SOCIAL ASPECT OF HUMAN BEING

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Personal identity in the space of virtual culture: on the example of geek and glam subcultures

Purpose. The article presents exploring the cultural and anthropological traits of consumers and producers of cultural services and products in the digital epoch. There have been singled out two types of cultural subjectivity according to the aim of a person's activity in the virtual net: either production of things, services, and technologies or the consumption and creative use of all mentioned innovations. So these sociocultural formations are called "geek" and "chic" subcultures. **Theoretical basis.** The historical genealogy of the definitions was analyzed, so as the changes in social esteem of the contribution of geeky persons to modern art and design practices. Social and cultural identities of those who belong to the modern youth-subcultural communities have been formed according to the topology and temporality of digital trends. To explain the worldview characteristics of the members of those subcultures the concept of "the New Middle Ages" was used to discover the values and pursuits of those who represent geek and chic subcultures. The study is based on the theoretical works of such classical authors as A. Toffler, and Z. Bauman, as well as current investigators of youth cultures. They are Calum Finister, Thomas V. Pollet, Nick Neave, Jessica McCain, Billy Wong. The chic subculture is oriented toward the imitation of visual images, consumer habits, and the way of life of successful (or seemed to be such) people. Glamorous followers need to receive approvals and likes from like-minded people. The geek subculture is more inner-sense-oriented. It unites intellectuals and activists who have common creative intentions. **Originality.** There have been analyzed the main attributes and features of such modern subcultures were conditionally named chic and geek. They were analyzed in the context of the concept of the New Middle Ages. **Conclusions.** The virtual user's life world seems to be diverse only quantitatively, but qualitatively it is as narrow, mythopoetic, and esoterically uncritical as the world of the Medieval person, who used to live the whole life in the same place, mai in one's village. But thanks to the merger of the IT industry with effective social management, the geek culture becomes a powerful super-subculture that defends values of social good, industrial productivity, and cultural creativity. Chic subculture creates new trends in fashion and art discourse. It develops modern lifestyles, its visual images with which our era will be associated in the future.

Keywords: civilization waves; information epoch; youth-subculture; the New Middle Ages; geek-subculture; chic-subculture

Introduction

To understand the dynamic sources of actual culture, two factors should be taken into account: firstly, the main tools of creativity and communication are of digital nature; secondly, the innovators of creative production have achieved a high level of computer literacy and digital aesthetics. Visual culture has divided its participants into producers and consumers of digital products.

For a better understanding of the challenges the current socio-cultural environment causes for the person, it is worth analyzing the prerequisites of the actual digital culture, particularly the wave theory of human history periodization. Its author Alvin Toffler, has divided civilized life history into three waves, particularly the first period has been called "Agrarian", the second one "Industrial", and the third era, which we are been living in, is called the "Informational" era.

The actor of the current culture is been formed according to the communicative frames of a digital environment. His/her inculturation and socialization occur both through real face-to-face communication and through its anonymous continuation on the surface of the multiple screens. The new type of cultural subject has been caused by the autonomous chronoscope of the virtual world.

The second wave of civilized history, if compared with the third one, interconnected people in the physical dimension – by highways, railways, and air flying, also social time was counted out by the functioning of industrial machines. On the opposite, the information epoch consists of multiple asynchronous information realms, where both space and temporal dimensions are the results of program and design decisions. So what are the core characteristics of the actual cultural actors, and what are the sources of their creativity and popularity?

Purpose

The article is dedicated to exploring the cultural and anthropological traits of consumers and producers of cultural services and products in the digital epoch. There have been singled out two types of cultural subjectivity according to the aim of a person's activity in the virtual net: either it production of things, services, and technologies or the consumption and creative use of all mentioned innovations. So these sociocultural formations are called "geek" and "chic" subcultures. The historical genealogy of the definitions was analyzed, so as the changes in social esteem of the contribution of geeky persons to modern art and design practices.

Statement of basic materials

The modern culture of the information society develops under conditions of relative virtual boundlessness. Information turns out into the raw materials, tools, and products of human activity. So information according to public opinion is been assessed as the main stress-generating factor of human life, the mean of covert psychological manipulation. Consequently the notions of "information violence", "information hygiene", and "information protection" have appeared. The more people become dependent on the information mediated by digital sources, the more persistent is the exhortation to defend them from the information stream.

In the epoch of "printed sources", people received information that was multiply-levels checked by editors from books and newspapers pages. The speed of information assimilation has depended on reading motility with its letter coding and decoding processes.

