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HOW HAS THE WEB CHANGED OUR PERSONALITY?**Matthias Kolonko**

The shown aspects of influence on human personality draw a dark, even dystopic picture of the future of human mankind. Despite all the good aspects of the Web, it seems to be a catalyst or even an amplifier of the bad habits of mankind like laziness, disinhibition, aggression or bias. Personally, I have to admit that these developments are scaring - especially when we talk about the way people deal with each other more and more hostile using hate speech and the like. It points into a gloomy future if these developments intensify

Keywords: Web, hate speech, social bubble, social networks

The World Wide Web has created a tremendous change in the way human beings are living their lives. We all have access to enormous resources making it so much easier to cope with certain situations than a few years ago (e.g. doing bank transactions at home online or buy special items via the Web).

But how did this vast progress affect human personality? This essay illuminates the approaches from as a starting point with scope on human personality. It will reveal that the topics outlined there also pose challenges to the personal development of mankind which are to overcome.

The Networked Mind

Paul R. Smart extends the «Extended Mind» hypothesis (Clark and Chalmers, 1998) to the World Wide Web creating «The Web-Extended Mind» hypothesis [HM14, ch. 8]. Halpin, Clark and Wheeler go beyond that approach introducing the idea of «the Web as Collective Intelligence» [HM14, ch. 2, par. 6]. The example of Otto (a mentally impaired agent) and Inga (a regular agent) introduced originally by Clark and Chalmers is impressively extended to support this view where both agents make use of the same representation via the Web making the action of one agent influencing the actions of the other agent when Inga marks the original entry as closed because of a construction site and another entry as main entrance. Otto then makes immediate use of this change of the common representation and finds the new entry.

In fact, the argumentation can not be dismissed that two people making use of the same information resource like an online map «share a single representation» and therefore to a certain extent «cognitive state» [HM14, ch. 2, page 26]. This theory has entered the field by now with the online map systems provided by Google, Bing and the like. And yes, it is absolutely obvious in this example that the intelligence of one person (Inga) can manipulate this representation that all users share and hence influence the decisions in their minds.

But personally, I would not call this «Collective Intelligence», especially reconsidering what Bringsjord and Govindarajulu worked out about intelligence with respect to the Web ([HM14, ch. 9]), which could be resumed as a rhetorical question: Is it really intelligence when I make use of the production of the intelligence of someone else? Hence, the approach of the «Web-Extended Mind» seems more valid. I would rather speak of what I would call a «networked mind». The minds of people are

connected via the Web as a vast network. It is this «many-to-many» characterization that Stefaneas and Vandoulakis describe when analyzing the Web as «proving» tool ([HM14, ch. 10, par. 3.1, p. 152]). They share representations, thoughts and ideas working together on and making use of them. The border to a collective intelligence is not reached yet, but for our personality the idea of collaboration and information sharing regardless of physical distance has become the common case and we are starting to get used to the possibility of doing that in a vast network with public access for everyone instead of only interacting with people of our personal environment, so only a certain group of persons interact. «The Web-Extended Mind» where we can outsource and rely on certain cognitive state and share it, has already become true.

The Laziness of the Human Mind

What sounds so enthusiastic and promising about the «Web-Extended Mind» also carries some risks. It is pretty comfortable to outsource certain parts of what our mind contains, especially knowledge. As Halpin, Clark and Wheeler state: «Humans have difficulty maintaining any sort of coherent memory (. . .). Technology allows this weakness to be turned into a strength (. . .).» [HM14, ch. 2, p. 26] This argument is definitely undeniable. But when you think this through to the end, human kind must be aware of that strength turning into a weakness again! Otherwise, it will become a complete fail when all people leave all remembrance to technology. It involves the danger that outsourcing all memory to the Web and relying on it creates the possibility of not being able any more to distinguish which information is valid and trustworthy and which is not. We lose the freedom to decide on our own what we accept as reality and leave it to a black box not knowing any more where the information is coming from.

To apply this to the example of Chalmers and Clark about Otto and Inga: While the impaired Otto has no other choice to rely on the information his hand-held device offers him, Inga might become simply too lazy to remember herself the right way to the museum and looks it up just like Otto does. And as she becomes more and more lazy, Inga will start to follow the way to the map each time without questioning the route, because she won't remember how she went there last time. If we assume a bad agent, Mister X, who manipulates the information on the map with bad intentions (maybe to create chaos on the streets or guide people to his own museum), Inga would simply follow this and could not correct the wrong information as she wouldn't remember. Of course, this is an exaggeration. But it shows the danger of laziness creating people who can't question critically any more.

