A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Elecommunications on the Worldview of Russian Society

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Abstract: Threats posed by modern telecommunication systems (particularly by computer) are a danger not only at a social level, but also at the individual and psychological ones. These include the problem of addiction (in particular to the Internet; in the scientific literature there is now the term "Internet addiction"), the issue of identity and self-determination of the person in electronic telecommunication systems, the problem of deviant behavior, the problem of stratification (changes in social regrouping of society) and some others. It is clear that the whole range of problems is impossible to cover in one article. Because of the interdisciplinary nature they should be studied jointly by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, culturologists and historians... However, we will try to identify the problem field that is both directly and indirectly interesting for the philosophical science.

Key words: Internet · Telecommunications · Worldview

INTRODUCTION

Exploring the social causes of deviant behavior and the impact of information flows on the behavior of people, the Russian sociologist E.Yu. Mitrokhina noted: "The research shows that at the transition to the new system of socio-economic relations under the impact of information flows the bulk of people experience negative emotions. Along with a sense of charm and deception Russians are enthralled with anxiety, defenseless, fear, exhaustion, humiliation and insecurity. As it may be seen from the analysis, they develop a kind of inferiority complex, based on the absorbing sense of doubt in their social experience and knowledge. Inadequate perception of reality through the prism of anxiety, insecurity and even fear holds down the will of a large part of population; it affects the assessment of situation and decision making by both individuals, social groups and communities.

The negative impact of telecommunications on the consciousness of the individual and on society in general is mentioned by foreign scientists [1-4].

The destructive influence of mass media is the most pronounced in destroying the foundation of humanism - the highest social value. Information flows, especially the electronic media, are charged with the thought that the price of a human life is negligible. Dehumanization of information has become a major feature of modern Russian television. By choosing the Western repertoire and its broadcasting the media are trying to impose on the public consciousness the worldview standards unusual for Russian citizens, which are based on the cult of greed and enrichment at any cost."

According to sociological research, TV information programs and the latest news in the channel "Russia", "NTV" and "Channel I" evoke feelings of uncertainty in 57.2% of respondents; anxiety - 59.6%; deception -50.8%, fatigue - 57.9%; indifference - 28.3%; insecurity - 58.1% and fear - 48.9% [5, p.48].

The media of the Russian Federation, trying to change the social direction of public consciousness, absolutize consumer trends and by deforming the traditional spiritual culture try to weaken social immunity of people reducing it to individual selfish interests implemented at any cost. And they succeed. The proportion of people oriented to consumption as to the only value of public life, grows from year to year. In 1988 their numebr was 10-12%, in 1993 it was already 35-40% and in 1994 – 45%. At present, this figure exceeded 65% [6, p.139]. Thus, the main socio-psychological orientation of the media creates the appropriate information background, which contributes to the destruction of public consciousness, which in turn creates the conditions for deviant behavior of the individual, i.e. diverting from the accepted social norms [7, p. 88].

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Modern sociologists and philosophers have also noted that the expansion of Western values in modern Russia against the background of destruction of traditional culture of Russian mass public consciousness leads to the idea of violence as the most effective and efficient form of achieving the goals. Violence is not just a way of life in the consciousness of Russians, but also a necessary condition for their personal well-being. Moreover, the violence, thanks to elegant and glamorous Hollywood envelope, is taking even some idealistic halo so attractive for the younger generation.

The symptomatic is also the fact that in the very Western European countries, the problem of screen violence has long caused anxiety in society and different social structures. In America it was counted that in the animated films for children the act of violence occurs average every two minutes. And by school graduation the young generation witnesses about 18,000 murders. Foreign governments have created a legal barrier to questionable motion pictures. The accumulated slag is with pleasure "leaked" to Russia to receive considerable economic and ideological dividends. As for the present Russian leadership, it seems that they are little interested in the state of consciousness and mentality of the Russian people. Meanwhile, the "destructive goals put forward by Russian television tend to generate social apathy in assessing aggression by the majority of viewers and to accustom people to flows of blood, etc." [6, p. 21- 23].

