

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****DESTRUCTIVE TRENDS OF DIGITAL CULTURE: “SIDE
EFFECTS” OF NEW MEDIA**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of destructive trends in digital culture that are manifested in the communication processes of new media. The purpose of the article is to analyze the social and cultural “side effects” of new media that cause destructive manifestations of digital culture. The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach, since the problem under study is directly related to a number of scientific areas, as well as a communicative approach aimed at analyzing various aspects of digital communications. The paper shows that the “side effects” of new media are an important indicator of destructive trends in digital culture. In addition to digital means of transferring and broadcasting cultural experience, society is experiencing a shift in the content of cultural values, which are now often associated with technical innovations, successful adaptation to the digital environment. The digital space of new media has a negative impact on the modern person, who often becomes a victim of social and mental addictions, hidden manipulations, and is also subject to the transformation of the boundaries of identity (including as a result of mixing the digital and real “I”). The destructive effects of digital culture, despite the progressive technical transformations of reality, are the processes of erosion of true knowledge, the replacement of objective knowledge with global flows of unverified information, the presence of planned misinformation and, as a consequence, the appearance of the phenomenon of “post-truth”.

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1. Introduction

The trends in the development of modern culture are interpreted by the humanities in different contexts, but special attention is increasingly paid to the social and cultural aspects of the global digitalization of reality. The large-scale spread of digital communications, the growing dynamics of the introduction of innovative technologies have led to the fact that “digitalization from a simple method of improving various private aspects of life has turned into a driver of world social development, ensuring an increase in the efficiency of the economy and an improvement in the quality of life” (Halin & Chernova, 2018, p. 47).

New forms of communication radically change cultural values, attitudes, norms, ideals, and such a transformation of cultural mechanisms causes a digital shift in the anthropological environment. As scientists note, “a critical mass of consistent innovative developments have come together over the past half century to create a huge new 'thermonuclear' explosion of information and social interaction” (Meyer, 2018, p. 9846), which could not but affect culture. A new type of culture is increasingly called digital.

2. Problem Statement

Digital culture is “a fundamentally different type of development of society, in which analog and linear formats of communication and functioning of systems are replaced by digital, electronic ... they not only determine the nature and direction of human and social activity, but also become the main ones that determine the goals and meanings of human life and work” (Astaf'eva et al., 2018, p. 519). Its appearance is associated with the development of digital means of communication, electronic devices, information technologies and programs that provide constant communication, mobility and regular access to information. The electronic nature of digital culture changes the reality in which a modern person is immersed, including the principles of interaction, behavioral codes, ways and speed of transmission of values and cultural stereotypes.

New media, which are adapted for digital devices and digital information processing, act as means of digital communications. Their electronic nature allows for continuous communication, enhances the mobility of the recipient of messages, and ensures prompt communication. As sociologist Rejngold (2006) noted, “electronic word processing and virtual communities, eBay and electronic commerce, Google and weblogs with reputation systems” (p. 256) emerged as a result of the integration of mobile communications, ubiquitous computing and information and communication technologies.

In this regard, digital culture has led to the emergence of a new person, a person of the digital age - “digitalman”, who is characterized by the daily use of digital devices to interact with people. Digital culture is embodied in digital communications, supported by the presence of the Internet and electronic gadgets. The traditional artifact is replaced by a virtual artifact (for example, in virtual museums), a traditional signature on a document is an electronic signature, a printed photograph is a virtual photo on an online resource. The digital society is multi-communicative with the ability to quickly exchange information. Cultural values, images, stereotypes within the digitalman's daily communications are transformed into a digital environment, where they acquire a virtual character.

The socio-cultural consequences of digitalization are only now beginning to be comprehended by the scientific community. The digitalization of society makes the alienation of a person from their essence even deeper, where, as modern Marxists note, “the kingdom of mass media and the production of spectacles is replacing the machine production of goods, the cult of consumption is replacing the cult of labor, and the motive of compensation is replacing the maintenance of existence as the main motive of labor” (Dudnik, 2020, p. 17). Digital culture causes a whole range of risks in society, one of which is a radical change in the daily life of young people, and fragmentation, individualization of society (Kravchenko, 2019). We must agree with the opinion that the digital era has introduced not only personal freedom “but also serious, unknown to previous generations, risks of mental pathologies and massive distortion of universal human moral norms ... a shift in the real and virtual worlds in human consciousness” (Andreev & Nazarova, 2015, p. 89).