Laziness is part of the human personality and everybody has to be careful with this part all the time not to take over. Especially, when the Web lures us to enforce this essence by making it so easy.

The fact that this is not just scare stories, but beginnings are already visible can be seen in everyday life. In Germany you can find more frequently the saying «Wissen heißt wissen wo's steht!» (Knowledge means knowing where it is located!) The verse «Google is my professor!» from the song «Now Generation» of the band «The Black Eyed Peas» [Pea09] is also indicative for this current development. Hence, the Web enforces laziness as part of our human personality.

Human Perception of the (Non-)Digital World

Another field of our personality that underwent a change to some extent is the

perception of the digital and non-digital world. The essay of Yuk Hui about "What is a Digital Object"[HM14, ch. 4] already shows that people start to perceive digital objects not as plain data represented through bits and bytes, but as an incarnation of what they represent or even as real independent objects of our world that people use.

Moreover, Johnny Saker refers to the «extravirtual» (meaning the world outside the web - our «regular physical world») and the «intravirtual» (the virtual world we see inside the Web) and points out «the importance of being clear about the intravirtual and extravirtual consequences of our actions, and the corresponding placement of conditions of satisfaction».[HM14, ch. 11, p. 179]

Saker describes virtual worlds as not being only bits and bytes but as being what these bits and bytes represent. This idea becomes very clear when thinking about "Second Life" - a system that creates a whole virtual world where people interact inside with each other using human avatars. They even create this virtual reality by building their own buildings, cities and infrastructure. They pay and earn money there. It is a complete own society as a virtual world in the Web.

These explanations prove that for humans the borders between the virtual and the physical world start to blur. We accept both worlds as reality and interact with them likewise. The perception is of course «observer dependent» as Saker puts it [HM14, ch. 11, p. 179]. This leads to a different way how different people perceive the virtual world.

Saker's example of the virtual rape [HM14, ch. 11, p. 176] shows pretty clear what is meant by the «observer dependent» perception. Both, perpetrator and victim, perceive virtual avatars as existing items and interact with them. But while the perpetrator sees the avatar and the whole virtual world as a kind of parallel world or a lifeless model of a world, the victim goes even further in its perception seeing the virtual world as part of our world as a whole and breaks down because of sympathizing for the avatar. Still, the perpetrator executes interactions with the avatar in the virtual world as with a real person. He wouldn't do these actions in the real world as he is held back by the conventions of our social and legal rules as he acts as a regular member of our society. However, he seems to live his fantasies here freed from all social conventions. Hence, the virtual world is perceived as reality by both. And the fact that virtual worlds like «Second Life» or «World of Warcraft» are populated by an enormous amount of people shows that this is not only a singular phenomenon.

But doesn't that hold true for the physical world as well? Isn't it the regular case that different people can have different opinions about the same issue. And to stay with the example about the virtual rape: If you look at psychopathic persons, you can see that they also have this kind of different perception when observing the physical world. What the virtual perpetrator is doing only virtually, because he does not see a misconduct in his virtual actions, applies equally to a psychopath as he or she can not see a misconduct in his real actions, although they are socially and legally not acceptable.

When we accept this coherence and look at the other presented facts, it shows that our personality changed indeed in a way that we integrate the virtual world and the physical world as one continuum.

The Social Bubble

The essay of Thomas W. Simpson about «Evaluating Google as an Epistemic Tool»[HM14, ch. 7] reveals another development in human personality induced by the Web. Among his dimensions of assessment for an epistemic evaluation, «objectivity» and its restrictions stand out for the considerations about human personality. He points out that the current trend of «personalization» threatens objectivity although authority prioritization is given. The problem he depicts here is that through personalization an agent receives indeed valid information, but only that kind of valid information that he is interested in, i.e. information he wants to hear. But if you ignore certain valid information on a topic, you might recognize only half of the truth. This inevitably leads to bias. Although all received information is valid, the picture in the receiver's mind is still incorrect.

