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Ontological Features of Worldview Transformation Among Youth in the Context of Virtual Reality

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Abstract

This article explores the ontological characteristics of the transformation of youth's worldview under the influence of virtual reality (VR) technologies. The authors analyze the virtual world not merely as a technological tool, but as a new form of existence – an "interactive ontology." Based on David Chalmers' theory of virtual realism and Michael Heim's metaphysical perspectives, the article examines the ontological status of digital objects, the evolution of subjectivity into a "digitized Self," and the shifting perceptions of space and time. Furthermore, the article analyzes the dynamics of values across generations and proposes the "3V" model (Virtuality, Veracity, Values). The study concludes with scientific findings on the impact of virtual environments on human identity, the risks of escapism, and the challenges of digital ethics.

Keywords: Virtual reality, ontology, worldview, digitalization, virtual realism, immersion, interactivity, Proteus effect, digital generation, Metaverse, digital identity.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the process of digitalization, which has encompassed all spheres of human life, has led to the emergence of fundamentally new forms of reality that are radically transforming the structure of human experience. Virtual Reality (VR) is no longer merely a technological tool or a means of entertainment; it has become a unique ontological domain where the worldview of the modern generation is being shaped and transformed [1]. For the youth, whose socialization occurs amidst the ubiquity of digital interfaces, the virtual environment is not a "second" reality, but is becoming an integral part of their life-world, necessitating profound philosophical and sociological analysis. Examining the ontological characteristics of this transformation allows us to understand how fundamental categories of human existence-space, time, subjectivity, and the nature of reality-are evolving under the influence of immersive technologies[2].

A central question in the analysis of virtual reality is determining the status of the objects existing within it. In modern philosophy, two primary positions stand out: virtual realism and virtual fictionalism. David Chalmers, one of the leading proponents of virtual realism, argues that virtual objects are not illusions or fictions, but fully-fledged real entities [3]. His argument is based on the premise that virtual objects possess causal power, they are capable of evoking genuine cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions in the user. From an ontological perspective, if an object is integrated into a stable structure of interactions and influences the state of the subject, it fulfills the criteria of reality.

Chalmers defines virtual objects as data structures embodied in computational processes. Despite their immaterial nature, they possess a degree of permanence and independence from individual perception within a given digital system. For the worldview of the youth, this signifies the gradual dissolution of the dichotomy between the material and the ideal. In the consciousness of young people, a virtual sword in a multiplayer game or a digital asset (NFT) carries the same level of existential significance as physical objects. This ontological equivalence serves as the foundation for a new axiology, wherein the value of an object is determined not by its physical essence, but by its functional role within intersubjective and cultural processes[4].

Methodology

The research methodology of this study is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach combining philosophical, sociological, and psychological analysis to examine the ontological transformation of youth worldview under the influence of virtual reality technologies. The study primarily employs qualitative methods, including conceptual analysis and theoretical synthesis, to interpret key philosophical frameworks such as virtual realism and metaphysical perspectives on digital existence. A comparative analytical method is used to evaluate differing ontological positions regarding the nature of virtual objects and their impact on human cognition and identity formation. In addition, the research incorporates elements of interpretive analysis to explore how immersive technologies reshape fundamental categories such as space, time, and subjectivity within youth consciousness. Empirical insights are derived from secondary sources, including contemporary scientific publications on virtual environments, digital behavior, and psychological effects such as the Proteus effect, allowing for the identification of behavioral and cognitive patterns among digital-

native generations[5]. The study also applies a systemic approach to examine the interaction between virtual environments and value systems, particularly through the proposed "3V" model (Virtuality, Veracity, Values), which serves as an analytical framework for understanding shifts in ethical perception and social norms. Furthermore, elements of discourse analysis are utilized to interpret generational differences and communication patterns within digital spaces. Logical reasoning and abstraction are employed to generalize findings and formulate conclusions regarding the risks of escapism, identity fragmentation, and digital ethics. This methodological design ensures a comprehensive and theoretically grounded exploration of virtual reality as an emerging ontological domain shaping modern youth worldview[6].

