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VALUES OF MEDIASPHERE AND E-CULTURE¹

KEYWORDS: values, existential axiology, media-culture, e-culture, freedom, personality

ABSTRACT: The article focuses on the axiological aspects of consciousness under conditions of the development of contemporary media culture and e-culture. Relying on theories of media-philosophy the author considers the media as a main factor of the determination of human value in the information society.

The research is aimed at eliciting the peculiarities of modern media culture in the context of an existential and axiological approach that enables the determination of the effect the development of the mediasphere in modern culture has on the world of human values. In this case, media (mediasphere) is understood in its broad sense as a sphere of electronic communication with diverse forms of appearance and electronic mass media, generating the global information space. The author suggests the analysis of the penetration of communication e-culture (and its forms) and media-culture. The author argues that the values of media-culture (freedom, personality orientation, pragmatism, and other) developed under the conditions of information and ethic pluralism, which give a person more responsibility of spiritual choice.

1. Introduction

Currently, we take the formation of the modern media-culture as a given and an established fact, but it is, at the same time, a continuous process in which new cultural phenomena and forms, coming within this general definition, are arising. The mediasphere comprises diverse phenomena, such as real and electronic mass media, the Internet, social networking web-sites, forums, etc. that mediate the information transfer between individuals. Modern media are found to be the sphere influenced by such factors as the development of information technology, electronic culture, the peculiarities of the society of consumers and services, the strengthening and expansion of human rights, etc. Media culture as a dynamic phenomenon in the dynamic environment is influenced by the epoch and becomes in turn a source of new opportunities and challenges for individuals. In this context, there is a need to study the interaction of such important phenomena in the information world as electronic culture and media culture and identifying the forms in their interaction.

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Understanding the place and peculiarities of media culture will enable researchers to demonstrate what effect it has on the formation of contemporary world views and value systems now.

The paper is aimed at conducting axiological analysis of media culture and describing the general characteristics of human values that are developing under its conditions. I would like to specify that I am referring to the philosophical analysis of values rather than the sociological one that makes it possible to bring to light their essence and forms of manifestation, meanings and their importance for culture in general.

Applying existential and axiological analysis, I am providing the analysis of human values related to the influence of information and media technologies on a person. It makes it possible to show to what extent modern individuals are free or depend on the information media reality and how their world views and rationality change.

2. Literature Review and Methodology Approach

In the methodological aspect, two considerable groups of sources should be noted which affect this research, namely, the theories on the problems of the information age, electronic culture and the theory in philosophy of media culture. The understanding of values which represent the subject of the paper is methodologically based on the author's theory of existential axiology provided in my previous papers.

To start with, I wish to point out that the studies of the issues of the development of information culture have become a principal megatrend in socio-humanistic sphere and in the contemporary science. The researchers of the information age, D. Bell, A. Toffler, P. Drucker, M. Castells, J. Naisbitt and others, have already engaged in the issues of studying the influence of information technology on culture, society and human beings. The development of society and individuals in the age of high technologies has been analyzed by J. Habermas, N. Luhmann, U. Beck, R. Barthes, J. Baudrillard, P. Bourdieu and M. Epstein in terms of a socio-cultural approach. Within recent decades scientific centers were organized that study the general issues of the development of the information society as well as several specific aspects of this subject, e.g. the development of e-culture, Internet-communication, the ethics of the information society, etc. Thus, the scientists of the University of Milan headed by A. M. Ronchi (2009), Virtual Maastricht McLuhan Institute (Netherlands), study the problems of the development of electronic culture. These studies have greatly influenced the author's research, representing the theoretical basis for further development of the ideas.

