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**ALWAYS IN TOUCH:
TO THE QUESTION OF THE INFORMATION HYGIENE¹**

The article examines the problem of information hygiene in the situation of modern development of information technologies. The rapid development of information technologies has generated not only an increase in the volume of information, the ability to work with information flows and networks, but also revealed certain risks, various problems associated with the processing of information and the ability to cope with information consequences. In this sense, the topic of information hygiene and detox, various practices for filtering and limiting information flows, human interaction with the information universe, finding ways for a harmonious and balanced existence of the user in the information environment becomes particularly relevant.

Keywords: information hygiene, social networks, the Internet, information platform, information control, messengers.

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ВСЕГДА НА СВЯЗИ: К ВОПРОСУ ОБ ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЙ ГИГИЕНЕ

В статье рассматривается проблема информационной гигиены в современных условиях. Стремительное развитие информационных технологий породило не только увеличение объема информации, умение работать с информационными потоками и сетями, но и выявило определенные

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риски, различные проблемы, связанные с обработкой информации и способностью справляться с информационными последствиями. В этом смысле тема информационной гигиены и детоксикации, различных практик фильтрации и ограничения информационных потоков, взаимодействия человека с информационной вселенной, поиска путей гармоничного и сбалансированного существования пользователя в информационной среде становится особенно актуальной.

Ключевые слова: *информационная гигиена, социальные сети, Интернет, информационная платформа, информационный контроль, мессенджеры.*

Introduction. From the very beginning, it should be said that this article is also an information, and everything that is discussed below applies equally to it. And perhaps, the theses given in it should also be filtered out. However, you have already started reading.

We are surrounded by information. It comes to us from many sources. The information is often repeated, sometimes with small changes, and sometimes it changes to the exact opposite. Sometimes each subsequent part of it simply confirms the previous one, sometimes complements, and sometimes raises doubts about the reliability of both it and all the parts that came earlier. There is a lot of it. Now – more than ever. If a few decades ago people were happy to receive any information – the winter will be cold, the store has opened, and do you even know what's going on with the neighbors? And, although these and similar explorations of an inquisitive mind have not gone away, there is much more variety. And the main thing that has changed is that now the information itself is looking for its consumers.

There is a theory that cats believe that they are the ones who get the owners. So is information, if it had consciousness (though?), it would probably perceive us as mechanisms for its storage and dissemination. Information flows are in a state of fierce competition for consumers – you and me. This very phrase – information flow – (is it by chance?) reflects the amount of information we have to deal with every day. And it turns out that in order not to drown in this bright, shining information world, it needs to be filtered.

Let's talk about information hygiene.

Main part. Information hygiene (as digital hygiene as well) is a set of guidelines and best practices to help people keep their information life “healthy”. As much as regular hygiene helps you to stay safe and healthy, information hygiene helps to achieve the same in your infor-

mation life. Information or deployment of various information technologies has become critical in our daily business and private lives. And the sheer volume of information taking place online is staggering. This information acceleration has not been without a variety of risks, ranging from clicking on an unsecured link, which takes only a fraction of a second, to reading/receiving toxic information. And all this has devastating consequences for both companies and individuals.

The purpose of information hygiene is to prevent the negative impact of information on human health, social groups and the population as a whole, and to prevent diseases related to information [1, p. 6]. “Information hygiene – a branch of medical science that studies the laws of the influence of information on the mental, physical and social well-being of a person, his working capacity, life expectancy, public health of society, develops standards and measures to improve the information environment and optimize intellectual activity” [2, p. 352].

Streams. We all know perfectly well that an excess of information does not affect us in the best way. Frequently, after reading dozens of blogs, social media feeds, reading newspapers and listening to the radio, we feel tired, can't focus on something serious, and take on a difficult task with all our energy. And, the most unpleasant thing is that we can get used to it. And yes, we need information, our brain needs to process something, think about it – we need data. That's just the quality of this data may be different, and most often it's not nuclear physics.

As an analogy, the following suggests itself: try to lie still for a few hours. Generally. There will be an unbearable desire to at least rhythmically twitch the leg. But to run a couple of kilometers – not everyone will have a desire.

It's the same here: more necessarily to check the news feed – “suddenly something happened without me!” – than to repeat the tenses of verbs

in English. Moment, and I've already opened my favorite social network.

From the point of view of neurophysiology, gadgets cause a constant influx of so-called “cheap dopamine”¹ in our brain. On the other hand, we lose the joy of life and acquire anxiety, irritability, difficulty concentrating. Getting pleasure without any emotional or physical costs deprives us of motivation to make efforts. Accustomed to high doses of dopamine, the brain wants to get more, easier and right now [3].

However, most of us know that you still get more satisfaction from Present Perfect. And if you are drawn to this kind of pleasure a little more strongly, then sooner or later you come to the conclusion that (not all information is equally useful – crossed out) not all information is of equal value, and since the resources of our body are still limited, you may begin to think about a more thorough approach to choosing an information assortment.