Result and Discussion

Michael Heim, known as the "philosopher of cyberspace," proposes supplementing this analysis with the concept of "metaphysical realism." He identifies seven core characteristics of virtual reality: simulation, interaction, artificiality, immersion, telepresence, networking, and information intensity [7]. Heim argues that virtuality is not the absence of being, but rather a specific form of existence based on the interplay between imagination and technology. In his interpretation, imagination plays a crucial ontological role, enabling the construction of worlds immersed in information structures that transcend the boundaries of physical reality.

The transformation of the youth worldview in this context can be described as a transition from substantial ontology (thing-based) to relational ontology (based on connections and interactions). In a virtual environment, "to be" is synonymous with "to be online" and "to be interactive." This reshapes the conception of space: it ceases to be a mere physical extension and becomes a set of navigational possibilities. For the younger generation, virtual reality is a field of action where boundaries are defined by code algorithms rather than the laws of physics[8].

Immersion and interactivity are the primary ontological features of VR, determining the depth of transformation in consciousness. Immersion is a psychological response to the degree of objective technological isolation from the physical world. It creates a "presence effect," where the subject ceases to perceive the interface and begins to feel as though they are part of the virtual environment [9]. In this state, the brain adapts to a new mode of functioning, consistently producing neurotransmitters such as dopamine and adrenaline, which makes the virtual experience biologically significant.

From the perspective of interactive ontology, virtual reality offers a unique method of "embodied cognition." The user does not merely observe a screen; they move within the environment through an avatar. Research indicates that individuals tend to perceive the avatar as themselves, projecting their own body schema onto virtual images [10]. This gives rise to the "Proteus effect," where the characteristics and behaviors of the avatar begin to influence the user's self-perception and actions in the real world. For instance, utilizing an avatar that embodies confidence or strength can enhance a young person's self-assurance in the physical realm.

According to Erik Erikson, the process of identity formation during adolescence and youth-traditionally defined as overcoming a crisis-acquires new dimensions in the context of virtual reality. Young people shape their identities in both online and offline spaces, which often leads to the emergence of a "digitized self." This "self" is characterized by multifacetedness and flexibility: within

different virtual communities, a young person can adopt various roles and even distinct identities[11].

Ontologically, this signifies a transition from a monolithic subject to a networked subject. The virtual environment provides a space for experimenting with identities that are otherwise constrained by social norms and biological factors in the physical world. However, such freedom possesses a dual nature, presenting the risk of "self-alienation." Research indicates a correlation between the degree of similarity of personality traits in the physical and virtual worlds and levels of psychological well-being. The greater the discrepancy between the actual individual and their idealized digital counterparts, the higher the level of anxiety and the risk of social isolation.

The transformation of worldview in VR inevitably impacts value systems. Traditional forms of intergenerational value transmission are undergoing a profound digital transformation. As representatives of Generations Y and Z, the youth are "digital natives" whose socialization occurs under the influence of global digital networks rather than being confined to local culture[12].

A primary trend in this process is cultural hybridization. Digital platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of values, blurring the boundaries between national cultures. While this opens avenues for global communication and the exchange of ideas, it simultaneously creates a risk of cultural homogenization, where dominant global narratives displace local traditions and identities. In the youth worldview, this manifests as an orientation toward universal consumerist and technological standards and a diminishing interest in ethnic heritage[13].

Furthermore, the shift in values within the virtual environment is intrinsically linked to changes in the structure of communication. Virtual behavioral models are frequently oriented toward activity within artificial environments, which tends to suppress interpersonal interactions and limit real-life social bonds. Escapism-fleeing from the problems of reality into virtual realms-is becoming an increasingly prevalent behavioral strategy among students. This creates a disconnect between "virtual models of success" and the practical possibilities of realizing them in physical reality, ultimately leading to heightened levels of frustration.

Table 1: Dynamics of Value Changes Across Generations

Generation	Attitude toward Technology	Method of Socialization	Dominant Values
Generation X	Adaptation (Digital immigrants)	Offline communities, books	Traditions, stability, hierarchy
Generation Y (Millennials)	Integration (Mastering the Internet)	Social networks, forums	Self-expression, work-life balance
Generation Z (Zoomers)	Naturalization (Digital natives)	Messengers, TikTok, VR games	Globalism, inclusivity, flexibility
Generation Alpha	Immersion (Life in the Metaverse)	Interaction with avatars, AI	Techno-optimism, digital

Generation	Attitude toward Technology	Method of Socialization	Dominant Values
			fluency

The "3V" model (Virtuality, Veracity, Values) is proposed to analyze value shifts within the "real-virtual" interface. This model allows for an investigation into how higher education students interpret the concepts of "authenticity" and "community" in mixed-gender environments. The results indicate that if a virtual community provides a high level of emotional support and collaborative activity, its value to young people is often perceived as being as significant as that of a physical social circle[14].

