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MANIFESTATIONS OF ESCAPISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

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Abstract. This article explores the phenomenon of Escapism and examines its primary characteristics. It highlights the ambivalent and complex nature of Escapism and emphasizes its social, cultural, and psychological roots. The study examines the meaning of Escapism in real and virtual contexts. It argues that the life of a modern individual, especially a young person, unfolds in two parallel worlds – the real and the virtual – resulting in conflicting perceptions and ambiguous consequences for personal development and social interaction. It is noted that Escapism, as a way of living, thinking, and behaving socially, has occurred throughout human history and has been shaped by specific historical and cultural contexts. Both the real and virtual worlds have a complex and ambivalent influence on the cognitive abilities and behavioral strategies of adolescents and young people. The article explores the differences between Escapism in real and virtual environments, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects inherent in each of these worlds. Excessive immersion in the Internet and social media can lead to a decline in critical thinking and an inadequate awareness of events in the real world. The increasing complexity and uncertainty of modern life encourage individuals to seek solace in virtual environments full of illusions, which is very attractive to young people. For many young people, existence in such environments is becoming a mass trend and a core value. It is emphasized that virtual environments offer a way to escape the negative and traumatic aspects of real life that many teenagers and young adults do not want to accept. It is concluded that intense engagement in a virtual world, especially when accompanied by digital addiction, brings with it a variety of risks associated with Escapism. One of the most critical manifestations is loneliness, which becomes a seemingly convenient and effective survival strategy.

Keywords: *Generation Z, social media, hybrid existence, Escapism in the real world, virtual Escapism, digital addiction, loneliness, illusion*

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Introduction

Modern global and digital trends are giving rise to new social phenomena that necessitate interdisciplinary analysis in the social sciences and humanities. Among these phenomena, the phenomenon of

real and virtual Escapism is becoming increasingly important, making its study important from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The manifestations of Escapism are diverse, its nature is contradictory, and its consequences are ambiguous, especially for young people. The spread of virtual Escapism is closely linked to the development of IT technologies. The desire to escape the hardships of reality and immerse oneself in a world of illusions is not peculiar to modern times. Still, digital technologies have intensified this desire, so that both forms of Escapism – real and virtual – are linked and reinforce each other. The infinite possibilities of the internet trigger escapist tendencies, especially in today's world, which is characterized by uncertainty and contradictions. For many, virtual Escapism becomes a way of coping with the complexity of modern life.

The widespread use of digital tools and their integration into everyday life has led to the emergence of new social and psychological phenomena that are profoundly changing lifestyles, social values, ethical norms, and patterns of interpersonal interaction. While the Internet offers obvious benefits, it also contributes to the emergence of potentially questionable behaviors. These include Escapism and the growing problem of loneliness, which is becoming increasingly common among Generation Z. Paradoxically, despite the increase in various forms of virtual communication, people often find themselves in a state of loneliness.

Materials and Methods

This article aims to explore the topic of Escapism, analyze its social and psycho-emotional nature, and examine its specific manifestations among adolescents and young adults. Escapism is a complex issue that has both positive and negative effects. It has an ambivalent impact on an individual's cognitive functioning and social behavior, potentially leading to disruptions in personal values and life experiences. The application of dialectical principles – systematicity, accuracy, completeness – together with general scientific research methods enables a holistic and multi-layered study of this socio-cultural issue. Referring to the works of Russian scientists such as E. Andreeva [1], V.I. Belov [2], O. Davydov [3], I. Kolesnikova [4], O. Lavrichenko [5], A. Kibalnik and I. Fedosova [6], O. Kolotova [7], N. Nyatina [8], K. Perepelkina and M. Cherepanova [9], E. Shapinskaya [10], A. Shchetinina [11], and others make it possible to analyze various aspects of Escapism and the loneliness associated with it.

The researchers note that both real and virtual Escapism are becoming a widespread lifestyle among young people, shaping their perception of the world. Traditional forms of communication and interaction are undergoing significant changes. Many people are no longer able or willing to engage with the real world due to virtual Escapism, which in turn deepens and broadens the experience of loneliness.