Scientists have come to the conclusion that haphazard absorption of information leads not only to overwork, but also to problems with setting long-term goals. Experts agree on one thing: understanding your own goals and objectives is the key to changing patterns of behavior.

Filtering. As a first step, many of us come to the fact that we are reviewing our channels of information. There are not so many of them – the Internet, TV, radio, newspapers, word of mouth and so on. Several factors are involved in choosing the main ways of obtaining information, there are: a convenience, a habit, a quality of information, an availability of topics of interest, a relevance, a correspondence of information to one's own views.

In addition, channels can be divided according to interactivity principle. These are opposites of the kind – the perception of the information that is transmitted to us, or the independent formation of an information agenda. For example, take TV: in the most general case, all the interactivity here comes down to switching channels to which we have a subscription. Everything else is at the discretion of the editors and the information agenda of each individual channel. On

the other hand, the Internet is really where we can choose from a variety of not only topics as such, but also from ways to obtain information. And since the possibilities of setting up such a channel for receiving information as a TV are initially largely limited, then, having come to understand the need to filter incoming information, we will most likely exclude television from our agenda, and not the Internet. And indeed, more and more often you can hear “I don't watch/have TV” than “I don't use the Internet”.

Again, if we look at the ways of obtaining information using these two different technologies of its transmission, we will find out interesting things. As for TV, there are two technologies – to watch and listen or to listen and not watch. As for the Internet, there are much more forms here and from the point of view of meeting information needs, the Internet wins over TV. For this reason, let's focus further on the information supplied using network technologies.

So, we have a need to reduce the daily flow of information received. Thus, let's assume that we have chosen the Internet as the main channel of information. Most likely, we will see that in our mailboxes there is a mountain of unread emails from all sites and services that we have ever visited, among the YouTube subscriptions we have dozens of channels about which we can no longer say exactly what they are doing there, and in social networks we have we have a lot of communities with which we have had nothing in common for a long time (pun intended).

Often all this looks so threatening that the determination to bring order to our information agenda quickly disappears. In addition, the fact that many information channels do not require immediate action or response from us is also important here. Previously, most messages, whether it's email or SMS, required some kind of response, but now emails and messengers often do not require any reaction from us. Indeed, they are not interested in our opinion, they do not ask us direct questions, they do not demand immediate action. The main thing for them is to convey information to us, regardless of whether we need it or not. In this sense, even interactive channels are becoming more and more similar to social media channels.

For those who don't know what they want.

Social media feeds are an excellent mechanism for user's attention retention. If earlier the feeds were divided into separate pages and after

¹Dopamine is one of the main hormones of the “reward system” of our brain. He participates in the formation of feelings of satisfaction and love. Dopamine is called “cheap”, which is produced as a result of simple, unencumbered actions.

viewing, for example, ten posts, we had to click on a button to load ten more, now these buttons are gone! And the tape can be scrolled until your device's memory runs out – this kind of flow state. What happens? If earlier we could say "I'm going to finish this page now and go do something else", now we came to "Hey User, you won't get so simple away from us".

In general, this looks like one of the options for controlling the information agenda. Moreover, even in very setting up of the information need for our taste, not only we participate. Yes, we still choose the channels or groups we are interested in, subscribe to them, and so on. But in the same time more and more often, among those materials that we have somehow agreed to, those that the information platform considers worth our attention also slip through. And then, just try to hold your gaze on any of these posts – be sure, next time you will get several times more of them. And it turns out that as a result, our feed begins to contain a large amount of information about the same thing. Interestingly, this is exactly what most users prefer – perhaps subconsciously – the transfer of control over their information agenda to someone else. And here the question of control arises (we are talking about information control) as a determination or manipulation, on the one hand, and about self control, on the other, which also requires special attention, since it is directly related to the topic of information hygiene.

In confirmation of the above, note that in February 2013, Google product manager Tristan Harris sent out a presentation to his colleagues in which he criticized Google and Facebook for brazenly and irresponsibly capturing people's attention by manipulating the peculiarities of human perception. Harris said it was time to stop doing this and think about responsibility. The company's management did not fire him for sabotage, but appointed him a design ethicist. In February 2018, Harris founded the Centre for Human Technology movement and gave a TED talk entitled "How Several Technology Companies Control Billions of Minds". In the lecture, he again blamed corporations for profiting from people through manipulation, and called for a "design renaissance" in which people would be left alone and allowed to manage their time calmly. In May 2018, Google hosted an I/O conference, most of which was dedicated to Digital

Wellbeing. This project is designed to combat people's dependence on gadgets [4].

Let's continue our research. The Internet, in the state in which it is now, is able to provide us with many different options for obtaining and, importantly, exchanging information. For example, communication with another person. That's just this person can be both familiar and not so familiar. And often we want to have a certain distance in communication.

