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Intrapersonal conflicts of bloggers: psychological perspective

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Abstract

Aim. The aim of the study was to establish depth and substantive characteristics of intrapersonal conflicts of bloggers. Internal conflicts were analyzed at the levels of individual typological characteristics, self-conception, and value orientation of personality.

Research methodology. The study was based on the method of content analysis and psychodiagnostic tests. 100 respondents (50 respondents who have blogs and 50 respondents who do not have blogs) were examined with Sobczyk's individual typological questionnaire, Stephenson's Q sorting, Budassi's scale of self-assessment, Leary's interpersonal diagnosis of personality, Fantalova's value / accessibility correlation in different life spheres. Mann-Whitney test and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient were applied for statistical data processing.

Research results. The results of the survey support the hypothesis regarding the special character of the intra-personal conflicts of bloggers in comparison with those people who do not have blogs and use the Internet less often. In fact, conflicts between real self and virtual self are characteristic of bloggers. Most of the tension is the result of contradiction of ideas about their personal social and communicative competence and the opposition of coping strategies "acceptance of struggle – avoidance of struggle".

Conclusions. There are different views on how the Internet influences psychological wellbeing. Social networks allow bloggers to present themselves in a certain desired light, to create some image, to stress their unique features, to attract attention to those character properties which are not manifested in real life as desired.

Keywords: conflict, value orientation, virtual self, blogger.

Streszczenie

Cel. Celem niniejszego artykułu było scharakteryzowanie oraz ustalenie głębokości intrapersonalnego konfliktu blogerów. Konflikty wewnętrzne zostały przeanalizowane na poziomie indywidualnych cech typologicznych, samooceny i orientacji wartości osobowości.

Metoda. Narzędzia badawcze. Badanie opierało się na metodzie analizy treści i testów psychodiagnostycznych. 100 respondentów (50 respondentów, którzy prowadzili bloga oraz 50 respondentów, którzy nie prowadzili bloga) zostało ocenionych z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza osobowości Sobczyka, Techniki Q-Sort, Skali Samooceny Budassiego, interpersonalnej diagnozy osobowości Leary'ego, korelacji wartości / dostępności Fantalova w różnych sferach życia. W celu statystycznego przetwarzania danych zastosowano test Mann-Whitneya i współczynnik korelacji Spearmana.

Wyniki badań. Otrzymane wyniki wspierają hipotezę istnienia szczególnego konfliktu między rzeczywistym ja i wirtualnym ja wśród blogerów, w porównaniu do osób nieprowadzących blogów i rzadziej korzystających z Internetu. Najbardziej napięte są wyobrażenia o sprzeczności z ich osobistymi kompetencjami społecznymi i komunikacyjnymi oraz opozycją strategii radzenia sobie "akceptacja walki - unikanie walki".

Wnioski. Istnieją różne poglądy na temat wpływu Internetu na dobrostan psychiczny. Sieci społecznościowe pozwalają blogerom prezentować się w określonym świetle, tworząc obraz, podkreślając swoje unikalne cechy, zwrócić uwagę na cechy charakteru, które nie są dostrzegalne w realnym życiu.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt, orientacja na wartość, wirtualne ja, bloger.

Introduction

Over the last decades, the Internet communication has been developing rapidly. Social networks and blogs as parts of it, allow the users to create their virtual self. As a rule,

it may be different from the real self to an extent allowed by the person who keeps it. When the real self and virtual self overlap, intrapersonal conflicts stemming from their differences and even antagonism may arise [1]. That is why,

a study of the influence of the virtual environment on psyche or a person is of practical and theoretical importance. In the article, the results of the empirical study of the features of bloggers' intrapersonality conflicts are compared to those of people who have no blogs and use the Internet less often.

A blog gives the possibility to post notes similar to a personal diary in a virtual space. Yet, these notes are open for reading to other users of this Internet product, who can have a dialogue with the author of such blog. The first official free English blog service was founded in 1999. Thus, this phenomenon is somewhat new. A survey was held in 2005 to learn about the basic functions of blogs [2]. As the result, the following types of functions were singled out: communicative, self-presentational, cognitive, entertaining, memorial, and psychotherapeutic.

