Phenomenology of National Identity in Cyber Space (Case Study: Postgraduate Students of Political Geography at Universities of Tehran, Tarbiat Modares and Kharazmi)

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Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION

New media and cultural identity are the issues of utmost importance, because the political, economic and social dimensions of human life have undergone a visible and prominent change from the new media developments. In the process of cultural change, innovation plays a special role. The roots are changing, the process is continuous, yet the fusion of newer concepts and ideas regenerates newer forms of creative expressions to do away with the older ones which get degenerated. The essence of creative existence is defended in many forms. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to search for identity in a virtual space: appearance, behaviors, community affiliations, and the need to have more than one avatar (a user’s three-dimensional digital representation). The questions we hope to answer as part of this study are: (a) what are the values, social conventions and moral compasses behind some of the choices we make as we construct identities in a virtual life? (b) How are these values tested when one creates an identity with complete anonymity? (c) How do the communities that a member chooses help to establish an avatar’s identity and how does this association affect the real life of the user? The first part of this paper will examine the identity theory and how identity is formed, how community affiliations and activities impact our identity, and what happens to our identity (even if we remain anonymous) once we enter virtual spaces. This will give way to an introduction of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and a conceptual framework for analyzing identity theory and activity, particularly in virtual environments. Finally, discussion for future research about how identity formation, visualization in virtual spaces, and our sense of self can impact our real-life identities will be provided.

The Internet, with around 200 million people globally being online, seems to speed up the messages across all kinds of boundaries. Expanding communication space has

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given way to global communication processes in which knowledge, values and ethics, aesthetics and lifestyles are being exchanged, hence it is giving rise to a third culture. Such a generative framework of culture is being shaped into a global world culture by new media.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Positive dimensions reveal optimistically that new media, i.e., the Internet is a tool of development for developing countries. It provides easy access to any information. It improves horizontal as well as vertical flows of information. It provides a platform for understanding issues with wider viewpoints. It also provides democratic expressions of individuals in the society. Therefore, the new media enriches the indigenous cultures and provides the deep cultural roots which adhere to their identities with the culture.

3. METHODOLOGY

Methodology of this study is descriptive-analytical and required data have been collected through library research. Sampling is based on cluster sampling and was done using semi-structured interviews with the methodology of "Q" that measured attitudes about national identity in cyber-space.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the impact of cyberspace on the national identity. Participants in the study included 50 graduate students of political geography at University of Tehran, Tarbiat Modares and Kharazmi. The concept of national identity in this study in terms of three indicators of national language, national history and the territorial belonging were investigated. The research is an applied one in terms of aim of research and it is carried out on the phenomenological approach. The results showed that the index of language and national history has decreased because of the interaction in cyber space and the index of land belonging has increased due to lack of cross-border nature of cyberspace. However, increasing the sense of belonging to the language and national history in terms of the validity of the documents available on the Internet is undesirable. Therefore, the phenomenology of national identity in cyberspace showed that the discourse of national identity has faced with ruptures due to poor education and lack of infrastructure

Keywords: Cyberspace, National identity, Internet, Phenomenology, Political geography

References (In persian)


References (In English)