Results and Discussion

Escapism is a widespread social phenomenon that has existed throughout human history. The desire to escape life's hardships is common among specific individuals and can manifest in various ways. Modern Escapism is primarily driven by information and communication technologies, which offer far-reaching opportunities to extend real-life Escapism to virtual practices. The attraction of virtual images lies in their ability to "displace and compensate for the aggression and negativity of the physical and social world" [12, p. 141], which increases the likelihood that young people will adopt an escapist mindset. Such negative attitudes are caused by a general dissatisfaction with life, which is particularly pronounced among young people. Since real life often fails to meet their idealized expectations, many of them view the digital world as a safe space where anything seems possible. In this case, the likelihood of internet addiction among teenagers is high. After returning to the real world, they are once again confronted with stress, which can have harmful consequences. This is also facilitated by moral and ethical dissonance – the views of teenagers and society on social norms and standards often clash. When they do, "the problem of escapism inevitably arises" [13, p. 106].

Escapism is widespread among students today. The challenges they face – such as increasing alienation and the transformation of the education system into a service-oriented system that promotes utilitarian thinking – favor Escapism as a coping mechanism for psycho-emotional stress. Virtual Escapism plays a particularly important role as it often removes students from real-life experiences and makes it difficult for the education system to re-engage them in real-life social interactions.

Real and virtual Escapism are two interlinked trends that are having a profound impact on young people, particularly teenagers. The merging of online and real-life experiences creates a hybrid environment in which young people realize their ambitions and desires. The greater the dissatisfaction with real life, the stronger the desire to escape into an alternative reality unencumbered by moral expectations or social

responsibility. Escapism reveals its dual nature: it can help alleviate the 'stress of monotony,' but can also lead to a destructive immersion in virtual madness. This duality can lead to negative consequences that ultimately limit a person's freedom in the real world.

These tendencies also extend to the field of education, which is expected not only to provide services but also to create conditions that reduce the risks associated with Escapism. The need to orient students to real life is a key challenge for modern education. Without this change, the risk of social infantilism and pragmatism grows, distorting socialization processes and negatively impacting learning and personal development. This is particularly critical as education must shape mature, socially responsible individuals. Educators face the complex task of reintroducing students to the world of authentic experiences and helping them develop a mindset that enables them to distinguish between reality and illusion. To achieve this, students need to be actively engaged in real-life activities that can significantly reduce the adverse effects of Escapism.

This problem is particularly relevant for special schools, where cases of social Escapism are more common. Escapism often serves as a defense mechanism and a way of coping with negative external influences. For young people, including those with disabilities, escaping into a fantasy world can provide a sense of security and reassurance. However, although fantasy provides them with relief, it also distances them from real life, which can have a detrimental effect, not only on their physical and emotional well-being, but also on the quality of their learning. Traditional forms of interaction are often lost and replaced by new, sometimes misinterpreted practices that are simply adopted because they are believed to be universally accepted. These patterns of behavior are usually widespread in the school environment, where students are more receptive to new trends. Without participation in such practices, there is a real risk of social isolation.

As a result, the individual's awareness is split between the real and virtual worlds. This often isolates teenagers and young adults, with loneliness creating new anxieties and drawing them into a social void characterized by apathy and emotional distance. Many school-age escapists show high levels of social alienation and minimal interaction with peers. They often lead lonely lives, withdrawing from real life and seeking online communication with individuals who also feel lonely or excluded, forming bonds around socially unacceptable behaviors that are encouraged in cyberspace.

Many escapist students show a high level of social alienation and, at the same time, a low level of communication with peers; they are characterized by a solitary lifestyle, “away” from others. A so-called “withdrawal into oneself” occurs, which is overcome by searching for like-minded people who are lonely and unsuspecting. In doing so, they often resort to socially disapproved behaviors that are encouraged in cyberspace. In a situation of excessive passion for mobile tools, these processes are widespread, which has a direct impact on learning. In this context, the social responsibility of all those involved in the educational process is fundamental. No less important are the problems of adaptation of students, teachers, and parents to a rapidly changing social and cultural context, for which the education system must be prepared in the first place. First and foremost is the need to strengthen the role of the spiritual aspects of life, which form the basis of human aspirations and desires.

