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Virtual space as a sphere of the personal identity's formation Tomsk Polytechnic University

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Abstract

Unlike real contacts, virtual space does not have any bounds of time and place. Nowadays Internet let people interact with the unlimited number of people. The paper is devoted to the value's detection and influence degree of modern virtual space on youth personal identities' formation. It is noted that younger participants of the events comprehend them more significant than the older ones. In global Internet time the events, which keep general remembrance of society and let people share such memories with other people, form new groups in virtual space. The article presents the results of students' interrogation at Tomsk polytechnic university (TPU) and international scientifically - educational school UniverCiTerra (July-August 2015, Tomsk). It is concluded that modern young people are mobile, ready to accept and understand values of different culture and entrench values of their own culture.

Keywords: Identity, virtual space, information society, students, UniverCiTerra;

1. Introduction

Thornton Wilder, a classicist of modern American literature, writes in his novel “Theophilus North” that every person is in need of three communication groups: representatives of younger generation; coevals and representatives of older generation. Nowadays communication realizes through the virtual space of the Internet, where intensive various and complex communications take place. Virtual space covers a great part of the modern people's lives and there is a question – what is a person looking for and what can s/he find in virtual reality?

Tendency of social “virtualization”, the transition from the basic forms of activity to the virtual space of the Internet, appears and “people's communicative activity transfers to the Internet, which leads to the formation of different “virtual worlds”, where real and virtual people, groups and communities are the subjects of such organizations [4].

Anthropological turning presented at the formation of postmodern realities remains as it used to be: people try to realize him/herself; to understand who they are, to find themselves and to find the aims of their lives.

Modern youth is in constant search of personal identity. If this process happens in a standard way, character of a young person has stability and capacity to realize her/his place in the world correctly, to build a career and private life successfully. If the process of personal identity's search is broken, person has problems with self-actualization and needs more time to find her/his personal identity.

Thus, the research problem of dynamics of the youth's personal identity through the social, cultural and mobile trends appears.

The term “identity” was presented by S. Freud, who wrote about the perceptive identity [2]. K. Jaspers defined “identity” as one of four formal characteristics of the self-consciousness: I am who I used to be [3]. The problem of identity was fully developed by E. Erikson, who defined “identity” as a feeling of uninterrupted self-approximation based on the person’s acceptance of her/his complete own self [1].

Relying on the given works, we use an identity concept as a result of self-approximation with different social groups, which is formed by the influence of many factors, can change the form of its presentation, and keeps its self-approximation during person’s life.

The term “virtual space” has been used since 1987 actively and has a leading position in the studies, devoted to the people’s place in the Internet.

Summation of social relations, appeared in the process of using the functional electronic computer network and consisted of some information, is understood as a “virtual space” in the work.

Transition to the information society has become a so-called ‘break’ between two worlds for a person: social and virtual, and if the first one, social world, is real, objective, ordered and determined by space; the virtual one is unlimited, and needs to be familiarized constantly.

Research strategies of the virtual space’ familiarization can come out in two ways: through the transfer of the social world’s content in the virtual space and through the self-comprehension, self, national and social cultural identity, and virtual personal reconstruction.

It is known that studies of different social phenomena (including identity) is more productive with the following methodological principles: the phenomenon analysis should be done from the local (concrete) to the general; the results of the interrogations, which reflect modern concept about the youth’ identity.

2. Methods

The authors of the Institute of Social Technologies (Tomsk Polytechnic University) with the support of the Russian Foundation for Humanities’ research Grant “Social memory into Internet space as a resource of a collective identity’s formation” (№ 15-13-70001) try to explain:

- 1) how students (bachelors, specialists, masters) use modern internet space for making and supporting existent bonds, which form identity;
- 2) how they (students) identify themselves with historical and modern development of their countries;
- 3) how much they are ready to set up active contacts in internet communities.

The polling is dedicated to the students’ activity in the social networks, to the degree of their participation in public life, and to the most significant and important concepts for them. For example, the polling contains the following types of open questions:

What motivates you to participate in different internet-communities? (Choose only 1 variant)

1. *Getting information*
2. *Data exchanging*
3. *Entertainment*
4. *Public reaction following*
5. *Feeling of belonging to some events in the world, country, city, region*
6. *Problems’ discussion*
7. *Other:*

Are you agree with the statement, that every person should know the history of his nation and country? (Choose 1 variant)

1. *Yes, because if you don’t know your Past, you won’t have your Future*
2. *Such knowledge is useless*
3. *Maybe, but such knowledge is not the most important thing*
4. *I don’t know*

5. *Other:*

Which qualities characterize a person? (Choose at most 3 variants)

1. *Patriotism*
2. *Optimism*
3. *Pessimism*
4. *Kindness*
5. *Confidence*
6. *Bravery*
7. *Purposefulness*
8. *Independence*
9. *Freedom*
10. *Religiosity*
11. *Generosity*
12. *Compassion*
13. *Openness*
14. *Tenderness*

The questions are directed to open different students' personal qualities and their identity - public, virtual and national ones.

