagismelovich (a)*, Kuchukov Magomed Musaevich (b),
Bizheva Agnessa Petrovna (c), Dadashev Ali Aydinovich (d),
Kuchukova Zhaneta Magometovna (e)

*Corresponding author

- (a) Kabardino-Balkarian State University named after Kh. M. Berbekov, 173, Chernyshevsky Str., Nalchik, 360004,
Russia, robertkochesokov@yandex.ru
(b) Kabardino-Balkarian State Agrarian University named after V.M. Kokova, 1V, Lenin Ave., Nalchik, 360030,
Russia, kuchukovm@mail.ru
(c) Kabardino-Balkarian State University named after Kh. M. Berbekov, 173, Chernyshevsky Str., Nalchik, 360004,
Russia, agnkish@mail.ru
(d) Kabardino-Balkarian State Agrarian University named after V.M. Kokova, 1V, Lenin Ave., Nalchik, 360030,
Russia, dadali@yandex.ru
(e) Kabardino-Balkarian State Agrarian University named after V.M. Kokova, 1V, Lenin Ave., Nalchik, 360030,
Russia, kuchukova.1976@mail.ru

Abstract

The paper is devoted to the study of the influence of the Internet as a fundamentally new means of communication on changing the consciousness of time. The authors draw attention to the fact that while the scientific literature has deeply and comprehensively studied the “virtual reality” and “virtual space” formed by the Internet, the formation of a new time consciousness has not yet received due attention. The paper contains a comparative analysis of the influence of three main types of communication means – oral, written and the Internet – on the consciousness of time. The comparison criteria include (1) the localizability of transmitted information and (2) the completeness of the information transmission process. In the era of oral communication, information is not separated from its medium, as a result of which it is not localized in time. For this reason, a person is not able to build information linearly. With the advent of written forms of communication, information is separated from its medium, which makes it possible to localize it in time, i.e. to build it linearly. In the era of the Internet, on the one hand, information is separated from its medium and localized in time, but, on the other hand, information exists in virtual space. In virtual space, information is not sequential, as was the case with written communication, but “simultaneous”, as was the case with oral communication. As a result, a person himself has to build information in time.

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1. Introduction

Teachers of schools and universities are already accustomed to how easy modern students deal with historical material, easily mixing various historical eras and combining non-compatible events in a single time. The fact that many students, preparing reports, download long-outdated materials from the Internet is also puzzling. Moreover, this happens not only in social and humanitarian disciplines, but also in natural and technical sciences. In these cases, the blame lies primarily with various “reforms” of the educational system. By no means questioning the validity of such explanations, the attention should be drawn to other underlying factors. First of all, this refers to the transformation of time consciousness under the influence of new information technologies.

2. Problem Statement

New technologies are rapidly and radically changing not only the world around, but also our vision, consciousness, view of life. Since the second half of the 20th century, scientists have begun to put forward various versions of the information society, the hallmark of which is the transformation of information (knowledge) into the most important and significant value. But these concepts focused on the information itself, and only a little later began to pay attention to how the means of production and transmission of information affect not only the society, but also our vision, perception of society and the world around.

An important step in this direction was the concept of McLuhan (2003), who convincingly showed the important role of mass communication media in the life of man and society. He emphasized that the means of communication represent “external extensions” of a person. Moreover, he noted that the means of communication are by no means “neutral”, they form the core of a “message”, “it is the means of communication that determines and controls the scale and form of human association and human actions” (McLuhan, 2003). But McLuhan’s understanding of the means of communication as “external extensions” of a person shows that he is mainly interested in the influence of the means of communication on the spatial consciousness of a person. The influence of the means of communication on the consciousness of time escaped from his attention. He speaks only about how communications such as the hours affect the streamlining and coordination of the activities of society and man. In other words, their external influence on human consciousness, but not the change of time consciousness itself.

Well-known futurologists of the last century also paid serious attention to the transformation of spatial consciousness. In particular, Toffler emphasized that with the emergence and spread of new means of communication, space is “shrinking” (Toffler, 2002). However, futurologists did not pay due attention to the transformation of time consciousness limiting themselves only to the fact that time in modern society is accelerating.

The next important contribution in the topic under discussion was made by postmodern philosophers, which in the person of Baudrillard (2000a) concluded that in our time the “world of simulacra” is gradually forcing out social reality. But the change of spatial consciousness takes the first place. However, Baudrillard (2000b) says that historical consciousness is a product of the New Age and is now beginning to be supplanted by “non-historical” consciousness.

With the advent of the Internet, these changes become even more fundamental. Now virtual reality has become, we apologize for the play of words, a reality. But reality, as you know, has spatial and temporal characteristics. “Virtual reality” and “virtual space” have become generally accepted concepts, and not as concepts of technical sciences, but as special varieties of reality and space. Oddly enough, this did not happen with the concept of “virtual time”, which so far remains a purely technical concept.