Excessive engagement with social media hinders young people’s ability to adapt to the fast-paced and complex realities of modern life. Returning to reality becomes a complex challenge, as it requires accepting socially shared standards, ethical norms, and values while finding a balance between personal desires and societal expectations. Digital addiction distorts the individual’s perception of reality, deepens social withdrawal, and hinders the development of relationships in real life. Although the virtual space offers extensive opportunities for interaction, it also promotes alienation, particularly among young people who are increasingly rejecting the norms of real life. The stronger the digital addiction, the more pronounced the feeling of loneliness, which affects the social, psychological, and emotional levels of socialization.

Escapism manifests itself differently in different age groups, but has the most significant negative impact during adolescence. In mild forms, it can help adolescents focus on personal problems; however, when it worsens, it leads to diminished cognitive abilities, behavioral changes, and a loss of interest in reality. Combating this problem requires joint efforts from educators and parents, as it is a systemic issue. Digital addiction leads to a loss of authentic perception and critical thinking. Escapists are increasingly relying on virtual trends and illusions, losing the ability to distinguish between reality and fiction. This undermines both personal and collective identity, posing a threat to psychological and social well-being. In search of stability, people are turning to the Internet and social media, where life’s challenges are replaced by entertainment, fostering virtual Escapism.

Among adolescents and young people, Escapism often takes the form of an addiction to video games, which are seen as a way of escaping the anxieties of real life. The degree of Escapism varies with the level of immersion in the virtual environment: reality loses its value for those with a strong digital addiction, while moderate users tend to maintain a healthier balance. Such activities help young people to cope with internal conflicts between personal aspirations and societal expectations. This highlights the importance of paying closer attention to youth culture and the evolution of online and offline communication within the context of a hybrid lifestyle.

In adolescence, cases of Escapism are more pronounced due to the limited ability to evaluate social reality critically. False trends can easily influence teenagers, causing them to lose touch with reality and fall prey to imposed illusions. They either follow someone else's script or try to create their own alternative reality. The escape into the virtual world is often due to unfulfilled longings or an attempt to compensate for emotional discomfort. However, the digital environment merely imitates reality, replacing it with substitutes and artificial emotions, although the hope of returning to an authentic life remains. As the researchers note, young people generally have two paths ahead of them: "One is to escape into a reality invented by others... The other is to invent a new one themselves, to create their own game" [14]. The escape into the virtual world is often driven by unfulfilled longings and attempts to overcome these longings with the help of digital tools. However, "the triumph of net-based surrogates, second-hand experiences and counterfeit emotions will not go away" [15], despite the hope of a return to authentic life.

Digital environments play a crucial role in shaping digital identity, but maintaining a constant online presence carries significant risks, including manipulation, pressure, cyberbullying, and intimidation. These factors harm young people's mental health, leading to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. As a result, cognitive abilities are weakened and socialization is disrupted. Young people are particularly vulnerable, and the loneliness they experience affects all aspects of life, from emotional well-being to values. In a hybrid reality, this contributes to shifts in consciousness and thinking, the consequences of which often go unnoticed.

Escapism as a behavioral strategy can have a positive effect, especially when combined with active involvement in educational, scientific, or playful activities, and stimulates mental effort and creativity. It helps to think beyond the "familiar, the ordinary, the

everyday” [16, p. 126] and to overcome the limits of “primitive thinking and simple rationality” [17]. In this form, Escapism supports adaptation to modern life, deep self-knowledge, and the development of new skills. Some researchers describe it as ‘life as creativity’ and ‘life as a dream’ [18, p. 10]. It creates a pleasant emotional environment and provides “relaxation by breaking the monotonous routine and stress of everyday life” [19, p. 22]. Virtual Escapism compensates for unfulfilled longings, transforms fantasy into a quasi-reality, and facilitates the hybrid lifestyle of youth.