All volunteers aged from 18 to 28 and participants of the UniverCiTerra school have answered the questionnaires.

3. Results

Basing on the questionnaires' results, the authors made the conclusion about the dynamics of students' comprehension, which characterizes certain features of the youth's personal identity in the Internet space: the virtual, social and national ones. The research part of the virtual identity's detection has the questions, devoted to the students' motivation for participating in different internet communities, to discussing nationalism and person's level of knowledge about her/his state history. Respondents note that the main motivational factors of their participation in different Internet – communities are getting information (54% of the interrogated), entertainment (33%) and data exchanging (21%). The majority of students expresses the desire to know the history of their nation and state (72% of the interrogated), and notes that they are not interested in discussing nationalism through the Internet space (75%).

Social identity's research based on the questions, devoted to the most important concepts for students, their personal characteristics and feeling of pride for their country. Many students mark out that such notions as family, freedom and peaceful existence are important for them (89, 42, 39 % of the interrogated). Furthermore, foreign students note the importance of such phenomena as tolerance (18% of the interrogated) and safety (18%). Speaking about the basic person qualities, respondents choose kindness unanimously (54% of the interrogated). Foreign students also mark out such characteristics as optimism (21% of the interrogated) and confidence (18%) and the Russian ones - durability (21%), generosity (15%), courage and solidarity (12%). The majority of respondents note that they are proud of their countries' achievements, especially in the sphere of culture and art (72% of the interrogated), science and technology (39%). Besides, foreign students are proud of the democratic freedom of their countries (21% of the interrogated), and Russian respondents consider the victory over the fascism and development of cosmonautics to be influential occasions to be proud of their country (36 and 21 %).

National identity's determination is based on the study of respondents' attitude to representatives of different nationalities and cultural values of other countries. The majority of students note that world cultural values could be accustomed in their own countries (69% of the interrogated) in conditions of the modern global world of "confluence of cultures". However, respondents mark out that the values of their own countries should be preserved as well as the borrowed elements (81 %). Many students notice that they have an interest and respect to

representatives of different races, cultures and nationalities (45 and 33 % of the interrogated) and all participants of the interrogation agree unanimously that nationality does not play the main role for them when they contact with people (100% of the interrogated).

Despite the fact that students share their opinion about some questions generally, there are some differences in their answers. For example, the question about respondents' attitude to representatives of different nationalities has the greatest resonance among students. Foreign students choose such variants of answers as respect (61% from 100% of the interrogated foreign respondents) and interest (44%). Russian students note not only interest (60%), but indifference as well (20%).

It is worth to note, that foreign students have not chosen the last variant of answer. It means that they are more positive to foreigners. There are some reasons for such attitude: lifestyle and culture of foreign students – they are opened up, sociable, tolerant and accustomed to representatives of different nationalities, races and cultures. It is possible owing to such factors as good country's geographic position, citizens' freedom of travelling around nearby territories and life in big cities, etc.

4. Discussion

Another topic of discussion is social networks that are popular among respondents. Despite the fact, that social network "Google" is chosen by foreign and Russian students as the frequently used Internet- services (50 and 46% of the interrogated), the other different social networks share the superiority. Thus, foreign students choose social network "Facebook" as the most popular (88 % of interrogated) and Russian ones – "Vkontakte" (100 %).

Such division is explicable – despite the fact, that the social networks have similar features (which are peculiar to the majority of social networks): possibility to search friends and acquaintances, to communicate with people, to add some photos to different internet communities, etc., they also have differences, and the key one is an opportunity to listen to music and to watch movies on-line for Russian respondents. Foreigners have no such possibility, because of the right holders' policy to preserve content and you should pay for audio and video content, if you desire to get it remotely (for example, in the internet shop) or locally (in the supermarket or special store).

Another important topic of discussion is concentrated on the following - what makes respondents to be proud of their country. Foreign students note culture and art of their countries as bragging right (77% of the interrogated), and democratic freedom (38%). It is worth to note that the last answer is not chosen by any Russian students and it shows, that citizens of Russia do not feel comfort living in this country, and government should pay some attention to make people trust the authority.

In spite of the absence of democratic freedom, students note that their countries can be proud of their culture and art (77% of the interrogated), victory over fascism (80%) and development of cosmonautics (46%). Such answers dramatize an importance of taking measures, connected with the retention of social memory, which is transferred from generation to generation, because such measures help to carry the recollections through years and serve as bragging right for next generations.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Russian and foreign students' answers shows that respondents' personal identity is reflected in many spheres of their lives – in virtual space, forming virtual identity of a person and giving people a feeling of belonging to some community (or social network). The person also finds his\her reflection in social life, where people realize, that they belong to a group, building their own social identity. Finally, s\he feels her\his belonging to the nation, country and culture on the level of national identity. Basing on the abovementioned information,

the cooperation of different individuals with formed characteristics of identity has a role of a dialog between cultures and nations, where participants are ready not only to discuss advantages of their countries, but they also have an interest, respect and tolerance to different cultures and foreigners.

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