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THE ETHICAL SIDE OF DIGITALIZATION: GOOD *VS* HARM

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Abstract

The current world situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic in a new way levels the attitude of people to the everyday aspects of life, with a special place given to the use of digital technologies. Digitalization is becoming the major condition for high-quality distancing, one of the main mechanisms for combating the pandemic. The purpose of the article is to define the dichotomous essence of the ethical component as the most important personal component of the modern information society, where digitalization processes have priority. A sociological study conducted by the authors to determine the reflective factors of the implementation and impact of digitalization on everyday life of people allowed certain conclusions. Several main vectors have been identified. The first is connected with the formation of the so-called digital culture expressed primarily in the fact that, in addition to traditional interpersonal communication, people are constantly interacting with digital technologies and their carriers. The second vector is presented within the framework of digital economy and structures related to it. Here the largest number of associated benefits is determined and only some negative nuances are identified. The third vector is digital education, which is unacceptable for the majority of citizens if it completely replaces traditional format and acceptable if it assumes the form of additional education and distance formats for a number of professions. Finally, the fourth vector, causing the most contradictory answers, is associated with family values, which, as it was unequivocally defined, a digitalized society is actively trampling.

Keywords: Digital civilization, digital culture, digital economy, digitalization, ethics

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1. Introduction

The current world situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic in a new way levels the attitude of people to the everyday aspects of life. It can be traced in absolutely all spheres; representatives of all professions - politicians, doctors, psychologists, philosophers, economists, IT specialists, and others - speak about it. A special place is given to futurologists. One thing can be said unequivocally - the whole world is in an unprecedented situation, when the threat is great, and the living generation has no experience of getting out of the situation. At the same time, the pandemic served as a trigger for an unprecedented mass use, at least in Russia, of digital technologies.

The growing digitalization has been in the focus of attention for a long time already; the facts of its penetration into different layers of everyday life are obvious. The situation of today, on the one hand, has put "life on pause"; on the other hand, it has forced many processes of gradual implementing of digitalization to speed up. These dichotomous contradictions coexist closely in our reality. Therefore, the previously raised questions about the risks, primarily of the moral and ethical order, caused by the active introduction of digitalization into new areas of life, sound even sharper; at the same time completely new questions appear due to the spontaneity of the pandemic situation in the world. The benefits and harms of life digitalization are really on the scales of time, and there are many risks associated with this.

How to regulate the already existing processes from the point of view of ethics? What new ethical norms should be expanded for the sharply expanded possibilities of digitalization, which is in a way helpful during the period of forced distancing and which will certainly significantly expand its influence after the period of the pandemic? Moreover, for such large country as Russia with a not very large population, digitalization could act as a competent civilizational solution to many problems. But, on the other hand, the complicated ethical and legal regulations and the traditional moral and patriarchal way of life have become the stumbling stone and an object of analysis.

2. Problem Statement

The ethical side of the digitalization process was considered by both foreign and Russian scientists and researchers. Among foreign researchers, first of all, it is necessary to single out Harrison and Huntington (2002), authors of the book "Culture Matters" published in 2002 and still relevant. The authors have clearly shown that while introducing the digital economy in different countries, it is necessary, among other accompanying factors, to take into account cultural differences (Huntington, 2002).

A number of researchers pay attention to the benefits and ethical problems arising in the implementation of digital education. For example, Buchanan (2019), a researcher at the School of Education, University of Newcastle, draws attention to the problems that appear during digital learning; at the same time, however, Basili et al. (2017) the coordinator of European Information Literacy Network, demonstrates that digital humanities can strengthen the external impact of humanities research, particularly the commitment to public participation, through the strategic opportunities offered by digital methods.

At the same time, the majority of scientists and researchers express concern about certain problems brought by the process of digitalization. For example, Jonathan Cole, Assistant Director of the Center for

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Social and Contextual Theology at Charles Sturt University, Canberra, explores issues related to the ethical use of new information technologies (Cole, 2015).

Sarah Spiekermann, Director of the Institute for Information Systems and Society at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, who study the problems at the intersection of computer science, philosophy, psychology and economics, together with her colleagues expresses concern about mass digitalization (Spiekermann, 2017).

A number of researchers, such as Andrejevic (2019), professor of the School of Media, Film and Journalism at Monash University, and Coleman (2019), professor of the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University, have expressed a negative attitude towards the inevitable increase in digital surveillance connected with the introduction of new digital technologies.

Stressing the positive aspects of digitalization, Christian Fuchs, professor of Social Media at the University of Westminster (Fuchs, 2015), and American researchers Dipayan Ghosh and Ben Scott (Ghosh & Scott, 2018), draw attention to the fact that digital technology will inevitably lead to an increase in fake news, polarization of society, and sometimes to hatred incitement.

Also, foreign authors pay attention to privacy issues in the development of the digital economy (Ketscher, 2018), to assessment of digital technologies' impact on human rights of the transport industry workers (Falikul, 2019), and to other ethical, moral and legal issues.

Among the main research areas developed by Russian scientists, it is necessary to single out the comprehension of technological, economic and socio-anthropological risks (Arshinov & Alekseeva, 2016; Budanov et al., 2017).

It is important to search for transformational changes associated with digitalization and happening in educational, scientific, cultural practices that have the potential to form the context of digital culture (Astafieva et al., 2018; Basalaeva & Lukina, 2017; Kuznetsova, 2019).

