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N. S. Yegorov Internet and personality of digital natives: the problem of virtual boundaries

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Abstract. The paper dwells on the problem of the relationship of reality and Internet virtuality. The competitive structures of virtual interactions in the mental continuums of the Internet and related changes in the semantic structure of the individual are clarified. These changes are transformed at the intersection of traditional life practices and newly emerging, multiplying virtual environments. The question of the bases and forms of recognition of the new social network and local personal reality of communications is raised; the general and everyday changes in the life of a human Internet user are clarified; in this regard, we analyze the value structures of public consciousness, the dominants of its sacred otherness, changed as a result of the emergence of new information technologies and their carriers, the generation of "digital natives".

Keywords: information society; Internet virtuality; competition of spaces; changing personality; digital natives

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Егоров Н. С. Интернет и личность «цифровых аборигенов»: к проблеме виртуальных границ

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Аннотация. Рассмотрена проблема соотношения реальности и интернетвиртуальности. Уточняются конкурентные структуры виртуальных взаимодействий в ментальных континуумах Интернета и связанные с этим перемены в смысловой структуре личности, преобразующейся на пересечении традиционных жизненных практик и вновь возникающих, приумножающихся виртуальных сред. Ставится вопрос об основаниях и формах распознания новой социально-сетевой и локальной личностной реальности коммуникаций; уточняются общие и повседневные (бытовые) перемены в жизни человека-пользователя мирового Интернета; в связи с этим анализируются ценностные структуры общественного самосознания, доминанты его сакрального инобытия, изменившееся в следствие появления новых информационных технологий и их носителей, поколения «цифровых аборигенов».

Ключевые слова: информационное общество; интернет-виртуальность; конкуренция пространств; преобразующаяся личность; «цифровые аборигены». Для цитирования: Егоров Н.С. Интернет и личность «цифровых аборигенов»: к проблеме виртуальных границ // Научный результат. Социальные и гуманитарные исследования. 2020. Т. б. № 1. С. 95-102. DOI: 10.18413/2408-932Х-2020-6-1-0-10

Currently, all spheres of human's life have been influenced by the Internet: it transforms the system of education, ways of communication, and changes the society. The issue of interaction between the real life and the Internet as another virtual reality appeared at the end of the XX century¹. Many researchers investigated an important role of the Internet in modern life becoming more and more complex; the changing personality is like looking in the mirror of all those virtually communal or interactive being. This is not to say that the being of the changing personality or its practically reflective mirror is philosophically clear; there are a lot of opportunities to analyze it. In the following article, I would like to discuss a hypothesis on the situated semantic boundaries of its virtual representation (or, in other words, its social otherness).

In his book "The Great Disruption", Francis Fukuyama argues that the Internet is designed to reshape our society. After the end of history proclaimed by this philosopher, the information revolution will supposedly allow us to regain our lost unity: the unity of the space of work (organized by digital means of communication) and the space of family life. The new social order will return us to the existing social order (Fukuyama, 1999). Then, Jean Baudrillard criticizes Francis Fukuyama for being overly optimistic and writes that the Internet is not the solution to problems, but is problem itself ("In Fragments") the (Baudrillard, 2007). Baudrillard does not explain exactly what kind of universal changes the Internet creates, but from his reflections on media, we can understand that the threat of the Internet is that it provokes the mindless

consumption of signs; it leads to the disappearance of the value of the real world; it suggests life in the space of images that become the metalanguage of an absent world (Comp.: Baudrillard 1970). To understand the problem modernly based on common sense it is necessary to explore how the Internet creates a new space-time zone, a new way of communication, and forms a new matrix of social contacts, individual as well as net-local (See, f.e.: Zhao, 2006).

It can be assumed that there are two dominant concepts to understand the interactions of real life and the Internet at the moment: 1) automodern by Robert Samuels (Samuels, 2008) and 2) digimodernism (digital modernism) by Alan Kirby (Kirby 2009). Automodern focuses on the parallel processes of automation and personal autonomy, which are the main contradiction of modern life, and digimodernism is based on the identification of a new type of textuality that arose in the process of computerization. In Russia, the research of the works of Robert Samuels and Alan Kirby is carried out by I.V. Nechaev (Nechaev, 2010a); (Nechaev, 2010b). But the problem of boundary between life reality and the web space is not studied enough. Moreover, the problem of how the Internet impacts the life world, which is out of web space, is of great interest. It is especially interesting, what way does the Internet impact the consciousness of the society and everyday life of a person?

