

Digital Resocialization of Elderly People*

Ivan Lapshin

Department of Ethics
 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
 Peoples' Friendship University of Russia
 Miklukho-Maklaya str., 10/2
 Moscow, Russia 117198
 E-mail: lapshin_ie@rudn.university

Abstract—The process of socialization today is a process that occurs with most of the people. However, there are many different processes that may be called “socialization” and they come with many subtleties, which are implied according to or despite the will of those being socialized. In the last decades, many people experienced digital socialization and accommodation to the world of computers. However, primary digital socialization can be very different and depends largely on the age of people being socialized: young people are much more predisposed to become “digital citizens” while elderly people experience difficulties or appear resistant to some aspects of digital socialization. Our study is an attempt to summarize the problem of digital resocialization of elderly people and its most important aspects.

Keywords—*digital socialization; resocialization; digital immigrants*

I. INTRODUCTION

In past centuries, there were many discussions on the methods of nurturing and raising of adolescents. The role and the importance of this process however remained indisputably high. Children and young people are the future blood of any nation, society, culture and religion. People of ancient times were fighting for their children in the sense that they must survive famine, diseases, and wars. But modern people are much more concerned about the prospect of losing their children to the malignant influence of various factors, such as crime, drugs etc. Therefore, the task of nurturing supposedly consists in cultivating a mental set that would help children become decent citizens of their country. However, the typical components of this set often have a form of “strive for everything good and avoid everything bad”. The idea of nurturing sometimes tends to be reduced to the system of restrictions which should be imposed on the youth. The youth, in their turn, seeks to get rid of these prohibitions which are based on opaque ideas. Moreover, these ideas vary from country to country, from social stratum to social stratum and even from person to person. In our opinion, this applies to both education within the family and academic education.

Nevertheless, as we have already mentioned, there is a notion which is both more universal and distinct: the notion of citizen. Some educators consider subcultures to be the source of moral corruption, sports as a way of overcoming several problems at once etc., but being a good citizen is always regarded as a virtue. Again, in different countries different traits are connected with the idea of citizenship, but a citizen is always a part of society, therefore, it must be socialized. It is socialization that makes us a part of society and can make us good people [1]. In our opinion, socialization is the concept that should replace – and it's already happening – the vague ideas of nurture and upbringing. Being able to exist in a society means to have access to things that befit a human being. Socialized person is not necessarily a person with high moral standards; socialization is required but not sufficient for it.

However, there are other problems of socialization which often remain concealed behind the above-mentioned questions: the problem of resocialization and specifically the problem of digital resocialization of elderly people.

II. DIGITAL RESOCIALIZATION: THE MOST PROMINENT PROBLEMS ARE THE MOST SHADOWY

The concept of resocialization is relatively new. As it can be derived from the notion itself, resocialization is a process during which a person gains a new social role. The need for resocialization mostly arises in two situations: when a person is socialized in a way that disturbs other people or in a way that disturbs himself. The first type of resocialization is usually applied in prisons. It is a process that seems to have been discovered many centuries ago. Since the process of prison resocialization is not relevant for our study, it suffices to say that effective prison resocialization is a much more recent phenomenon than it has been widely supposed: S. Mesoniere in her study remarks that at the end of nineteenth century in Europe “there was... public apprehension about the lack of success in rehabilitating convicts and increased recidivism. German, Belgian, Dutch and French criminologists and lawyers... emphasized the impact of social factors on criminality, philosophically discrediting imprisonment as an effective method of correction (resocialization). The hypothesis that imprisonment

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(isolation) can lead to effective correction of convicts was theoretically invalidated" [2].

The other motivation to resocialize oneself is usually connected with changes in everyday routine. Today we live in an ever transforming world and there are many factors that change our life, but the most important changes are connected with the digital sphere and the sphere of Internet communication. Again, most of the problems here are usually considered as the problems of young people that hang out too much on the Internet. We will try to show that such view is overly simplistic.

Elderly people today become more and more involved into digital life. Several decades ago, computers and computer networks served mostly as an optional means to facilitate some routine procedure, as an element of prestige and as a means of entertainment. Today, one either can't avoid using Internet services in very many situations or this avoidance would cost too much effort. This makes elderly people become more and more familiar with Internet communication, sometimes without letting them see the difference between real life communication and conversations on the Internet.

B. Zizek analyzes examples of typical conduct on the Internet and concludes that one of the most important traits of Internet communication is a possibility to "filter interactions", making any deep participation optional. This constitutes certain "emptiness" of communication, which impedes socialization. Despite the fact that "the Internet-based interaction... lacks key qualities of socialization interaction" [3], young people tend to be socialized in this "empty" way. Elderly people, however, due to this "emptiness" often fail to recognize what exactly on the Internet is different from real life.

Of course, this shallowness of communications also has its origins in the necessity to combat the information overload. The term "information overload" was coined by Alvin Toffler in his "Future Shock" half a century ago but it has never been as vital as today, in the era of the Internet. Annoyingly persistent advertisement on the Internet causes various problems [4], but what is most communication-specific is devaluation of personal addressing and communication. Modern IT-technologies let advertisers send and post enormous amount of ads making them look like personal letters and greetings. Of course the necessity to filter information is a commonplace today, but it is aggressive email marketing that made pushing close button a usual response to "hello <name>, I'd like to tell you something". The difference between man and computer becomes more and more indistinguishable, and besides questions raised by A. Turing there is also a problem of Internet socialization. While young people get accustomed to ignore messages that seem to be spam (however they may turn out to be not), elderly people sometimes fail to tell automated messages from messages sent by human beings. Among young people, this can lead to shallowness of communication in real life; among elderly people, this can lead to failed communication and frustration.

