Cognitive Distortions, Negative Consequences of Distance Learning and Other Anthropological Risks During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: The article examines various risks of an anthropological nature caused by altered anthropic practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the destructive psychological risks the most dangerous are neurodegenerative changes, cognitive uncertainty which provoked covid-hysteria. Further, various risk factors of online education are analyzed: technological, psychological, social, and didactic. Among the new, previously unarticulated risks of the COVID-19 pandemic of a cognitive nature, the author highlights the phenomenon of heuristic accessibility – feeling of omniscience, false expertise – overconfidence, caused by the long term lockdown and lack of "feedback effect" of reality as a catalyst of the relevance of judgments. Further, the author reveals the ambivalent nature of distance education, where the main emphasis is on the factor of equal access to educational content. Such popularization of education through the Internet platform implies its massification that neutralizes the value of diplomas; but on the other hand, the segregation of offline education as elitist increases. The need for a systematic integrated approach was justified, taking into account all risks and inconveniences in all spheres of life.

1 INTRODUCTION

Since 2020, our humanity has entered a phase of hyperturbulence, associated with the unprecedented scale of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the dynamic world of VUCA: V - Volatility, U - Uncertainty C - Complexity A - Ambiguity was replaced by the chaotic world of BANI: Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible. Almost all spheres of life turned out to be vulnerable: economic, technological, political, legal, social, pedagogical, healthcare. Cognitive uncertainty provoked covid-hysteria. The term "Covid hysteria", known throughout the world, expressed the fact that in an attempt to regain control over the situation and cope with anxiety, people en masse began to resort to solutions that were understandable to them: stocking up on food, personal hygiene products (in Russia - toilet paper and buckwheat), provoking rush demand for essential goods. Humanity faced hitherto unknown existential problems; it had to adapt as soon as possible: to find and update new ways of conducting economic activities, changing thousand-year-old anthropic practices. The combination of these factors, as well as the neurodegenerative consequences of the Covid-19 virus itself, led to a significant deterioration in cognitive functions and manifestations of "destructive mental reactions": fears, phobias, panic attacks, frustration, depression, disorientation in time and in space. Covid hysteria also had a mental effect, expressed in hysteria and anticipation of the end of the world. Apocalyptic scenarios and conspiracy ideas have been regularly amplified through media over the past centuries. B.M. Bekhterev, the discoverer of syndromes in neuropathology, noted that the occurrence of hysterical seizures is caused by observation of those seizures in others. The tantrum people showed aggressive attacks against people around them, calling to find and punish those responsible for worsening the situation, threatening strangers or sellers in public places if they did not use sufficient personal hygiene equipment (masks, gloves). Doctors had not only to restore the physiological functioning of patients, who had suffered from COVID-19, but

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also to improve their mental health. All spheres and levels of life turned out to be mutually integrated and interpenetrating, like a Mobius strip – a strip of paper twisted into a figure of eight, in the sign of infinity. A striking example illustrating the intricacy of the spheres of economics, politics, technology or sociality is the invention of the epivac vaccine. Many fellow citizens expected it to appear on the Russian market in order to get vaccinated. However, Epivac was not allowed onto the Russian market because the private interests of large corporations were affected.

Digital transformation in the education system can be viewed in a similar way. These measures (introducing online/digital education) were forced and justified by lockdown and were supposed to be temporary, as well as the wearing of masks or gloves. However, thanks to the fourth industrial revolution, they are already firmly rooted in the post-Covid education system, posing a threat of crowding out the classic offline education. To what extent this type of education is relevant and meets ontological needs, and who are the beneficiaries of its implementation, we will just consider in the "RESULTS" and «DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS» section.

2 METHODOLOGY

The above examples are: The appearance of the epivac vaccine on the Russian markets during the pandemic and the integration of online education before and after the pandemic, illustrated the ambiguous nature of the measures taken, which did not fit into the framework of traditional linear logic. Accordingly, their consideration requires a systematic approach that considers this phenomenon through the prism of all spheres of life and management: economic, political, social, medical, etc. There is no clear demarcation of where the social sphere begins and ends, where the economic or political sphere begins.

The model of intersecting circles, being too rigid, is not suitable for explaining such complex interactions. The essence of the multifaceted approach is better reflected in the metaphor of the Mobius strip. Accordingly, the following costs of online education were identified: technological, didactic, psychological, physiological, and social.

Also, during the research, the international experience was studied, generalized, critically reflected and summarized by the method of theoretical analysis: in particular Survey to Monitoring the Main Education Aggregates (MIMEA). In addition, the university rankings were calculated for their use of technologies of the fourth industrial revolution (by K. Schwab). The data was taken from university self-survey reports as well as from the Internet.

The purpose of the study is preventive in nature: to identify cognitive distortions, negative consequences of distance learning and other anthropological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic for their subsequent neutralization. The relevance of the study is due to the insufficient elaboration and uncertainty of this issue, as well as the practical significance of the results presented in order to prevent anthropological risks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The novelty of the study is due to the identification of new, previously unarticulated risks of the COVID-19 pandemic of a cognitive nature.

