CYBERCULTURE: A THREAT OR A CHANCE FOR HUMAN EDUCATION

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Summary: The subject of this study is to assess the impact of cyberculture on the education of a modern human being. Focusing on this topic is necessary due to statistical data which indicates that the informal education utilising ICT instruments is becoming increasingly important. The research hypothesis assumes that education in cyberspace is extremely useful, providing new opportunities of acquiring new qualifications. Nevertheless, the aim of the work is to indicate possible threats of VR, the solution to which is the creation of cyberculture. The work is interdisciplinary, combining law, sociology and statistics.

Key words: cyberspace, the third dimension of culture, human rights

INTRODUCTION

The term "cyberculture" is almost 60 years old. It was coined by A.M. Hilton in the year of 1964 [Hilton 1964, 139–53]. Since that time, the term has been quite often used in titles and in bodies of both narrower and of broader articles wrote mainly in English, but also in Polish. The most significant foreign language studies include the works of the following authors: F. Turner [Turner 2010], R. Kozinets [Kozinets 1998, 366–71], and P. Lévy [Lévy 2001]. As far as the Polish literature is concerned, the following authors need to be mentioned: R.W. Kluszczyński [Kluszczyński 2001], Z. Brodecki and A.M. Nawrot [Brodecki and Nawrot 2007], and P. Zawojski [Zawojski 2018].

In the very beginning of her study from 1964, Hilton wrote that, in those times, cyberculture came into being due to computers, and that it had a significant impact on millions of people. There has never been such a rapid change in culture and its surrounding in the history of humankind. The changes have been occurring not only in the sphere of technical or IT devices, but, above all, in the style of communicating, learning, trading, ruling, and image-creating [Hilton 1964, 139].

The term "cyberculture" is defined in various ways. Different definitions can be found in the literature. Zawojski indicated two criteria to be applied for all definitions. The first one is the bond between culture and broadly

understood technology. The second criterion, based on which, it is possible to group other definitions of cyberculture, is the theoretical discourse on the basis of which a cultural paradigm is created, which is dominated by media, especially digital ones [Zawojski 2018, 13].

The definitions established on the basis of the second criterion are more accurate. According to these definitions, "cyberculture" is "a set of activities pertaining to the use of digital media conducted in order to create a new model of culture based on the synergy of what is online with what is offline" [ibid.].

Cyberculture shall be perceived as a kind of a phenomenon created on the basis of digital technology which, in turn, is a foundation of cyberspace which constitutes an important factor of the globalisation processes. In this perspective, "globalisation" is a much older and much broader term than "cyberculture" which is created in cyberspace.

Many various characteristics of the phenomenon referred to as "cyberspace" can be found in professional literature. Having been referred to as "virtual" not long ago, it is thought to be a kind of illusion of the real world created with the use of ICT devices. In recent past, the border between cyberspace and virtual world could be precisely established. Many warned people against cyberspace claiming that it is dangerous for a human being that it dehumanises him or her, and that it cuts or loosens interpersonal ties, especially within families.

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CYBERSPACE OR VIRTUAL REALITY (VR) OF A HUMAN BEING

At present, the boarder between real world and virtual world has blurred. Many spheres of human activity have been transferred from real world to the Internet which is a means of connecting computers. These include postal services (only those services which require postal receipt are left in the real world) and banking services. Also, shopping is more often done online, not to mention the use of dating sties which replaced indirect contact the purpose of which was to find a life partner. In addition, a human being satisfies his or her spiritual, and even religious needs via the Internet. It is thus possible, without greater restrictions (apart from legal ones), to listen to the best music in the world, to read books in each and every language, to watch movies, to see collections of paintings of almost all art galleries in the world, to participate in meetings with artists, to participate in religious ceremonies or even to attend in meetings with the Pope via the Internet. Finally, this virtual world became a part of our lives, without which it is hard to imagine normal functioning of a human being, of a society, of a state, or even of an international community.

Since human's environment has undergone radical changes over the last 50 years, and since the speed of technical, technological, cultural,

communicational, and social changes has never been so rapid, the fundamental question needs to be posed about the style of human living in such an environment. It is no longer possible to warn children, youngsters or even adults or the elderly against the Internet. Even the elderly, being 90 years of age, know how to use the Internet and how to utilise the phenomenon of cyberspace along with its devices.

