Digital Culture and Students' Awareness of Their Participation in This Phenomenon

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Abstract - **Digital culture is a complex phenomenon that pervades contemporary digital society. Digital culture can be interpreted through any activity in the digital sphere such as work, communication, creation, recreation, or just entertainment. Modern students are highly connected to and highly dependent on digital culture. For the purposes of this paper, the aim of the conducted research was to investigate whether students are at all familiar with the concept and meaning of digital culture, if they are aware of their participation in digital culture, the impact it has on them, whether they use the content of the digital environment in a targeted and rational manner, and if they feel a connection with it and what feelings it evokes in them in general. The research was conducted with a self-assessment questionnaire that contained questions on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive levels of a sample of students from VERN' University and Algebra University College in the winter semester of the academic year 2022/2023.**

Keywords – digital culture, students, digital culture awareness, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Digital culture emerged from amplified use of communication technologies, caused by the changes and accelerated prevalence of the electronic broadcast culture. The expeditious development of technologies has changed ways of communication, creation, and culture consumption. Change in societal terms and means, interaction, and alteration of technology usage constitutes digital culture. Synonymous terms used to describe this form of cultural change are cyber culture, internet culture and computer culture.

This research paper seeks to inquire and examine the impact of digital culture on social relationships. Concisely, the study aims to explore the ways digital technologies interfere with interpersonal communication and interaction, and the interference of these changes to our sense of identity, community, and well-being. Through a survey, the study will analyse the ways in which individuals use, participate and associate with digital technologies to maintain and negotiate social connections, as well as the challenges and opportunities that derive from these practices.

This research aims to provide a distinct and analytically grounded understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between digital culture and social exchange.

II. DIGITAL CULTURE

Digital culture consists of change in societal terms and means, interaction, and alteration of technology usage, caused by the changes and accelerated prevalence of the electronic broadcast culture. Digital culture is marked with newfound set of practices, social norms, and values that modified and shaped our culture. It is disseminated widely and implemented in various industries.

Digitality can be thought of as a marker of culture because it encompasses both the artifacts and the systems of signification and communication that most clearly demarcate our contemporary way of life from others [1]. Cyberspace, which is the basis of digital culture, has different characteristics and fewer boundaries than real space. Digitalization has enabled the process of media convergence to take place and merged the cyberspace with legitimate industries and affect changes that remodel society.

The circulation of media content across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders depend heavily on consumers' active participation [2]. Arts and entertainment, and the way they have developed, have changed the consumer consumption and media production to their core. With the rapid and constant development of new social media platforms such as TikTok and BeReal, streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu, and platforms for streaming music like Spotify and SoundCloud, consumers are given easy access to participate in their preferred form of entertainment.

III. PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL CULTURE

Participation as a term refers to actions demonstrating forms of involvement performed by parties within evolving structures of talk [3]. All the same, participation as a noun refers to the action of taking part in something, involvement, engagement, contribution, association, partaking, et cetera.

Taking into consideration how the modern world is immersed in digital surroundings that describe digital culture, it is in favour of the basic human need to socialize with others as humans are social beings by nature. Participating in digital culture, the media could become creators of their own individual worlds, by creating virtual reality with information saturation.

Participating in digital culture gained strength when the feeling of being left out of the virtual world became prominent. (FOMO – fear of missing out) [4]. The need to participate became overwhelming and overbearing, forcing everyone to participate in one way or another.

IV. AWARENESS OF DIGITAL CULTURE

Awareness offers a way of releasing from automatic and useless ways of thinking to reacting. Once individuals are aware of their actions, they can successfully process incoming information from their surroundings and respond adaptively. Unawareness indicates the absence of information processing.

Focused awareness implies an increased focus of attention on experiences happening in the present in an accepting way [5]. The basic assumption of focused awareness is that experiencing the present moment without judgment, with openness and acceptance, enables taking a broader perspective regarding:

- *thoughts* - that are observed only as thoughts that come and go, not the absolute truth,
- *feelings, especially negative* - that are observed as a current experience and not something to fight against,
- *body sensations* - that are viewed as a bodily reaction to feelings [5].

