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On-line Communication

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Abstract

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The technological revolution has offered a lot of new opportunities in the educational area. The ease to adapt to a computerised society of the future requires development of digital skills, building of scientific skills that are necessary for the selection and effective use of information. Therefore, the progress of digital technologies had been successfully put to use in the communication sphere (interpersonal communication, didactic and managerial communication). In the educative-instructive environments, the direct benefits of the technological era are expressed in the accessibility of informational sources and the speed of correct informing, the possibility to use the new knowledge from various domains and integrate them in inter and transdisciplinary curriculum structures, reducing educational costs, especial continuous education. Our study aims to take an account of the main advantages and disadvantages of online communication and identify potential changes in the personal framework of users, brought about by this type of communication.

Keywords: On-line communication, digital skills, education.

1. Introduction

The educational systems have taken over and put to good use the progress of digital technologies in making learning accessible, by generating online libraries, learning with teachers/specialists who are thousands kilometres away, essential diminishing of self-learning costs and continuous learning. Online

communication, through the hosting cyberspace, ensures unlimited access to information, free and uncensored expression of ideas, feelings and personal issues; an active learning that generates progress, build-up in personal and spiritual development of the individual, the possibility to identify desirable solutions in the benefit of large communities of populations (Manea, 2015). Some advantages of new media communication, by comparison to the classical means, are visible in the simultaneous passing of the information towards an increasing number of receivers at any time and place (Gherunda, 2013). The use of *email* in the detriment of face-to-face meetings presents the obvious advantage that it saves time, which also means reduced costs; it offers the possibility to structure information and ideas by comparison to verbal communication, where there is the risk of omitting some subjects. Online communication allows the check-over of received information at any necessary moment. It has, nonetheless, a major drawback: as much as the message may be customised, it cannot be humanised. At the same time, a direct dialogue means a higher degree of emotional involvement, and this has a positive influence upon efficiency and productivity (Antonescu, 2013).

The functionality of a varied array of educational levers is able to provide and develop skills at the level of educational consumers, meant to use effectively mass-media tools, the Internet and computers throughout their lives, in order to gain access to information and to master the means of accessing genuine, reliable and scientific knowledge (Uzunboylu, 2015). Several educators focused on the topic of current means of using content and technology-based devices in improving educational efficiency. Technology that is embedded in the educational environments is considered to be a typical trend in the field of worldwide education (Park, 2013). There are numerous attempts in specialized literature that emphasise the potential changed brought about by the new technologies, regarding teaching, the technical aspect of the didactic activity, the analysis of online self-learning, the evolution of online learning (Selvaggi,colab. 2007). An illustrative example in the didactic activity is represented by the WebQuest model- activities that make use of the informational function of the Internet, as well as online learning platforms- activities that exploit the communication function of the Internet (Glava, 2009).

The youth see the Internet as an element that is vital to many activities, from everyday life to building and keeping virtual communities (McMillan, Morisson, 2006). Neil (2008) indicates the undergraduates' addiction to the Internet as a source of information, mentioning at the same time, that the influences represented by the Internet are much stronger than potential influences at the level of studies, age, gender, and ethnicity. In order to use technology in a genuine and effective manner, young people must have digital skills. Young digital tech users have a tendency to overestimate the digital skills they have. A study from 2014, conducted in Austria (An online study makes it possible - new ECDL - reframing the climate of public opinion) indicates a wide discrepancy between self-evaluation and real skills in using computers. For example, 84% of respondents claimed they had „ very good" and „good" knowledge about the Internet, however, at the practical tests, 49% of them got an „unsatisfactory" or" very low" grade. The greatest gap between perceived and real skills is constantly found among the youth (15-29 years old). A person who is digitally smart not only knows how to make use of digital technology, but they also have the capacity to evaluate it critically, to make ethical choices and take pragmatic decisions.

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2. Research coordinates

The purpose of the research is represented by the investigation of the undergraduates' means of referring to the phenomenon of online communication, by the inventory of main advantages and disadvantages of online communication and identification of potential personal and social changes that are triggered by this type of communication.

The main investigation method was the questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire consisted of 10 semi-structured items with multiple choice answers. The results of the research are presented in tables below.

The subject sample was made of 84 undergraduates, being a heterogeneous sample from the point of view of age (Table 1) and service in employment (Table 2).

