

Czech Adolescents' Communication in Cyberspace

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The present study focuses on communication by Czech adolescents in the internet environment. The research is based upon a qualitative study, using the grounded theory method. Sixteen interviews were carried out, half held in person and the half in the internet environment. Adolescents' communication is analysed on two levels, from the adolescent's point of view and from that of the researcher. The author carries out a comparison of the virtual and 'real' interviews and investigates the differences between them. A new phenomenon in virtual communication is defined in the research, that of multiplicity communication.

Key words:

electronic communication

multiplicity communication

adolescents

internet

Abstract

The research presented is an exploratory study of Czech adolescents in the internet environment, focusing on communication. Qualitative methodology, specifically grounded theory, was selected to investigate this subject. Sixteen interviews with adolescents, aged 14-25, were conducted and analysed. Half of the interviews were conducted through the internet, and the other half in the traditional manner using a dictaphone.

In this study on adolescents' communication in the internet environment, virtual communication is analysed in detail from the perspective of contextual modalities on two levels: from the perspective of adolescents and in terms of the differences observed between real and virtual interviews. The paper specifically addresses communication from these two angles and described the benefits and deficits of this type of communication. In the presented work, a new phenomenon in the virtual communication environment is defined, the phenomenon of multiplicity communication, which is described in the context of its possible causes and effects.

Introduction

Technology reaches and influences us and our individual lives more and more with the development of modern society. Computers and the internet are becoming irreplaceable and necessary for individuals as well as for the whole of society. According to data from the GfK agency for the second quarter of 2003, about a third of the population of the Czech Republic aged 12-79 uses the internet at least once a month (GfK, 2003). Adolescents constitute the group markedly impacted upon by the development of the internet. They are in the process of searching for their own identity, open to a wide spectrum of experiences and thus often have a positive relationship to technology and the internet (Suler, 2003). This hypothesis corresponds with the fact that there is a high proportion of internet penetration among adolescents and young people. Sixty-five per cent of adolescents aged 12-15, and 72% of adolescents aged 16-19 use the internet (GfK, 2003). The subject of adolescents' internet use, focusing on communication, is discussed in the present paper.

Research Subject

The goal of the present research is to explore the specifics of virtual communication from the point of view of adolescents, and to present a description of the gains and losses in

on-line communication as adolescents themselves perceive them. The specific topic of the research is the question of the 'quality' of virtual communication: is virtual communication rather superficial, or does it have a certain depth? Special attention is also given to subjects which arose in the course of the research, leading to the definition of the phenomenon of 'multiplicity communication', which appears to be the new specific phenomenon of communication taking place in the virtual environment.

The presented research is an exploratory study based on qualitative methodology and is the pilot study for related quantitative research.¹

Theoretical Concepts

The peculiarities of the virtual environment will be further analysed on the basis of the theory of contextual modalities, which Vybíral (2000) described as the basic elements of the context and situation of communicational exchanges, during which each of the modalities changes according to the situation. The basic modalities are:

- Time, when and how long we communicate, how much time we have
- Space and the configuration of space, where the communication takes place
- The significance ascribed to the communication by each of its participants
- The presence of emotions
- Relationship variables (dominance, submissiveness, rivalry, etc.)
- Relationship (system) framework, the established system of communication, the role of expectations, participants' self concept self valuation, etc. For example, the presence or non-presence of that which is being discussed
- The existence of continuity in the communication, such as its sequencing

The given contextual modalities are the means by which the specifics of virtual communication are assessed in the present research.

The manner in which we give information is itself becoming message, which was best articulated by Marshall McLuhan (2000) with his assertion that a certain message is presented depending upon the medium of communication. According to McLuhan, using a new media has greater social and psychological impacts than the actual content of the message. This statement is particularly interesting in terms of the internet, where a new

opportunity to send a message arises very often. In this context, the question of the validity of the present research on the virtual environment arises in respect of the tremendously rapid tempo of the development of technology.

