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## Images of Family and Family Education in Russian Feature Films of the 1920s and the early 1930s

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### Abstract

The article presents an analysis and characterization of the image of family and family education in young Soviet feature films. Beginning with the first years of Soviet power, cinema acquired a pronounced propaganda and agitation significance. These features influenced the content of silent feature films of that time. In the process of the country's "cinematization", cinema became a mouthpiece of the state policy, and the main objective was to create films that would contribute to the new type of person. Family themes in feature films are not central and act as accompaniment in film stories about the revolution, reviving industry, etc. One of the central conflicts in the film industry of those years is the conflict between the old and new world order, the fight against religious and bourgeois remnants. In the 1920s and 1930s, the attitude towards the family in young Soviet Russia was ambiguous. It was believed that traditional values of the family life were outdated and should be replaced by public education. The family as a union of a man and a woman had also lost its value, as many public and government figures believed. The family could be completely replaced by a collective, which, under the leadership of the state, could educate, teach and form the necessary qualities. A hermeneutic analysis of Soviet feature films of this period allows us to identify the main trends in family issues, some educational models in feature films in the context of an appeal to the socio-cultural and ideological contexts of that time.

**Keywords:** family, family upbringing, media, media text, media culture, media education, Soviet feature films.

### 1. Introduction

Film production at every stage of its development reflects the main events taking place in society. Being a transmitter of social, political and cultural transformations, the art of cinematography has always been an important source of society's ideas about socio-cultural development. The important role of studying film production is due to the fact that "the film reality created by film authors (screenwriters, directors, cameramen, actors, editors, etc.) encodes ideological and cultural orders of society in artistic images, as well as the author's ideas about the world around them and transmits them to the viewer, reinforcing certain models of behaviour, stereotypes of thinking and moral and aesthetic standards. Thus, cinema implements the functions of documenting and constructing reality, being not just a reflection of current processes, but rather their projection, including reflection and generalization of the problem under consideration (Mazur, 2017: 374).

Considering the images of family and family education models presented in the Soviet cinema of the 1920s and early 1930s, we will turn to the characteristics of the socio-cultural

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context, the analysis of social processes that took place in the 1920s and early 1930s in the context of media education. Speaking of the emerging of ideas about the family of a new formation in Soviet cinema (1920–1934 of the twentieth century) (Chelysheva, 2024), we will present an attempt to determine the role of the family in Soviet feature films of this period, the specifics of the representation of family images on the Soviet screen of those years by carrying out a hermeneutic analysis of Soviet audiovisual cinema media culture.

## 2. Materials and methods

The main material of our research is Soviet feature films of the 1920s – early 1930s analysed in the context of representing family images and models of family education.

The purpose of this study is to carry out a hermeneutic analysis of Soviet feature films of the period under consideration in terms of identifying the major patterns, characteristic features, trends of media texts of different genres, and key media education approaches. The main methods are comparison, analysis and synthesis of the obtained data, generalization and typification based on the material of feature films of the period under analysis, including the ideological and socio-cultural contexts, analysis of stereotypes, genre specifics, the dominant themes related to family education presented on the Soviet screen in those years.

In our study, we analysed Russian (Fedorov et al., 2014; Fedorov, 2015; Fedorov, 2016; Fedorov, Chelysheva, 2002; Levitskaya et al., 2017; Polivanova, Shakarova, 2016; Posukhova et al., 2021; Toropova, 2017; Zhbankova, 2019) and foreign scientific findings (Bahun, Haynes, 2014; Fitzpatrick, 1979; Gradinaru, 2017; Kenez, 1992; Lloyd, 2014; Papazian, 2023; Pedrosa, Camara, 2019; Potter, 2022; Robertson, 2010; Shlapentokh, 1993; Smith, 2014; Todd, 2023; Youngblood, 1992) devoted to family and family education in the mirror of Soviet feature films (1920s – early 1930s).

## 3. Discussion

The issues of family and family education, presented on the Soviet screen, are analysed today in many studies of a pedagogical, psychological, cultural, historical, and political nature.

This includes the historiographic analysis of feature films of the period under consideration presented in Russian research findings (Mazuritskaya, 2016; Usenko, 2009; Yudin, 2000). The sociological analysis of the processes that took place in the young Soviet cinema is carried out by some Russian scholars too (Bikkinina, 2017; Krylova, 2014; Levchenko, 2023).

The cultural and art history analysis of the family issues in the cinema of the period under consideration is partially presented in other Russian scientific papers (Gozhanskaya, 2005; Kirillova, 2015; Khanzhov, 2018; Mazur, 2017; Petrova, 2021; Salny, 2023; Zharkova, 2022).

The overwhelming majority of authors note the significant influence of cinema on the viewing audience of those years. “Already silent cinema demonstrates its capabilities; the power of the image’s impact here is increased by close-ups and editing. With the advent of sound and the further professionalization of cinema art in the 1920s, the possibilities of creating a full-fledged cinematic illusion increase” (Gozhanskaya 2005).

M.A. Mazuritskaya, examining the influence of cinema on the system of value orientations of the audience in that period, emphasizes: “propaganda among the population and young people in particular developed precisely through cinema, which was only just gaining momentum, but was already a popular “novelty”, a mass form of leisure. In the USSR, under the established regime, showing stories on the screen was perceived as a powerful tool for propaganda and the formation of the necessary attitudes (Mazuritskaya, 2016: 15).

Psychological and pedagogical aspects of reflecting the family image in feature films of this period are presented in some Russian researches (Nusinova, 2003; Mikhaleva, Chelysheva 2024; Smagina, 2018; Yalozina, 2023; Zhuravleva, 2023). For example, N.I. Nusinova, providing an analysis of this period, emphasizes: “From the moment Soviet cinema emerged, its creators were obsessed with the idea of creating a new person, worthy of living in the new, communist world, and such an artificial person was first and foremost created by cinematography” (Nusinova, 2003).

If the first Russian films of the pre-revolutionary period were intended mainly for “people who do not need to think about their daily bread every hour, who have few problems in life, and the main shocks are love, betrayal of a loved one, office intrigue, etc. These are people of average income (from the point of view of Russian society as a whole). In the social hierarchy, they occupy a step above

peasants, workers and servants, but below the rich, large entrepreneurs and high-ranking officials” (Usenko, 2009: 20), then the films of the Soviet period were aimed at a mass audience.

As for the film production in those years, the key criteria for a good Soviet film were loyalty to ideology, mass appeal, and accessibility to a wide audience. These characteristics determined the usefulness of films in terms of solving state problems aimed at using cinematography as one of the leading official mouthpieces of propaganda and agitation. For example, the study by N.B. Kirillova states: “The revolutionary cinema of the 1920s attempted to put the colossal potential of uncontrolled meanings to the service of worldview and ideology. The masters of cinema (Kuleshov, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko) created politically engaged, ideological cinema, which, through class slogans and concepts, attempted to concretize the general humanistic pathos of the struggle for truth and justice, which is always present in politically concerned art” (Kirillova, 2015: 76).

One of the essential objectives associated with young Soviet cinema was creating films for children. E.A. Yalozina, providing an analysis of this period in the context of using cinema as a factor in spiritual and moral education, notes that “the period of Soviet children’s and school cinema in the 1920s was accompanied by difficulties of a creative, logistical, and financial nature. At the same time, the influence of the bourgeois and pre-revolutionary system of moral values was overcome, but advanced technologies and methodological experience of the West in using cinema in education were not ignored and were borrowed. In order to effectively develop the children’s film industry, administrative resources were actively used” (Yalozina, 2023: 134).

#### 4. Results

Analysing the historical, ideological and socio-cultural contexts of feature films of the period under consideration, we can state that from the first years of the advent of Soviet power, interest in cinema as an important factor in influencing people began to actively develop. This is evidenced by a number of state directives and documents aimed at increasing the agitation and propaganda role of cinema. As early as 1918, a cinema subdepartment was created under the extracurricular department of the State Commission for Education, and the educational role of cinema acquired a clear vector for upbringing the younger generation in the spirit of the socialist worldview and corresponding values. This was due to the fact that “cinema optimally corresponded to the needs of the Soviet government in mass media influence. Cinema was supposed to become not only a means of “educating the masses”, but also a kind of demonstration stand, emphasizing the progressiveness and modernity of the new government. In addition, ritually staged collective trips to the cinema, which were readily covered in newsreels, were supposed to strengthen the impact of the ideas being demonstrated on the masses and control over their correct perception” (Khanzhov, 2018).

One of the serious challenges that the new government faced was the significant influence of foreign films of an entertaining nature on the mass audience. And although the fight against “thoughtless and harmful films” was introduced everywhere, was supported by censorship control, people continued to view cinema as entertainment and an amusing event. In order to distract the younger generation from their passion for entertaining films, the Society of Friends of Soviet Cinema, created in 1925, was actively working, film education activities were carried out in remote rural areas, etc. And of course, the Soviet government faced the urgent necessity to create Soviet films that would fully meet the new ideological requirements. To achieve this goal, film studios were created throughout the country.

As the analysis shows, work with film or “film work” had to be organised in such a way as to prepare the audience for proper understanding of feature films. Moreover, the task of reading introductory lectures before the start of the film was assigned not only to teachers specially trained for film work, but also to trade union workers. Thus, for example, “it was assumed that trade union workers would organize regular lectures, discussions on films, introductory speeches, reading of the libretto” (Zhdanova, 2013).

As for the forms and methods of media education with feature films, it was mainly developed during film lessons, film lectures, specially organized film screenings – film matinees, independent media creativity during amateur filming, etc. At the same time, in the first publications of the Soviet period on the use of cinematography in the upbringing and education of the younger generation, the basic principles and approaches to media education were formed, which found their development in subsequent periods.

The ideology and worldview of the new Soviet cinema were vividly reflected in the presented film images. The key foundations that the Soviet screen reflected were the revolutionary struggle to build a new world. In this regard, the family theme was not central in the period under study.

The issues of family education were considered primarily through the prism of propaganda and agitation. A good example here is the 1918 film *Cohabitation/Uplotneniye* by A. Panteleev, N. Pashkovsky, and A. Dolinov. It is interesting that among the authors of the idea of the simple story about a simple working family moving into a professor's apartment was the People's Commissar of Education A.V. Lunacharsky who was very passionate about cinema and clearly understood its ideological role, which he repeatedly emphasized in his speeches and articles.

In addition, the Soviet public widely discussed the advisability of the family in its traditional sense. Ideas were put forward that the family could well be replaced by a commune, and parents by the state. There were proposals to "implement the communist idea of transferring all minors to the care of the state, since the family would cease to exist" (Nechaeva, 2016). It was believed that "the family had to be abolished and ousted from the consciousness of the population by new forms of the communist world order. A special role in this theory was given to issues of upbringing and socialization of the individual: children were to be raised not by parents who were busy in production, but by professional teachers in special institutions. Innovations also concerned the moral aspects of marriage – requirements for maintaining moral purity in marital relations were cancelled as obsolete" (Bikkinina, 2017: 160).

Consequently, the family theme in cinematography in this period gave way to propaganda tasks that faced the young Soviet state. The state replaced the family values that were characteristic of pre-revolutionary Russia with the values of public education of children in the spirit of the new time. These trends were declared as priorities of the state policy, education and culture. They were presented in films and actively positioned in Soviet cinematography of those years.

The films of the 1920s and 1930s reflected the dominant historical events of the period in question: the revolution, the fight against the remnants of the past, etc. Accordingly, the images created by filmmakers of those years depicted the revolutionary events and the years of the Civil War through the prism of film production. These events influenced both the representation of the family as a whole and the reflection of female, male and children's film images.

Thus, on the young Soviet screen, strong, goal-oriented women dominated as positive characters, for whom the main factors determining a woman's happiness were not family and everyday life, but study, hard work and social life. These images are sharply different from the romantic and languid beauties that appeared before viewers on the Western screen. Examples of such film characters are Marfa Lapkina from the film *Old and New/Staroye i Novoye* (the original title of the film *General Line/General'naya Liniya*) by S. Eisenstein and G. Alexandrov, Oktyabrina from the film *The Adventures of Oktyabrina/Pokhozhdeniya Oktyabrinyy* by G. Kozintsev and L. Trauberg, Tugatysh from the film *Rivals/Sopernitsy* by A. Dmitriev and others. Such heroines are opposed by negative female characters – with bourgeois and outdated ideas about life. Such female characters, however, as well as male ones, are usually created in a satirical manner. For example, Madame Irene is presented in this way in B. Barnett's comedy film *The Girl with a Hat Box/Devushka s Korobkoy* (1927).

A detailed description of female images in Soviet films was given in the research conducted by O. Khloponina. The author notes: "In the 1920s, the female image was characterized by determination, orientation toward a new way of life, social activity, collectivism, and literacy. In general, the female type manifests itself in pronounced masculinity" (Khloponina, 2017).

The themes of creating a family as a human value, the idea of a woman as the keeper of the hearth are replaced by the mother's protective functions. The reason for this is that "motherhood in the new conditions is in demand as a function of the body for the reproduction of new workers, while educational functions are transferred to the state. The film demonstrated the role of the Soviet government as the first protector of women and their children. Nadezhda in the film *The Prostitute/Prostitutka* emphasized the independence of women and their ability to make decisions about the life of their children. Kat'ka in the film *Kat'ka-Paper Rennet/Kat'ka-Bumazhnyy Ranet*, Lyudmila in *Third Meschanskaya St./Tretya Meshchanskaya*. All these roles were intended to demonstrate the freedom of decisions and movements, possible only in the conditions of a new society and a new way of life" (Khloponina, 2017).

In other words, in Soviet feature films of the 1920s, we can see a completely new image of a new Soviet woman – independent, free, striving for a bright life, making a conscious life choice in

favour of serving new ideals. Stereotypical images of female characters in films of those years are workers, peasants, less often – representatives of the intelligentsia. Moreover, the display of female characters on the screen was closely connected with their views and attitude to the revolution. As a rule, positive female characters actively support communist ideas, advocate for the construction of a society free from old ideological remnants. The central symbols personifying the goals of a woman of the new world on the screen were such as faith in a bright future, the desire to learn something new, become independent, overcome difficulties, together with like-minded people.

New male images presented on the Soviet screen of those years (revolutionaries, sailors, workers, peasants, etc.) also differed from Western ideals. The main values for male media images, as well as for female ones, became the construction of a new society in which “who was nobody will become everything”. A smart appearance, work clothes, a leather jacket, a Budyonovka, boots and a tunic – these are the distinctive features of real men. The words “revolution”, “proletariat”, “workers” are often heard in the speech of such film characters (in sound films). These characters are merciless towards the enemies of the revolution, however, if they meet like-minded people, they show friendly, even family feelings. Often in the films of the period under consideration, positive male characters are shown surrounded by children, to whom they show care and tenderness.

On the screen, they are contrasted with male images of the bourgeois class and enemies of the Soviet power. These film characters, as a rule, appear in civilian clothes, their appearance clearly shows the features of the old world, outdated foundations. Typical characteristics of these characters are rudeness, bad attitude towards women and children, a gloomy face. Often, negative characters are lonely, they seem to be in a world alien to them, in which there is no place for them.

The relationship between a man and a woman is also considered in most new Soviet films through the prism of a new idea of the family, where public interests and loyalty to the new ideals of the revolutionary struggle play a leading role. The themes of family comfort, home, motherhood and fatherhood are subtle and do not occupy a dominant position in films. This was due to the fact that the main purpose of releasing feature films during the period was agitation and propaganda. These trends were characteristic of both the representation of urban and rural families in Soviet cinema. For example, L.N. Mazur, providing an analysis of the image of a rural family in Soviet cinema of the period under consideration, points to its mythological nature, aimed at achieving the goals of agitation and propaganda of the new state system: “In general, the cinema of the 1920–1930s was a myth-maker, called upon to substantiate and justify the policy of collectivization, to form a positive attitude towards the collective farm system, and to show the role of the Soviet government in resolving the women’s issue” (Mazur 2017: 380).

Of particular importance for our study are film images of children. If we talk about stereotypical ideas about children, then we can distinguish several types in the films of the 1920s and 1930s: street children, little farm labourers, pioneers, children from working and wealthy families, etc. It is clear that the film representation of these images is different, it determines a positive or sharply negative attitude towards film characters. As a rule, stories about the difficult fate of orphans, children who are servants or are raised in families where violence and merciless exploitation reign, end quite positively. Having abandoned old views and being tired of humiliation, they end up in children’s communes or orphanages, join pioneer detachments or the Red Army.

One of the central themes of Soviet feature films of the 1920s and 1930s was the problem of homeless children, children who were orphans or from shelters. For example, the films *How Petyunka Went to Ilyich/Kak Petyun’ka Yezdil k Il’ichu* by M. Doronin, released in 1924, told a story of a child from an orphanage who goes alone to say goodbye to V.I. Lenin in Moscow, or *Mariyka* by A. Lundin (1925), who ends up in a thieves’ den.

Children without families were not necessarily complete orphans, but they are also shown in most films of this period as fully grown and independent people for whom family and parents do not occupy a significant place in life. Here, the conflict with parents (people of the old formation and views) who the children oppose often runs through as the red line. Examples of this theme are the films *Van’ka – a Young Pioneer/Van’ka – Yunyy Pioner* by P. Malakhov (1924), *Tal’ka the Innkeeper/Tal’ka Traktirshchitsa* by B. Svyatozarov (1928), which tell a story of children for whom the pioneer organization replaced their family. Having rejected their parents, who live by old ideas and end up with pioneers, the main characters of the films find a new family – a pioneer detachment. As E.A. Artemyeva correctly notes, “the new ideology provokes child film characters to abnormal, completely unchildish behaviour. This inconsistency can be explained not through the

eternal problem of “fathers and sons”, but through the distinction between two concepts – intelligence and wisdom. Intelligence in the most positive sense is now exclusively given to children and teenagers, wisdom with negative connotations (it is from the past) is given to adults. They, the “wise”, that is, burdened with knowledge of the past, including numerous ossified prejudices, must certainly give in to truly “smart” children, right in their decisiveness, youthful audacity, ability to look at the problem with a young and therefore the only correct view. In other words, the problem lies in the dispute between two ideologies – old and new, and not a dispute between two generations” (Artemyeva, 2013: 156).

The families of revolutionaries, fighters for Soviet power, are shown in a completely different way on the Soviet movie screen, where parents and children together embark on the path of struggle against the enemies of the revolution. Examples of such films are *Mother/Mat'* by V. Pudovkin (1926), *Bay of Death/Bukhta Smerti* by A. Room (1926).

Another theme associated with the family in the feature films of the period under consideration is revenge on enemies of the revolution for parents. A striking example here is the leader of the Soviet distribution of the 1920s – the film *The Red Little Devils/Krasnye D'yavolyata* by I. Perestiani. It was released in 1923 and became the leader in terms of audience, especially children. The historian of children's cinema K.K. Paramonova highly appreciated this work of cinematographic art and its role in the development of children's cinema: “*The Red Little Devils* was a work of “new spirit”, new revolutionary aspiration. Everything in this film was a living echo of the revolution, the pathos of the film was generated by the revolutionary struggle of the people. In its style and content, the film largely met the requirements of the future art, and this determined its place in the history of cinema” (Paramonova, 1962: 9). Analysing the phenomenon of the success of this film among viewers of that time, E.V. Brodskaya notes: “*The Little Red Devils* turned out to be extremely successful – partly due to the fact that they were persistently promoted at the box office by the party. *The Little Red Devils*, in fact, were a mixture of ideological clichés and an adventure film. Already at the very beginning of work on the film, the story underwent significant changes – for example, the father of the main characters turned from a revolutionary peasant into a conscious railroad worker, etc.” (Brodskaya, 2021: 77).

## 5. Conclusion

Our analysis of Russian feature films of the 1920s-early 1930s shows that the main objectives of working with film in those years were forming a new society, where every citizen was devoted to the ideals of the revolution. The most important thing in life for each person was not the traditional values formed in the pre-revolutionary era, but the fight against the remnants of the bourgeois past. For this purpose, active work was launched to introduce children and adults to the culture of the new revolutionary cinema, the ultimate goal of which was to form a communist worldview, the primacy of public interests. Accordingly, pedagogical tasks related to family education faded into the background, giving way to public education, which functions were performed by the state and the Communist Party.

The image of the family in the first Soviet films was not the central theme, and family issues, as well as family education, were considered in the context of the clash of the old bourgeois social order with the new – revolutionary. This conflict can be traced in many plot lines of Soviet feature films. Another plot line of films of this period was compliance with the principles of emerging socialist realism: a change in the fate of the characters, which is accompanied by joining a collective, revising their views, and re-education.

The core principles of creating a good film, including showing a family in it, were mass appeal, accessibility, and compliance with the ruling ideology. It is no coincidence that films by Soviet directors were accompanied by a new style of visual images associated with the revolution and the echoes of the civil war. In the context of depicting a family, this theme is reflected in the plots of films about street children, orphans, people with difficult fates who had to make a hard choice between the old and the new.

The state's increased attention to the family in the 1930s brought a new view of the socialist family, where the dominant values were collectivism, participation in restoring the national economy, the fight against enemies of the revolution, and active public work. By the beginning of the 1930s, there was an increase in state control over child rearing. This trend laid the foundations for communist principles of upbringing, which were preserved for many years both in educational institutions and in the family.



As for family education, this topic was also presented in contrast to old and new views. The former were characterized by a rude attitude towards children and demands for complete obedience, the latter – a friendly life in a collective. Moreover, the collective could not necessarily be a family, often these were state or public organizations.

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## Scientific Myths on the Covers of the Polish Edition of “Scientific American”

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is a semiotic analysis of the covers of the Polish edition of “Scientific American” magazine in the context of scientific myths. It is an attempt to understand how scientific ideas and images are transformed into cultural symbols that carry additional meanings and values. The study is based on a semiotic analysis of 60 covers of the Polish edition of “Scientific American” from the last five years (2019–2024). The commutation test technique and the artificial intelligence application The Semiotic Engine were used to prepare descriptions of each cover. The covers were categorized into larger thematic groups, and the dominant themes were presented in the form of a cross tabulation in relation to the scientific myths analyzed. The analysis showed that the scientific myths present on the covers of Scientific American have a significant impact on society, shaping our understanding of science and technology. These myths can both inspire and mislead, simplifying complex issues and giving them sensational or ideological meanings. Examples of myths include the image of the scientist as hero and technology as salvation. The article offers a new perspective to the study of science popularization and media education, showing how semiotic analysis of journal covers can reveal hidden cultural meanings and values. The work underscores the need for critical analysis of media messages to better understand how culture influences our perception of science and its role in society.

**Keywords:** mythology, science, science popularization, “Scientific American”, scientific myths, semiotic analysis.

### 1. Introduction

Scientific myth in the context of semiotics is a concept that refers to the way scientific ideas and images are transformed into cultural symbols that carry additional meanings and values. Roland Barthes, one of the key theorists of semiotics, in his work “Mythologies” analyzes how myths function as the second level of the semiotic system. Semiotics, as the science of signs, studies how signs (that is, anything that can signify something) communicate meanings. Barthes introduces the concept of myth as a second level of semiotic analysis, where signs create new, more complex meanings (Barthes, 1957). For example, the image of a scientist in a laboratory at the denotational level represents a person doing research. However, at the mythological level, it can symbolize progress, innovation and even a kind of heroism.

Scientific myth, then, is not so much false information, but rather the way scientific concepts are presented and interpreted in culture. Barthes argues that myths tend to naturalize history, making it seemingly eternal and immutable. In the context of science, myths can simplify complex issues, giving them sensational or ideological meanings that can affect the way society views science and its achievements. An example of science myths are constructs related to the image of

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the scientist as a hero. Often in the media, scientists are portrayed as solitary, brilliant individuals who make breakthrough discoveries. Such an image can distort the reality that science is usually the result of teamwork and long-term research. Another scientific myth concerns technology as salvation. Many scientific publications present new technologies as solutions to all of humanity's problems, which can lead to excessive optimism and ignoring potential risks.

Scientific myths have a significant impact on society, shaping our understanding of science and technology. According to Bishop Adam Lepa, a Polish media educator, scientific myths “concern the goals and functions of science, as well as scientific research and its interpretation. They are also meant to create an image of science in a country with emphasis on the merits of the ruling party or coalition” (Lepa, 1999: 21). They can both inspire and mislead, so it is important to critically analyze what meanings are conveyed by the media and scientific publications. Thus, scientific myths in the sense of semiotics are how scientific ideas are transformed into cultural symbols that carry additional, often simplified meanings. Analyzing these myths allows us to better understand how culture affects our perception of science and its role in society.

We will take a look at the scientific myths on the covers of the Polish editions of the monthly magazine “Scientific American”, analyzing why these myths are on the covers and what implications they may have for readers and for science itself. We will also examine how these myths fit into a broader cultural and ideological context, in line with Barthes' theory that myths tend to naturalize history, making it seemingly eternal and unchanging.

## 2. Materials and methods

A semiotic analysis was carried out: denotative and connotative of 60 covers of the Polish edition of the journal *Scientific American* from the last five years (2019–2024). Specifically, from issue 11/2019 (339) to issue 10/2024 (398). This prestigious monthly magazine has been published in the US since 1845, in Poland – as “World of Science (Świat Nauki)” – since 1991. Semiotic analysis of magazine covers is both a media studies methodological proposal (Taylor, Willis, 1999: 19-26) and a method of contemporary media education in identifying social myths and cultural codes (Drzewiecki, 2016).

An answer was sought to the question of contemporary scientific myths present on individual magazine covers. They were categorized into larger thematic groups. The dominant themes present on the covers in the journal were also indicated. They were presented – in the form of a cross table – in relation to the analyzed scientific myths. In the semiotic analysis of the covers, the technique of the commutation test was used, seeking answers to the question of what was omitted in the construction of the image of science on the covers of the Polish edition of *Scientific American*. The artificial intelligence application *The Semiotic Engine* was used in the preparation of descriptions of individual covers.

## 3. Discussion

The research topic undertaken in the article is part of the contemporary discussion on the social image of science. Science is still a tool for dealing with the difficulties of civilization. However, the scientific community is faced with a new metamodern reflection, seeking answers to the question of how to popularize science on the one hand, make it interesting to the modern media, and make it easy and accessible to the audience. On the other hand, how to maintain its seriousness and strict methodological requirements, the formal language of science, the requirements of the process of scientific proof of truths. Another aspect concerns the policy of open science and its digitization, providing the public with wide access to research achievements (Pipere, Mārtinsone, 2023). The main challenge of modern science is the problem of post-truth, which undermines our basis for knowing knowledge, as well as trust in scientists. The discourse of post-truth renders invalid the rationality of the world, destabilizes epistemology, and leads to competing ways of explaining reality based on pseudoscience. Hence the need for a new social responsibility of science and correction of its public image (Wagner, 2023). It also seems important to study the language of contemporary scientific messages, to inquire how the media image of science is created, not only the rational one, but also the emotional one.

This is not only a question about the function of scientific and popular science publications, but also about the scientific policy of countries and regions (Mamonova, 2023). This image of science is also created by pop culture, including feature films. Popular depictions of science play a key role in constructing society's “scientific imagination”, they are an integral dimension of

society's understanding of science and are just as important to science communication as “real” science. Here we are sometimes confronted with negative stereotypes, of the scientist as an evil demigod, an egotist without morals, a nerd and a capitalist who betrays the ethos of science. However, these are largely positive images: the objective researcher, the practical expert and the dedicated idealist (Domaradzki, 2023). Contemporary questions about the image of science are leading to the need to rethink its paradigms. From the time of Galileo and later through the critical rationalism of Karl Popper, there is a need to rethink the Aristotelian conception of science. It also takes into account the role of religion and theology as a discipline in the system of modern sciences (Baruwaso, 2022).