Modern science does not agree on the influence of frequent use of the Internet. In the late 1990s, a longitudinal research was held in Carnegie Mellon University, USA. It showed that frequent use of the Internet leads to narrowing of social ties, shrinking of communication within a family, and development of depressive disorders [3]. Similar results were attained in Stanford University in 2000s [4]. The possibility of social perception through information technology is a positive thing itself. However, it also establishes reduced ways of shaping the image of a communicative partner [5]. This happens during traditional communication and leads to the phenomenon of depersonification of communication. Nevertheless, the researchers of shyness, point that for shy people the anonymity and the possibility to have structural control during the interaction in the virtual space are quite useful in the development of their communicative abilities [6, 7]. In a similar manner, communication done through machines is by far the only possibility for people who suffer from autistic disorders to have connection with the outer world, for example, to communicate in the written form or to work in programming, among other things.

With the growth of popularity of the Internet communication, a notion of "virtual personality" [8] was introduced. The virtual personality has the following characteristics: immaterialness, or reduction of personality to textual messages; anonymity, or possibility to hide the real name and take a pseudonym or nickname; free set of personal traits; plurality, or opportunity to create several virtual personalities; automatization, or possibility to stimulate activity of a virtual personality with the help of computer programs. This phenomenon is applied to participants of electronic communication via the role games, discussion forums, virtual worlds, personal webpages, such as blogs or virtual diaries.

What is more, the virtual personality may turn into an implementation of ideas about a personal ideal self which is

not manifested in real life [9]. However, virtual personality may also become an attempt to vent negative tendencies, such as aggression that is blocked in reality. According to Belinskaia [10], the emergence of virtual personality, different from the real one, reflects the variety of motivational determinants of its creating, for example, realization of ideal self, realization of negative tendencies characteristic of personality which are kept hidden in real social surrounding, reflection of the wish to control themselves among the individuals with manifested destructive desires, acquisition of image and power, obtainment of new experience as self-worth desire [10].

A hypothesis about the compensatory character of the virtual personality by means of compensating the challenges which the user experiences in real interaction is well-spread. Still, much research support the idea that virtual self is not a complete reflection of real or ideal self, but is an independent creation [11].

Virtual reality promotes its own laws of interaction, its social medium of visitors, but also limits the manifestation of a personal self, just as it happens in real life. Therefore, a need to shape an identity also exists in virtual space. Here, the correlation of real self and virtual self remains an open issue. It is worth mentioning that bloggers, as frequent visitors of thematic forums, can develop an increased dependency on the rules of virtual environment. That is why the change of identity and creation of multiple identities by bloggers is a burning issue [12, 13]. We believe that a look into the intrapersonal conflicts of bloggers may be an effective way of dealing with them.

I put forward a hypothesis that is based on the assumption that the Internet activity of bloggers may rely on some specific features of their intrapersonal conflicts. At the same time, blogs serve as a mechanism of dealing with those inner conflicts through creation of their virtual self-image. Thus, the main task of the present paper is to reveal the inner experiences of people who are used to virtual interaction through a virtual self, created by them.

Methods

The aim of our study is to determine the depth and substantive characteristics of intrapersonal conflicts of bloggers. The object of the research is the personality as a subject of virtual media, and the subject matter of the research is the characteristics of intrapersonal conflicts of bloggers.

Research groups. The number of 100 respondents aged 21-30 took part in the survey. Out of them, 50 respondents are people who have blogs, 34 women and 16 men (group I). Other 50 respondents, 32 women and 18 men, do not have blogs (group II). As many as 46% have jobs, 30% are

students, and 24% combine work and study. Respondents' average age is 25.

With the view of the subject matter of the research, those blogs that are used as Internet diaries for description and analysis of feelings, thoughts, and actions were in the focus. Internet diaries are more common among women because they are more liable to descriptions and discussions of their feelings. Of 100% of personal blogs, 62% are kept by women and 38% by men. Men mostly keep blogs of social and political character where they publish corresponding data and avoid information which would be directly related to their personality. This explains why the number of male respondents is smaller. The main method applied was psychodiagnostic testing. The content analysis was also used. It presupposes the study of textual information offered in blogs for selection of texts that point to the inner conflict.

Measurement. Psychodiagnostic testing included such methods:

Sobczyk's individual typological questionnaire, which was used for determining of dominant tendencies related to anxiety, strength and direction of motivation, style of interpersonal communication and cognitive processes [14];

Stephenson's Q sorting was applied for determining six basic tendencies of person's behavior in real group: dependence – independence, communicativeness – uncommunicativeness, acceptance of struggle – avoidance of struggle [14];

Budassi's scale of self-assessment allowed to range the properties of real self, ideal self and virtual self, the discrepancies between which, show the degree of expression of intrapersonal conflict [14];

Leary's interpersonal diagnosis of personality was applied for determining the content and depth of inner conflicts through the discrepancy between real self, ideal self and virtual self [14];

Fantalova's value / accessibility correlation in different life spheres was employed for determining whether there is a stage of tension because of the impossibility to fulfil the most desired values [15].