It is possible to make a division of electronic communication based on the means by which the information is transferred (Šmahel, 2003):

- Text, most electronic communication now: email, chat, etc.
- Picture, sending pictures, videoconferences
- Sound, upgrades of various programmes

Individual communication instruments can sometimes fall into two or even three categories as they combine the transmission of information using text and a picture or sound. At present, text communication, which will be discussed further below, dominates in most virtual communication instruments. Email is similar, which enables the sending of messages of all three types, but text communication dominates.

Another division of electronic communication (Suler 2003, Šmahel 2001, Vybíral 2000) is:

- Synchronic communication, when those communicating must be at a computer at the same time (e.g. chat) and communicate together in real time
- Asynchronic communication, when presence on a computer is not required, or the communicator can pick up the message later, when connected to the internet (e.g. email, web, web notice boards)

This division is not strict. In most cases it is also possible to place a communication instrument into both categories. Most of the newer electronic communication instruments are broadly universal and enable all types of communication to be used. Synchronic text communication is the subject of this paper.

Method

The target group for the qualitative research was adolescents aged 14-25, who use the internet. Due to the character of the research, the population sample was not representative, or rather the goal was to best represent the breadth of the research problem. For this reason, respondents who use the internet more than the majority of the population were chosen.

¹ The research was supported by the 'Youth, Children, and Family in Transformation' research programme at the School of Social Studies at Masaryk University in Brno.

Specific phenomena and situations which come about in the virtual environment can be identified and defined in this group.

The data for the qualitative research came from semi-structured interviews, part of which was carried out over the internet using the program ICQ (ICQ is a communication instrument in the internet environment which enables one to search for users present on the internet by gender, age, interests, etc., and to keep a record of the interview). The other half of the interviews was carried out the traditional way, using a dictaphone. The double method of carrying out interviews was used so as to make it possible to conduct a comparative analysis of the interviews carried out in reality, and those carried out through the internet.² A breakdown of the interviews according to method and respondent's age is given in the following table.

Age	Reality	Internet
14-15	1	1
16-18	3	4
19-25	3	4

The basic method of analysis used was qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews using grounded theory methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A systematic set of approaches is used in grounded theory research. Data collection, analysis, and the creation of theory contribute to each other and are repeated many times throughout the cycle. Theory is then inductively created during the course of researching a certain phenomenon.

The sequence of steps in the analysis of interviews is as follows:

open coding axial coding selective coding
recording interviews => appearance of phenomena => narrower categories=> relationships among categories

² It is possible to find the full text of the interviews (in Czech only) on the internet at: <http://www.fss.muni.cz/~smahel/dipl2002/rozhovory>

The first step was making notes and recording the appearance of relevant phenomena according to the interview record. This step corresponds to open coding in the grounded theory process.³

In axial coding, common features of phenomena were identified in open coding. On the basis of these common features, the phenomena were then categorised. Some phenomena may appear in more than one category, if appropriate. Before entering the identified phenomena into the table, they were highlighted according to the following criteria:

- Colour marking of phenomena by age of respondent (red, 13-15 years; blue, 16-18; black 19-25)
- Style of font according to interview method (cursive for normal interviews recorded on a dictaphone, normal font for interviews carried out through the internet)

This marking then facilitated further steps in the analysis of categories and interpretation of research results.⁴

Possible relationships and connection among the categories created were investigated in selective coding. In the results some of the wider categories were later divided according to phenomena and relationships among subcategories.

The final parts of the analysis, after the collection of all interviews and ongoing analysis of them, was the reduction and amendment of the axial coding tables, in which some close categories were combined.

Research Results

In the following text, communication in the virtual environment will be considered on two levels:

- 1) The differences from real communication from the point of view of adolescents. On this level, the differences between real and virtual communication will be described as adolescents themselves see and perceive them, and how they described them in the interviews. The described differences correspond to the phenomena identified in categories in the axial coding.

