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**INTRAPERSONAL COMMUNICATION – A HYPERSENSITIVE
AREA FOR THE INTERPRETING OF MESSAGES IN THE VIEW
OF DIGITAL NATIVES AND MULTILINGUISTS**

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Abstract

Internal communication processes determine the trajectory of a message through the stages of internal dialogue, thus creating or preventing the creation of preconditions for the response/ “outward” expression of impulses. In this study, the researcher tried to find out what these processes are and how they function. To study perception, acceptance, and adaptation of external impulses, an extraordinary event was required. This study was conducted using one unknown impulse that would be equally unknown to everyone and difficult to explain to all recipients who participated in this study. For this purpose, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was used as a reference point to understand how digital youth perceived the emergence of a pandemic and to assess their attitude towards it. The study revealed that upon receiving new, unknown information, the internal communication process uses a specific (black and white) system of self-defence preventing unwanted/disturbing messages from using cascades of internal dialogue stages. The study revealed that internal communication is “coming home”, and it is necessary like a conversation with a friend or a like-minded person, especially in critical situations and at times when emotionally difficult decisions are require.

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1. Introduction

Internal communication is a relatively new area of research in communication science. Until now, it has been studied more as communicating with oneself to include a vast range of cognitive behaviours, mental entities like traits and knowledge and processes like association and comparison (Shedletsky, 2017) and even as recall and memory (McLean, 2005) relating more to the study of mental entities and processes as cognitive psychology.

The concept 'intrapersonal communication' consists of two words – 'intra' and 'communication'. Therefore, it is studied by both psychology and communication science, and so far, these studies do not contradict each other, but rather mutually complement each other. The study of interpersonal communication (IPC) is gaining importance in this milieu of globalization and these communication processes can also be viewed from the perspective of communication science because "as you connect with yourself, you begin connecting more deeply with other people. Without the first step, the second step isn't possible." (Thich, 2013, p. 39) This means that internal communication is a precondition for external or interpersonal communication and largely determines the further flow of the information impulse – the following cascades of communication processes – in the direction of interpersonal, group and mass communication processes.

Communication at all levels involves the sorting and selection of communicative signals, interpretation of message from oneself and from others. Of course, internal communication with yourself involves various processes: talking to yourself, reading aloud, writing, thinking, meditating, singing and analysing. In this way a self-view is formed as a mediator of intrapersonal processes and as an outcome of intrapersonal communication.

This study attempted to continue the work started (Veinberg, 2019) by studying the ability of digital natives to translate verbal and visual impulses because intrapersonal communication receives 2 types of impulses: verbal (listening, written) and non-verbal communication (conveying information through signals). Non-verbal phenomena are most important in the structuring and occurrence of interpersonal communication because non-verbal signs "help regulate the system, cueing hierarchy and priority among communicators, signaling the flow of interaction" (Baran Mandal, 2014, p. 417) and define the process which psychologists define like metacommunication as the sum of verbal and non-verbal communication.

In communication science, verbal and non-verbal communication form two mutually interrelated parts of the same general process. So far, verbal communication has been studied more because it centres on the person's ability to master their internal use of language and the most common form is the internal monologue. The inner monologue can use the first- and second-person form of narration. The first-person form is used primarily to discuss feelings and the second person used when one is working to change behaviours or determine a course of action (Vocate, 2017). The aim of this study and survey of digital natives was to show that the information processing chain of internal communication has several stages or information adaptation cycles: a) perception/non-perception of information impulses; b) impulse collection, selection; (c) internal sorting of the collected information material; (d) external response. Non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in this process because non-verbal behavior plays an important role for the communication of states such as emotions as well as in first impressions (Hess, 2016).

The purpose of the research in this study was to determine the first steps of internal communication, or the principles of distinguishing the perceived, unfamiliar signal. The Research Questions are as follows – what kind of unfamiliar but important content is perceived? How are received messages sorted? Answering these questions could lead to the next stage of research in order to understand the best way of addressing individuals on important, but initially incomprehensible topics in the media and in public discussion.

2. Methodology

To develop an understanding of internal communication by youngsters and seeing the connection between internal and external communication, a non-proportional stratified sample of the population of young adults was used. A total of 160 students took part in the survey. All of them were asked to fill out the research questionnaire, which consisted of 54 quasi – structured questions. The questionnaire only included questions that were relevant to assessing two elements: the activity of internal communication in pandemic conditions and the selection process of external impulses in a situation of emergency. The data collected concerning these two variables could offer interesting insight into this type of communication. The average age of the participants was 28 years, 46% were men and 54% were women. All of them were students at Liepaja University and RISEBA in Riga (February - March 2022).