To create a stereotype of an indifferent perception of violence the information flows are constructed in such a way that the lack of spirituality has become a national disaster, which core and embodiment is the aggressive ignorance, that has captured not only the majority of the people, but all echelons of various branches of government. According to Professor I.M. Ilyinskiy, this aggressive ignorance, being a specific historical socio-cultural phenomenon, is manifested in many ways, in particular: the inability to grasp and understand the complexity, diversity and multi-layer processes in society; the total suppression of intelligence and creativity, expressed in the scornful relation to knowledge, science, education, intellectuals, national scientists and national experience and the negative styles of economic behavior: a) money-grubbing b) exploitation and c) trade and barter; mythologization and fetishization of the mass consciousness, explained by Russians' propensity to the absorption and diffusion of the myths that have become clichés: "The market economy is the only path to prosperity", "The IMF will help us", "Russia has no

enemies in the world any more, but only friends and allies", "Having received a voucher for ten thousand you become the owner" and similar phantoms; the masochistic destruction of their motherland, its history and science; disregard of the Russian culture, cultivation of religion and mystification of the social process [6, p. 146].

Information flows have a strong influence on the formation of human psyche, consciousness and mentality. Television, becoming popular and accessible, is perhaps the most powerful factor of human education, development of social position and the source of moral and social guidelines. This is why in the world there is such a brutal war for television channels. *The power over television means the power over the minds and emotions of millions of people.* You can also say without exaggeration that the TV determines the gene pool of the country.

Because of this, a man in a "virtual reality" is vulnerable to manipulation with his mind by "operators" ("Gods") of software products of cyberspace. "Digital stereo sound, the magic of colors and picture quality on the monitor, the proper specificity of using the computer create ideal conditions for the impact on the user. And if the possibilities of virus are, in our opinion, somewhat limited, the specially created computer games or their "hacked" versions, to date, have simply no restrictions on the impact of the human psyche. The man with a new three-dimensional toy immersed in computer and hearing only the sound of his SoundBlaster is the ideal target for the mental influence" [8, p. 196].

We would not want to underestimate the harmful effects on the psyche and spirituality of man caused by interactive games (the so-called 3D-Games or 3D-simulations) designed by the developers for youth audience (from 4 years old onwards). In 2010, in the international contest in Korea the first place in 3D-games was taken by the Russian youngster and in the group competition at the same contest, the Russian team significantly outstripped its 3D-fans from Canada. The winner admitted that for many years he has been spending at the computer virtually all waking hours and now he is expelled from high school for academic failure... So whose is this victory?

Many psychophysiologists also tend to believe that wave of computerization that has recently swept over our society could not but bring into our lives those negative aspects that have repeatedly become the object of attention of psychologists and sociologists. V.V. Pavlovskiy exploring the effect of computer games on various aspects of social life, notes that "in particular, it

is known that the managers of a number of major Western companies deliberately introduce an adjustment for the decline in labor productivity due to the development of new potentially successful computer games" [9]. Researchers believe that computer games with plenty of violence are a reflection of social life and fulfill certain social order. The researchers note: "In practice the above statement is as follows: the background of conflict in society increases, the number of crimes grows and the level of violence in the media increases dramatically. As a consequence, as a kind of fulfillment of the social order, the proportion of violence in video games is dramatically increasing... While there is a dominating request for the implementation of certain trends bound with open manifestation of violence, computer games will keep in line with it. Consequently, the idea, that playing computer games people become more aggressive and more willing to show such aggression towards others, is built on the principle of relieving of responsibility. This is not us who are responsible for the worsening background of conflict and aggression in society, but computer games (movies, books and religious groups). There is a substitution of a cause by a consequence" [9].

In our view, the author somewhat overemphasizes the formula "demand creates supply," and seeing in aggressive games for young people only a reflection of social reality, ignores the impact of these games on social behavior and education of the person. In addition, the concept of demand in this case is not a one hundred percent criterion, because "demand" for violence, aggression and sex will apparently exist at all times. As it was rightly argued by S. Freud, the content matter of our Self, inherited from the animal world, is ineradicable. That is why the great humanist concluded about the need to limit the "suggestions" for such a "demand" through its control by social institutions (super-ego) and self-discipline ("inner censor"). If we blame only the demand, without limiting the offer, we can go very far. Why, for example, to introduce criminal responsibility for the marketing and promotion of drugs? There is a demand – let it be a proposal. Assumingly not everyone will agree with such logic.

