



HUMAN BEHAVIOUR IN “CYBERSOCIETY” AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

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This study was initiated by the desire to understand to what extent the “virtual adventure” of man in the “cyberspace” is also a form of unconscious search for religion, starting from the very mechanism of functioning of the virtual world, namely by connecting or linking people in a network. Based on this premise, by analysing several scholarly works as well as by investigating the actual behaviour encountered in today’s society, we will try to draw out the consequences of the confluence of digitalization and human behaviour and its effects not only on national security but also on geo-political stability at the global level.

Keywords: human behaviour; contemporary religiosity; national security; digitalization; technology; addiction;

INTRODUCTION

Through this study we will try to understand the benefits, but also the risks of *the virtual world* or *cyberspace* for the present man as an individual and as a member of a society. As a starting point, we need to consider the global geopolitical context in which the Internet has emerged and the factors that have fostered the spread of virtual networks. The analysis of the Internet will also include the political, economic and psychological context of mankind in which technology gave birth to the “Internet”, as well as the evolution and prospects of this product of technology.

We will often refer to the word “*technology*”, but it should be said at the outset that this word can be understood in several ways. Most of the issues raised by technology do not refer to technological advances such as the loom, the thermal or electric motor, the MRI scanner or the F16 airplane, but rather to the digital technologies associated with companies and platforms that develop social networking, *big data*, mobile communications and artificial intelligence technologies, which are increasingly dominant in the social, economic and political life of the world. Therefore, it is very important to understand that a critical assessment of the implications of technological environments is not an aversion to particular technologies such as those listed, and even less a denial of the benefits that technology has achieved over time.

Of course, all technologies, taken as a whole, have helped people to be more informed, expanded human capabilities and created new opportunities, increasing productivity (Bartlett, 2019). However, it does not mean that technology is generally beneficial or that it brings more benefits than risks, because, as new technologies spread, both benefits and risks increase exponentially. Moreover, the instance of technological advancement that we see today is just the beginning, as technologies continue to expand. Therefore, one of the issues that will be analysed in this study is whether or not humanity has control over the trajectory of technological advancement.



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The Internet, as a result of the technological advancement that began in the last century, is defined as a text-based and graphical system of relationships and interactions between individuals (Mitcham, 2005). Through electronic devices, the Internet has become a global network, also referred to as a “digital habitat” or “cyberspace” (Collins, 1996). The seeds of the Internet emerged in the West at the height of the Cold War in the 1960s, in the context of the confrontation between the two great military powers of the Eastern and the Western worlds, as a counterbalancing reaction to the technological advance achieved by the Soviet bloc with the launch into space of the first satellite – Sputnik. A military project developed by the Pentagon has come to be used on a planetary scale, fundamentally changing life and inter-human relations, opening the way to the age of artificial intelligence, the generation of a new language and a new virtual world. Humankind was in an era of physical and spiritual reconstruction after two world wars and in the midst of the Cold War, during the arms race between the two political-military blocs: West and East. The Internet was a military project of the US Army and we can see it as a success for the West, a weapon that, non-militarily, has conquered the whole world.

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When we are critical of technology, we are referring to the negative aspects that a possible “cybersociety” could have. So, we will consider the implications of today’s technological system, such as the impersonal automation of the individual, the alienation of personal and community life in favour of a technical organization, and the reduction of the human being to a component part of the global network. What are the vulnerabilities to which we are exposed when technology is present in the most intimate and unexpected places of our lives? To what extent can we even speak of our identity being undermined by the hyper-technization of our lives?

Suffocated by useless information and glued to ubiquitous screens, today’s man experiences an artificial, digitized, hectic life devoid of what the fathers of early Christianity called “wakefulness” or “inner calm”. Some researchers have even spoken of a dehumanization of man as a result of his predominant existence in the artificial environment of technology, to the detriment of God-given reality.

This also represents the greatest risk that technology brings, namely the birth of mutations on the specificity of human existence, so that empathy, love, spontaneity and living thought are alienated, and man becomes and is evaluated according to technical criteria, like a machine (Lemeni, 2022).