Contemporary research on scientific myths can provide interesting clues here about the contemporary image of science. Much of this research refers to the colloquial understanding of a scientific myth as something false or untrue. These include myths about historical science figures (Kokorina et al., 2023), as well as contemporary beliefs that are not supported by research findings, for example, about the “creativity crisis” in young people (Barbot, Said-Metwaly, 2021), or quasi-scientific ideas about reality, such as the noosphere theory (Fesenkova, 2019). However, there is also an emerging semiotic understanding of myth as a hidden idea that organizes social life, including science. This is the case with the myth of technological progress, which replaced the medieval belief in a world guided by divine providence (Burdett, 2020). Barthes' model of denotative and connotative analysis makes it possible to establish myths, primarily concerning contemporary politics and social life (Istiyanto et al., 2024). However, it seems that it can be successfully used when studying the dominant current image of science.

#### 4. Results

Denotative and connotative analysis, commutative tests performed on 60 covers of the Polish edition of “Scientific American” pointed to 113 detailed myths about modern science. They were grouped into 8 main categories: the myth of science as a driver of progress, the myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion, the myth of technology as inevitable evolution, the myth of man as the dominator of nature, the myth of global crises and disasters, the myth of exploratory science and exploration, the myth of social harmony and cooperation, and the myth of cyclicity and finality. The results of these analyses are presented below on 8 selected covers relating to 8 major scientific myths. Then a summary of the mythological analysis is presented in the form of a cross table. The didactic possibilities of semiotic analysis in media education classes were also pointed out.

##### *The myth of science as a driver of progress*

The myth of science as a driver of progress is based on the belief that science and technology are key factors leading to continuous development and improvement in the quality of life. Within this myth, scientific progress is seen as a continuous process of discovering new truths and pushing the boundaries of human cognition, which is expected to lead to a better understanding of the world and dispel old beliefs. Technology, as the fruit of science, is considered a tool that brings progress and promises a better world through innovation and discovery. Science is also seen as a light in the darkness, a guide that helps humanity control and predict future disasters, and a lifesaver that has the potential to solve global problems. Scientists are often portrayed as heroes who, through their work, contribute to humanitarian progress and the exploration not only of the Earth, but also of space. In this way, the myth of science as a force for progress combines a belief in constant development, innovation and the drive to conquer new territories and search for truth.

On the cover of issue 10/2022 (“Świat Nauki”, 2022c) we see the title of the magazine “Scientific American”, with the supplement “World of Science (Świat Nauki)” on the left. The main element is a large, transparent hourglass that contains galaxies and star clouds, suggesting the cosmos. In its lower part we see a vortex that resembles a black hole. In the foreground is the inscription *The Paradox of Black Holes resolved* in Polish. In the margin to the left are slogans foreshadowing the magazine's content, such as *Spacetime Tunnels*, *Event Horizons* and *Monstrosity at the Center of the Milky Way*. We see the hourglass as a symbol of time, the passage of time and inevitability. In the context of the cosmos, the hourglass may suggest the idea of infinity, the evolution of the universe or its cyclical nature. The black hole symbolizes mystery, the unknown and the forces of nature that transcend understanding. It can also suggest a theme of deep scientific discovery or challenges in cosmic physics. The message *The Paradox of Black Holes resolved* suggests that the magazine article addresses the topic of scientific puzzles and

breakthroughs. This is typical of popular science magazines, which often try to present complex theories in an accessible way. Blue is often the color associated with science, peace and infinity, while the black of the black hole symbolizes mystery, horror and the unknown.

The hourglass combined with galaxies suggests the narrative that science has the ability to penetrate time and space, uncovering the secrets of the universe. The myth of the scientist as hero or science as light in the darkness is strongly present here. In this context, science is presented as a force capable of solving even the most complicated puzzles of the universe. Taking a commutation test, we can imagine that instead of an hourglass we have a mechanical clock on the cover. The mechanical clock would still refer to time, but more in terms of the human understanding of time, structure and control, instead of the idea of a cosmic, infinite passage of time. Such a substitution could suggest a more “earthly” and understandable approach to the subject of black holes, rather than a cosmic mystery. By replacing the black hole with something less abstract, such as a planet, the cover would cease to be so strongly symbolic. It would lose the element of mystery and depth, turning into a more conventional representation of space science.

The analyzed cover of the Polish edition of Scientific American magazine uses strong visual signs and symbolism to communicate the complexity and depth of scientific topics. The hourglass sign, combined with galaxies and a black hole, introduces the viewer to a world of science that is both mysterious and promising to solve great cosmic puzzles. A denotative and connotative analysis, coupled with analysis of myths and a commutative test, reveals that the cover depicts science as a force capable of solving the greatest mysteries of the universe.

#### *The myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion*

The myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion is based on the belief that humanity is destined to explore and colonize the infinite cosmos. Within this myth, the cosmos is seen as the final frontier, full of mysteries and unknown civilizations waiting to be discovered. Space pioneers are heroes who cross the boundaries of the known world, striving for cosmic harmony and the search for the ultimate truth about the universe. Science is the tool that enables knowledge and understanding of this great galaxy, as well as the transcendence of human experience. As a place of both fascination and horror, the cosmos symbolizes both potential dangers and infinite possibilities. In this way, the myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion combines dreams of humanity's future as a species exploring the universe and the quest to discover the mysteries of the cosmos.

At the denotative level, the cover of issue 1/2023 (*Świat Nauki*, 2023) shows the title of the journal: “Scientific American”, main headline: *A New Era of Astronomy*, subtitle: *How the James Webb Space Telescope is Changing Our Understanding of the World*. The background is an image of outer space with stars, nebulae and galaxies visible. Dark colors dominate, with bright flares of stars and clouds of cosmic dust. Additional article titles: *Deceiving the Light*, *A New Look at Autism*, *How Teeth Evolved*. The visual and textual elements are directly scientific in nature, aimed at an audience interested in space, astronomy and new discoveries.

On a connotative level, the cover symbolizes a watershed moment in space science, pointing to the James Webb Space Telescope as a technological tool that is revolutionizing our understanding of the universe. The use of the word “new era” refers to the marked change the telescope brings to astronomy. The connotation of the word “era” suggests that this event is not temporary, but permanent and of great historical significance. The illustration of the cosmos on the cover depicts the vast, mysterious expanses of the universe, which connotes the infinite and the unknown that are being explored. Colors such as black, blue and white are often associated with scientific seriousness, outer space and the mysteries of the cosmos, reinforcing the importance of discovering and exploring this area. The phrase “changes our understanding of the world” suggests that discoveries made with the Webb Telescope can affect not only scientific knowledge, but also our world view, which underscores the importance of modern space exploration.

On a mythological level, the cover touches on the myth of science as a means to discover truths about the universe. The modern myth of technological advances that enable us to reach new frontiers of cognition is prominent here. The James Webb Space Telescope is presented as a symbol of the human ability to push the boundaries of knowledge and understanding of the universe. The cover also fits in with the myth of the cosmos as the last frontier that humans are constantly trying to cross. Here, the telescope acts as a tool that allows us to “cheat” limitations that were previously impassable – for example, the limitations of vision that formerly prevented such a deep look into space. Conducting a commutation test allows us to understand the meaning carried by key elements of the cover. Replacing the illustration of an image of outer space with another,

more earthly one (such as a landscape of nature) would completely change the context of the cover, shifting the meaning from space discoveries to nature themes. The cover would cease to be understood as a reference to space science, while losing its mystical and exploratory aura. If a title of a more technical nature had been used instead of *New Era of Astronomy*, such as *Discoveries of the Webb Telescope*, it would have changed the perception of the cover from a new breakthrough in astronomy to a more detailed, technical article, which might have discouraged readers interested in more general scientific aspects. Changing the colors to more warm or bright colors (e.g., green, yellow) could dilute the sense of mystery and seriousness associated with the discovery of the cosmos, causing the cover to be perceived as less serious and less connected to the subject of astronomy. The commutation test shows that both the image of the cosmos and the color scheme and title are key to building an atmosphere of discovery and emphasizing the importance of astronomical breakthroughs.

#### *The myth of technology as inevitable evolution*

The myth of technology as inevitable evolution is based on the belief that technological development is an inherent and inevitable direction of human development. Within this myth, the relationship between humans and technology is seen as symbiotic, where artificial intelligence acts as a super-intelligent tool that has the potential to transform society. The human body and brain are often compared to machines, leading to the idea of “mind mapping” and the unlimited potential of artificial intelligence. Technology is seen as a powerful tool that can control the fate of the planet, fight invisible threats and disinformation, and create new things from existing elements. Fire, as a symbol of civilizational progress, reflects the belief in technology as a key element in the evolution of humanity. In this way, the myth of technology as inevitable evolution combines belief in the power of technology and its ability to shape the future.

On a denotative level, the cover of issue 5/2024 (Świat Nauki, 2024b) depicts a large AI (artificial intelligence) sign in the center, in bright pastel colors, surrounded by a mosaic of small cubes and pixels in orange and blue tones. The main text reads *What AI Teaches Us*, and below it is a subtitle: *How Artificial Intelligence Deciphers Damaged Papyri, Proves Theorems and Helps Us Understand Ourselves*. Additional topics appear in the margins: *Mysterious Brown Dwarfs, How to Bring a Piece of the Cosmos to Earth*, and *The Battle Against Ineffective Drugs*.

On a connotative level, the main symbol is AI, which immediately refers to modern technology, especially artificial intelligence, which is at the center of discourse about the future of science, technology and society. The text and image suggest technological sophistication and the potential of AI to analyze data and discover new facts, especially in a scientific context. The pixelated appearance of the letters in the AI caption connotes the digital world and virtual reality, emphasizing that artificial intelligence operates in the realm of information technology. The mosaic of cubes and pixels scattered around the central inscription may symbolize the chaos of data that AI can transform into orderly information. The colors orange and blue can symbolize both energy (orange) and calmness or rationality (blue), reinforcing the narrative of AI as both a dynamic and precise tool.

The cover story is in keeping with contemporary myths about artificial intelligence. The first myth is that of AI as a “super-intelligent tool” that has the ability to solve complex problems, process massive amounts of data and decipher complex puzzles such as ancient papyri. AI is presented here as a “lifesaver” for science and culture, a technology that not only makes our lives easier, but also deepens our knowledge of ourselves and history. The second myth is the narrative of technology as the inevitable direction of humanity’s evolution. Artificial intelligence, symbolized by the inscription AI, in this cover story becomes a metaphor for the future, where technological progress is not only beneficial, but even necessary for the further development of civilization. The third myth is the belief in the “unlimited potential” of artificial intelligence. The cover suggests that AI has the ability not only to analyze current data, but also to tap into knowledge from the past (like deciphering papyri) and enable a better understanding of human nature.

As a commutation test, the central element of AI could be replaced with another technological symbol, such as that of a quantum computer. Such a change would shift the narrative from data analysis and artificial intelligence to quantum physics and more abstract concepts related to the future of technology. Such a change could also introduce connotations of accelerating technological development and more scientific, less popular applications, reducing the universality of the topic and its emotional impact on the viewer. Another change could be to replace the pixelated form of AI letters with more traditional mechanical imagery, such as cogs or tools, which



would introduce connotations of industry and mechanical technology, shifting attention away from the digital world toward more physical forms of technology. Then the topic of AI would lose its reference to the virtual and digital world and relate more to industrial technologies, which would change the perception of AI as not only an informational tool, but also a material one.

#### *The myth of man as the dominator of nature*

The myth of man as the dominator of nature is based on the belief that humanity has the ability and right to control and transform the environment. Within this myth, man is seen as a being who, through science and technology, has come to understand nature and can subdue it. The struggle against one's own body and its limitations is part of this process, as is the pursuit of harmony with nature, which is often idealized as wild, innocent and close to the ideas of social relations. The myth of Prometheus symbolizes human ambition and daring to gain knowledge and power, while nature is seen as both a powerful force and a resource to be exploited. Man's evolution and dominance after the extinction of the dinosaurs emphasize his unique position in the world. In pop culture, dinosaurs often symbolize this former power of nature, which man now dominates. In this way, the myth of man as the dominator of nature combines elements of struggle, understanding, harmony and control over the environment.

On a denotative level, the cover of issue 6/2024 depicts a man blowing out fire, which occupies most of the frame (Świat Nauki, 2024c). It is a dynamic image in which the flame fills the upper right part of the composition, moving from yellow to orange tones. The background is dark, which emphasizes the contrast between the flame and the surroundings. The main text on the cover reads: *Life in Pyrocene. How Fire Shapes Human Civilization*. Additional topics listed on the cover include *Talking Robots*, *Nature's Strongest Influence*, and *The Age of Strange Metals*.

On a connotative level, fire symbolizes both a destructive and creative force, which is one of the central ideas of this cover. The flame motif evokes the controlled energy and civilizational progress associated with fire, which since ancient times has enabled mankind to survive, cook, make tools and develop technology. The image of a man blowing out fire can be interpreted as a reference to man's power over nature and his ability to subdue and control the powerful forces of nature. The dark background further emphasizes the contrast between light and darkness, which may suggest the historical significance of fire as an element that literally and metaphorically “illuminates” the darkness and allows people to gain control over their environment. The motif of “pyrocene” is also a neologism, referring to the age of fire, which may indicate an anthropocentric approach to man's relationship with nature.

The cover refers to several myths ingrained in the culture. The first is the myth of fire as a symbol of civilizational progress. Fire is portrayed here as a force that has influenced humanity's development, allowing it to take control of nature and transform the environment to its advantage. Modern narratives often glorify technology and science as means to subdue and control nature, with fire as their primary symbol. The second myth is that of man as the dominator of nature, who controls and shapes the forces of nature according to his own needs. The fire-blowing man symbolizes this dominion and power, emphasizing humanity's superiority over the primordial forces. It is also a myth about man's relationship with technology – fire, as the first technological tool, is part of a long line of inventions that have enabled mankind to advance civilization, from the Stone Age to the Age of Metals to modern technology.

By conducting a commutative test, the image of fire could be changed to include other elements related to civilization and technology, such as replacing the flame with LED light or a laser. Such a change would radically affect the reception of the graphic, shifting the narrative from the archetypal meaning of fire to more contemporary and technical associations. Laser light could symbolize more modern forms of energy and technology, moving away from the primal force of nature, which is fire. Then the “pyrocene” theme would lose its original meaning, and the focus would be on a more modern and futuristic relationship between man and technology. On the other hand, changing the background from dark to light or adding other natural elements, such as water or earth, could introduce new connotations related to harmony or conflict between the elements, rather than just the dominance of one (fire) over darkness.

#### *The myth of global crises and disasters*

The myth of global crises and catastrophes is based on the belief that humanity faces numerous, serious threats that could have catastrophic consequences. The nuclear threat, climate change and global warming are seen as major sources of danger, with glaciers acting as guardians of the global climate balance. Pandemic, as an all-encompassing phenomenon, is portrayed as both

a disaster and a catalyst for change, with the virus being the invisible enemy. Science is seen as a tool that can save humanity from these global threats, while the president is seen as responsible for solving problems on both a national and global scale. In this way, the myth of global crises and disasters combines elements of fear, hope and responsibility, emphasizing the need for action and cooperation for the survival and future of humanity.

On a denotative level, the cover of issue 4/2022 depicts an image of the Earth in dark tones, dominated by a reddish glow reflected in the water (Świat Nauki, 2022a). The main title reads *How COVID Changed the World*, and the subtitle explains that the article addresses lessons learned from two years of the pandemic. Additional text on the cover refers to the topics of diagnostics, conspiracy theories and the importance of cooperation in times of crisis.

Connotatively, the cover expresses a sense of global crisis and transformation. The earth illuminated by a reddish light suggests an alarming condition, which may be symbolic of the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic. The red color is strongly associated with danger, warning, as well as blood and suffering, which may refer to the many victims of the pandemic. The reflection in the water distorts the image, symbolizing the chaos and change that COVID-19 brought, and the difficulty of adapting to the new reality. The symbolism of the Earth underscores the global nature of the pandemic – it is not a problem confined to one country or region, but a situation that has affected everyone on the planet. The dark, nocturnal depiction of the planet and the gloomy glow may also suggest that the pandemic has still not been fully resolved, and the world is still struggling with its effects.

The myth associated with the cover story fits into the global narrative of the COVID-19 pandemic as an event that radically changed the world. The pandemic became a symbol of the fragility of systems that were previously considered stable – health, economic, political and social systems. The cover reflects the myth not only of the pandemic as a disaster, but also of it as a catalyst for change. The title *How COVID Changed the World* indicates that the pandemic not only caused a crisis, but also initiated a transformation whose effects will be felt for a long time to come. This myth is part of broader narratives about a “new normal” and the need for global cooperation and resilience against future threats.

In the commutation test, we could replace the image of Earth with another symbol, such as a depiction of the SARS-CoV-2 virus or a human figure wearing a protective mask. This change would transform the meaning of the cover, focusing attention on the more immediate aspects of the pandemic – such as the virus itself or health measures. However, the image of Earth gives the message a more global, abstract dimension that emphasizes the impact of the pandemic on the entire world, not just the individual. Another element that could be substituted is the red reflection in the water – if it were instead, for example, a reflecting rainbow, the message would suggest hope and positive change, rather than danger and crisis.

The cover of “Scientific American” presents the pandemic reality as a global crisis and world-transforming event. On a denotative level, we see the Earth illuminated by a reddish light, which on a connotative level suggests a state of emergency, crisis and change. The myth of the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for global change is part of a broader narrative about the need to cooperate and adapt to a new reality. The commutation test confirms that changing the main visual elements would change the nature of the message from a general global crisis to a more local or specific one, which would weaken the meaning of the cover.

#### *The myth of exploratory science and exploration*

The myth of scientific discovery and exploration is based on the belief that science is a key tool for discovering truths about the universe and the human body. Within this myth, scientific discovery and space exploration are seen as means to expand the boundaries of human cognition. Researchers are the heroes who discover the “New World” and the mysteries of nature, both on Earth and in space. Science is a tool for exploring the unknown, from ancient beliefs about sea creatures to prehistoric threats. In this way, the myth of discovery, science and exploration combines elements of adventure, the search for truth and pushing the boundaries of human cognition.

On the cover of issue 9/2022 we see a transparent tentacled sea creature – most likely a jellyfish or a species of deep-sea octopus (Świat Nauki, 2022b). This image dominates the title of the magazine *Scientific American* and the Polish headline *News from the Deep*. In the center is the text that explains the main theme of the issue: *What the Oceans Tell Us About Life – Not Just That On Earth*. Additional text elements refer to “reports” on bioluminescence, sea creature migration and water-related therapies, among others. Visible on the left is the magazine's permanent

identifying feature, a red bar with the “World of Science (Świat Nauki)” logo, indicating the Polish edition of the magazine.

On a connotational level, the image of a deep-sea creature symbolizes more than just an exotic creature – it refers to the mysteries that the oceans hold and the cognitive possibilities that face science. The juxtaposition of a creature from the deep with a text suggesting research into extraterrestrial life opens the field to connotations that go beyond biology. The deep sea becomes a metaphor for uncharted areas of science that may hold the key to understanding life on other planets. The transparency of the creature may also suggest the delicacy and ephemerality of life in the deep, and its unknown appearance brings to mind alien, “cosmic” life forms. The cover's color scheme – a dominance of black and transparency, with contrasting white and blue text – also connotes mystery and scientific discovery in unexplored areas. The cover acts as a symbol of exploration of the unknown and deep in the literal (oceans) and figurative (science, space) sense. The slogan “not only on Earth” implies a combination of terrestrial and extraterrestrial life, and the creature image itself becomes an image not only of marine fauna, but also of hypothetical beings from outer space.

The myth on the cover refers to ancient beliefs about unknown sea creatures that have been present in human cultures since the dawn of time. The creature from the deep, although scientifically described, evokes images of mythical monsters, which in the cultures of many peoples were symbols of unknowable forces of nature and mysteries of the cosmos. The myth of the explorer can be identified here – science appears as a modern form of mythology, where the oceans are the “unknown land” and the creatures of the deep represent modern versions of ancient legends. The myth of science also manifests itself in the way the cover depicts ocean research as the key to understanding life – not only on Earth, but also in space. The ocean becomes a metaphor for the unknowable, and science itself acts as a tool to reveal these mysteries to us. In the context of this cover, a commutation test could be performed, swapping, for example, a deep-sea creature for something more familiar, like a dolphin or whale. Such a change would significantly weaken the original effect of mystery and exoticism, as well as change the cover's connotations. Instead of a symbol of unknown depths and extraterrestrial life, we would have a more down-to-earth image that suggested research on known marine species, diminishing the “cosmic” exploration aspect. Also, changing the title from *News from the Deep* to the more general *Research of the Oceans* would affect perception – the cover would become more neutral and scientific, and less enigmatic and full of associations with mystery.

The cover of the above issue of “Scientific American” operates with multiple layers of meaning. Denotatively it shows a deep-sea creature, connotatively it refers to the exploration of the unknown, and mythologically it corresponds to ancient beliefs about sea monsters and the modern myth of science as a tool for discovering the secrets of life. The commutation test demonstrates how crucial it is to choose an image of a deep-sea creature and an appropriate text to maintain an atmosphere of mystery and depth.

#### *The myth of social harmony and cooperation*

The myth of social harmony and cooperation is based on the belief that humanity can achieve understanding and unity through cooperation and interconnection. Social harmonization of thought and understanding is key to building a “global village”, where cooperation and networking lead to social justice and solidarity. History is seen as a narrative to be rediscovered, especially in the context of a patriarchal society and the reconstruction of women's history across cultures. Daydreams are considered a mirror of reality, and holistic health and food as medicine symbolize the pursuit of harmony and balance. In this way, the myth of social harmony and cooperation combines elements of unity, justice and a common quest for a better world.

On a denotative level, the cover of issue 12/2020 shows an illustration of a face that is deformed, as if “stretched” in different directions, with the dominant color blue (Świat Nauki, 2020). In the background we see blank comic balloons, suggesting unspoken thoughts, statements or dialogues. The main title is *Combating Disinformation*, and the subtitle informs: *How to Protect the Public from Lies and Manipulation*. At the bottom of the cover are additional topics: *Space – Aggression in Orbit*, *History – Epidemics of the Past*, and *Medicine – Body or Mind?*

The illustration of a deformed face connotes information chaos and the effects of misinformation on the individual. The face, deformed and distorted, may suggest that lies, manipulation and disinformation distort perception and common sense. Its blue color can indicate feelings of anxiety, dehumanization or cool analysis – suggesting that disinformation affects

rational thinking. Empty balloons indicate a lack of real communication or dialogue, and may also suggest that much of what is “said” in the public sphere has no real substance or is a lie. The title *Combating Disinformation* connotes fighting something negative and destructive – disinformation becomes something to be actively fought, like a social threat. The subtitle emphasizes the need to protect society from manipulation, indicating that the phenomenon of disinformation has far-reaching consequences not only for individuals, but also for social and political structures.

The cover refers to the myth of fighting disinformation as an indispensable part of modern information society. At a time when social media and other information sources are saturated with false information, the fight against disinformation becomes a matter of survival of rational public debate. Here we have the myth of “truth” as a value that must be protected from manipulation and falsehood. The face on the cover is a symbol of an individual distorted by disinformation – the myth of “deformed reality” refers to how lies affect our perception of the world. The deformed face suggests that false information can change the way we see each other and the reality we live in. Empty balloons, suggesting a lack of content in the messages conveyed, can be read as the myth of the “empty narrative” – the idea that much of the information we receive is devoid of value and truth. These are “empty” messages that may look like real dialogues, but carry no meaningful content.

If the illustration of the face was replaced with another, more realistic face or photo of a person, the cover's message could be less abstract and more literal. The current form – a deformed face – suggests some abstract but profound reflection on the nature of misinformation and its impact on the human mind. Changing the balloons to, for example, fill-in-the-blanks words could reduce the symbolic significance of the emptiness that disinformation brings. If the title were changed to *Fighting Misinformation*, it could be more technical and less dramatic. The current title *Combating Disinformation* suggests not only the fight against falsehood, but also the need to be proactive in defending the truth, which emphasizes the importance of the problem.

The cover of the above issue of “Scientific American” presents a visual metaphor for the effects of disinformation – a deformed face symbolizing the distortion of perception and the void of communication. Together, the title and illustration create a narrative about the need to combat disinformation, which is presented as a threat to both the individual and society. A commutation test showed that changing the image or title would affect the reception of the cover, weakening the message about the profound, distorting impact of disinformation on our perception of reality.

#### *The myth of cyclicity and finality*

The myth of cyclicity and finality is based on the belief that life on Earth is inextricably linked to the cycles of nature and the cosmos. The sun, as the central source of life, symbolizes the constant cycle of birth and death, while water is a symbol of life, rebirth and purity. The tree, as a symbol of life and nature, reflects longevity and tradition, as well as transformation and regeneration. The cycle of life, old age and the inevitable passage of time emphasize the finality of human existence. The myth of “stellar birth and death” and the cosmic illusion point to the great mystery of the universe, where the lost past and the dark side of reality remain invisible but inseparable from our experience. In this way, the myth of cyclicity and finality combines elements of nature, the cosmos and human life, emphasizing their interconnectedness and the inevitability of change.

On a denotative level, the cover of issue 2/2024 depicts a visualization of the cosmic wilderness, with a dark, almost black space in the center, surrounded by a network of colorful structures (Świat Nauki, 2024a). These networks resemble fibers or waves of energy, shown in shades of blue, orange and gold. The main title is *Cosmic Nothing*, and the subtitle adds: *Will the Exploration of the Empty Areas of the Universe Reveal its Deepest Secrets?* In the margins are additional topics: *Dark Energy – 25 Years of Exploration*, *Life Without Sex*, and *Dethroned Vitamin D*.

On a connotative level, the cover refers to the idea of “nothing”, which in a cosmological context is as intriguing as it is paradoxical. The dark space in the center may symbolize the cosmic vacuum, the unexplored mystery of the Universe, which, despite its apparent emptiness, may conceal a profound understanding of the nature of reality. The surrounding structures, which resemble fibers, may connote gravitational forces, dark matter or energy, which connect space in the cosmos. The color scheme – gold and blue – can be read as a contrast between the warmth of energy and the coolness of emptiness, further enhancing the impression of duality between fullness and lack. The title *Cosmic Nothing* introduces the theme of emptiness, which is seen not as lack, but as a potential source of discovery. What looks empty may in fact hide secrets of fundamental

importance to science, suggesting that the “nothing” in cosmology may be more full and complex than one might think.

The cover story operates on several levels of modern scientific myths. The first is the myth of the “void of space” – a space that appears to be empty, but hides vast mysteries. Modern science often changes the perspective on what seems simple and obvious – “nothing” here becomes a symbol of what is unknowable, but critical to understanding the nature of the Universe. The second myth is that of the “power of exploration”. Humanity, through its ability to explore even the most remote and seemingly insignificant areas of the cosmos, gains the ability to discover key truths about the nature of the Universe. The depiction of the void as a potentially valuable space underscores the notion that any space – even one that appears empty – has meaning and can lead to breakthrough discoveries. The third myth is that of the “invisible”. On a scientific level, what we can't see (like dark matter, energy, or just cosmic emptiness) can be crucial to understanding the entire structure of reality. In this way, the cover refers to the myth that science reveals the hidden, transforming “nothing” into something of fundamental importance.

The application of the commutative test could involve replacing the visualization of emptiness with another image, such as a densely star-filled expanse of space. Such a change would shift the connotation from a mysterious and incomprehensible “nothing” to a more traditional image of the cosmos as a space full of life and energy. Instead of exploring the void, the emphasis would be on exploring the complexity and richness of the Universe's structures, which could reduce the element of mystery and paradox. Replacing the dark void with an image of, for example, known planets or other celestial bodies would introduce more concrete references to known and already explored cosmic objects, which would weaken the narrative of undiscovered areas of the Universe.