The design of the research implemented the traditional mixed methods which are commonly used in communication science. In this experiment the researcher tried to determine whether an independent variable (protection system of internal communication) may be affected by a dependent variable (external impulses).

The author used content analysis to analyse the results (Bakhtin, 1981; Bakhtin, 2017; Bakhtin, 2015; Bakhtin & Voloshilov, 2010; Thich, 2013). Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory were also used for the purpose of analysing results, as research on internal communication has so far been influenced by sociogenetic theorists, George Herbert Mead and L Vygotsky (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), and is therefore used in this study to ensure the processing and interpretation of the data that has been obtained (Inyang, 2021; Rodriguez, 2021).

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Communication is also food

To further explore internal communication concerning digital natives, the researcher decided to explore the movement of a new, little-known impulse through a person's internal communication system. So, the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic was used to initiate the data gathering process to find out how the respondents perceived this information two years ago when the COVID-19 pandemic appeared as new/incomprehensible information in the media and public space. Goal was to find out how each of the respondents catalogued (systematized) it, assessed it and how they took a decision regarding their personal attitude towards the issue of the pandemic and the related movement restrictions and the vaccination process.

The results of the survey showed that 31% of the respondents were worried about what had happened, while 4% of them, feeling anxious, disassociated themselves from the issue, not wanting to hear anything about COVID-19, and 27% of the respondents due to anxiety tried to rapidly search for information to calm down. 17% of the respondents perceived the fact of the approaching pandemic calmly, without stress. 5% of the respondents were aware of their tendency to avoid bad news, and another 5% deliberately ignored the new issue because in their opinion everything unpleasant is harmful and unhealthy. 13% of the respondents read on a regular basis about casualties, deaths and public panic as a result of the pandemic, further isolating from the pandemic and avoiding information about it. A half or 52% of the respondents admitted that they regularly sort external impulses into “good ones” and “bad ones” and avoid “letting in” incomprehensible issues. 48% of the respondents did so only occasionally.

The survey showed that half of the respondents upon facing unfamiliar/incomprehensible information, in this case – the issue of an impending pandemic, first tried to avoid it and not to let it into their internal communication “sorting warehouses”. If the information of external impulses was perceived as bad and put in the “black” or negative/unwanted category, “its” moving speed within the internal communication network was cancelled – “I deliberately avoided this information” (12.6%), “it was too negative” (6%). Part of the respondents admitted that they had deliberately selected positive information about the course and process of the pandemic (4.2%). As the pandemic lasted for two years and it was relatively difficult to find a positive flow of information, it could be assumed that respondents might be interested in the activities of anti-vaxxers who spread alternative news on the Internet and were largely skeptical about COVID-19, praised the body’s immune system, and offered herbal teas instead of vaccines. The survey showed that 0% of the respondents used these relatively positive sources of “anti-vaxxer” information on social media.

Thus, it was found that digital natives sort incoming impulses into “black ones” and “white ones” (40.7%) or according to a slightly more nuanced black-and-white news spectrum (28%) on a daily basis to protect themselves from the negative effects of the outside world. This deliberate “black and white” way of sorting external signals makes students reluctant to hear anything about topics, areas, and issues that “seem unpleasant” or “incomprehensible”. For example, 12% of the respondents admitted that due to this reason they systematically avoided all types of information related to politics – both domestic and international political developments. They do not want to get involved in election campaigns (21%) or listen to discussions of political parties (28%) because politics is “dirty” and “incomprehensible”. Critical media coverage on the corruption of politicians and findings of investigative journalism have contributed to a public perception of politics as “bad” and not worth taking an interest in or participating in.

The system of selecting pleasant or unpleasant impulses which the survey revealed was also discovered in the text written by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. According to his opinion, “the conversations going on around us, and those we participate in, are also food. We can think about our communication in terms of nourishment and consumption”. You absorb thoughts, speech and actions you produce (Thich, 2012, p. 3) and after the “intake of the respective food” we feel good or bad. Communication with yourself is part of the same process or absorption of external information. This means that instead of seeking information that causes digestive problems, an individual seeks tasty information.