Table 1. Age distribution for the subject sample

Age interval	19-25 years old	26-35 years old	36-45 years old	46-55 years old	Over 56 years old
Number of subjects	8	20	36	17	3
Percentage	9.5%	23.8%	42.9%	20.2%	3.6%

Table 2. Subject sample's service in employment

Service in employment	0 years	1-5 years	6-10 years	11-15 years	over 16 years
Number of subjects	11	7	3	24	39
Percentage	13.1%	8.3%	3.6%	28.6%	46.4 %

We mention that the ethical and deontological principles specific to a psychopedagogical inquiry have been respected. Due to allocated space for the current article, we shall analyse only the answers corresponding to some of the applied items of the questionnaire.

3. Presentation and interpretation of results

The first item of the questionnaire was related to the daily allocated time for online communication.

Table 3. Time allocated daily to online communication

What is the approximate amount of time allocated to daily online communication?	**N**	**%**
None at all	2	2.4
1 - 2 h	64	76.2
3 - 4 h	2	2.4
5 h	13	15.5
More than 5 h	3	3.6

As indicated in the data presented above (Table 3), three quarters of the subject sample, respectively 76.2%, claim that they spend 1-2 hours per day for online communication. We consider that such communication behaviour is one that answers the real informational and communicational needs demanded by the contemporary society. There are serious concerns regarding the significant percentage of 15.5 5 of respondents spending 5 hours a day communicating online. Regardless the

reasons, arguments they have, the exception being those with jobs that require them to use this type of communication, we consider that that, on the long term, the amount of 5 hours per day allocated to online communication may generate a series of difficulties with effective face-to-face communication. We refer here to a diminishing of empathetic and assertive communication abilities, lacking verbal and emotional expression, a lack of reaction in para- and nonverbal communication regarding reception/understanding of the message. The number of those who communicate for more than 5 hours per day is reduced (3.6%); as is the percentage of those using this type of communication for 3-4 hours per day (2.4%). We reckon this is a conjunctural aspect, which is related to instructional needs, the respondents' initial training or the age interval they find themselves in (9.5% of the subjects have ages spanning between 19 and 25). Even more surprising is the fact that there are 2.4 % students who don't communicate at all online. This fact may be explained in virtue of the lack of digital skills; of we are to correlate this deficit with ages over 56 for 3.65 at the level of the subject sample, an age where a conservatory attitude is present.

The second item of the questionnaire allowed for the identification of the main advantages of online communication.

Table 4. The main advantages brought about by online communication

Indicate the main advantages presented by online communication	**N**	**%**
Speed and time saving in sharing the information	23	27.4
High amount of shared information	22	26.2
Supports learning and self-development through easy access to information from various domains	21	25.0
Enables any type of problem-solving	18	21.4

The data protocol presented in Table 4 records minor differences among the main advantages of online communication. Therefore, at only 1 percentage point difference, the main advantage is represented by „ speed and time saving in sharing the information" (27.4%) followed by the advantage indicating „high amount of shared information" (26.2%) and „supports learning and self-development through easy access to information from various domains" (25.0%). Situated three percentage points away from these two main advantages, the „enabling of any type of problem-solving" represents yet another essential aspect. This span of the main perceived advantages may be read as an expression of the fact that this type of communication implies a personal decision in using it, in accordance to personal needs, which grants it a customised character, marked by a high level of subjectivism and individual decision.

The third item asked respondents to rank the main disadvantaged of online communication, the data interpretation being visible in Table 5.

Table 5. The main disadvantages of online communication

Indicate the main disadvantage of online communication	**N**	**%**
One lacks the certainty regarding the identity of the interlocutor	28	33.3
High degree of insincerity, or inaccuracy of the interlocutor	22	26.2
Generated emotions are much stronger, with immediate kickbacks	5	6.0
Increasing popularity and influence of negative role models	28	33.3
Others	1	1.2

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The disadvantages indicated by respondents may be associated with their concerns. This may explain the positioning of the first disadvantage for 33.3 5 of the subjects, namely „ the lack of certainty regarding the identity of the interlocutor" and the „increasing popularity and influence of negative role models". Positioned thirdly, is the disadvantage depicted by 26.25 of respondents as the „high degree of insincerity or inaccuracy of the interlocutor". This also indicates a natural concern of the person with a certain projection and expectation from the relation with the communication partner. We estimate that these fears are met as long as the quality and truthfulness of the cyberspace information has proved uncertain for so many times. The data analysis indicates „the high level of generated emotions, with immediate kickbacks "as a minor flaw of online communication, according to the opinion of 6% of the respondents, while 1.2.% of them stated they felt there are also other drawbacks of online communication, such as disadvantages related to the physical or mental state of the users: sight disabilities, addiction.