#### *Mythological analysis in the form of a cross table*

These analyses are summarized in the form of a cross-tabulation of the main scientific myths and themes represented on each cover of the Polish edition of Scientific American (Table 1).

As mentioned earlier, 113 scientific myths were extracted and combined into 8 main problem categories. They were assigned to the 7 subject areas 118 times. Hence  $N = 118$ , rather than 60, which is the number of covers, or 113, which is the number of scientific myths described in detail.  $N$  here is the number of assignments.

**Table 1.** Mainly scientific myths and topics presented on individual covers of the Polish edition of “Scientific American”

	Cosmos	Nature	Health	Technology and civilization	Mind	History	Society		
The myth of science as a driver of progress	7 22,58%	5 22,73%	3 15,00%	3 15,00%	0 0,00%	2 22,22%	0 0,00%	20	16,95%
The myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion	18 58,06%	1 4,55%	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	1 11,11%	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	20	16,95%
The myth of technology as inevitable evolution	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	2 10,00%	5 25,00%	5 55,56%	0 0,00%	4 57,14%	16	13,56%
The myth of man as the dominator of nature	0 0,00%	7 31,82%	3 15,00%	5 25,00%	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	15	12,71%
The myth of global crises and disasters	0 0,00%	2 9,09%	6 30,00%	2 10,00%	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	0 0,00%	10	8,47%
The myth of exploratory science and exploration	2 6,45%	2 9,09%	1 5,00%	1 5,00%	1 11,11%	3 33,33%	0 0,00%	10	8,47%
The myth of social harmony and cooperation	0 0,00%	2 9,09%	3 15,00%	1 5,00%	2 22,22%	3 33,33%	3 42,86%	14	11,86%
The myth of cyclicalality and finality	4 12,90%	3 13,64%	2 10,00%	3 15,00%	0 0,00%	1 11,11%	0 0,00%	13	11,02%
	31	22	20	20	9	9	7	118	
	26%	19%	17%	17%	8%	8%	6%		100,00%

The above cross-tabulated analysis includes the frequency of a given major scientific myth in relation to the dominant theme. Seven recurring themes are indicated here: space, nature, health, technology and civilization, mind, history, and society. The percentage calculations show a certain dominance of cosmos-related issues, as well as the myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion (58.06 %). With regard to the subject of the human mind, the myth of technology as an inevitable evolution was prominent (55.56 %). With regard to social issues, we mainly have the myth of social harmony and cooperation (42.86 %). Also prominent were the myth of man as the dominator of

nature in relation to the subject of nature (31.82 %), the myth of global crises and disasters in relation to health (30 %), as well as, in relation to history, the myth of discovery science and exploration and the myth of social harmony and cooperation (33.33 % each). The most common topics were those related to cosmos (26 %) and nature (19 %), while the least frequently presented were social topics (6 %).

The myth of science as a driver of progress and the myth of transcendence and cosmic expansion are the most strongly represented (20 assignments, 16.95 % each). The myth of global crises and disasters and the myth of exploratory science and exploration are the weakest (10 assignments, 8.47 % each). The calculations presented were checked using Cramér's V test. The chi-square statistic was 135.25, Cramér's V coefficient was 0.44. This indicates a moderately strong relationship between the variables.

#### *Didactic possibilities of semiotic analysis in media education classes*

The results of semiotic analysis of the covers of the Polish edition of "Scientific American" magazine can be a valuable tool in media education, especially in the context of critical thinking training in students. Semiotics, as a research tool, provides a deeper understanding of how the media transform scientific ideas into cultural symbols. Using this analysis in didactics can help students identify hidden messages and myths that shape their perceptions of science and technology.

For example, during the course, students may be asked to conduct their own denotative and connotative analyses of selected covers. Based on the article's results, they can create their own interpretations of the themes presented, such as the myth of the scientist as hero or technology as salvation. Such an activity develops critical analysis skills, allowing students to identify myths and stereotypes in media messages, as well as to understand how these messages affect public perceptions of science.

In addition, this analysis could serve as a starting point for a discussion on the ethical responsibility of the scientific media. Students could consider how the media can both inform and mislead audiences by simplifying complex scientific issues. By analyzing the differences between media coverage and scientific reality, students will learn to recognize semiotic manipulation and the impact of commercialization on the representation of science.

This class could also include discussions of current examples from the covers of popular scientific magazines, which would allow students to practically apply semiotic theory and media analysis skills to the current cultural context. In this way, semiotic analysis of "Scientific American" covers could become not only an academic exercise, but also a tool that helps students understand communication mechanisms and their impact on society.

In the 2023/2024 academic year, I taught popular science journalism as part of the education and media specialization, in the course of study journalism and social communication, at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. These classes were aimed at developing students' skills of critical analysis of popular science content and semiotic approach to media messages. Students, analyzing selected covers and articles from the Polish edition of "Scientific American", had the opportunity to see how science is presented in the media, often in the context of scientific myths. A variety of suggestions were made during the discussion. Some students suggested that the covers may build unwarranted optimism around new technologies, while others noted that the media too often create an image of the scientist as a heroic individual, instead of portraying science as a team effort. One pointed out that some covers oversimplify complex scientific issues, which can lead to misunderstandings and a false sense of easy problem-solving. Another student noted that in depicting global crises, such as climate change, the media often operate with images of catastrophes, which instills fear, rather than promoting a balanced approach to the problem and encouraging rational debate. I plan to implement this class again in the 2024/2025 academic year, expanding the topics with new examples and deepening the critical analysis of popular science messages.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the semiotic analysis of the covers of the Polish edition of "Scientific American" and the scientific myths presented in the article, it can be concluded that the process of creating and receiving these covers has a profound impact on the public perception of science. These covers not only depict the latest scientific achievements, but also fit into a broader cultural context in which science is interpreted through the prism of mythological structures. These mythological interpretations, based on Roland Barthes' concept of science, portray science as a source of progress and often as an undeniable force of an almost divine nature.

The images depicted on covers reinforce beliefs about technology as the salvation of humanity, which can lead to oversimplification of complex scientific issues. This analysis shows that covers not only inform, but also modify public understanding of science, often giving it a sensationalist or ideological character. Such myths can inspire, but also mislead, creating a simplistic picture of science that overlooks its interdisciplinary and often collective nature.

A critical approach to such media messages is essential to understanding how culture influences our perceptions of science and its role in the modern world. Future research can help better understand the dynamics between the popularization of science and its media portrayal, pointing to the need for more balanced representation that not only informs, but also teaches critical thinking.

The cross-tabulation-based analysis reveals an interesting relationship between the various categories of scientific myths and the topics depicted on the covers. Eight main myths were identified, which include the myth of science as a driver of progress, the myth of global crises and disasters, and the myth of technology as inevitable evolution, among others. A cross-tabulation table juxtaposes these myths with the themes of the covers, making it possible to see which myths dominate each period. For example, the myth of technology as humanity's salvation is often linked to covers depicting modern technological advances such as artificial intelligence or space exploration, while the myth of global crises is particularly prominent during periods of heightened interest in climate change or public health threats. Such juxtapositions show that these myths not only respond to contemporary public fears and hopes, but also direct readers' attention toward specific narratives that can have far-reaching consequences for how science is perceived.

The analysis also reveals a certain undervaluing of social issues compared to the topics of space and nature, which is in line with the philosophy of scientism. Scientism, which puts the natural and technical sciences on a pedestal, promotes the belief that these fields offer the only true solutions to the problems of the modern world. As a result, covers often focus on space exploration, technological innovation and natural phenomena, leaving social issues in the background. Complex social problems, such as inequality, health policy or issues related to the ethics of science, are less frequently exposed. This emphasis on space and nature reinforces the myth of technology as salvation, and the natural sciences appear as an area of ultimate answers, which can lead to the marginalization of social discourse in the scientific media narrative.

Popular science media has a huge impact on the way the public views science and its role in solving global problems. By analyzing examples of science myths, students saw both positive and negative aspects of science popularization. A critical approach to cover stories and media narratives allowed them to understand the importance of conscious and responsible creation of scientific messages. The class showed that media education can effectively prepare future journalists to analyze and create content that not only informs, but also engages audiences in a more complex reflection on contemporary scientific and technological challenges.

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## The Role of the Teacher in the Formation of Media Competence of University Students: Problems and Prospects

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### Abstract

The actualization of media education issues in the modern world necessitates the improvement of the activities of universities in general, and the work of a teacher in particular. It is the teacher who is at the forefront of working with young people, responsible for developing skills in working with information, its analysis, understanding and generation. The purpose of this article is related to the study of the role of a teacher in the practices of forming students' media competence. The leading research method is a questionnaire survey of students of Russian universities (n = 633). It was found that students rate the efficiency of the teacher's use of multimedia services, presentations and other traditional attributes of working with information quite highly. However, with fairly high ratings of the level of teaching in higher education, a third of students note the lack of interactivity in the work of teachers. Self-assessments of the level of students' media competence showed a high level of polarization of knowledge and skills of young people. High ratings were received for such skills as "using different sources of information", "observance of the culture of behavior in the digital environment". Lower ratings were received for such competencies as "the ability to work with large volumes of digital data, conduct analytics", "produce multimedia content". The results of the qualitative study showed that the teacher's exactingness is a key factor in the formation of analytical skills for working with information. It was found that the insufficient content of digital platforms used in training with materials limits the formation of students' media competence.

**Keywords:** media competence, role of teacher, digital platforms, analytical skills, media product, educational environment, university.

### 1. Introduction

The mediatization of everyday life, the penetration of information and communication technologies into various professional fields and activities require the development of students' media literacy and their socialization in the media environment (Kazakov, 2024). At the forefront of solving these problems is the higher education system and its key subject – the teacher. Foreign studies emphasize the need to develop adequate tools for the formal educational environment of universities to develop students' media competence. In particular, such skills as the readiness to use information and communication technologies to solve professional problems and responsible behavior in the online space are of particular relevance (Zhu et al., 2021).

The key to solving these ambitious tasks lies in the hands of the teacher as a guide in the world of information and knowledge. The media competence of the teacher himself and his

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readiness to work with students in this direction ensures the scaling of positive changes in terms of conscious and responsible media consumption.

The thesis on the need to improve the professional skills of teachers in order to develop students' media competence is gaining significant support in scientific circles. The teacher faces the inert attitude of the student, which must not only be overcome, but also transformed into constructive communication practice in the media space of higher education. This is due to the fact that in modern conditions the student acts as a media consumer, which means that the teacher must have technologies for creating a media product and promoting it. Practices of joint (students and teachers) media design of unique content are becoming relevant (Simkacheva, Bakanov, 2024).

## 2. Materials and methods

The author attempts to critically comprehend the functional significance and place of a higher education teacher in the practices of developing students' media competencies. This became the goal of the study.

*The logic of achieving it is determined by the fulfillment of a number of research tasks:*

1. Analysis of the student's level of media competence according to the following parameters: the ability to critically comprehend digital communications products, the ability to work with large volumes of digital data, conduct analytics and produce multimedia content, analyzing the dependence of the formation of these competencies on the teacher's activities.

2. Analysis of students' assessments of the effectiveness of the teacher's activities in the process of working with multimedia services, using video materials, presentations, etc.

3. Establishing deficiencies in students' media competence, dysfunctions in the teacher's work as factors in the transformation of his role in the media space of higher education.

*Research hypotheses:*

1. Attention to the soft skills of a teacher in the context of digitalization and expansion of channels of interaction with a student has reduced the requirements for strengthening the professional basis of higher education. Working with large databases, the ability to generate multimedia content are becoming an area of professional deficit for a modern teacher.

2. A significant factor in the decline in students' media competence is the insufficient content of digital platforms (services) used in training with materials.

The key research method was a questionnaire survey of students. Respondents were recruited using the snowball method and personal contact with students. The status of "student of a higher education institution" served as a sign of representation. Other signs of representation were not introduced, as well as differentiation of students by socio-demographic characteristics, profile / place of study. Thus, the total sample was 633 people. Of these, 59.4 % are girls, 40.6 % are boys. 78.6 % are students of metropolitan universities, 21.3 % – regional. The profiles of study are represented relatively evenly: natural sciences – 32.5 %, humanitarian – 17.2 %, socio-economic – 26.1 % and technical – 24.2 %. The sample mainly included full-time students, which generally corresponds to the objectives of the study. The sample covers the following levels of study: bachelor's degree, master's degree, specialist degree.

## 3. Discussion

In the works of foreign scientists, attention is paid to the interpretation of the essence of media competence, the transformation of its substantive components and meanings in the context of post-digital education, the introduction of artificial intelligence (Nam, Bai, 2023). The era of "post-truth" places new demands on the skills of critical perception of information, searching for alternative sources (Fletcher, Park, 2017), skills in verifying the authenticity of information on the Internet (Metzger et al., 2010), and information skepticism (Edgerly, 2017).

Based on the importance of the above skills, we can agree with the opinion of scientists who conducted studies on the media competence of students and teachers in Brazil, Spain, Portugal and Venezuela. According to them, media competence includes a set of skills that allow one to consume and produce media products based on analytical and critical thinking (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019). A similar point of view is shared by other scientists, in whose works media competence is divided into the skills of competent media consumption and information production. Scientists include analysis, decoding, understanding and interpretation of

information among media consumption skills (Pereira, Moura, 2019). A number of studies highlight the importance of digital skills when working on media platforms: operational, navigational, social and creative skills (Lybeck et al., 2023).

Russian scientists draw attention to the need to develop media competence of young people, on the one hand, for successful integration into various spheres of public life, and, on the other hand, to increase the level of competitiveness in the labor market (Frolova, Rogach, 2022). In particular, the effectiveness of media education ensures the development of cultural-creative qualities of the individual, which contributes to the formation of new meanings of professional activity, new qualities and values (Yarnykh et al., 2020). Filling the educational environment with a socio-cultural component becomes the task of a modern teacher, in whose hands are concentrated the mechanisms for transforming the student's personal media culture.

In developing these conclusions, we can add the thesis of Chinese scientists who, based on an experimental study in Beijing, conclude that the teacher has priority responsibility for the implementation of educational initiatives in the field of media literacy. The results of the study confirmed the existence of a relationship between the student's media competence and the teacher's work (Zhang et al., 2024).

At the same time, a number of scientists believe that technical innovations have changed the criteria for assessing information, which, on the one hand, creates high demands on the personal epistemology of media consumers (Schwarzenegger, 2020), while on the other hand, they form a methodological gap in the education system (Kine, Davidsons, 2022). Explaining the second part of this thesis, it is worth noting that the problems are associated with the difficulty of identifying categories of students in need of media literacy training, as well as with possible deficiencies in the media skills and relevant competencies among the teachers (Mateus et al., 2019). It can be assumed that a higher education teacher, provided that he or she maximizes his or her skills in the media sphere, can become a driver for the formation of media competence among young people, both in terms of consumption and creation of media products.

#### 4. Results

Interpretation of the obtained research materials allowed us to draw a number of conclusions. Firstly, it is worth noting that the respondents rate the effectiveness of the teacher's use of multimedia services in their work quite highly. However, the trajectory of the scores given shows a decrease from maximum values to average as they move from traditional media practices (presentations, messengers for additional communication with the teacher) to exclusive practices of using digital services and programs. In particular, less than 2/3 of students (62.4 %) note the use of digital educational services in the teacher's work (Table 1). It should be noted that the potential of educational digital services today is beyond doubt. This is due to the fact that, on the one hand, the use of digital services in education ensures that students consolidate basic knowledge in specialized subjects. On the other hand, they open up wide opportunities for media design. As practice shows, modern digital educational services have a wide range of use of digital tools that allow the teacher to optimize work with students, taking into account modern capabilities and requirements. Among other things, the active presence of a student on educational digital services contributes to the development of related digital skills, including operational, information and communication, and situational navigation skills.

**Table 1.** Distribution of responses to the question: "Do teachers use in their work ...?" (%)

<i>Answer options</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
presentations	95.6	4.4
video materials	76.6	23.4
digital platforms for organizing the educational process	83.4	16.6
corporate and personal messengers for additional communication	84.2	15.8
digital educational services	62.4	37.6
distance learning system	73.3	26.7
fascinating interactive tasks	52.6	47.4

Modern media consumption trends create a high demand for the use of interactivity, which allows focusing educational practices on the moment "here and now". Unfortunately, 47.4 % of

the surveyed students note the absence of such pedagogical tools in their educational experience. The data obtained correlate with the respondents' answers to the question about the problems of studying at the university (Table 2). Thus, with a fairly high level of teaching in higher education (87.2 % of students did not encounter such a problem), 34.0 % of respondents note the absence of interactivity.

**Table 2.** Distribution of responses to the question: “Are the following problems of education present in your university (in the field of your training)?” (%)

<i>Answer options</i>	Yes	No
uninteresting to study	29.5	70.5
difficult to study	39.3	60.7
lack/insufficiency of content of digital platforms (services) used in teaching	34.3	65.7
no interactivity	34.0	66.0
low level of teaching	12.8	87.2

It is noteworthy that just over a third of the surveyed students (34.3 %) critically assess the content of digital platforms with relevant educational material. Recognizing the importance of the technical component of organizing the work of digital platforms and services, the priority role in the quantitative and qualitative content filling should be given to the teacher. As V.R. Milushev rightly notes, a modern teacher is required to combine a traditional approach to teaching with the effective use of media resources in educational activities. According to the scientist, the meaningful filling of digital platforms with media resources will ensure a high level of learning efficiency. In particular, media resources become the basis for the development of new knowledge, providing expanded opportunities for information coverage of the topic (Milushin, 2023).

During the analysis of contingency tables, some dependencies were identified. In the group of respondents who noted the problem of insufficient filling of digital platforms with educational materials, the proportion of those who have the skills of critical understanding of digital communications products is lower (84.3 % compared to 88.7 %). The analysis allows us to conclude that the content of digital platforms affects the level of media competence of students. (Table 3).

**Table 3.** The relationship between the availability of materials on educational platforms (digital services) and students' assessments of their digital skills (%)

Lack/insufficiency of content of digital platforms (services) used in training	How would you rate your digital skills, where «5» is very high, “1” is very low				
	1	2	3	4	5
use different digital sources for studying					
yes	6.5	8.3	24.4	24.9	35.9
no	4.1	6.5	19.7	27.2	42.5
Average value	4.9	7.1	21.3	26.4	40.3
produce multimedia content					
yes	17.5	18.0	28.1	13.8	22.6
no	16.3	18.0	23.8	14.7	27.2
Average value	16.7	18.0	25.3	14.4	25.6
can work with large volumes of digital data and conduct analytics					
yes	11.1	17.1	32.3	22.1	17.4
no	9.1	17.1	29.3	23.1	21.4
Average value	9.8	17.1	30.3	22.7	20.1
observe the culture of behavior in the digital environment					
yes	7.4	8.7	19.4	22.1	42.4
no	3.1	8.4	15.1	25.0	48.4
Average value	4.6	8.5	16.6	24.0	46.3

The “problem” group of students has a higher proportion of those who rated their ability to apply digital skills for study as low. It should be noted that, in general, students are quite optimistic in assessing their media competence (40.3 % – “5” and 26.4 % – “4”).

It should be noted that the content of digital platforms also affects other aspects of students' media competence. In particular, 41.9 % of students who have no problems with the content of digital platforms at the university highly rated (in total “4” and “5” points) the skill of developing multimedia content (14.7 % and 27.2 %, respectively). For comparison, in the “problem” group, the proportion of students with high self-assessments of the skill of developing multimedia content is lower (36.4 %). In general, it should be noted that this skill is characterized by the lowest student ratings. More than 1/3 (in total “1” and “2” points) of respondents did not develop the skill of developing multimedia content. It seems possible that the active media consumption, which is typical of a modern student, has already ensured the development of his or her skills in searching and primary processing of information.

This was facilitated by the rapid integration of social networks into personal, professional and educational networks (Zhu et al., 2020). At the same time, creative competence, which includes the generation of a new media product, is not provided by educational institutions with a comprehensive methodological approach. It is fair to note that some students have successfully mastered this skill in everyday life and do not associate its formation with the task of the teacher.

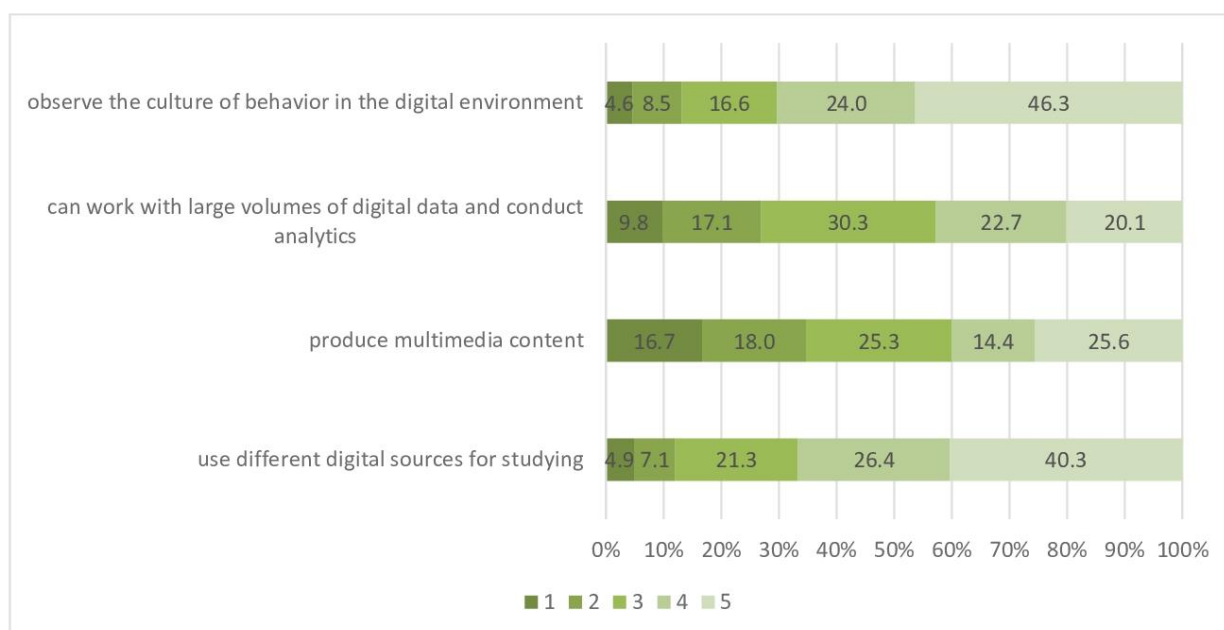
The research results are confirmed by materials from focus group interviews.

*Olga T.:* “These days, developing multimedia content is a cool skill. But they don’t teach it at universities, there are no programs or teachers ready to teach...”

*Dmitry K.:* “Not everything should be taught at a university. Not everyone needs to be able to develop multimedia... And if you want, you can learn it yourself.”

Based on the data obtained, a conclusion is made about the existence of a connection between the low level of development of students' media competence and the deficit of teachers' pedagogical skills in terms of pedagogical design of e-courses, the deficiencies in the IT infrastructure of universities. This conclusion is partially confirmed by the works of other Russian scientists. In particular, they conclude that in the context of large-scale digitalization, in order to maintain the role of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge and mentor for students, it is necessary to transform the online learning environment and change the methodology of e-learning (Tatarinov, 2020; Vaganova et al., 2019).

An unfavorable situation is also typical for such aspect of students' media competence as “ability to work with large volumes of digital data, conduct analytics” (Figure 1). Less than half of respondents (42.8 %) rated their skills at “4” and “5” points.



**Fig. 1.** Self-assessment of students' level of development of their media skills, where “5” is excellent, “1” is absent (%)

The results of the focus group study showed that in some cases students have a distorted perception of the skill of working with large volumes of digital data.

*Anna G.: "I know how to work with digital data, everything is on the Internet, I can find and read it all, draw conclusions. You don't need to get an education to do this. I can find fresh data faster than the teacher".*

*Dmitry K.: "It seems to me that teachers themselves do not know how to work with big data".*

It is fair to note that students of technical specialties demonstrate higher standards of working with big data.

*Grigory S.: "Every techie knows data analysis algorithms, a programming language... This is the basis. But, of course, a lot depends on the teacher and the capabilities of the university".*

Thus, despite the high self-esteem of students their media competencies, the role of the driver in their formation belongs to the teacher. During the educational process, the teacher should use educational practices and tasks that maximally reveal his media skills to students. This approach has a number of advantages, as it allows not only to maintain authority and "media leadership" in front of students, but also to demonstrate the importance of media competencies in real life. The purposefulness of demonstrating the teacher's media competencies will also, in our opinion, avoid dysfunctions of their spontaneity formation of students' media competence, which in most cases is destructive. In the latter case, distortions in the perception of the content of media competencies may arise, as well as destructive practices of working with media resources may develop.

The results of the study showed that a low level of teaching becomes a barrier to students acquiring basic knowledge and skills in the mediasphere. The study tested the connections between the level of teaching and the development of such skills as «uses different digital sources for studying» and «can work with large volumes of digital data, conduct analytics» (Table 4).

**Table 4.** The relationship between a weak level of teaching and students' assessment of the level of development of their media skills (%)

Low level of teaching	How would you rate your digital skills, where "5" is very high, "1" is very low				
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>use different digital sources for studying</i>					
yes	14.8	8.6	32.0	21.0	23.6
no	3.4	6.9	19.7	27.2	42.8
Average value	4.9	7.1	21.3	26.4	40.3
<i>can work with large volumes of digital data and conduct analytics</i>					
yes	17.3	21.0	25.9	21.0	14.8
no	8.7	16.5	31.0	23.0	20.8
Average value	9.8	17.1	30.3	22.7	20.1

According to the data obtained, students who noted the presence of such a problem at their university as a low level of pedagogical skills of a teacher, more often than other respondents also assess their digital competencies as insufficient. In particular, the analysis of the results of the study on the skill "use different digital sources for studying" showed a share of 14.8 %, which is 9.9 percentage points higher than the average; on the skill "can work with large volumes of digital data and conduct analytics" – 17.3 %, which is 7.5 percentage points higher than the average for the sample. A similar situation of exceeding the average values is observed in the group of respondents who did not indicate the presence of teaching problems at their university. However, the proportions here have a positive vector – the share of those who assessed their level of competence as higher.

The materials of the focus group study made it possible to see the reasons for the obtained dependence.

*Konstantin A.: "There are demanding teachers who make you prepare analytics, look for different digital sources, and draw conclusions".*

*Victor B.: "My teacher... is not satisfied with simple copy-paste from the Internet. At first, it irritated me, but when I figured it out, I realized that this is a good skill that will come in handy in the future. In general, I pumped up my skills".*

Thus, the role of the teacher is seen not only in the transmission of knowledge, but also in the organization of effective systems for their control. Students especially note that the teacher's exactingness is a key factor in the formation of their media competence, including the formation of analytical skills. In foreign studies, barriers to the development of students' media competence include not only the insufficient level of professionalism of the teacher, but also the institutional conditions of the functioning of educational institutions. The Institute of Education, due to its reliance on centuries-old traditions and the academic presentation of knowledge, cannot fully integrate digital technologies into the educational process. This problem does not allow for an effective transition to a new level of practices of digital interaction between teacher and student (Masalimova et al., 2014).