In the postindustrial epoch linked with the so-called visual turn, information has become easier to perceive because of the prevailing iconic and image signs, but not letters as they used to be previously.

The ability of consciousness to assimilate the number of imaged forms of information is much higher but human's reflective motility stays unchangeable. The defensive trustlessness for the information has been formed to resist the intensity of accessible and checkless data flow. So that is the reason why the term "information violence" has appeared. The need to be defended from negative information influence caused the restructuring of such sociocultural practices as virtual production and consumption of digital goods, net interactive communication, and education.

The common tool of providing these services was interpreted as a threatened prerequisite of the world's cultural universalization. Although it later becomes clear that imagined homogenous (unstructured and monotonous) digital space proves to be pretty heterogeneous (structured and diverse). It is the place where opposite views and doctrines can coexist peacefully. Global digital culture has promoted such deep virtual and real sociocultural segmentation and separation that there appear reasons to define the current state of culture as "neo-medievalism".

The notion was justified and explained by such researchers as Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (1984), Umberto Eco (Kearney, 2004), and Ulrich Beck (1992). The modern world seems alike to the Medieval epoch because of such features as the accentuated apocalyptic worldview, pro-

voked by future ecologic uncertainty; the growth of the influence of thought leaders, social media icons, and pop idols; the horizon of power and political decisions have returned to micro and macro-level presented by either local lobby groups or the huge international trading corporations (passing by the main middle level of civil society). The phenomenon of modern pre- or over-state identification is similar to that of the Middle Age when the main social references were constructed based on either local artisan guild belonging or the wide international identity of the membership of the Christian community.

By the medieval inhabitants, the future was perceived as threatening and risky because of the neediness to overcome the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the Last Judgment that was predicted in the Bible. For those who live in the postmodern or digital epoch, the future is also seemed to be full of risks and trials. As Ulrich Beck (1992) admitted in his work "Risk society. Towards a New Modernity", the modern young generation is afraid of the future as no one before because ecological, military, and demographical hazards they ought to deal with are of global nature.

> The experience of this victimization by risks which is closed to decisions makes understandable much of the shock, the helpless rage and the 'no future' feelings with which many people react ambivalently and with necessarily exploitative criticism to the latest achievements of technical civilization. (Beck, 1992, p. 41)

Thus, associations with the future now, as in medieval times, are risky and frightening, although it is no longer a matter of the horror of the total Last Judgment, nowadays it is fear of the totality of the ecological catastrophe.

The Enlightenment formed a powerful discourse of the natural sciences, called to life institutional and technological equipment for the study and conquest of nature, for the discovery and extraction of the necessary energy resources.

As a result, the environment of human living was discovered more thoroughly than their own nature and abilities. The main challenge the current humankind should deal with is its ability to act consolidating and farsighted. Therefore, the most series threat to the world's future is the mercantilist economic behavior of people and their individualistic nature. It's almost the same as that of the Middle Ages worldview which interpreted a person as a threat to the process of paradise created on the earth because of humans' damaged nature, its original sin.

The next feature of the medieval ideology that is similar to the nowadays thinking tendency is the request for successful life stories and readiness to rely on the opinion of popular screen idols. The Christian of the XIV-th century compared his/ her actions with those of the favorite saints, their fantastic, and therefore practically unachievable, miraculous exploits. He prayed to them, and looked for their icons, rushed on a pilgrimage to visit the places which were associated with these heavenly patrons. Following their lifestyle examples brought a sacred sense into the sinner's life.

The fact that numerous fan clubs of modern TV or YouTube stars, footballers, or even anime characters exist and make a great influence, points to the powerful demand of the current secularized society for idyllic archetypes. This phenomenon is the key manifestation of the so-called "chic culture" based on the imitation of lifestyles, looks, and habits of popular people.

The chic-culture proposes some kind of predictable orientation in the changeable global world. In a situation of extreme uncertainty – about the world, oneself, and the future – copying the lifestyle of someone more successful is a way to find a fulcrum in the world. The chic-culture is a natural protective mechanism in the risky reality. It is oriented toward the instant reaction of friends and followers to the changeable statuses, expressive images, selfies, or gifs.

In other words, the chic-culture is presented by the quick and shimmering product. The criterion of "advancement" in chic culture is the number and intensity of social ties. The content of a personal page is needed to be renewed regularly with certain periodically to improve the success and brightness of a personal life.