3 RESULTS

«As a part of the reaction by the federal and regional governments, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education issues several decrees and orders to protect the breach in the society's collective immunity. In particular, the order came that prescribed the universities to transfer all of its educational activities online and suspend all nonnecessary activities. The period of the order was only for one week at that time. As a result of compliance with the recommendations and decrees, the university issues its decree describing the exact methods and procedures for such transition. Furthermore, lastly, as a part of the university, the department successfully managed to transfer educational activities for a week to the online.»5

By switching to the online format in the shortest possible time, we have changed the ways of our business activities, our anthropic practices that had been formed for centuries, which has increased anthropological risks. The unprecedented online format of our daily activities has led to a cognitive distortion of reality, making our psyche extremely vulnerable. Despite the fact that the main burden fell on the health sector, education has become one of the most affected sectors. The education system was one of the first to face global changes and the need to develop distance learning technologies for security purposes. Almost all educational organizations switched to remote mode, affecting 94% of the global student population (before the pandemic it was 24%). According to the UN, this was the largest disruption of the education system in the history of humanity. The pandemic was a sudden test of the readiness of

the entire e-education infrastructure. We have identified numerous inconveniences and risks of a technological, social, didactic, physiological and psychological nature, despite the fact that risks, as a rule, hide from monitoring, they evade assessments, mislead, changing their own appearance and type.

technological inconveniences: - problem with reliable Internet connection and with access to digital devices; - lack of a comfortable place to study at home; - insufficient training of teachers to work with the MOODLE system and use other online platforms for learning; - students benefit it to cheat on tests; - lack of the required amount of time to prepare classes using digital devices and online textbooks instead of devoting time to scientific research and development; - lack of consultation; - the impossibility of learning many practical skills (for example, it is impossible to fully train in examining a patient or performing a scientific experiment) and integrating the acquired knowledge into practical activities.

physiological risks: by spending more time in front of monitor screens, students cause enormous harm to their health: from physical inactivity, scoliosis, to myopia, visual impairment, functional abnormalities of the cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems.

didactic inconveniences: - wile online learning, students are less likely to ask questions and take part in discussions than in the classroom, and shy away from interacting with the class; - heated debates, polemics, brainstorming, discussions are impossible without the collectivization of students, regular and meaningful interactivity between students and teachers is necessary; - disciplinary difficulties arise for those who do not have a sufficient level of internal motivation and need constant external control, weakened in conditions of remote learning. This circumstance can subsequently lead to a significant lag behind the curriculum of vulnerable groups of students; - the increased role of independent work has a negative impact on primary school students to a greater extent; - digital education leads to the loss of writing skills, and that in turn leads to problems with the perception of large texts and the formulation of thoughts, disrupts motor skills and coordination; - weakening of students' critical and creative thinking; - the new ethics of online learning presupposes an excess of emotions in communication, a grotesque increase in intonation, naturalness is lost, areal rhetoric is formed when we shout to shout; - increased formalization of education process creates a threat of the blocking student's creative impulses; - reducing the students' life skills because of lack of social activity: cancellation of many educational, scientific, educational, sports and cultural student events (a study of students and graduates of UK universities showed that almost 60% of students expand their life skills due to the social element of university life); - online education has changed the ontological status of the teacher, from now on it becomes irrelevant, unclaimed in the new paradigm; it is "successfully" replaced by a variety of online resources, applications, as well as training courses and educational content offered by well-known universities. But online education offers only a huge amount of content that is consumed by student without reflecting. It cannot replace the transformational communication based on interpreting and problematizing the student's life path. The direct participation of a teacher, its accumulated reflective experience is more significant for student than an access to a huge amount of educational content. It increases the threat to the formalization of the learning process and the risk of developing false expertise.

social risks: the lack of emotional-personal and intimate-personal direct communication with peers has a detrimental effect on the general mental state of primary and secondary school age students and negatively affects the development of gender interaction among adolescents. For emotional well-being, fostering empathy, collective feeling, cooperation, direct communication with peers is urgently needed; - online interaction has led to a transformation of communicative ethics: greater distance between actors, detachment provokes communicative uncertainty; the risks of not being able to withstand the pressure of offline direct communication, when very important are real reactions of the person to whom we are appealing.

