

The "media man": The ethics of communication in the digital age

By

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Abstract

This study presents the results of exploring the communicative ontology of a “media” person who exists as a social subject in the field of digital communication. Digital space is a special place in which the line between reality and illusion, permissiveness and responsibility is blurred. This is a huge uncontrolled mechanism that works according to its own chaotic laws. The purpose of this research is to study the transformations of the communicative field of a “media” person, the status in the context of modern simulative reality. The relevance of the study is caused by the global processes taking place in culture, the process of wide spreading of digital communications all over the world, which is gradually replacing traditional ones. This process is due to the progress of science and technology, as well as the widespread use of the Internet. More and more people are communicating with each other using digital technologies, through the online space. The novelty of the research is in an attempt to consider the problem in a socio-ethical context, since in the modern digital space, due to the specifics of its organization and often uncontrollability, it is rather difficult to set up the moral tuning fork of media communication, since there is no social institution that transmits ethical standards. In fact, communication takes place according to a certain intuitive behavior, and not according to the existing system of agreements in the form of digital ethics norms. There are no uniform rules of behavior in the digital space, but there are some general norms of communicative behavior that can spread from the local space to the global one.

Key words: ethics, online communications, media person, digital technologies, risks.

Introduction

Communication in the digital age is a complex interaction, which is based not only on the ability to competently and logically express one's thoughts, but also on the ability to establish contact by connecting technical devices (media) into a single chain. At the same time, in comparison with offline communication, in which communicators strive for the logical completion of discourse, in online communication the process of exchange of statements, judgments, opinions is fluid, often continuous and depends on where, when, with whom and in what situation a discussion is held.

Currently, the digital space, unfortunately, is still poorly regulated by generally accepted norms, which causes certain risks. The constant presence in the digital communication environment often leads to the fact that it becomes uncomfortable for a person and “loses” its human face.

Materials and Methods

There are many empirical studies of modern authors who have turned their views on the problem of transformation of the human communicative sphere in the context of culture mediatization. Among them are HjavardS. (2013), KnorrC. (2014), KrotzF. (2017), Lundby K.

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(2014), Siapera E. (2012), Hepp A. (2014), Deacon D. (2014), Couldry N. (2013), Averbeck-Lietz S. (2014), Silverstone R. (2006), Schultz W. (2004), Barger R. (2008) and others. The theoretical basis of the research consists of the works of postmodern philosophers Foucault M. (2008), Baudrillard J. (2013), Castells M.

First of all, it is necessary to refer to the opinion of Foucault M. (2008), who confirms that in the process of socialization, a person comes to a certain average behavior and communication, thanks to which a person has the opportunity to coexist in society calmly, avoiding of stress. We are taught to certain ethical standards of calm and favorable interaction. For Foucault, any rationing is, of course, violence. But violence is not in the form of direct aggression, but a certain level of a tough imperative that every person faces as they grow up. This is how any social environment works.

Baudrillard J. is an exponent of the idea of the existence of a special simulative reality, reflecting the modern illusion of a meta-space, where a person himself builds a scenario of being. According to the apt remark of Baudrillard, "the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia acquires full meaning" (Baudrillard, 2013). This thesis perfectly characterizes the state of a modern person living in a stream of fleeting and ever-increasing information and, at the same time, in a vacuum of human communication.

According to Castells M. "If the fundamental battle about the definition of the norms of society, and the application of these norms in everyday life, revolves around the shaping of the human mind, communication is central to this battle. Because it is through communication that the human mind interacts with its social and natural environment" (<http://socium.ge>). This once again confirms the special mission of the media environment, which forms a certain communicative field, where its own structure of morality and ethics of communication is constructed.

Vartanova E.L. (<https://www.nkj.ru>), further developing the idea of Castells M., comes to the conclusion that «the very idea of a "media person" is the idea of a person whose existence is directly formed by the process of receiving, consuming and comprehending mediatized information, the media environment, and social, individual existence in fact is implemented in information and communication processes. The process of mediatization, which is associated with the production, storage, processing and consumption of information, is becoming one of the fundamental in personal and social experience». Kolomeets T.V, like other modern researchers, accurately notes that "the irreversible process of transformation into Homo digitalis is actively continuing, the "digitization" of our life continues" (Kolomeets, 2019). Polonskiy A.V. formulates the concept of "medialect" (<http://dspace.bsu.edu.ru>) as "a form of expression of the consciousness of a "media person" actualizes the understanding of the transformation of the foundations of human existence in the context of the ontology of communication.