At the same time, the author's self-reference is almost completely dependent on the number of symbolic approvals from followers – on their "likes", to which there should be a backlash reaction of "thumb up". This creates a vicious circle of almost entirely "positive feedback". The individual is locked in a bubble of his narcissism and presumed communicative environment, which is based only on the approval. Haters or critics can be easily banned or removed from the friends' list. According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, social media is a narcissistic trap.

> The difference between a community and a network is that you belong to a community, but a network belongs to you. You feel in control. You can add friends if you wish, you can delete them if you wish … Social media don't teach us to dialogue because it is so easy to avoid controversy… But most people use social media not to unite, not to open their horizons wider, but on the contrary, to cut themselves a comfort zone where the only sounds they hear are the echoes of their own voice, where the only things they see are the reflections of their own face. Social media are very useful, they provide pleasure, but they are a trap. (De Querol, 2016)

To establish additional virtual connections, more and more content of the same type is needed to be posted, because previous approval reactions create an illusion of increasing demand and acceptance. At the same time, it should be noted that there are "conductors" in the network who set trends, propose the discussion topics, and influence the degree of the deliberation tension.

In general, the chic-subculture is based on the "tribal-leading principle" and its quantitative indicators are rarely equivalent to the qualitative ones, such as rational worldview position or follower's clear identity of self. It mostly relies on the principle of external imitation and mass conformity.

In this respect, there is a radically different subculture that has emerged in the space of virtual interactions – namely geek-subculture. According to its character, it's also reactive towards intensive and unstructured information flow. But if the chic (or glamour) subculture is based on the principle of external imitation and copying a leader's behavior, then the geek-subculture creates

its own structured reality, distancing itself from other segments of information space. Interpreting the definition into the language of medieval reality describing, the geek-subculture is a kind of Christian order that has clear value orientations and declares its social mission.

Originally, the word "geek" had a negative connotation and referred to the marginal actors of medieval fair theatres, who performed the characters of an aesthetically lower comedy world, and in real life, they turned to be thieves and pickpockets. This term denoted such a feature as indifference to the prescriptions of social norms. In the XX-th century, the word was attached to the computer sphere professionals who were associated with such characteristics as untidy appearance, unhealthy looks, offishness, atypical mode of work and rest, indifference to ideological movements, and cultural values. The "nerd" is another neologism but with a wider sense: it designates a person immersed in experimental science.

Therefore, with this in mind, the word "geek" has changed its meaning, now describing a self-motivated professional in the field of highly intellectual work with rare creative skills. Possessing such outstanding cultural capital (unique and in-demand knowledge) determines a geek's elitist social position. But as Billy Wong (2016) noted in his study devoted to the specificity of the geeky cultural identity, there are many stereotypes about those from the field of computer sciences, for example, the geek supposedly is a young man, who prefers wearing mass-market clothes and fashionable glasses (geek chic), he is intellectual, pedantic and a little bit introverted but also success-oriented and with a strong leadership features of character. Thus, the image of a technologist is not devoid of ethnic, social, or gender stereotypes. Computing professions are rarely associated with women, although in reality, their presence in the IT sphere is higher than was expected by the respondents of the sociological investigation analyzed by Billy Wong.

Calum Finister, Thomas Pollet, and Nick Neave (2021) note that nerds and geeks' turning from negative cultural heroes into active performers with positive connotations indicates not so much the transformation of these characters as the changing of the cultural narrative itself. Jessica McCain (McCain, Gentile, & Campbell, 2015) describes the psycho-portrait of the representative of geek-subculture. This is a creative person with a pronounced narcissistic type of character, whose fantasies are richer than real-life circumstances. It causes phantasmagorical, mythical, and even mystic features of the geeks' worldview, also it could be expressed as reckless devotion to work – programming, gaming, collection, etc. For techno-geeks, virtual reality overcomes the social one by its value. Their community is solidary in the virtual screen space. In the dimensions of social participatory reality, they are perceived as lonely and eccentric. On the other hand, geeks' collective solidarity is strong, also their communicative and participative skills are well developed but the sphere of their manifestation is a screen culture. And it could be an effective way to satisfy the need for belongingness in the increasingly individualistic society because traditional resources of group identity-forming such as the nuclear family and strong local communities have weakened or lost importance for the current generation.