Awareness creates space between perception and responses to situations. Participants of digital culture become able to answer to situations reflexively based on their own choices. The term focused awareness refers to the state of consciousness with attention directed to their own experiences (cognitive, behavioural, and emotional) or to their surroundings in the present moment with the attitude of acceptance [6].

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

Research in the form of a self-assessment questionnaire has been conducted amongst the students at VERN University and Algebra University College in the academic year 2022 /2023. The research goal was to investigate whether students are at all familiar with the concept and meaning of digital culture and aware of their participation in it.

The self-assessment survey questionnaire contained fifteen claims on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive levels by which the students could express at what level they agree or disagree with the claims developed according to the theoretical framework related to digital culture and adapted according to cognitive, behavioural, and emotional awareness [6]. The questionnaire was composed based on the Likert scale that contained five of the possible answers of agreement (14 statements) and frequency (1 statement). The research was conducted via Google Forms and the total number of respondents was N=160.

B. Research Sample

The research was approached in total by 160 participants, 75.6 % of which are from VERN University and 24.4 % are from Algebra University College.

The highest number of participants that took part in the research are students of undergraduate studies at VERN University:

- Economics and Entrepreneurship (28 %)
- Tourism (14 %)
- Cyber communications (13 %)
- Public relations and media studies (27 %)
- Journalism (2 %)
- Internet of Things (4 %)
- Business informatics (4 %)
- Technical management (2 %)
- Transmedia dramaturgy (2 %)
- Film, television, and multimedia design (4 %).

Students of graduate studies at VERN University:
- Management of sustainable tourism development (9.1 %)
- Business management (27.3 %)
- Accounting and finance (6.1 %)
- Human resources management (24.2 %)
- Business communications management (9.1 %)
- IT management (15.2 %)
- Film and TV production (9.1 %).

Students of Algebra University College:
- Software engineering (15.4 %)
- System engineering (7.7 %)
- Multimedia computing (10.3 %)
- Data science (5.1 %)
- Digital Marketing (28.2 %)
- Design of market communications (33.3 %).

C. Research Results

The results of the research according to all 3 levels will be presented below:

a. *Cognitive level of students' awareness of their participation in digital culture*

1. FAMILIARITY WITH THE CONCEPT OF DIGITAL CULTURE

Results showed that 30 % (48) of the participants strongly disagree and 31 of the participants disagree with the claim "I am not familiar with the concept of digital culture". The neutral response was given by 26.9 % (43) of the participants. Somewhat fewer participants, or to be exact, 13.1 % (21) agree with the claim and 10.6 % (17) strongly agree with the claim that they are not familiar with the concept of digital culture (as presented in Table 1).

TABLE 1 Response distribution to the claim: *"I am not familiar with the concept of digital culture"* (N=160)

I am not familiar with the concept of digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	48	30 %
Disagree	31	19.4 %
Neither agree nor disagree	43	26.9 %
Agree	21	13.1 %
Strongly Agree	17	10.6 %

2. THINKING ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN DIGITAL CULTURE

With the claim *"I have never thought about participating in digital culture (ex. How much time I spend, for what purpose I use digital culture)"* 26.3 % (42) of the participants strongly disagree and 20.6 % (33) simply disagree. The biggest number of participants, 26.9 % (43) neither agree nor disagree with the claim so their response is neutral. 13.8 % (22) of the participants agree and 12.5 % (20) strongly agree with the claim (as presented in Table 2).