Therefore, we believe that one of the most important scientific problems is the lack of comprehensive knowledge about the social and cultural consequences that digital culture determines. And one of the directions of this kind of research is the analysis of destructive trends in the development of digital culture, which are manifested in the modern media environment.

3. Research Questions

New media are the conductor of digital culture, giving rise to the possibilities of endless interactivity of the communicative space in which a person is immersed. With the help of digital devices, texts are constantly being changed or refined.

Miller (2011) notes this specificity of digital culture, emphasizing that the existing cultural form of “storytelling”, along with authorship, has been problematized in networked, hyperlinked digital media: products are always incomplete, and the reading paths contain hyperlinks and networks, relations between creators and the audience is often anti-hierarchical and the output is products of joint designs. (p. 25)

New media, in fact, represent an alternative to traditional media, and their specificity is reflected in the nature of digital culture. According to Matthews (2010), “new media is a collection of online technologies, techniques and environments that people use to create content and exchange news, opinions, experiences and interests” (p. 18). In this regard, new media usually include blogs, podcasts, video publishing and sharing services (for example, YouTube), social networks (for example, Facebook, microblogging (for example, Twitter), video conferencing, instant messaging systems (ICQ, AOL Messenger), etc.

New media have such properties as multimedia, interactivity and hypertextuality. Communication processes in new media are distinguished by the speed of information transfer, openness and brevity. The content of traditional media was created by people with professional competencies (journalists, writers), which guaranteed a certain cultural level of the texts. New media presuppose the presence of a user who can not only create multimedia content on their own, but can also distribute it using special programs,

services, and also consume texts from other users. Consequently, another feature of new media is the emergence of a new communicative role of the user (mixing the sender and the recipient of information).

The online format of new media and the ability of an ordinary person to participate in creating texts, expanding the boundaries of texts, the use of information technology is a digital model for creating and distributing content within the framework of digital culture. The digital content of new media is placed on virtual platforms and services (applications, websites) that are available to a million audiences. New media messages are characterized not only by interactivity and the possibility of their editing, but also by brevity and frequent visual accompaniment.

At the same time, new media not only blur the boundaries between the sender and the recipient of messages in digital communications, but also minimize the private sphere at the expense of ubiquitous transparency (Nazarov, 2018). Using digital devices and being in a virtual environment often negatively affects many aspects of the user's life. It is no coincidence that scholars claim that such a situation "presents a person with numerous cognitive, emotional, motivational, social and cultural problems" (Meyer, 2018, p. 9846). The user of new media regularly encounters such digital phenomena as fake news, spam attacks, trolling, sexting, etc., which have a destructive effect both on culture in general and on individuals.

So the research question is: what destructive effects do new media have? How do they affect the trends in the development of digital culture? Accessibility, simplification of forms, instant communication give rise to the so-called "side effects" of digital culture. Let us consider some of these destructive trends that are manifesting in new media digital communications.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main goal of this work is to analyze the "side effects" that new media exhibit in the context of digital culture. Thus, the study is aimed at identifying the key destructive manifestations of digital culture through the prism of communications in the space of new media.

5. Research Methods

The research methodology assumes reliance on an interdisciplinary approach, since the stated problems are related to a number of scientific areas. Integration of culturological, philosophical, sociological aspects of the problem into a single context will allow achieving interdisciplinary synthesis in the analysis of destructive trends in digital culture. The author relies on a communicative approach, which is aimed at revealing various aspects of digital communications in the study, focusing on the processes of encoding messages, the nature of the addressee, trajectories and specifics of the distribution of messages in new media to implement such a strategy.

6. Findings

Let's consider the main destructive tendencies of digital culture, which are "side effects" of the communication processes of new media.

Firstly, within the framework of digital communications, hidden manipulations often occur, which are adapted to the specifics of new media due to the frequent anonymity of messages, which causes a certain

danger due to the latent nature of such manipulations and implicit manifestations. These include, for example, massive spam attacks in the form of mass following (mass subscription to network users in order to attract attention to their own account) and mass-like (automatic process of putting “likes” on publications and commenting). In most cases, the victims of this kind of hidden digital manipulation are young people who are vulnerable during the period of socialization and strive to improve their status in the digital environment.