The analysis of the specific character of e-culture should be started with a definition of this concept, as it is polysemantic and its content requires specification. 'Electronic' means the representation in a digital form. E-culture first was mentioned at the end of the 1990s. According to the European tradition, e-culture was originally understood as a form of cultural heritage preservation (Ronchi 2009) and also as some opposition to e-commerce. Later, the term was used for the notion of different objects having electronic or other digital form. Currently, 'e-culture' is an interdisciplinary concept having connotations in philosophy, cultural studies, sociology, political science, economics and, of course, in the field of information technology. Its subjects and creators are scientists, programmers, artists, representatives of mass media and average users of information systems, creating electronic forms of self-representation and self-manifestation in the global network of the Internet by the means of technological facilities.

A great amount of research over the past 50 years has been devoted to the study of the media problem that has caused the formation of new branches of knowledge, theories, concepts and categories. M. McLuhan, M. Castells, C. Wulf, D. de Kerkhof, M. S. Contrer, Z. Kramer, R. Margreiter, D. Mersch, S. Münker, M. B. N. Hansen, L. Engell, V. V. Savchuk should be mentioned as major researchers, studying the problems of media culture and working out socio-cultural, philosophic, humanistic, ethical, esthetic and interdisciplinary aspects of studying the mediasphere.

Contemporary researchers have the same opinion that under the conditions of the electronic culture development, information technology has become a major factor in the development of the social environment and the vital world of a person. Furthermore, the means of communication or media become moderators of thought and world view. According to M. McLuhan, the media is now a background and habitat of individuals where they themselves become media, passing through themselves the flow of messages, data and various information and facts. He considers that media environment covers all artifacts, excluding, perhaps, only natural objects (McLuhan 1992). In the information age, the media background is getting more and more obvious and is declaring its presence and influence. M. McLuhan emphasized the three most important properties of the media environment: emergence, inconspicuousness and permanent variability. Media produce energy of an unprecedented scale, creating meanings and images, structures and patterns, ideas and values. Under modern technological conditions, the media culture is constantly changing and takes new forms (blogs, networks, chats, forums and other). In the view of V. Savchuk, as a researcher of media philosophy problems, media becomes not only a background but also us, changing our consciousness and rationality (Savchuk 2013). Following these researchers, it is possible to state that media develop into a source of cultural coding and modeling of consciousness and play a key role in forming a special type of rationality and valuable reference points of a person.

The term 'values' is of importance for this research and also needs to be made more precise as it is polysemantic and is differently interpreted. In terms of an existential and axiology approach, I understand values as significant dominants of life and consciousness of human beings, contributing to the solving of human existential problems (Baeva 2012). The theories by M. Heidegger, J.-P. Sartre, V. Frankl and N. Abbagnano influenced the formation of my conception of existential and phenomenological axiology in different ways. According to the existential-axiology approach, a value is a meaningfully-significant purpose of existence while the appraisal is a phenomenon of the individual's attitude to subjects in the context of the revelation of positive or negative qualities and characteristics. Values, being the base of the person's world view, have creative functions: they are able to bear influence on the external world, and become a response to the life challenge and the absurdity of existence without appraisal, estranging one from a subject like the pieces of spiritual work. In this context value is a dominant of the consciousness and existence, directed at the achievement of the ideal objective reality, creatively influencing the person's inner development and visual environment by filling them with meaningfulness and sense.

Therefore, this study is based on the methods and theoretical positions of media-philosophy, the theory of E-culture and existential axiology.

3. E-Culture and Media-Culture

First of all, it is essential to focus on studying the general background of the conditions in which media culture has been developing. The rapid growth of information technology started in the late twentieth century and resulted in the formation of the information technology conditions in which communication and information transfer started to play a paramount role. This process was accompanied by the development of post-modernism that appeared as a sort of philosophy of the epoch of the boosted personalism and pluralism. In his work "Postmodern Media Culture", Jonathan Bignell demonstrated in detail the interplay and relationship between the theories of the postmodern and contemporary media institutions, products and consumers (Bignell 2007).