"The status of the player in the real world," continues the author, "also grows in a group of other players, which is a reference group to him and reorientation and narrowing of interests start. The game, as a product created for entertaining, is focused on the user, player, therefore it is destined for a central role. The player gets maximum attention because the product is initially focused on him. Between 1996 and 2000, we conducted a study of various psychological aspects of computer games ranging from aggression in the game and finishing with features of the players' characters and games selected by them. More than 300 people, both males and females in the age from 14 to 26 years were surveyed. The most common reason for continuous interest in computer games among the respondents was emotional attachment, "the need to be a hero" [9]. However, it should be remembered that the "heroism" in 3D-games, as a rule, is aggressive and destructive. The player often has no choice - the three-dimensional computer games that most closely simulating the phenomenological, social reality, *as a rule*, promote the hero-killer, the hero Rambo, glorifying the ideal of blunt and brutal force, the standard of heroism through violence, blood and cruelty.

As the author rightly says, "the game turns into a kind of drug that produces an emotional dependence, which is supported by the availability and pseudo-realism of virtual space. Teenagers prefer gaming world to the real world, because in the game space, they feel needed and they commit the acts that lead to visible results. Since a teenager is focused on immediate results and often is not ready for long-term work and expectation, a computer game with its instant effect increases the importance of gaming success for a teenager. Thus, the "reality" for the gamer is the world in which he is the most successful - the world of game. Thus the orientation to success formed and encouraged by society encourages young people to an interest in socially harmful activities." And further: "The phenomenon of the CG (computer games - auth.) as an indicator, is also interesting as it affects not only the physical response or consolidation of certain skills but the formation of ideas about the moral and ethical side of reality. CG is a modern textbook about the rules of behavior, which can not but affect the real actions of the individual. However to blame the games that the young people have begun to behave much more aggressively, means to blame the gun that shoots" [9].

All these arguments would be true were it not for one condition. In our opinion, leaving for a virtual reality (in this case, 3D-games) can be certainly considered as a provoked social lack of demand for an individual. But only in part. The fact is that the computer games (as well as the whole spirit of the virtual reality) were originally oriented to escape from society. The author rightly compares the virtual games (and not only games) with the drug. In both there are the illusion of self-realization, the illusion of success and the illusion of heroism without much effort. The man is inert by nature. He tends to choose the path

of the least resistance. And if offered a choice - a long and difficult way to the heroes of society, or a simple, effortless way to virtual characters - he is likely to choose the latter. This is the path of the least resistance for a weak man (a teenager for whom these games are designed, of course, is still such a person). This is the reason why personalities not yet formed and weak instead of a real self-improvement and spiritual work on themselves, may well choose the virtual world of illusions, alcohol and drugs. Especially if all this is actively promoted, cultivated and encouraged.

And we quite agree with the accusations that "rifles happen to shoot." Shotguns really shoot and this is mostly not good. It is especially frustrating when these "guns" are sold all around, actively promoted and imposed on teenagers, promising to solve all their social, moral and psychological problems.

Of course, computer games and "virtual reality" perform the role of a kind of "compensation" of the vacuum arising in social life. But the commercialized themes of cyberspace for some reason persistently rely on sex and violence, the destruction of moral and cultural imperatives.

This is the "beautiful new world", the door to which is helpfully opened today for us and our children by show business. This is the illusory mental impasse of endangered society of consumption [6].

For a more detailed description of virtual reality it is necessary to consider its features and properties. To begin with, focus on the properties that have been reported in the scientific literature. We will try to review them and provide our comments.

We shall keep in mind that as a "virtual reality" we consider not all subjective reality, not all of the reality of mental immersion, but namely the reality of cyberspace, that is the *reality of simulacra space*.

Most of the researchers of "virtual reality" anyway agree with N.A. Nosov, specifying as its main properties: *generatedness, relevance, autonomy and interactivity*.

Under *generatedness* we understand the dependence and secondary nature of virtual reality in relation to activity of external "constant" reality. While agreeing with the author of this point of view, we pay attention to the contradiction that arises inside the virtualistics itself. As it is clear, virtualistics insists on the polyontologic idea?, declaring many independent realities not reducible to each other. However, listing the properties of "virtual reality" the authors are to recognize the dependence of the "virtual reality" on the reality of the "empirical givenness." At that the virtualists mention that, say, this generatedness is relative [11, p. 195]. But actually it does not change anything. Virtual reality is an artifact ("artificially created object"), entirely dependent on the phenomenological reality, where it was generated and which laws it imitates.

