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THE INTERNET AND VIRTUAL „REALITY”

Abstract: The Internet is undoubtedly one of the most provocative sociological and psychological phenomena. In addition, the Internet is a new virtual world of „reality”. Computer Communications and entire virtual culture show inseparable connection between technology and society. The Internet connects people, connects all those struggling communicators who cannot cope in the real world. But, would it be fair to speak about human interaction in space, which is not a space, in the time that is stuck somewhere between computer programs and the people who are not people but „borrowed fictional characters”. We have to accept that the Internet is networking, or virtual society as a space inhabited by virtual friends. At the moment, we lack many answers, but running away from reality indicates that in the real world there are so many problems which lead humans to a desire to escape into the virtual world.

Humanity has lost interest in everything that happens in the real world. Conformism prevailed not only in behavior, but also in thinking. Modern man has less and less time for real meetings and socializing. Globalization, the reduction of individuality, cloned sameness kills the charm of the real life, socializing and communication.

Key words: *the Internet, virtual, reality, computer, people, communication*

INTRODUCTION

The Internet communication and the whole cyber-culture show an inherent connection between technology and society. The social interactions of millions of people around the world, along with the creation of their virtual identities, social relationships and communities, lead to the scenario in which the computer technology and virtual communication are actually forming the parallel society and the new virtual cultural space.

Mass communication has become the dominant mode of information exchange necessary for a contemporary man. In the system of general globalization,

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the mass distribution of information has become increasingly globalized, and omnipresent. Space without „boundaries” in the media sphere provides a media platform for creating the layout behavior of public opinion. Thus, contemporary media „outgrew” its basic informative role, consequently transforming into the creator of „reality” [1].

Each individual has an awareness of the self and his/her belonging to the specific type of people, as well as the ability to identify one’s own personality traits, skills and knowledge, share convictions, values and attitudes that are different in relation to any other group [2]. The skill of a communicator to establish a good communication relationship with others determines his/her position within the social group. In a situation where an individual is not satisfied with the expression of one’s own personality within a social setting, because the degree of realizing social integration did not bring the expected recognition, the person begins his/her search for a new social framework. One of the alternatives is the use of the Internet, which can significantly contribute to the alleviating of the feelings of loneliness [3].

SOCIAL BELONGING

Each individual has an awareness of the self and his/her belonging to the specific type of people, as well as the ability to identify one’s own personality traits, skills and knowledge, share convictions, values and attitudes that are different in relation to any other group. A person builds its identity through preserving the individual, while adapting to the collective behavior patterns. In an environment characterized by a high percentage of psychological problems experienced by the general population, the need for finding security within the group becomes more pronounced. Belonging to a group, or a certain collective, apart from security brings also a certain sense of self-evaluation. This phenomenon not only identifies one with a particular group, but also provides the experience that the group bestows some special qualities, thus making one stand out from the others.

Man is a social being with a potent desire to belong, both at the individual and larger social group levels. If satisfactory level of communication is not achieved in the real world, spiritual groups create online communities to promote their beliefs and the community becomes an informally bound group of people who share their expertise and passion. How successful is the modern man coping with a globalized, alienated world where there is less and less time for face-to-face contact? It is but a small group of people who can successfully cope with the unstoppable current of daily changes, who are able to build their own social capital. Such individuals or groups achieve an advantage over other players who are struggling in the modern age. Alienation, increasing isolation and burden of searching for ways to meet basic human needs in times of transition, as well as the accumulated effects of the global crisis in poor societies is constant, resulting in restrictive human encounters and the communication deficit. Persons who have problems with social adaptation, who are burdened with a sense of low self-esteem and rejection by other members of the group, are looking for alternative methods that can help them fill these gaps.

In cyberspace, we often have the opportunity to meet the complete lives of others. As one has written a diary that is being exposed to the sight of the observer: there are photos of all events, often in chronological order placed on a daily basis. A full life is exposed to the bare nakedness and available to everyone. The persons, who are doing this in a virtual community, are usually detached and unavailable for conversation and sharing of secrets in real life.

Social anxiety is for many the biggest real life obstacle for establishing relations and contacts with other people. In the online world, one is spared of such an obstacle: we can be anyone. Acceptance for socially isolated people, can mean a great deal, can invigorate their lives and bring personal satisfaction. Virtual communication gives the illusion of conversational easiness, and virtual friends can sometimes understand us, unburdened by our past, lifestyle and habits. Internet is undoubtedly one of the most provocative sociological and psychological phenomena.