Secondly, the digital environment causes the process of erosion of sustainable knowledge and, consequently, the substitution of this knowledge with unverified information. This side effect arises from the information redundancy that characterizes the functioning of new media. Digital platforms for new media, in particular social networks, have a fundamentally different structure than traditional media, where “content can be transferred between users without significant third-party filtering, fact-checking and editorial judgment” (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). Digital content is often created by the layman and is not verified for authenticity. As a result, “a disorderly stream of video and audio information replaces systematized knowledge that is difficult to access and requires conscious effort” (Andreev & Nazarova, 2015, p. 91); knowledge as such is devalued. While the endless process of circulation, updating, editing of digital content often becomes an end in itself, regardless of the content, authenticity or beliefs of people.

Thirdly, a person of digital culture is subject to new psychological addictions that arise as a result of the communicative characteristics of new media. Therefore, the study of media communications has now “transformed into a study of digital differences and the role of digital media in compensating for physical, mental and social addictions” (Givskov & Deuze, 2018, p. 400). So, one of the common addictions that are formed in the era of digital culture is selfie addiction or selfism. This phenomenon is associated with the painful desire of people to constantly update visual information about themselves, with the aim of further posting it on digital media platforms, as well as with the aim of receiving positive feedback from the digital audience (subscribers, friends). Often, such a practice determines the occurrence of hysteria in people, brings them to their emotional and physical exhaustion, which occurs as a result of the replacement of a real image with a virtual one, irrational use of time, negative reviews, etc.

Fourth, the digital environment and the virtualization of everyday life have such destructive effects as the erosion of identities and the emergence of new identities. According to scientists, digital communications and new media forms of representation of everyday experience “entailed a transformation of defining the boundaries of identity”, where “a person is forced to construct and represent his own demand”, resulting in a mixture of digital and real “I” into a single digital public identity (Lisenkova, 2020).

Fifth, digital content circulating in new media often has the effect of planned misinformation, deliberate distortion of information to solve certain problems that the user does not know about. In particular, we are talking about fake news using fake texts, photo and video materials, an artificially created image of a person, which is carried out using Internet bots, fake accounts and other technologies. According to scholars, digital fake news is “deliberately fabricated news stories that are designed to appear credible and spread over the Internet (Leyva & Beckett, 2020). In the modern era, “unreliable, fake news, disseminated as an “alternative” point of view, including through electronic, digital communications, has an impact on public consciousness and largely shape the opinion of citizens (Shushpanova, 2018). As a result of open access to digital content in new media, the so-called “alternative truth” is freely created,

fabricated and distributed to a wide audience, operating with a combination of real facts with fictional ones. In this regard, digital culture is characterized by the emergence of the phenomenon of “post-truth” as rumors or a certain element of subjective, evaluative knowledge, in which the rate is made on emotions. In this case, new media become one of the most important determinants of public opinion, where the honesty of politicians and the reliability of information are no longer a priority, experts and science are treated with suspicion, sometimes with contempt (D’Ancona, 2017).

Sixth, within the framework of digital culture, there is a change not only in the methods of transmission and transfer of cultural values, but also a radical shift in the content of the cultural values themselves. In particular, we agree with the opinion of scientists who believe that in the digital world “we began to rebuild all cultural meanings and values in relation to the technical world ... accordingly, their ideas about happiness, justice and even physicality are changing qualitatively” (Kravchenko, 2019, p. 51). Today, those who have managed to adapt to the digital environment are successful, and the realization of digital opportunities often sets the bar for good and evil. The priority of the values of novelty and the primitiveness of traditional practices changes the digitalman's picture of the world and forms new cultural stereotypes based on the idealization of technical innovations, which is reflected in the corresponding principles of coding everyday reality and behavioral norms of people.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that the “side effects” of new media are an important indicator of destructive trends in digital culture. The generation of the digital age is faced with new cultural phenomena and forms of communication, acquiring new communicative roles in new media practices. In addition to the digitalization of the ways of transferring and broadcasting cultural experience, there is a cultural shift in the content of cultural values in society. In particular, cultural meanings are being rebuilt in relation to the innovations of the technical world and, as a result, people’s ideas about the ideals and key categories of the modern world are changing. In the digital space of new media, a modern person is subject to hidden manipulations, becomes susceptible to various kinds of social and mental addictions that arise as a result of digital communications. Moreover, especially young people are vulnerable to transformations in the definition of the boundaries of identity, including as a result of mixing digital and real selves. Also, the destructive effects of digital culture, despite the successful technical transformations of reality, are the processes of erosion of true knowledge, substitution of objective knowledge by global flows of unverified information, the presence of planned disinformation and its distortion, the emergence of the phenomenon of “post-truth”.

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