³ The results of the open coding (in Czech only) can be found at:
http://www.fss.muni.cz/~smahel/dipl2002/otevrene_kod

⁴ Complete tables of categories and the frequency phenomena can be found (in Czech only) at the following address: http://www.fss.muni.cz/~smahel/dipl2002/axialni_kod

- 2) The difference from real communication from the point of view of the interviewer based on comparison of real and virtual interviews. This level exhibits how the differences were seen and perceived by the researcher after comparative analysis of two types of interviews, those carried out through the internet, and those carried out in reality using a dictaphone. It is necessary to bring into consideration that the interviews on the internet and in reality were only dyadic communication and cannot evaluate or be compared with communication, in which more people take part.

Time Framework

The modality of the time framework characterises time in the course of communication, i.e. when communication occurs, how many people take part in it, etc.

Two contradictory opinions were found among respondents regarding how much time one has in virtual communication for considering their response, and how fast they react to communication. It is interesting that in both cases, girls spoke in the chat environment, thus the difference is not caused by different types of virtual environment. One of the respondents indicated that there is more time for consideration and thought in responses in the virtual environment.

“On the internet I would have time to think, I’m not saying that I don’t now, but I would probably think about it more. Perhaps when I leave here. I will say that I could have come across differently.” (Soňa, 22)

The amount of time for considering responses is also related to adolescents’ feeling, that the virtual environment has a better capability for expression, better put:

“here my sentences are more perfect than in reality ... in reality I am not able to express myself accurately” (Delphie, 19)

On the other hand, adolescents conveyed a higher speed in virtual communication. In the virtual environment they react immediately, and time for consideration is actually less than in reality.

“In reality I can summarize in my head a bit, perhaps be quiet for a while... There there is the speed, there I have to react immediately.” (Alice, 24)

It is interesting that, in connection with the above, respondents also mention limitation on vocabulary in the virtual environment.

“I have the feeling that, on the internet, my vocabulary is limited, or at least more limited than it normally is.” (Alice, 24)

The perception of time for considering responses and the capability for expression is individual here and also differentiates according to which technical means one uses to communicate on the internet. For asynchronic communication (Email) and immediate response is not expected; however, there can be differences in on-line communication instruments and also in the actual environment.

It appears that a markedly longer latency between statements and responses is accepted in the virtual world than in the real world. This is confirmed by comparative analysis of the real and virtual interviews. In the internet environment, it is often assumed that one's counterpart is not just communicating with one person, but is concurrently running a "multi-dyadic" conversation with more than one people. This does not mean a conversation involving many people in one 'room', but rather many conversations in different computer 'windows'. The conversations can be held through the internet using completely different communication instruments. This phenomenon will be discussed further in the chapter 'Multiplicity Communication'.

The above is confirmed by a passage from an internet interview with 15-year old Carmen:

dav: *do you often chat this way with more than one person on the internet?*

Carmen: *YES, sometimes even with 7 people, and that is a terror :)*

dav: *and do you do that in reality*

Carmen: *In reality a max of 3 people, it really doesn't work with more*

dav: *how's that*

Carmen: *well in reality, when I chat with someone I try to give my attention to them and less to others, see? I can concentrate better on one person and there is the risk that the second person you're talking with could start to be jealous*

dav: *And it's not better here to concentrate on just the one person? Just to chat with one person? Why?*

Carmen: *I think it's advantageous for many reasons. Firstly it takes a while before someone responds, so in the meantime you can write to someone else. You make the most of the money you're spending this way, and you find out even more stuff*

The conversation then gains (among other things) a quite distinct time framework. The reactions of the person being communicated with are markedly slower and this latency between statements and responses is common. However, this statement cannot be generalised across all types of internet communication environments.

