Chapter 106

# The Origin and Current Status of Cyberpsychology in Russia

**Alexander Voiskounsky**
*Moscow Lomonosov State University, Russia*

## ABSTRACT

*Theory, history (several decades long), and the current status of the studies in cyberpsychology in the USSR and later in Russia are presented in a condensed form. Socio-historic theory of psychic development, introduced by Vygotsky in 1930s, and particularly ideas of semiotic mediation, seem to offer the best perspectives in cyberpsychological studies. A brief historic overview in this article combines general conclusions and personal memories. Directions of the current studies are briefly described as well. This section starts with studies made within the new communities which emerged with the advance of information technologies; special attention is given to hackers and gamers. The section proceeds with the studies of children's behavior on the Internet. Finally, research in the field of Internet Addiction Disorder is discussed. The current status of cyberpsychology as a non-universally accepted discipline, in which new generations of specialists are deeply interested, is discussed. Methodological work is presented as the major source of progress in the near future. The reference section includes publications in English and several recommended books which are available exclusively in Russian.*

## INTRODUCTION

Cyberpsychology is a new discipline within psychology. Moreover, it is not yet an academic discipline in Russia, and the relevant studies are dispersed in various bibliographic sources.

Besides, cyberpsychology neighbors computer science, education, sociology, media studies and communication science. *Cyberpsychology deals with human online behavior* and therefore is substantially dependent on the development of computer networks and availability of online services. Computer networking has been available

in Russia since early the 1990s; from that time on the Internet audience has been rapidly and steadily accelerating.

Although never numerous, some relevant studies can nowadays be identified as referring to cyberpsychology. Similarly to the existing work in the field of media studies, the number of research projects is dependent not only on the number of scholars and their productivity, but also and most importantly, on the existence of a broad and diverse population under investigation. This means that quantitative psychological studies make sense when the population is diverse and large enough. At the end of the first decade of the 21$^{st}$ century Russian cyberpsychology deals with audiences representing a population of over 60 million users of various Internet services, including online gaming, social networking, e-mailing, web exploration and information searching, blogging.

## THE ORIGIN OF STUDIES IN CYBERPSYCHOLOGY IN RUSSIA

The initial breakthroughs, which resulted in accelerated development of the Internet, are known to take start in 1969. During the first decades of its development, the terminology sounded mainly as "computer-mediated interaction", "computer-mediated communication" (or *CMC*), "computer telecommunications" and "computer networking". For at least two decades, the word 'Internet', coined in 1970s as a technical term and derived from the 'Internet Transmission Control Program', was not in use in the studies of human behavior. This means that the earliest studies in the field did not have 'Internet' in the titles of papers and names of conferences, while 'CMC' was a frequently used abbreviation.

### Brief Historical Overview

Generally, there was no chance for any type of global communications, including computer tele-

communications, to get a status of a public source in the former Soviet Union. In this completely *closed country* the people were not allowed to engage in non-controlled and non-censured interactions, especially with anyone abroad. There was probably only one source in Moscow (RIAAS, or Research Institute of Applied Automated Systems which belonged partly to the Academy of Sciences and partly to the State Committee for Science and Technologies) which developed computer telecommunication channels and mediated an exchange of online academic information with the institutions from abroad, including an official provision to academics (one selected person from the whole institution) for a limited access to bibliographic databases. *A propos*, experts from the RIAAS have later been partly involved in the development of public access of the Soviets to global computer networking.

In the early 1980s the RIAAS invited well-known scholars — a sociologist Roxanna Hiltz and a computer scientist Murray Turoff (both from the New Jersey Institute of Technology), who co-authored a famous book "The Network Nation" (1978), to give a brief lecture course. The lectures were not public and thus could not promote broad interest to the studies of human behavior in computer networks. In order not to lose face, the RIAAS organizers wanted at least several competent people to attend these lectures. Due to this probable reason, the author, Alexander Voiskounsky, who was known to have interests in psychology of computer-mediated communication and to carry on some studies using local-area networks (LANs), was invited to participate. The lectures became helpful in his subsequent work.

At RIAAS in 1983 Voiskounsky met Anatole A. Klyosov, professor of biochemistry, who was lucky to get a *unique* permission from the Academy of Sciences to organize and moderate a team of experts in the field of bioconversion of lignocellulose, to participate in a computer telecommunication session initiated by the UNEP/UNESCO Microbiological Resource Center in

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