In this case, we do not tend to distinguish a feature of *generatedness* as specific feature of "virtual reality." To some extent, the "generated" are all objects of culture and civilization without exception: from the "Sistine Madonna" to the banal screwdriver. "Virtual reality," in this case is no exception. And this feature contributes a little to its essential understanding.

Referring to the following characteristic of "virtual reality," namely to its *relevance*.

Maestros of virtualistics explain the *relevance* as the existence only "here and now", but only the generating reality is yet active [12, p. 13]. According to M. Yu. Openkov, it means presence, dynamic continuity and fluidity of the present. "Being here and now suggests non-involvement of duration when a person is, where he is and not in front and not behind himself" [13, p. 19]. At the same time, virtual reality differs by the removal of opposites between death and life, the imaginary and non-imaginary, the future and the past. V.M. Rosin, believes that, in this sense, there are three fundamental properties of the reality: the coincidence of the contents of consciousness and reality itself, since in the absence of reflection the world occurring in reality becomes similar to the world of "I"; and unintentional, natural events that take place in the world of reality. Rosin notes that the state of a man, who entered reality, depends on the events that occur in it; and finally, the sustainability of events, things and relationships that occur in a certain reality. "The events observed in reality, strengthen it; there are the events and relationships that agree with such a reality" [11, p. 195].

E.V. Kovalevskaya argues with this thesis logically enough. She believes that the importance of virtual reality is indisputable, but speaking of it as a pure "here-and-now" is possible no more than about a property of any other reality. In any reality, any person exists "here and now", in a barely perceptible "now" and, at the same time, he can dive into the past or the present. For example according to the same authors: "A man happens to be cut off from himself when he lives either in the past or future, i.e. not rooted in the present" [14, p. 193]. In our opinion the same thing happens in the virtual reality as well, since in virtual reality, man is "here-and-now." However, in virtual reality, in our opinion, there is the past and the

future, the immanent to this virtual reality and the person can dive into the past or the future of virtual reality... "As to such property of virtual reality as relevance or being "here and now", it is manifested only in relation to other types of reality. (It manifests itself in a virtual reality in relation to the constant reality) "[15, p. 74-75]. Simply put, the urgency, the state of "here and now" is certainly peculiar to the state of immersion in "virtual reality", but also does not make up its essential characteristic. This kind of relevance is inherent in any state of consciousness, in the absence of intellectual reflection.

Autonomy and interactivity. We deliberately combined these two properties, since, in our view, they are closely related. The interactiveness in this case is the essential feature "of a virtual reality" as the user gets the possibility of "feedback" though very restricted. Under the interactivity we should understand the possibility of dialogue with the objects of "virtual reality", or the ability to influence the situation. Unlike immersion in artistic reality, or reality of television, where a person assumes the position of an observer, in the computer virtual reality, the virtual subject becomes a kind of a full member of the virtual events. We say "a kind of" because his dialogue and impact on the situation are *relative*. This effect on the situation and the dialogue are not beyond the strictly regulated selection, programmed by the software. However, the *illusion of interactivity* in the virtual space is created that provides a subjective perception of *autonomy* of "virtual reality". Add to that a high degree of *immersiveness* (mental immersion) in virtual reality and we receive not only an *autonomous*, but an *alternative* world, capable to replace the phenomenological world of empirical reality.

These properties of "virtual reality" (pseudo-interactivity, autonomy, immersiveness, alternative) have long been an object of attention of modern medical science.

In our view, to identify the phenomenon of "virtual reality" it is necessary to develop its new criteria and attributes. Moreover, these criteria and characteristics should, on the one hand, emphasize its connection and relationship with certain types of subjective realities and the realities of mental dives and on the other hand, identify the specific features that have arisen on the basis of new telecommunication technologies, mainly the computer ones.

As we have seen, the virtual reality must be understood as a reality of psychic (subjective) immersion into the space of simulacra. Hence, *the main characteristic of virtual reality is its simulation nature*.

This fundamentally distinguishes it from the class of subjective realities, where a space of the system of symbols and images constructed by man is not artificially created (the reality of sleep, the reality of hallucinations, etc.). On the other hand, this property of virtual reality distinguishes it from the real artistic reality as the latter, as we have shown, does not involve entry into the simulated space (in the space of "copies" substituting and replacing the phenomenological reality). From this point of view the virtual reality can be likened to a "poor" art, which does not create a fundamentally new world and only "copies" the world of phenomena, imitating them.

Other features of virtual reality must be recognized as secondary, as they result from the main property – simulation nature – and are determined by it.

