RRI 2016

International Conference «Responsible Research and Innovation»

MANIFEST AND LATENT RISKS OF CONTINUOUS ONLINE-COMMUNICATION

Daria N. Karpova (a)*

* Corresponding author

(a) MGIMO-University, Vernadskiy Av., Moscow, Russian Federation, d.n.karpova@yandex.ru, +7 (910) 473 19 74

Abstract

The Internet mediated interaction of individuals became a predominate form of communication of society in the beginning of the 21st century. Digital technologies successfully take root into all spheres of activity of society. Recently in sociology there have also appeared a scientific discourse concerning various aspects of influence of the development of Internet technologies on social reality. In particular, both Russian and foreign experts in the field of sociology of risk focus their attention on new specific risks generated by "network" society. In this regard the relevance of social risks of online-communication research caused by its continuous character doesn't raise any doubts. Emergence and superspeed of a new form of communication development, bearing in itself its risky potential, demands scrupulous theoretical and methodological research. The author proposes to separate a new form of mass self-communication from other forms of people's interactions proving it by its specific nature and call it continuous online-communication. Active users or representatives of this "mobile" category of citizens, in essence, appear in another tempo-world, having an opportunity to keep in contact with each other nearly 24 hours in days. On the one hand, new form of communication gives indisputable freedom of communication and mobility which were not available even 20 years ago. On the other hand, this uncontrolled openness and freedom in the society cause real concern of modern social researchers because it is connected to potential risks. The author suggests two kinds of risks of continuous online-communication which are expressed in manifest and latent forms.

1. Introduction

The relevance of our research is caused by increasing "openness" of the Russian society provoked by a transition period lasted for more than 20 years since elimination of "Iron Curtain". Since that time the Russian behavioral practices were based on copying some samples of the western way of life declaring

the principles of freedom, individual rights especially the right to freedom of communication. The mass inclusion of our citizens in *continuous online-communication* became one of manifestations of these realities. It is referred to the e-mediated interaction of individuals which assumes daily, often continuous (continuous) using of mobile devices with the help of which we can easily form our personal virtual space (mass self-communication) (Castells, 2010). However the consequences of that increasing "openness" have ambivalent character. At the same time that euphoria provoked by literally endless freedom of communication and virtual mobility causes alarms and fears in connection with the potential *risks* of that "openness". For that very reason the tough problem of our research is in unintended consequences of mass continuous use of the mobile Internet, mainly, risks which we consume every day as active actors of virtual space. In that respect we can raise some research questions:

- what is the contextual nature of continuous online-communication discourse emergence?

- what are those specific characteristics of risks of continuous online communication which differ it from other communicational forms?

- how can we systematize those risks through the prism of social sciences using dichotomy of manifest / latent?

- could it be any social and demographic differentiation between categories of the population by their susceptibility to risks of continuous online-communication?

According to above mentioned problem statement and research questions we can define **the purpose of our study** – on the basis of theoretical analysis and empirical research to systematize probable manifestations of risks of continuous online-communication taking into account their differential impact on different categories of the population.

2. Methods

There are used different **methods** in our study. As empirical base we use the results of the sociological research "Virtual Freedom and Safety of Students on the Internet" conducted in 2012 by scholars of Sociological Department of MGIMO-University (Russia). There were questioned 600 students of a bachelor degree and 129 undergraduates from three leading higher educational institutions of Russia: MGIMO-University, Moscow State University named after Lomonosov and RUDN. We used the quote principle of respondent's selection. Controlled factors when developing the scheme of selection were belonging to faculty, course, and also gender. In 2015 within the same research there was interviewed the control group of MGIMO students. The results of comparison allowed to judge the remaining tendencies in the studied behavioral practices of students. In 2016 there was initiated a series of twelve in-depth interviews with students from different courses of MGIMO-University. The validity of this research is proved by high degree of an involvement of students into process of continuous online-communication. There was conducted an analysis of secondary data by leading sociological centers of Russian Federation: Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), and also researches of teenage online behavior of Russian sociologists: S. Tsymbolenko (2010), E. Pavlova (2007), E. Omelchenko (2006), etc.; And data of foreign researches in the field of the computer mediated interaction: Sh. Turkle (2012), G. Gardner (2013), S. Livingstone (2010), etc.