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that students highly evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' use of multimedia technologies and platforms. It can be assumed that digitalization of education and updating of retraining and advanced training programs for teaching staff have had a beneficial effect on the teacher's media competence and their willingness to use multimedia technologies in the classroom. However, an analysis of students' qualitative assessments showed that there are deficiencies in the teacher's media skills. While traditional media practices are quite popular in the teacher's work, exclusive practices of using digital services and programs are minimally represented. The lack of these media skills reduces the teacher's authority, both in terms of the process of knowledge transfer and in terms of popularizing media education. The modern media environment equips students with the skills of searching and analyzing information, while the creative competence of generating a new media product requires an integrated approach to its formation and inclusion in educational practices. The research results showed that 34.7 % of students today have not developed the skill of developing multimedia content. It can be assumed that the insufficient level of development of students' media competencies is due to both the weakness of the teacher's skills in terms of pedagogical design of electronic courses and the deficiencies of the IT infrastructure of universities. Indirect confirmation of this conclusion is the opinion of a third of respondents who experience a lack of interactivity in the educational process.

One of the limitations in the development of students' media competence is the lack or insufficiency of the teacher's filling of digital platforms and services with educational content used in training. This problem affects such a skill of students as critical understanding of digital communications products. Similarly, students note the deficit of such an aspect of students' media competence as «the ability to work with large volumes of digital data, conduct analytics». The increasing complexity of everyday operations when working in a digital environment makes these skills extremely relevant to ensure the successful functioning of an individual in financial, economic and social life. In addition, analytical skills increase the level of competitiveness of a graduate in the labor market. A teacher, possessing the relevant knowledge and a high level of exactingness, acts as a key subject in the formation of a student's media competence in terms of his work with big data, preparation of analytical conclusions. The role and authority of a teacher is based on the ability to work with large databases, make analytical conclusions and generate new knowledge. Today, the emphasis in understanding the role of the teacher has significantly shifted towards "soft" skills (communication, empathy, charisma). However, it would be fair to note that such an interpretation narrows the role of the teacher, leaving key professional interests on the periphery.

The results of the study showed that a higher level of teaching at the university allows for the successful development of such student skills as "I use different digital sources for study" and "I can work with large volumes of digital data and conduct analytics." The results of the focus group interview confirmed that the teacher's exactingness becomes a key driver in the formation of students' media competence, including the formation of analytical skills.

Thus, the key vectors for improving students' media skills and their competencies in working in the modern media space are determined not only by the teacher's readiness to provide pedagogical support for this process, but also by the availability of the necessary his skills. The results obtained emphasize the importance of developing the teacher's media competencies in accordance with new digital requirements. This approach will help increase the teacher's

authority in the educational process, as well as ensure greater involvement and motivation of students to acquire new skills. The study established the importance of developing "fundamental" knowledge and competencies in young people. Excessive emphasis in the educational process on the development of soft skills leads to a decrease in pedagogical attention to the academic component of higher education. This imbalance is reflected in a decrease in the on students' fundamental knowledge and skills that allow working with large databases, analytically comprehending them and generating new high-quality media content.

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## Exposing Cloned Newspaper Pages on Social Media: the Role of User Awareness and Knowledge, and a Framework for Addressing Identity Theft

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### Abstract

The digital age has transformed how people consume news and interact with media content, but it has also given rise to the widespread dissemination of misinformation and cloned media content on social media platforms. This paper reviews the existing literature to develop a conceptual framework, the Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF), aimed at enhancing user awareness and knowledge of fake news and cloned media pages. By examining key factors such as source credibility, media literacy and algorithmic curation, this study proposes a comprehensive framework to assist users in identifying and understanding deceptive content. The framework integrates insights from communication studies, psychology and information science to provide a holistic approach to media literacy. The findings underscore the need for coordinated efforts to improve digital literacy and promote transparent practices on social media platforms. ONCITF offers practical applications for educators, policymakers and social media practitioners to mitigate the effect of misinformation and foster a more critically engaged public.

**Keywords:** fake news, cloned online newspaper pages, social media, media literacy, source credibility, identity theft, ONCITF.

### 1. Introduction

In the digital age, the proliferation of information across social media platforms has revolutionised how people consume news and engage with media content. However, this transformation has also led to the emergence of noteworthy challenges, notably the widespread dissemination of misinformation and the creation of cloned media content and fake news pages. These phenomena have serious implications for public trust and the overall credibility of online information. The increasing sophistication of these deceptive practices necessitates a comprehensive approach to enhancing user awareness and knowledge to effectively combat fake news and cloned media pages. This paper seeks to address this issue by reviewing the extant literature and developing a conceptual framework aimed at understanding and identifying fake news media pages and content in online spaces, particularly on social media platforms.

The primary aim of this paper is to propose a robust conceptual framework that delineates the factors influencing users' awareness and knowledge of cloned media content and pages. By integrating insights from existing research, this framework will serve as a tool for users to pass through the complex information landscape of social media. The objectives of this study include: examining the current state of knowledge regarding fake news and cloned media content;

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identifying the key factors that contribute to user awareness and understanding of these issues; and proposing a conceptual framework that can be used to enhance media literacy and critical evaluation skills among social media users.

Recent studies have highlighted the urgent need for improved media literacy and critical thinking skills to counteract the spread of misinformation. For instance, Pennycook and Rand (Pennycook, Rand, 2018) found that false news spreads more rapidly than true news on social media platforms, indicating the effectiveness of fake news in capturing user attention. Additionally, A.H. Alsharif and A.A. Alsharif (Alsharif, 2021) emphasised the role of source credibility and content quality in shaping user perceptions and trust in online information. These findings underscore the necessity of a conceptual framework that can help users discern credible information from deceptive content.

The proposed conceptual framework in this paper is informed by interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on theories from communication studies, psychology and information science. It aims to identify and explain the various factors that influence user awareness and knowledge of fake news and cloned media content. These factors include source credibility, media literacy, algorithmic curation and the psychological heuristics employed by users when evaluating online information. By understanding these elements, the framework seeks to provide a comprehensive approach to enhancing user capability in identifying and responding to fake news.

Moreover, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on digital media literacy by offering practical recommendations for educators, policymakers and social media platforms. Enhancing user education and promoting transparent algorithmic practices are crucial steps in mitigating the effect of misinformation. As highlighted by Vosoughi et al. (Vosoughi et al., 2018), addressing the root causes of misinformation spread requires coordinated efforts across various stakeholders. This paper aims to support these efforts by providing a theoretically grounded and empirically informed framework for understanding and combating fake news.

The increasing prevalence of cloned media content and fake news on social media platforms poses a serious challenge to the integrity of online information. By reviewing the literature and developing a conceptual framework, this paper seeks to enhance user awareness and knowledge, thereby contributing to the broader goal of fostering a more informed and critically engaged public. The proposed framework serves as a valuable tool for researchers, educators and practitioners dedicated to addressing the complex issue of misinformation in the digital age.

*Definition of Key Terms:* In this sub-section, the following key terms are defined, namely awareness, knowledge, social media pages and cloned social media pages (cloning).

In the context of this study, 'awareness' and 'knowledge' are crucial constructs for understanding how individuals interact with and discern fake news on social media, particularly concerning cloned online newspaper pages.

*Awareness:* Awareness is defined as the state of being conscious of and recognising the presence and characteristics of fake news and cloned online social media pages. It involves an initial understanding that such deceptive content exists and is pervasive within digital platforms. Awareness encompasses the ability to identify the signs and indicators of fake news, such as sensationalist headlines, questionable sources and inconsistencies within the content. According to Jiang and Leung (Jiang, Leung, 2020a), awareness is the preliminary stage in the cognitive process of media literacy, where individuals begin to acknowledge the potential for misinformation and its implications.

*Knowledge:* Knowledge, on the other hand, refers to the comprehensive understanding and factual information that individuals possess about the nature, purpose and strategies of fake news and cloned online social media pages. Knowledge involves a deeper level of cognitive processing that goes beyond mere recognition, including the ability to critically evaluate the authenticity of news sources, apply verification techniques and understand the broader context of media production and dissemination. As Livingstone (Livingstone, 2018a) suggests, knowledge is integral to media literacy, enabling individuals to not only detect but also counteract the influence of fake news through informed decision-making and critical thinking.

*Cloning:* In the context of this study, cloning refers to the unauthorised creation of a duplicate page that mimics an existing legitimate page. This practice involves copying the visual and textual content, including profile pictures, cover photos, posts and other identifying information, to deceive users into believing that the cloned page is the original. Cloned social media pages are often used for malicious purposes, such as phishing, spreading misinformation, or engaging in fraudulent activities (Zhao, Zhang, 2017).

Cloning on social media, e.g., on Facebook, Twitter (i.e., X), Instagram, etc., can seriously undermine the credibility and trustworthiness of legitimate entities. This phenomenon exploits the trust users place in familiar pages, leading to potential harm such as data breaches, financial losses and reputational damage (Rosenberg, Egbert, 2011). The malicious actors behind cloned pages may use them to solicit personal information, propagate scams, or manipulate public opinion by spreading false information.

Research has shown that social media platforms, due to their open and interconnected nature, are particularly susceptible to cloning and other forms of identity theft. Zhao and Zhang (Zhao, Zhang, 2017) discuss the technical and social vulnerabilities that enable the proliferation of cloned pages, highlighting the ease with which malicious actors can replicate content and mislead users. Moreover, the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms amplifies the impact of these malicious activities, making it challenging to contain the spread once it begins (Rosenberg, Egbert, 2011).

The implications of cloned social media pages are far-reaching. For businesses, these pages can divert traffic, dilute brand messaging and erode customer trust. For individuals, they pose risks such as identity theft and cyberbullying. Governments and public figures are also vulnerable, as cloned pages can be used to disseminate fake news or propaganda, thereby influencing public perception and undermining democratic processes (Zhao, Zhang, 2017).

Addressing the issue of cloned social media pages requires a multifaceted approach. Social media platforms must enhance their detection and verification mechanisms to identify and remove cloned pages promptly. Users should be educated about the risks and taught how to verify the authenticity of pages they follow. Additionally, legal frameworks need to be strengthened to hold perpetrators accountable and provide recourse for victims (Rosenberg, Egbert, 2011).

Hence, cloning in the context of Facebook pages is a significant cybersecurity threat that involves the creation of unauthorised duplicate pages for malicious purposes. The impact of cloned pages is extensive, affecting businesses, individuals and public institutions. Effective mitigation requires improved technical measures, user education and robust legal protections.

*Social Media Pages:* The influence of social media pages extends beyond mere information dissemination and user engagement. They play a critical role in shaping public opinion and fostering a sense of community. By providing a platform for dialogue and interaction, social media pages can facilitate the formation of online communities that share common interests and goals. This aspect is particularly important for non-profit organisations, advocacy groups and social movements, which rely on such platforms to mobilise support and raise awareness about their causes (Lovejoy, Saxton, 2012).

Furthermore, the analytic tools provided by social media pages offer valuable insights into audience behaviour and engagement. Facebook Insights, for example, allows page administrators to track metrics such as page views, post reach and engagement rates. These analytics are crucial for refining content strategies and optimising the effectiveness of communication efforts (Gummerus et al., 2012). By understanding which types of content resonate most with their audience, page administrators can tailor their posts to maximise impact and foster deeper engagement.

Social media pages also offer opportunities for targeted advertising. With the ability to create highly specific audience segments based on demographics, interests and behaviours, organisations can ensure that their advertisements reach the most relevant users. This targeted approach enhances the efficiency of advertising campaigns and improves return on investment (ROI) (de Vries et al., 2012).

For instance, in the context of crisis communication such as the faking or cloning of an organisation's authentic page(s) by cyber criminals, social media pages serve as vital tools for disseminating timely and accurate information. During crises, organisations can use their social media pages to provide updates, correct misinformation and interact directly with their audiences and/or affected individuals. This immediate and direct communication helps to manage public perception and maintain trust (Liu et al., 2011).

The importance of social media pages is also evident in the academic literature on social media marketing and communication. Studies have shown that the interactive nature of these pages can significantly enhance user engagement and loyalty. For example, Gummerus et al. (Gummerus et al., 2012) found that user participation on brand Facebook pages positively influences customer loyalty and word-of-mouth behaviour. Similarly, research by Pletikosa Cvijikj

and Michahelles (Pletikosa Cvijikj, Michahelles, 2013) indicates that the emotional tone of posts can significantly affect user engagement levels.

Hence, social media page is not merely a digital presence but a dynamic tool that supports strategic communication, marketing, community building, crisis management, content verification and combating disinformation. The success of an organisation's social media page hinges on the organisation's effective content strategy, user engagement and the use of platform-specific features and analytics. As such, it remains an indispensable element of contemporary digital communication strategies, especially for news media organisations.

*Literature Review – Influence of Cloned Pages on Media Credibility:* Cloned pages are one of the specific forms of fake news that the current study focuses on. In the context of this study, cloned pages are social media sites that mimic the appearance and content of legitimate news sites, but contain false or misleading information. Cloned pages are often created and distributed by malicious actors who seek to deceive, manipulate, or profit from the online audience. Cloned pages are especially problematic in the Nigerian context, where online journalism is still developing and facing various challenges such as lack of regulation, professionalism and ethics (Lazer, Baum, 2018; Meta, 2022; Reuters Institute..., 2020).

The conceptual framework assumes that cloned pages have a negative effect on media credibility, which is the quality and accuracy of the information provided by the media, as well as the professionalism and ethics of the media practitioners (Reuters Institute..., 2020; Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020; Swaen, George, 2022). Media credibility is an important factor that affects the trust and confidence that the public has in the media, as well as the influence and impact that the media have on the public opinion and behaviour (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Meyer, 1988; Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020). The conceptual framework hypothesises that cloned pages undermine media credibility by:

- Creating confusion and uncertainty among the online audience, who may have difficulty distinguishing between real and fake news pages or sites and may be exposed to contradictory or inconsistent information;

- Damaging the reputation and trustworthiness of the legitimate news media pages or sites, who may be associated with or mistaken for the cloned pages and may lose their credibility and authority as sources of information; and

- Spreading misinformation and disinformation that may have adverse social, political and economic consequences such as influencing the public perception and attitude toward certain issues, events, or actors, or affecting the public decision and action on matters of public interest or concern.

The current study aims to identify the factors that influence user awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content, as well as develop a conceptual framework for that purpose.

*A Review of Related Theories:* The study's theoretical framework is anchored on two theories main theoretical perspectives, namely the Trust in Media theories and Media Credibility frameworks. From the Trust in Media theoretical theories, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was selected while from the media credibility frameworks, Social Media Credibility Framework (SMCF) was adopted.

*a) Media Credibility Frameworks:* As mentioned earlier, media credibility is another complex and multidimensional concept that has been examined from various angles and approaches such as journalism, information science and human-computer interaction (Flanagin, Metzger, 2008; Li, Wang, 2021). Some of the influential frameworks and models that explain media credibility are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

First, the multi-dimensional model of media credibility identifies four main dimensions of media credibility: believability, accuracy, fairness and completeness (Gaziano, McGrath, 1986). Believability refers to the extent to which the media present the information in a convincing and coherent manner, accuracy refers to the extent to which the media provide the information that is factual and correct, fairness refers to the extent to which the media cover the information in a balanced and impartial way, and completeness refers to the extent to which the media include all the relevant and important aspects of the information (Gaziano, McGrath, 1986; Li, Wang, 2021).

Second, the dual-processing model of media credibility distinguishes between two types of processing that the audience uses to evaluate media credibility: heuristic and systematic (Sundar, 2008). Heuristic processing involves the use of simple cues and shortcuts such as the source,

the medium, or the appearance of the information, to judge the credibility of the media. Systematic processing involves the use of more elaborate and effortful reasoning such as the evidence, the logic, or the consistency of the information, to assess the credibility of the media (Li, Wang, 2021; Sundar, 2008).

Third, the social media credibility framework adapts and extends the existing models of media credibility to the context of social media, which are online platforms that enable users to create and share content and interact with each other (Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Singh, 2022). The framework proposes that the credibility of social media depends on three main factors: the content, the source and the medium. The content refers to the quality and accuracy of the information provided by the social media, the source refers to the reputation and trustworthiness of the user who created or shared the information, and the medium refers to the features and functions of the social media platform that facilitate or hinder the verification and validation of the information (Lee, Kim, 2023; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013).

*Relevance of Media Credibility Frameworks to the Current Study:* The theoretical framework of trust in media and media credibility is relevant and applicable to the current study, as it provides a comprehensive and coherent basis for understanding and investigating the research problem and the research questions. The current study aims to develop, design and propose (proffer) a conceptual framework that will identify and explain factors influencing user awareness and knowledge about cloned content and pages in online media spaces, such as social media platforms. The study also seeks to provide some practical implications and recommendations for improving user awareness and knowledge regarding faked content and pages in online media, as well as enhancing the quality and credibility of online content, e.g., online journalism.

Moreover, the theoretical framework can help to achieve these objectives by:

- Defining and operationalising the key concepts and variables of the study such as trust in media, media credibility, awareness, knowledge and cloned online newspaper and other relevant media's pages.

- Identifying and measuring the dimensions and indicators of trust in media and media credibility such as expertise, trustworthiness, dependency, social capital, uses and gratifications, believability, accuracy, fairness, completeness, heuristic processing, systematic processing, content, source and medium.

- Explaining and testing the relationships and effects of trust in media and media credibility on the awareness and knowledge of users, as well as the factors that moderate these relationships, namely age, gender and user experience.

- Providing and applying the theoretical and empirical insights and evidence from the literature on trust in media and media credibility to the Nigerian context, as well as the specific context of the online media users, such as students and technocrats, who could be future journalists, media professionals and opinion leaders.

*b) The Social Media Credibility Framework:* From Media Credibility Frameworks perspective, this study chose the Social Media Credibility Framework for its conceptual framework and for data explanation.

The social media credibility framework is a conceptual model that describes the factors and processes that affect the credibility evaluation of information found on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Q&A systems. The framework was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013) (also, e.g., Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. The framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process (Li, Wang, 2021; Meyer, 1988; Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020).

The source component refers to the originator or provider of the information on social media such as an individual, an organisation, or a group. The source component has three sub-components: source characteristics, source cues and source reputation. Source characteristics are the attributes of the source that affect its perceived credibility such as expertise, trustworthiness, authority and bias. Source cues are the indicators of the source's identity and quality that are available on social media such as name, profile, photo, verification and rating. Source reputation is the collective

evaluation of the source's credibility by other users or entities such as endorsements, reviews, comments and citations (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

The message component refers to the content or information that is transmitted or shared by the source on social media such as text, image, video, or audio. The message component has three sub-components: message characteristics, message cues and message quality. Message characteristics are the features of the message that affect its perceived credibility such as accuracy, completeness, timeliness and consistency. Message cues are the indicators of the message's validity and reliability that are available on social media such as links, references, hashtags and metadata. Message quality is the collective evaluation of the message's credibility by other users or entities such as likes, shares, retweets and feedback (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

The medium component refers to the platform or channel that facilitates the creation, dissemination and consumption of the information on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Q&A systems. The medium component has three sub-components: medium characteristics, medium cues and medium reputation. Medium characteristics are the attributes of the medium that affect its perceived credibility such as functionality, design, accessibility and security. Medium cues are the indicators of the medium's identity and quality that are available on social media such as logo, domain, layout and interface. Medium reputation is the collective evaluation of the medium's credibility by other users or entities such as ratings, rankings, awards and certifications (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

The receiver component refers to the user or consumer of the information on social media such as an individual, an organisation, or a group. The receiver component has three sub-components: receiver characteristics, receiver cues and receiver outcomes. Receiver characteristics are the attributes of the receiver that affect its perceived credibility such as prior knowledge, motivation, interest and involvement. Receiver cues are the indicators of the receiver's identity and quality that are available on social media such as profile, activity, network and history. Receiver outcomes are the effects or consequences of the receiver's credibility evaluation on social media such as satisfaction, trust, engagement and behaviour (Alsharif, 2021; Li, Wang, 2021; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Meyer, 1988).

*SMCF Assumptions and Relations to this Study:*The main assumptions of the social media credibility framework and how they relate to this study's topic and questions are discussed below.

The social media credibility framework was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. According to the scholars, the framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process.

The main assumptions of the social media credibility framework, according to Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), are:

1. Credibility is a multidimensional and dynamic construct that depends on the interaction of source, message, medium and receiver components, as well as the context and situation of the information.
2. Credibility evaluation is a cognitive and affective process that involves the use of heuristics, cues and reputation indicators to assess the validity and reliability of the information.
3. Credibility evaluation is influenced by the characteristics and motivations of the information seekers and providers, as well as the features and functionalities of the social media platforms.
4. Credibility evaluation has implications and consequences for the information seekers and providers, as well as the social media platforms and society at large.

These assumptions relate to the study's topic in the following ways. First, this study focuses on the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages. This implies that this study is interested in how users evaluate the credibility of online newspaper pages as a source of information and education, and how they cope with the challenges of identifying and avoiding cloned online newspaper pages. This aligns with the first and second assumptions of the social media credibility framework, which suggest that credibility is a complex and dynamic construct

that depends on various factors and processes, and that credibility evaluation is a cognitive and affective process that involves the use of heuristics, cues and reputation indicators.

Second, this study also examines the factors that influence users' credibility evaluation of online newspaper pages such as their prior knowledge, motivation, interest, involvement, media literacy, media awareness and media skills. This relates to the third assumption of the social media credibility framework, which indicates that credibility evaluation is influenced by the characteristics and motivations of the information seekers and providers, as well as the features and functionalities of the social media platforms.

Third, this study will also theorise for users' credibility evaluation of online newspaper pages such as their satisfaction, trust, engagement, behaviours and potential to become victims or perpetrators of media manipulation and deception. This connects to the fourth assumption of the social media credibility framework, which states that credibility evaluation has implications and consequences for the information seekers and providers, as well as the social media platforms and society at large. Therefore, this study will theorise for how users' credibility evaluation affects their media use and consumption, and how they can improve their media literacy and awareness.

*SMCF in Research:* The social media credibility framework (SMCF) was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. The framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process.

Several studies have used the social media credibility framework to investigate the credibility evaluation of online newspaper pages. For example, a study by Cassidy (Cassidy, 2007) examined the perceptions of print and online daily newspaper journalists of the credibility of Internet news information, and found that online newspaper journalists rated Internet news information as 'significantly more credible' than did the print newspaper journalists. The study also found that Internet reliance, populist mobiliser role conception and adversarial role conception were significant predictors of online news credibility. Another study by Shabani and Keshavarz (Shabani, Keshavarz, 2022) explored the role of media literacy in the credibility evaluation of social media information among students, and found that media literacy could affect all components of the credibility evaluation, except for currency evaluation. The study also found no significant difference in credibility evaluation with respect to the application used. A third study by Bashir et al. (Bashir et al., 2022) measured the personal and academic differences in students' perceived social media credibility, and found that students considered social media partially credible. The study also found that currency, community wellness, understandability and completeness of information were the highly rated facets, while factual and unbiased information was the low rated aspects.

*SMCF's Strengths and Limitations:* The strengths and limitations of the social media credibility framework and how it addresses the gaps and challenges in the existing research are discussed below.

The social media credibility framework was proposed by Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013), who synthesised the existing literature on social media and credibility from various disciplines such as communication, information science, psychology and computer science. The framework consists of four main components: source, message, medium and receiver. Each component has several sub-components that influence the credibility evaluation of social media information. The framework also considers the dynamic and interactive nature of social media, as well as the contextual and situational factors that affect the credibility evaluation process.

According to Metzger and Flanagin (Metzger, Flanagin, 2013) and Gan et al. (Gan et al., 2015), the social media credibility framework has some strengths such as:

1. It recognises the multidimensional and dynamic nature of credibility, which depends on the interaction of source, message, medium and receiver components, as well as the context and situation of the information.
2. It provides a comprehensive and flexible framework to analyse various social media platforms and contexts such as online newspaper pages, health information, political communication and organisational issues.
3. It helps to understand the cognitive and affective processes involved in credibility



evaluation such as the use of heuristics, cues and reputation indicators to assess the validity and reliability of the information.

4. It helps to understand the implications and consequences of credibility evaluation for the information seekers and providers, as well as the social media platforms and society at large such as satisfaction, trust, engagement, behaviours and potential to become victims or perpetrators of media manipulation and deception.

However, the social media credibility framework also has some limitations (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Gan et al., 2015) such as:

1. It ignores the power and influence of media producers and distributors, who shape and manipulate the media content and availability according to their interests and agendas.

2. It fails to account for the social and cultural factors that affect media use and consumption such as norms, values, beliefs and ideologies.

3. It lacks clear definitions and measurements of key concepts such as credibility, validity, reliability and quality, which makes it difficult to compare and generalise the results of different studies.

4. It overestimates the rationality and autonomy of media users, who may not always be aware of or consistent with their motivations and expectations, and who may be influenced by other factors such as habits, emotions and peer pressure.

5. It neglects the structural and ideological aspects of media production and distribution such as ownership, regulation, censorship and bias, which may limit or distort the media choices and preferences of the users.

The social media credibility framework addresses some of the gaps and challenges in the existing research by providing a user-centered and media-specific perspective to study the media use and consumption. For example, the framework helps to explore the motivations and gratifications of online newspaper readers, who may have different needs and expectations from traditional print newspaper readers, and who may face different challenges such as credibility, quality and profitability of online newspapers (Chyi, Sylvie, 2001; Chyi, Yang, 2009). The framework also helps to examine the social media use and consumption of users, who may have different media skills and competencies from other media users, and who may face different challenges such as media literacy, media awareness and media manipulation (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Gan et al., 2015; Hsiao et al., 2015).

However, the social media credibility framework also leaves some gaps and challenges in the existing research by being too individualistic and descriptive, and by ignoring the broader social and political contexts of media use and consumption. For example, the framework does not address the issues of media ownership, regulation, censorship and bias, which may affect the quality, diversity and credibility of online newspapers, and which may influence the media literacy, awareness and trust of users. The framework also does not consider the power relations and conflicts between media producers and consumers, and how they may shape and manipulate the media content and agenda (Al-Jabri et al., 2015; Metzger, Flanagin, 2013; Shabani, Keshavarz, 2022). Therefore, the framework needs to be complemented by other communication theories and perspectives such as the critical theory, the political economy theory and the cultural studies theory, which can provide a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the media use and consumption in the contemporary society.

*c) Trust in Media Theories:* Trust in media is a complex and multidimensional concept that has been studied from various perspectives and disciplines such as communication, sociology, psychology and political science (Kohring, Matthes, 2007; McQuail, 2013; Shoemaker, Reese, 2014).

Some of the prominent theories and models that explain trust in media are briefly discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

First, the source credibility theory posits that the credibility of a source depends on two main factors: expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland et al., 1953; Li, Wang, 2021). Expertise refers to the source's knowledge and competence on the topic, while trustworthiness refers to the source's honesty and goodwill. The theory suggests that the more expert and trustworthy a source is perceived to be, the more persuasive and influential it is on the audience.

Second, the media system dependency theory proposes that the degree of trust in media is influenced by the extent to which the audience depends on the media for their information needs and gratifications (Ball-Rokeach, DeFleur, 1976). The theory argues that the more dependent the

audience is on the media, the more likely they are to trust the media, as they perceive the media as essential and beneficial for their survival and well-being.

Third, the social capital theory asserts that trust in media is related to the level of social capital in a society, which is the network of norms, values and relationships that facilitate cooperation and collective action (Putnam, 2000). The theory contends that the higher the social capital in a society, the higher the trust in media, as the media are seen as part of the social fabric and as a reflection of the public interest.

Fourth, the uses and gratifications theory. The uses and gratifications theory is a communication theory that focuses on how people use the media and other forms of communication to fulfill their interpersonal needs and wants (Rubin, 2002). The uses and gratifications theory believes that mass media audience chooses which types of media they will expose themselves to, based on certain gratifications or some sense of personal satisfaction that they expect to receive from the respective media. The theory emphasises that trust in media is determined by the motivations and expectations of the audience, as well as the satisfaction and gratification they receive from the media (Katz et al., 1974). The theory maintains that the more the media meet the audience's needs and wants, the more the audience trust the media, as they perceive the media as relevant and rewarding.