From the comparative analysis of the interviews, it was found that, in contrast with the interviews carried out in reality, the majority of virtual interviews remained unconcluded, all topics were not covered, and in half the cases the respondent ended the interviews for various reasons. The virtual interviews that were concluded took substantially longer than those conducted in reality. This even applies to cases where the respondent gave his or her full attention to the interview and did not chat with other people at the same time. The length of a complete interview in the real environment was about one hour; it was 3-4 hours in the virtual environment. It is necessary to understand this fact as disadvantageous from a methodological point of view. Not every respondent is willing to sacrifice four hours of his or her time. Not least of all, it is financially demanding if the respondent is paying for his or her own internet connection.

Another consequence of the limited speed of writing text is that respondents in the virtual interviews gave shorter and less developed answers. Respondents had the tendency to present their opinions and feelings in a condensed form. On the other hand, the responses in the virtual environment appeared to be often more apt. It was as if, in some cases, the internet led to an ability to make clear and concise statements. It functioned the opposite way in other cases, where responses were shorter and even terse thus rendering it necessary for the interviewer to ask about points again and be more active in the interview.

Space and the Alignment of Space

There is clearly a significant difference between the two types of environment, real and virtual. In contrast to real communication, there is no real sharing of space in the virtual environment. In most cases there is only one or more windows on the screen of the monitor. One cannot be certain in the virtual environment that one is communicating with a real person, or if an 'intelligent' instrument is taking care of the communication.

The most frequently given difference is the absence of physical contact in the virtual environment, which makes non-verbal communication impossible.

"It upsets me that I don't recognise the person with whom I'm chatting, if it's a girl or a boy ... that doesn't suit me, it's so impersonal..." (Alena, 16)

"It doesn't flow like in face to face communication. You get to know a person better face to face; something radiates from a person but not from text on the net." (Pavel, 14)

The impersonal nature of virtual communication is perceived as negative in most cases. However, adolescents also perceive the advantages brought about by disembodiment

and anonymity. On one hand the impersonal nature of it is unpleasant and disadvantageous, but on the other hand it is pleasant to have the possibility to be anonymous and to take advantage of the opportunity to behave uninhibitedly on the internet.

As one respondent noted, a rather interesting result of the absence of non-verbal communication is that in the virtual environment there is a reliance on feedback and long monologues are not possible. While in the real environment non-verbal signals can also serve as responses, the absence of these signals in the internet environment necessitates a response in the form of words or symbols. In some cases in the real environment (in contrast with the virtual environment) the presence of a person who we 'give' information to is sufficient.

"I ran into a boy on ecstasy and he chatted with me about things which didn't interest me, without me even asking him, just like on the net. I didn't want to chat with him and I told him that upfront. I didn't react to what he was saying, nonetheless he wanted to chat with me. Even though it must have been like talking to a brick wall for him. I wouldn't think that would be fun for him on the net. That wouldn't work on the internet; there it wouldn't be fun for someone to talk to a brick wall." (Marie, 25)

It appears that 'one directional' communication is more limited in the virtual environment, or conversation that does not interest one in general. Not responding or ending a conversation is easy in the virtual environment.

A specific aspect of the absence of verbal communication is that it is not possible to differentiate intonation, pitch, or strength of voices. On one hand, it is detrimental to imparting information, but on the other hand it can be perceived positively by those communicating.

"...you don't have to be afraid of talking because someone might interrupt you. Simply, no one interrupts you." (Marie, 25)

This aspect of electronic communication can also provide opportunities for joining discussions, for example for more submissive people (those without the nerve to talk over others), or for people with naturally weaker voices.

As stated above, another effect of the different organisation of 'virtual space' is that the possibility to communicate with many people at once, which is a strong feature of interviews carried out through the internet. In the interviews, it was never certain how many people the respondent was communicating with at the same time (how many windows he or she had open on the computer). If there was a long latency between

questions and responses, the respondent was asked if he or she was communicating with someone else. One girl stated that she was chatting with four other people at the same time, which definitely influences the quality of the interview. The spatial layout in the case of a virtual interview is very heterogeneous and never the same for both sides.