Parts of the Web can formalize that. And the problem here lies in the fact that by this the agent becomes ignorant of information without purpose. A web user searching for information is presented «personalized» results for his search, meaning that the user is presented filtered information by evaluating interests based upon previous behavior. Hence, instead of seeing all relevant aspects to a topic, the user sees only information he or she was interested in in the past (and so should be still interested at present) - or in other words: Information, arguments or opinions he or she liked. Hence, a formalized process «decides» what the user is interested in and the other side of the coin remains unseen without the user probably being aware of this. This creates a feedback loop of self-reinforcement of one's own point of view by which he or she usually only sees what is appreciated and does not see any other evidence than that of what supports his or her own point of view.

Hence, we start to encapsulate ourselves within a «social bubble» as a group of persons that have the same ideas and follow the same argumentations. We don't look beyond the box anymore and start to see people with differing opinions as eccentric or even as enemy and we don't accept them anymore. As an example, the New York Times published an article on this phenomenon showing the reasons and the consequences about this encapsulation.([Hes17]) And we can find a lot more evidence for this. A thorough scientific research on that would be adorable.

This development of human personality encapsulating into one's own comfortable group of consent is somewhat dangerous as it enforces a split between people and open dialog is replaced by mistrust, aggression and hatred. Every-one should become more aware of this problem when using tools like Google that propagate personalization as a feature. And it is also the responsibility of those operators of these tools to confront themselves with the dangers of this «feature» and find ways to limit the consequences.

Social Exhibitionism

Speaking of social activities - what's also recognizable is the tendency of a blurring between public and private issues in the web. E.g., the German data protection officers find that Facebook is breaking German data protection law on purpose and as part of their business model.[Wei12] Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg openly admits that he does not hold any privacy. He calls it outdated.[Joh10]

Coming to the question of human personality, we can find many evidence on the web where people publish their everyday actions and partly intimate details of their

live publicly on their Facebook page, Twitter or Instagram as if they were friends with the whole world. This becomes especially vital for the younger generations that have never known a life without the Web. For them it is socially accepted and normal to share private life in the Web and it is even socially disapproved not to do so. At the worst, one feels obliged to follow this social pressure or it becomes even a competition between individuals. This leads to a "social exhibitionism" revealing all private life to the public.

Hence, Zuckerberg seems to be right. Or was it perhaps his statement that initially created this social pressure to publish all private life on the Web?

However, it is a fact that we accept more and more that publishing our private life is somewhat «normal». And the actions of Facebook as a very central part of the «Social Web» enforce that development. Everybody, who has a Facebook account can tell of everyday system requests like «Do you want to post an update?» or memories presented to you to «re-post». The way Facebook tries to make user present themselves to the world intensifies on the one hand, while their efforts to protect the data stays in the background and gets more and more complicated. If you have a look at the privacy settings you can see that it is partly hard to tell which setting will have which consequences on publishing. And even more dangerous: Some settings have consequences for the posts of other people. Hence, if a «friend» on Facebook has a wrong setting, you will be exposed without wanting that.

What sounds pretty technical and far away from the philosophical view of human personality is the description of the path, why human personality starts to accept why it is «OK» to open ones private life to the public: While it is hard and complicated to have the correct settings so the people you want to get your posts, Facebook demands you to post your life all the time. Hence, we give up to hide as it gets too complicated accepting that we just cannot do anything about it. And so we accept the «Social Exhibitionism» as normal.

The Disinhibition of the Human Character

The most disturbing development in human personality that we could observe for the last years is an increasing disinhibition of the human character. The example about the virtual rape mentioned before is a first indicator. One might discount it as a crude joke, but if looking at it from what we know today, it is more a start of a development that we can see until today.

It is significant that the term «hate speech» has manifested over the last months. It describes the way people write about others extremely aggressive and full of hate. They tell lies about them and insult people extremely rude. It is also significant that a few years ago, people did this anonymously using a pseudonym account or no name at all when posting those messages. But lately people do this openly showing their real name and seem to have no fear of any consequences. This can be observed clearly at the example of journalists that are confronted more and more with hate speech as reaction of people that do not agree to their writings. It is remarkable that this has become such a big problem already that German public service television started the campaign «Sag's mir ins Gesicht!» («Tell it to my face!»)[Kra17b] where journalists try to face the hate speech writers directly. It is astonishing and also a good proof how the Web influences the personality that when the asynchronous character of writing posts in

the Web is abandoned and people have to tell things right to their opponent's face, the hate speech vanishes.[Kra17a]

One of the reasons for this kind of disinhibition might be again the aforementioned "Social Bubble" where people only accept the information they want to hear and by doing so reinforce themselves and others that have the same opinion which as already suggested leads to massive hatred which finds its way in the Web. And the fact that people start to post their messages openly with their real names shows that this is indeed a disinhibition of the human personality as those people seem to feel that it is their right to do so and it is OK to do so.