3. Results

3.1. Social discourse of continuous online-communication

We prove the emergence of a discourse of continuous online-communication with two stages. The first stage – social processes of mass computerization and virtualization of the society. The term "computerization" here is understood as a process of penetration of computer facilities and computer technologies into various spheres of human activity. Indeed, a personal computer became available to a popular majority. Functioning of social institutes also began to be followed by active use of information and communication technologies. Under virtualization we understand an institutional replacement of real practices by virtual images and simulations. Besides this social aspect, we can witness that even sociological categorial language began to be enriched with concepts from a programming language. And finally those problems which had seemed to be in the area of computer technologies became all-social. The second stage of sociological discourse development of a society digitalization is connected with a revolutionary event in the history of the Internet – transformation from its stationary format to mobile one. We can illustrate the fact of a massification of a mobile form of Internet communication with one example. According to the international analytical company TNS Gallup Media, at the end of the year 2015 the "mobile" category of citizens estimated 50 million people, a third part of the whole population of the country (143, 7 million people according to gks.ru). With introduction of "clever" technologies in our everyday life there has appeared a category of people which connects to the web only from mobile devices. The monthly audience of Russian users of exclusively mobile Internet, according to the same company, approaches 5 million users.

For the purpose of conceptualization of characteristics of continuous online-communication we use methodology of *grounded theory* proposed by American scholars A. Strauss and B. Glazer in 1967. During conducting of in-depth interviews there have been distinguished several characteristics of continuous online-communication:

1) simultaneity of network interactions commitment;

2) instantaneousness of interaction (maximum reductions of time for communicative contact, feedback, etc.);

3) openness as availability to personal information and communications of one individual or the whole organization;

4) possibility to communicate on behalf of other person;

5) lack of standard regulation – social control, removal of social taboos, bans;

6) space of horizontal communications, equalizing of the social statuses;

7) opportunity to return to kept dialogue history, etc.

It is quite important to note that the list of collected characteristics on continuous online-communication can't end based on the fact that it directly depends on the level of development of new forms of electronic and network interaction. We will continue to allocate them further.

We make an assumption that the social environment of new form of mass self-communication is intensified and rapidly becomes complex, showing its ambivalent character (Kravchenko, 2012). On the one hand, indisputable freedom of communication, mobility, pluralism of opportunities of continuous online-communication, availability of earlier inaccessible values and cultural artifacts, on the other hand,

studied "openness" gives rise to concern of potential risks. Above mentioned characteristics, results of students questionnaire, and secondary analysis of alike research of Russian and foreign authors, give grounds for risks of continuous online-communication systematization. Using the methodological principles of the functional analysis of R. Merton, we assume that there are two types of risks: *manifest and latent*. We call them manifest risks because they are realized by actors of online-communication and can be empirically counted. Latent ones – are hardly calculated and are poorly realized by actors of continuous online-communication.

As the results of our theoretical analysis and empirical research we have finally systematized manifest and latent risks of continuous online-communication.

3.2. Manifest risks

1)   Firstly, cyber risks which are shown as manipulation of personal data, financial means of the victim for the purpose of causing economic, reputation, political, moral, ideological, cultural and other types of damage. In their essence cyber risks have technological character because they are made by special computer programs, or technically competent individuals. The characteristic of continuous online-communication selected earlier as "openness of personal information" involves potential risk to fall a victim of cyber criminals. Taking into consideration the need to focus our scientific attention on social aspect of cybercrime we suggest to define a cybercrime as an act of social deviation made for the purpose of causing economic, political, moral, ideological, cultural and other types of damage to individual, the organization or state by means of any technical tool and Internet access. The methodology of sociological analysis of cybercrime is formed by object and subject nature of this social action (who commits the crime and who is its victim). Below in the form of the scheme we will designate the main methodological aspects of cybercrime as social action.