TABLE 2 Response distribution to the claim: *"I have never thought about participating in digital culture (ex. How much time I spend, for what purpose I use digital culture)"* (N=160)

I have never thought about participating in digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	42	26.3 %
Disagree	33	20.6 %
Neither agree nor disagree	43	26 %
Agree	22	13.8 %
Strongly Agree	20	12.5 %

3. THINKING ABOUT ONE'S OWN PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL CULTURE

The results are fairly similar to the former claim, in which 23.1 % (37) of the participants strongly disagree and 26.9 % (43) do not agree with the claim *"I do not wish to think about my participation in digital culture (ex. I do not wish to read my weekly report on using social media)"*. 26.3 % (42) participants of the questionnaire do not have a specific opinion on the claim, so they remained neutral, 12.5 % (20) agree and 11.3 % (18) strongly agree with the claim (as presented in Table 3).

TABLE 3 Response distribution to the claim: *"I do not wish to think about my participation in digital culture (ex. I do not wish to read my weekly report on using social media)"* (N=160)

I do not wish to think about my participation in digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	37	23.1 %
Disagree	43	26.9 %
Neither agree nor disagree	42	26.3 %
Agree	20	12.5 %
Strongly Agree	18	11.3 %

4. THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL CULTURE

With the claim *"I believe that digital culture does not affect me (ex. The content I consume does not change my opinions, does not change my habits.)"* 51.9 % (44) of the participants strongly disagree and 24.4 % (39) disagree. 26.3 % (42) remain neutral, 14.4 % (23) agree with the claim and 7.5 % (12) strongly believe that digital culture does not affect them (as presented in Table 4).

TABLE 4 Response distribution to the claim: *"I believe that digital culture does not affect me (ex. The content I consume does not change my opinions, does not change my habits)"* (N=160)

I believe that digital culture does not affect me	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	44	27.5 %
Disagree	39	24.4 %
Neither agree nor disagree	42	26.3 %
Agree	23	14.4 %
Strongly Agree	12	7.5 %

5. AWARENESS OF ONE'S OWN PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL CULTURE

Only 1.9 % (3) of the participants believe that they are completely unaware and 5.6 % (9) are not aware of their participation in digital culture. Furthermore, 21.9 % (35) of the participants do not have a certain opinion. With the claim *"I am aware of my own participation in digital culture (ex. I know what purpose I use it for and how I use it)"* 38.1 % (61) agree and 32.5 % (52) strongly agree (as presented in Table 5).

TABLE 5 Response distribution to the claim: *"I am aware of my own participation in digital culture (ex. I know what purpose I use it for and how I use it)"* (N=160)

I am aware of my own participation in digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	3	1.9 %
Disagree	9	5.6 %
Neither agree nor disagree	35	21.9 %
Agree	61	38.1 %
Strongly Agree	52	32.5 %

b. Emotional level of students' awareness of their participation in digital culture

6. A SENSE OF CONNECTION TO DIGITAL CULTURE

Most of the participants feel connected, or to be more exact, 40 % (64) agree with the claim, and 25.6 % (41) strongly agree with the claim *"I feel connected to digital culture (ex. Digital culture connects me to the rest of the world – entertainment, work, friends...)"*. 20.6 % (33) of the participants do not have a specific opinion. 10.6 % (17) disagree with the claim and 3.1 % (5) strongly disagree with the claim, they do not feel any connection to digital culture.

TABLE 6 Response distribution to the claim: *"I feel connected to digital culture (ex. Digital culture connects me to the rest of the world – entertainment, work, friends…)"* (N=160)

I feel connected to digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	5	3.1 %
Disagree	17	10.6 %
Neither agree nor disagree	33	20.6 %
Agree	64	40 %
Strongly Agree	41	25.6 %

7. RELAXATION IN TIME SPENT IN DIGITAL CULTURE

Results show that the largest amount of participants relax in their free time as a part of digital culture, to be more exact, 40 % (64) agree with the claim, and 22.5 % (36) strongly agree with the claim. *"I am relaxed in my time spent in digital culture (ex. It releases me of tension; I participate at the end of a tiring day for the purpose of clearing my mind)"*. 6.3 % (10) strongly disagree, 7.5 % (12) disagree and 23.8 % (38) were neutral (Table 7).

