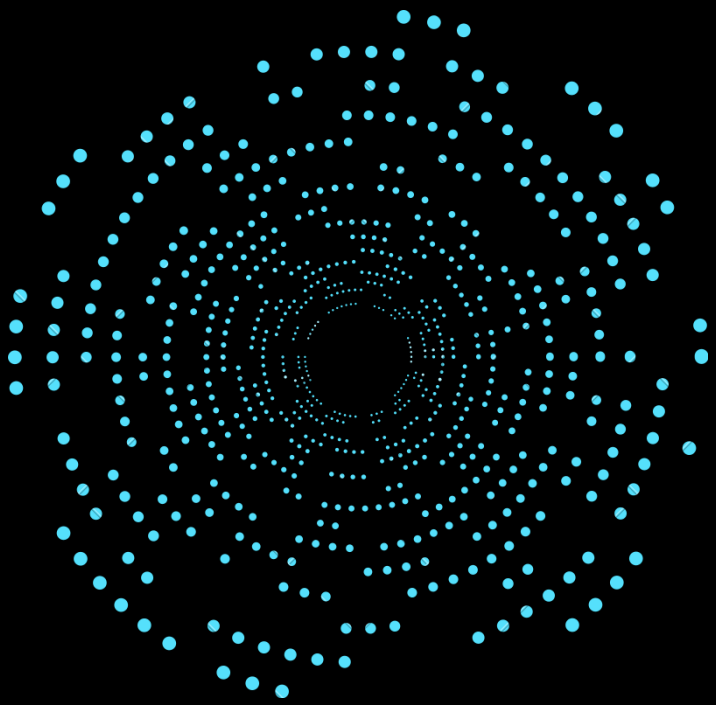
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UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CYBERSPACE

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ABSTRACT

The physical world is not the only space in existence, there exists another realm that is made up of computer communications and simulations. A domain where the digital exchange takes place. This article explores the dimension of psychological understanding of cyberspace. With the speedy advent of technology, everything is turning digital. people have access to the internet and computer. here in this article, it is attempted to describe cyberspace and the distinction between real space i.e. the physical world and cyberspace i.e. the virtual world. The differences between real and cyberspace stem from certain psychological features that are unique to cyberspace only. These unique features are starting point in understanding the psychology of cyberspace. the cyber world can be accessed through hardware and software. these components also affect the psychology of cyberspace.

KEYWORDS: Cyberspace, Psychology, Basic features, Communication , Real space

INTRODUCTION

Within the last two-three decades, technology has taken a huge leap and is advancing continuously. Huge computers of then can now fit into our wristwatches. Technology is now cheaper and more affordable by a majority. Every aspect of life is turning digital. E-learning, E-commerce, E-banking, E-shopping, E-gaming, telecommunication, video-conferencing, webinars and whatnot. Almost everyone is connected to the cyber world in one way or the other. Be it the working class, the learning class or those sitting in their home in leisure; All of them repeatedly access the realm of the Internet and have a presence in the virtual world of cyberspace. So, what exactly is this Cyberspace?

I. WHAT IS CYBERSPACE?

The term Cyberspace, as the name suggests is the realm where computer communications and simulations are used on the internet. So it's a Space, an imaginary pocket or bubble which exists in a virtual sense, a space without any physical boundary or geographical limitations. It can be said that the term cyberspace is not yet completely defined. An interesting fact about this term is that it is coined by the science fiction author William Gibson, he used this term to describe the whole range of information resources available through computer networks. Hence in an attempt to define it, we can say that cyberspace is the realm or domain of interaction, communication and interconnection between human beings or between a human and a computer which is accomplished by the exchange of digital data in the sea of computer networks.

II. HOW CYBERSPACE DIFFERS FROM REAL SPACE.

Cyberspace differs from real space in tons of ways. The first and foremost difference is the physical form and identity. Real-world exists within well-defined geographical boundaries. Cyberspace is as dynamic as the human imagination. It is undefined, static and vast. In cyberspace, an individual's presence is only through a digital medium. unlike the real world where that person is physically present in reality. Right now, cyberspace lacks a generic system of identification. In the real world, if a man just opened his door to receive a delivery, he leaves behind many secondary information about his identity as any

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interaction done in real space carries our physical traits with them. The deliveryman may able to remember what was the colour of his shirt, his hair, his skin etc. And so do that man.

In a cyber environment, digital communications can only transmit the information that is encoded in it. Nothing more if not explicitly coded there. The zeros and ones are not able to transmit any separate information. In Cyberspace each person has a digital identity. This identity is not as secure as our real identity hence more prone to identity theft.

III. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CYBERSPACE?

In the present scenario, cyberspace is a very hyped-up term. It is widely in use. However, this term is not without any psychological aspect. whenever a person commits any transaction through a computer, when he powers up his system, launches any program, opens any application, watches any video, writes a mail, visits an e-store or does e-banking, he experiences either consciously or subconsciously – that he is entering a place or space other than the physical world. A space that is full of wide arrays of meanings and purposes.

This psychological understanding of cyberspace can be categorised into three stages. the experience of entering a place or space is the first stage. Exploring the world wide web or telnetting a remote computer through telecommunication protocols which allows one to access a distant computer and function online, produces a sensation similar to "going to or travelling to someplace" this experience is the second stage. The third stage reflects deeper psychology. it is when users feel that their computer reflects their tastes, attitudes and interests. That the computer has turned into an extension of their mind and personality. Users start experiencing cyberspace as a transitional space between themselves and others. This type of psychological experience opens up the way for all new and creative fantasies and imaginations. They either use it to explore themselves better and improve their understanding of themselves or they use this space to spend all their fury, anxiety, feelings and desires. The latter depicts a somewhat less ideal situation than the former.

However, the bridge between the real and digital world is comprised of few hardware and software components. It is these components that decide the psychological quality of one's cyberspace. An efficient wi-fi network can maintain a pleasant sensation. A lag or glitch may destroy that whole sensation. Different factors associated with hardware devices and software applications or programs affect the cyber environment differently. A chat or messaging app creates a separate psychological feel from email communication or a telephonic or audio exchange. A video conference produces a different effect.

IV. THE BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL FEATURES OF CYBERSPACE

One of the advantages of Computers and the internet is that they minimize distance by acting as a tool that allows us to communicate in an instant, Other is that they save a major portion of our time. Though this digitalisation has changed the way people interact. This difference has created certain psychological features unique to cyberspace which regulates the behaviour of users present in it. These features can be understood as the basis of the conceptual architecture of the psychology of cyberspace.

A. REDUCED SENSATIONS.

Anyone who operates cyberspace does so through a curtain created by their devices. I am not able to see and remember the person I am e-mailing. The person on the other side of ongoing telecommunication can only hear my voice but cannot see the facial

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expressions or body language I am producing throughout the conversation. Even in a skype conversation or video conferencing the audio and visual exchange is greatly reduced to a software window on the screen. This greatly affects the behaviour of an individual present in a cyber environment and the relationship between those individuals.

The most basic and most widespread form of communication is through typed language. Audio communication is possible through many applications such as social media outlets, gaming, audio conferencing, podcasting, internet phoning and many more. So there is a visual sensory experience and there is an auditory sensory experience. the mix of the two is also available though not widely available as these two, video conferencing. this audio-visual mode of conversation became more efficient in covid period to answer the needs of people stranded in their homes and not allowed to physically meet each other. But to reach the level of communication where tactile interactions can be possible remains hidden somewhere in the remote future.

These limited sensory experiences have both pros and cons. It allows users to create a level of social relationship which they may not be able to create in the real world. This aspect alone is both advantageous and disadvantageous.

B. TEXTING.

As text communication is the most widely used form of communication in the cyber environment, one should not underestimate it. Starting from telegrams, it has evolved through phone messages, emails, and sms to chats, instant messaging and blogs. This mode is cheaper and more user-friendly than other modes and requires the minimum hardware and software quality. It is also a novel way to communicate through words instead of talking and listening. Users found this way the safest out of all as the person or persons on the other end are not capable to reach him, hear him and see him. they cannot know his thoughts unless he presses the ok or send button. Or in the case of touch screen generation touches it. It a unique way to present one's identity , perceives other's identity and establish a relationship.

C. IDENTITY FLEXIBILITY.

Identity flexibility is another unique feature of cyberspace that affects its psychology at many levels. It is also something that comes out both advantageous and disadvantageous.it allows users to present themselves as they want, such as only expressing a part of their real identity, assuming an imaginary identity, using avatars to express themselves or even remaining completely hidden i.e., working anonymously. One can imagine how much psychology is involved in this step. Though anonymity allows a user to be as nasty as he can while hiding in the dark or on the positive side allows them to share something which they could not discuss with their identity known. For example, the cybercrime reporting portal allows victims to remain anonymous, this has made many hesitant victims to report their cases.