True friendship is based on a sincere relationship, the intimacy and confidence, body language, signals. Can a network provide that? Friendship on social networks is largely based on the same or similar interests, because someone behind the monitor came to the same place where you are, for a definite reason. In cases of people who are, for example, living in a small town and cannot meet people with similar interests, it is a unique opportunity to find a „soul mate”.

Internet connects people, connects all those struggling communicators who cannot cope in the real world. Would it be fair to speak about human interaction in space, which is not a space, in the time that is stuck somewhere between computer programs and the people who are not people but „borrowed fictional characters”. We have to accept that Internet is networking, or a virtual society as a space inhabited by virtual friends. Statements by some members of these communities, such as: *Who is not on Facebook, does not exist*, does not show the degree of correlation, but the level of more drastic alienation [4].

Visitors of the virtual space claim for the virtual communities that they are „more real than their real-life” and that real life is just one of the „windows” and not necessarily a place in which a person feels better [5].

The person on the Internet can create a virtual role that will appear with a fictitious identity, form a new entity, or a different view of themselves. Often the new person has been in opposite relation to the real one. It has everything that a visitor of internet wanted to become, but did not [6].

THE INTERNET AS GLOBAL REALITY

Communication methods, as well as the position of man in a social setting, have been simultaneously changing with the development of human society and its technological advancement. In the absence of real time for meeting with people, the attraction of the Internet becomes new phenomena of the human community. Virtual world offers pleasure to a communicator positioned by his own choice in the computer world, as opposed to dissatisfaction or disorientation of the real world.

Internet allows individuals to be involved in these virtual creations. They are providing users with an opportunity to meet new people reacquaint with old

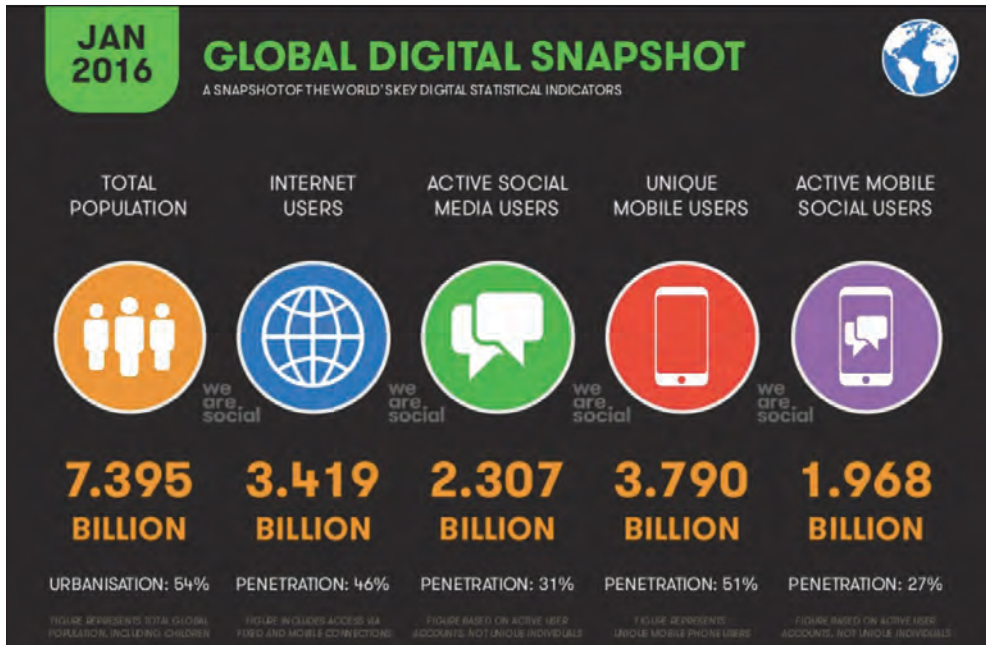


Figure 1. Using of the Internet technology [9].

friends and quench their communication needs. It does sound nice, but we need to ask ourselves whether such communications actually result in alienation.

But on the Internet, in virtual space people are feeling free, and often cross into communication anarchy in the absence of censorship. In such behaviors the excess of their freedom, often leads to endangering other people's freedom [7].