Recalling the main stages of how the electronic network conquered the world will help us to note how the marginal geek has turned into a major cultural actor. In the mid-2000s, thanks to the great technological and economic success of such companies as Microsoft, Apple, SpaceX, eBay Inc., PayPal, etc. the public attitude to programming, web design, and digital engineering changed dramatically. To be a geek means to be innovative.

Nowadays techno-geeks are already got other connotations that differ them from the marginal medieval ones so from the modern nerds: they are attributed such character traits as full concentration on the subject of exploration, high level of theoretical knowledge, and practical skills of

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the realm, technological competence, and innovative thinking. They effectively communicate with like-minded people, create target communities, and launch successful projects and startups. Thus, the narrow specialization of geeks has the prospect of entering the external field of real social action, through the creation of an intensive communicative environment and a combination of technological innovation and effective management.

Modern geek culture can still be compared to the artisan guilds of medieval cities, which specialized in the production of a certain type of product, had internal corporate requirements for the professionalism and skill of artisans, and even external markers – guild emblems. Now the usage of the so-called "geek code" is widespread. It is a prototype of the electronic business card, which includes information about the owner's specialization, job experience, and professional level.

The notion of geek-culture has expanded its conceptual field and, besides the IT communities, includes lots of other creative subcultures. Some social philosophers classify geek culture as the super-subculture because, firstly, it functions in the realm of the virtual chronotopic providing its followers with both necessary identification dimensions – virtual time and digital space. Secondly, both geek and chic subcultures function in the international network, and the number of its users surpasses the number of citizens of many nation-states. Unlike unshaped global culture, super subcultures such as geek and chic, propose clear criteria of auto-reflection to their followers. Third, the geek-subculture has strict identification requirements (glam culture operates only with external recognition markers) – such as creativity, originality, and dedication to the case that promotes overcoming its original fragmentary nature.

Belonging to a geek community motivates the participant to a certain type of creative activity, in fact, that's why people become geeks – they have a special intention or research interest. The place and status of a person in the community are determined by the level of his/her originality and efficiency. Creativity here is somewhat reminiscent of compilation, but it's not a blind replication of previous examples, it's rather a kind of self-realization within a canon. For example, Lego Corporation holds competitions, and conquests among its fans. Lego ambassadors test or even design new constructor models and sets to introduce them into mass production.

Geek-culture also includes collecting, writing fan fiction, developing profiles and stories for computer games, writing screenplays, and more. The geek subculture gave birth to new genres of visual culture. There are numerous genres of short videos that were not known in traditional entertainment journalism a decade ago: such as unboxing, gaming, tutorial (AMH – ask me how), BTS (behind the scene), reaction videos, etc. Their aims are to reflect someone's experience and impressions which are supposed to be common, to form new skills quickly and easily, to ask expert's opinions, to show the "human face" of successful people, screen stars, and start-up inventors.

An interesting visual genre is the so-called "Adult Swim" – an animation for older audiences. The plots of such cartoon series have a clear structure and typical heroes whose behavior sometimes is childish, their statements are stupid or immodest, and they tell ironic banalities, but after all the characters live in the world of adult needs and abilities, performing responsible actions. The spectators of such video content are labeled as "kid-adults" but often the series is interesting for both audiences – young and elder. Every age group finds something interesting for its apprehend level. The adults are caught in the philosophical ideas of "evil's banality", "human nature imperfections" or the "cyclical principle of history". At the same time, children decode instructions of true friendship, are fond of the courage of inter-galaxy adventures, etc. Such animated sitcoms as "The Simpsons", "Futurama", "Daria", "South Park", "King of the hill", and so on be-

long to the adult swim genre. In fact, the secret to their success is that there was used the complex artistic technique of double coding. It is typical for postmodernist novels to be multi-level in sense in order to satisfy the demands of different kinds of readers.

Members of geek communities carry out military reconstructions in city squares, take part in musical performances, and thematic dance numbers dedicated to outstanding persons, dates, and socially silenced problems. Geek culture has the inner creative and communicative sources to become an influential force in the space of productive social interactions.

A lot of successful projects have been realized by geek community members. For example, Netflix, an American media provider that supplies streaming services in 190 countries worldwide, enlists subscribers to translate and subtitle movies, series and shows into the languages available for the viewers. Geeks become the main experts and users when launching various online services, enrolling as volunteers in groups of beta testers.

Geek culture is a kind of super-subculture that consists of a variety of smaller, more local thematic communities.