Statistical analysis. Mathematic processing of the data required the use of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Mann-Whitney nonparametric test for comparing groups and Spearman rank correlation coefficient.

Results

The content analysis of the blog texts allowed to determine the most acute manifestations of bloggers' inner conflicts, and how they describe the feeling of internal contradictions. The results of the content analysis are given in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1., most respondents of group I have an experience of describing the situations of inner conflict and psychological tension connected with it.

Table 1. Blog text content analysis results

Text fragments	Frequency of use in blogs	Blogs, per cent
I have a dilemma	81	90%
I don't know what decision to make	115	85%
my feelings are in confusion	102	70%
as if two people fight inside me	98	60%
I cannot understand what I really want	110	67%
I need do choose one thing, but I cannot	45	30%
internal conflicts are bothering me	56	35%
sometimes I want to be with him, and sometimes I don't want to be in relationships with anyone	37	25%
I don't understand why I would avoid communication even though I need it	60	30%

The data offered in Table 2. shows that for both groups of respondents the least acute thing was the psychological conflict connected with high expression of spontaneity and sensitivity. The conflict related to equally high level of aggressiveness and anxiety is characteristic for the group of bloggers. Rigidity and lability are significant for both groups of respondents.

Table 2. Indicators of significant discrepancy in individual typological trends as per Sobczyk's method (% , n=100).

Group	Percentile distribution of results according to opposite tendencies			
	extroversion – introversion	spontaneity – sensitivity	aggressiveness – anxiety	rigidity – lability
Group I	22%	12%	46%	50%
Group II	8%	8%	20%	40%

As can be seen in Table 3., in bloggers' group I, the greatest tension is created by the dichotomy communicativeness – uncommunicativeness. The conflict of acceptance of struggle – avoidance of struggle is characteristic of a third of the bloggers. For the group II respondents, the conflict of dependence on – independence from the group is the most common.

Leary's method reveals the dominant conflicts between real self, ideal self and virtual self. According to the real self marker, only 7% of respondents in the group of bloggers believe that they are highly authoritarian. On the egoistic type of attitude scale, 12% acknowledge having high level of it. In addition, 60% of respondents have low results on the scale of aggressive type of attitude to people around, 25% got average results, and 12% show an extreme degree of it. About 14% believe that they have a high level of suspicion. According to the submissiveness level, 12% of bloggers show extremely high results and 20% have high ones, which points to the manifestations of maladjustment or deadadaptation. Almost 64% have low levels of dependence, and 12% have high dependency on the group. When it comes to 16% of respondents, they consider themselves as quite friendly, and 10% of bloggers point to their altruism, while 30% speak about not having this quality.

Comparison of real and ideal self shows that 34% of bloggers would like to have more authoritative traits, be admired by others, and show leadership. This explains frequent ostentation common among bloggers in the virtual space but lacking it in real life. Manifestations of submissiveness of ideal self are much lower compared to real self. In general, it should be mentioned that a great number of bloggers has problems with social interaction in their real life, feels unsure of themselves, and is rarely initiative, yet they would like to change that. Interestingly, in real life, bloggers would like to be less friendly, less trustful, less compulsive, and less altruistic and empathic.

Table 3. Distribution of high rate of conflicting tendencies as per Q-sorting method, (% , n=100)

Group	Percentile distribution of conflicting tendencies between real self and social self		
	dependence – independence	communicativeness – uncommunicativeness	acceptance of struggle – avoidance of struggle
Group I	6	40	32
Group II	30	22	24

To assess proneness to conflict in value and motivation sphere, Fantalova's method was applied [15]. The results were grouped according to gender, as men and women have different values based on the difference of their gender roles. Among 40% of female bloggers the most desired and unattainable values are love and active and stirring life. Experience of unhappy love, anxiety because of the lack of someone loved, problems in the present love relationships

form a large share of women's blog posts. Relatively large number of women has a high level of disintegration in relation to such values as self-assurance and family: 36% and 32% of women respectively. Women of group II are most often anxious about desirability but unattainability of materially well provided life (36%) and interesting job (32%). Only 28% believe that love is unattainable, among them are those who think that they have not been in a serious relationship. In addition, 28% believe that active life is unattainable because of the lack of time for entertainment. When it comes to 22% of women from group II, they think that good health is desirable but unattainable.

