

Conference Paper

Dehumanization of a Human: Abstraction or Reality?

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Abstract

This article focuses on the topic of society digitalization in terms of the negative impact of innovative technologies on the value and citizens' cognitive potential. Authors pay special attention to the problems facing the system of higher education. The authors' argumentation is supported by data analysis of publications from well-known websites (including the Times Higher Education, University World News, and All-Russian Internet Pedagogical Council), as well as interviews with students, university staff and personal observations. The survey has shown that the functioning of universities today is complicated by the phenomena known in modern science as functional illiteracy, or 'digital dementia' aggressive disinformation. The development and improvement of methods using by society and academic community aimed at enhancing the information content quality that affects intellectual capital of citizens and intensify the efforts of education subjects in the process of eliminating the consequences of the global bureaucratic structures infringement of academic rights and freedoms.

Keywords: digitalization of education, Universities, digital dementia, value and cognitive potential of citizens, aggressive disinformation.

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1. Introduction

From interdisciplinary perspective, the process of analyzing the destructive impact of the Fourth Technological Revolution is gradually attracting the attention of an increasing number of scientists [15]. At the same time it should be noted that among the most interesting studies of this phenomenon are R. Campa's works [4], [3]. However, complex and multifaceted research papers are relatively scarce. The latter narrows the evaluation field to the framework defined by the positioning of a particular science. For example, economists consider the negative effects of technological innovation through increasing unemployment, harmony or disharmony in financial flows, business performance domestically and internationally [7]. The works describing the influence of subjective behavior on sales efficiency are becoming universally recognized [1], [17]. Meanwhile, a human with his problems and changes in dynamics of sociocultural preferences remains outside the framework of philosophers and sociologists analysis. The latter, in turn,

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pay very little attention to comprehending neurophysiological, psychological processes that change the behavioral, motivational characteristics of any subject of society under conditions of massive and not always conscientious information pressure.

Our study tries to fill this gap.

2. Methodology and Methods

Discussions about innovative technologies that expand the all aspects of human life digitalization, as a rule, inevitably lead to prospects referring to artificial intelligence development. Today some tasks of the national educational systems development are associated precisely with this fact. States need new technological expertise, either their own or borrowed, as well as people who are ready to implement and enrich this experience. Scientists should answer some questions. Whether the machine is capable of becoming a human? Is there a possibility that a human will become a machine under present circumstances? To our opinion, to avoid this situation a person should remain faithful to traditional human values. This thesis is the basis for our discussions when considering topical studies of the destructive consequences of digitalization on society. C. Christensen, M. Raynor, R. McDonald [5], C. Millar, M. Lockett, T. Ladd [13], [14], L. Lin, P. Park [12] and other authors write about processes that are disastrous, especially for already established business practices. The destructiveness of innovative technologies is considered in the context of the concept 'disruptive' It is viewed as technology capable of creating destructive innovations at any of the following attribute levels such as cost ('new' quickly becomes cheaper compared to the old), quality ('old' becomes uncompetitive), customer preferences, tightening of rules and regulations to minimize negative effects of 'old' technologies on the environment and lack of resources and the consequences of 'trade wars'. The development of something fundamentally new requires significant human involvement when creating any type innovations both destructive and 'normal' [14, p. 7]. Nevertheless, this conclusion allowed C. Millar to ascertain the relevance of the interdisciplinary efforts of scientists to study "the wide social impact of destructive innovation and the interconnection of social, technical, environmental and economic factors that pave the way for disruptive innovation and lay the foundation for acceptance, success or failure" [14, p. 15]. It is evident that a person with their complex uniqueness of psychological characteristics is still aloof from the analysis of business processes referring to the context of the Fourth Technological Revolution.

K. Stoeckl [16, pp. 103–104], a researcher of values in modern society from the perspective of political sociology, writes about the role of traditional values in modern society within the framework of the phenomenon of conflict over moral and religious concepts in family and education. It is needed to rethink and reassess of various aspects of social life which previously seemed immutable. But this reassessment does not always end with a rejection of established attitudes. Most often, in the conditions of conflict, there is a return to the most significant of them. The researcher draws attention to the V. Shklovsky's statement that the period of alienation (even external, not meaningfully connected with the traditional religious context) from the self-evident in relation to the family and education takes on a strictly conflicting character in confrontation of the 'new' and 'old' after testing by experience. Since 2012 Russia has been considered as the one lobbying for human rights protection policy. Consequently, the concepts of political sociology that are valid to this day should be reviewed not only about the significance of religion, but, above all, about the essence of moral conflict. This fact refers to other scientific segments. From this perspective, the educational system also has to 'return to the roots' and revise the concepts of problem-solving approach to teaching. Unfortunately, Russian teachers have learned about the P. Freire's works, the founder of critical pedagogy recently [8], within the framework of which learning based on problem-solving activities was further developed. 'The pedagogy of the oppressed' became the starting point of the educational process, which was dubbed as liberating and 'challenging' for students, urging them to involve in active social action. With the help of critical thinking and literacy students who realized the level of their oppression had to learn to change the world in which they live mainly by evaluating it 'thoughtfully and critically'. It means that they are able to identify disagreements and contradictions, "inherent in the relations between oppressors and the oppressed, to resist them" [8]. Today, to implement this goal, it is necessary to overcome barriers that are systematically noted by both scientists and practitioners: we are talking about the phenomena of functional illiteracy, "digital dementia", which is becoming increasingly difficult to deal with in the context of a global "attack" on academic rights and freedoms [6; 9].