TABLE 7 Response distribution to the claim: *"I am relaxed in my time spent in digital culture (ex. It releases me of tension; I participate at the end of a tiring day for the purpose of clearing my mind)"* (N=160)

I am relaxed in my time spent in digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	10	6.3 %
Disagree	12	7.5 %
Neither agree nor disagree	38	23.8 %
Agree	64	40 %
Strongly Agree	36	22.5 %

8. RATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Only 3.8 % (6) of the participants strongly disagree with the claim *"I participate in digital culture rationally (ex. I use it with a certain purpose/reason, I use targeted content of the digital environment)"* and 15.6 % (25) disagree with the claim. The majority of the participants find that they participate rationally in digital culture, 53 % (56) agree and 18.1 % (29) strongly agree with the claim. 27.5 % (44) of the participants do not have a certain opinion regarding the claim, therefore remain neutral (as presented in Table 8).

TABLE 8 Response distribution to the claim: *"I participate in digital culture rationally (ex. I use it with a certain purpose/reason, I use targeted content of the digital environment)"* (N=160)

I participate in digital culture rationally	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	6	3.8 %
Disagree	25	15.6 %
Neither agree nor disagree	44	27.5 %
Agree	56	35 %
Strongly Agree	29	18.1 %

9. FEELING OF MISSING OUT

Out of 160 participants in the questionnaire, 28.1 % (34) strongly disagree with the claim *"I feel as if I will miss out on something (FOMO – Fear of missing out)"* and 25 % (40) disagree with the claim. 6.3 % (10) strongly agree and 20.6 % (33) agree, whereas 20 % (32) remain neutral on the matter (as presented in Table 9).

TABLE 9 Response distribution to the claim: *"I feel as if I will miss out on something (FOMO – Fear of missing out)"* (N=160)

I feel as if I will miss out on something	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	45	28.1 %
Disagree	40	25 %
Neither agree nor disagree	32	20 %
Agree	33	20.6 %
Strongly Agree	10	6.3 %

c. Behavioral level of students' awareness of their participation in digital culture

10. DIGITAL CULTURE PARTICIPATION FRUSTRATION

31.1 % (50) of the participants disagree and 16.3 % (26) strongly disagree with the claim *"I am frustrated by constant participation in digital culture (ex. I feel restlessness, internal tension)"*. 25.6 % (41) neither agree nor disagree with the claim, whereas 16.3 % (26) agree and 10.6 % (17) strongly agree with the claim (as presented in Table 10).

TABLE 10 Response distribution to the claim: *"I am frustrated by constant participation in digital culture (ex. I feel restlessness, internal tension)"* (N=160)

I am frustrated by constant participation in digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	26	16.3 %
Disagree	50	31.1 %
Neither agree nor disagree	41	25.6 %
Agree	26	16.3 %
Strongly Agree	17	10.6 %

11. PARTICIPATION IN DIGITAL CULTURE

Only 3.8 % (6) of the participants rated their participation in digital culture as never and 6.9 % (11) consider they rarely participate. 28.1 % (45) believe they sometimes participate in digital culture, 40.6 % (66) claim they often participate and 20.6 % (33) always participate in digital culture (as presented in Table 11 which follows below).

TABLE 11 Response distribution to the claim: *"I participate in digital culture."* (N=160)

I participate in digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Never	6	3.8 %
Rarely	11	6.9 %
Sometimes	45	28.1 %
Often	65	40.6 %
Always	33	20.6 %

12. CONVERSATION ON THE TOPIC

More than half of the participants disagree with the claim *"I do not wish to converse on the topic of digital culture (ex. I dislike the topic "I am reluctant to answer any questions regarding my participation")*. 35 % (56) strongly disagree and 31.1 % (50) disagree with the claim. A minority of the participants i.e. 3.8 % (6) strongly agree and 5.6 % (9) agree, whilst 24.4 % (39) do not have a certain opinion on the matter (as presented in Table 12).