Blending of virtual and real worlds affects, above all, the style of human living and human relation with the environment. Provided that all the things which are called "culture" are human creation, then transferring main human activities to cyberspace has an impact on culture per se, thus not only on the technical culture or on the arts. Owing to this, it seems necessary to discuss the issue of cyberculture analogously to the culture of a given society; however, in this case, it is the culture of a global society. Thus, it is important to analyse human behaviour in various professional, social, and religious groups through the perspective of global cyberculture, the control of which is less and less attributed to governments. This is because the cyberculture is becoming independent of past cultural or political divisions. Quite an analogous phenomenon was brought about by Christianity which offered certain standards of behaviour and the system of values which became universal in nature for almost two thousand years independently of a cultural field.

The cyberspace described above constitutes the so-called human virtual reality. It is characterised by three-dimensionality. Owing to this, the multimedia computer creation of a vision of things, space, and events is enabled through the utilisation of IT. A VR participant exists within a created space. Such is the characteristic of virtual space, that it enables its participants to see the surrounding world from a new perspective. Traditional senses provide new cognitive and sensory capabilities which were unavailable to human being functioning in reality. In any case, the border between the reality and VR is becoming blurred.

New social structures and arising of the so-called "web society" are the consequences of the virtual world. Human relationships are unsteady; they are often temporary (the so-called "enterspace relationships"). VR participants are becoming active participants of the process of creating and receiving information. Thus, the noticeable decadency of traditional media is visible, where there was a publisher, a journalist, and, at the very end of this chain, more or less critical readers – recipients. Today, it is not always clear who is the author of a given phrase, saying or a thought spontaneously published on the web [Krassowski 2018, 327–40].

Reality provides grounds for the multiplication of subjectivity or rather for the loss of thereof. Each VR participant can create few or even hundreds of distinct personalities hiding behind various nicks. This facilitates anonymity

and even impunity in most cases of online hate. An individual loses his or her exceptional position and meaning.

2. TRADITIONAL EDUCATION VS. VR EDUCATION

Since ancient times, or at least since Roman times, until today, the model of teaching children and youngsters in primary and high schools was dominated by traditional classes taught by a teacher who used a board and chalk. This kind of education is referred to as "formal schooling." It stands in opposition to informal schooling which is based on self-learning or on education acquired in educational institutes other than public ones, e.g. on vacation camps, on oases or through home schooling. All forms of informal schooling provide 70–80% of competences needed in life [Solarczyk–Szewc 2014, 94].

Often the students felt fatigued and melancholic after having a few 45-minutes classes in a row which lasted for 6–8 hours total. Teachers also barely coped with this kind of teaching. The most popular way of student learning was to memorize book content, lexical items or definitions, which did not necessarily imply the understanding of a class subject. A teacher aimed at stimulating student's imagination. Thus, the most valued were those teachers who knew how to transfer knowledge in a lively, emotional manner, using proper intonation and prosody.

Undoubtedly, the students, especially those studying technical majors, who could learn in laboratories, were in a somewhat better situation. But the students of liberal arts and social sciences majors still learnt by material memorisation.

Without any doubt, the introduction of activating methods, starting from nursery school, was a kind of "antidote" to these "complaints". The methods include conversation, interview, simulation, and live images. Moreover, the creative thinking methods have been established, such as visualisation of abstract terms, association chain, and transformation. Another significant activating method is the problem-solving method [Sawicka 2019].

Teaching children and youngsters, starting from a nursery school up till higher education, has undergone a radical change since the creation of VR. At present, these are digitalisation and multimedia that are the platform of communication, information transfer, but also of education. As M. Żmigrodzka claims, the traditional methods seem not only archaic, but also faulty; thus, university boards, following new trends in education, willingly implement new technical solutions such as, for instance, virtual reality [Żmigrodzka 2017, 120].

The boarder between the systems of formal and informal teaching is gradually blurring. More and more studies on the newest IT solutions are available online. These are educational materials which are either short summaries or

extensively broad studies. This is due to the open-source intelligence system, that is to make academic achievement public for general, free of charge use. Such studies can be found in professional databases like google scholar, researchgate or academia.edu.