psychological risks: the Internet addiction (in the ranking of addictions, Internet addiction is in 4th place, dependence on mobile gadgets is in 5th place), after the outbreak of the pandemic, these trends intensified (the hand of a modern person reaches for the phone even when it does not vibrate from incoming messages); the logic of "phone is for a person" is transformed into the logic of "a person is for a phone"; – an irregular work schedule led to the fact that the work became larger and even endless (until time runs out, or forces leave, as a result of an irregular work schedule; a person lost his own fullness of life, work has replaced Life itself, which often leads to professional burnout and existential crises; - long-term lockdown, isolation from interaction with reality which sends us a "feedback effect" as a catalyst for the relevance of judgments. The lack of such feedbacks leads to undesirable

cognitive consequences: cognitive uncertainty, which leads to a such phenomenon as the availability heuristic - feeling of omniscience, an intuitive process in which a person evaluates an event as more frequent or more likely in terms of ease. Often a person misleads himself regarding his own competence, being by nature a creature prone to self-deception. He takes wishful thinking when he doesn't know something or has insufficient cognitive resources to solve a problem, receiving dopamine satisfaction. As a result, the individual develops a distorted picture of the world, creates false expertise - overconfidence. That's why it is necessary to practice "cognitive hygiene" by correlating our knowledge and judgments about the world with reality in order to prevent clinical pathologies or be manipulated.

4 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The above analysis has not shown all the risks and inconveniences of online education. The fact that students enrolled in online education programs, on average, have poorer academic performance and lower outcomes than students attending classes in traditional full-time, is reflected in the Brookings Institution report. Based on this, it would be logical to make distance learning an alternative form of an "emergency" nature, a measure only temporary and forced. Despite the fact that most education participants and stakeholders including teachers, scientists, employers, students and the public are skeptical about the quality and value of online education, it is the fastest growing segment especially the commercial sector. The electronic format of education, which has been very successfully adopted after the end of the pandemic has taken root and becomes not only an alternative to "natural" education, but also a threat of its replacement. The Government of the Russian Federation legalized online education, equating it with traditional education in Article 16 of Federal Law No. 273-FZ dated 12/29/2012 (ed. dated 07/31/2020) "On Education in the Russian Federation".

There was a substitution: the means have become the goal. In order to deal with the illogicality of such educational reforms being undertaken, it is necessary, as they say, to look for qui bono qui prodest. As we said, the introduction of online education has changed the ontological status of the teacher, in the information age of the fourth industrial revolution, he is no longer the only source of knowledge, He is "successfully" replaced by many online resources, applications, as well as training courses and educational content offered by famous or well-known universities. Competing online platforms of various Universities leads to increased Monopolization of large universities and content providers. They have a competitive advantage that attract students from all over the world by offering more "attractive" certificates and diplomas. The absorption of regional and local educational organizations will lead to serious economic, socio-political and cultural consequences. In this aspect, various theories of the Great Conspiracy find justification.

These large universities, having become monopolists of the educational market, order research and carry out the monitoring in which they articulate the results they need for themselves. At the same time, they ignore the risks and inconveniences of online education, constituting new connotations and hiding behind a noble mission - to make education accessible to everyone. These are Global Monitoring of School Closures Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic6 and Survey to Monitoring Impact on Main Education Data Aggregates (MIMEA)8. According to them: «The most challenging issue in education under the current crisis is to ensure that equity in access and learning are not set back…… Equity and inclusion in learning needs to continue being a key objective in crisis management.»9 «In these circumstances, the main objective of the Survey to Monitoring the Main Education Aggregates (MIMEA) is to collect up-to-date information on the most essential education variables for immediate use, and to monitor the structural changes that may remain after the COVID-19 pandemic.» These communities make ranking of universities based on the technologies highlighted by K. Schwab, driving the fourth industrial revolution. They are divided into four blocks: digital technologies, the physical world, human changes, and environmental integration: «Each of them contained three types of technologies, the presence of each of which was assessed as follows: • the university uses technology in the educational process or scientific activity, or the scientific community is its developer for practical application - 1 point; • the university provides training on this technology in educational programs, schools, projects - 0.5 points; • technology is not applied at the university - 0 points».

5 CONCLUSION

As a result of our analysis the need for a systematic integrated approach was justified, taking into account all risks and inconveniences in all spheres of life. At

the same time the ambivalent nature of distance education has been revealed, where the main emphasis is on the factor of equal access to educational content, but many anthropological risks and inconveniences of a technological, psychological, social, and didactic nature are ignored. Among the new, previously unarticulated risks of a cognitive nature are the phenomenon of heuristic accessibility – feeling of omniscience and false expertise – overconfidence. The introduction of distance education during the isolation of the Covid 19 pandemic was a temporary, forced measure. However, the main stakeholders of online education are lobbying for its widespread implementation on an ongoing basis, having sufficient resources to conduct monitoring and analytical research. Main beneficiaries are large universities и content providers, whose competitive advantage leads to increasing Monopolization and the absorption of regional and local educational organizations.

On the one hand, the popularization of education through the Internet platform implies its massification that neutralizes the value of its diplomas; and on the other hand, the segregation of offline education as elitist (ex. transformational communication) increases.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Noam Chomsky: «The Internet is a hideous time-waster. There's no point in having access to vast amounts of data if you can't make sense of it. And for this you need to think, reason, study. I believe that in today's world the ability to do these things is gradually fading. It is impossible to measure the degree of degradation, but I bet that this is exactly what is happening now."

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