In this case, communication via messengers and other platforms allows us not to share detailed information about ourselves and not to let a person get too close. A real paradise for introverts! That is, the exchange of information occurs through text, emotions – through emoticons or gifs. Fun – smiling smiley face, sad – smiley face with downturned corners of the lips. And often this is enough and even turns into some advantage.

The same is true with the search for information: it is much easier to dive into the topic yourself, sort out a certain amount of information, compare several points of view and collect the required information in the right volume, the necessary depth and detail, than to consult with a person, ask clarifying questions, listen to unnecessary statements, try to understand his way of thinking and so on. Interestingly, in addition to the apparent attempt to avoid live communication, this method assumes greater independence and responsibility for the chosen decision.

So, we have come to the point that it is becoming increasingly difficult for us to cope with incoming information, that optional data has begun to compete with primary data, and we do not have enough resources to process everything. What'll we do?

Firstly, we recognize that this is a normal situation for the world in which we now live. The information flows are huge, its suppliers compete for consumers, trying to attract our attention in many possible ways. And its volume is likely to only increase. However, the fact that we have just recognized the ever-increasing amounts of information as the norm does not mean that nothing needs to be done about it. Of course it is necessary: the resources of our body (including mental ones) are not unlimited, we need to learn how to filter out information. And here it is worth saying that this is not a one-time process, so from time to time we will need to revise our

information agenda, make adjustments, add something, and limit something. The context is changing, interests are changing, better sources are emerging – we will also change our information policy, and hence preventive practice. To begin with, it is proposed to revise the channels of information receipt – such as TV, radio, the Internet. It is quite possible that we will give up something altogether.

Next, you need to go to a more detailed level. Review your mail, unsubscribe from some mailings, maybe all of them. Filter out spam sources. Try to classify incoming correspondence in some way, since there are more and more tools provided by the postal services themselves – rules, actions, storage intervals, directory structures, and so on. The study of this area in itself involves writing a special article.

Finally, these are social networks. The first step, again, will be to determine whether we need each network in which we are a member. If you are a distributor of some information, then perhaps you need it. But since we are considering the opposite case here, it is likely that membership in some social networks will have to be terminated. There can be many reasons for this – the quality of the information received, its compliance with our needs, ease of use, the presence of people and groups interesting to us in it, and what has become important lately, the relationship of the social network with its users.

So, we decided to keep a few important social networks for us. Then, as in the case of mail, you will need to review all our subscriptions and leave only the necessary ones. Here you can use the following approach – not to revise everything at once, but to give yourself time, for example, a week, and review the sources of information we have every day. And so, gradually, choose the right ones and unsubscribe from the unimportant ones. The same applies to messengers. However, the situation here is complicated by the fact that messengers – both separate and embedded in social networks – not only have impersonal content providers, but also live, familiar people who sometimes also require our attention. And here everything already depends on our lined up communications and our attitude to real people. You will need to restrict someone, negotiate with someone, unsubscribe from someone. The criteria are still the same – mutual interest, the importance of communication and

harmonious coexistence with other circumstances that also require our attention.

A number of articles on information/digital hygiene contain tips to turn off the phone at least an hour before bedtime. This is due not only to infrared radiation and not even scrolling through social networks, but to endless work correspondence. Research shows that responding to work after nine o'clock in the evening means sleeping poorly at night and working worse the next day. And that even waiting for calls and letters increases stress for employees and their families, because if they suddenly come, you will definitely need to answer. Currently, governments and organizations in Canada, Ireland, Germany and other countries are concerned about the problem of information/digital hygiene – protecting the right to rest, including the right to disconnect at the legislative level. For example, in the French Labor Code², the right to disconnect has already been introduced.

Conclusion. As in many other cases, the most difficult thing is to take the first step, find the strength and courage to overcome fears that by changing your information agenda, you will miss something important. We need to analyze our interests and needs, determine what is important to us and what is secondary. As you can see, we have something to do at this difficult stage. But then, having acquired some habit of rethinking and the skills to regularly transform our information picture of the world, all this will happen much easier, and most importantly, the resources we need will be freed up, more time will appear, and the flow of information coming to us may be somewhat narrower, but undoubtedly better. Thus, information hygiene is the catch-all term for the practices and behaviours related to cleaning up and maintaining our information world. Information hygiene includes everything from organizing the files on the computer, to locking down the social media accounts, to introducing new apps or technologies to make our information life more healthy. And just like cleaning our physical house, there's also an emotional benefit to cleaning up our information life.

²"En dehors de ses heures de travail, tout salarié n'est pas tenu d'être en permanence joignable par son employeur" indiquait ainsi la loi/ "Outside his working hours, any employee is not required to be permanently reachable by his employer," the law thus stated.

As we can see, the topic of information hygiene covers a wide range of questions and requires answers to them, in connection with which it seems very productive and requires further research.

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