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**Научная статья**

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**COMMUNICATION FEATURES IN ONLINE AND OFFLINE SPACES**

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**Abstract.** No other media has become so popular in such a short period of time as online, which mainly serves for the purpose of communication. Online communications have the potential to fundamentally change the character of our social lives on all levels of social interactions. This article represents an attempt of discussing pros and cons of the online communication compared to the offline ones, and including functional as well as cultural components such as habits, usefulness, as well as specific cases affecting the gradual and immediate shift from the offline to the online communication (like COVID-19 pandemic). Online communication spaces provide ample opportunities for self-representation, convenience and compliance, easy connectivity from every place in the world, it is time-consuming and costly. It is widely used in all areas of everyday life. At the same time participants of online communication need nonverbal communication and those all-important social signals, which make communication more efficient. Despite the number of advantages, online communication still cannot completely replace the offline ones.

**Keywords:** communication, online and offline, social media, mass media, verbal and nonverbal communication.

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## Научная статья

### ОСОБЕННОСТИ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ПРОСТРАНСТВАХ ОНЛАЙН И ОФЛАЙН

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**Анотация.** Ни одно другое средство массовой информации не стало таким популярным за такой короткий промежуток времени, как Интернет, который широко используется именно в коммуникативных целях, вытесняя коммуникацию в реальном пространстве и времени. Виртуальная коммуникация способна коренным образом изменить характер жизни общества на различных уровнях, включая межличностное общение, профессиональную, образовательную деятельность. В статье предпринята попытка анализа вероятности замещения коммуникации офлайн виртуальными формами, с обсуждением преимуществ и ограничений обеих форм. Онлайн-пространство предоставляет широкие возможности для самопрезентации, удобства в общении, обучении, для легкого подключения из любой точки мира. В статье анализируются факторы, способствующие постепенному, а также скачкообразному переходу от офлайн к онлайн коммуникации (такие, как пандемия Covid-19). Вместе с тем, участники онлайнкоммуникации все еще нуждаются в элементах традиционной коммуникации, делающей межличностное и профессиональное общение более полноценным и эффективным. Таким образом, несмотря на ряд преимуществ, виртуальные коммуникации все еще не готовы заместить коммуникацию офлайн.

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникация, пространство онлайн и офлайн,, социальные медиа, СМИ, вербальная и невербальная коммуникация.

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The online space in recent years has become one of the main tools for communication and building relationships. Unlike communication in the traditional offline space, it includes a variety of platforms for virtual communication, which, in turn, provide a non-physical/online presence of communicating people (users), the so-called "remote presence". This type of communication often includes a new system of signs, a new language that serves as a means of communication in the network and allows managing information. There is currently a debate about the impact of online communication on offline communication, their relationship, and their substitution to each other. Some studies show that online communication has many advantages over offline communication and the opposite.

Interest in the study of communication in online and offline modes, their differences and similarities, including user preferences, is gradually growing among practi-

tioners who realize that it is impossible to study, undertake or carry out any professional activity without understanding their essence, differences between them and user preferences concerning numerous online platforms.

Referring to the micro-level of communication, which is often identified with the interpersonal level of communication, the smaller the physical distance between people, the more opportunities they have to establish close and friendly relationships. The degree of proximity, in turn, varies depending on the variation of this physical distance. In addition, the frequency and availability of interaction also determine the degree of intimacy of the relationship [11, p. 66-70]. In conditions of online space, the factor of proximity due to physical distance decreases, since communication can occur independently of the physical distance. In contrast, the impact of frequency and availability increases. In this case, the factors put forward by Fehr may be complementary.

*Physical factors* relating to distance are tightly coupled with the cognitive, social, and emotional challenges on macro and meso levels of communication. As a result of reliance on online communication, groups featuring high geographical dispersion have higher perceptions of unfairness, which also leads to internal conflict [13]. In this case, the online channels of communication do not substitute the offline communication. Some studies show that the reality is that reaching the right audience takes more time than expected and using intensive channels requires genuine commitment from everyone, which is often hard to gain.