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Media technology, from social networking, media, remote communication to video games, is playing an increasingly important role in people’s lives. Thanks to the development of technological systems and the exponential growth in processing power found in increasingly portable devices, people are constantly connected to the internet and the virtual world wherever they are. The existence of these facilities through which people can connect anywhere and anytime with each other creates a conflict between real, face-to-face socialization and pseudo-socialization through online communication platforms.

In terms of the psychological implications that today’s technology has, we are living in a unique period in history, characterized by profound changes in human behaviour. The rapid pace of change that is occurring, sometimes without our realizing it, is the effect of the rampant introduction and adoption of technologies in all areas of our lives, and it has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, socialize, work and live. But what are the costs and benefits of using technology in this way for our lives?

While there are some who would argue that the adoption of new technologies in people’s lives is a “win-win situation”, with technology consumers becoming happier and more productive and technology providers enjoying the success of their products, the situation is more complex than at first glance. Although the benefits are obvious, the purpose of this study is to explore whether the claim that the benefits of technology outweigh the risks is true or, if not, what are the risks we face and what is to be done about them? The concerns of sociologists, psychologists and physicians about the effects of technology on human behaviour have been always expressed, but they have often been ignored or even trivialized.



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How people relate to the latest technological developments and how they have influenced their behaviour in everyday life is an important area of investigation that should be of concern in today's society.

As early as the 19th century, in the *British Medical Journal*, people were warned about a hearing impairment that can occur in people who use the telephone for long periods of time. It is well known that the telephone was the most important invention of the late 19th century, and in a very short time it became a fixture in most homes in the United States of America. Symptoms of that ailment included nervousness, a “ringing” in the ear, dizziness, and neuralgic pain (*Church Service by Telephone*, 1904). Also, there are publications of those years that talk about how the telephone affected people’s emotional state and behaviour (Marvin, 1988), although at first glance the new invention brought only benefits. The above example emphasizes that new technologies have always raised concerns about their effects on people’s health.

The progress of new technologies tends to make us see the benefits first, ignoring the risks or not seeing them at all. The main danger we run is to see the risks only after the effects are irreparable. How people relate to the latest technological developments and how they have influenced their behaviour in everyday life is an important area of investigation that should be of concern in today’s society.

The period in which we find ourselves can be likened to the Enlightenment (1650-1800), when humanity underwent major transformations in terms of consciousness, social behaviour, knowledge and technology. The Enlightenment implied the generation of new freedoms, just as new technologies seem to offer us dizzying and unlimited freedoms. Absolute freedom is a concept of the internet age. But is it also a freedom that corrupts? This feeling of absolute freedom arises due to the fact that the internet is ubiquitous, highly complex and, at the same time, highly attractive to human stimuli at any time and anywhere (Aiken, 2019).

From the year 2000 to 2021, the number of internet users has increased twelvefold (Petrosyan, 2024), with around 5 billion people currently online at any given time. Also, the number of cell phone subscriptions and the hours people spend online is growing exponentially every year. So, we can see that in recent years most people have discovered a new medium in which to spend their time. And just as any move from one real place to another has an effect on the psyche, so human behaviour is affected when we move to a virtual

space, as the environment has a strong influence on us. Therefore, what are the benefits, but more importantly, what are the risks to which we expose ourselves when we step into this realm of virtual sensations and how does it affect the behaviour of individuals in society?

The speed at which we are moving towards a “cybersociety” is driven by the usefulness of technology in our lives. The main advantages that media technologies present or the reasons why they are so easily assimilated into our daily activities can be various. Thus, the virtual environment is a source of fulfilment of basic needs such as connecting with loved ones, stimulating positive psychological states of well-being (Guillory, Keilman, Woodruff, Hancock, 2015). Media technology is also a source of effective information, social outreach, entertainment, and a factor of comfort and efficacy, with one of the key purposes of technology being to actually make our lives easier. In a study in which people were asked to describe in one word what they liked most about their smartphone, the most used word was “convenience” (Smith, 2012). Today, most people can access the internet from a device carried in their pocket, with the technology giving them instant access to a variety of resources that were previously restricted by time and space. Last but not least, while embracing new technologies may mean being prone to certain security vulnerabilities, the same remote communication systems available at the touch of a screen can provide help in the event of an emergency.