The post-nonclassical type of thinking and cognition, associated with the plurality of options to achieve the truth, plurality of forms and methods of cognition, attitude to uncertainty and openness of the difficult systems as objects of cognition, the creation of nonlinear determinations of their dynamics, the refusal of a dialectic development model and the transition to the model of stage transition from the chaos genetics to a structure genesis, etc., acquires the characteristics of paradigm. At the same time, the post-modernist interpretation of knowledge was established in Western culture allowing each subject to have their own truth as a point of view,

interpret the laws of the universe as a game, refuse to look for sense and enjoy feelings, and consider one's own ego above all scientific theories and political ideologies. Within the last three decades of last century, those projects and that mentality had ups and downs. During that period, the world entered the information age which has since made its own modifications to cognition and everyday practices, however, the reference point on pluralism and personalism has remained principle in the value system of the age.

Under the conditions of the information age, a new type of culture, involving the creation of digital objects, i.e. e-culture, has actively been forming since the beginning of the twenty-first century. The first steps of the e-culture studies were taken in understanding e-culture as a form of cultural heritage preservation (Ronchi 2009); in the modern treatment, its area has considerably extended.

Nowadays, I am studying e-culture or digital culture as a new sphere of human activity, associated with the creation of the electronic copies of real cultural objects as well as the creative work of the virtual objects of science, communication and art. E-culture includes the results of the activity and communication of a human under the conditions of information technology implementation, characterized with creating free information space, a virtual form, a distant technology, and content liberality. E-culture comprises the following phenomena: first of all, electronic forms of modern communication (Internet, cellular communication and smartphone applications, social networking sites, virtual communities, chats, blogs, web-forums, and web-sites), electronic cultural heritage (on-line museums, galleries and exhibitions), on-line education, electronic reconstruction of cities and objects of cultural heritage in their historical and spacial perspective, computer games including network games, electronic mass media (on-line magazines and newspapers), digital modern art (animation, photography, cinema, music and advertising, created by means of advanced information technology), electronic reference systems (archives, encyclopedias, dictionaries and libraries), and information programs (security, forms of data security, etc.).

There are two main types of e-culture phenomena: firstly, the electronic form of real cultural objects like their digital analogues (e.g., online museums, e-libraries, e-exhibitions, e-education, etc.); secondly, electronic cultural objects in a form and essence (computer games, social networking sites, Internet, digital art pieces, etc.). The manifestations of these forms are mostly similar and interconvert. The culture that is electronic in a form and essence is the extension and development of a 'real' culture that has become electronic in a technological form (to keep its importance and competitiveness).

Under the conditions of the information age, media culture is the extension of the electronic culture development and exists in diverse forms of communication and information transfer; primarily, this is e-mass media, the Internet, and social networking web-sites (see figure 1).

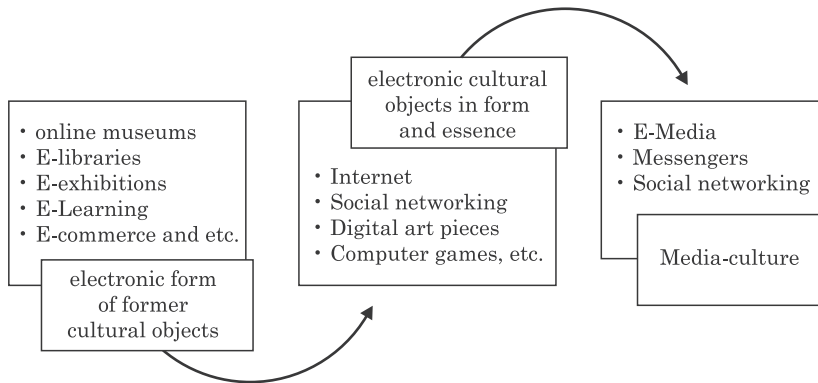


Figure 1. E-culture and media-culture

When information technologies are public and of a global scale, media culture turns into the greatest source of influence on individuals, coding and modeling their world views, valuable reference points, aspirations, ideals and behavioral stereotypes. Media culture proves to be the sphere of the electronic communication which has a real effect on individuals from the first years of their lives despite its virtual form. As even children are currently dipped into the information culture, both their families and real people surrounding them, as well as media characters, the heroes eliciting a strong emotional reaction and having a bright visual effect, are found to be the most important moderators of their first images and value systems. The visual media culture in which a modern person develops is the manifestation of electronic culture in a technological form. As for its meanings and reference points, they are mostly linked with the modern post-nonclassical age in which the cult of freedom, personality, pluralism, consumption, etc. resides.