Modality of Meaning

The modality of meaning of communication captures the manner in which those communicating understand a question or a sentence and how they ‘guess’ the correct meaning of the communication.

It is interesting that respondents discuss modification of meaning in communication very little; however, it appeared to be a relatively significant attribute of the virtual interviews. The question is whether respondents consider misunderstandings to be a common part of internet communication, or if they are unaware of changed meanings in communication.

It is principally non-verbal communication that aids accurate understanding in real communication. One of the girls who was aware of misunderstandings in on-line communication stated that:

“Communication is more difficult there. You only have words and never know how they are meant, because in normal communication intonation helps you, facial features, or hands. You don’t have that on the net. It is the lack of clarity that bothers me. In spite of emoticons, which help a bit...I have to clarify the communication.” (Delphie, 19)

It seems that the possibility to express emotions there is also an issue as to the depth of the scale of ‘emoticons’ that the internet user knows and ‘reads’. The girl who mentioned emoticons, responded:

“... every emoticon is different, each means something totally different” (Delphie, 19)

Expressing emotions using the keyboard and understanding these emoticons then becomes an ‘art’. It is common that advanced internet users use two types of emoticons, which indicate positive or negative emotions. In response to the question on whether emoticons express emotions adequately, one man responded:

“not exactly, but one can roughly tell that if someone writes very happy smiley faces, he certainly is not sad.” (Tobegan, 21)

From the comparison of the real and virtual interviews it was found that, in communication through the internet, there were markedly more frequent misunderstandings where the respondent guessed the meaning incorrectly, incorrectly understood a question, or the meaning of their response was misinterpreted. A common phenomenon in the virtual environment is projection; the respondent added his or her own meaning to questions or responses.

The Presence of Emotions

The emotional framework in the internet environment is strongly influenced by how the concrete adolescent perceives and experiences the internet environment. The 'phenomena of the internet environment', as described elsewhere (Šmahel 2002a), often influence this experience.

As regards the presence of emotions in the virtual world, respondents' opinions differ on the appropriateness of using the internet for communicating about personal topics and expressing emotions. One group of adolescents perceives communication through the internet as rendering the expression of emotions easier. They state that they are more open, or even more vulnerable and that they can better express their emotions through writing:

"Because I put up a wall around me in my life, I keep my heart hidden so that no one can hurt me. When I'm here, I leave all that aside and then I'm more vulnerable, more open, and more emotionally accessible." (Delphie, 19)

"...but over the internet we can chat about girls, problems. It's because you can express things better in writing than in speech. At least that's how I see it. I can write my feelings better than I can say them." (Soňa, 22)

It can be inferred that the adolescents in this group tend to be people with specific social handicaps, shy, fearful, nervous, etc. This more than likely is the case for these respondents.

The second group of adolescents speak about how the virtual environment offers substantially less for communicating emotions than does the real world. Some even see the internet as an inappropriate environment for expressing emotions.

"It's simply text, you write text, send it, nothing more. Sure, you put feelings into it, but less so. It's different face to face. You're nervous, a bit stressed, it's harder." (Pavel, 14)

"It's better in reality. The internet is only for those who are afraid to go out during the day, so they'd rather set at a computer" (Majk, 16)

"...I'm not going to chat with someone I know about intimate subjects just through the net " (Tobegan, 21)

It is, however, possible to see a certain ambivalence. On one hand, adolescents express emotions less in the virtual environment, and on the other hand these testimonies are more open than they would be in the real world. This ambivalence is expressed well in the words of the youngest respondent:

“On the internet it’s all about nothing, but you say more there than normally” (Pavel, 14)

Perhaps it is true that in the virtual environment adolescents put less emotions into their communication, but can talk about those emotions. The question is whether these emotions do not then become on the whole flatter and more superficial.

In the comparison of both types of interviews the expression and perception of emotion is, entirely comprehensibly, more difficult in the virtual environment. It was often difficult to give appropriate feedback when wanting simply to listen to the respondent. (Or perhaps, it was impossible to express the Rogerian “hmmm”, which, in its written form, has assumed a different meaning in the virtual environment than in reality.)