Originality

There have been analyzed the main attributes and features of such modern subcultures were conditionally named chic and geek. They were analyzed in the context of the concept of the New Middle Ages. Thus, the orientation into a celebrity, pop-idol, and copying his/her appearance or lifestyle typologically resembles the middle-aged practice of worship and collecting relics, which have been belonging to the saints and holy patrons. The chic subculture is oriented toward the imitation of visual images, consumer habits, and the way of life of successful (or seemed to be such) people. Glamorous followers need to receive approvals and likes from like-minded people, it is treated as recognition of equality and belonging to the reference group. It forms the vicious cycle of entirely positive feedback. Instead, the geek subculture is more inner-sense-oriented. It unites intellectuals and activists who have common creative intentions. Taking into account the concept of the New Middle Ages, representatives of modern chic and geek communities could be compared with members of the Christian orders and those of the artisan guilds. Thus, when a follower collects souvenirs and merches reminding him/her about the idol, it is of the same root as a medieval Christian kept saint patron's relics. Geek subculture as a community of professionals and experts of a certain branch reproduces the pattern of the artisan guild's solidarity that had been characterized by requirements of high standards of craftsmanship and group identity.

Conclusions

Modern culture falls on the Third wave of production, according to Alvin Toffler's (1980) theory, when information is both the main tool of production and its highly needed result. At the same time such characteristics of the information flood as intensity and asynchrony puzzle users. They are scared by the uncontrollability and global scope of information exchange. The virtual user's life world seems to be diverse only quantitatively, but qualitatively it is as narrow, mythopoetic, and esoterically uncritical as the world of the Medieval person, who used to live the whole life in the same place, mainly one's village. So to make it more interesting and variegated person's mithconsiesness filled it with otherworldly forces. According to the main actors' positions and functions in this virtual environment, geek and chic subcultures are distinguished.

Such a type of modern clip subjectivity as a "geek", being initially immersed in a highly specialized segment of the techno-sphere – computer programming – over time has turned into an

effective actor of social and cultural life. Thanks to the merger of the IT industry with effective social management, the geek-culture becomes a powerful super-subculture that defends values of social good, industrial productivity, and cultural creativity. Chic-subculture creates new trends in fashion and art discourse. It develops modern lifestyles, its visual images with which our era will be associated in the future.

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Особистісна ідентичність у просторі віртуальної культури: на прикладі гік та глем-субкультур

Мета. Стаття присвячена дослідженню антропологічних характеристик споживача й творця популярного продукту культури в епоху "суспільства знань". Цей тип суб'єктності позначають поняттям "гік". **Теоре-**

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тичний базис. Проаналізовано історичну генеалогію терміна від часів Середньовіччя, де його зміст мав маргінальний характер, до нашого часу, коли гік указує на технічно-інноваційну діяльність індивіда. Ідентичність сучасних акторів культури формується в просторовому й темпоральному векторах віртуального світу. Для окреслення картини світу представників технологічної субкультури використано концепт "Нове Середньовіччя", з'ясовано його креативний потенціал. Так, орієнтування на селебриті, кумира, поп-айдола, копіювання його вигляду й стилю життя типологічно нагадує практику поклоніння та збирання реліквій середньовічними християнами. Глем-культура, зорієнтована на візуальне копіювання практик споживання та стилю життя, потребує зовнішнього схвалення. Гік-культура об'єднує однодумців-інтелектуалів, що мають спільний творчий інтерес. Дослідження спирається на теоретичні доробки класичних авторів Е. Тоффлера й З. Баумана, а також таких сучасних дослідників у галузі соціальної антропології, як Калум Фінішер, Томас Полет, Нік Нів, Джесіка Маккейн, Біллі Вон. **Наукова новизна.** Обґрунтовано атрибутивні особливості сучасних суперсубкультур – глем- та гік-спільнот у контексті концепту Нового Середньовіччя. **Висновки.** Сучасні креативні ком'юніті зароджуються в діджитальному просторі. Залежно від позицій акторів культури в цьому віртуальному середовищі розрізняють гік- та глем-субкультури. Завдяки злиттю ІТ-індустрії з ефективним соціальним менеджментом культура гіків стає потужною суперсубкультурою, яка захищає цінності соціального активізму та інновативності, промислової продуктивності та культурної творчості. Глем-субкультура створює нові тренди в дискурсі моди, мистецтва, стилю життя.

Ключові слова: цивілізаційні хвилі; інформаційна епоха; субкультура; Нове Середньовіччя; гік-субкультура; глем-субкультура