The theory was first introduced and advanced by Katz (Katz, 1959) when he advocated that the field of Mass Communication research should change its line of thought from 'How the Media Affect People' to 'What do People do with the Media,' (Popoola, 2010: 250). Katz et al. (Katz et al., 1974) cited in Popoola (Popoola, 2010: 250) characterised a more comprehensive view of the uses and gratification. The social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in need gratification and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones.

Contrary to the early belief of bullet theory which tends to look at the audience as homogeneous, responding uniformly and inescapably to the powerful stimuli from the media and also perceived audience as passive in the communication process, uses and gratification theory perceives the recipient as actively influencing the effect process, since he/she selectively chooses, attends to, perceives and retains the media messages on the basis of his/her needs, beliefs, etc. (Folarin, 1998).

*Summary of Research Gaps:* The literature review has revealed some gaps and limitations in the existing research, which the current study aims to address. The main gaps and limitations are:

- The lack of empirical and comparative studies on the awareness and knowledge of fake news and media credibility, especially in a Nigeria context.
- The lack of comprehensive and contextualised studies on the influence of cloned pages, which are social media sites that mimic the appearance and content of legitimate news sites, but contain false or misleading information, on media credibility in Nigeria, where online journalism is still developing and facing various challenges.
- The lack of effective and feasible strategies for countering fake news and enhancing media credibility in Nigeria, which involve various stakeholders such as the government, the media, the technology companies, the educational institutions and the individuals.

Based on these gaps and limitations, the current study proposes the following research questions:

1. RQ1: What are the factors that influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned newspaper pages online (in social media platforms)?
2. RQ2: What are the strategies for countering fake news including cloned newspaper and other news media pages in social media platforms and enhancing media credibility?

The current study aims to answer these research questions by conducting a rigorous and comprehensive review of existing literature on the subject. This involves synthesising findings from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and significant reports from credible institutions to identify the key factors influencing awareness and knowledge of cloned newspaper pages on social media platforms, as well as effective strategies for countering fake news and enhancing media credibility.

To address RQ1 – “What are the factors that influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned newspaper pages online (in social media platforms)?” – the study examines various independent variables identified in the literature. These include online media use, online media

literacy, online media skills, online credibility, online media satisfaction, online media trust, and online media engagement. Each of these factors is explored in terms of its impact on individuals' awareness and knowledge of fake news. The study also considers the moderating effects of age, gender, and use experience, which can shape how these factors influence awareness and knowledge. By incorporating insights from multiple studies, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how different demographics and media consumption habits affect the recognition and understanding of cloned newspaper pages on social media.

Regarding RQ2 – “What are the strategies for countering fake news, including cloned newspaper and other news media pages in social media platforms, and enhancing media credibility?” – the study identifies and evaluates various proposed strategies from the literature. These strategies encompass developing and enforcing laws and regulations to penalise the creation and distribution of fake news; supporting high-quality, professional journalism; investing in and innovating tools and technologies to detect and flag fake news; incorporating media literacy and critical thinking education into curricula; and promoting diverse, credible information sources. The study assesses the effectiveness and feasibility of these strategies, considering the challenges and opportunities they present for different stakeholders, including government bodies, media organisations, technology companies, educational institutions, and individual users.

By systematically reviewing and integrating findings from a wide range of studies, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on these issues. The aim is to identify gaps in the literature, propose directions for future research, and offer practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, media practitioners and the general public to combat the proliferation of fake news and improve news media credibility.

*Developing the Proposed Conceptual Framework:* This study adopts a conceptual framework that integrates three main aspects: the factors influencing awareness and knowledge of fake news, the effect of cloned pages on media credibility and the strategies for countering fake news (Forbes Communications Council, 2020a,b; Swaen, George, 2022). A conceptual framework is a structured approach to organising and understanding complex ideas, theories, or concepts (Creswell, Plano Clark, 2018; Creswell, Poth, 2018; Raimond, 2020; Swaen, George, 2022). It provides a systematic and coherent way of thinking about a problem or topic, and helps to guide research or analysis in a particular field. This section describes the main components of the conceptual framework and how they are related to each other and to the current study.

RQ1 focuses on the factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages in social media platforms, as well as other news media. This question is answered in the sections and sub-sections that follow, including the development of the proposed ONCITF.

*Factors Influencing Awareness and Knowledge:* Awareness and knowledge of fake news are the key variables that this study aims to explore them. Awareness refers to the extent to which the users are able to recognise and identify fake news content and news media cloned pages from real news on online in social media platforms. Knowledge refers to the extent to which users are able to understand and explain the nature, causes and consequences of fake news and cloned news media pages, as well as the methods and tools to verify and validate the information they encounter online (Apuke et al., 2023; Meyer, 1988; Miles et al., 2020; Omenugha et al., 2019).

Based on the literature review, the current study identifies 10 main factors that influence the awareness and knowledge of fake news (cloned social media/online news media pages): Online Media Use, Online Media Literacy, Online Media Skills, Online Media Credibility, Online Media Satisfaction, Online Media Trust and Online Media Engagement. The conceptual framework proposes that these 10 factors have direct and indirect effects on the awareness and knowledge of fake news. The framework also suggests that these factors interact and influence each other, creating a complex and dynamic system of influences. This study aims to proffer this framework for future research to test.

*A Brief Review of the Literature on the Influencing Factors – i) Knowledge:* Knowledge plays a critical role in shaping individual attitudes and behaviours towards various phenomena, including media consumption. In the context of online media, knowledge encompasses understanding the nature, purpose and functionality of digital platforms. Scholars argue that an individual's knowledge about online media significantly influences their media usage patterns and their ability to discern credible from non-credible sources (Livingstone, 2018b). Knowledge acquisition in this realm is often facilitated through formal education and personal experiences with digital platforms (Chen, Lee, 2015). For example, users who are typically engaged in school

and academic activities such as students, teachers, etc., their level of knowledge about online media is presumed to be higher, potentially affecting their awareness and recognition of cloned online newspaper pages.

*ii) Awareness:* Awareness refers to the degree to which individuals are conscious of particular issues or phenomena. In the digital age, awareness of cloned online newspaper pages is crucial as it can mitigate the spread of misinformation and enhance the quality of information consumption (Jiang, Leung, 2020b). Awareness is often shaped by direct encounters with digital content, educational interventions and media campaigns aimed at highlighting the existence and dangers of cloned sites. Previous research suggests that higher levels of awareness among internet users can lead to more critical engagement with online content, thereby reducing the likelihood of being deceived by counterfeit media (Chen, 2018).

*iii) Online Media Use:* Online media use refers to the patterns and frequency with which individuals engage with digital platforms for information, entertainment and communication purposes. The increasing reliance on online media has transformed how individuals access and interact with news (Newman et al., 2021). For example, users who are typically engaged in school and academic activities like students, researchers and teachers, given their academic demands and technological proficiency, are likely to exhibit high levels of online media use, which can influence their exposure to and perceptions of online newspaper pages, including cloned ones (Bright, 2017). Research indicates that frequent online media users develop diverse media habits that can either enhance or impede their ability to identify credible sources (Hargittai et al., 2018).

*iv) Online Media Literacy:* Online media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media in various forms. It is a critical skill in passing through the complex digital landscape where misinformation and cloned sites proliferate. Media literacy education aims to equip individuals with the competencies to critically assess the credibility of online content (Bulger, Davison, 2018). Studies show that media literacy can significantly enhance individuals' capability to recognise cloned online newspaper pages and reduce susceptibility to misinformation (Mason et al., 2018).

*v) Online Media Skills:* Online media skills pertain to the technical and cognitive abilities required to effectively use digital media platforms. These skills include exploring online sites, understanding digital interfaces and employing search strategies to find accurate information (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014). The proficiency in online media skills is pivotal for identifying authentic sources and avoiding cloned sites. Research by Park (Park, 2019) suggests that individuals with higher online media skills are better equipped to discern the authenticity of online newspaper pages, thereby enhancing the quality of their information consumption.

*vi) Online Media Credibility:* Online credibility involves the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of digital content and its sources. With the proliferation of cloned newspaper pages, assessing online credibility has become increasingly challenging (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015). Various factors influence the perception of credibility, including the design of the social media pages and other related online sites, the presence of author credentials, including the presence of the 'blue tick' for verified pages and other sites on Facebook, Twitter (i.e., X), etc. and the quality of information provided. Research indicates that higher levels of knowledge and media literacy contribute to better assessments of online credibility (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017). Users possessing some levels of formal education, especially in Nigeria and other parts of the developing world, due to their educational background, are likely to be more critical of online sources, enhancing their ability to distinguish between credible and cloned pages.

*vii) Online Media Satisfaction:* Online media satisfaction refers to the gratification that users derive from engaging with digital media. It encompasses various dimensions, including content quality, user experience and the perceived utility of information (Didi, LaRose, 2006). Satisfaction with online media can influence users' trust and engagement with specific platforms. Studies indicate that when users are satisfied with the quality and reliability of online media, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards those platforms (Choi et al., 2017). Conversely, encountering cloned newspaper pages can diminish user satisfaction and trust in online media.

*viii) Online Media Trust:* Trust in online media is a crucial determinant of how individuals interact with digital platforms. Trust is built over time through consistent, reliable and credible information dissemination (Sterrett et al., 2019). The presence of cloned newspaper pages can undermine trust, making it essential for users to have the skills and knowledge to identify and

avoid such sites. Research suggests that trust in online media is closely linked to users' media literacy and their ability to critically evaluate digital content (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

*ix) Online Media Engagement:* Online media engagement refers to the active participation of users with digital content, including commenting, sharing and creating media. High levels of engagement can enhance users' critical thinking and media literacy skills (Shao et al., 2018). Engaging with credible online media can lead to a more informed and discerning audience, whereas engagement with cloned pages can propagate misinformation. Studies indicate that users who are often engaged in research and academic discourse, are likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement with online media, thereby enhancing their ability to identify and critique cloned newspaper pages (Kim et al., 2020).

*Moderating Variables:* In the investigation of awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages, the moderating variables of age, gender and use experience play critical roles. These variables influence how individuals engage with online media, perceive the credibility of information and develop the necessary skills to discern genuine from cloned content. This literature review examines existing research on these moderating factors to establish a foundation for understanding their effect in the context of cloned online newspaper pages.

*a) Age:* Age is an important moderating variable in the study of media literacy and awareness. Different age cohorts display varying levels of digital literacy, media consumption habits and susceptibility to misinformation (Hargittai et al., 2018). Younger generations, often termed "digital natives," are generally more adept at exploring digital landscapes due to their prolonged exposure to technology from an early age (Prensky, 2001). However, this familiarity does not necessarily translate to superior skills in identifying fake news or cloned content. Research indicates that while younger users may be more frequent consumers of online news, they are not always the most critical or discerning (Livingstone, 2018b).

Older individuals, though sometimes less proficient in the technical aspects of digital media use, may apply more sceptical and cautious approaches when engaging with online information. The experience and cognitive maturity associated with older age groups can contribute to a more analytical perspective towards news consumption (Guess et al., 2019). Thus, the influence of age on awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages is multifaceted, requiring a nuanced understanding of how different age groups interact with and evaluate online content.

*b) Gender:* Gender differences in media use and perception have been extensively studied, revealing distinct patterns in how men and women engage with and trust online information. Research shows that women tend to be more cautious and sceptical of online information, which may lead to higher scrutiny of news sources and a greater likelihood of identifying cloned or fake news (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017). Conversely, men are often more confident in their ability to discern the credibility of online content, although this confidence does not always correlate with actual discernment skills (Mitchell et al., 2017).

The gendered differences in online media engagement also extend to social media use, where women are more likely to engage in sharing and discussing news, potentially leading to higher levels of awareness and knowledge about news content, including cloned pages (Sterrett et al., 2019). Understanding these gender dynamics is crucial for comprehensively analysing the factors that influence awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages.

*c) Use Experience:* Use experience, defined as the duration and intensity of engagement with online media, can influence individuals' ability to recognise and respond to fake or cloned news content. Prolonged exposure to digital environments can enhance users' familiarity with the nuances of online information dissemination and improve their skills in identifying unreliable sources (Hargittai, Hsieh, 2013). Experienced users often develop heuristics or mental shortcuts that aid in the quick assessment of news credibility, although these heuristics are not infallible and can sometimes lead to overconfidence (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

In contrast, users with limited online media experience may struggle with basic digital literacy skills, making them more vulnerable to cloned news pages and misinformation. The disparity in use experience underscores the need for targeted educational interventions to equip all users, regardless of their digital proficiency level, with the necessary tools to pass through the complex landscape of online news (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

Age, gender and use experience are pivotal moderating variables that shape the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages. Each variable contributes uniquely to how individuals interact with, perceive and evaluate online news content. By comprehensively

understanding these moderating factors, researchers and educators can develop more effective strategies to enhance media literacy and combat the proliferation of cloned news pages.

*Definitions of the Moderating Variables – Age:* Age refers to the chronological number of years a person has lived since birth. It is a demographic variable commonly used in research to segment populations and examine differences across various life stages. In media studies, age is important because it influences an individual's media consumption habits, digital literacy and susceptibility to misinformation. Generational cohorts—such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z – often exhibit distinct media behaviours and attitudes due to the historical and technological contexts they experienced during their formative years (Strauss, Howe, 1991). Understanding these differences is crucial for analysing how age influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages.

*Gender:* Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender-diverse people. It influences how individuals experience the world, including their interactions with media. Gender can be a binary categorisation (male or female) or more inclusively defined to encompass non-binary and other gender identities. In the context of media use, gender differences may affect patterns of media consumption, trust in online information and the ability to identify fake or cloned news. These variations are important for understanding the differential effects of media literacy initiatives across gender groups (Mitchell et al., 2017).

*Use Experience:* Use Experience, also known as digital or online experience, refers to the extent and quality of an individual's engagement with digital technologies over time. This encompasses the duration (how long someone has been using the internet), frequency (how often they use it) and intensity (the depth and variety of online activities they engage in). Use experience affects a person's proficiency in exploring digital platforms, evaluating online content and identifying misinformation or cloned news pages. Experienced users are typically more adept at applying critical thinking skills to assess the credibility of online information, although they can also be susceptible to overconfidence in their abilities (Hargittai, Hsieh, 2013; van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

*Operationalising the Moderating Variables – Age:* In scholarly research, age is often operationalised as a continuous variable representing the chronological age of respondents at the time of data collection. It can also be categorised into generational cohorts to analyse differences in media use, digital literacy and susceptibility to misinformation. Generational cohorts, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z, provide a framework to examine how historical and social contexts influence media behaviour and cognition (Strauss, Howe, 1991).

Researchers may use age as a moderating variable to explore how different age groups interact with online media and perceive cloned online newspaper pages. For instance, studies have found that younger users, typically more adept with technology, may still lack critical evaluation skills compared to older users who might approach online information more sceptically due to life experiences (Guess et al., 2019).

*Example Operationalisation:* Age will be measured in years. Respondents will be asked to provide their age, which will be recorded as a continuous variable. Additionally, respondents will be grouped into generational cohorts: Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), Millennials (born 1981–1996) and Generation Z (born 1997–present) to analyse differences in media literacy and awareness of cloned news content.

*Gender:* Gender is typically operationalised as a binary variable (male or female) or, in more inclusive studies, as a spectrum that includes non-binary and other gender identities. The operationalisation of gender in media research can help elucidate how different genders engage with, trust and evaluate online information. Gender differences in media consumption habits and critical thinking skills can influence the awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages (Mitchell et al., 2017).

Researchers may use self-reported gender information from survey respondents to analyse behavioural differences and perceptions related to online media use. This approach helps in understanding gendered patterns of media literacy and the susceptibility to misinformation.

*Example Operationalisation:* Gender will be measured through a self-reported questionnaire item, where respondents will select their gender identity from the options provided: male, female, non-binary and other (with a text box for specifying if 'other' is chosen). This categorisation allows for a nuanced analysis of gender differences in media engagement and awareness of cloned news content.

*Use Experience:* Use experience, also referred to as digital experience or online experience, is operationalised by measuring the duration, frequency and intensity of an individual's interaction with online media. This variable can include the number of years an individual has been using the internet, the average hours spent online per day and the variety of online activities engaged in (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

Use experience is critical in assessing media literacy and the ability to recognise cloned online newspaper pages. More experienced users are generally expected to have better-developed heuristics for evaluating the credibility of online content and a higher likelihood of detecting misinformation (Hargittai, Hsieh, 2013).

*Example Operationalisation:* Use experience will be measured through a composite index that includes:

1. Duration of Internet Use: Number of years since the respondent first started using the internet.
2. Frequency of Use: Average number of hours spent online per day.
3. Variety of Online Activities: Types of activities regularly performed online (e.g., social networking, news consumption, academic research, etc.).

This comprehensive measure will allow for a detailed analysis of how varying levels of online use experience influence awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages.

Operationalising age, gender and use experience in the context of awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages involves measuring these variables in ways that capture their effect on media literacy and information evaluation. By using precise and comprehensive methods to quantify these moderating variables, researchers can better understand their influence on how social media users in Nigeria and elsewhere interact with and discern online news content.

## 2. Materials and methods

This review paper employs a comprehensive and systematic approach to synthesising existing literature on the awareness and identification of cloned news media pages, sites and content in online spaces, particularly within social media platforms. The methodology adopted for this paper is designed to ensure the inclusion of a wide range of scholarly perspectives, rigorous analysis and the development of a robust conceptual framework. With this methodology, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based and theoretically grounded framework to enhance user awareness and identification of cloned newspaper pages and related news media content in online spaces, especially in social media.

*Literature Search and Selection:* The literature search was conducted using multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus and JSTOR. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings in the fields of mass communication, information systems, social media studies and digital literacy. The search strategy incorporated a combination of keywords and phrases relevant to the topic, such as “cloned online newspaper pages and content identification,” “fake news detection,” “social media misinformation,” “media literacy,” “algorithmic transparency” and “online media credibility.”

To ensure the inclusion of the most recent and relevant studies, the search was limited to articles published from 2015 to 2023. Additionally, references from key articles were scrutinised to identify further pertinent studies. This snowball literature selection technique helped in capturing a comprehensive set of relevant literature.

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:* Inclusion and exclusion criteria were meticulously established to ensure the relevance and quality of the articles reviewed. Articles were included if they specifically addressed issues related to the identification and awareness of cloned newspaper pages, sites and related content in online spaces such as social media platforms, were published between 2015 and 2023 and were written in English. Furthermore, the review focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, conference paper and important reports from credible institutions, ensuring a high standard of scholarly rigour.

Conversely, studies were excluded if they were deemed irrelevant, such as those focusing on unrelated aspects of media or social media not connected to cloned pages, sites and/or content. Articles from non-scholarly sources or lacking rigorous peer review were also excluded, maintaining the academic integrity of the review. Additionally, papers that did not provide new

insights or merely duplicated the findings of other studies were not considered, ensuring that the review presented unique and valuable contributions to the field.

*Data Extraction and Analysis:* A structured data extraction form was used to capture key information from each selected study. This form included fields for the study's aims, methodology, key findings and relevance to the conceptual framework being developed. Extracted data were then systematically analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, trends and gaps in the literature.

*Development of the Proposed Framework:* The proffered conceptual framework, termed the Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF), was developed by synthesising insights from the reviewed literature. The framework integrates theories and models pertinent to news media credibility, user awareness and digital literacy. Particular emphasis was placed on understanding the dual-processing model of news media credibility (Sundar, 2008), especially newspaper, and the uses and gratifications theory (e.g., Rubin, 2002), as these provided foundational insights into how users process and respond to media content.

*Validation of the Framework:* To validate ONCITF, a Delphi method was employed, involving a panel of experts in media studies, digital/online communication and information systems. Experts were asked to review the framework and provide feedback on its comprehensiveness, relevance and practical applicability. Iterative rounds of feedback were used to refine and finalise the framework.

*Ethical Considerations:* As a review paper, this study did not involve human participants or the collection of primary data, thus exempting it from the requirement for ethical approval. However, ethical considerations were upheld by ensuring accurate representation and citation of all reviewed studies, respecting intellectual property rights and maintaining the integrity of the analysis.

### 3. Discussion

*RQ1 – ONCITF:* The Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF) provides a robust conceptual framework that elucidates the dynamics influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news, particularly concerning cloned online social media pages of newspapers and other news media. This section discusses the implications of the findings for theory, practice and policy by integrating them back into the existing literature.

*Implications for Theory:* ONCITF advances theoretical understanding in several ways. First, it builds on the uses and gratifications theory by illustrating how different motivations for online media use (such as seeking information, communication and entertainment) influence awareness and knowledge of fake news (Rubin, 2002). This extends Katz's (Katz, 1959) original proposition by providing a contemporary context in which media use is directly linked to digital literacy and the identification of misinformation (Popoola, 2010).

Additionally, the framework incorporates the dual-processing model of media credibility, distinguishing between heuristic and systematic processing as mechanisms through which users evaluate media credibility (Sundar, 2008). The integration of online credibility as an independent variable underscores the importance of both automatic and deliberate processing in the recognition of credible versus non-credible sources (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

*Implications for Practice:* The practical implications of ONCITF are important for educators, media practitioners and social media platforms. By highlighting online media literacy, skills and engagement as critical factors, the framework suggests targeted interventions to enhance users' ability to discern fake news. For instance, media literacy programmes should focus on developing critical evaluation skills and technical competencies, enabling users to navigate and scrutinise digital content more effectively (Bulger, Davison, 2018).

Moreover, the framework's emphasis on online media satisfaction and trust as influential variables points to the need for media organisations and social media platforms to prioritise quality content and transparent practices. Ensuring high standards of content quality and fostering trust can enhance user satisfaction and, subsequently, their critical awareness and knowledge of cloned media pages (Choi et al., 2017; Sterrett et al., 2019).

*Implications for Policy:* Policy implications derived from ONCITF stress the need for robust regulatory frameworks to address the spread of misinformation. Policymakers should develop and enforce regulations that hold social media companies accountable for the dissemination of cloned and fake news content. This includes mandating transparency in algorithmic practices and



requiring platforms to provide users with tools to control and understand the information they receive (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

Additionally, the framework highlights the importance of demographic factors such as age, gender and use experience in moderating the effects of media use on awareness and knowledge. Policymakers should consider these demographic variables when designing and implementing digital literacy programmes, ensuring that interventions are tailored to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different user groups (Hargittai et al., 2018; Flanagin, Metzger, 2017).

Concisely, ONCITF offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news associated with cloned social media pages. By integrating multiple independent variables (online media use, literacy, skills, credibility, satisfaction, trust and engagement), a mediating variable (awareness), a dependent variable (knowledge) and moderating variables (age, gender and use experience), the framework provides a nuanced approach to studying this phenomenon.

The findings underscore the importance of media literacy and user engagement in enhancing awareness and knowledge of fake news. They also highlight the need for transparent algorithmic practices and robust regulatory measures to combat misinformation. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of media literacy interventions, cross-cultural comparisons to understand the influence of cultural factors and the impact of algorithmic transparency on user trust and engagement.

*RQ2 – Strategies for Countering Fake News:* The study delves into strategies for countering fake news, focusing on the necessary actions and measures to prevent, detect and correct misinformation, thereby enhancing the quality and credibility of authentic news. This involves a multi-faceted approach engaging various stakeholders, including governments, media, technology companies, educational institutions and individuals. The conceptual framework of the study identifies and evaluates several strategies for countering fake news, drawing from an extensive literature review and web search results.

Firstly, developing and enforcing laws and regulations is essential to prohibit and penalise the creation and distribution of fake news while protecting the freedom and responsibility of the media. Derakhshan and Wardle (Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017) underscore the need for robust legal frameworks to address the proliferation of fake news. Furthermore, regulatory measures should be coupled with efforts to support high-quality journalism that adheres to industry standards and ethics. Professional journalism, which provides accurate, balanced and comprehensive information, is crucial in combating misinformation (Meyer, 1988; Omenugha et al., 2019; Reuters Institute..., 2020).

Investing in innovative tools and technologies is another vital strategy. Technological solutions can identify and flag fake news, reduce the financial and social incentives for its production and dissemination and enhance the online accountability and transparency of information sources (Hassan et al., 2021a; Omenugha et al., 2019). These technologies, however, must be accessible and user-friendly to be effective.

Enhancing media literacy and critical thinking education is paramount. Integrating these skills into the curriculum and public awareness campaigns equips individuals to recognise and resist fake news (Apuke et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2021b; Reuters Institute..., 2020). Media literacy fosters a discerning audience capable of navigating the complex media landscape.

Diverse information sources and a sceptical approach towards online information also play a critical role. Encouraging individuals to seek information from varied and credible sources helps in mitigating the effect of fake news. Moreover, fostering scepticism and vigilance in information consumption can prevent individuals from falling prey to misinformation and promote support for genuine news (Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020; Raimond, 2020; West, 2017). This study seeks to provide practical recommendations for implementing and improving these strategies based on research findings. For instance, the integration of media literacy into school curricula should be accompanied by continuous professional development for educators to ensure effective delivery (Hassan, Latiff Azmi, 2021b).

*Implications for Theory, Practice and Policy:* The findings of this study have noteworthy implications for theory, practice and policy. Theoretically, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on media literacy and misinformation by providing a comprehensive framework that integrates various factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news. This can serve as a foundation for future research to explore and expand upon.

In practice, the strategies identified can be operationalised by educators, media organisations and technology companies to create a more informed and resilient public. For example, media organisations can adopt stricter editorial guidelines and fact-checking procedures to ensure the credibility of their content. Technology companies can develop more sophisticated algorithms to detect and flag fake news, enhancing user trust in digital platforms (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

Policy implications include the need for governments to formulate and enforce regulations that balance the fight against fake news with the protection of free speech. Policymakers should consider collaborating with international bodies to establish global standards for digital content regulation. Additionally, investment in public awareness campaigns and media literacy programmes can empower individuals to critically evaluate the information they encounter online (Apuke et al., 2023; Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017).

Countering fake news requires a multi-pronged approach involving legislation, professional journalism, technological innovation, media literacy and individual vigilance. The study's proposed Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF) provides a structured approach to understanding and addressing the challenges posed by fake news, offering valuable insights for theory, practice and policy.

#### 4. Results

*The Proposed Conceptual Framework – Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft (ONCITF):* The ONCITF was designed to explain the phenomenon of social media fake news associated with cloned online social media pages of newspapers and other news media. This framework incorporates multiple variables to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the awareness and knowledge of fake news. Awareness is positioned as the mediating variable, while knowledge serves as the dependent variable. Age/generation, gender and use experience are included as moderating variables. The independent variables in the framework are online media use, online media literacy, online media skills, online credibility, online media satisfaction, online media trust and online media engagement (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Variables of ONCITF

S/N	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Mediating Variable	Moderating Variables
1	Online media use	Knowledge	Awareness	Age
2	Online media literacy			Gender
3	Online media skills			Use experience
4	Online media credibility			
5	Online media satisfaction			
6	Online media trust			
7	Online media engagement			

Below (see Figure 1) is the designed conceptual framework for the Online Newspaper Cloning and Identity Theft Framework (ONCITF) along with a detailed explanation of each component and the hypothesised relationships among the variables. The framework illustrates how various independent variables influence awareness, which in turn influences knowledge. Additionally, it incorporates the moderating effects of age/generation, gender and use experience.

##### *Conceptual Framework Structure:*

1. *Independent Variables:* The following are the independent variables of the framework.