It is not possible to judge whether actual emotions were present in communication in the internet environment more or less frequently, nor how intensively. The virtual interviews appeared to be more ‘alive’, often containing humorous elements, less ‘scientific’, and often became a sort of game in and of themselves. This subjective view is not necessarily based upon independent content analysis of the documents.

It can simply be said that the virtual interviews were more open, and that the anonymous environment enables easier access to sensitive subjects. Respondents divulged more about themselves than they would have in a real interview. This corresponds with the admission of one girl:

“On the internet I perhaps wouldn’t answer with a simple sentence; I would be able to elaborate. Because, as I said, I am better at writing my emotions than saying them.” (Soňa, 22)

Relationship Variables

Virtual communication is, in contrast with real communication, markedly different. This also applies to relationship variables.

In the virtual environment relationships between people can be more symmetrical and complementary than in the real environment. With regards to this contextual variable, virtual communication is probably less influenced. Dominance or aggression play a lesser

role in communication, just as age and authority. This is evidenced by statements from one girls:

“... you don't have to be afraid that someone will shout you down. Nobody shouts you down.” (Marie)

In the virtual anonymous environment adolescents can chat with their peers the same as with anyone else.

“you can be bold, you can change what you are, and so on” (Pavel, 14)

Submissiveness and social nervousness are also suppressed. In a safe environment, adolescents can be direct and open.

“The directness on the internet suits me. I can say what I want and not hurt anyone if they don't know me. That sort of openness. There I can basically do what I want and no one can do anything to me for it.” (Alena, 16)

If one contemplates the comparison between the real and virtual interviews with regards to relationship variables, perception of the interviewer as an expert and an authority figure played a greater role in the real interviews, particularly in the case of younger adolescents. In the virtual interviews the relationship was considerable more equal, even the youngest respondents spoke with the interviewer as with an ‘equal’. In one long attempt to obtain an interview in the virtual environment a fourteen year old girl addressed the interviewer as a ‘boy’ (in spite of the fact that it had been clearly stated the interview was needed for psychological research). This would more than likely not happen in reality.

Relationship Framework

Systematic psychological approaches emphasise that every interpersonal communication does not stand alone, but is instead part of other communicational exchanges (Vybiral, 2000). It can be said that in the internet environment the modality of the relationship framework is often to a large extent disrupted, even changed. This change is given by means of the internet itself, where it is nearly always possible to carry out a conversation anonymously and privately. Even in a chat room with other people, there is the possibility to ‘whisper’, or give information to only one person in the room without others ‘hearing’. Thus in many cases, virtual communication alters the meaning of the usual relationship framework.

It is also possible to discuss the creation of the relationship framework in terms of getting acquainted with the person being communicated with. The question as to the way

in which adolescents form images of the person they are communicating with is interesting. It is certain that this image and the relationship framework are created differently than in the real world.

“While in reality clothing reveals the person, on the internet it’s according to interests. I create a personal image of a person according to interests, what they’re about... Some forms of communication create a sort of virtual clothing for the person.” (Marie, 25)

The Existence of Continuity in a Conversation

The existence of continuity in a conversation is closely related to the time framework, as discussed above. In general it appears that virtual communication is significantly more fragmented, and the continuity of a conversation is considerably lower. As already stated, abrupt conclusion of dialogue is a common phenomenon. Communication also becomes more fragmented in that it takes place over longer time intervals.

If we compare interviews from reality and the virtual environment, a marked feature of the on-line interviews was the difficulty in maintaining continuity in an interview. This is related to greater fragmentation of communication in the internet environment. Virtual interviews can be characterised by frequent digressions and changes of subject, which render efforts to maintain continuity in the conversation and in the subject difficult.