Avatar is a virtual body the one who enters into the virtual community inhibits. In this case, an avatar is a body that is used when a person from the real world goes into the virtual world to visit other members. Avatars usually have a human face, but they are also present in the form of animals or objects. Avatars are built mainly on some of the characteristics or preferences of their owners. Entering the virtual world is like going to a plastic surgeon: one can change the appearance according to the personal preferences, while the „surgical” procedure is painless and free of charge.

Anonymity that the Internet provides to its users represents a surrogate mask which is, by turning on the computer, mounted on the face.

„When self-doubt in one's own beliefs, person adopts other people's beliefs or actions in order to receive their guidelines for appropriate behavior. The theory of social comparison explains that conformity provide us different means of self-evaluation” [8].

Figure 1. illustrated that the Internet technology has become part of our everyday life: Almost 50 percent of the world's population, or 3.42 billion people use the Internet every day. Mobile phones actively using the 3.79 billion people, or 51 per-

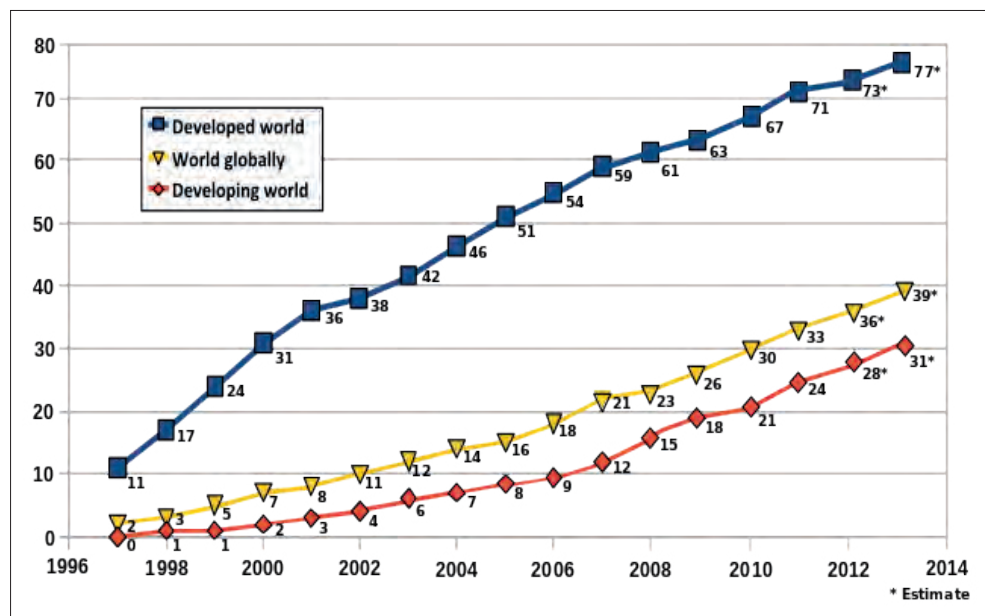


Figure 2: Growth in the number of Internet users 1996–2014 [10].

cent of the world population. Profile on social networks has one-third of people, or more than 2.3 billion. Nearly two billion social network users access their profiles via mobile phone — 27 percent of the world population. Cyber society is, in fact, a society created by the modern technology, mainly computer technology. However, mobile communication, telephone communication and audio-visual communication also belong to the virtual society, within which every action takes place in real time, but in the invisible, virtual space.

From the figure 2. we can see that in a developed world number of the Internet users has emerged from 11 percent in 1996 to 77 percent in 2014; the developing world recorded significantly weaker progress—from 2 percent at the beginning of the observed period to 39 percent in 2014. Use of the Internet is an interactive process in which users, with distinctive characteristics, are on one side and a virtual space with its specificities on the other side [11].

Virtual communication has significantly affected the nature of social life and social interaction at the end of the 20th century. Through contact with other people we fulfill both our individual and collective needs [12].