The need for self-expression often drives the desire to escape into an alternative reality, as the virtual environment requires unconventional thinking, new experiences, and digital communication skills. Online information can be educational, but it cannot replace real knowledge, which requires intellectual effort and critical evaluation. A lack of digital literacy often pushes people back into the offline world, where authentic human interactions are more prevalent.

Although many young people spend the majority of their time online and on social media, they are still prone to feelings of loneliness. The success of others can trigger feelings of jealousy and inferiority. This can lead to extreme social behaviors and even suicidal thoughts. Feelings of inferiority often promote insecurity and make loneliness seem like a source of comfort. Today’s youth are significantly different from previous generations. As digital natives, they are characterized by greater independence, ambition, and activity. Their worldview is in stark contrast to traditional norms. However, digital addiction encourages both virtual and real Escapism, which increases loneliness and expands individualism.

Conclusion

Escapism, in both real and virtual forms, has a complex and ambivalent impact on the consciousness, thinking, lifestyle, behavior, and emotional state of young people. As a behavioral strategy, it is shaped by a complex combination of objective and subjective factors, making Escapism a social, cultural, and psychological phenomenon. Hybrid existence, characterized by living simultaneously in both real and digital environments, contributes to the development of escapist tendencies and often reinforces feelings of loneliness. This life at a crossroads can lead to a loss of connection with the real world and weaken one’s social identity. Ultimately, reality itself becomes dependent on virtual space, which is filled with simulacra and illusions

that can profoundly affect the still-forming minds of young people and young adults.

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ПСИХОЛОГИЯ

ПРОЯВЛЕНИЯ ЭСКАПИЗМА В МОЛОДЕЖНОЙ СРЕДЕ

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется феномен эскапизма, рассматриваются его основные свойства. Подчеркивается сложный и амбивалентный характер эскапизма как социального, культурного и психологического явления, анализируется характер его востребованности реалиями подлинной и виртуальной жизни. Прослеживается идея о том, что жизнь современного индивида, в особенности молодого, протекает в пространстве двух миров – реального и виртуального, что придает существованию противоречивые смыслы и неоднозначные по своим воздействиям последствия. Обращается внимание на то, что эскапизм, как образ жизни, мышления и соответствующие социальные действия, всегда присутствует в человеческой истории, испытывая влияние специфики исторического и культурного контекста. Гибридное существование в реальном и виртуальном мире противоречивым образом сказывается на когнитивных способностях молодых людей и подростков, выборе ими поведенческих стратегий. Исследуются отличия между реальным и виртуальным эскапизмом, показываются содержащиеся в каждом из них позитивные и негативные смыслы. Отмечается, что чрезмерное пребывание в пространстве Интернета и социальных сетей приводит к минимизированию способностей к критическому мышлению, адекватному восприятию процессов, происходящих в подлинном мире. Указывается на то, что неопределенность современных форм жизни, их все большее усложнение имеют своим следствием «бегство» от реалий мира в мир иллюзий и симулякров, которыми изобилует виртуальность, столь привлекательная для молодежи. Обращается внимание на то, что бытие в виртуальном мире становится для многих молодых людей своеобразным мейнстримом и ценностным ориентиром. Подчеркивается, что с помощью цифровых инструментов становится возможным преодоление негативных аспектов реальной жизни, обладающих травмирующим эффектом, с чем не желают мириться многие подростки и молодые люди. Прослеживается мысль о том, что бытие в виртуальности, и в особенности цифровая зависимость, создают многочисленные риски эскапизма, одной из форм выражения которого становится одиночество как наиболее комфортная и эффективная стратегия выживания.

Ключевые слова: *«Поколение Z», социальные сети, гибридное существование, реальный эскапизм, виртуальный эскапизм, цифровая зависимость, одиночество, иллюзия*

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