

I-DENTITY AND E-DENTITY: A NEW APPROACH

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Abstract. *The present article explains the structure of human personality and shows why electronic communities are favorable for the development of the virtual components of our personalities. We deal with the consequences of this effect for the society and general and for management. Some solutions are proposed..*

Key Words: *human personality, electronic communities, virtual components*

I. INTRODUCTION

We are used to believing that a person has only one personality – the one people let us see in our everyday life. All exceptions from the system of two equations $1\ person=1\ personality$ and $person's\ personality=personality\ seen\ in\ everyday\ life$ are perceived as psychiatric deviations. However, is this popular belief true? Or better: has it always been true and is it still being true now, when digital technologies are changing our world? Even better: is the personality we see in everyday life the person's complete personality? The reply is "no" and I will try to demonstrate it below.

It is very important to highlight that the model I develop in the present article is purely theoretical and requires empirical verification. However, this model is supported by facts and I strongly believe that it will be useful for managers, business psychologists and sociologists.

A necessary explanation: an electronic community is any kind of communication environment (video games, online role playing games, Web forums, blog services) based on information technologies where people communicating do not see each other and the identity of persons communicating cannot be verified within this environment.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Let us start from the beginning, that is – from the childhood. Children always dream of becoming a king, a princess, a gangster or a pop star. They do not want to wait until they *actually* become kings and princesses – they simply create imaginary worlds of their own where they *are* kings or corsairs. An excellent example of such an imaginary world is given in "Peter Pan". In addition, in these worlds children have friends – mostly virtual fiends whose roles are performed by these children (or should I say "by world creators"?) themselves. The same is true for enemies – they are mostly virtual too.

Children always create their Neverlands and nobody accuses them of schizophrenia and escapism – it is normal for children to play after all. But what changes when we grow up? We still have dreams and we realize that most of these dreams will never come true. The only solution to satisfy our need is to design our own world where these dreams *did* come true – a kind of Neverland for adults.

Traditionally all information about this imaginary world was stored in its creator's brain (or in his/her diary). The person who created such world had to keep track of all events and all characters from this universe. (S)he also had to create these characters on a basis of his/her personality (a typical set of characters includes an idealized incarnation of the world's author, some good characters and some evil ones). So it leads us to the conclusion that the real personality of a person is just a part of his/her complete personality, other parts of this complete personality being used to create such virtual characters (these characters reflect the aspects of the complete personality that cannot be used in real life). But these worlds were very primitive and poorly organized as it was very difficult for a person to follow them up in real time. A solution was proposed by role playing games (RPG), but they were a mere formalization of our dreams with hard-to-follow scorecards and without any visual representation of the worlds they were dedicated to. They also required the third person – a game master, who destroyed the privacy of this world. So, the use of RPG was very limited.

The situation improved thanks to video games and changed dramatically thanks to the Internet and online role playing games (ORPG). ORPG offered to people a unique opportunity to create a dream character in a dream world: a character with all values our real personality has but without our personal shortcomings. This ideal world is interactive and exists in real time, we share it with a lot of other players and – which is very important – this world has a visual incarnation on our computer screen. We may even register several characters – for each side of our personality. As the game goes on, we dive deeper into these imaginary worlds and these characters become somewhat real to us.

The next stage is represented by all kinds of Web forums and blogs. As registration is very easy and does not require official identification, any person can register an unlimited number of user accounts in such forums – such virtual accounts are called "sock-puppets". These sock-puppets reflect different aspects of personality of their creator and are used in different circumstances (especially in cases when a person wants to express his/her opinion or make some actions but does not wish to disclose his/her real name). Imaginary characters came in our real world – or better, in the virtual – based on the Internet – part of our everyday world (while ORPG characters exist in imaginary worlds – this is the difference). Interestingly enough, even if we register an account under our real name, we may create a kind of sock-puppet, as our behaviour in virtual space will be somewhat

different from our behaviour in the real world (quite often people used to know each other on the Internet, ICQ etc and convinced that they are a perfect match are very disappointed during a real meeting; vice versa sometimes we are surprised by our friends' postings in their LiveJournal blogs as we cannot match these postings and all that we know about the real life of these persons).

So, a human being's complete personality can give life to several occasional personalities: the real one, which is used in everyday life (which only reflects those aspects of the complete personality that are useful in real life) and some virtual personalities (that are inspired by the complete personality and reflect those aspects that are hidden in real life). It means that the "everyday personality" reflects only one aspect of the complete personality, namely the most society-friendly aspect. This is true for the whole historical period of human civilization, but only the appearance of digital support for virtual personalities made this phenomenon clear. And it has nothing to do with schizophrenia – psychiatric problems begin when a person stops seeing the difference between his/her real personality and virtual ones, but such cases are relatively rare.

III. RESULTS

And now we come to the new personality formula:

$$CP = RP + nVP_a + mVP_b \quad (1)$$

- CP – complete personality;
 - RP – real personality;
 - VP_a – virtual personality the person identifies himself/herself with (basically – the idealized self-perception of the person in question);
 - VP_b – virtual personality the person does not identify himself/herself with (basically – the "evil" part of the personality of the person in question; most of us would be happy to behave like bad boys or bad girls, but we are all limited by the society's traditions; such "evil" virtual personalities help us free ourselves from social constraints);
- n and m – integer numbers.

We may call the real part of our personality I-identity (as reflecting our "I" as it is perceived by people around us in the real world) and the virtual parts of our personality may be referred to as E-identity (as identity which came to existence thanks to electronic technologies).

