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SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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Abstract

This article is devoted to issues related to the processes of social communication that we are trying to comprehend. The relevance of the study is due to the fact that changes in the modern information society are happening rapidly. At the present stage of social development, new features and methods of communication are appearing. As a result of social interaction, an information field, a space of signs and meanings are created. Social interaction generates network interaction. The role of communication in the development of network society is growing, forming the basis for the semantic construction of the community. In modern social sciences, the network approach is becoming increasingly important, allowing us to conclude that the communicative strategy in modern information society can reduce the degree of uncertainty that exists in the world. The information society is formed by creating and disseminating those values and meanings that depend on the content existing in multimedia communication networks. Thanks to the restructuring of meanings and values, global changes are taking place in the social structure. These changes are the result of the features of the course of network processes: the multiplicity and alternative ways of moving information, multichannel nature, and high density of information flows.

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1. Introduction

The current stage of human development requires close attention to those processes that take place within society. A variety of sciences, including philosophy, sociology, political science, etc. they study both the information society and the place and role of man in the new social reality, as well as the influence of various factors on the formation of social interaction in modern conditions. The analysis of scientific sources indicates that the problem of man in the conditions of information society formation has not been fully studied yet. Today, scientists are studying the transformation of ethical values and the educational environment, global virtualization, the problem of information security in society, the problem of interpersonal understanding (Pavlova & Paliy, 2020), the formation of an eco-information culture (Barkova et al., 2019), etc. The habitual life of a person is changing rapidly, and he is not ready to adapt to the increasingly accelerating pace of socio-cultural, scientific and technological development. D. Bell, E. Toffler, M. Castells and others find signs of a fundamentally new type in modern society in comparison with industrial society. However, there are alternative studies, for example, F. Webster, K. Kumar, in the framework of which the existence of the information society itself at a given time is called into question. So, Moiseev (2004) notes that “there are qualitatively different thoughts that relate the information society to the concepts of the distant future and consider it generally premature to discuss its features, since everything that we observe in the development of the information environment is just a simple improvement of the post-industrial society” (p. 428). A number of other researchers, considering the current state of society and its characteristics and creating two competing approaches, suggest distinguishing between such concepts as the information society and the knowledge society. According to Khan (2004) “... the concept of the information society is associated with the idea of “technological innovation”, while the concept of “knowledge society” touches on social, cultural, economic, political, economic and legal aspects of transformation and better reflects the complexity and dynamism of the changes” (p. 22).

Thus, the discussion on the identification of essential characteristics, features and principles of modern social organization is far from complete. But, despite the existence of very different views, it is worth recognizing that modern social and humanitarian thought comprehensively considers issues related to the concepts of “information society”, “information”, “new information technologies”, “knowledge”, and the idea of communication as about the essential characteristics of society itself makes it possible to take a fresh look at social reality and the processes taking place inside it and arouses a special interest of researchers. At the present stage of social development, new features of the communicative space are revealed. For example, as negative characteristics, the researchers (Lezhebokov & Onoprienko, 2017) identify the loss of stability resulting from the control of information resources and means of transmitting information of individual, small social groups. The well-known researcher McLuhan (2003) believes that it is dominant communication that determines the type of existing society, and the type of perception of reality by an individual is measured by the speed of information flows transmission.

McLuhan’s (2013) ideas mark a new stage in understanding the communicative space of modern society. He focuses on the communications media as factors that determine communication in society and represent an independent reality.

Luman (1999) considers communication as a constructive element of the social system. The understanding of the communication essence is given through the definition of society: society is a network of communications with “crossroads” in which there is intersection and redistribution of flows. He believes, society is a closed system in terms of communication. It produces communication through communication. Only it can communicate, but not with itself and not with its surrounding world. It produces its unity through the operational implementation of communications recursively addressing the previous ones and anticipating subsequent communications (Luman, 1999, p. 223). Thus, society itself chooses and determines the methods of interaction with the external environment, since it is self-reproducing (Sushko, 2019).