It is obvious that education does not exist "on its own": it is fueled by the general cultural background of society and existing ideology. The fact that ideology can only exist in a society is also axiomatic. The statement that society should exist within "complete ideological freedom" is especially dangerous today in the context of political confusion and vacillation [2, p. 213].

The ability to think critically and thoughtfully, to evaluate the surrounding reality, to find legitimate ways of resisting external and destructive pressure become a stable basis

for safe, reliable self-actualization of both the individual and society. This is especially important in conditions when the constitutional protection of human rights is susceptible to the change of 'political winds', the priorities of political leaders and the regulations of declarations on a social state that seemed immutable.

Signs of poor quality education in our country have been revealed by A. B. Zakharov, A. V. Kapuza, K. A. Adamovich [18], G. S. Kovaleva [14] and other analysts. This large-scale standardized monitoring showed that students from families with low socio-economic status as well as residents of rural areas have the lowest educational attainment. In general, the share of functionally illiterate students has increased everywhere. This means that they do not possess the minimum set of skills necessary for their life in modern society.

3. Results and Discussion

The authors conducted publications on the websites of Times Higher Education, University World News, the All-Russian Internet Pedagogical Council. 129 first-year and second-year students and 48 undergraduates of the Ural State University of Economics were questioned. The survey has shown that students who do not possess general learning skills including speaking skills are ready for short-term training activities, to 'torn' contexts. Therefore, during their studies at universities, additional pedagogical efforts have to be made to correct these shortcomings. Moreover, the majority of freshmen have difficulty overcoming internal resistance before engaging in educational dialogues, fear to express their thoughts due to problems with verbalization and fear to say something 'not expected by the teacher'. This indicates a low level of intellectual readiness for interaction with the information environment.

Regarding interactions with the external environment, which has the strongest effect on individuals with poorly developed critical thinking, we should pay attention to the media. Only 2% respondents watch TV programs related to political events in the country and the world. About 52% respondents do not even watch films on TV, turning to alternative sources of information. The main reasons are the excessive aggressiveness of television content, the circumstances of the lives of characters that are far from the actual practices of students who try to balance their studies and work (more than 54% respondents were full-time students) and the dominance of advertising which simply does not allow them to follow the plot". Professors points out several aspects. The TV channels owners broadcast interesting and educational programs mainly at night. Currently the amount of advertising used on TV is inadmissible (more than 20%

of an hour is dedicated to unintelligent commercials that are endlessly repeated and framed by informational contexts about promising television programs). In general, adult respondents expressed negative assessments about the quality of advertising (there is no proper control over the reliability of information in advertising — for example, there is actually propaganda of self-medication and the spread of infectious diseases in public places after removing the symptoms of respiratory viral infections, common are suggestions of sexual deviation, constantly imposed are hysterical patterns of consumer behavior and aggressive boorish human relations), 100% of professors and 76% students negatively assess TV content.

The information space of the Internet is poorly controlled. Respondents noted the dominance of informational messages and videos where publicly demonstrated unworthy acts and the appearance of people, for unknown reasons, positioned as stars of show business and “socialites”.

In their practice, there are proven processes and procedures for public influence on the negative sides of the information field. However, here the innovative tasks of the academic community are concretized in connection with the emergence and growing importance of social networks “in combination with the consolidation of the so-called “era after the truth” [10]. Furthermore, M. Knobel indicates the dominance of presentations of pseudoscience data, for example, on YouTube. Thus, we see that today many statements of the scientist are significant, with which one cannot but agree.

4. Conclusions

It is necessary to change the role of universities and teachers in an aggressive information environment. We support and develop the M. Knobel’s proposals.

Firstly, universities at the institutional level can not only recognize the strategic importance of communications that enable them to present evidence-based information to the public, but also clarify the essence of misinformation presented to citizens.

Secondly, scientists and university staff should more fundamentally inform citizens about the real role of their organizations in the development of regions and even small territories. In addition, they will have to learn people how to create compelling content on social networks at both the institutional and personal levels, aimed at “changing beliefs and influencing behavior” of fellow citizens.

The anti-educational and anti-intellectual reality that M. Knobel talked about it is really gains strength. In this regard, it is necessary to take into account the findings of researchers about the risks and problems of education in the context of active attempts

being made to dehumanize a human. These attempts are aimed at transformation of historical memory of all mankind for the sake of dishonest politicians as well as traditional moral values, and the true causes of social conflicts.

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