However, it is often found that in our daily communication with the outside world, something nasty and bad is taken in. A person does not systematically control the effect of information impulses, and then

such negatively charged messages enter the individual's internal communication system without hindrance, causing "intoxication". This is because "there is a vacuum inside us. In daily life we are disconnected from ourselves (Thich, 2013, p. 13) and when we are inattentive, harmful information tends to enter the internal communication system, causing stress. In order to stop this negative flow of communication, according to the author, it is necessary to start communication with yourself. "This is called mindful awareness. Mindfulness is full awareness of the present moment. In just a few seconds, you can connect with yourself (p. 13) with the goal of coming home. According to this theory, 'coming home' means the beginning of active internal communication because home is the place where loneliness disappears. "When we are home, we feel warm, comfortable, safe, fulfilled. Home is inside us. Going home requires only sitting down and being with yourself, accepting the situation as it is" (p. 17)

The students surveyed perceive communication with themselves as necessary in situations when something special or extraordinary has happened or when an overload of information is received (40.7%). Communication with yourself as a process of coming home is confirmed by 18%, it is regularly practiced by 26% of the digital natives surveyed. This means that internal communication is like a dialogue with a friend or like-minded person (17%), and most of the respondents admitted that they have had internal conversation with themselves in situations of intense emotional experience, stress, or suffering.

3.2. Communication as the energy of a shared meditative silence

Much can be said for the Buddhist belief that communication creates a kind of energy. Communication is not only physical acts, but the energy of a shared meditative silence or communal chanting is also communication and a powerful kind of action (Thich, 2013, p. 130)

The survey showed that communication consists of the process of several phases of active processing of external stimuli. This means that the internal communication process has several periods or information adaptation cycles: 1) perception or non-perception of information impulses, 2) collection, selection; 3) internal analysis and 4) feedback. This assumption is confirmed by the conclusion that accumulation of information is not a prayer or a religious rite, but rather a form of communication (p. 130). First, the "energy" is accumulated (listening and trying to understand the world) and only then it is analyzed, taking a position and getting ready to respond. This is also confirmed by the results of the survey. Respondents felt (42%) that communication is the exchange of energy charges, and 52.4% confirmed that the process of internal communication consists of four already mentioned steps: perception – sorting – analysis/assessment – response. 15% of the respondents found that the third cycle or analysis is not used in their internal conversation because 31% of them think that this stage of communication processing "makes them anxious and requires too much strength". This means that the third step is a hypersensitive area. 29% of the respondents involve media, friends and acquaintances in this third step in order to decide and assess correctly.

Thus, respondents agree that information accumulation in the internal communication system is a multi-step process, in which the first steps involve the perception of external impulses, followed by assessment and selection (distinguishing between the good ones and bad ones). The final step is deciding on the response which means deciding and taking action.

Thus, thinking is already action with powerful energy. “Our communications will not be lost when our physical bodies are no longer here. The effect of our thinking, speech and physical actions will continue to ripple outward into the cosmos. (p. 143) Of course, there is a certain imprint of the Buddhist religion in this statement, however, a version of communication as a flow of energy seems a considerable statement.

3.3. Internal conversation is always a dialogue

Mikhail Bakhtin, an influential Russian linguist, literary critic and researcher of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s works, has addressed the problems of internal communication in his texts, calling “the flow of words which each of us observe within ourselves as internal speech” (Bakhtin & Voloshilov, 2010, p. 180) In his opinion, such an internal speech is never a monologue, but a dialogue, “The moment we start thinking about a question, as soon as we try to immerse ourselves in a topic in our thoughts, our inner speech immediately (sometimes quietly or loudly inside us) starts asking and answering questions, forming a positive and negative attitude. In short – our inner speech is divided into larger or smaller replicas and takes the form of a dialogue” (Bakhtin & Voloshinov, 2010, p. 192)