What are the values of a person and the society in the world of the media culture?

4. Axiology Aspects of Media-Culture

To a large extent, Freedom remains a key ontological value of individuals under the information age which becomes “freedom from” manipulations and control, grounded on the unavailability of access to reliable information and “freedom for” getting opportunities to produce information, to be its source on a global scale and to choose significant things for themselves in a flow of the arriving information. The electronic and media sphere provides a modern person with the information sources that were not available earlier and new tools for creative work. Therefore, the implementation of creative ideas and research projects becomes available and effective as never before. In the context of media culture, freedom is primarily

the freedom of access to reliable and full information which frees a person from external manipulations and self mistakes. The value of an open access to this information is supported by the strategies and recommendations for the development of the information society, adopted at international (Recommendation 2003) and national levels, e.g. the 'Strategy of the information society development till 2020' is in effect in the Russian Federation now; thus, "Recommendation Concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace" of UNESCO, that decelerated 'the development of new information and communication technologies' (ICTs) provides opportunities to improve the free flow of ideas by word and image but also presents challenges for ensuring the participation of all in the global information society' (Recommendation 2003). Currently, these rates are approaching 100 per cent in the developed countries whilst the African countries are considerably lagging behind. The elimination of this gap is a priority of social and information development. In this regard, a value had both existential and socio-political context in the individualistic cultures (according to the classification by G. Hofstede), in new conditions it is supplemented with the freedom of information (Hofstede 1991). In collectivistic cultures, the value of freedom has a high position in the existential and ethical context but it is not expressed in the social and political contexts. The value of the freedom of access to information or its creation is a topical problem in this case as a government censors and controls the information. For example, in China and other countries censorship is imposed on the content of web-sites, social networking web-sites and messengers; in Iran, Cuba and North Korea, all the messengers, social networking web-sites and the content of web-sites are blocked; Facebook is banned in Vietnam; Pakistan, Tajikistan, Sudan, Syria, etc. have banned some web-sites and networking services (Strany 2014). In Russia, the access to web-sites is not limited now, although legal censorship and a certain control over the Internet information do take place. In the countries where socio-political and legal freedom was not the value of the culture or a person, the value of information freedom has not been implemented in full so far, however, its relevance as an aspiration and ideal are rapidly developing.

The value of personality, personalism, and the priority of the individual over the social acts is the most important anthropological value of the modern media culture. (The most important anthropological value of the modern media culture is the value of personality, personalism, and the priority of the individual over the social.) Personal feelings, experiences, significant and insignificant events and thoughts are presented owing to the social networking web-sites and Internet communication on an equal basis with global events. On the one hand, individuals assert their rights – the right to freedom of expression and freedom of press (including the electronic one) and on the other hand, they become extremely isolated, even autonomous, despite virtual communication all round. A person is brought up by the media culture as privileged, special, unique and worthy of special attention.

In the most extreme forms of expression, personalism passes into egocentrism and narcissism when the super-value of “I” can become deviant and pathological.

