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Kancik Ewelina**IDENTITY CREATION ON THE INTERNET, THAT IS,
THE VIRTUAL IDENTITY OF A MODERN MAN**

The computer technology development has a significant impact on every sphere of human life today such as communication, education, work as well as his or her identity. The goal of the article is to present how is the identity of a man constructed and created on a social network society nowadays. The article contains definitions of the identity in general and definitions of the virtual identity of a man. The author concentrates on creation and self-presentation of an individual identity on the Internet by means of blogs, social networks, newsgroups and computer games.

Keywords: Internet, identity, virtual identity of a man.

Канцік Е. Ідентичність створена в Інтернеті, тобто віртуальна ідентичність сучасної людини

Розвиток комп'ютерних технологій значною мірою вплинув на кожну сферу життя сучасної людини: комунікацію, науку, працю, а також на ідентичність. Стаття має на меті продемонструвати, як вибудовується та створюється ідентичність людини в епоху мережевого суспільства. Визначення ідентичності, що тут містяться, стосується ідентичності загалом та віртуальної ідентичності людини. Авторка зосереджує увагу на тому, як індивід здійснює творення власної ідентичності в мережі за допомогою блогів, соціальних мереж, дискусійних груп та комп'ютерних ігор.

Ключові слова: Інтернет, ідентичність, віртуальна ідентичність людини.

Канцик Э. Идентичность созданная в Интернете, или виртуальная идентичность современного человека

Развитие компьютерных технологий значительно повлияло каждую сферу жизни современного человека: коммуникацию, науку, труд, а также на идентичность. Статья имеет цель продемонстрировать, как выстраивается и создается идентичность человека в эпоху сетевого общества. Опре-

еление идентичности, которые здесь представлены, касаются идентичности вообще и виртуальной идентичности человека. Авторка обращает внимание на то, как индивид создает собственную идентичность в сети с помощью блогов, социальных сетей, дискуссионных групп и компьютерных игр.

Ключевые слова: Интернет, идентичность, виртуальная идентичность человека.

First of all, speaking about the identity of the modern man on the Internet, the concept of the identity should be explained for in postmodernism the identity of the man is still controversial. There are many definitions of the identity. It is a kind of accumulated skills in recognising its distinctiveness or resemblance, gained cognitive, emotional, moral and political qualifications, which allow to define personal place in the world. Such an approach is depicted by Bronislaw Misztal [7, p. 24]. Roman Ingarden says that the identity is not any real property, it is at the most a necessary condition to have any possessions of an object and it constitutes a particular moment of a form of the object [8, p. 28]. Postmodernity which carries an autonomy of the individual and the right to be different so, it becomes the element which permeates many aspects of our lives [3, p.9]. Every individual functions in a number of groups and different roles, which often develops an identity conflict and determines, in a sense, change of the identity. It often happens that on a daily basis, we do not show our true identity, depending on the circumstances, roles in which we are, we put on 'masks' [11, p. 63-67] which we often use to create ourselves on the Internet.

Based on these concepts, we can formulate a new definition, which will serve as an explanation of the concept of 'the virtual identity'. Assuming that, the virtual identity is a social identity which an Internet user establishes being on the social network. However, such an image is exposed to a number of factors that may form our online image completely different than we would like.

The process of building an internet identity is best described in Waclaw Branicki's book, entitled 'Torzsamość a wirtualność'. The author claims in it that creation of the virtual identity largely rests upon experience, character and even the environment of the individual. All occurrences and emotions which are experienced by the person will be reflected in some part in the character that the person tries to create. According to Branicki alternative avatar creation on the In-

ternet is never entirely distinct from our own identity. 'Virtual body' creation may be done in two ways: adoption of an already existing character or creation of a new one. Nonetheless, the Internet users prefer creating their avatars from the beginning. Branicki assumes that devotion of the time and emotions points out man's attitude towards his or her virtual identity. The individual does not treat his or her avatar only as a communication tool but often identifies himself or herself with the virtual character [2, 205-208].

Just like in a real life, also online one has to pay attention to what he or she is saying and how he or she behaves. Social network sites, open forums, blogs and games of MUD and MMO type – these are just examples of places, in which our virtual counterparts come into being. Judging from the amount of more and more new ideas for 'common' spending time in front of the computer screen, we can see that people, especially young ones, have a growing desire for beyond personal communication. In that case, what should we do to make our image unique and stand out of the rest of the people? It is necessary to emphasize that everything we do is suggested by our personality. This way even creating of our brand new image on the Internet actually we are guided by our awareness, taste, hence identity. There will always be something that can be attributed to the virtual identity, as well as to a real person.

The character, which we are generating, will always be a reflection of ourselves. On the social network websites we are creating ourselves as 'almost perfect' people. It means that we are sharing with others what we regard as our positive features. It hardly ever happen to somebody to show his or her drawbacks. It is similar on the blogs. The exceptions are the thematic blogs, where character of our virtual identity covers a social plane. In online games almost every element may talk about the identity of the person sitting in front of the computer screen. The way we lead our avatar, how we will dress it or even how it will look like, comes out of our imagination, therefore it certainly must be suggested by the character. Avatars may be defined as any virtual identity and visual-linguistic person through which users participate in computer-mediated communication (CMC) [9, p. 130]. The open forums, which are also completely anonymous, do not break the rule. Everything a person writes, and even his or her nick shows marked and the emotional state. Every written word indicates both the virtual identity that is created through our forum activeness in addition to the real identity, which characterize us as the inimitable individual.