It is more and more factually diverse how objective reality is replaced by internetworld; the Internet becomes one more mental human habitat. It can be realized as "a human need to visionary doublet the world. In this sense TV and computer tools of visualization help to understand human's nature. Necessities of fancy being, when the world is represented as an adventure, are anthropological

¹ Manual Castells already in 1996 called opportunity of access to the Internet the most important for modern culture. See: (Castells, 1996), comp.: (Webster, 2006).



features" (Mikeshina, Openkov, 1997). This problem is especially important for people, who are born in the era of the Internet – "digital natives" (Bennett, Karvin, Maton, 2008). Disappearing of space-temporary boundaries since the early childhood becomes the feature of outlook formation (Maksimova, 2013: 6). Analyzing this phenomenon, we understand the reality more exactly making the space for a new or personally updated consciousness of the digital natives (Brown, 2000); (Tapscott, 2008).

The imagination about the Internet develops from the view of new axiology of spaces. One of the spaces is thought to be more important, the other - less important. N. Koroleva and V. Chernomoretz write about the results of their empirical research: "permanent users have special adaptation to being in web space <...> the sense center of their life goes to the sphere of virtual reality" (Koroleva, Chernomoretz, 2004: 176). They are based on the research conducted by K. S. Young and D. N. Greenfield (Young, 1998); (Greenfield, 1999). One of the reasons for free transition of sense center to the sphere of virtual reality is that web space doesn't lose reality in its amount: it gives the feeling of information infinity to a person. It occurs because of limited possibilities of information usage. Thus, a user doesn't see any difference between the size of the Internet and a real world (Helsper, Eynon, 2009); (Moran, 2016).

Changing personality as the individual images of a person reflected and localized in virtual mirrors is in the tense attitude to the real world. One of the ways of interpreting the English acronym of "PC" is in understanding it as "Personal Culture" (Samuels, 2008: 229). The latter is more stative and demanding than controlled web space. It is easy for the user to give preference to Internet virtuality, so network gamers are often much more concerned about their game appearance than about the appearance of their own.

This attitude towards the Internet environment is sometimes understood as a form of escapism (Shapinskaja, 2014), but this definition is not really sufficient, for the gamer his/her virtual social status is important no less than the real one because of which in the Internet space there is more important "society" for him (Allison, Wahlde, Shockley, Gabbard, 2006). This "society" consists of gamers, people who hold similar views. "Active communication and self-expression in a social network can serve as a vivid example of the fact that the Internet as a medium is the "real" social sphere of a modern teenager, since it provides a young person with all the same social functions that he needs in his "real" life in accordance with psychological age characteristics" (Kramarenko, Somov, 2013: 44).

In some cases, the importance of virtual space can go as far as sacralization. If we follow the logic of M. Eliade, the virtuality becomes sacred, and the reality becomes profane. Here is how A. Zabiyako describes the sacralization of the Internet environment: "The contours of a different type of cyberreligion are opening before us. <...> in the coordinate system of this mentality, computer virtual reality acts as a higher reality, supervaluable other being, which is beyond the boundaries of everyday existence and dominates over it" (Zabijako, Voronkova, Lapin, Pratyna: 2012: 32).

It's important to consider the issue of space competitiveness from the point of view of simple timekeeping, you can trace the correlation: the more time a person spends on the Web, the less time he has to live in real space. Consequently, less attention is paid to reality and household as part of it. The number of necessary things in housing is also reduced. The Internet is driving things such as radio, television, children's toys, books, and even musical instruments out of living space. The Internet virtuality offers alternatives to meet information and entertainment needs. Instead of traditional media - video channels; computer games instead of toys; instead of "live music" - audio from the Web. All these tools to meet various needs in material form are located on the screen of a computer, tablet or phone. Since one gadget performs the function of such bulky objects as a bookcase, the



living space is empty. Thus, as the value of some things weakens, we observe a phenomenon that can be called consumption hygiene.