1. Online Media Use: Refers to the patterns and frequency with which individuals engage with online/social media platforms for information, communication and entertainment (Bright, 2017).

2. Online Media Literacy: The ability to access, analyse, evaluate and create media content and sites (e.g., profiles, pages) in various forms (Bulger, Davison, 2018).

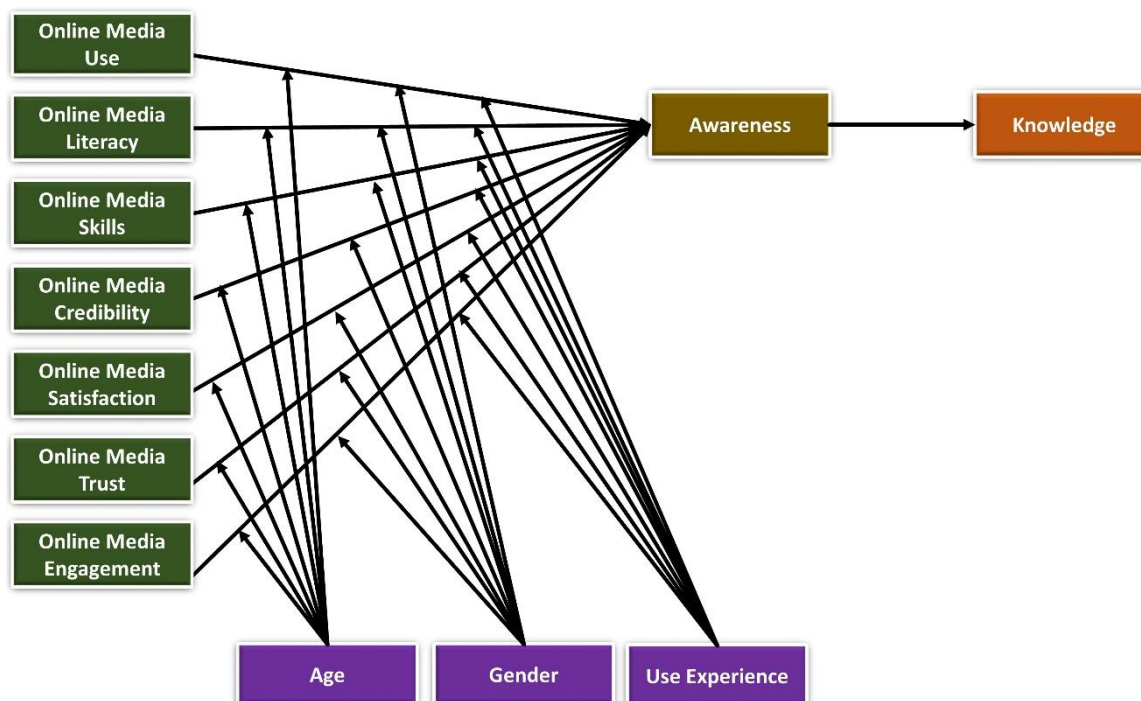
3. Online Media Skills: Technical and cognitive abilities required to effectively use online media platforms (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

4. Online Media Credibility: Perceived trustworthiness and expertise of online media content and sites and their sources (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

5. Online Media Satisfaction: Gratification derived from engaging with online media, encompassing content quality, user experience and perceived usability (Choi et al., 2017).

6. Online Media Trust: Trust in the reliability and credibility of online media platforms (Sterrett et al., 2019).

7. Online Media Engagement: Active participation in digital content and sites in online media through commenting, sharing and creating media content and sites (Shao et al., 2018).



**Fig. 1.** A diagrammatic representation of ONCITF (Source: authors)

## 2. Mediating Variable

– Awareness: Consciousness and understanding of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news. Awareness is influenced by the independent variables and, in turn, affects knowledge (Jiang, Leung, 2020b).

## 3. Dependent Variable:

– Knowledge: Understanding of the nature, purpose and functionality of online platforms, specifically related to identifying and mitigating cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news associated with cloned social media sites (Livingstone, 2018b).

## 4. Moderating Variables:

1. Age/Generation: Different age groups may have varying levels of digital literacy and media usage patterns, affecting their awareness and knowledge (Hargittai et al., 2018).

2. Gender: Gender differences can influence media consumption habits and susceptibility to cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017).

3. Use Experience: The duration and intensity of media use experience can moderate the relationship between the independent variables and awareness (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

*Proposed Hypothesised Relationships:* The following are the proposed hypotheses.

1. Online Media Use → Awareness → Knowledge: Increased online media use enhances exposure to diverse content, potentially increasing awareness of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news, which subsequently improves knowledge (Bright, 2017).

2. Online Media Literacy → Awareness → Knowledge: Higher media literacy equips individuals with critical thinking skills to identify cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news, thereby increasing awareness and enhancing knowledge (Bulger, Davison, 2018).

3. Online Media Skills → Awareness → Knowledge: Proficiency in online media skills aids in exploring digital platforms effectively, increasing awareness and knowledge of cloned online

newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (van Deursen, van Dijk, 2014).

4. Online Credibility → Awareness → Knowledge: Perception of online media credibility influences awareness of credible versus non-credible news and other media content sources, affecting knowledge (Metzger, Flanagin, 2015).

5. Online Media Satisfaction → Awareness → Knowledge: Satisfaction with media quality and reliability enhances engagement, increasing awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Choi et al., 2017).

6. Online Media Trust → Awareness → Knowledge: Trust in online media fosters a critical assessment of information, heightening awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Sterrett et al., 2019).

7. Online Media Engagement → Awareness → Knowledge: Active engagement with online content promotes critical evaluation, increasing awareness and knowledge of cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Shao et al., 2018).

8. Moderating Effects of Age/Generation, Gender and Use Experience: Age, gender and use experience moderate the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent variables and awareness, influencing knowledge (Hargittai et al., 2018; Flanagin, Metzger, 2017; Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

Age/Generation: Different age groups may show varying levels of awareness and knowledge based on their digital literacy and online/social media use habits (Hargittai et al., 2018).

– Gender: Gender differences can influence how individuals engage with online/social media and perceive cloned online newspaper pages and related news media content and fake news (Flanagin, Metzger, 2017).

– Use Experience: The amount of time and intensity of online/social media use experience can moderate the effect of independent variables on awareness and knowledge (Johnson, Kaye, 2015).

ONCITF provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of social media fake news associated with cloned online social media pages of newspapers and other news media. By incorporating multiple independent variables, a mediating variable, a dependent variable and moderating variables, the framework offers a nuanced approach to studying how awareness and knowledge of fake news are shaped among different demographics.

*RQ2: Strategies for Countering Fake News:* RQ2 focuses on strategies for countering fake news. Countering fake news is the ultimate goal and implication of the current study. Countering fake news refers to the actions and measures that are taken to prevent, detect and correct fake news, as well as to enhance the quality and credibility of real news (Lazer, Baum, 2018; Stanford News Service, 2021; West, 2017; Singh, Singh, 2022). Countering fake news is a shared responsibility that involves various stakeholders such as the government, the media, the technology companies, the educational institutions and the individuals. The conceptual framework identifies and evaluates some of the possible strategies for countering fake news, based on the literature review and the web search results. Some of the strategies are:

1. Developing and enforcing laws and regulations that prohibit and penalise the creation and distribution of fake news and that protect and promote the freedom and responsibility of the media (Apuke et al., 2023; Derakhshan, Wardle, 2017; Forbes Communications Council, 2020a, b).

2. Providing and supporting high-quality and professional journalism that adheres to the standards and ethics of the media industry, and that provides accurate, balanced and comprehensive information to the public (Meyer, 1988; Omenugha et al., 2019; Reuters Institute..., 2020).

3. Investing and innovating in tools and technologies that can identify and flag fake news, reduce the financial and social incentives for those who produce and spread fake news, and improve the online accountability and transparency of the information sources (Hassan, Latiff Azmi, 2021a; Omenugha et al., 2019).

4. Incorporating and enhancing media literacy and critical thinking education in the curriculum and training of the all categories of users, especially students, as well as in the public awareness and engagement campaigns, to equip and empower the online audience to recognise and resist fake news (Apuke et al., 2023; Hassan, Latiff Azmi, 2021b; Reuters..., 2020).

5. Following and diversifying the sources and types of online information, and being sceptical and vigilant of the information that is encountered and shared online, to avoid falling prey to fake news and to support the real news (Oyero, Oyesomi, 2020; Raimond, 2020; West, 2017).

## 5. Conclusion

The proliferation of fake news and cloned newspaper and other news media pages, sites and content on social media poses a serious challenge to the credibility of online information and public trust. This study has developed and proffered ONCITF to enhance user awareness and knowledge, enabling them to better identify and respond to deceptive newspaper and other news media pages, sites and content online. By integrating insights from various disciplines, the framework provides a comprehensive tool for understanding the factors that influence user perceptions and behaviours regarding cloned news media pages, sites and content, which is also another type of fake news. This framework not only advances academic discourse but also offers practical solutions for improving media literacy, especially online media literacy and promoting transparent practices on social media platforms. The implementation of ONCITF can importantly contribute to a more informed and critically engaged public, ultimately helping to mitigate the adverse effects of misinformation.

*Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research:* To address the pervasive issue of fake news and cloned news media sites and content on social media platforms, several key recommendations are proposed. Firstly, enhancing media literacy programmes is essential. Educational institutions and organisations should incorporate comprehensive media literacy training into their curricula, emphasising the development of critical evaluation skills and increasing awareness of cloned media content. This approach aims to equip individuals with the necessary tools to discern credible information from misinformation.

Secondly, promoting transparent algorithmic practices is crucial. Social media platforms must improve transparency regarding their content curation algorithms. By providing users with the tools to understand and control the information they receive, platforms can foster a more informed and empowered user base. This transparency is vital for helping users pass through the complexities of online information ecosystems.

Thirdly, there is a need to strengthen regulatory measures. Policymakers should develop and enforce robust regulations that hold social media companies accountable for the spread of misinformation and cloned content. These regulations should ensure that platforms take proactive steps to mitigate the dissemination of false information and protect the integrity of online discourse.

In terms of future research, several areas warrant further exploration. Longitudinal studies on the influence of media literacy interventions are necessary to understand their long-term effects on user behaviour and awareness of fake news. Such studies could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of educational programmes over time.

Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons are important. Investigating how different cultural contexts influence the perception and spread of cloned news media sites and content can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the global nature of the problem. These comparative studies could reveal unique challenges and solutions pertinent to various regions.

Research into algorithmic transparency is also critical. Examining the impact of transparent algorithmic practices on user trust and engagement with social media platforms can inform the development of more user-centric and ethical algorithms. Understanding how transparency affects user interactions with platforms can guide improvements in content delivery and user experience.

Furthermore, user engagement with fact-checking mechanisms needs to be investigated. Studying the effectiveness of different fact-checking strategies and their impact on user behaviour could inform the creation of more effective countermeasures against misinformation. Insights from this research can help design better tools and practices for combating fake news.

Finally, it is important to research the psychological heuristics involved in information processing. Understanding the cognitive biases and heuristics that influence how users process information, can refine educational approaches and aid in the design of more intuitive tools for detecting fake news. This knowledge is crucial for developing interventions that resonate with users' cognitive processes and enhance their ability to identify false information.

By addressing these recommendations and exploring these research domains, we can better equip individuals and society to combat the challenges posed by fake news and cloned news media sites and content in the digital age.

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## Lexeme “Creativity” Syntagmatics as the Embodiment of Ethical Ideas and Moral Traditions in Modern Media Discourse

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### Abstract

The article deals with the peculiarities of the lexeme “creativity” use in modern media discourse. The authors prove that the use of this word has ethical and linguistic limitations not always realized and taken into consideration in media communication; analyze the sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic origins of inconsistency with the principles of ecological linguistics, manifested in the lexeme “creativity” syntagmatics. The article uses the modern media texts, mainly the genre of interview, where violations of ethical and linguistic standards connected with the word “creativity” use have been noted. The analyzed feature of the use of the lexeme tvorchestvo (creativity) plays an evaluative role, reflects the further blurring of the fuzzy boundaries between the concepts of “aesthetical/unaesthetical”, “linguoecological/non-linguoecological”, “ethical/unethical”. To study this material the authors used functional and pragmatic analysis and sociolinguistic methodology based on the correlation of social and linguistic parameters of communication. Non-ecology can be associated not only with the use of a crude substandard, but also with the inadequate use of high-sounding words. In media education, it is necessary to focus not only on the appropriate use of linguistic units in accordance with the purity of style, but also on the use of linguistic means in accordance with ethical and linguistic standards. To do this, it is necessary to study the media portraiture of certain words. When studying the discipline “Creative means and tools of communication” in the master's program “Media Linguistics and new means of communication”, it is important to devote a special topic to portraying one of the frequency words of the modern media world picture which can be illustrated by the example of the “creativity” word. Media literacy, formed, among other things, when studying the pragmatic potential of the frequency words in the modern media world picture, will contribute to the proper use of linguistic means and media rhetorical strategies in accordance with ethical and linguistic standards, strengthening the culture of media communication and taking care of the language as a whole.

**Keywords:** media discourse, media communication, media literacy, media education, linguistic pragmatics, syntagmatics, ethical and linguistic standards, media rhetoric, lexeme “creativity”, interview.

### 1. Introduction

Ethical and linguistic standards have long been firmly included in the general system of normativity with systemic, vertical, contextual and situational standards (the detailed bibliography of the issue is in the monograph and articles (Barabash et al., 2023; Kulikova, 2022a; Kulikova,

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2022b; Kulikova, Barabash, 2022; Kulikova et al., 2023; Kulikova, Barabash, 2024a; Kulikova, Barabash, 2024b). Ethical and linguistic normativity is closely connected with media literacy education background (Fedorov, 2001; Fedorov, 2009; Fedorov, 2010; Fedorov et al., 2014; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2015; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018; Fedorov et al., 2019; Fedorov, Chelysheva, 2002; Gálik et al., 2024; Gálik, Gáliková Tolnaiová, 2022; Gáliková Tolnaiová, Gálik, 2020; Gáliková Tolnaiová, Gálik, 2022), generalizing linguistic and cultural parameters. Violations in this area may reflect communicative tendencies related to already established stereotypes of behaviour or their formation. “A special focus on oneself, manifested itself in individualism, the cult of publicity and self-promotion, contrasting one's opinion with the opinion of others, has largely determined freedom as the main behavioural value of a new generation in the real and virtual spaces of its existence” (Mamina, Pochebut, 2021: 21). As will be shown in the article, it is these new behavioural values that predetermined the inconsistencies of ethical and linguistic normativity in the “creativity” word use.

## 2. Materials and methods

The article uses the material of modern media texts, especially the interview genre, where violations of ethical and linguistic standards in use of the “creativity” word are noted. Functional-pragmatic analysis and sociolinguistic methodology based on the correlation of social and linguistic parameters of communication have been used to study this material.

## 3. Discussion

About the absence (undesirability, questionable normativity) of grammatical forms it have been known for a long time: the first person of the future tense of the verb “to win” is not used (and on this occasion it has been repeatedly written that the language itself protects against boastful statements like *\*pobedyu* (in English *I will win*, but it is impossible to use this form in Russian), in fact there is a ban on the first person of the indicative mood of the verb *kushat'* (to eat), for example, *kushajte, gosti dorogie* (eat, dear guests), but *ya kushayu* (I eat).

Nikolai Akimov in the famous book “Not only about the theatre”, among other prohibitions, noted the following one: do not use the verbs *kushat'* (to eat), *tvorit'* (create) in the form of first person in singular. Maxim Gorky also noted in his article “On Plays”: “It is not quite appropriate and too often young writers use a loud and also not quite definite church word – *tvorchestvo* (creativity).

The author, determining the semantics of the lexeme *tvorchestvo* (creativity), pays attention to its transparent internal form and the word-formation characteristic of the lexeme *Tvorec* (Creator).

In the semantics of this unit, it is significant for M. Gorky the relationship with the lexeme *God*, and the author taking into consideration the communicative situation, chooses a special characteristic of the lexeme *tvorchestvo* (creativity) is *church word*. This combination of words seems to intentionally actualize the negative evaluation characteristic of the situation, but does not extinguish the correlation of the lexemes *tvorec* (Creator) and *God*, which is significant for linguoculture as a whole. Later, M. Gorky argued that since “there is something aristocratic and ecclesiastical in the word *tvorchestvo* (creativity), it is better to replace it with a simpler and more precise *rabota* (work)”. Such a stable interpretation of the lexeme *tvorchestvo* (creativity) developed back in the XIX century: it is considered to be stylistically marked, related to high, bookish, etc. style, its use is considered to be appropriate when defining something unique, unusual.

Thus, the letter from I.S. Turgenev to V.P. Botkin contains an indication of the peculiarities of the meaning of this lexeme: “This word is impermissibly impertinent – who dares to say not in jest that he is the *tvorec* (Creator)?!” (Turgenev, 1856).

Also: “Since the middle of the XIX century, the words *tvorec* (creator), *tvorcheskij* (adjective creative), *tvorchestvo* (creativity) get a shade of ceremonial solemnity, majestic, high style” (Vinogradov, 1947: 6-9)

It has been repeatedly noted (by writers, linguists) that the word *tvorchestvo* (creativity) is not quite acceptable in combination with the possessive pronouns *my*. “Sensitive to language Bulat Okudzhava reacted ironically in the last years of his life to questions about “*tvorcheskie plany*” (creative plans): “Creativity is for Alena Apina, but I just work” (Novikov, 2016: 127).

I.B. Levontina points out: “There are many words in the Russian language, as one of my colleagues says, “*na koturnakh*” (on the couch). These words are not necessarily high, but perhaps just slightly out of use, not applicable to every situation. Like the words *sovershennyj* (perfect), *sovershenstvo* (perfection). ... The Russian language is very sensitive to such elation. In particular,

this is manifested in the fact that not everything can be said about yourself. When, for example, an actor or singer says in an interview: “in my *tvorchestvo* (creativity)...” – it sounds vulgar and ridiculous” (Levontina, 2021: 93).

V. Tokareva also writes that she does not like the word *tvorchestvo* (creativity), but does not know how to replace it (Tokareva, 2015). It can be replaced, as is sometimes believed, by a foreign-language borrowing (Algavi et al., 2021; Baranova et al., 2022; Brusenskaya et al., 2023; Kang et al., 2022; Kayal, Saha, 2023; Ozbek et al., 2023; Skvortsova et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023).

Many authors (García-Perdomo, 2021; Lane, 2020; Langer, Gruber, 2021; Macgilchrist et al., 2020; Manca, 2020; Muzykant et al., 2022; Muzykant et al., 2023; Osipovskaya, Savelyeva, 2023; Shin et al., 2022; Stoumpos et al., 2023; Švelch, 2022) attribute the popularity of the anglicisms *kreativnyj* (creative) and *kreativnost'* (creativity) to the fact that they filled a pragmatic lacuna: synonymous with the words *kreativnyj* (creative) and *kreativnost'* (creativity), they, however, lack “elation”, bounding collocation.

“...it seems inappropriate to strive for the actual identification of the concepts of *tvorchestvo* (creativity) and *kreativnost'* (creativity), which can also be traced in scientific, philosophical and educational literature, not to mention the levels of everyday and mass consciousness”; “the mechanistic, technological and algorithmic essence of *kreativnaya* (creative) activity, which, in turn, not only does not exclude, but also it assumes the possibility of replication and mass production of a *kreativnyj produkt* (creative product)” (Kachay, 2016: 33).

It is necessary to clearly distinguish the semantics and pragmatics of the concepts *tvorchestvo* (creativity) and *kreativ* (creativity). “During this period, there is a tendency to merge and interchangeability of *tvorchestvo* (creativity) and *kreativ* (creativity), but their reflection shows that the opposition of *tvorchestvo* (creativity) and *kreativ* (creativity) still exist. *Tvorchestvo* (creativity) and *kreativ* (creativity) can be contrasted by the parameters of verticality – horizontality” (Azarova, 2015: 36), but at the same time, there is also an understanding of *kreativ* (creativity) as “well-paid *tvorchestvo* (creativity)” (Azarova, 2015: 44).

V.I. Dahl in the “Explanatory Dictionary of the living Great Russian language” explains the word *tvorchestvo* (creativity) through the synonym “*sozidanie* (creation) as an active property” and fixes the saying “A *tvorcheskij* (adjective *creative*) gift is given just few persons” (Dahl, 1955).

As I.B. Levontina writes, “the Russian language is characterized by a peculiar duality such as doubling of important concepts, dividing them into “gornij (higher)” and “dol'nij (lower)” variants such as *istina* and *pravda* (truth), *dolg* and *obyazannost'* (duty)... And now a new pair: *tvorchestvo* (creativity) and *kreativ* (creativity)” (Levontina, 2021:95).

In the fact that a reduced conceptual and stylistic synonym *kreativnost'* (creativity) to the word *tvorchestvo* (creativity) has appeared, I. B. Levontina sees a manifestation of the primordial pattern.

#### 4. Results

The analysis of the lexeme *tvorchestvo* (creativity) functioning in the communicative practice of mass culture figures makes it possible to assert that speakers relating to mass culture and considering this attribute significant for themselves tend to intentionally use the lexeme *tvorchestvo* (creativity) to themselves and their activity.

For example the content of the interview with Elizaveta Afanasyeva “Creativity must be loved like a child” (Interview, 2023):

– Do you have a favourite poet: a classic and a contemporary one? Are you guided by someone in your work?

– Oh, I always forget to name someone on this question. Perhaps, it's time to make a list of favourites. Of the classics, of course, Mayakovsky. Of contemporaries is Andrei Orlovsky. There is no reference point in my work, but I try to notice for what reasons I like other authors' poems, what catches on in them, how to integrate it into my *tvorchestvo* (creativity). <...>

This poem was a powerful start to my work on the word. That's what I wrote after analyzing my texts with Andrei Orlovsky. It is this poem that essentially reflects my *tvorchestvo* (creativity) and gives an answer to the questions “why verlibra? and why without punctuation marks?” <...> The theme of mirrors has taken root in my *tvorchestvo* (creativity) unnoticeably for me. My solo album last September was called “The Hall with Mirrors”. And with this text, I summarize, I give myself the answer to where does this topic grow legs from, and what to be done to get out of the looking glass.

– Have you ever dedicated poetry to someone?

– *To say, this is dedicated to the boy who broke my heart, of course, is impossible. But, a lot in my tvorchestvo (creativity) is written about someone, although rather about my emotions related to people. There were direct dedications to my mother and grandmother in childhood.*

– *You promote your tvorchestvo (creativity) by performing in other cities. What is the usual purpose of such events and the audience?*

– *The audience is very often unfamiliar with poetry, and therefore very valuable. It is an indescribable feeling to see how people's eyes are burning, because they used to not know poetry at all beyond the conventional Pushkin, and now they can read a whole crowd of modern authors. The goal is to present modern poetry to people, to present modern poetry in an unusual format to people.*

– *How do you understand that you are talented and your poems are not a set of words devoid of meaning?*

– *It is important to show the poems to more skilled authors, to be ready for criticism and years of work on the texts. To connect common sense yourself and develop the ability to look at your tvorchestvo (creativity) from the outside. And the concept talent is overrated, in my opinion. The most important thing is work.*

– *What advice would you give to aspiring poets or those who has been writing for a long time, but who is afraid to present his/her tvorchestvo (creativity) to the people?*

– *I always say that you need to love any of your tvorchestvo (creativity) like a child. Love for children is unconditional, but this does not prevent them from being educated, because a loving parent wants the child to develop, learn new things, be a good person.*

*Where can the readers of “Open Belgorod” get acquainted with the Muse's tvorchestvo (creativity)?*

– *I am actively run my telegram channel now. There are poems, poetic notes and my other tvorchestvo (creativity)”.*

As we can see, the poetess does not feel any discomfort using the combination “*moyo tvorchestvo (my creativity)*”. It should be admitted that this feature correlates with the idea that it opens the horizons of poetry for people, “who did not know poetry at all beyond the *conventional Pushkin*”. The poetess thinks it's time for her to make “a list of favourites. Of the classics, of course, Mayakovsky...”.

The annoying repetition of the combination “*v moyom tvorchestve (in my creativity)*” betrays a complete lack of self-irony and an obviously exaggerated idea of her own importance (very comical against the background of such pearls as *where this topic grows legsfrom* or *conditional Pushkin*). It was N.A. Nekrasov or I. Brodsky who called their poems *stishki* (small poems), E. Afanasyeva uses only *tvorchestvo (creativity)*. “In the media discourse, like in any other, ethical standard is one of the most important, universal, socially sanctioned regulators of speech behaviour, which perform an orienting, regulating, predictive and evaluative role” (Surikova, 2009: 70), and non-compliance with these standards necessarily needs public reflection.

Even more striking example is the use of the word *tvorchestvo (creativity)* by singer Ya. Dronov – SHAMAN; for interview materials “There were periods of complete despair”. SHAMAN told how he went to success for 15 years” (Sysoev, 2023):

*“It was only when I was already 30 years old that the first song “Let's get up” shot out, which served as the locomotive for the rest of my tvorchestvo (creativity). As I have been doing this for eleven years, first seven years at music school and then for four years in college, I set myself the task to have folklore notes in my tvorchestvo (creativity). There is another theme that, of course, excites me and that is present, as a kind of leitmotif, not only in my tvorchestvo (creativity), but also in life – this is the theme of death.*

*As a tvorcheskij chelovek(creative person), I try to get as much emotion as possible on these trips. They also leave their mark on my tvorchestvo (creativity), they inspire, of course. These people let into their hearts only those they believe. I am very pleased that I have earned the trust of my lifestyle and my tvorchestvo (creativity). It seems to me that moyo tvorchestvo (my creativity) does not leave indifferent people all over the world. I would like anyone who searches the Internet for moyo tvorchestvo (my creativity) to see something fresh, relevant material and an up-to-date image first of all.*

The word *kreativnost'* (creativity) is the best word for the activity of a Shaman, since “an indicative feature of a *kreativnyj* (adjective creative) person is the desire to draw attention to

his/herself by any means, which often leads to ethical nihilism” (Kachay, 2016). But it is the word *tvorchestvo* (creativity) that the Shaman likes:

*“For the years of my tvorcheskij (adjective creative) career, I have tried a large number of musical directions, tried on many different images. When your tvorchestvo (creativity) touches a large number of people, gives rise to some emotions in them, of course, interest in yourself. I try not to distract the fans' attention from my songs with some antics. Everything I want to express and say is in my tvorchestvo (creativity). Now I form a team for my own producing centre.*

*It will be called SHAMAN. At first, these professionals, not even employees, but rather like minded people whom I want to unite, will be engaged in the development and promotion of my tvorchestvo (creativity), such as organizing tours, shooting music videos, interacting with the press and so on. I'm not afraid of anything at all. In 15 years of conscious tvorcheskij (adjective creative) activity, I have written about two hundred songs”.*

The answers to the question “Do negative comments touch a nerve?” are amazing!