Social network websites have one primary goal – appear to the society and become known in the contemporary world media. Nevertheless, any posted information, knowingly or not, is subjected to the identity verification. It means that we just put the things that other people might like on the social network. We do not show our drawbacks there as a result we do not show the other part that is creating integrity. It is possible to argue that number of Facebook users create their avatars in their own resemblance, with similar identity characteristics merely retaining their own idea of perfection. Because of such action, third party are mislead. In that case it is impossible to fully get to know the other person.

Extremely popular virtual world game in the United States is at the same time one of the most complex production of this brand. The Second Life game consist in leading our own virtual life. We participate in the Second Life game as if we actually lived in this world. The only thing we have is our avatar, which often resembles well-known characters from the real world. Each element of the landscape, a house, a tree, or a car, we can create ourselves or select already existing one. The game allows to create animation and sounds for our virtual character through the built-in program. Therefore, we can ideally project ourselves or create someone we would like to be. To start the virtual life we simply need creativity and imagination. The Second Life game and its users are conclusive evidence to the fact that the virtual identity depends entirely on our own identity.

Examining a problem of the human identity, one should pay attention to the self-created 'ego' in the cyber reality or as Jean-François Lyotard writes 'we now live in a space-time where there is no identity, there are only transformations' [6, p. 31]. Currently, computers are present almost in every part of our life. They become universal tools that we use at work, at home, at school and on travel. One may observe many elements of consumerism in the virtual world. The Internet is an omniscient medium, which dynamic development on a global scale results in the virtual reality creation that has an impact on the actual reality. It leads to expansion of a cyber culture, cyber terrorism, electronic money or the virtual identity. The peculiarity of the Internet makes the network a self-knowing place, and thus the anonymity causes that depending on our preferences, we can assume different identities. The network identity games in the cyber world are something natural and the masks used to communicate cause freedom

of contact. The Internet user is often devoid of all identity symbols both verbal and physical. Every person, who is using an instant messenger, uses pseudonyms participating in 'masquerades' or even the identity 'games'. The individual can freely create his or her identity on Internet pages, profiles, social networks or blogs. Moreover, one is showing him or her as positively as possible while their identities are not usually true and constitute fiction. People enjoy changing their identities as the Internet makes it possible, along with beautifying themselves, rejuvenation, idealization of their person or assuming different personalities because the most important thing on the Internet is the text. The identity game causes that one may try for some time to be someone else than he or she is in the real world. The virtual world allows the man not only to change his or her character traits but also to change social roles he/she is performing in the reality. 'In the process of computer-mediated communication there is elimination of the body accordingly there is no involuntary self-presented messages generated by it. The difference is also in the fact that in the cyberspace one can easily take different roles or become an invisible observer' [9, p. 129]. Zygmunt Bauman writes about a set of identities which give the individual 'the rebirth, constant creation and penetration of oneself' [1, p. 56].

'The concept of the identity construction in communication via the computer is derived from poststructuralist theory, which has rejected the belief in perpetuated essence of the identity. The identity is perceived as a fluent process of constant interaction between 'ego' and the environment. The idea rests on the thesis that the identity is controlled within the framework of the discourse' [5, p. 316]. The cyber identity characterizes each Internet user, it is a specific indication of every blogger and chat user. Magdalena Szpunar rightly points out that 'nowadays in the face of the Internet, the identity has become extremely important in terms of domination of not determined feelings. The Internet communication carries the elements, among which the fluent identity and anonymity deserve our attention, which result in different ideas of self-presentation. (...) Trying to name the phenomenon of the fluent identity we use many terms such as the cyber identity, the cyber body and a cyber sex' [10, p. 400]. It seems that the man does not want to live in the virtual reality. He or she creates the virtual characters since he/she wants to find out through experience who he/she really is' [2, p. 222].

The growth of the new media in particular, the Internet causes that the man of the information age moves in the virtual reality which results in creation of the virtual identity or the e-identity. The hypermodern identity is often variable, false and created by the individual that the virtual identity prompts to. The man, who is surfing the Internet, creates as if his/her new and at the same time different identity that varies from its real equivalents. One creates the identity in relation to his/her values, necessity or a schedule which we can see, even visiting websites of the politicians, on which they create themselves. The growing popularity of Facebook confirms the thesis that the modern society prefers to communicate via medium rather than face-to-face. Consequently, the virtual identity starts to dominate over the real identity.

'The world of the turn of XX and XXI century transforms us into cyborgs – hybrid creatures that crosses the barrier between what is restricted and what is fabricated, and artificial. The foundation of our 'ego' becomes the identity delivered by the mass media'[4, p. 126].

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