Remote teaching, the so-called "e-learning," is yet another significant element of virtual education. The free Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) platform was created with the aim to realise this possibility. Thus, the educational materials can be published there. Apart from this, there is the possibility to control the learning progress through posing questions or through taking tests. E-learning also allows for modular schooling to be utilised. Improving qualifications does not necessarily entail enrolling to a university. It is enough to purchase one or more modules at a prestigious university, to learn the e-learning material and to pass an exam [Brzostek–Pawłowska 2009, 5–32]. At present, more and more courses are organised in such a way so as to utilise this instrument. Consequently, improving qualifications no longer requires losing time commuting to a university or covering the accommodation costs.

What is more, new teaching methods utilising ICT devices allow for a lifelong learning. This form of education also comprises the spheres such as: communicating (the exchange of ideas and beliefs), physicality, time, space, art, citizen (justice, respecting human rights, civil society creation), morality (ethics, emotions, customs, moral development), technology and science (critical, reflective, and innovative thinking, integrating thinking and activity) [Lengrand 1995].[1] The European Grundtvig programme which, in turn, is a part of the Socrates I, Socrates II, and Lifelong Learning programmes, is both a financial and substantive support for the elderly. Unfortunately, The Polish Central Statistical Office [GUS] data indicates that the implementation of these programmes in Poland is not to a high extent, since approximately 55% of people in post-educational age, that is between 24 and 64 years of age, do not participate in any form of further education.[2] However, the persons who participate in further education most often choose informal type which often utilises IT instruments.

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[1] The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, issued by the European Union Commission in Brussels, 2000, is of essence here. SEK (2000) 1832. The said document concentrates on new skills directed towards all people, on the increase of the scale of investment in human resources, on the change in thinking with regard to professional counseling and professional orientation, as well as on the mobilisation of resources for lifelong learning.
[2] The Polish Central Statistical Office. Adult education in the year 2016, https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/edukacja/edukacja/ksztalcenie-doroslych-w-2016-roku,14,1.html [accessed: 17.01.2019].

3. WHAT HAS VR EDUCATION CHANGED?

Not only the VR education play greater and greater role but it can also be said that it starts to dominate over formal education. What is more, the formal education needs to be adjusted to devices and solutions utilised in VR. They are the ones that, to a large extent, determine the content and the methods of formal schooling. In this perspective, using projectors for delivering a lecture seems archaic. It is necessary to use animation, which requires the knowledge of programming.

The VR-created situation diminishes, among others, parents' right to bring up their children, also with respect to the right to shape their system of values. Parents are less and less perceived as authority. Patterns of behaviour, along with the system of values, are shaped by social media in which people from all over the world communicate with each other. Until now, the geographical and state boundaries enhanced the preservation of local cultures which used to be transferred to younger generations mainly by parents. At present, these boundaries do not exist in VR. This new situation is also affected by the fact that the younger generation is extremely VR literate, unlike the older generation of their parents. The later, due to their limited skills to use the new technology, are at a disadvantaged position.[3]

VR allows for unlimited access to technical, medical, and historical knowledge. Thus, during a class or a lecture, a student can check whether a professor is right. The knowledge available in the virtual world is of greater authority than the knowledge of a teacher or of a lecturer. Owing to this, the authority of a teacher or even of a professor has been weakened, and their overall position is relatively lower than of the knowledge accessed on the Internet.

The loss of authority of formal educators, that is of teachers and of professors, was caused by the invasion of new Information Technology and by the multiplication of knowledge on various fora or Internet sites. This apparent positive phenomenon bears numerous threats for VR participants. Information or knowledge available in VR is available on different levels. What is more, for marketing purposes, information available in VR is profiled in such a way so as to encourage a participant to purchase a product or service, even educational one. The way of providing such information may create in a recipient the sense of belonging to a better, modern and progressive world. Sometimes, people who have not graduated from any university become heroes or educators. Professors and teachers who devote their time to tedious study of scientific problems do so for little money and lose with VR educators who can earn millions of dollars in a very short period of time.

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[3] See Sitek 2016, 192; Sepulak 2016, 37–50, to learn more about the right of parents to bring up their children.