SOCIAL NETWORK

The number of social network site users is growing on the yearly basis, but over time there are also an increasing number of people, especially on Facebook, shutting down their accounts or using it much less frequently. The reason for this is the

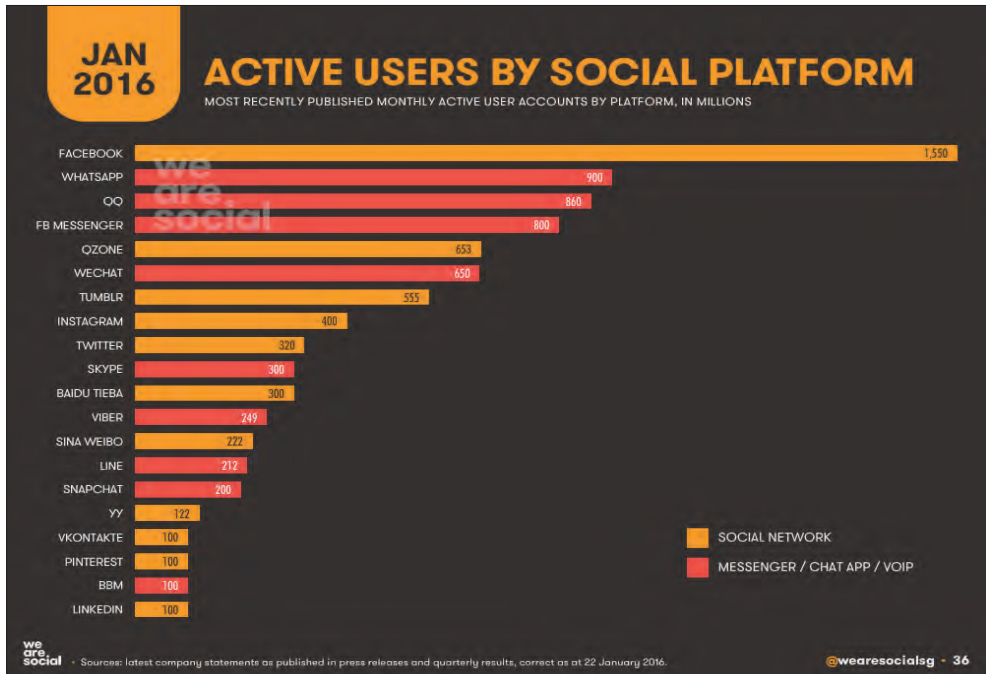


Fig. 3. Social network users [13]

options by means of which other users, as well as the newly introduced options, are rendering the services obsolete and strenuous.

From the fig. 3. we can conclude that Facebook is the largest social platform. People go to Facebook to „meet” their friends and to find out what they are doing. Facebook is a bank full of photos, and it looks like some kind of modern record of who is who and what he/she is doing.

Although the reasons why people join social networking are heterogeneous, one factor stands out as a particularly strong motivation: the desire to maintain contact with friends [14]. Researchers speculate about another factor — our need to publicly show social contact and closeness. Social networking has its other seemingly paradoxical way: contributing to feel lonely.

There is a connection between the extensive use of the Internet and the sense of loneliness and depression. After the first online experience, level of satisfaction with their own lives and the degree of social cohesion as a decreasing function of ways, i. e. scope of use of the Internet begins to decrease [15].

The relationship between Facebook and unhappiness is conditioned by social comparison. It is our intention to compare with people at relevant parameters considered similar to themselves. In the context of social networks, of course, we tend to network administration with such people. If they inform us about their personal or professional achievements, here appears less sense of values. When the owner of the profile limited to passive participation — monitoring posts of your friends

without commenting and *like*- Facebook has the opposite effect: it reduces the feeling of connection, and increases the feeling of loneliness.

CONCLUSION

People passing through various stages of development of human society reacted differently to the changes that have transformed their way of life. With the advent of computers and the Internet, a technological leap in the human community took place, laying the foundations of a new, parallel virtual world. The need for communication, as well as the challenge sets sail for the inexhaustible virtual landscapes and typing of the feelings on the keyboard, is opening a recently initiated odyssey quest for answers.

We can conclude that the modern era, although providing with highly productive technological discoveries, demands a shift towards a genuine human being. Although the social life is focused on virtual contacts, communication is still considered a central component of effective social processes with priority given to the respect of human.

Modern technologies have significantly contributed to the redefinition of communication, and the transition to the techno sphere is carried out with the support of IT network which increases the risk of value systems conditioning. The benefits of the Internet are great, but only when it is understood as a tool, and not as an instant replacement of real life.

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