The own experience associated with the confidence in the possibility to acquire knowledge independently develops into an important cognitive value of a person. “Point of view” is getting more valuable than truth; private opinion is more valuable than accumulated book knowledge and facts. However, the pluralism of opinions and attitudes does not mean that they are the result of rational reflection. More likely, this is a cognitive paradox, a person strives for their own originality in views which are in fact the sum of the compilations received from different sources. In the age of media culture, a special type of thinking and cognition, based on the dominating role of information mediators, is forming; in this case the created images and ideas are not the product of own cognition or appropriation of knowledge produced by another person but the result of obtaining the information, accepted without reflection and created by an abstract (over-individual) subject or an anonymous programmer. If the information is absorbed by a subject without the reflection and critical processing or checked for logic and reasoning, is it a rational practice? At first sight, it is not; more likely it is similar to an irrational style of thinking, having its origins in the belief and trust in an authority, citing a source, reasoning by a precedent, etc. In this case, it is relevant to discuss the pseudo-religiousness or mythologiness of modern culture and thinking, formed by media and e-culture. Nevertheless, the information, taken as read, is super-significant and acquires value for religious and mythological consciousness owing to its highest transcendental origin. In the information media background, a person receives flows of the information which does not acquire the status of valuable information as it is constantly changing, on the one hand, and its source does not possess the sacral status. In this regard, subjects have to decide by themselves whether the information is important or insignificant, proceeding from the capabilities and needs of their personalities, identities and offered options. Jean-Paul Sartre believed that ‘man is condemned to be free’ and I have to add today: ... including the opportunity to choose the information. The choice can consist in denial of the reflection and sponge-like absorption of the acquired information. It is the way described in existentialism as *objectivation*, which shows itself in the conditions of the modern world in the form of a virtual, networking and collective way of life and reality perception. The rationality of the subject as an element of networking and objectified society shifts towards standardization and argumentation simplification, restricting all models of thinking to standard Challenges and Responses.

The most important feature of the information transferred by the modern media, in contrast to the mainly printed and verbal media of the “classical” period, is its visual form. The dominance of a visual form over sense and content has turned into one of the specific values, generated by the age of the media and electronic culture. The transfer of both scientific and private information does not go without

esthetic and visual expression, modeling, and simulation. The forms of visualizing meanings are popular among all social and professional groups. Verbal communication is replaced with an exchange of images and pictures imitating feelings and emotions but simplifying them to an elementary level. The luxury and complexity of the technological format of visual forms does not make their sense and content more complicated. On the contrary, the modeling of virtual images aims at evoking the strongest emotional experience of a recipient and simplifying memorization and perception. The visualization is closely connected with the aestheticization of the routine. To apply S. Kierkegaard's concepts, 'aesthete' has finally defeated 'ethicist'. The cult of pleasure, including the pleasure from beauty and sensibility, reached this unprecedented scale thanks to information technology. In the media sphere, it is expressed by the aspiration to evoke strong emotions of individuals, to draw their attention by feelings of pleasure or fear. The emotional and moral feelings are excluded as they lead a person to stress and complicate the life that is already hard. Hedonism distinguishes a modern subject from a "classical" one, oriented around service, work or fulfillment of duty. Modern individuals are convinced that they live to rest and enjoy and if they do not experience this, it is necessary to improve things immediately. The life of modern individuals cannot be imagined without various goods and pleasures anymore; it is some kind of 'festival' culture, oriented on an everlasting holiday. The media culture sends a person the central message – to be successful and enjoy life. Under these new conditions, visualization and hedonism complement each other. F. Nietzsche would more likely be pleased that the Apollonian type of culture is exhausted, and has given way to the Dionysian type, liberating sensibility and giving pleasure from life in exchange strictly to know its truths.

At the same time, there is one more essential feature of the modern media culture – pragmatism and utilitarianism. The modern media technologies, from entertaining to training and scientific, are subordinated to practical or commercial purposes. Media culture is typical for the age of consumerism, consumption and overconsumption. The society serves the paradigm of selling various services and goods which are often excessive for people and "high technologies" of controlling consciousness and behavior of human beings are required to convince people that there is a need to buy them. André Jansson stated the interrelation between the media culture and the development of a consumer society, having specified the visual nature of media as an important factor of their proximity. He pointed out that image culture is a socio-cultural state in which media images and media-influenced commodity-signs are to an increasing extent used as sources for, and expressions of, cultural identity (Jansson 2002). Media plays a crucial part in this case, performing commercial purposes among others.