The vast majority of studies on the impact of new IT on society concern its spatial characteristics: formation of a network society (Castells, 2000; Nazarchuk, 2008; Van Dijk, 2012), displacement of real network communication, influence of the Internet on various spheres of social life, etc. (Castells, 2000; Cullen & Sommer, 2011; Graham & Dutton, 2014; Jia & Li, 2019; Nam, 2012; Ross & Rivers, 2016; Taylor, 2005).

In the past few years, it has become clear that those who control the IT giants have enormous power. Using the example of the so-called “cancel culture”, we see that under the conditions of domination under the domination of new IT, it is not difficult to make “non-existent” and even “never existing” not only individuals, but anything in principle. Here we are interested in the fact that IT in general allows establishing the dominance of “virtual time” over real time or the “replacement” of real time with virtual time.

3. Research Questions

Researchers of the past paid considerable attention to such issues as the influence of various means of communication on the formation and statement of logical thinking, on the change of spatial consciousness, etc. However, the problem of the influence of the Internet on the change of time consciousness has not yet been the subject of substantial philosophical research. It is therefore extremely important to study (1) the links between the means of communication and the consciousness of time; (2) how the means of communication affect the features of time consciousness.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to identify the impact of the Internet as a fundamentally new means of communication on the change of the consciousness of time.

5. Research Methods

The theoretical basis of the study included the concept of communication means by McLuhan (2013) and the theory of the Internet by Castells. A comparative method was used to identify the characteristics of the influence of various means of communication on the consciousness of time. The discursive (reflexive) method is used to understand the features of time consciousness in the conditions of dominance of the Internet as a means of communication.

6. Findings

The person obtains information (in this study information is understood as all knowledge and data) via various means of communication. Therefore the nature of judgment of the surrounding reality depends not only on *what* information a person obtains, but also *how* he obtains it (i.e. via what means of communication). Before considering the issue of how the means of communication influence information, namely the nature of consciousness (perception) of time, it is necessary to identify the most significant measurements (characteristics) of the communication means.

It is, first, the *way of information transfer*. As McLuhan (2013) showed, in terms of the way of information transfer the communication means can be divided into three groups: oral, written and oral-written (electronic).

Second, *localizability of transmitted data in time*. The localizability in time is meant as an opportunity to coordinate information and a source of information (communication medium) with certain time. In other words, it is about whether the information and the source of information (communication medium) allow defining time of its (information) emergence?

Thirdly, *completeness of information transfer*. The process of information transfer is complete if information is separated from its carrier and becomes an independent reality, and incomplete – if information exists only through its carrier.

Based on these measurements of the means of communication, let us try to identify the features of the time consciousness they form. It is immediately necessary to state that the transition to a new means of communication does not mean that the previous means of communication fall into oblivion or are “abandoned”. They adapt to the new, sometimes acquire completely different characteristics. For example, the creation of writing, of course, did not cancel oral communication. Considering the problem of the relationship between the Internet and traditional means of communication (books, newspapers and magazines, radio and TV), Castells (2004) shows that they are not supplanted by the Internet, on the contrary, they use it for survival and development.

(1) *A method of transmitting information*. Let us take McLuhan's typology as the original, but, unlike him, we will combine written and oral-written means into one group, and we will put the Internet as a fundamental new means of communication into a separate group. Here the authors agree with Castells.

(2) *Localizability of transmitted information over time*. In oral communication, information and means of communication are not separated, i.e. information exists, materialized only during its transmission. Therefore, the oral form of information transfer does not allow determining the time of its (information) appearance. The matter consists in the following. During oral communication, information is each time transmitted again. In other words, the oral form of information transfer always knows only the present. Although the transmitted information may relate to the past, the past appears as the present.

Let us show an essence of the above by comparing an orally told fairy tale and a fairy tale *recorded in writing*. It would seem that the same fairy tale that at oral and written retelling remains the same and transfers the same information. But this is not exactly so. During oral retelling the story-teller every time retells the fairy tale *automatically adapting* it to the time. Of course, he does it inadvertently.

The story-teller cannot act differently as he retells the fairy tale as he understands it and “passes through himself”. He even has no questions, like maybe the fairy tale initially had a different meaning. Naturally, people may know that there are different versions of the same fairy tale. But they appear as *different versions* of the same fairy tale, but not as the *transformation (evolution)* of the same fairy tale in any way.

During written communication the information and the communication medium are divided. Simply speaking, information “materializes” in the form of a text. It is easy to notice that in this case we deal with several texts in which the same information is recorded. Any good observer notices essential differences in texts, for example, in terminology, information submission, etc. In this case with certain knowledge of history, philology and other sciences it is already possible to track the history (evolution) of the same information. Besides, we are able to define what of the available texts are the first (initial) and what are the adaptations to changes in the society. In other words, we know that there are not only different versions of the same fairy tale, but also the *evolution* of information.

The basic means of written communication (newspapers and magazines, books, radio and TV) form linear consciousness of time. First, even purely technical parameters (specifying numbers, date, etc.) localize information in time. Second, by means of the same parameters they emphasize the linear nature of time. Third, they regularly emphasize that time is a continuous and moving process.