Used on a planetary scale, in all areas of human activity, as well as in private life, the internet is a way of life which offers easy access to a virtual network where the speed of connections meets human needs. The fundamental question is to what extent man can control technology and, ultimately, whether man will nevertheless understand what he is looking for by constantly toggling between the real and virtual worlds.

Although the integration of technology in all areas of our lives can provide us with viable solutions to many of our problems, connecting with the virtual environment can disconnect us in a seemingly harmless way from the real world. According to several studies, traditional socializing and connecting with other people face-to-face is closely related to good psychological and emotional well-being (Przybylski, Weinstein, 2012), and connecting with other people through



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Cyberspace presupposes our engagement in multiple tasks at the same time, which results in attention deficits and even limited cognitive functions. It is because we are normally used to focusing on a single task, and the fragmentation of the tasks that our brains have to perform leads to a decrease in the quality of their performance, and this is even more dangerous for young users, as it affects their learning and memorization capacity, so important during school.

technology-mediated ways, at the expense of traditional socializing, involves taking real risks, which we will discuss below.

Anyone who has been attracted to cyberspace can testify to the time-distorting effect we are subjected to when we access the online system. Once we enter this space, we risk getting lost in this world, and when we come back, we feel as if we have woken up from a dream. In the real world, the estimation of the passage of time is kept much more effectively than in the virtual world. Many people who use the internet are deceived by the feeling that they are actually in the same place, in the comfort of their own homes, and that nothing has changed since they sat in front of the screen. However, people have honed instincts suited to tangible reality, and in cyberspace they fail in unexpected ways (Aiken, ib.).

Cyberspace is not only an environment that makes it easier for us to perform certain tasks such as sending a message, reading the news or passively watching a programme, but it also hyper-stimulates our brains due to the highly interactive, engaging and highly addictive flow. At the same time, cyberspace presupposes our engagement in multiple tasks at the same time, which results in attention deficits and even limited cognitive functions. It is because we are normally used to focusing on a single task, and the fragmentation of the tasks that our brains have to perform leads to a decrease in the quality of their performance (Liefoghe, Barrouillet, Vandierendonck, Camos, 2008), and this is even more dangerous for young users, as it affects their learning and memorization capacity, so important during school. Moreover, the use of new technologies such as TV and smartphones is linked to concentration and attention deficits (Johnson, Cohen, Kasen, Brook, 2007), and their use before sleep affects sleep quality and the ability to rest (Lanaj, Johnson, Barnes, 2014).

THE “NEW MAN” AND THE DIGITAL AGE

How appropriate is the phrase of the writer Virgiliu Gheorghe, describing the situation in the world 15 years ago, referring to the impact that television has had on human behaviour, talking about a “world enchantment” through which the “new man” was created: “The new man no longer pursues high ideals; he no longer cares about truth and love, but only about the portion of pleasure and the illusion

of power that television or the entertainment industry provides him with”! (Gheorghe, 2008).

Although not much time has passed since these assessments, it is not difficult to realize that this project of the “new man” is still in progress, and that its evolution has moved in the expected direction, but at an unexpected speed. What is more serious is the fact that, although we can partly predict how man will change, there are also unpredictable aspects, both in terms of how changes will be precipitated and how they will unfold.

In general, when new technological products are invented as a result of technological advancement, they are launched on the commercial market targeting people of a certain age group, as with any product that has a target audience. What is unique about new technologies is their ability to infiltrate all age groups, from children who have not yet learned to speak or write, but are instantly attached to the mobile phone screen, to older people who have become adept at technology faster than expected. This infiltration of media technology into all social and age groups has led to the formation of what we can call the “new man”.