Electronic communication, permanent transfer of emotions, ideas, and images filling the vital world of a person, becomes the key value of the age of media. It is brightly proven by the development of such a mass phenomenon as social networks

which have supplemented real human communication with remote facilities. The rate of social network users is growing annually. The 2016 survey of the foundation “Public Opinion” shows 87 per cent of Russians are users of various social networking web-sites (Fond 2016). At the same time 37 per cent of the users log into the social networking web-sites several times a day to communicate or acquire information. It demonstrates that a need for the acquiring and transferring of information and permanent virtual communication is developing in the society. In this regard, the progressive replacement of the real communication with the virtual interaction, which is modelled by human beings and requires less responsibility and empathy from them, is a trend of the information age. The system of human values under media culture can be shown as a scheme (see figure 2).

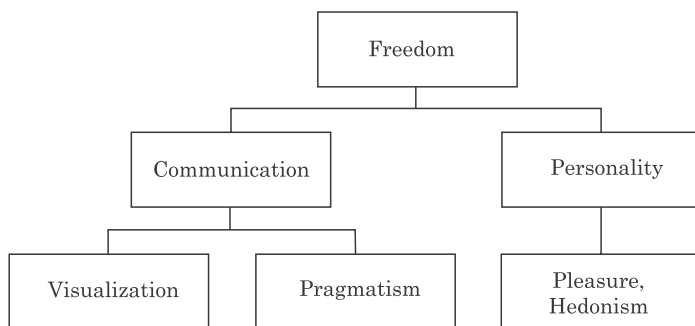


Figure 2. The system of human values under the conditions of media culture

Globality and blurring of status, spatial and language borders are becoming the features of virtual communication. At the same time, it differs in monolog, one sidedness and the aspiration to ‘speak’ but not to listen. For individuals media is the main method of manifestation in the world. Such communication is used for the manifestation of oneself and a form of enjoying the subsequent attention and the growth of own public assessment rather than transcendence, the way to “Another”. Virtual communication is also distinguished by narcissism, special attention to oneself, own needs and interests, which are known by everybody at once, and a need to have a mass audience for transmitting thoughts and feelings to. The style of communication as an end in itself is characteristic for the virtual communication: the vast part of information does not comprise qualitatively new content; communication turns into a form of pleasure, entertainment or search for new friends, clients and buyers. In the course of virtual communication, the media are not simply mediators but also full participants in the communication; they find their way to present the information, the nature of interpretation, a visualization form, etc. By means of electronic media, the communication represents a mass exchange of information, assimilating a person to a transmission device, who then turns into a mediator of a uniform Network.

5. Conclusion

I can draw the following conclusions from my above presented ideas. Under the information age, media develop into a form of individuals' existence (they become media), the moderators of their perception and thinking. Along with this, media act as a form of transcendence of individuals to the world and manifestation of their own Ego for Another.

The modern media culture contributes to the assertion of one of the most important human values – freedom. This freedom takes new shapes, primarily, associated with an unlimited access to information. Acquiring information becomes a relative value while the opportunity to receive it by means of media – an absolute one.

The modern epoch is closely linked with the value of personality and personalism which become transmittable from individualistic cultures to collectivistic ones owing to the media sphere.

The values of the age of media culture shift in the direction of such reference points as visualization, hedonization, and pragmatization. However, the rationality crisis of critical and creative activities of mind is not all-round.

The transition from verbal perception of the information to symbolic and visual promotes, on the one hand, the simplification of its values and meanings, and on the other hand, strengthens emotionality and expands the range of feelings. The role of an intellectual and critical factor weakens and the role of emotional and sensitive amplifies in a worldview.

By means of electronic media, the virtual communication turns into the major value and factor of the modern individuals' socialization and their adaptation to the information space. It gradually acquires the status of a need and dependence. At the same time, its considerable part is not spontaneous; it is controlled and linked with economic purposes.

The study of media still has a significant amount of uncovered issues and the constant variability of this sphere requires a regular situational analysis. Studying the rational and irrational, individual and over-individual, verbal and symbolic aspects of this type of thinking which fits into the modern information and media epoch is the most perspective.

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