According to McLuhan's concept of technological determinism, technology has an important impact on the life of the entire society. The Internet has made and is making a revolution in society; hence, social networks enable users to create social change, negative or positive. The level of social skills of users of the online space is reduced due to the lack of physical and face-to-face communication. Within the framework of technological determinism, the development of technology affects the quality of communication in a social context. The development and expansion of technology flaunt "the connections that exist between the prevailing communication technologies of the century and the main features of society." Despite harsh criticism, that is gone over again introducing a new type of communication technology space, such as online communications. In this regard, fundamental changes have taken place and are taking place: first of all, from the point of view of the revision of the interactive communication space. At the initial stage, this leads to the availability of communication, to the instantaneous sending of messages, and to the loss of the sense of time. This becomes a tool of degradation when technologies begin to completely replace offline communication. As shown by one of the tests conducted in this area and related to the use of modern technologies in the family, the growth of technology in this regard affects the skills of the group and interpersonal relationships and communication within the family, since, according to theorists, family members stop spending time with each other "qualitatively". This is followed by misunderstandings in communication, a decrease in the atmosphere of trust, and a decrease in attachment to each other, which is the basis of family relations and cooperation [11, p. 66-70].

In the course of offline communication, communicating persons can exchange information not only verbally, but also using *non-verbal* methods. It is this position that underlies the behaviorist method of studying communication: understanding and mutual understanding of humans and animals are achieved through their nonverbal and sensory responses to environmental stimuli. The main point here is the stimulus-response [4, p. 5-10].

When it comes to the transmission of purely text messages, the possibilities of enriching information with non-verbal communication methods are very limited. In contrast to real (offline/face-to-face communication), when communicating online, it is often impossible to see a person's facial expression, an instant response to any phrase, question, or situation, it is impossible to notice any suspicious sign, etc.

According to the theory of "weakened signals" in the online space, nonverbal signals (gestures, facial expressions), oral signals (intonation) affect the effectiveness of communication. Their absence in online communications, in turn, reduces the effectiveness of both message and feedback. A similar approach is also put forward by the theory of "Social information processing", according to which in the course of communication the above signals require identification to recognize them, which is only the case when communicating offline, thereby clarifying misunderstandings that have arisen during online communication, and strengthening mutual understanding between the communicators. At the same time, a purely written text requires less attention for feedback signals.

In addition, the factor of *anonymity* allows hiding or faking not only certain personal characteristics but also identity. Self-disclosure of one's personality is among the advantages of virtual communication [5, p. 9-15]. This is especially true for young people who spend more time in the online space and show a higher degree of self-disclosure compared to the older generation [14, p. 432-440]. From this perspective, online communication increases misunderstanding and the level of dehumanization. The consequences of that can be defined based on the structural differences between online platforms, including nonverbal cues, anonymity, flexibility, and specifics of audience [10, p 17-19].

From the very first days of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a need to transform all types and levels of communication all over the world. That transformation was mechanical, not natural, and prompt, not gradual. The focus of specialists in the field of sociology and education is the problem of using online space as a tool for remote education and work due to the rapid spread of infection, which as a result led to the crisis of offline communication. The pandemic became another essential reason for the widespread use of online communication tools, based on security concerns: in fact, it has forcibly become a way of life. Online communication, which used to be considered unhealthy (unnatural) compared to offline (natural) communication, suddenly became a guarantee of health in conditions of the pandemic.

As the volume of offline communication decreases, people become more suspicious of each other. This circumstance, which initially serves as a way of protection, leads to an ever-growing suspicion, which, in turn, creates a further dependence on isolation to ensure the constant protection of health. As an advantage, the development of skills for using online technologies is considered, which is also inevitable in the current conditions. With the advantages of online communication, it is not easy to maintain a balance between online and offline options. The restoration of offline communication will undoubtedly be slow and will reveal problems of social and psychological readaptation. The online space will strengthen and remain the most important communication platform, but it will not yet be able to completely replace offline communication [15].

Many healthcare applications have been created and used worldwide. Although children of preschool and school-age are the least at risk of infection compared to older people, the process of switching from offline to online for security reasons is most difficult for the elderly and much easier for younger people.