Also, traditional media of knowledge like books, in particular coursebooks and encyclopaedias, are passing into history. There are no traditional libraries at some of American or Canadian universities. They have been replaced with computer laboratories where readers can familiarise themselves with scanned books. Digitalisation replaced books. The utilisation of electronics, especially of mobile devices and of computers, to acquire knowledge is more and more popular among both students and youngsters, as well as among adults. Basic knowledge is most often acquired from Wikipedia or from other encyclopaedic entries available on the Internet, the number of which is greater and greater. No one controls anymore the correctness and the quality of information provided there. Information is not reviewed, and often times its aim is to gain as many site visits as possible for marketing purposes.

The change in the form of information access and in the new form of knowledge resulted in mental changes – that is even in the '90s, there was a popular belief that whatever has been said or written in media must be true. The accuracy of information dogma has been now adopted by information portals. Not many are aware of the fact that a lot of information, especially within the field of history, is entered by foreign authorities with the aim to discredit historical figures important for a given nation. Examples are numerous articles slandering one of the most prominent Polish kings, Casmir the Great. Today, many states, including Russia, China or North Korea, have specially trained persons whose task is to spread disinformation [Aleksandrowicz 2016, 11–28].

Media campaign can very quickly change social views on a given problem, on a group of people, or even on a state. Such an instance is the discrediting of the Catholic Church – and only this Church. The aims of such campaign may be great in number. However, the weakening of the position of the Catholic Church undoubtedly facilitates the introduction of a system of values which is typical of postmodernism, such as, for instance, moral laxism.

CONCLUSION

Blurring of the border between cyberspace and reality is undoubtedly the effect of a great technical and technological advance spread to the greatest extent ever known in the human history. This process cannot be unambiguously valued with the use of a true or false quantifier or with a good or evil criterion. Rather, a method of description of phenomena occurring in cyberspace, including those connected to education, shall be utilised.

Due to the use of ICT devices, the new communication possibilities have been created, along with the possibility to virtually cross physical boundaries, to gain a new view on the reality, as well as to learn. Information and knowledge, as well as numerous services, became cheaper and easier to acquire. The

informal education is becoming more and more significant in the sphere of education. The access to information and, consequently, to knowledge, is extremely easy. Thus, it is possible to improve occupational qualifications much easier than it was three decades ago.

However, facilitation and improvement of numerous spheres of human life achieved through the utilisation of ICT devices poses many threats for a human being. The lack of control over the content of the information posted in VR results in the fact that a person who makes use of such knowledge does not know whether the information is true or not. Paradoxically, it is possible to improve one's qualifications but through acquiring incorrect and false knowledge. One also needs to remember about the phenomenon of intentional and conscious disinformation present on the web.

From this perspective, it is essential to construct a new cultural paradigm which would encompass normative organisation of interpersonal communication on the web, and which would evoke the sense of responsibility for the content posted by persons functioning in the cyberspace. The creation of cyberculture is required for the sake of cybersecurity which is to be understood not only as a threat for a human being, for his or her estate or status, but rather as the lack of the skills to participate in cyberspace. This definition can be compared to road traffic which is regulated by road traffic code. However, the observance of these rules is not enough to feel safe on the roads. It is necessary to exhibit a kind of culture towards other participants of road traffic. This way, the road safety is increased. Undoubtedly, the respect for other participants of road traffic is similar to the case of cyberspace users, and the respect shall be the common denominator of the culture of road traffic and of the culture of cyberspace.

In this perspective, the cyberculture is an essential phenomenon required for normal VR functioning. Unquestionably, it is not a threat but rather an aid for educational processes. Yet, one cannot forget about potential threats.

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CYBERKULTURA: ZAGROŻENIE CZY SZANSA DLA EDUKACJI CZŁOWIEKA

Streszczenie. Przedmiotem opracowania jest ocena wpływu cyberkultury na edukację współczesnego człowieka. Podjęcie się takiego tematu jest konieczne ze względu na dane statystyczne, które pokazują, że edukacja nieformalna z wykorzystaniem instrumentów teleinformatycznych nabiera coraz większego znaczenia. Hipoteza badawcza to twierdzenie, edukacja w cyberprzestrzeni jest niezwykle pożyteczna, niesie ze sobą nowe możliwości dla człowieka w zakresie zdobywania nowych kwalifikacji. Celem zaś pracy jest wykazanie ewentualnych zagrożeń. Wyjściem jest zatem tworzenie cyberkultury. W pracy są liczne odniesienia do elementów prawniczych, ale też socjologicznych i statystycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: cyberprzestrzeń, trzeci wymiar kultury, prawa człowieka

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