Another maybe quite delicate example that can be presented is the disinhibition of sexual desires. A humorous proof for this is a song from the musical "Avenue Q" titled «The Internet is for Porn»[LMW03]. As it is with most satirical plays, there is some truth in it and indeed the number of web pages of this genre established early in the Web and has reached an absolutely remarkable amount.[Bra17] The biggest problem about this kind of disinhibition lies especially in the possibility of obtaining material anonymously that is definitely not legal like e.g. child pornography. Hence, this disinhibition abandons the distinction between what is ethically right or wrong.

Conclusion

The shown aspects of influence on human personality draw a dark, even dystopic picture of the future of human mankind. Despite all the good aspects of the Web, it seems to be a catalyst or even an amplifier of the bad habits of mankind like laziness, disinhibition, aggression or bias. Personally, I have to admit that these developments are scary - especially when we talk about the way people deal with each other more and more hostile using hate speech and the like. It points into a gloomy future if these developments intensify.

But we should not forget that the Web altered the human perception of the world. It helps to find information and communicate with people all over the world. It can augment our physical reality and create even virtual realities that can become part of our everyday life. It is definitely not exaggerated to talk about a revolution in communication technology.

And as we have seen with the industrial revolution as a predecessor revolution of that kind, mankind has to undergo a development and adaptation process to cope with the challenges this revolution brings. The initial enthusiasm about this revolution makes us blind to these challenges at the beginning and we jump on these new and fascinating opportunities. We learn only now what these challenges are and slowly start to cope with them. The Web is a great innovation with great potential. This must be enforced by disputing the challenges clearly and finding ways to overcome the negative influences.

Obviously, the influences through the Web on human mankind have a great impact on our personality as we have seen in this essay and most of these influences are not desirable and should be restrained so that the positive aspects of the Web creates an amplification of the positive characteristics of human mankind. As it has been so often, we have to become aware of our own personality and the influences and find the right way and not let us distract by possibilities that offer the easy way.

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Матіас Колонко**КАК ИНТЕРНЕТ МЕНЯЕТ НАШУ ЛИЧНОСТЬ?**

Исследование интернета открыло множество новых аспектов человеческой личности: «речи ненависти», де-табуирование сексуальной распущенности. Интернет изменил человеческое восприятие мира. Он может увеличить нашу физическую реальность и создать новые виртуальные реальности, которые могут стать частью нашей повседневной жизни. Не преувеличением будет назвать это революцией в коммуникационных технологиях.

И, как ранее с промышленной революцией, человечество должно пройти процесс развития и адаптации, чтобы справиться с вызовами, которые эта революция приносит. Первоначальный энтузиазм в отношении этой революции заставляет нас уменьшить важность этой проблемы и увлеченно исследовать новые и увлекательные возможности. Но сейчас мы должны признать наличие проблем, чтобы справиться с ними.

Ключевые слова: интернет, речи ненависти, социальный пузырь, социальные сети

Матіас Колонко**ЯК ІНТЕРНЕТ ЗМІНЮЄ НАШУ ОСОБИСТІТЬ?**

Дослідження інтернету відкрило безліч нових аспектів людської особистості: «мови ненависті», де-табування сексуальної розбещеності. Інтернет змінив людське сприйняття світу. Він може збільшити нашу фізичну реальність і створити нові віртуальні реальності, які можуть стати частиною нашого повсякденного життя. Не буде перебільшенням назвати революцією у комунікаційних технологіях.

І, як раніше з промисловою революцією, людство повинно пройти процес розвитку

і адаптації, щоб впоратися з викликами, які ця революція приносить. Початковий ентузіазм щодо цієї революції змушує нас зменшити важливість цієї проблеми і захоплено досліджувати нові і захоплюючі можливості. Але зараз ми повинні визнати наявність проблем, щоб справлятися з ними.

Ключові слова: інтернет, мови ненависті, соціальний міхур, соціальні мережі

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