Another feature of Internet communication is the prevalence of short messages. Twitter and some other means of Internet communication are often considered "young people's domain" [5] and they accustom their users to do without long letters and narratives. The length of messages is however only an indication of a much more important difference between conversations in real life and Internet conversations. In contrast to real life communication, almost any Internet communication tends to be a phatic communication, i.e. it doesn't have to be substantial and informative. Nevertheless, it doesn't mean that Internet communication is less "meaningful". H. Piotrowska in her article remarked that "phatic messages potentially carry a lot more weight to them than the content itself suggests. However, although they may not always be "meaningless", they are almost always content-less in any substantive sense. The overall result is that in phatic media culture, content is not king, but 'keeping in touch' is. In this spirit we can assume that the point of twitter is the maintenance of connected presence and sustainability of this presence, even though it is almost completely devoid of substantive content" [6]. This trait of Internet communication or at least of some of its types can embarrass those who are used to more traditional "substantial" conversation.

III. M. PRENSKY: DIGITAL NATIVES AND DIGITAL IMMIGRANTS

In our opinion, the most concise but comprehensive cultural conceptualization of this problem was given by M. Prensky. We usually conceive civilization as something that evolves and spreads from some hypothetical centers towards hypothetical provinces and from the past to the future. This concept implies that older countries are usually the most civilized as well as elderly people are more culturally competent than the youth. However, digital culture is a very specific type of culture which relatively quickly captured the attention of very many people. Therefore, younger generations became assimilated much more rapidly while it took much more time for elderly people. One might have expected that it is only a question of time and the main difference is that older people need to make special efforts where the youth succeeds more naturally, but in truth, there are differences that are more substantial. To explain this, M. Prensky uses an example from the field of more classical cultural studies: he describes the younger generation as digital natives, i.e. as bearers of the new digital culture. This analogy implies that the Internet and other parts of digital world feel like home to digital natives: they know the Internet language better, they are better at interacting with new services, they imagine what is technologically realistic and what is not more clearly. To the contrary, elderly people are digital immigrants: the same digital technologies and resources are available for them, but they always retain their accent: "today's older folk were "socialized" differently from their kids, and are now in the process of learning a new language. And a language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain" [7]. Similar to immigrants in common sense which can learn a foreign language and speak it really fluently, digital immigrants can learn the digital language; however, an immigrant is usually

easy to be recognized as such by a native. M. Prensky provides examples of solutions that look strange to digital natives: bringing people into one's office to show them an interesting web site instead of sending them a link, using a phone to ensure that one's e-mail has reached its destination.

Therefore, it would be only natural to suppose that younger generations should overtake the role of teachers and educators. Of course, it almost never happens due to obvious reasons: if we apply the notions of immigrants and natives to the traditional cultures, we would rather consider elderly people as natives and adolescents as immigrants. This contradiction is most evident in the sphere of education: for a teacher it is very difficult to consider oneself a native while giving a lecture and then suddenly admit oneself to be an immigrant when it comes to showing a presentation. The problem is that digital immigrants try to socialize digital natives into their "immigrancy".

Getting back to the question of digital resocialization, we would like to underline that the problems we discussed earlier are first of all problems of "missocialization". The digital accent is usually acquired in the process of getting familiar with the digital world – but only superficially familiar. Fortunately or not, Internet as a mediascape has its own intrinsic means today that can subtly socialize and resocialize people.

To our opinion, first, the existence of "digital immigrancy" can be explained by the existence of "digital diasporas" where people can keep their digital immigrant identities. These diasporas are usually formed by people that keep contact in real life. However, this is exactly the reason why it becomes more and more difficult to preserve such diasporas: they indirectly limit elderly people in their possibilities so that they, again, remain in a social environment where e-mailing doesn't facilitate one's life (it's better to call someone than to e-mail if you have to check per phone whether your e-mail has been delivered). An elderly person that runs a business and is working with paper correspondence only can notice sooner or later that their younger partners are more effective at performing some routine tasks.

Second, technologically modern services and social networks with contents that appeal to elderly people are also a means of digital resocialization. It can be "Odnoklassniki", a Russian social network service that helps former classmates find each other, or sections of Reddit (subreddits) dedicated to the movies released in decades of digital immigrants' childhood. Internet users of all ages usually feel uncomfortable when being on a forum or any other site where everything looks unfamiliar. Digital natives, however, are much more likely to be surprised by the contents of a website and not by its structure while surfing the web. Functionality of most Internet services remains in general easily comprehensible for them. Digital immigrants, on the other hand, are sometimes embarrassed by both contents and functionality. This is why elderly people are more likely to repost a news story or to leave a comment than young people, while their use of social networking sites for news is lower than among young people: news sites often provide the same

information as TV news and papers [8]. On the other hand, "web services for the elders" can surely form some kind of "immigrant diasporas", but these immigrants inevitably become involved into the modern types of communication, which implies digital resocialization.

Third, there is also family resocialization: elderly people that have children become involved into modern digital life by them. Domestic communication is usually less formal than any other types of communication, and elderly people can see the advantages of "fundamental" digital socialization on the example of their family members.

IV. CONCLUSION

Digital resocialization of elderly people is a topical problem today. The most difficult part of the problem, to our opinion, is that elderly people are not always prone to accept resocialization as a necessity. Whether fortunately or not, elderly people often feel comfortable with their digital "immigrancy", however, they yield to the indirect influence of mild factors of socialization.

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