Table1. Methodological aspects of cybercrime analysis

Subjects (risk producers)	Cyber criminals		
Objects (risk consumers)	individual	organization	state
Aims (motives)		1. economic	
		2. reputational	
	3.social and psychological		
	4. ideological		
			5. political
Instruments	social engineering		
	virus programming		

Subjects (or risk producers) are understood like actors who commit actions of criminal character. Objects (or risk consumers) – are individuals, organizations and state institutions (strategically important objects) whom criminal act is focused on.

2)   Secondly, content risks which affect ontological essence of individuals. Manifestations of the content risks are, as a rule, connected with obtaining undesirable or dangerous content while using the Internet. Dangerous information is understood as one which can dysfunctionaly affects mental or physical state of health of a person. Dangerous information can conditionally be divided into two groups into relation to violation of norms: legal (illegal information) and moral (immoral information). According to

2012-year survey conducted by VCIOM, the vast majority of Internet users faced a problem of availability of dangerous content using Internet (Table 2).

Table 2. Facing content risks

Have you ever faced dangerous information on the Internet	All respondents	Age				
		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-59	60 +
Yes, often	38	48	40	37	28	27
From time to time	35	35	36	36	37	23
No, I haven't	25	16	22	25	34	46
Neither agree nor disagree	2	1	2	2	1	4

3) Thirdly, communicational risks. Using methodological approach to that kind of risks offered by the Fund of Internet Development we determine communicational risks as interpersonal relations of Internet users including risk of being insulted. We distinguish two types of that risks: 1) *the illegal contact* (online grooming) – communication between an adult and a child where the adult intentionally ingratiates with the child space (by deception) with the purpose of establishing close relations to commit sexual character actions. When holding in-depth interviews students of MGIMO-University noted high probability to face manifestations of communication risks in the form of illegal contact. According to students, doubtful content represents danger not for them, but for children. As they aren't capable to estimate information from the point of view of morals and the standard system of values yet. 2) *the cyber bulling* – is the second example of communicational risks. It means receiving the massages which contain aggressive insults, intimidation. Such messages can be as in the form of the text, and the image, the photo or video. Similar humiliating information can proceed from one or group of individuals by means of mailing of offensive material to friends and relatives of the victim, the publication on profiles on social networks and so forth.

We can consider that risk manifestation example as a social phenomenon studied within symbolic interactionism paradigm known as a certain symbolical exchange of stamps and labels – *stigmatization*. Stigmatized form of interpersonal communication is inherited more often by children who aren't capable to cope with the psychophysical feelings. And in virtual environment it is much simpler for them to paste labels on peers for the purpose of humiliation showing their superiority.

In 2010 the international project of European Commission EU Kids Online studied safety Internet issues for children and teenagers, in particular, a cyber bulling problem. There participated 25 European Union countries and Russian Federation. In Russia there were interviewed 1025 children from 9 to 16 years old and their parents from 11 regions of 7 federal districts (Kemerovo, Kirov, Makhachkala, Moscow, the Moscow region, Rostov-on-Don, St. Petersburg, Saratov, Syktyvkar, Chelyabinsk, Chita). As a result, 23% of children who use the Internet were stigmatized online or offline for the last 12 months. Every tenth child is exposed to a cyber bulling more often than once a month. Children of 11-12 years get into risk group on frequency Internet cyber bulling. And it is only those data which have been openly stated by respondents (Table 3).