If until the twentieth century, redundancy in home life was associated with the status of the owner, was a measure of his wealth and success, then in the modern world the redundancy of objects, forms, colors of the interior is associated with foolishness, kitsch. In a room that is freed from a large number of furniture and household items, we see the prerequisites for the popularity of minimalism in interior design. Currently, minimalism has been a style that not only frees the room from the objects that are displaced by the Internet, but also minimizes the factors that distract the user from being in Internet virtuality. Minimalism provokes detachment from reality by minimizing diversity, contrasts, and brightness - all that attracts a person's attention (Newport, 2019). Thus, we conclude that the minimalism of interiors is currently largely popular because it is convenient for Internet users and meets their needs.

Undoubtedly, the influence of the Internet on the user extends to the information society as a whole. This influence will inevitably lead to changes in society. The World Wide Web is not only self-arranging within itself, but also arranges a society. An example of the increasing influence of the Internet on political life is "e-democracy" or "virtual democracy". E-democracy is a form of interaction between people and authorities, in which the processes of informing and involving citizens in politics, voting, joint discussion and decision-making, control over their implementation, etc. implemented on the basis of the latest information and communication technologies (Macintosh, 2004).

We should note the changes that the World Wide Web brings to public consciousness. Social consciousness is the spiritual side of society, that acts as a set of ideas, thoughts, people's ideas about themselves (selfawareness), about events and phenomena of reality, about society as a whole (worldview) (Schlitz, Vieten, Miller, 2010). Let's consider how the society worldview is changing, thanks to the influence of the Internet space on the examples of such signs of modern society as planetarity, blurring of the social vertical and transparency.

1. Planetary, or global, social consciousness. The Internet user is in the world "global village", according of the to M. McLuhan. The Internet (INTERnational NETwork) is an international network. The distance between the source of information and the consumer ceases to matter, so the user feels himself to be a part of the global information field. However, it should be noted that some states (China with the Great Chinese Firewall, North Korea with the internal network of Kwanmen) artificially limit the planetary nature of the Internet.

2. A blur social vertical. The Internet does not have a fixed hierarchical structure. The Internet is multipolar; it is built as a distributed and self-organizing system. The device of the social network can also be called horizontal, since users have equal opportunities. Any user can write to anyone else who has opened access for correspondence. At the same time, any user can restrict access to their profile. Thus, we see that users are equalized by one set of features. S. Katrechko notes that the type of society characteristic of social networks can be correlated with the anarchist ideal of society as "a horizontal collection of freely coexisting small communities" (Kramarenko, Somov, 2013: 63). M. Egoumenides also writes about this correlation (Egoumenides, 2014: 208). J. P. Barlow considers antior non-statehood one of the features of the network (Barlow, 1996). Another factor that influences the blurring of the vertical is the change in social roles and high social mobility within the Internet space. Social networks level status signs (income, power, education). The Internet as a fast disseminator of information offers a wide range of opportunities for instantly gaining wide publicity or for destroying a reputation. This makes the social structure more mobile than in the "before digital era".

3. Transparency. Transparency is the lack of secrecy, the availability of any infor-



mation (Carpenter, 2000). Openness, universal access to information - these are the achievements of modern society that took shape thanks to the Internet and social networks. A social network gives information an environment in which it can freely be distributed, broadcast through news feeds and personal messages. At the same time, there are no ethical or market restrictions in the social network, which allow users to access information that is not disseminated through traditional media (Yegorov, 2018). Having mentioned the positive impact of transparency on society as a whole, it should be noted that transparency is a threat to the private information of a particular person.

There is no doubt that the Internet is a phenomenon, which shapes modern public consciousness, therefore, freedom of access to the World Wide Web is becoming a measure of the development of the information society. Access to the Internet determines the right of citizenship in the information age (Brown, 2003).

Thus, we see that reality and Internet virtuality in the modern world compete. The Internet not only displaces reality from the user's life, but also causes the transformation of such segments of reality as life and the organization of social life processes.

The influence of the World Wide Web is so great that public consciousness is changing as a result of the emergence of new informational realities.

The outcome of these findings is the fundamental problem of real world autonomy. This problem remains open for further study that aims at fixing new boundaries between Internet virtuality and reality.

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