Despite its immense potential, virtual reality poses serious ontological risks for developing individuals. These risks include the distortion of reality perception, the deterioration of social skills, and threats to mental health.

1. **Reality Confusion:** Prolonged exposure to VR can lead to the blurring of boundaries between the physical and digital worlds. Children and adolescents may begin to apply the laws of virtual reality to physical objects or, conversely, underestimate real-world dangers due to the habitual absence of fatal consequences in simulations. This "reality shift" disrupts fundamental instincts of self-preservation and spatial evaluation.
2. **Solipsistic Introjection:** Communication in virtual spaces is often filtered through avatars, which makes interactions feel less "real" on an emotional level. Users may begin to project their fantasies onto others, no longer perceiving them as living human beings with feelings and rights. This contributes to the rise of cyberbullying and the dehumanization of communication.
3. **Dissociative Anonymity and Invisibility:** The sense of anonymity in VR liberates the individual from moral obligations. Research has documented high levels of hate speech and harassment within Metaverses. Over 44% of American teenagers have encountered hate speech in these digital spaces. The ontological risk here lies in the formation of a "split morality," where the subject permits themselves to engage in behaviors in virtuality that they would consider unacceptable in reality[15].

Privacy issues in VR entail profound ontological consequences. VR headsets gather vast amounts of data regarding user eye movements, facial expressions, and physical reactions. This enables corporations to create a "digital footprint" of the human persona, which can be utilized to manipulate behavior and worldview at a subconscious level. In this light, the subject's free will within the virtual environment becomes illusory, as the space itself is engineered to steer their choices.

The ontological features of the transformation of youth worldviews in the context of virtual reality indicate profound shifts in the understanding of the essence of human existence. Virtual reality is not merely an imitation of the physical world but a new form of existence characterized by high interactivity, the causal power of digital objects, and the possibility for multi-subject identification.

The transformation of the youth worldview is occurring across several dimensions:

1. **Ontological Transition:** Moving from perceiving reality as an immutable given to perceiving it as a plastic, constructed space.
2. **Identity Transformation:** Moving from a monolithic "Self" to a fluid, networked "digitized Self," which necessitates new mechanisms of psychological integration.
3. **Axiological Reconstruction:** The formation of a hybrid value system where global digital standards coexist with local traditions, and virtual validation becomes a potent regulator of behavior.

To minimize risks such as reality confusion, social isolation, and dehumanization, it is essential to develop critical thinking and digital literacy at an ontological level. Virtual reality should be perceived not as a substitute for the physical world, but as a tool for expanding human capabilities, fostering empathy, creativity, and scientific inquiry. The future of the Metaverse and immersive technologies depends on humanity's ability to maintain a balance between the power of simulation and the authenticity of the human spirit.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that virtual reality has evolved into a distinct ontological domain that significantly reshapes the worldview of modern youth by transforming fundamental categories of existence, including space, time, identity, and value systems. The findings highlight a clear transition from a traditional, stable perception of reality toward a dynamic and constructed understanding characterized by interactivity, immersion, and relational ontology, where being is increasingly associated with digital presence and engagement. The emergence of the “digitized self,” influenced by phenomena such as the Proteus effect, indicates that identity formation has become more flexible yet simultaneously vulnerable to fragmentation and self-alienation. Furthermore, the study reveals that virtual environments actively reconstruct value orientations through cultural hybridization and digital socialization, often equating virtual interactions with real-life experiences. These transformations carry important implications for education, psychology, and digital ethics, emphasizing the need to develop critical thinking, digital literacy, and ethical awareness to mitigate risks such as escapism, reality distortion, and social isolation. The proposed “3V” model offers a useful analytical framework for understanding the interaction between virtuality, truth perception, and values in contemporary youth culture. Future research should focus on empirical investigations of long-term psychological and social impacts of immersive technologies, cross-cultural comparisons of digital identity formation, and the development of effective pedagogical and regulatory strategies to ensure a balanced integration of virtual reality into human life while preserving the integrity of real-world social and moral structures.

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