Results and Discussion

Contact as a certain technical possibility of maintaining communication is practically not interrupted today. Along with the generally accepted speech etiquette norms, such as "see you soon", "goodbye", the expressions "I'll be in touch" and "On the line" are increasingly used. Communication in a broad sense has come to be identified with the use of modern technologies. These are email, phone call, skype, social networks, blogosphere, and instant messengers. This

allows us to consider them an important element of socio-cultural and communicative practices, with the help of which the possibility of continuing communication (“On the line”) and its continuity (“in touch”) are recorded.

Thus, it can be seen that a modern person is constantly in the space of communication, in constant interaction with the outside world (in touch 24/7), losing the opportunity to be alone and enjoy silence.

With the continuity of physical contact, when a person is always “in touch,” the communicative contact itself usually fades into the background. A striking example of this is the use of texting. As a form of media communication, texting is the transmission of an SMS message using compression of the text to the minimum size, based on the principle of transmitting a maximum of information through a minimum of symbols.

To convey the emotional content of the communicator, the text is saturated with various signs-symbols in the form of "emoticons", and "increased emotional arousal of the writer can be indicated by repetition of the exclamation mark, capital letters" (Meshkova, 2012). The mosaicism of new forms of communication does not imply the construction of a consistent discourse; the communication itself is usually short-lived and assumes that new symbols and abbreviations are already known to the participants in the communication.

Communication, in which completely different, often unfamiliar people, who are at a great distance from each other, can participate, has become the norm in a person's everyday life. The new reality that a person has encountered in connection with the spread of the coronavirus is being studied by sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, ethnologists and other specialists who study man and society. There has been a fundamental shift in the digital space, 2020 became a point of no return in the formation of a new ethics of digital communication.

What transformations the ethics of communication at telecommuting has undergone was discussed thoroughly by Andrei Goloshchapov in the article published in the journal "Snob" (Goloshchapov, 2002): "Digital ethics began to transform from the opposite - excluding what annoys the majority." Referring to the study conducted by the «Comunica» agency during the 2020 pandemic among employees of marketing and PR agencies in Moscow on the specifics of online communication in self-isolation, the author identifies 3 basic rules for conflict-free communication with colleagues and clients. So especially annoying factors are identified as following ones:

- more than 5 minutes late;
- eating during a conversation;
- being in noisy places.

It should be noted that none of the three above-mentioned irritants cause great discomfort and conflict situations in offline communication, they are quite frequent there. The reason for rejection lies in the imbalance between the verbal and audiovisual content of communication, misunderstandings and conflict situations arise, but that could be avoided by adhering to certain rules of behavior in the network. That is, there are psychological risks of media communication.

What risks can we talk about when a person independently, without constraint, forms platforms, creates interest groups, in which questions of interest are discussed, an opinion is openly expressed, and events of personal life are broadcasted? After all, a person himself determines with whom to communicate, what, when and how to broadcast. Moreover, “media” people, if necessary, have the ability to hide the facts of real life, give a minimum of information or remain unrecognizable, changing their identity. That is, to preserve an integrity through anonymous communication.

However, there are also negative factors that need to be highlighted as common barriers to digital communication.

Mobbing. The relative freedom of speech on the Internet sometimes corrupts a person, and a person stops thinking about the feelings of other people. So, supporters of one opinion attack a person with a different opinion, thereby committing psychological violence against others. Sadly, this scary phenomenon is quite popular, since such an easy way of self-affirmation is enjoyable and does not cause any consequences. It is important to take full account of online statements and not to violate the personal space of others.

Hosting. A common phenomenon that many people practice, since most people perceive network communication as something frivolous and non-binding.