Another item that was analysed in the current study marks the level that registers major changes upon online communicators. (Table 6)

Table 6. The degree to which online communicators suffer major changes

Indicate the degree to which you estimate that online communicators suffer major changes	**N**	**%**
Behavioural level	6	7.1
Cognitive, informational level	51	60.7
Affective level	9	10.7
Interrelation, social level	7	8.3
Cultural level	5	6.0
Economic level	3	3.6
Spiritual, moral level	3	3.6

More than half the respondents, 60.7% indicate the „ cognitive, informational level" to be the level where major changes occur with online communicators. Reported to the main advantages of online communication (high amount of information, speed and time-saving in sharing the information, supporting learning and personal development), seen on the last positions (Table 4), the indication of the cognitive level as the level bearing the most significant changes is justified. The affective level, ranked second by 10.75 of the subjects, confirms the power of the Internet to generate emotions. From the point of view of operating changes due to online communication, „the interrelation, social level" is ranked on the third place, according to 8.3% of respondents. We estimate that such positioning expresses the possibility to access different websites and communication, socializing and information addresses. The influence of online communication upon the behavioural level is ranked fourth, the percentage of those who stated in favour of this level being 7.1%, which may be explained through the role played by distinct models (positive or negative) in changing the behaviour of the individual. The cultural level is appreciated by 6% of the respondents to be registering major changes, which means that the influences of this type of communication are strongly felt in cultural contexts as well. Though situated on the last positions, „the economic, spiritual, moral levels" are indicated by 3.65 of

respondents as those levels that register major changes. This option can be explained through the fact that, according to the quantity and quality of the shared information, one may contain major benefits economically, morally and spiritually, benefits that are responsible for major changes upon such communicators.

The applied questionnaire allowed us to investigate personal perception upon behavioural changes produced by supported online communication, data presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Changes felt as a result of accessing online communication

Indicate the main change that you felt, as a result of using online communication	**N**	**%**
I am more self-assured	11	13.1
I am more analytical and reflective	13	15.5
I make better use of the available time	14	16.7
I am better informed	30	35.7
I am more impulsive and moody	3	3.6
There hasn't been any change	13	15.5

We observe from the received answers (35.7%) that the main change was the one related to the cognitive level, namely: „I am better informed!" This may be explained as a natural change, given the fact that this type of communication allows people to connect to multiple communicational and informational systems. Online communication has produced both positive behavioural changes of the surveyed subjects (better use of time-16.7%, concerns in analysing, reflecting upon things, phenomena, events-15.5%, certainty in thinking and doing - 13.1%) and negative changes (impulsiveness and increased moodiness-3.6%). One must also notice the fact that 15.5% of respondents claim they haven't been affected by this type of communication, an explanation that may be explained in light of the fact that little time had been allocated -0-2 hours- to such type of communication.

Reported to the macro level of the social context, the changes caused by online communication are indicated in Table 8.

Table 8. Social domains affected by online communication changes

Choose the social domain in which you estimate that most changes caused by online communication occurred	**N**	**%**
Economic	10	11.9
Political	27	32.1
Educational	25	29.8
Health	3	3.6
Family	11	13.1
Cultural	7	8.3
Others	1	1.2

The main domain in which major changes occurred due to online communication is the political one (32.1%), closely followed by the educational one (29.8%). This positioning is illustrative of the advantages of this type of communication, the direct effects being naturally felt by the individual and portrayed externally, in the social context (educational and political). Located at a 15-percentual-point distance, the levels „family" (13.1%), „economic" (11.9%) „Cultural" (8.3%) are to be found. „Health"

is ranked in the lower part of the list (3.6%) followed by others (1.2%), including religion. These latter positions can be explained in light of the fact that economic-cultural and social marketing in cyberspace is not effective enough, and also because of the doubts caused high levels of information.

4. Conclusions

The current study allowed us to:

- indicate the main effects produced by online communication at the level of the individual 9 cognitive-behavioural changes, emotional ones) and society (major changes at the level of the political and educational levels)
- validate the spectrum of advantages (high amount of information, speed and time-saving in sharing information, supporting learning and personal development, facilitating any type of problem-solving) and disadvantages (lack of certainty regarding the identity and intentionality of the interlocutors, emotional manipulation, lack of information accuracy) of online communication and, at the same time,
- emphasize these factors' relation to the personality of communicators and their needs (to form, inform and socialise)

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