Consequently, communication is the most important social process. It forms the basis for the semantic construction of the community and allows the factors to be connected, which gives society its integrity (Yakovlev, 2016). With this understanding, a social system is understood, first of all, as a semantic connection, which is a consequence of social actions. These actions are consistent with each other, but a demarcation line arises between them and the environment since the environment consists of actions unconnected with the original social system (Rozin, 2016). Another approach is proposed by J. Habermas. He considers communication from ontological positions. Communication arises as a result of subject-subject dispositions. Meanings are organized into the “life worlds” of the participants in communication; they are structured and restructured in social and cultural development. Integral implicit knowledge arises.

2. Problem Statement

The interaction of knowledge growth processes, increasing the intensity of information flows and accelerating the pace of scientific and technological development lead to the formation of a new society, to the formation of new ways and means of self-organization of society, including technical and information ones. The question of the primacy of information or the person himself in information processes leaves a wide field for modern discussions. The constantly expanding audience of social networks indicates that the scale of human resources included in the process of using communication networks is becoming truly global. And this, in turn, raises a number of issues for researchers related to the processes of interaction, sparseness, density, centralization, orientation between the elements within the communication system. All of the above puts forward a new problem of modern social reality, the problem of network communication.

3. Research Questions

In order to understand the place and role of social communication in the modern information society, it is necessary to consider the currently existing theories about the development of social communication. We are going to identify the essential characteristics of this process. In addition, it should be understood what it is, how it is characterized and what functions the social network performs in the communication process.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the article is to study thoroughly and consistently social communication not just as a process of interaction, but as a network process that affects the formation of both knowledge about reality and the socio-informational reality itself.

5. Research Methods

As the theoretical and methodological base of the research, the general scientific principles of systemicity, integrity, determinism, development and self-development are used in the study of social reality, as well as the theory of self-organization of social matter. In addition, the study is based on the network approach, the sources of which are such scientists as M. Granovetter, B. Wellman, H. White and others. The book “The Information Age: Economics, Society and Culture” turned out to be the most significant work that influenced its formation. There M. Castells considers network approach, network interaction and network forms of organizations.

6. Findings

The scientific interest for various disciplines is the problem of identifying the essence and specificity of social communications. This is due to the fact that there are many ways to analyze the process of people interacting with each other in the context of their joint activities. Scientists highlight several approaches to the study of communication (Lezhebokov & Onoprienko, 2017).

The first considers communication as a means of linking the objects of material and spiritual being that exist in a single structure. The second approach studies the field of interpersonal interaction, i.e. processes of transferring information from one person to another. The third focuses on the fact that communication plays an important role in the social processes of information exchange and is necessary in order to influence both a person and social groups. In addition to this, a philosophical understanding of communication, which finds its origins in the 19th century, is also significant for modern science. Thus, studies of the communicative process are influenced by studies conducted in the fields of semiotics, hermeneutics, and analytical philosophy.

Semiotic studies pay attention primarily to the iconic nature of communication (Pinchuk, 2019). Most clearly these ideas are presented in the works of R. Jakobson, M. Lotman and W. Eco. Hermeneutical factors of communication are attitudes towards the understanding and interpretation of certain meanings. This problem was first identified by F. Schleiermacher. Analytical philosophy is engaged in understanding the connection of human experience with speech communication, language schemes, basing on the works of L. Wittgenstein, G. Frege, and others.

In addition, modern researchers consider various models of the development of social communication: instrumental, evolutionary, and cooperative (Gruzdev, 2017). Each of them has its supporters. Thus, representatives of technological determinism in their studies emphasize the improvement of communication tools and develop the instrumental model of development. D. Bell, E. Toffler, L. Mumford, G. Innis, G. M. McLuhan, etc., turn their attention to the instrumental dimension of social communication and examine technology as the most important factor in development.

Proponents of the evolutionary model view social communication as an autopoietic system. Individuals, as a result of the influence of external reality on them, begin to interact with each other; as a result, the development of communication takes place (Panchenko, 2018). In their minds there are “generalized symbols,” that is, universal and stable concepts that set the rules for the development of consciousness systems. This model was presented in the works of N. Luman.

The action-related dimension of social communication is found in a cooperative model of the development of social communication. The theory of the construction of niches by F. J. Odling-Media, M. Feldman and K. Laland has particular importance in this case. As a result of the evolutionary pressure of the environment on a person, he came to understand that he could not survive alone. This led to the fact that the person switched to cooperative behavior, for which he needed to create and develop communication skills. Thus, communication has become a mechanism by which a person began to transform the natural being around him, creating a special niche for his own existence.