Striving for approval. Many people are chasing a large number of "likes", because this is a kind of assessment of a personality, and the higher it is, the more attractive a person is. Sometimes the pursuit of approval extends to absurd; a person begins to frantically embellish themselves and the achievements, which leads to certain consequences. A person ceases to be himself, and not only mood, but even self-awareness and self-esteem depend on the number of "likes".

Communicative dialogue in several messengers at the same time. It is unethical to conduct one dialogue on different sites, moving from one messenger to another just because it is convenient. It is necessary to respect the interlocutor, find compromises and communicate on a suitable site for everyone.

Conclusion

Communication between people is increasingly being replaced by a dialogue between a person and their gadget. The mediator becomes both a projection of the person and the interlocutor. However, with the expansion of the possibilities of communication, its content cannot remain unchanged. At the same time, there are things that are timeless. No matter by what means a person exchanges information, they will think in the same way as all people on Earth, regardless of the era.

In the game model of the complex relationship between reality and illusion, manifestations of masquerade and impersonal elements, there are all the main problems of compliance with ethical norms of communication, “to play with identity was predicated on the simple fact that Internet users were geographically remote from one another” (www.philol.msu.ru).

The digital online space, as well as offline communication, should have their own rules of behavior, since it is important for maintaining, first of all, healthy relationships between people, the mental well-being of each individual and the creation of a comfortable space. Respecting norms of personal boundaries, that is, restricting access to a certain circle of users to especially personal information, avoiding ignoring the interlocutor, attacking someone with an oppositional opinion - all this should become the basis of a person's digital life.

A person, in an attempt to protect himself from aggression, starts using filters to create a kind of comfortable information environment for himself. By creating a space for himself thanks to the possibility of forming a convenient agenda at the level of publics, putting "likes" to people who are close at the mental level, a person creates his own illusory world, in which it is safe and comfortable. Against this background, an extreme polarization occurs, since a person forgets how to listen to the Other, to understand the value of his being. In some extent a person loses communication as a discursive practice of expressing ones thoughts in polemics with the Other. And this makes us think about the transformation of man as a social being.

Let's highlight the basic rules of media communication ethics, the observance of which will reduce the risks of misunderstanding and conflict situations to a low level.

The principle of agreement. In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is necessary to outline the boundaries of digital interaction. Business issues can and should be resolved before a required hour. You need to be able to distribute the time and respect the Other's personal time. In the evening hours, it is advisable to communicate in the digital space by prior arrangement. An exception may be force majeure.

Communication analogy or mirroring principle. Voice messages, emojis, stickers can be sent only when there is confidence; all interlocutors understand them the same way. That is, if there is no rejection, you can do the same.

Respect for personal boundaries. Adherence to the norms of privacy (the dichotomy of Ally/ Foe) allows you to feel safe, protected from negative external influences. Compliance with this communication norm allows each person to realize in practice the primary need for security. This problem is revealed and remarkably analyzed by the modern researcher of the normative content of the privacy, Porohovskaya T.I. (Porohovskaya, 2014). In her opinion, "the leading edge of modern developments in the topic of privacy is information privacy in the context of new computer and information technologies. Their emergence is associated with new opportunities for abuse in the field of information privacy. The topic of privacy in the workplace is relevant and little developed.

Summing up, I would like to note that despite the fact that "medialization is a process that changes everything, because it creates new conditions for the basic human activity of communication" (Tubaro, 2019), the ethics of relations between people today must maintain the same principles as before the advent of innovative technologies and the internet.

Since a person will always remain a human, and in any era, the manifestation of respect and benevolence will be appreciated regardless of the place and form of communication since "the Ethical studies concentrate on the ability of the person to determine right from wrong, and to consistently evaluate his or her ethics in relation to actions and decision-making. In almost every facet of business, education, medicine and computer ethics is an important factor" (Serhat

Bahadır Kert et al., 2012). In other words, the process of mediatization and digitalization of all spheres of culture cannot rid society of ethical norms, which should fulfill their stabilizing function. The process of forming a new ethics of media communication has not yet been completed, there are no unified transparent rules, but there are basic opinions and consequences due to which the communication process becomes much more comfortable.

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