Such important properties are the *alternativeness and autonomy* of virtual reality. If virtual space is professionally simulated, it blocks the channels of communication with the outside world and creates the illusion of self-sufficiency. The virtual world, seeking to create a "better", more comfortable and attractive model of phenomenological reality, replaces, supersedes and forces out the phenomenological reality.

It is also necessary to highlight the features conditioned by the purposes of virtual reality modeling. These certainly include *suggestiveness* (suggestion) and the *manipulation* of human consciousness. Virtual reality is based on the external mental suggestion, change of the processes of thinking, feeling and reactions of the subject. With a higher degree of subjective "authenticity", it is simultaneously the targeted product created by specific people who set the "rules of the game" and pursue their own goals.

As the simulated space, virtual reality is doomed to the inevitable "*under-presence*." The virtual world represents a "truncated", "degenerate" model of phenomenal reality ("true reality"), which can not (even potentially) transfer the diversity and depth of the copied world of phenomena.

Quasi-constructiveness and quasi-interactivity make virtual space especially attractive. Virtual world creates a psychological illusion of self-expression and creativity, active "involvement" of the user in virtual events, the ability to influence these events. However, creative and interactive functions are defined and limited by algorithms and software. Or rather by specific software developers.

We believe that although the *anonymity* is inherent in virtual reality, however, it is not its essential property. First, people have always had vast possibilities

for anonymous action beyond the virtual reality. Second, the anonymity understood as a *desire to remain anonymous* is not quite characteristic for the virtual reality (except for the cases of deliberate concealment of identity from law enforcement or the general public). Anonymity in the Internet is only a tool allowing the user to present himself at will. And the *arbitrariness of the self-presentation* in the virtual space allows a person to turn into a simulacrum - a false, illusory image, substituting the real personality. Unlimited possibility of free self-presentation provides the user with a mechanism to present himself in the virtual space as a self-constructed subject. As a result, the user presents not himself or his qualities, but the qualities and properties that he "attributes" to himself at will. According to philosophers, psychologists and sociologists such arbitrary self-presentation of the subject is not based on the qualities of the subject, but on the "fictional" qualities ascribed to himself. This in turn leads to unpredictable deformations of *self-identity*. Without changing himself and making no effort to change (for example, to self-improvement), the subject of virtual reality simply declares and postulates these changes deluding not only his interlocutors, but, in the end, himself.

In conclusion, we must mention that in the proposed article we have carried out mainly a *critical* analysis of virtual reality, hyperspace and the achievements of new telecommunication technologies. We did not set an objective to identify the positive factors of virtual reality influence on human life. And there are, of course, a lot of those.

We do not encourage everyone to disconnect from the Internet and throw out their personal computers. We're not going to argue with the fact that with the advent of computers, our life has become easier and more comfortable. With the emergence of the World Wide Web financial flows have significantly quickened. We now have access to the abyss of information. With one-touch buttons we make purchases and move to the far corners of the world. But newspaper and magazine tell a lot about it. The undeniable merits of the "virtual space" are stated by scientists and "priests of science," businessmen and of course, our unselfish friends from the West. Most opuses lying on the shelves in Khimki praise Internet and virtual space, widely opening doors in the civilized, full of information, unbuttoned "Open Society".

At that there is no word or syllable about the difficulties faced by people dealing with the Internet and diving into a virtual reality. As if someone strictly tabooed all this.

We have chosen this topic not accidentally. We are convinced that the problem of the so-called "virtual reality" is relevant to the most families of our long-suffering Russia. If not now it will happen in the short term. Let's face it: who of today's children does not want to have a computer? And guess what choice will make a child with the help of computer, whether he will go to the Virtual Museum of fine art, where the marble David is waiting for him, or he will play a virtual game filled with plenty of blood and fantastic monsters, buxom girls and muscular playboys? After a few years in front of a teenager the boundless world of the Internet will open. Of course, he will visit the sites of the world's libraries to supplement his knowledge. And, of course, he won't be enticed by porn sites not at any price. Think about it: what a teenager would look at this kind of dirt?!

And while philosophers-virtualists are trying to weigh the "pros" and "cons" related to "virtual reality" spread, while the representatives of the "open society" are advertising benefits of information space and new telecommunication technologies, the modern Russian like a sponge absorbs a virtual subculture, doomed floundering in a strange, but "insanely charming" depths of cyberspace.

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