As many as 44% of male bloggers think that freedom as a possibility to act according to their liking is desired but unattainable. Those are the men who use virtual space because of the subjective feeling of the outer world oppression. Half of the men from the bloggers' group feels unattainability of active life. About 40% believe that self-assurance is unattainable, and about 36% say the same of love. Among men, 30% have a high level of disintegration with regard to such values as interesting job and materially well provided life.

Through the mathematic processing, statistically significant discrepancies between the two groups and correlations between the parameters analyzed were traced (see Table 4.).

Table 4. Significant correlations in blogger group

Parameters which correlate	Spearman's coefficient	Significance
anxiety – aggressiveness	0.439	0.002
communicativeness – uncommunicativeness	0.554	0
independence – unattainability of freedom	0.314	0.025
low self-esteem – authoritarian type of ideal self	0.440	0.001
inaccessibility of active life – uncommunicativeness	0.340	0.016
lack of self-confidence – egoistic type of ideal self	0.357	0.011
inflated self-esteem – aggressiveness – independence	0.361	0.010

Correlations singled out in group I underlie the intrapersonal conflicts of bloggers and specify their sense (see Table 4.).

All in all, there are statistically significant discrepancies between the two groups (see Table 5.), and they include personal characteristics and value orientations.

Table 5. Significant difference between two groups as per Mann-Whitney value

Scales with significant difference	Mann-Whitney value	Significance
aggravation	786	0.002
introversion	872.5	0.012
anxiety	916.5	0.028
extraversion	941	0.043
communicativeness – uncommunicativeness tendency	367	0.000
love (value)	961	0.045
self-confidence (value)	958	0.044
freedom (value)	970	0.050

Discussion

The results of the survey support the hypothesis related to the special features of bloggers' intrapersonal conflicts and attempts to solve them through the creation of virtual self-image.

The majority of the bloggers has an internal conflict. Most often this conflict is caused by the clearly defined opposing tendencies of individually psychological traits, discrepancy in assessing of real self, ideal self and virtual self, and conflict between the hierarchy of values and their attainability.

Social networks give bloggers possibility to present themselves in a certain desired light, to create image, to highlight their unique traits, and to attract attention to those traits which were not manifested as desired in real life. In the virtual world, it is possible to ascribe to oneself the traits that a personality wishes to attain to create an illusion of ideal personality, and to substitute the real self.

Content analysis of blog texts allows to determine the most acute manifestations of the bloggers' inner conflicts. They include (1) lack of fulfilment of their potential in the relationships with the opposite sex, which manifests itself in the contradiction between the desire to have romantic relationship, fear to be abandoned and fear to lose freedom, what lead to the refusal of those relationships; (2) establishment and support of social contacts, including the topic of loneliness, that, on the one hand, is negatively assessed, and on the other, is defined as a shield against complicated relations with the surrounding; (3) contradiction between the desire to communicate

with people and social passiveness; and (4) absence of unconditional self-acceptance, such as acceptance of one's physical self and one's bodily needs. A possible reason for this may be the undeveloped and infantile mechanisms of self-assessment which result from idealistic demands and interfere with shaping of differentiated and adequate ideas about themselves. The tendencies mentioned above have negative impact on the emotional states and lead to increase in the protective mechanisms among bloggers.

The root of bloggers' inner conflicts is often connected with the equal levels of aggression and anxiety manifestation. As anxiety is derived from emotional vulnerability and feeling of insecurity, a need to compensate it through aggressiveness as a mechanism of self-defense emerges. Under such circumstances, a personality can feel an acute dissatisfaction with the actions and would condemn the manifestations of aggressiveness.

Conclusions

Thus, the analysis of the data received during the survey allows to come to certain conclusions as to the features of bloggers' intrapersonal conflicts. The results of empirical survey show that the bloggers are prone to construct their virtual personality which is significantly different from the real one. In this way, a compensation of bloggers' behavioral patterns that have not been realized in real life takes place, but at the same time it leads to the aggravation of conflict between the personality's realistic and virtual concept of self. The results of this research may be used as the recommendations for consulting and psychotherapeutic work with clients who suffer from Internet addiction or have problems with the concepts of self as a result of shaping of virtual self. Further study of gender features of bloggers is also needed.

Conflict of interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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