It is very important to distinguish VP_a from VP_b as they are used for different purposes. VP_a is necessary when a person wants to highlight his/her good qualities and normally is an idealized equivalent of the person in question (thus it reflects those aspects of the person's personality that (s)he likes – these features may be imaginary, the person wants to have them and thinks (s)he does, but it is not true). VP_b is used when the person wants to undertake some actions (s)he considers undesirable but which (s)he cannot help undertaking (so it reflects the complete personality's aspects that do exist but that the person does not like).

It is obvious that our preferences are changing as time goes by, so $n=n(t)$, $m=m(t)$, t – time. In addition to this, we may suppose – in order to generalize the formula (1) – that the number of real personalities is not necessarily equal to 1 – it may be above or below 1 for persons with different kinds of mental diseases. So the final formula would be as follows:

$$CP=a(t)RP+n(t)VP_a+m(t)VP_b \quad (2)$$

a – a number.

One may ask what this odd psychological formula has to do with social networks.

The reply is quite simple: the only way to understand how people will behave in these networks is to get a deep insight into their personality structure. The formula (2) says that our complete personality includes virtual components that we hide in real life but use in virtual communication environments (video and on line games, all kinds of Web forums and blog services). The real component of our personality – the one our friends and colleagues see everyday – is necessary for real goals. But, *par excellence*, real goals are limited and harder to reach than the virtual ones – the ones that can be reached by our virtual personalities and that are virtually unlimited. Most our physical and simpler social everyday needs are satisfied or can be easily satisfied (food, drink, clothing, sex etc). Unfortunately, more complex needs will most probably never be satisfied (we will not become as rich as Bill Gates for men or as beautiful as, let us say, Miss Universe for women) – but we will be unhappy feeling that the things we want will not be ours. So we will try to substitute real things by their virtual equivalents. We (=our real personalities) will not be as invincible as Marshal Zhukov or as selfless as Frodo Baggins in the real world – but the virtual components of our personalities in imaginary worlds will. It means that we will spend more and more time in virtual worlds and pay less and less attention to the real part of our life. We will develop our virtual personalities – but not the real ones.

Thanks to the anonymity of Web forums and blogs we already see the emergence of online services with no real users – sock puppets only.

The formula (2) has very interesting consequences for management: one the most important management tasks is to organize employees in such a way that their productivity is maximum, that is, to find the best ways to use employees' potential and to find good motivation tools. According to the formula (2), an employee's potential for a company is the potential of his/her real personality (indeed, the employer is not very interested in virtual personalities). But the more virtual personalities a person has, the less real effort will (s)he dedicate to his/her job – as the formula (2) indicates, the complete personality can be considered a constant, so if the number of virtual personalities increases, the potential of the real personality decreases. Thus, the manager may wish to prevent the emergence of virtual personalities – in order to prevent the waste of time. So it seems that the birth of social networks will make the conflict between managers and employees even more acute.

There may be three solutions to this problem:

- The manager hires persons with a very simple personality profile so no virtual personalities will ever appear (unfortunately, this solution is impossible for positions where intellect and creativity are essential);
- The manager finds a good way to organize the work so that employees could satisfy most of their needs doing their job. There is no need for any virtual personalities. This solution is better than the previous one, but it is unfortunately somewhat utopian, especially in the case of big international companies with employees from different social, cultural and age groups;
- The manager accepts the emergence of virtual personalities but implements a motivation system that links results in the real world with bonuses in virtual worlds – the worlds where employees' virtual personalities exist.

IV. CONCLUSION

The third solution seems to be a paradox – but actually, it is not. Employees will always try to escape to virtual worlds and it is impossible to stop this process (of course, we can block Internet access from office computers – but it will simply disappoint the employees and lower their motivation). If this process cannot be stopped, it must be used for corporate benefits. I can imagine two ways for this:

- The company motivates its employees by purchasing bonuses in the virtual worlds and distributing them among employees. Obviously, the company should first find out which virtual worlds (ORPG, blogs, social networks etc) its employees prefer. It may be convenient for small companies;
- Most virtual worlds are built up according to the same rules (of course, these rules are different for different types of virtual worlds – ORPG, blogs, social networks etc). It means that a big company may design its own virtual worlds for its employees. Success in these worlds may be linked with professional results of an employee (that is, an employee, in addition to his/her salary and financial bonuses will receive some bonuses that can be used in the company's virtual world – virtual money, virtual promotion, virtual rights etc).

I am confident that there may also be other solutions but one thing, in my opinion, remains uncontested: thanks to the Internet, people can create and cultivate virtual personalities in addition to the real one and these virtual personalities have to be taken into account by managers. This situation, as usual, has its advantages (we may have a possibility to satisfy our needs – or, at least, we can get an illusion that our needs are satisfied; we can develop our complete personality by developing its virtual components) and disadvantages (social networks will steal us from real life; real circumstances will become less and less important to us). We cannot change the situation that exists already – we must simply adapt ourselves to the changes in progress and try to preserve our real world.

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I-DENTITET AND E-DENTITET: NOVI PRISTUP

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Autor u radu objašnjava strukturu karakteristika ličnosti i pokazuje zašto su elektronske zajednice pogodne za razvoj virtualnih komponenti ovog resursa. Ukazuje se na posledice ovih efekata na društvo i uopšteno na menadžment. Predložena su i neka rešenja.

Ključne reči: *karakteristike ličnosti, elektronske zajednice, virtualne komponente.*