Table 3. Ways which children were exposed Internet cyber bulling (age differences (%))

%	Age				All in Russia	All in Europe
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16		
Face-to-face	15	16	13	10	12	13
On the Internet	7	10	12	10	10	6
On mobile phone	3	5	6	5	5	3
Were cyber bulled online or offline	18	28	25	22	23	19

3.3. Latent risks

That kind of risks of continuous online-communication is hardly to calculate. They are mostly affects emotional, psychological, behavioral characteristics of a person who is actively involved into a process of continuous online-communication. The consequences of manifestations of latent risks cannot be realized here and now, but are capable to be shown in the future (Giddens's paradox). For systematization of various manifestations of latent risks we will also use the principles of grounded theory. It means that all conceptual positions stated below are received by means of empirical data (results of in-depth interviews with students and data of secondary sociological research).

1) The first type of latent risks is *psycho-cognitive*. These are special forms of dependence on functions of mobile devices. The scientific discourse strongly includes the term of that risks as *internet addiction* as a form of individual dependence. Where a person "is absorbed" by information, game and other types of computer activity, often losing feeling of real time and going into the world of virtual reality. As the Russian sociologist M. Gorshkov notes, prevalence of Internet dependence users makes, according to various researchers, about 10% of users around the world. Psycho-cognitive risks can have various forms. The first one is *Google effect*. The essence of that risk manifestation consists in changing properties of a memory: from quick (information is stored in from several seconds to several days) and long-term to transactive (a person remembers not the information he is interested in but the place where he can find it).

2) The second type of latent risks is designated in a research in the spirit of English sociologist Z. Bauman as "fluid identity". The similar characteristic of latent risks represents earlier unknown ability of technological means to change "the Self" of Internet users in the course of their continuous online-communication.

3) The third type of latent risks is called "flexible intimacy". By that term is meant the ambivalent nature of the intimate interpersonal relations which are transformed in the era of mobile Internet.

4) The fourth type of latent risks is "anonymous credibility", that is such trust to technological systems (to cloud services, memory of a phone, openly published personal information on the Internet, etc.), at which a subjective sense of security of the individual (ontological safety) is transformed to full disclosure to these systems.

5) The fifth type of latent risks is "ephemeral friendship" which is meant as the easiest manner to both striking up a friendship and rupture friendly communications between people in electronic and network interaction.

4. Conclusion

In this work we come to a conclusion that examples of both manifest and latent risks of continuous online-communication have multiple consequences for various social and demographic categories of the population. Potential probability to become a consumer of studied risks is becoming high for active users of virtual space (children and youth), and for the people who are poorly involved in self-communication (representatives of advanced age). Consequently, the methodological bases and conclusions offered during the research can promote further deeper and detailed studying of possible risks of virtual interaction of individuals and prevention of pathological problems from excessive and unsafe use of mobile means of communication.

Conclusions of our research can be used as base for carrying out empirical research of continuous online-communication, a classification of social risk groups, and also when developing practical recommendations for carrying out youth policy of the Russian Federation and adoption of the draft of the Concept of Strategy of Cyber Security of the Russian Federation.

References

Castells, M. (2010). *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society*. Second edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Gardner, H. & Davis K. (2013*). The App Generation*. Yale University Press.

Kravchenko, S. (2012). *The becoming of Complex Socium*. Moscow: MGIMGO-University.

Livingstone, S. (2010). *«E-Youth: (Future) Policy Implications: Reflections on online risk, harm and vulnerability»*. In: e-Youth: Balancing Between Opportunities and Risks. [Web log post]. Retrieved   from http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/27849/1/eYouth_(future)_policy_implications_(LSERO_version).pdf.

Omelchenko, E. (2006). The Beginning of the Era of Youth or the Death of Youth Culture? *Studies of Social Policy*, 4, 151-182.

Pavlova, E. (2007). *Consciousness in Information Environment*. Moscow: Academia.

Tsymbolenko, S. (2010). *Teenager in Informational World: Practices of Social Projecting.* Moscow: NIII School Technologies.

Turkle, S. (2012). *Alone Together. Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York, Basic Books.