It must be assumed that in the conditions of the formation of the information society, all three of these models play a role in the formation of social communication, since the technological aspect, as a source of development of social communication, cannot be denied, and the evolutionary and cooperative models can be considered as complementary since they have the common idea of interaction which influences the formation of communication. In one case, we are talking about interaction with external reality, and in the other, about interaction within social reality. Any interaction is a process of influence of both people and social groups on each other, in which the action is due, on the one hand, to the previous action, and on the other hand, the expected result from the other. Social interaction always creates a space of signs and meanings, an information field. Modern man is in constant choice and various information flows in which I and We intersect and double, the boundaries and values are blurred, and the images and meanings become infinite in their interpretation. The foundation of one’s own existence is lost. The unsystematic nature of existing information flows generates uncertainty, i.e. the possibility of a variety of phenomena, the idea of each of which is not sufficiently structured (Antonovsky, 2016). This leads to the fact that it is impossible to predict reliably the development of a particular situation. Three components of uncertainty are distinguished, firstly, fundamental, i.e. due to the stage and speed of development of the phenomena themselves, secondly, informational, arising as a result of the lack of necessary information and, thirdly, intellectual, which is the consequence of the ability or inability to comprehend the information of a certain scale and complexity.

In such conditions, issues related to problems of social development, social interaction, the content and form of intercultural and interethnic, inter-social communications become very relevant, since it is the verbal behaviour of a person that is the basis for the progressive development of human civilization as a whole, and its preservation. And in this situation, technology comes to the aid of man. A new foundation of existence is found in virtual reality, which is becoming the basis of information and technical metamorphoses occurring in modern society (Deshko, 2017). The network method of transmitting information is becoming critical. In general, a network is a decentralized (distributed) structure consisting of nodes and the connections between them. Social interaction generates network interaction, which is carried out through network communication and is determined by such features:

multiplicity and alternative ways of moving information, multichannel nature, and high density of information flows. The social network is the foundation which controls and directs information flows.

The emerging network logic of social interaction influences the course and results of processes taking place in all spheres of society, from the political to the social sphere of diverse human ways of life. Thus, network interaction refers to the phenomenon of social reality, determined by the network method of transmitting information. The result of this process is an increase of the information field of the network structure. Bard and Soderquist (2005) proposed to interpret the network as a new, climax way of communication: The network is a translucent system, and therefore it is democratic and provides people with equal opportunities. The principle of transparency is manifested in the fact that all network participants have access to all the necessary information and can make their own contribution at any time (p. 196).

Changes occurring both in society itself and in existing network structures are the result of the conditions and characteristics of network processes. The system becomes more integrated only if the frequency of direct social interaction increases. At the same time, changes in networks are the result of not direct, but indirect interactions (Morgunov & Proner, 2019). It is especially worth noting that interaction is always communication. This is a fairly broad concept since it is not only a direct exchange of information, but also an indirect exchange of meanings, due to which global changes in the social structure occur. The core of the social structure, its isomorph, is formed by clarifying the meanings used on the periphery and arising as a result of indirect interactions (Gruzdev, 2015). Indirect communication is mainly one-sided and arises as a result of exposure to the recipient of such information sources as works of literature and art, radio messages, television programs, publications in newspapers and Internet magazines. The network approach suggests that the stability of the existing social structure arises from the horizontal communicative dehierarchization. Thus, horizontal communication strategy is considered as a strategy that reduces the degree of uncertainty in modern socio-cultural processes, and vertical communication strategy increases the degree of uncertainty. It is worth paying attention to the fact that the globalization process observed in the modern world is a consequence of the implementation of a horizontal communication strategy that focuses on the present, on the same amount of competencies, responsibilities and information, and the desire for ethnic self-sufficiency creates the need for a vertical communication strategy that goes back to information flow from past to present and future.