*“On the contrary! I am grateful to all the haters. It means that my tvorchestvo (creativity) does not leave anyone indifferent, and this is the most important thing.*

*Ksenia wrote three publications about me at the same time in her million-dollar Telegram channel. I didn't say anything at first, but after the third post I “broke down”. (Laughs.) I thought I should thank her for such a powerful promotion and promotion of my tvorchestvo (creativity).*

*I think Alexander is a fan of mine who genuinely liked this song. Thank him very much for the additional PR and drawing attention to me and my tvorchestvo (creativity)!”*

*He is not confused by remarks of this kind: Songs “Let's get up” and “I'm Russian”, released in collaboration with producer Victor Drobysch, do not even have a hint of intellectual value <...>. The theme of patriotism from the point of view of Russian morality does not tolerate blatant pride (Konovalov, 2022) ... this is just “meaningless pop music”. Singer Olga Kormukhina, in an interview in the program “Tak skazat' (Say so)” on the YouTube channel “Abzats-media”, said that the Shaman could have become the second Kipelov, but did not have enough intelligence that sooner or later he would remain at the broken trough”.*

To the writer Evgeny Martin, the Shaman's songs remind the answers of negligent students: “When I was teaching, I noticed that some of the most lagging and negligent students used one technique, which could be conditionally called “buttons”. Answering my question, they looked into my eyes and strained their brains with an effort to squeeze out of themselves... individual words. When he gives out the word and looks at you hopefully: well, you know what I mean? The idea is the teacher knows perfectly well what is behind this word and that the “general view” itself will be drawn in teacher's head. And that she was drawn in his head, but not in the student's head, he (teacher) probably won't notice. And the student will be saved the trouble” (Martin, 2023).

Indeed, it is quite expected that the author of such lyrics is not confused talking about *svoyom tvorchestve* (his creativity). “The inner moral law expressed in language” (Dmitrieva, 2005: 9) is most likely to be unknown to the Shaman. Normative restrictions on the use of the combination “*v moem tvorchestve* (in my creativity)” in relation to oneself and one's activity are based on the concepts of linguistic ethics, a certain set of ethical concepts fixed in linguistic culture, including at the level of cognition, which should ensure the unity and continuity of spiritual and moral parameters that ensure a systematic worldview, including linguistic and, as a result, the formation of cognitive, including social and communicative principles of interaction. “Linguistic ethics is an inner feeling, to some extent akin to linguistic instinct or taste, but more psychologically deep, primary one in relation to the latter” (Dmitrieva, 2005: 10). Of course, all this is incompatible with the principles of show business such as to shout loudest, to overtake competitors, to succeed at any cost. Of course, the problem is not only in Shaman, but in the general linguocultural situation. When the writer Yuri Polyakov was asked a question about the singer Shaman, he also spoke about poor lyrics, but at the same time he remembered that there was a state song committee in the USSR, hence there were the lyrics that we remember and love to this day. And songs with “dumb” lyrics can only destroy us, empty our souls. And it is not necessary to contrast the current “freedom of *tvorchestvo* (creativity)” and “censorship” of the Soviet era.

The analyzed feature of the use of the lexeme *tvorchestvo* (creativity) plays an evaluative role, expresses the further blurring of the fuzzy boundaries between the concepts of “aesthetical/unaesthetical”, “linguoecological/non-linguoecological”, “ethical/unethical”.

## 5. Conclusion

Thus, non-ecology can be connected not only with the crude substandard use, but also with the inadequate use of high-sounding words. Socially, linguoculturally and communicatively conditioned restrictions on the use of the combination “in my creativity” (*v moem tvorchestve*) are associated with the processes of reflection and author’s reflection, based on ethical, ethical and linguistic standards, are not always significant for the current situation in the society focused on consumption and achieving personal success.

This determines the necessity for a detailed and systematic research of the linguoecological and ethical-linguistic aspects in the culture of using linguistic units in modern Russian speech in general and modern media discourse in particular. Since language is the main tool for the professional activity of journalists, advertising and public relations specialists and all those who will work in media communication, media education should focus not only on the appropriate use of language units in accordance with the purity of style, but also on the use of language tools in accordance with ethical and linguistic standards. To do this, it is necessary to study the media portraiture of certain words. When studying the discipline “Creative means and tools of communication” in the master’s program “Media Linguistics and new means of communication”, it is important to devote a separate topic to portraying the frequency words of the modern media world picture, which can be illustrated on the example of the “creativity” word. Careful attention should be paid to the investigation of this lexeme and the context of its use in accordance with ethical and linguistic standards. Media literacy, formed, among other things, by studying the pragmatic potential of the frequency word in the modern media world picture, will certainly yield excellent results: students will competently, clearly and appropriately use linguistic means, achieving the necessary effect and creating media-rhetorical strategies in accordance with ethical and linguistic norms, strengthening the culture of media communication and taking care of the language as a whole.

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## From Space Missions to Screen: Analyzing Virtual Product Placement in the NASA-Star Trek Collaboration

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### Abstract

The rapidly advancing technology has led to the evolution of traditional product placement into Virtual Product Placing (VPP), a technique that use software to digitally include images of specific products or brands into media output, like as movies or television shows, during the post-production phase. While such virtual technology offers significant benefits to marketers, broadcasters, and production businesses in terms of consumer targeting, its implementation is not devoid of legal, marketing, and ethical concerns. This paper examines the relationship between the 2013 film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and its vision through a case study methodology in the film and media industry. Within its narrative, the film emphasizes NASA's image by implementing a specific form of virtual product placement. Furthermore, examined in this paper are the consequences and implications of virtual product placement in ethical, legal, and marketing domains, as well as potential avenues for the advancement and incorporation of this strategy. Through the use of a qualitative approach including in-depth analysis of the movie material, this work generates more comprehensive insights. The use of virtual product placement in films such as *Star Trek: Into Darkness* demonstrates how the advanced incorporation of brand and CGI technology further complicates the intersection between product placement and the film production process.

**Keywords:** virtual product placements, consumer markets, *Star Trek*, NASA, infringement, brand, product copyright, fake endorsement, brand development.

### 1. Introduction

In response to the growing fragmentation of the consumer market, advertisers have shifted their focus the past decade towards a diverse range of communication channels in order to effectively target a broader customer base globally. In recent years, product placement has emerged as a very effective and extensively adopted strategy. A product placement strategy is the deliberate and strategic inclusion of branded products into television or movie programming with the intention of influencing viewers through sponsored product messages and promotions. Product placement messages are distinguishable from other forms of marketing communications as they are classified as embedded advertising and are integrated into media content (McDonnell, Drennan, 2010). The reason for this is that product placement messages employ a type of persuasion that is less forceful and more understated compared to other advertising (Meenaghan, 2001).

Product placement has evolved significantly from the conventional concept, which involved physically placing products in films and television programs, to virtual product placement

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(hereinafter VPP). In VPP, computational software enables the digital integration of product or brand imagery during the post-production stage (McDonnell, Drennan, 2010). This shift not only enhances the variety of items that may be integrated into content, but it also broadens the reach and efficacy of advertising efforts. Thus, broadcasters can more efficiently manage and acquire control over advertising revenue by utilizing Virtual Product Placement (VPP), an advertising strategy. A studio records the broadcast and adds product placements to it. After licensing the show, sponsors buy placements and use post-production techniques to digitally inject advertising content. Not only that, but virtual product placement enables for the tailoring of advertising to reach different locations, reflecting demographic variances across release versions (McDonnell, Drennan, 2010).

Examining its historical background, product placement has existed prior to the widespread use of the name VPP in the contemporary day. As an illustration, the initial documented instance of product placement occurred in the renowned silent film *Wings* (1927), which also received the prestigious Academy Award for Best Picture. This film gained recognition for its pioneering production methods and visual effects at that era. Consistent with the title, the film showcases several authentic aircraft, including some that were produced by aviation businesses operating during that time period. Naturally, this granted the aircraft manufacturers featured in the film, such as Curtiss Aircraft and Thomas-Morse, with immediate visibility and increased marketing opportunities. Equally, in the commercially successful film *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), an American science fiction picture created and directed by Steven Spielberg. In addition to providing financial support for the film, the product placement in "E.T." established a favorable connection between the brand and the movie. Reese's Pieces, the chocolate confectionery brand, had significant advantages from its prominent presence in the film, resulting in a substantial increase in its sales following the cinematic release (Bergren, 2022). It may be asserted that the notion of deliberately positioning products within media content, as opposed to as independent ads, was undoubtedly created in the past and will continue to be refined in the future (Balasubramanian, 1994).

As other scholars highlight a primary obstacle of conventional product placement is the difficulty in quantifying the efficacy of physical placement in a specific film, which typically necessitates thorough examination of audience reaction over a period of time. This intricacy is heightened by the fact that companies that enjoy popularity in the United States may not exert the same level of influence in other worldwide markets, resulting in disparities in marketing effectiveness on an international scale (McDonnell, Drennan, 2010). Within this particular framework, Virtual Product Placement (VPP) arises as a more flexible and effective alternative. Vertical Purchasing Platform (VPP) allows for immediate personalization and modification of brands to cater to the requirements of various markets, addressing the issue of global mismatch, and offering enhanced benefits in terms of brand exposure and cost-effectiveness in diverse international locations. Virtual brand protection (VPP) ensures the continuous maintenance of the brand image worldwide, therefore maximizing marketing effectiveness and expanding the global audience reach.

Virtual product placement (VPP) outperforms conventional product placement not just because of its cost-effectiveness and capacity to target more specific market segments, but also because of its superior creative freedom. Through the use of technology that allows for the digital integration of products or brands into post-production, Virtual Product Platforms (VPPs) offer the capability to customize marketing messages with greater accuracy by considering geographic, demographic, and consumer behavioral factors. Specifically, VPP enables companies to modify the advertisements or items displayed based on current market trends or local tastes, without the need for any physical alterations to the movie. However, Virtual Publications do not fully supplant other forms of publicity or commercial initiatives. The effectiveness of virtual product placement is enhanced when it is integrated into a comprehensive and all-encompassing marketing approach. This method should incorporate a blend of diverse advertising and publicity strategies to comprehensively engage the audience and optimize the overall effectiveness of the marketing campaign. In essence, whereas Virtual Personalities provide robust capabilities for personalization and precise targeting, the achievement of complete marketing success ultimately relies on the incorporation of VPPs with other conventional and digital marketing tactics.

This cinematic technique was employed in the film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013). VPP was used in this film to effectively highlight brand and institutional aspects, particularly in relation

to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) image, in a highly integrated manner within the storyline. The utilization of VPP technology enables NASA to depict its presence in the film with greater adaptability and dynamism, as opposed to the more fixed conventional method of product placement. The film incorporates NASA through a range of visual elements, such as logos, interior designs, and facilities, which effectively convey the distinctive features of the agency. In addition to bolstering the credibility of the film, this also delivered a substantial marketing advantage for the businesses engaged.

As a new topic in the realm of technology and research, the objective of this paper is to examine various aspects of Virtual Product Placement (VPP), including an overview of the practice, efficient methods for its application in different contexts, and efforts to address common challenges and misunderstandings encountered. This research will undertake a case study on the film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) to examine the ideal use of Value for Money (VPP) in different scenarios. It will explore methods to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in attaining marketing goals. The objective is to enhance comprehension of VPP, thereby enabling brands, broadcasters, and production studios to strategically and creatively employ this approach, particularly within the film industry. The primary objective is to assist stakeholders in recognizing opportunities and overcoming obstacles in the implementation of Visible Product Placement (VPP), therefore enabling them to optimize marketing potential and obtain substantial advantages from incorporating products into media content.

This research aimed to address some fundamental points regarding the use of Virtual Product Placement (VPP) in films and television programs. These inquiries primarily center around:

Q1: How can Virtual Product Placement be implemented in movies or television shows without violating existing physical advertising or copyright terms?

Q2: How can Virtual Product Placement be done without creating false claims of support or false implications on the part of the actors involved?

Q3: How can the implementation of Virtual Product Placement be done without affecting the script of the show or creating confusion for viewers about whether they are being tricked by the product images shown?

This research will provide case studies of successful and distinctive brand relationships within the film industry, focusing on content that resonates closely with the public, in order to address these questions. The analysis will investigate the viable and ethical implementation of VPP in modern media creation, as well as how this approach might address different obstacles while preserving the artistic integrity and financial worth of the work. The objective of this approach is to offer a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of VPP, guaranteeing that the method is not only groundbreaking but also adheres to relevant ethical and legal norms.

## 2. Materials and methods

This research employs a qualitative methodology to examine Virtual Product Placement (VPP) in films, with a fundamental emphasis on *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) as a specific case study. The primary data utilized comprises the film itself and pertinent secondary data sources, such as scholarly articles, periodicals, and promotional materials. The analysis involved a thorough examination of the film content to identify and assess the implementation of brand positioning (VPP), including the integration of brand aspects, namely the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in the film's plot and graphics. The selected case study in this research is anticipated to offer an elaborate explanatory account of a phenomena (Barnes et al., 1994). The objective of this study is to investigate the use of VPP in enhancing marketing flexibility and effectiveness within the movie industry.

Furthermore, conducting a contextual analysis of marketing documents and other publications offers further understanding of the influence of VPPs on brand image and marketing strategy. The research intends to give a thorough analysis of the application of Viral Promotional Products (VPPs) in movies and to enhance comprehension of the obstacles and opportunities presented by this marketing strategy in the film business (Iversen, 1991).

## 3. Discussion

The comprehension of product placement in the media sector is of utmost importance given the intricate nature of media, particularly in light of the development of audio-visual media since the 20th century, which differs from the interconnection facilitated by the internet (Roudometof,

2023). In the contemporary world, media is not only perceived as a medium for personal expression but is intricately linked to advertising (Kim, Chan-Olmsted, 2022). In addition, media has the ability to generate its own collection of services (Gould, Gupta, 2006). According to few scholars product placement refers to the intentional and purposeful integration of a brand into media material in order to gain brand visibility and enhance brand recognition among the audience (Reijmersdal et al., 2009). Virtual Product Placement (VPP) is a more nuanced method of linking consumer products with celebrities, films, or other media elements, which has evolved from traditional product placement (Hey, 2000). Digital Product Placement (VPP) is a form of virtual advertising in which computer-generated graphical components, including brand names, items, and animations, are integrated into television programs or films, either in real-time or via pre-recorded footage, according to (Reichman, Moreland, 2006). Its application in the transmission of English Premier League matches is a prominent example of VPP (Sosnovskikh, 2006). The VPP system is employed to exhibit brand adverts on digital billboards positioned adjacent to the field. The digital alterations have the capability to cater to both local and international advertising, thereby obviating the necessity of replacing traditional billboards within the stadium. The implementation of this approach not only improves the whole spectator experience within the stadium by reducing any visual disturbances, but also generates supplementary income for broadcasters.

Furthermore, this encompasses the proliferation of digital advertising on different media platforms propelled by algorithmic technology and user data, and the potential influence of these capabilities on the interplay of platforms, marketers, and consumers (Burgess et al., 2024). Moreover, another research evaluates that the strategic positioning of products in advertising material, usually achieving a more realistic appearance in digital media content, results in favorable impressions among viewers (Li, Ma, 2024). Indeed, these advertising skills have the potential to influence and control customer behavior (Grigsby, Skiba, 2024).

Virtual Product Placement (VPP) differs from conventional product placement by emphasizing its capacity to facilitate the digital incorporation of brands into a film or television program, once the filming phase has concluded (Hey, 2000). Furthermore, this benefit not only decreases the expenses associated with product placement, but also provides significantly more adaptability in tailoring the material to the intended brand. Video advertising platforms provide marketers with the ability to make real-time modifications to their advertisements based on several criteria, including shifts in market trends, audience preferences, or regional requirements, without the need for any physical alterations to the production process. Nevertheless, it is crucial to bear in mind that the primary goal of VPPs is not to enhance direct sales exclusively through extravagant advertising, but rather to shape audience awareness and perception in a more understated and cohesive manner. Through digital integration, Virtual Product Placements (VPPs) can provide a powerful naturalization effect, creating the perception that the product is inherently linked to the narrative or ambiance established in the film or show (Karrh, Pardun, 2003).

Ultimately, although virtual advertising may not entirely supplant the function of conventional advertising in mainstream media, it continues to be a significant source of income for the broadcast industry in the present day. The notion of virtual advertising slot enables producers and studios to provide advertising space for sale on various media channels with a significant level of adaptability. As an illustration, a corporation has the option to sell advertising space for a television series during its initial broadcast, and thereafter provide various advertising slots for subsequent versions that are broadcasted at a later time. As a consequence, the advertisements that viewers see differ based on the platform they use to access the material. For instance, individuals who buy a DVD of a film may encounter distinct virtual advertisements in contrast to those who watch the same film in a live cinema. Hence, virtual advertisements not only offer supplementary income for broadcasters and content creators, but also facilitate the personalization of advertisements based on various consumption formats and experiences. This exemplifies the ongoing adaptation of the entertainment business to shifts in consumer behavior and technology, by utilizing advancements in content monetization to optimize revenue and enhance overall audience involvement (Chena, Haley, 2014).

The expanding revenue flexibility provided by Virtual Product Placement (VPP) has produced a rising interest among marketers and academics in the several marketing aspects of this technology. VPP, as a component of a novel advertising approach, is seen as a message-delivery agent specifically created to shape audience opinions about the promoted product (Zhou et al.,

2024). Nevertheless, the current body of research suggests that the progress made in virtual technology introduces novel obstacles that are not faced with traditional methods of product placement. These challenges encompass legal and regulatory matters that are currently insufficiently prepared to tackle these advancements. At now, the study on how to tackle the legal, marketing and ethical challenges developing from virtual technology is still in its nascent phase. Nevertheless, these concerns have been expressed with clarity and precision (Almond, 2007; Reichman, Moreland, 2006).

Few scholars discuss the legal dimensions that emerge from the violation of advertising rights when a network permits the integration of virtual advertisements above pre-existing physical advertisements (Reichman, Moreland, 2006). In such instances, the depreciation of the capital investment is not limited to the corporation responsible for paying for the physical advertisements, but also extends to the entity that possesses and trades the physical advertising space. For instance, in 2002, OTS Signs, a company that oversees and markets billboard space, filed a lawsuit against Sony Corporation and other parties, accusing them of engaging in deceptive trade practices, infringing upon advertising rights, and engaging in unfair competition at both the federal and state levels. The lawsuit emerged subsequent to the digital substitution of Samsung's advertisements with advertisements for USA Today, consequently replacing Samsung's initially expansive billboards with virtual advertisements for Cingular Wireless. This case highlights the legal ambiguity, especially in New York, regarding the classification of such activities as trespass in the absence of direct physical harm to property. The incident exposed deficiencies in the control of virtual advertising and ignited a progressively heated discussion on the efficacy of Virtual Product Platforms (VPPs) (Li, Ma, 2023).

A further unresolved issue is copyright infringement. In general, copyright infringement refers to the act of reproducing, distributing, publishing, or transforming a copyrighted work without the explicit authorization of the copyright owner. Scholars observe that within the realm of virtual advertising, the original content being aired, such as a film or television program, needs to be altered in order to display the new advertised material. Should these modifications be implemented without the explicit consent of the copyright holder, individuals who possess the rights to the material may potentially lodge copyright claims. However, copyright law is designed to protect creative works and ensure that creators benefit from their creations (Freund, 2016).

Historically, television shows and movies have employed traditional product placement as a means to enhance brand recognition among customers and for the performers participating in the productions (Almond, 2007). Yet, Virtual Product Placement (VPP) is typically implemented in the post-production stage, sometimes going unnoticed by both viewers and actors. Consequently, performers may find themselves endorsing things that were not previously featured in the scene, or replacing products obtained from other companies. This may potentially result in lawsuits from performers who believe that the usage of VPPs violates their rights to publicity. Nevertheless, the researcher clarifies that performers in the United States lack sufficient protection of their moral rights. This is because, as per the Copyright Act, the ownership of the copyright for an actor's performance lies with the television studio rather than with the actor themselves (Almond, 2007).

The implementation of new advertising strategies by television networks and the film industry has prompted worries regarding the influence of Virtual Product Placement (VPPs) on screenplay content. Screenwriters and directors may feel obligated to create narratives that enable the incorporation of Value-Proposition-Products (VPPs), or dismiss concepts that are challenging to synchronize with marketing measures. Nevertheless, this strategy carries the potential of being rejected by audiences and so leading to adverse consequences. As an illustration, authors reference the film *Fantastic Four*, which faced criticism for its too noticeable product placement. Critics expressed concerns that an abundance of product placement may divert viewers from the principal narrative of the film, therefore disturbing the overall viewing experience (Gutnik et al., 2007; Ong, 1995).

An additional debated element concerning Virtual Product Placement (VPPs) is the ethical question of whether this technique can be considered deceptive. The urgency of this issue can be compared to the spread of conspiracy advertising and news on social media, which is widespread and concerning to the public (Mahl et al., 2021). VPP exploits the audience's perception that the broadcast accurately represents the filmed reality, unless special effects are used. However, the use of VPP involves visual modifications not intended to enhance the narrative, but for commercial purposes (Brown, 2016). The need to regulate various aspects of VPP arises from differing perspectives on this approach across different sectors within the media industry. Existing research on the legality and

validity of VPP marketing fails to offer adequate solutions to the identified issues.

#### 4. Results

The present study investigates the extent to which the film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) establishes a substantial association between its image and NASA and its vision. The research is grounded on the assumption that the moments in the film indirectly strengthen the image and credibility of NASA. An analysis of the relationship between *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) and NASA influences the overall influence of Virtual Product Placement (VPP) in the film. This analysis aims to evaluate the impact of virtual product placements on the audience's opinion of the brand or institution showcased on media. Furthermore, this study will investigate strategic methods of utilizing Virtual Reality Platforms (VRPs) to strengthen the reputation of a brand or institution by developing compelling tales and immersive visuals inside the framework of a science fiction story. This analysis will examine how VRPs function not just as a marketing instrument, but also as a crucial component that can enhance audience involvement with movie content, therefore establishing a stronger bond between the brand and the audience.

This paper aims to provide a theoretical overview of the conceptual gaps in Virtual Product Placement (VPP) and then address the misconceptions and issues that may emerge during its implementation. Within the framework of the suggested case study, there exist some crucial elements that require additional elucidation in order to get fully thorough comprehension.

To begin with, it is crucial to grasp the fundamental concept of Virtual Product Placement (VPP), which is a strategy that links consumer goods with celebrities, films, or other media components (Hey, 2000). Virtual product placement (VPP) in the realm of movies enables advertisers to digitally include products or brands into finished movie sequences by utilizing computer graphics technology to introduce or substitute objects inside the current scenes. Hence, it is important to bear in mind that the fundamental notion of VPP, as implemented in the *Star Trek* films and its correlation with NASA, is a broad implementation of this approach. This definition elucidates that the comprehension of VRPs can frequently be deceptive, as VRPs are in fact a distinct and more coherent manifestation of advertising. Nevertheless, from a particular standpoint, VRPs can be regarded as a component of a broader marketing strategy, which is a novel approach to advertising items by digitally integrating them into movies or TV shows after the production phase has concluded (McDonnell, Drennan, 2010).

Furthermore, the film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* serves as a highly significant case study example for analysis. It provides profound insights into the aforementioned elements and presents distinctive and intriguing implications that warrant further exploration. This film is a pertinent study primarily because the extensive advertising conducted for NASA offers a comprehensive framework for comprehending the successful implementation of Value Propositioning in an actual institutional marketing setting, using the medium of a science fiction film.

The symbiotic tie between the worldwide film industry and NASA's future envision of space flight has been robust since 1976. The visibility of this relationship became evident when NASA strategically used advertising campaigns that included the whole *Star Trek* ensemble, including prominent individuals like Leonard Nimoy. A pivotal event occurred when NASA bestowed the name Enterprise upon its inaugural space shuttle, directly inspired by the fictitious starship featured in the *Star Trek* series. The initial designation of the shuttle was Galileo, but it was subsequently altered in reaction to a fan campaign, therefore illustrating the notable correlation between science fiction and the actual work of NASA. The Galileo spaceship, which was originally employed in the development of the *Star Trek* series in 1966, came to represent the partnership. Furthermore, the Galileo exhibit situated at NASA's visitor center, Johnson Space Center, highlights the intimate connection and collaboration between the imaginary realm and NASA, therefore featuring NASA's tangible contribution to the inspiration of the science fiction shown in the movie.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to comprehend the foundation of the partnership behind this collaboration. Fundamental to this partnership is the shared vision between *Star Trek* and NASA. According to the National Research Council, this vision commitment emphasizes the education and motivation of future generations to accomplish shared objectives in space exploration (National Research Council, 2007). Fundamentally, both parties have a profound dedication to the pursuit of space exploration and addressing humanitarian concerns. While *Star Trek* and NASA are situated in distinct domains, one in the realm of science fiction and the other in legitimate exploration, they



both have a shared objective of broadening the limits of knowledge and investigating the potentialities in outer space as well as reflections on the political values and ideals of the United States through the depiction of leaders' actions in film (Weldes, 1999).

The alignment of goals between *Star Trek* and NASA elevates their partnership beyond mere advertising; it demonstrates a mutual dedication to advancing human development in the realm of space. The film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* (2013) clearly portrays this aspiration, with exploration and the pursuit of human knowledge being key elements of the narrative. The film not only embodies the principles supported by *Star Trek*, but also corresponds with NASA's objective and aspiration in the realm of space exploration and technological advancement. The association between NASA and a movie or TV episode has inherent risks, given NASA's renowned scientific foundation and *Star Trek's* classification as science fiction. However, the outcomes of such connections are frequently somewhat unexpected. NASA has undertaken a multitude of scientific investigations, which are well documented on their official website. This study encompasses science fiction technologies from the *Star Trek* series, including communicators, shipboard computers, antimatter, androids, tricorders, artificial gravity, and warp engines, which are demonstrated to be faithfully portrayed in the film (Uri, 2019).

Nevertheless, NASA also detected certain scientific inaccuracies in the film. They categorized it as a writer's quirk as none of the writers have a scientific expertise. The participation of NASA in the testing and verification of science fiction technology ultimately bolsters the movie's legitimacy among viewers and fans, even those lacking a technical foundation. In this instance, the involvement of NASA serves to strengthen trust in the precision and dependability of the screenplay, rather than giving rise to apprehensions regarding adverse influence. Furthermore, the inclusion of NASA in *Star Trek* has the potential to generate heightened curiosity and comprehension of science among the general population.

In his 2009 publication, David Allan Batchelor from NASA Goddard Space Flight Center elucidates that *Star Trek* transcends mere amusement; it is a masterpiece that combines a remarkable imagination with a robust scientific basis. Within the narrative, science not only functions as a background, but is meticulously upheld as an homage to the most remarkable accomplishments of mankind. The rigorous manufacturing method prioritizes scientific precision and astute storytelling, establishing it as one of the most reliable and esteemed science fiction masterpieces globally. The assertion made by Batchelor demonstrates that the association between *Star Trek* and NASA transcends mere cooperation, as it embodies a mutual vision and aspiration for the future of mankind in outer space. The *Star Trek* series, renowned for its intricate depictions of space exploration, frequently incorporates aspects that draw inspiration from NASA findings and hypotheses. These encompass cutting-edge technology, the notion of interstellar exploration, and a more comprehensive perspective on human existence in the cosmos. The participation of NASA in *Star Trek* initiatives not only enhances the scientific storylines in the films, but also injects a profound sense of genuineness into the franchise's portrayal of the future.

In order to ensure that the concepts shown in *Star Trek* accurately represent contemporary understanding of space and technology, NASA scientists and engineers offer regular feedback and counsel to the *Star Trek* producers. Through its ability to connect science fiction with contemporary scientific understanding, *Star Trek* presents a hopeful perspective on the future of technology and exploration. The concepts of warp propulsion, teleportation, and interplanetary communication serve as both plot aspects in the story and sources of discussion and conjecture regarding potential futures in the real world. As such, *Star Trek* functions as a catalyst for broadening comprehension and admiration of scientific inquiry, while also motivating future generations to seek innovation and fresh information. In addition to providing pleasure, *Star Trek* serves as a vehicle for educating viewers about the possibilities and difficulties of space exploration, and fostering an appreciation for the scientific efforts required to achieve these aspirations.