The specificity of this human evolution is characterized by the limitation of the capacities to interact face to face, people thus becoming less sociable. The new generations are less able to build deep relations with their fellows, to experience or transmit love, affection, and therefore the “new man” loses the ability to form lasting relationships, families or communities. And all the above-mentioned aspects represent only the beginning of the transformation that the new generations are undergoing, as the changes that may occur at behavioural, emotional and social levels can have a domino effect. In such a scenario, people could end up living in a society devoid of love and empathy.

Humans are social beings by their very nature, and the desire to connect with others is a fundamental human instinct and even a survival skill. Therefore, any attempt to alter these fundamental abilities and instincts is an attack on human identity and social characteristic. Therefore, yesterday’s man is no longer the same as today’s man, but not in the sense of the evolution of human civilization, but in the sense of the ontological transformation of man. Today’s technology



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makes man witness a unique period in history, which we could call an “*evolutionary syncopation*” (Aiken, ib.). Psychologist Mary Aiken is the one who coined this expression, using it in her discourse on the need for face-to-face socialization and the fact that the decline of direct eye contact between people could change the course of human civilization in every respect.

The idea of the “*new man*” is closely related to the fact that, although countless studies have been done on the devastating effects of technology on children, the full effects that will follow are not yet known (Haughton, Aiken, Cheevers, 2015). The repercussions of the use of new technologies by children will only be able to be observed and analysed in depth once the new generations become members of the new society. And if tomorrow’s society will be made up of the “*new people*”, the social transformation and implications for national security will be difficult to control or remedy.

That is why the shape of the society of the future is closely linked to how today’s parents will manage the time they spend with their children and the period when they come into contact with the new cyber world. Researchers in the field are unequivocal when they talk about the fact that replacing family time with a tablet, phone or any other electronic device connected to the internet is associated with a range of socio-emotional, physical and cognitive disorders. The speed at which we are moving towards “*cybersociety*” is closely linked to the way we use new technologies, since another risk they present that we have not talked about so far is that the continuous use of digital devices leads to addictions as powerful and dangerous as drug addiction. Any addiction, once established, has a tremendous power to subjugate and transform the human person in a negative way, and a collective addiction on a large scale can have catastrophic consequences for tomorrow’s society.

DIGITAL ADDICTION – THE METHOD OF SUBJUGATION

The dependence on technology and the transformation of human society into a “*cybersociety*” seem to be irreversible processes. The fundamentals of human civilization are changing before our eyes and we cannot estimate the impact of the virtual world on the real world, as it is a dynamic, ongoing process. As digital devices have become

indispensable to the homes in which we live, it has been only a matter of time for them to become increasingly portable to the point of becoming a “*digital extension*” of the human being. Although they provide us with convenience, entertainment and portability, these “*digital extensions*”, through their excessive use and connection to the online environment, affect people’s behaviour in the sense that they cause addiction, in addition to the other psychological conditions that come along with it (Nazir, Samaha, Griffiths, 2019).

History shows that the term *addictus* has had a very interesting semantic evolution. In the past, the term was used to describe the time for which a slave had to serve his master (Aiken, ib.). Today, by *addiction* we mean a neuropsychological disorder caused by the prolonged and repetitive use of a substance. With the mirage of digital technology, the term *addiction* has broadened its spectrum, in the sense that addiction to digital connection causes the same behavioural effects as other narcotic addictions (Heilig, Mackillop, Martinez, Rehm, Leggio&Vanderschuren, 2021). Also, internet addiction has been shown to be an important predictor of later drug use (Fisoun, Floros, Siomos, Geroulakis&Navridis, 2012).

Just as a person addicted to drugs struggles with the desire to feed their learned stimulants with certain substances, in the same way, notifications and alerts on a digital device or the compulsive obsession with checking email can cause the internet addict to manifest a drive to constantly check their phone or computer. These impulses that the internet and the virtual world provide are not so different from those produced by slot machines (Aiken, ib.).

Imperturbability, productivity and procrastination are much talked about today in the online environment itself, but gaining control and managing the time we spend online are increasingly difficult goals to achieve in a nascent “*cybersociety*”. There are even apps that can be installed on digital devices to help those who have problems in this area to counteract them.