The information exchange between the individual and the environment becomes more active if we need an influx of new information necessary to satisfy our needs and adapt to the reality around us. Under these conditions, the role of existing social networks is undoubtedly increasing. The possibility of developing an unambiguous interpretation of the concept of a social network is a theoretical problem and is a consequence of the methodological pluralism found in the social sciences. But there are universal signs of a social network. Among these signs, researchers (Davydov & Yudina, 2014) include:

- blurring of the boundaries of a social network;
- personification of relationships arising in networks;
- economic actions determine the structure and nature of social connections between network elements;
- trust plays a critical role in the functioning of the network;

- the ability to exchange various resources between network participants;
- the predominance of decentralized, dehierarchial relations between actors in a social network;
- the focus of network participants on obtaining benefits - both tangible and intangible;
- conditionality of the conversion of social capital by participation in a social network.

Thus, the social network becomes the basis for communication. Thanks to technical means, global networks of mass communication emerge. The most obvious example is the Internet. It should be noted that modern society is formed largely due to the creation and dissemination of those values and meanings that depend on the content that exists in multimedia communication networks.

In the modern, digital world, the place of communication and its influence on social processes is growing. Its social significance is increasing. Bogomolova (2012) believes that the role of communication in the development of a network society cannot be overestimated. She highlights some aspects of communication that ensure its social significance: Firstly, there are certain communication strategies that help in solving social conflicts; Secondly, special communicative mechanisms allow the formation of positive attitudes in public opinion; Thirdly, a successful communicative practice arises of the interaction of socially significant figures with civil society through the network.

This is not all the possibilities of network communication. Moreover, due to the dialectical nature of the reality around us, the communicative practice can bring negative, socially significant results. For example, various Internet sites can be catalysts for color revolutions, provoke conflicts in different areas of social reality.

The result of this practice is a special network culture, which is a reproductive and creative activity to form and reproduce certain meanings and values. The core in the content and functions of any culture is: fixing the optimal ways of organizing life and the interaction of people in a particular community, significant achievements for the life of society; initiation of subjective interpretation and creative development. Culture sets the measure of the ratio of reproductive and creative, individual and collective in value-oriented targets of activity (Sandakova et al., 2019). Network culture is characterized by fragmentation, which forms a high degree of individualization of the meanings generated as a result of network interaction, leads to the problem of values production and to the search for new ways to determine identity.

In addition, it is important to understand that culture, as a phenomenon, assumes its development and change within a certain orientation, having a relatively limited number of directions, and, therefore, the problem of boundaries and the vector of cultural development in the modern information society arises. At the same time, the key characteristics of the network as a system, namely, integrity and self-reproducibility, are preserved. The distinctive features are the absence of space-time restrictions and the predominance of electronically mediated practices of communicative interaction.

7. Conclusion

Diversity is the source of world development. Undoubtedly, in the reality around us, the interests of individuals, as, indeed, of states can differ. The preservation and development of society are possible only with the preservation of differences, uniqueness, and local interests within a single and integral

process of social development. The philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of social communication in the context of the information society is one of the ways to search for this integrity. It is necessary to consider all aspects of the communication process in order to form adequate communication strategies that minimize the risks of the negative impact of information technology on the course of the social process.

In addition, it is important to understand how the development of social communication occurs. In modern conditions, the instrumental, evolutionary and cooperative models show a tendency towards integration, because equipment and technologies turn out to be the most important source for the development of social communication, primarily the Internet. And interaction, as a concept closely related to communication, is a key term for both the evolutionary and cooperative models. Modern communications, including social, arise in the existing information space, which is characterized by unsystematic nature, lack of structure and uncertainty. It must be understood that communication is a broad concept, since it is not only a direct exchange of information but also an indirect exchange of meanings. There are conceptual systems in which people's knowledge of the world, acquired by them as a result of the reflection of the reality, and the experience of mankind, presented in the corresponding picture of the world and recorded in language, are accumulated.

The meaning is a part of the conceptual systems of native speakers i.e. information systems, including knowledge and opinions about the actual and possible state of affairs in human reality. Due to the restructuring of meanings, there are global changes in the social structure. Network space is becoming the platform on which new ways of interaction are formed. Restructuring occurs through various communication strategies. So, horizontal communication reduces the degree of uncertainty in modern socio-cultural conditions, and vertical communication increases the degree of uncertainty in the ongoing processes. The globalization processes observed in the reality around us is a consequence of the implementation of a horizontal communication strategy that focuses on the same amount of responsibilities, competencies and information. And the modern information society is formed largely due to the creation and dissemination of those values and meanings that depend on the content that exists in multimedia communication networks.

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