This concludes the analysis from the point of view of contextual modality. The special phenomenon of virtual communication which arose from the analysis of categories and axial coding will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Multiplicity Communication

Adolescents in the present research often stated that it is important, in communicating through the internet, to simultaneously communicate with many people on different subjects. The adolescents carried on many conversations simultaneously, often using different means of communication. If this phenomenon were to be imagined in reality, then

one would have to stand in a hallway and peek into different rooms where people were communicating on a specific topic. While peeking into those rooms, they would also be able to see a history of the communication that had taken place previously and then could add their opinions. It would seem that there is no parallel to this phenomenon in normal communication. The phenomenon of simultaneous communication with several people can be called multiplicity communication.

One respondent described this type of communication:

“Good net users manage about five people. They have one in one window, the second in the second window, and so on. So it’s a bit different, like if you were sitting in three pubs at the same time. In three different pubs.” (Marie, 25)

Adolescents then carry on many different conversations at one time, thus do not dedicate their full attention to any one of those conversations. As already discussed, some virtual interviews in the research also took place as multiplicity communication. This type of communication is quite common in the internet environment, and it would seem that it brings a certain type of dissatisfaction, in which it is ‘better’ to have ones attention and thoughts “fragmented“ on various communication levels. One girl responded with the following:

“...maybe all of them together give a bigger effect than if I just sat in one room. Not the effect as if you were sitting in three rooms, but somewhat bigger than if you were sitting in just one room.” (Marie, 25)

In response to the question as to what she meant by “effect”, she responded:

“That positive feeling that I am enjoying the communication. I talk and get feedback, that the people there accept me, that I communicate well, that I’m having fun and chatting.” (Marie, 25)

It can be inferred that the feeling of ‘enjoying communication’ is connected with acceptance and emotional support. One girl answered the question as to why it is more pleasant to chat with many people that just with one person:

“Because I notice there’s a more pleasant feeling...” (Carmen, 15)

The more communication, the more pleasant the feeling of communicating becomes. It can be inferred that the quality of the conversation is less important than in reality. Communication becomes fragmented; its course is more comparable to music videos on television, which Starý (2000) named the “most adequate expressive tool of postmodernity”. The only difference is that the pictures in a virtual video clip are chosen by the user him or herself. In the words of one girl:

“Music videos are made such that it is very interesting, but you don’t choose the pictures yourself there. But on the internet you can choose them. The pictures jump subjects, you jump subjects in changing conversations with people.” (Marie, 25)

In viewing a television music video there is the strong feeling that everything is happening so quickly, that one cannot keep up, cannot manage, cannot take it in. Respondents describe a very similar feeling:

"The feeling is super, I just have to write non-stop...the feeling that I can't keep up dominates." (Carmen, 15)

"It's intoxicating, you simply feel great...you're the centre of attention...that's the state when everyone is writing till you can't keep up." (Sexdrogyrock, 16)

Adolescents have the feeling of intoxication when they cannot "keep up"; they are included in (virtual) friendship and interest:

"I had the feeling that I couldn't keep up because I had so many friends that I can't even manage to talk with all of them." (Alice, 24)

Adolescents give identical descriptions of that feeling or state as being very pleasant, which may often be related to description of the state of "flow", which adolescents have the opportunity to experience in this type of communication. One of the girls described how she feels adrenaline and stress during "multiplicity communication":

"I felt adrenaline when was there...I chatted with 3 or 4 people at once, so it was stressful..." (Alice, 24)

Feelings during multiplicity communication can be compared to feelings during sporting success; adolescents feel adrenaline and stress, which is later perceived as highly positive. It can then be asked whether this endeavour like stress in sport is often a sort of second relaxation or rather the means to 'looking away' from one's own self and directing attention away from one's own problems. The hypothesis for further research could be: Does there exist a certain relationship between the extent of self-assessment (the feeling of loneliness in real life, the extent of communication in the family, etc.) and the popularity of multiplicity communication for adolescents? This question certainly demands attention, particularly in respect to the positive emotions which multiplicity (or multi-dyadic) communication gives adolescents, which is necessarily faster, more fragmented, demanding more attention, and moreover more superficial than pure dyadic communication.