Another important factor contributing to the activation of communication in the online space is its *convenience and compliance*. The most convenient place for communication is the physical space that evokes positive associations for the participant of communication, the essence of the place where the individual feels most comfortable. Factors ranging from architecture to interior design and the presence of familiar objects contribute to the most effective communication and influence the positive mood of users [12, p. 20-29]. Online communication supports these feelings as much as possible and is supposed to be an incentive to ensure the greatest comfort in communication. This, in its turn, is the reason that the preference is given to online mode rather than offline mode.

To the already mentioned factors of organizing work and study, daily communication, and medical care, another factor is added – the ability to make transactions and purchases through online platforms. There are many online opportunities, from collecting necessary information before buying anything, and convenient choice without time limits, to stay at home in comfort instead of stand in endless queues. For convenience, the online space as a trading platform is mainly used by young and middle-aged people. This is due to the lack of confidence on the part of older people, who still don't trust online security, including online banking. Anyway, the technical convenience of using online shopping reduces the frequency of offline purchases and transactions all the time, which also contributes to the effective implementation of measures aimed at reducing the rate of spread of the coronavirus epidemic. Moreover, some online shops offer goods and services that operate only online.

In online mode, a person simply communicates with other people, because it is extremely convenient, requires minimal effort and protects from "unnecessary" actions, and, finally, is a guarantee of health [16, p. 38-43].

On the other hand, stable use of online shops instead of visiting physical spaces might have adverse consequences in a form of laziness. A high degree of laziness of a person leads to antisocial behavior. Technologies that *"replace the brains"* of users are the subject of a fairly wide study: using technologies instead of their brain, including saving and sharing digital files, reduces their abilities [8, p. 160-166].

"Integration of artificial memory" is how digital memory is characterized; it exists as long as the user is available on the network, in the online space, which ensures uninterrupted saturation of information. In the online space, the user develops "superhuman" skills that do not correspond to the reality that exists in the offline space [8, p. 35-41].

The online platform allows instantly receiving and transmitting messages, establishing contacts with people who are distanced in the reality. Online communication is almost always available to everyone and is often free or cheap. This, in turn, helps to expand the boundaries of communication, since the users involved can be located anywhere in the world at the moment. Finally, online communication allows getting rid of complexes and fears associated with communication with real people.

Many users provide partially fake data using the opportunity to communicate without identifying themselves; a fake profile is the representation of a person, who creates a fictional profile or fake identity on social network sites [19, p. 10-14]. Fake users can be divided into 2 groups according to the self-representation; the first group includes those who do not hide that they are fake and even do everything possible to demonstrate their fakeness, and the second group of those who, as far as possible, try to present themselves as real users, while also faking their identity. Anonymity in the online space also gives a sense of seeming security. In this case, the vulnerability in-

creases, and the security of others involved in the communication decreases [9, p. 175-186]. The risk group includes, in particular, children and young users.

As already mentioned, there is a noticeable difference between online communication and reality in this regard. Online communication also brings a new language. Several specialists including sociologists, linguists, psychologists, and cultural scientists, are involved in studying the features of this language. Although communication on the Internet occurs mainly in written form, it is quite close to spoken speech as in offline communication, but clear and strict rules do not apply here. For example, on an online platform and, in particular, on social networks, the deliberately distorted spelling of words is a usual case. If at the initial stage of the development of online communications, this language and vocabulary were more typical for relatively small groups of users, now this phenomenon is widespread [7, p. 389-400]. The choice of language also depends on the level of education of a person, on his/her professional interests, on a certain social status, as well as on his/her goals and the audience to which the message is addressed. A large number of words are developed on the Internet, some are borrowed from other languages, some others belong to the original language spoken. Various types of online communication have turned into a kind of space; everyone can create their own virtual "self".

The debate about the impact of online communication on offline communication continues to be in the spotlight of media professionals. It shows that communication in a virtual format helps to strengthen the relationships formed in the process of real communication, allowing them to be carried out regardless of the further physical presence of the participants. However, online and offline communications continue to compete. With its advantages and limitations, online communication and online space will further widen and strengthen, but at the moment offline communication is still not replaced.

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