As cases of internet addiction have increased, studies and surveys have been carried out in many of the countries involved, showing that the number of people with an internet addiction disorder is on the rise, with the most affected age group being adolescence. As far back as the 1990s, David Greenfield, a noted authority in this field, stated



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Internet technology offers unlimited benefits and possibilities in terms of accessibility and efficiency. Today, through online connection, we can have anything we want delivered to our door or anywhere else, we can instantly contact people thousands of miles away, and just as quickly, we can find information that we once found after hours of searching through libraries.

that 10-12% of Americans suffer from Internet addictive behaviour (Greenfield, 1999). Just as drug addiction involves the use of multiple types of narcotic substances, internet addiction encompasses many types of users of the digital space, ranging from those who obsessively check their emails, phone alerts or social network notifications to compulsive shopping sprees, video game playing or pornography addiction.

As shown above, internet technology offers unlimited benefits and possibilities in terms of accessibility and efficiency. Today, through online connection, we can have anything we want delivered to our door or anywhere else, we can instantly contact people thousands of miles away, and just as quickly, we can find information that we once found after hours of searching through libraries. The problem arises when the desire to access the internet grows out of control. The state of today's society provides an enabling environment for it to happen (Aiken, ib.).

At the same time, the problems generated by technology addiction continue to evolve and cannot be denied. An interesting claim by those addicted to the internet, which should raise big questions for sociologists and those concerned about the future of society, is that internet deprivation would be the worst thing that could happen to them, far worse than the lack of food, housing, family or relationships.

Among the risks to those who exhibit internet addictive behaviour are psychosomatic disorders such as general malaise, weakened immunity, risk of diseases caused by prolonged exposure to electromagnetic fields caused by digital devices (Zorin, 2014), but also impaired learning and memory, decreased sleep quality, impairment of healthy eating (Yeonsoo, Park, Kim, Jung, Lim&Kim, 2010), locomotor system impairment due to sedentary lifestyle, ophthalmological disorders, mental disorders, socialization impairments (Whang, Lee, Chang, 2003), predisposition to other addictions such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs, and last but not least, deterioration of human spiritual life (Zorin, ib.) as it is replaced by life online. In such circumstances, the Internet unwittingly becomes an idol for man, and compulsive connection to this medium replaces and leaves no room for communication with God, i.e. prayer.

The conditions that an internet addict exhibits largely coincide with those of a psychotropic substances addict. Moreover, in both cases, the effects can even be fatal (Wallace, 2014).

In the case of other types of addiction, abstinence may be the first and most effective method of recovery for the addict, but can the same method be applied to internet addiction? Giving up the internet and technology altogether is not as viable an option as it could only be achieved by total separation from the society in which the new technologies have so deeply infiltrated. In the case of the other types of addiction, eliminating the substances used does not imply such a drastic change in daily habits as would be the case if technology were completely removed from daily life. Today, technology is necessary if we want to work, study, be informed or pay our bills, and therefore the approach to internet-dependent behaviour needs to be rethought. Instead of abstinence, we need to find a way of adapting effectively to the technological environment by becoming aware of its dangers and pitfalls: *"The Internet may be mankind's most seductive and tempting creation"* (Aiken, ib.).

CONCLUSIONS

In order to adapt effectively and intelligently, we believe that a thorough understanding of how technology affects us is necessary. Time has shown us that technology is becoming more and more indispensable to the society members in the years to come, and it is therefore necessary to learn to live with it, but on our own terms. We need to be educated in this realm so that we can become more disciplined and resilient, thereby reducing the chances of compulsive online behaviour.

When people are subjugated by the virtual world, by altering their ability to relate to others, their identity is also affected and their sense of belonging to a community or a people is diminished. This aspect has direct implications for national security, as it directly targets the way a person shows devotion and love to his or her people, homeland or nation. A high percentage of people addicted to the internet nationwide poses a major risk to the stability of a state, especially in times of national crisis. The strength of a nation and the survival



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of a people in history are closely linked to the will of the people to defend their country. Let these important qualities not be undermined by a possible dependence on the virtual environment!

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