At first glance, since information and means of communication are also separated on the Internet, it seems that information on the Internet is also localized in time, i.e. it is possible to set the time when information appears, set the sequence of information transfer, etc. This, indeed, can be done, but is only possible for a person *accustomed* to localizing information in time. But what about a person (generations) who is not used to this? Different sites (sources of information) appear to him “simultaneously”. Of course, he can build them linearly, in time. However, the chronology of the appearance of sites merges with other criteria, such as, for example, accessibility of presentation, design and layout, etc. For such a person, it is worth emphasizing that the time of information appearance is only one, and not the most important criterion of choice. Here we face the same situation that took place in a traditional society with oral communication. A man of the traditional society encountered various presentations of information, but for him they were just versions of the information presentation. In the same way, a person from the “generation of the Internet” sees the presence of many presentations of the same information, but he does not put them “vertically” (as appeared sequentially), but “horizontally” (as appeared simultaneously). Therefore, he chooses the “version” of information presentation that he liked for some purely subjective reasons.

(3) Completeness of information transfer. Oral communication does not provide complete information, since, as already mentioned, it involves the automatic adaptation of information to new times. To understand the essence of this dimension, we ask ourselves whether a fairy tale can be “outdated”? It is clear that the *methods of transmitting* the content (essence) of the fairy tale may become obsolete and yet get obsolete. But the *content (essence)* of the fairy tale is invariable. Therefore, the fairy tale retold orally is incomplete, and the tale recorded in writing is completed.

It is not necessary to prove that the process of transfer through written means of communication (books, periodicals) is completed. The situation is somewhat more complicated with radio and TV. McLuhan classifies them, along with the Internet, as a special group – *oral-written* means of

communication and distinguishes them from “purely” written means of communication. However, according to the measurement considered here, radio and TV do not fundamentally differ from the means of written communication. The fact is that the process of transmitting information on radio and TV is also completed. For example, the radio program that we heard yesterday will not be repeated again today. Of course, any program can be repeated, for example, at the request of radio listeners (viewers), but in this case we know that this is a repetition, and not new information.

Besides, it is important to bear in mind that both periodicals and radio and television broadcasts can and usually are archived, i.e. localized over time. In order to find out what happened yesterday, we have to address to files. We are well aware that the information thus obtained is outdated.

It shall be noted that even the appearance of these publications gives us a lot of information about time. Simply said, the evolution of appearance clearly shows time as something moving, incomplete, having a certain direction.

At first glance, the process of information transfer on the Internet, as in the means of written communication, is completed. However, there are fundamental differences between them.

First, most sites on the Internet are constantly *updated*. Therefore, a person loses the opportunity to compare today's information with the yesterday's. In this regard, the information transfer over the Internet more closely resembles the oral information transfer than the written recording of information.

Second, the Internet, like previous written means of communication, archives a lot of information. Therefore, it seems that there is no difference between them. But the changes are significant here as well. Previously, a person had to purposefully, specifically look for (no matter why) outdated information. In other words, he knew for sure that this information occurred in the past. But now the messages, both today and earlier, immediately (in parallel), at the same time “appear” to a person. Therefore, it seems to a person that these are *different versions* of the same information, and not *sequentially* passing. Hence, a person chooses the information that he liked more for some reason than the last by date.

Third, unlike the previous means of communication, which could be distinguished even purely externally (for example, the latest issue of the newspaper is easy to distinguish from last year's yellowed issue), the Internet does not allow paying attention to “appearance”. Of course, anyone can find the corresponding output of an archived message, but for this they must think linearly. In other words, he must “automatically” ask himself a question about the date, but only a person who *already* thinks linearly thinks this way. For a person who is not used to giving importance to time, it is not so easy.

Here comes the conclusion: in the era of the Internet, a person has to make a choice of information. Thus, the Internet radically changes the attitude of a man towards the world. Here we may agree with Rosin (2004), who writes: “On the computer and the Internet, a person slightly resembles a demiurge: he creates, constructs whole worlds before his eyes” (p. 13). Indeed, the Internet teaches a person to freely handle the world around him, including time. The time thus generated may be defined as the virtual time, and it is not objective, i.e. existing outside the consciousness of a person. It is rather a way of organizing, building information in the human mind. In other words, it is a special consciousness of time.

7. Conclusion

In the era of oral communication, messages “appear” to a person discretely, they do not flow from each other, so there is an opportunity to “confuse” various historical eras.

In the era of written communication, messages “appear” to a person consistently, flow from each other. They exist only as a movement, in interconnection. Therefore, in the human mind, they fit precisely through the relationship.

In the age of the Internet, messages “appear” to a person “simultaneously”, and he himself shall establish connections between them. Therefore, there is a kind of return to a traditional society. The process of transmitting information is externally written, but is in fact oral. In other words, this is a letter in which the basic characteristics of written communication (at least in terms of the linear perception of time) are largely lost.

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