Bakhtin’s attention to the peculiarities of human internal dialogue is closely related to his work as a literary critic. The best known work was created 100 years ago and is dedicated to the analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s literary laboratory. As a result of this research, Mikhail Bakhtin concludes that the most characteristic feature of Dostoevsky’s narrative is the use of peculiarities of human internal dialogue to describe his literary characters. More precisely, Dostoevsky allows his characters to express themselves in the novels in exactly the same style as a person talking to himself or herself during his or her internal communication. Thus, Dostoevsky’s heroes talk to themselves and the “foreign self”, which as a foreign subject has influenced the hero’s thinking by its opinion, appearance, behaviour and thoughts. In his critical reflections, Bakhtin calls this subject a “foreign speech” (a foreign impulse from the outside world). According to him, everyone at every moment of his or her life is forced to consider and respond to foreign impulses and “to be in a dialogue with themselves” (Bahtin, 2015, p. 27). Moreover, these “external impulses” or “foreign voices” may be many and thus a polyphony of voices or a choir of opinions is formed, which forms the polyphony of Dostoevsky’s research, and for this reason it is relatively difficult to read his texts today. Each of his characters thinks a lot, thoroughly and for a long time making the reader decide for himself or herself, to evaluate both the characters and the course of the event, as well as the outcome of the dramatic effect of the narrative. Thus, in his voluminous novels, Fyodor Dostoevsky offers a number of characters who introduce themselves to readers through internal communication dialogues, in which a counterpoint or polyphony is confronted with a contrast or dissonance. In this characterization, Bakhtin compares Fyodor Dostoevsky’s internal dialogues with Mikhail Glinka’s music (p. 67).

The student survey covered the effects of “foreign speech” in internal communication, and it was concluded that some of the respondents perceive external impulses in the internal communication process as a “foreign voice” (12%), while most of them perceive them as a “choir of foreign voices” (30.8%). 16% of the respondents are able to emotionally distinguish between their “foreign voices” that speak to them and participate in internal communication. It is interesting that 12.5% of the respondents immediately group

each of the “foreign choirs” into friends and enemies. Being under pressure, “all strangers look like an army of opponents” (4%) because everything is assessed “only emotionally, instead of rationally” (7%).

It is interesting that Dostoevsky himself, as the author, never explains and assesses his characters in his texts (p. 89). The writer delegates the evaluation of literary characters to the reader, who, after getting acquainted with the internal dialogues of the characters, assesses them. Besides, Dostoevsky in no way considers himself a psychologist (p. 92). If a literary character in the text has doubts and cannot cope with his or her thoughts, then Bakhtin called such an internal conversation a microdialogue (p. 113) and such a microdialogue is a typical daily phenomenon in the daily life of 38% of the students surveyed.

3.4. Internal dialogue as a discussion of ideas

There is rarely a real prototype of a specific person in Dostoevsky’s literary works. Instead, he expresses a specific idea. For example, Rodion Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) is not a specific person as a prototype, but he expresses the idea of individual anarchism of the German philosopher Max Stirner (Johann Kaspar Schmidt). According to Bakhtin, a language is full of ideological signs (Bakhtin & Voloshinov, 2010, p. 15) and the word is an ideological phenomenon because it carries along an assessment. The units of internal speech are statements which are components of the monologue. They resemble replies in a dialogue. Ancient thinkers called internal speech “an internal dialogue”, and participants to the survey also confirmed Mikhail Bakhtin’s assumption that internal conversation is a dialogue (42%), while 7 % of the respondents still believe that internal conversation is a monologue – self-rhetoric. If a conversation with oneself is about a very emotional topic, students are unable to distinguish whether the conversation (a dialogue) was in the first or second person. However, the second person form “you” is more active in everyday reflections and “discussions” (34%). The majority talk to themselves quietly in their thoughts (23.6%), while 15% also hold conversations with themselves out loud when walking in the woods, on the beach or walking down the street.

4. Conclusions

1. The internal communication process uses a specific protection system as a black and white rating scale. Information that is “tasty and healthy” is taken in, however, a suspicious, difficult-to-understand or unwanted message is not allowed to enter the internal dialogue. This peculiarity is explained by the law of conversation of energy which also exists in the process of communication and, if left uncontrolled, can cause “overheating” of the internal communication or internal stress.

2. Information accumulation in the internal communication system is a multi-step process in which the first steps involve the control and reception of external impulses, then the assessment and selection, and finally the decision on the response, which means the ability to decide and act. Some individuals use all four steps in their internal communication. Others skip the second or third step, or do not use them.

3. Internal conversation is in all cases a dialogue, whether or not it is conscious. In moments of emotional pressure, conversation is in the first person, while in problem-solving situations, a dialogue is in

the second person. In all cases, the dialogue focuses on the idea, not on a person, and the conversation with oneself involves 'coming home', which can take place non-verbally and verbally.

4. By conducting further research of these internal communication protection barriers, it should be possible to determine the best way to address an individual and provide them with unfamiliar information, which is especially important in such extreme situations as the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic

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