D. EQUALISED STATUS.

Internet projects an ideal democracy. This sentence may seem awkward. one's status, wealth and position in the outside world have an effect on cyberspace life but in most cases, everyone regardless of their gender, race, wealth, education or status has equal opportunity. Scholars call this "net democracy". In cyberspace, the skills of communication, interpersonal skills, the way one presents himself, and the quality and standard of

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his ideas matter not his or her gender or size or colour of skin.

E. DREAM-LIKE REALITY OR ALTERED PERCEPTIONS.

Cyberspace allows one to experience an imaginary world through the altered sense of consciousness which one achieves while quietly communicating on the web. it allows one to experience surrealistic things that resemble dreams or imaginations. This dream-like consciousness is possibly the reason behind the addictions to computers and cyberspace.

F. TEMPORAL FLEXIBILITY.

Communication through cyberspace provides a period of time to think and reply. Which creates a window for adaption to the information shared and a zone for reflection. Communication through instant messaging and chat rooms require communicators to be present in cyberspace at the same time. While emailing, blogging, and social media portals like Twitter and Facebook do not require their presence in cyberspace at the same time. The former type of communication is called synchronous communication which requires people to present at the same interface at the same time. Here the time period of pause is not much but enough stretch of time is present to think and decide. The latter type of communication i.e., via emails and other modes discussed earlier is known as asynchronous communication. In this type of communication, there is no need to be present in cyberspace at the same time. There cyberspace presents a unique stretch of time that allows users to adapt before answering. This sort of privilege is only available when we communicate through letters, however, they are very slow when compared to cyber communication. Hence cyberspace provides a fast and flexible mode of communication. A feature unique to itself.

G. SOCIAL MULTIPLICITY.

Other than the cheap, fast and flexible communication, cyberspace allows users to contact and communicate with a number of people of all sorts of backgrounds. A common citizen can tweet on the post of the Prime minister and there are examples where genuine questions from a common man have reached the eyes of higher authorities through cyberspace. Cyberspace allows users to communicate with a number of contacts at the same time and without letting them know the same. Blogs and social networks allow posting of messages which can be read by countless people. The search engine presents a quick way for searching, filtering and contacting a particular function.

Again, this aspect is found to be both advantageous and disadvantageous. It is possible to use the such facility to fraud others but it also helps to work effectively. A leader of some community can communicate with all his employees through a chat room or blog. It simplifies the work of a consumer service person by allowing him to chat easily.

H. RECORDABILITY

In the physical world, a conversation gets lost in memory lane, in cyberspace, it can be recorded or saved in files and folders. We can check what e-mail was sent to whom and when. chat records can be kept. Webinars can be recorded. communication is through the mode of documents be it text, audio or video. These documents can be recorded hence the relationship formed with these documents can be recorded too, which can be visited when needed.

It is an interesting psychological aspect that a saved file reflects the objective record of a relationship. Though this

feature of cyberspace sometimes restricts people to express themselves as they know these are recordable and thus fear the same.

I. **MEDIA DISRUPTION.**

The technology is in the developing phase, it is never perfect. software and hardware components keep on updating. the system is getting more complex and sophisticated over time but there are times when they get stuck. Communication breaks, lag, getting connected to the wrong end etc. These experiences trigger the frustration level of the user and give another interesting aspect for psychologists to study.

V. **PERSONALITY OF CYBERSPACE.**

The basic psychological features of cyberspace regulate the behaviour of the users in cyberspace. Prof. John Suler describes cyberspace as a psychological extension of the individual's intrapsychic world. He mentions an interesting question of how cyberspace is known to have a personality of its own.

Cyberspace is formed by digital data, it is a domain of networks that are formed with zeroes and ones but in the end, it is an extension of the human mind in one way or the other. Long-time users may feel that the internet is not the same as it previously was. This change can be credited to the new people coming online. An individual has a personality that connects and collaborates with the personality of other individuals when they make a group. the group gains a personality of its own. Similarly, a number of users communicate in cyberspace, the cyberspace forms its own personality through their interaction.

CONCLUSION.

Cyberspace offers a range of services. It has dating applications, shopping applications, education applications, banking applications, gaming applications and whatnot. It allows cheap, fast, easy, and efficient connectivity in both personal and professional spheres. The distinctions between real space and cyberspace give rise to certain unique psychological features which regulate the behaviour of users in cyberspace. These features are affected by the hardware and software components. The psychological factors of online interconnectivity influencing and regulating human behaviour, mindset and environment presents a subject matter for psychologists to study. The effect of cyberspace on human minds as an individual and in a group is fascinating for many. The human-computer interaction and human-to-human interaction on a network are often found way different than human-to-human interaction in real space.

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