Various aspects of the digital economy are discussed in the studies of Russian economists (Auzan, 2014; Glazyev, 2017). It is especially necessary to highlight the opinion of A.A. Auzan, the professor of Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov; he is convinced that "the digital economy brings the problem of culture to the fore, thus, economic efficiency becomes a fact of cultural predisposition to its active transformations in a particular country, region, etc." (as cited in Auzan, 2014, p. 21).

However, digitalization has not been considered yet from the point of view of the consequences of the processes of society digitalization through the prism of their perception by people at the level of the good or harm; after all, ordinary people are the main and most massive consumers of digital technologies.

3. Research Questions

Revealing of the problem necessitates answering a number of questions on the dichotomous attitude of the population to the digitalization process in the following areas:

- culture and interpersonal interaction in the new conditions of forming the digital culture;
- economics, finance, digital financial structures of digital economy;
- digital education and online education;
- family values.

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4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to show the dichotomous essence of the ethical component as the most important personal component of the modern information society, where the priority is given to digitalization processes.

5. Research Methods

The research methodology is analytical, interdisciplinary, philosophically and sociologically oriented. The main methods used were categorical-logical, system-structural, dialectical, as well as the method of statistical analysis of information. The dichotomous approach, which is reflected even in the title of the article, made it possible to consider the results of the study from the standpoint of opposing the impact of the consequences of the processes of digitalization of society through the prism of their perception by ordinary people at the level of good or harm. In general, one can speak about the dual, antinomic impact of digitalization, which is, in principle, characteristic of such a large-scale process. The empirical basis is a sociological study "The attitude of the population to the digital economy", carried out with the participation of the authors in February-May, 2020. The study consists of two parts – conducting seven focus groups and a questionnaire survey of the population. The general population consists of residents of the Kursk region aged 18 and over - 920 thousand people; the sampling method is quota; 65 people took part in focus groups, the sample population of the questionnaire survey - 384 respondents. We repeatedly tested this sample during other studies in the region (Podgorny, 2017).

6. Findings

The results of the study allow conclusions regarding the dichotomous division of the foundations and skills of the ethical and legal regulations and the moral and traditional way of life in the context of the development of the society digitalization processes among the respondents, which can be traced in relation to a number of specific vectors.

The first vector is culture, interpersonal interaction in the new conditions of forming digital culture. It is well-known that today a significant part of users of social networks "dump" a lot of unprotected information of various, including intimate properties, about themselves into the network or into cloud storage. Numerous public scandals are caused by stealing intimate photos, for example, of a public person. Research results show that up to 30 % do not consider such actions shameful, especially if they can be turned into money. At the same time, about 50 % of respondents do not consider such actions to be normal; they do not publish personal information on social networks, and also do not leave personal information on forums. There is also a group of respondents - about 17 % who did not think about the possible problems connected with posting information about themselves or other people on the Internet.

The second vector is the economy and financial structures in the conditions of forming the digital economy. As the focus group participants note, in addition to the undoubted benefits that have appeared with the introduction of a digital approach in the economy, management, trade, the expanding digitalization poses a danger in terms of theft of bank card data and passwords, omnipresent contextual advertising, etc.

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Information leakage, despite the efforts of information security services, happens more and more often even in large conglomerates (take, for example, the recent situation in Sberbank, when because of fraudsters' activities hundreds of bank clients were affected). The results of the survey show that more than 50 % of respondents buy online; the second half of the respondents do not consider this method of purchasing goods or services to be reliable. At the same time, about 48 % prefer to use cash for payments, 40 % prefer bank cards and about 10 % use bank applications on smartphones.

The third vector is online education. Undoubtedly, the main thing that attracts respondents in the online education format is its accessibility, structure, and visibility. At the same time, most focus group participants, when discussing issues related to online education, speak in favor of the traditional format of the educational process. The same results are obtained from the analysis of the survey of respondents. However, focus group participants also emphasize that the online format is suitable for additional educational formats such as narrow-profile seminars, retraining, and others, when students already have fundamental knowledge, skills of using it, etc. It is also worth mentioning here that about 90 % of respondents with school-age children are strongly against the transition of school education to a distance format. At the same time, the majority of focus group participants are definitely in favor of a remote work, of the so-called freelance variations.

The fourth vector is family values. Focus group participants note that family values are being transformed in the context of digitalization; traditional values are being actively trampled on. The most remarkable thing is that absolutely everyone feels the qualitative changes that level this part of human life, and the polarity of the respondents' conclusions about this process is almost halved. Some say that the destruction of traditional family ways of life associated with the forms of traditional marriage, traditional family upbringing and the consolidation of classical values will lead to an indisputable and catastrophic destruction of society foundations. At the same time, the respondents speak positively about such results of digitalization as dating sites, more opportunities for self-realization of a woman, in particular, during the maternity leave period, etc.

7. Conclusion

The research results show that today in Russian society there is a classic dichotomous situation, which has divided both supporters and opponents of digitalization approximately equally. At least half of modern Russian society has not yet fully realized the level and scale of digital transformations; moreover, we can say that many citizens of the country are not yet morally ready for what they already live in. On the other hand, it is possible to build a specific action plan aimed at solving moral, ethical and legal problems related to the digitalization of the environment. We believe it is especially important to introduce a professional code of ethics in industries directly related to the development, storage, dissemination of information, where the positions of human life value, freedoms, attention to the moral and axiological component of activity and its consequences should be emphasized. Also it is necessary to continue the already set trends in such institutional blocks as the digital economy, digital education, digital medicine (Volokhova & Aseeva, 2016), digital science, digital culture, digital communication, etc., where the impact of digitalization and the consequences of its implementation is massive, and the level of responsibility increases significantly.

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