

**FORMATION OF DIGITAL IDENTITY:
VIRTUAL PERSONALITY AS A NEW SOCIAL REALITY**

**Формирование цифровой идентичности:
виртуальная личность как новая социальная реальность**

The rapid development of digital technologies has led to the emergence of a fundamentally new social space – the Internet, which has become an integral part of our lives. In this space, a person forms a digital identity – a virtual representation of oneself, created for interaction in the network.

What is digital identity?

Digital identity is a collection of data about a person that exists in the digital space, and the image that they consciously or unconsciously project in the online environment. It is not just an avatar and a username, but a combination of:

- Social media profiles (photos, posts, likes, shares, and friend lists).
- Behavioral data (search history, purchases, and movements).
- Professional reputations (reviews on career platforms).
- Avatars and characters in games and metaverses.

The key feature of digital identity is its constructability. Unlike physical identity, which is largely determined by nature and our immediate social environment, we create our digital selves by purposefully selecting and editing information about ourselves.

Mechanisms and strategies for creating a digital self

The process of creating a virtual identity is based on several mechanisms:

- Self-presentation and curating: The user acts as a curator of their own life, carefully selecting content for publication. They create a «digital biography» that often focuses on achievements, travel, and positive moments, while leaving behind the mundane and failures.

- Using masks and roles: In different digital environments, individuals can adopt different «masks,» such as a professional expert on LinkedIn, a witty critic on Twitter, or a caring parent on Instagram. This allows them to cater to various social needs.

- Social validation: Feedback from the community plays a key role in shaping digital identity. Likes, comments, shares, and the number of followers become external markers of success and social approval, influencing self-esteem and further self-presentation strategies.

There are two main strategies for creating a digital self:

1. Authentic: Striving to accurately reflect one's real-life personality on the internet.

2. Idealized (or constructive): Creating an improved, corrected, or completely different version of oneself to compensate for the shortcomings of real life.

Problems and challenges associated with digital identity

The widespread use of this phenomenon gives rise to a number of serious problems:

- Crisis of authenticity: Constant comparison of one's real, non-ideal life with curated images of other people leads to an increase in anxiety, depression and the formation of complexes, especially among teenagers («FOMO syndrome» – missed out).

- Loss of privacy: By voluntarily posting information about oneself, the user loses control over it. Data becomes a commodity for advertising companies and a tool for manipulation.

- Cyberbullying and the digital shadow: The created identity can become an object for bullying. In addition, any mistake made on the network remains in it forever, forming a «digital shadow» that can haunt a person for years.

The formation of a digital identity has become an integral part of modern life. The virtual identity has evolved from a simple set of data to a complex, dynamic, and active social reality that affects our self-esteem, relationships with others, and position in society.

As a society, we face an important challenge: how to live in this new, hybrid world where the real and the digital are closely intertwined. We need to develop digital literacy, which includes not only the ability to use technology, but also a conscious and critical approach to constructing our digital selves. The future lies in a balanced approach that sees digital identity not as an escape from reality, but as a harmonious extension and tool for personal growth and social interaction.

References

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