TABLE 12. Response distribution to the claim: *"I do not wish to converse on the topic of digital culture (ex. I dislike the topic; I am reluctant to answer any questions regarding my participation)"* (N=160)

I do not wish to converse on the topic of digital culture	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	56	35 %
Disagree	50	31.3 %
Neither agree nor disagree	39	24.4 %
Agree	9	5.6 %
Strongly Agree	6	3.8 %

13. DISTRACTION

With the claim *"Digital culture distracts me while I am focused on something specific (ex. If I receive a notification, I almost immediately check my account)"* 9.4 % of the participants (15) strongly disagree, 12.5 % (20) disagree, and 20 % (32) remain neutral on the topic. 36.9 % (59) agree, whereas 21.3 % (34) strongly agree with the claim (as presented in Table 13).

TABLE 13. Response distribution to the claim: "Digital culture distracts me while I am focused on something specific (ex. If I receive a notification, I almost immediately check my account)." (N=160)

Digital culture distracts me while I am focused on something specific	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	15	9.4 %
Disagree	20	12.5 %
Neither agree nor disagree	32	20 %
Agree	59	36.9 %
Strongly Agree	34	21.3 %

14. DIGITAL CULTURE PARTICIPATORS' OBLIGATION OBSTRUCTION

Considering the claim *"Digital culture obstructs me while I am finishing my obligations (business or academic) and/or other activities (free time spent in the company of friends or relatives)"* the results are as follows: 17.5 % (28) strongly disagree, 20.6 % (33) disagree, 21.3 % (34) remain neutral, 24.4 % (39) agree and 16.3 % (26) of the participants strongly agree with the claim (as presented in Table 14).

TABLE 14. Response distribution to the claim: *"Digital culture obstructs me while I am finishing my obligations (business or academic) and/or other activities (free time spent in the company of friends or relatives)"* (N=160)

Digital culture obstructs me while I finish my obligations	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	28	17.5 %
Disagree	33	20.6 %
Neither agree nor disagree	34	21.3 %
Agree	39	24.4 %
Strongly Agree	26	16.3 %

15. SENSE OF TIME

The majority of the participants in the questionnaire agree with the claim *"I lose sense of time whilst consuming digital cultures (ex. I do not notice how much time I spend preoccupied with digital content – videos, TV shows)",* or to be exact, 31.9 % (51) agree and 24.4 % (39) strongly agree with the claim. 22.5 % (36) neither agree nor disagree with the claim, 11.9 % (19) disagree and 9.4 % (15) strongly disagree with the claim (as presented in Table 15).

TABLE 15. Response distribution to the claim: *"I lose sense of time whilst consuming digital cultures (ex. I do not notice how much time I spend preoccupied with digital content – videos, TV shows)"* (N=160)

I lose sense of time whilst consuming digital cultures	Frequency of responses	Students in percentages
Strongly disagree	15	9.4 %
Disagree	19	11.9 %
Neither agree nor disagree	36	22.5 %
Agree	51	31.9 %
Strongly Agree	39	24.4 %

VI. CONCLUSION

In the research, three levels were applied within the framework of digital culture on which the students, or participants of the said research, were self-questioned on emotional, behavioral, and cognitive levels. Taken into consideration that the participants of the questionnaire were only students at VERN' University and Algebra University College, there is room for further study of digital culture users in a wider spectrum of the population.

In the first group of questions the results have shown that students are familiar with their own participation in digital culture. However, they are unaware of the influence digital culture imposes.

The second group of questions was on an emotional level, and the results have shown that most of the students feel a connection to digital culture and that way of spending free time relaxes them. For the minority of students, it

makes them feel restlessness or creates internal tension. For the time being, the majority of the students do not have a fear of missing out when they are using digital culture.

The results of the behavioral questions have shown that a large group of students often participates in digital culture and that it distracts them from doing various other activities, which leads do losing sense of time. Students are continuous users of the digital environment, although they are aware of the influence it imposes on them and their own participation role in engaging with the content. Taking into consideration the development of the digital environment in the last couple of years, it can be assumed that digital culture is more present in the life of an individual from day to day in various aspects.

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