It is clear that in multiplicity communication there is a split in attention, and sometimes in identity as well (Šmahel, 2002b). From the perspective of cognitive psychology, it is possible to ask whether the ability to concentrate increases or instead decreases during multiplicity communication. It can also be asked whether thought becomes more acute or more superficial. From the perspective of deep psychology, it is possible to consider 'splitting' as a symptom of a dissociated personality. The adolescent

has projections of his or her fantasies, imagination, unconscious tendencies, wished and complexes into his or her dissociated personalities in the virtual world (Šmahel, 2002b)

On the whole, it can be said that virtual communication contains a certain contradiction in itself. On one hand, adolescents consider virtual relationships as an illusion and are aware of the superficiality and short-term nature of these relationships and on the other hand they throw themselves with vigour into multiplicity communication, where they frequently gain the feeling of acceptance and emotional support from these relationships. An adolescent is so flooded by this illusion of friendship in multiplicity communication that this friendship almost becomes real in that moment. Multiplicity communication is perhaps becoming a certain ritual, in which speed, number, superficiality, and quantity outweigh individuality, depth, and quality. To put it illustratively, adolescents become their own music video.

Conclusion and Discussion

I would now like to consider the results of the presented research on the basis of current theories on communication in the virtual environment.

Wallace (1999) speaks about the rhythm of communication in the internet environment, specifically the speed of interaction between the people communicating. The present research confirms her statements that the lags in communication through the internet which are entirely common, would often be intolerable in real communication. This state has been further developed here in the context of the phenomenon of multiplicity communication. In connection with this, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that electronic communication is very diverse and all types cannot be compressed into one category. It is necessary to differentiate between synchronic and asynchronic communication and to take into consideration the specific different means of communication even within subcategories (Šmahel, 2000, 2001). It is thus not possible to give a general theory that would express how communication using the internet differs from face to face communication.

Vybíral (2000) maintains that one of the reasons for the impoverishment of the possibilities of language in electronic communication is that those taking part in the communication react without consideration and with a lesser possibility for corrections in the course of the speech act and after its conclusion. However, this hypothesis is only

confirmed in part; many adolescents indicate exactly the opposite phenomenon. They state that their ability to express themselves (in their own view) improves in electronic communication as they have more time for consideration.

The effect of 'an environment without inhibitions' also plays a role (Šmahel, 2002a; Vybíral, 2002) in that, in the internet environment, adolescents do not need to feel anxiety, which inhibits and limits their communication in reality. The influence of technology on language appears to be very individual here. It seems that it cannot simply be said that language is more impoverished in the internet environment as opposed to real communication.

According to Dušková's (2001) research, communication using the internet is more open, freer, contains more fabricated information, is more ironic, more aggressive, and insensitive. The paradox is that, in spite of the fact that respondents listed openness and freedom as central features of communication in 'chat', they themselves feel freer and more open in real communication. The research presented here confirms Dušková's findings, but does not allow for quantitative comparison of the frequency of variables. And this it is necessary to consider the individual variables that play an important role in this question.

The assertions of King and Moreggi (in Grohl, 1998) that communication in the internet has great potential (people cannot communicate with a vacuum, so they fill in missing data with their own imagination) were fully confirmed in this research. Projection in the internet environment often leads to misunderstandings or shifts in meanings intended during the communication. This phenomenon is described in detail in the chapter on the modality of meaning.

On the whole, it can be said that the research presented here, based on grounded theory, meets its expectations. As the study is a qualitative one, it is not possible to generalise for the entire population. The study dealt with phenomena, which may occur in adolescents' communication in the virtual environment. The relationships indicated can be developed and also deepen knowledge concerning the given phenomena. The following connected research is a quantitative study, in which the goal will be to test some of the hypothesis and relationships presented in this study.

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