Therefore, the active involvement and endorsement of *Star Trek* by NASA not only contribute to the consolidation of the brand connection between the two entities, but also augment the attractiveness of the movie to the viewers. Both those with a profound scientific knowledge and those who is solely intrigued by the science fiction element of the narrative acknowledge NASA's role in the production process of *Star Trek*. Such enhances trust in both the scientific excellence and the technological aspects portrayed in the films. Concrete instances of how *Star Trek* incorporates concepts still in the research or speculative stage by NASA into its story include warp drive, teleportation, and distant star exploration technologies.

It is evident that the partnership between *Star Trek* and NASA is reciprocally beneficial. *Star Trek* acquires scientific and technological credibility by virtue of NASA's participation, while NASA leverages this widely recognized platform to communicate their objectives and accomplishments to the general populace. By using this collaboration, both sides may generate a more significant influence on advancing space exploration and the progress of cutting-edge technology. *Star Trek* serves as a prime illustration of how science fiction cannot only provide amusement, but also motivate and enlighten, so establishing itself as one of the most potent mediums for fostering scientific inquiry and human creativity.

Furthermore, there exists a noteworthy similarity between the NASA brand and the film helmed by J.J. Abrams. While the NASA emblem is not explicitly seen in the movie, the longstanding association between the two organizations enables the viewer to readily recognize the technology in the movie as goods inspired by NASA. This is because viewers tend to actively interpret the brands, they encounter in films in accordance with the brand identities they experience in the real world (Delorme, Reid, 2013). An additional aspect to take into account is the choice to refrain from visibly showcasing the NASA emblem in the film, which could be related to creative or legal deliberations. Through the deliberate omission of the logo, the movie producers might circumvent possible legal complications associated with the unauthorized use of the brand or violation of copyright principles as per relevant laws. Nevertheless, a robust brand identity maintains a distinct correlation between the NASA brand and the components in the film, thereby enabling viewers who are acquainted with the prominent space corporation to still identify the link.

Another piece of evidence is the choice made by the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) to exhibit a 30-second preview of their prospective concept of space exploration in cinemas situated in the United States. This footage was extracted from a three-minute film that was initially made available by NASA in 2012. The primary objective of this decision was to enhance the correlation between NASA and space exploration, a crucial aspect presented in the film. While not explicitly included in the movie's storyline, this video is often regarded as a crucial component of the audience's experience, especially in the United States. The stated objective is explicitly characterized as a mission for humanity, emphasizing the principles linked to space exploration and the crucial contribution of NASA in attaining them. Through the inclusion of this content, AIA seeks to establish a correlation between these concepts and the film being shown, thus enhancing public consciousness regarding NASA's involvement in space exploration on a wider scale. It is crucial to emphasize that the utilization of this material does not violate copyright, as it is derived from publicly published videos by NASA. Therefore, there is no modification or unauthorized utilization of the copyrighted work in this particular situation, guaranteeing the legal soundness of the exhibition of the video in cinemas.

Within the realm of branding and brand association, AIA's decision to use this video can be interpreted as a continuation of the preexisting connection between NASA, space exploration, and films such as *Star Trek*. While the NASA logo is absent from the trailer, the presentation of this promotional material in US theaters serves to strengthen the visual and narrative connections between the NASA brand and the subject of space exploration explored in the film. This demonstrates an astute approach of utilizing the brand's pre-existing connections with NASA to strengthen the message it intends to communicate to movie viewers. Through the implementation of legal measures to ensure the lawful and compliant use of the material, the action also prevents possible legal complications associated with the unlawful exploitation of protected works.

Finally, the film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* incorporates science fiction technology and warp effects that explicitly allude to NASA's dreams of the future, delving into fundamental ideas that surpass the limits of existing physics understanding. According to NASA, their research indicates that the stellar warp effect, as commonly portrayed in science fiction, remains far beyond the capability of present technology. Nevertheless, NASA persists in supporting further exploration and study to achieve this aspiration, notwithstanding the immense scientific uncertainties.

Given its methodology, *Star Trek* merits recognition as a classic that not only provides captivating visual pleasure, but also communicates a profound message about scientific inquiry and human imagination, so captivating its viewers (Fedorov, 2023). From its beginning, the series has emphasized space exploration as a fundamental aspect of its narrative, encouraging viewers to envision technological possibilities before unimaginable. *Star Trek*, by offering a positive outlook on human life in an expansive cosmos, not only presents thrilling narratives but also offers an opportunity to contemplate the philosophical and ethical consequences of deep space exploration. Undoubtedly,

the *Star Trek* television series and movies effectively established a robust connection between science fiction and scientific fact, enhanced by the most up-to-date information and study on space.

Cinema plays a crucial function in conceptualizing and elaborating on ideas that are still in the research phase or simply exist in the realm of wishful thinking. Although the warp effect may not meet the criteria of realism according to current scientific procedures, its portrayal in movies can be seen as an artistic representation of humanity's desires and ambitions to investigate deeper regions of the cosmos. The incorporation of digital effects in the creation of this image also introduces a contemporary technical aspect that enhances the science fiction experience. Although not yet a feasible product, these effects offer the audience a chance to envision the potential future possibilities that may be amenable to future scientific investigation and development. The integration of the *Star Trek* brand with NASA is reinforced by the inclusion of concepts like the warp effect in the film, which enhances the visual and narrative connections between the science fiction themes depicted and NASA's ambitions and goals in space exploration. Although the warp effect is considered implausible according to current scientific criteria, the portrayal is nevertheless remarkable and stimulates creative contemplation on the potential of future technology and space exploration.

In general, the film portrays a storyline that merges the imaginative elements of science fiction with genuine scientific ambitions fueled by NASA research. Viewers are encouraged to envision possible possibilities in space exploration through the visuals showcased in the film, while recognizing that the realization of aspirations like the warp effect still necessitates additional research and invention.

## 5. Conclusion

While Virtual Product Placement (VPP) is included into movies, its inherent way of modifying the product itself poses growing challenges in defining it across various situations. The use of a VPP in a movie not only establishes a connection between the product and the persona, but also incorporates the movie and the product itself. This renders the intricacy more nuanced and dependent on the circumstance. In certain instances, the outcomes can exhibit such a wide range of variations that it becomes challenging to precisely establish the VPP itself. The film *Star Trek: Into Darkness* serves as a compelling illustration of its intricacy. For instance, specific effects may exclusively manifest as part of theater screenings, but may not be included in the DVD release or TV broadcast. Consequently, virtual or supplementary adverts can only be accessed by those who are physically present in the theater and not by audience members who are not watching the movie.

Conceptually, the film is a result of CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) technology, which adds complexity to the editing process by merging live action footage with computer-generated effects. Consequently, it is challenging to delineate VPP as an independent component of the film production. The relationship between technology and visual effects in science fiction is inherently intertwined with the usage of computer-generated imagery (CGI). The probability of creating a science fiction picture without computer-generated imagery (CGI) is now quite rare. Therefore, it is crucial to take into account the influence of CGI itself while analyzing the existence of visual phenomena in films.

As an exception to the usual rule, VPPs are present in *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. Although the utilization of VPPs can give birth to certain problems, the enduring partnership between *Star Trek* and NASA mitigates the intricacy. The brand identity of NASA has been so intricately intertwined with the idea of *Star Trek* that it no longer needs any visible emblem for recognition. Hence, notwithstanding the presence of a reverse product placement or a 30-second extra advertisement, the film maintains its inherent qualities. Additional concerns, such as the violation of copyright, fraudulent endorsements, and motion picture scripts, can also be tackled within this framework.

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## Family and Family Education in the Mirror of Soviet Feature Films (1960–1985)

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### Abstract

Feature films about family life are powerful cultural artifacts that shape the upbringing of youth by modelling behaviour, reinforcing values, and addressing moral and ethical dilemmas. They provide young people with tools to navigate their own family relationships, foster empathy, and influence their aspirations for future family life. By portraying a range of family experiences, films help youth understand the complexity of relationships and the importance of communication, compassion, and responsibility in a family setting. Hence, studying feature films about family life in the context of film studies and media education plays a significant role in the upbringing of youth by shaping their understanding of family relationships. Our content analysis of Soviet feature films about family and family education during the period of “stagnation” showed that they reflected the desire of the Soviet government to maintain stability and order through the propaganda of the ideals of a strong and stable family. However, despite the official positive narratives, the films increasingly raised issues of the crisis of family relations, the conflict of generations and moral dilemmas, which spoke of the real problems of society. The worldview of the film characters of the “stagnation” period is characterized by a combination of conformism, the desire for stability and an internal search for the meaning of life against the background of general social stagnation. The characters are torn between traditional family values and a feeling of internal dissatisfaction, which creates tension and forces them to solve personal and moral dilemmas.

**Keywords:** family, family upbringing, media, media text, media culture, media education, feature films, stagnation.

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary society is undergoing significant changes and transformations, which is reflected in the family as a social institution: the number of single-parent families is increasing; the tendency towards late marriage and a conscious choice of childlessness is growing; the practice of civil marriages and unstable family relationships is widespread: “In recent years, traditional family values have been transformed in society, which has led to such results as: unpreparedness for family life, deterioration of the microclimate in the family, an increase in divorces, an increase in the number of unregistered marriages, etc.” (Andrienko et al., 2020: 37). These changes require the adaptation of family education models that are able to cope with new challenges. Traditional parenting methods lose their effectiveness in some situations, so the task of developing flexible and adapted approaches to family education has become urgent.

Economic instability and global crises have a significant impact on family life and the upbringing of the younger generation too. Parents often face the need to combine professional activities and raising children. This leads to increased stress in parents, which requires attention to

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the mental health of both parents and children. In such conditions, family education should take into account not only personal and moral qualities in the child, but also a psychologically comfortable environment for the whole family, since the family remains the main source of social and emotional development of the child. Therefore, in the context of constant changes in society, it is important to maintain the emotional well-being of the child, develop self-confidence, self-regulation skills and informed decision-making. In addition, family education forms basic moral attitudes and behavioural models affecting the further successful and fruitful life of a person in society (Zhuravleva, 2023).

Hence, studying feature films about family life in the context of film studies and media education plays a significant role in the upbringing of youth by shaping their values, behaviours, and understanding of relationships. These films often serve as both mirrors of societal norms and powerful tools for transmitting cultural and moral lessons. They often depict various family structures, roles, thus showing how parents, children, and siblings interact. These portrayals can serve as models for young viewers, illustrating how conflicts are resolved, how love and respect are expressed, and what healthy communication looks like. Moreover, youth often look to characters in films for guidance on how to behave in certain social roles. These depictions can shape their understanding of what is expected of them in family settings. Finally, films often reflect and reinforce the values of the society in which they are made. Through storylines and character development, youth are exposed to ideals such as respect for elders, family loyalty, honesty, and personal responsibility. Many films about family life present traditional or evolving views of gender roles, influencing how young people view the responsibilities and expectations of men and women in family and society. Some films serve as tools for promoting national values or ideologies. For example, Soviet-era films often portrayed families in ways that supported collective socialist values, teaching youth the importance of community and work ethic.

Also, critical film studies provide for emotional education of children and youth. Films often explore a wide range of emotions experienced within family life such as love, anger, betrayal, disappointment, grief, and joy. Youth can learn how to navigate their own emotions and empathize with others by observing characters going through similar experiences. On the other hand, films that portray family conflicts, divorce, or the loss of a loved one can help young people process difficult emotions and understand that such challenges are a normal part of life. This can build resilience and emotional intelligence in youth. Watching family stories unfold on screen allows young people to step into the shoes of different characters. This helps develop social skills such as understanding, tolerance, and compassion. Moreover, films often depict various approaches to resolving family conflicts, from open communication to reconciliation. Young viewers can learn valuable lessons about how to handle disputes in their own families and relationships by observing how characters navigate tensions. Positive portrayals of supportive, loving families inspire youth to aspire to similar relationships, while films addressing family dysfunction encourage them to avoid repeating negative patterns. Youth often develop their expectations for parenting and family life by observing how parents in films raise their children, balance work and family responsibilities, and deal with challenges.

Meanwhile, in the context of ongoing globalization, changes in social norms and intercultural interactions, traditional family values are being revised. Many families are faced with the need to raise children in a multicultural environment and changing ideas about gender roles. This requires that parents should pay attention to issues of tolerance, respect for differences and intercultural communication, and to develop flexible value guidelines that will help the child adapt to a rapidly changing world: "Indeed, the possibilities of media education in promoting interethnic tolerance in the student audience have already firmly established themselves in Russian media education as an important factor in education, upbringing and development of the younger generation" (Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2021: 49).

Digitalization has also affected many aspects of modern life, including family relationships and raising children. Modern children grow up in an environment saturated with gadgets, the Internet and social networks, which creates both new opportunities and challenges for parents. In this context, the experience of introducing modern technologies and methods of film and media education in order to educate children and adolescents is being updated. Here, it seems vital to form conscious and safe behaviour in children on the Internet, develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills, maintain a balance between online and offline interactions, developing social, communicative and emotional competencies of young people in real interpersonal relationships.

## 2. Materials and methods

The material of our study is audiovisual media texts on the topic of family and family education. The main method is a comparative-hermeneutic analysis of Soviet films of the “stagnation” period (1960–1985) devoted to family issues (including: analysis of stereotypes, ideological analysis, identification analysis, iconographic analysis, plot analysis, character analysis).

In our study, we analysed Russian (Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2020; Kosinova, 2016; Letzbor, 2019; Obukhovski, 2021; Prokhorova, 2013; Suvorova, 2021) and foreign scientific findings (Bruzzi, 2005; Douglas, Olson, 1995; Fulmer, 2017; Jenkins, 2015; Kerry, 2016; Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2013; Levy, 1991; Tanner et al., 2003; Zurcher et al., 2018) devoted to family and family education in the mirror of Soviet feature films. In addition, the following research methods were used: analysis and synthesis of articles and monographs on the topic of the study, generalization and classification.

## 3. Discussion

The theme of family and family education was always an important and relevant aspect of Russian feature cinema in the period from 1960 to 1985. This period of time covers the end of N.S. Khrushchev’s “thaw”, the era of L.I. Brezhnev’s “stagnation” and the first years of perestroika. During these years, cinema became one of the key means for the transmission of ideological values, norms and ideals of the Soviet family. During the “thaw” of the 1960s, there was a move away from strict ideological censorship and the liberalization of art, including cinema, began. Cinema became more humane, there were more plots related to everyday life, personal relationships, issues of morality and education. For example, Mikhail Kalatozov’s film *The Cranes Are Flying/Letyat zhuravli* (1957) shows complex family relationships against the backdrop of the war.

The issues of family and family education in Soviet feature films of the “stagnation” period (1970s – early 1980s in the USSR) are relatively widely studied by Russian (Chelysheva, 2013, 2014; Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2022; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2020; Kosinova, 2016; Letzbor, 2019; Obukhovski, 2021; Prokhorova, 2013; Suvorova, 2021) and foreign scholars (Applebaum et al., 2018; Chion, Brewster, 1991; First, 2008; Ianushko, 2022; Kim, 2022; Todd, 2023; Zawlacki, 2020; Zvonkine, 2016). During this period, cinema actively depicted the contradictions and characteristics of the Soviet family, emphasizing both traditional values and new social challenges. Films about relationships between spouses, parents and children reflected the real problems faced by Soviet people.

Cinema of the 1970s “stagnation” period, on the one hand, continued to depict the idealization of a stable Soviet family, but at the same time some films touched on the topic of generational conflicts and crises in family relationships. Films of this period often raised issues of moral choice, the value of family, labour and collectivism. For example, Vladimir Menshov’s film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears/Moskva Slezam ne Verit* (1979) shows the evolution of the main character from a single mother to a successful, self-sufficient woman. “Art, both professional and amateur, became one of the main channels for transmitting the ideas of power. The erosion of the “Soviet project” in the field of art became most noticeable in the era of stagnation. This is reflected in the field of amateur and naive art. In the works of a number of amateur and naive artists of this time, one can observe the phenomenon of the growing importance of individualistic values and the gradual displacement of the dominant ideological discourse (similar processes are also developing in professional art during this period), and the “grand narrative” of power is transformed into images of a schematized, strictly organized utopia” (Suvorova, 2021: 82).

Films of the 1980s (the beginning of perestroika) more openly criticized the existing political system in the country, emphasized the internal problems of Soviet society, also in the family sphere. Film directors explored the theme of alienation, the crisis of moral foundations, and the complexity of education in a changing world. For example, Vasily Pichul’s film *Little Vera/Malen’kaya Vera* (1988) shows a deep crisis of the family against the backdrop of a general decline in moral and social norms.

A quantitative and genre analysis of Russian feature films about family education conducted by I.V. Chelysheva and G.V. Mikhaleva shows that the number of feature films about family created from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s reached more than 150 films (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024). The same period is the leader in the average annual number of films shot about family and family education (about 9 years annually). At the same time, dramas and melodramas prevailed in terms of genre. In addition, the focus of feature films of this period was on the inner experiences of the



hero of the story, which led, in particular, to changes in the genre policy of Soviet cinema: “If the first half of the 1970s is characterized by a mixture of genres, then the second half of the 1970s – early 1980s is rather a time of “pure” genres. Especially many adventure, detective and melodramatic films began to appear. This is due to the decline in audience attendance that occurred in the second half of the 1970s. The battle for the viewer was waged by various means, including those of “pure” genres. A striking example of victory in this battle is V. Menshov’s film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears / Moskva Slezam ne Verit*” (Kosinova, 2016: 257).

In addition, during this period, such an unusual genre as a parable film came into fashion (*Parable of Love / Pritcha o Ljubvi* (1974), *Flights in Dreams and Reality / Polety vo Sne i Najavu* (1982) by R. Balayan, *Kalina Krasnaya / Kalina Krasnaja* (1973) by V. Shukshin). “It is significant that the widespread use of the parable experience coincided in time with the heightened interest in the so-called moral and ethical issues that the cinema of the 1970s and early 1980s was so intensely engaged in. One of the reasons for the gravitation towards the parable genre in the 1970s is that at that time the best moral ideals of socialism, humanism, etc. do not stand up to the test of reality. Thus, for the first time, an undefeated positive hero appears on the Soviet screen” (Kosinova, 2016: 258). Such films were very popular with young audiences: “During the Brezhnev stagnation period, researchers came to the conclusion that the favourite films of Soviet students were such films as *The Dawns Here Are Quiet/A Zori Zdes’ Tihie*, *They Fought for the Motherland/Oni Srazhalis’ za Rodinu*, *Kalina Krasnaya/Kalina Krasnaja*, *Solaris/Soljaris*, *Romance of Lovers/Romans o Vjublennyh*, and *Mirror/Zerkalo*. Soviet youth showed a tendency to liberate themselves from the prevailing ideological dogmatism, which, in particular, manifested itself in their interest in the films of A.A. Tarkovsky, which did not fit into the sociocultural paradigm of the “stagnation” period” (Obukhovsky, 2021: 46).

On the other hand, as M.I. Kosinova aptly noted, “the strengthening of censorship in the era of ‘stagnation’ leads to the overwhelming majority of filmmakers ‘breaking’ under the yoke of the system and continuing to work by inertia – in the space of canonical communist ideas and Soviet ideas about life. These ideological attitudes continue to be launched into the conveyor belt of the Soviet film industry, which automatically imparts to most of the products it produces a taste of falsehood, which the viewer cannot help but feel. In many ways, it is for this reason that in the 1980s our cinema will find itself in a deplorable state” (Kosinova, 2016: 255).

It is well-known that the family in Soviet films is often portrayed as an integral part of society. Many plots emphasize the importance of collective life and the connection between personal and public interests. Cinema from the 1960s to 1985s became an important mirror reflecting not only the family values of the time, but also changes in society, cultural and ideological attitudes. It played a significant role in the formation and maintenance of the ideal of the Soviet family, however, simultaneously reflecting the obstacles and contradictions that society faced during this period.

The family was seen as the main institution for transmitting moral and ideological values. Films often showed how parents tried to instil in their children such qualities as hard work, honesty, collectivism, and loyalty to the ideals of socialism. The image of the mother in Soviet cinema was often idealized, with selflessness, wisdom, love, and patience attributed to her. The father was usually portrayed as the head of the family, hardworking and fair, but sometimes distant or overly strict.

The theme of generational conflict became especially relevant in the 1970s and 1980s. These films show how children encounter difficulties in communicating with their parents, who do not always comprehend the changes in society and the lives of the younger generation. “The techniques of representing family life patterns underwent significant changes in films on the school theme in comparison with the previous periods. Very often the film makers showed the generation gap on the screen, problems of teacher-parent relationships (*You Wouldnt Even Dream It/Vam i ne Snilos’*, 1980, etc.), the crisis of family relations/single-parent families (*The Boys/Patsany*, 1983; *Other People’s Letters/Chuzhiye Pis’ma*, 1975), cruelty and violence combined with indifference and spiritual poverty (*Scarecrow/Chuchelo*, 1983; *Plead Guilty/Priznat’ Vinovnym*, 1983, etc.). In general, the films on the school theme were based on everlasting moral values such as generosity, kind-heartedness, goodness, responsibility, desire to help people, etc. These values had a powerful educational impact during that period” (Chelysheva, Mikhaleva, 2018: 138).

Discussing the verisimilitude of the cinematography of the period of “stagnation” and the appropriateness of its use in teaching Russian as a foreign language, K.V. Letzbor comes to the

conclusion that “in the cinematography of the period under consideration, we are talking about the embodiment of artistic truth according to the ideas of the French theorist of cinematography A. Bazin, which suggest reflecting the essence of life phenomena from the position of the artist and his aesthetic ideals and which are achieved with the help of life-like techniques of artistic imagery. Due to the linearity and simplicity of the narration, this cinematic language will also be more accessible to foreign students” (Letzbor, 2019: 73).

Analysing the theoretical concepts of the leading Soviet magazine “Art of Cinema” during the period of “stagnation”, A.V. Fedorov emphasizes that “On the whole, the magazine “Art of Cinema” in 1969–1985, as in the years of the “thaw”, was still within the framework of the typical model of a Soviet humanitarian magazine, which, despite significant concessions to censorship and the authorities, in no less than half of its text tried to preserve the ability to artistically analyse the film process (unfortunately, this did not allow it to criticize even in minimal doses the shortcomings of the work of the most “initial” influential Soviet screen artists of that time). The magazine was unable to hold back the “thaw,” which was still strong even in the late 1960s, and found itself largely in the ideological rut of the Brezhnev peak, although, paying tribute to Soviet propaganda, the magazine could afford to publish “in some narrow spaces” meaningful discussions and important theoretical works” (Fedorov, 2023: 43).

Thus, the relevance of the topic of family and family education in modern conditions is due to profound social and cultural changes, the influence of technology, economic instability and the transformation of family structures. Modern parents and teachers face new challenges of the time, requiring the adaptation of educational models that take into account the influence of digital technologies, intercultural aspects and socio-economic factors. In this context, family education continues to be the basis for moral values and the full development of the individual.

#### 4. Results

*The stagnation period feature films (1960–1985) about family and family education. Place of action, historical, social, cultural, political, and ideological contexts.*

1. *Historical context (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audiences). Features of the historical period when media texts were created, market conditions that contributed to the idea, the process of creating media texts, the degree of influence of that time on media texts.*

The period of “stagnation” in Soviet history began after L.I. Khrushchev’s “thaw” and is characterized by relatively stable political, economic and social stability against the background of the absence of significant reforms. This is the time of Leonid Brezhnev’s rule (1964–1982), which is remembered for stabilization, but also stagnation and conservatism. The historical context of this time directly influenced the subject matter and mood of feature films, including those dealing with family and family education.

In the 1970s, the political system of the USSR became more closed, and serious reforms ceased. The main goal of the state was to maintain stability and preserve the existing system. Hence, at that time, the cult of a stable, predictable life was actively promoted, which was reflected in cinema. Although censorship was less strict than under Stalin, the tendency to show positive, stable images, including in the depiction of the family, again increased in film production.

The family was seen as a unit of socialist society, which should demonstrate the strength of relationships prevailing traditional values: respect for elders, hard work, love for the Motherland and collectivism (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears / Moskva Slezam ne Verit*, 1979). State policy emphasized the importance of family ties, raising the younger generation in the spirit of collectivism, patriotism and socialist morality. Cinema actively promoted the image of harmonious and strong families, which served as a reflection and propaganda of state ideology. However, despite the official narratives of stability, in reality, society faced various social problems – deteriorating living standards, moral crisis, alcoholism and problems in family relationships. These aspects sometimes penetrated into the films of that time, but most often they were touched upon only indirectly.

2. *Socio-cultural, ideological, religious contexts (dominant concepts: media agencies, media categories, media representations and media audience).*

a) *ideology, directions, goals, objectives, world outlook, the concepts of the media texts’ authors in the socio-cultural context; ideology, culture of the world, depicted in these media texts.*

One of the key themes in Russian feature films of this historical period was the conflict between generations. Older people, brought up under the strict discipline and ideology of the Stalin era, encountered new trends among young people who grew up in relative stability and did not experience the hardships that their parents had gone through. So, the elders, brought up in the spirit of socialist ideals, often did not understand or did not accept the worldview of their children, who were more pragmatic and less idealistic. Young people in these films were depicted as freer, but also more cynical, which created additional conflicts in families (*Courier/Kur'yer*, 1986).

In cinema, these conflicts were resolved through the elders accepting the values of the youth or, conversely, the youth came to understand the importance of traditional Soviet values. For example, the film *Father and Son/Otets i Syn* (1971) presents a story of the relationship between a father, a representative of the older generation, and his son, who try to understand and accept each other.

Against the backdrop of official slogans about strong families, themes of family crisis also began to be raised in feature films. A number of films of this time trace themes of disappointment, alienation, and feelings of loneliness in marriage, which reflected the real problems of Soviet society. For example, the comedy film *Love and Doves / Lyubov' i Golubi* (1984), which, despite its light form, touches on important themes of family relationships, betrayal, and reconciliation.

The films of this period also actively raised the theme of women's emancipation, although this took place within the framework of traditional Soviet values. Women were depicted not only as mothers and wives, but also as full-fledged participants in the production process, actively involved in public life. However, most films still showed women as keepers of the hearth, which corresponded to the state ideology of the time. For example, in the drama *Autumn Marathon/Osenniy Marafon* (1979), the main character, the wife of the protagonist, embodies the image of a traditional Soviet woman who faces a marriage crisis, but remains faithful to the family.

In general, since the most important function of the family in cinema remained the upbringing of the younger generation in the spirit of socialist ideals, many films of that time emphasized the importance of raising children, passing on to them the correct moral values and skills necessary for life in Soviet society.

*b) the world outlook of the characters in media texts about family.*

The worldview of the characters mirrored the complex social and psychological atmosphere of that time. Unlike the "thaw" period, when cinema began to show personal conflicts and more realistic images, the "stagnation" era saw a gradual return to ideologically verified plots, but with a new emphasis on the internal and moral experiences of the characters.

In the conditions of social stagnation, many characters of family films show a tendency toward conformism – adaptation to existing conditions without actively trying to change anything. This could be expressed in the desire to live peacefully, avoid conflicts and not seek change, which coincided with the public mood of this period. The characters do not try to actively fight the system or personal difficulties, preferring to resign themselves and accept reality as it is. Often, they take a position of wait-and-see or passivity.

Films of the "stagnation" period usually dealt with the crisis of traditional family values. The heroes faced personal problems that reflected the erosion of old foundations, including divorce, midlife crisis, and generation gaps. However, such conflicts rarely led to radical changes or challenges to the system. On the contrary, the characters strived to preserve the family, at least outwardly, despite internal disappointments and crises.

The family was traditionally presented as the last bastion of stability in the context of general social stagnation. Films showed conflicts within the family, but they usually did not reach a tragic plot denouement: the family remained an important social unit, and the characters tried to preserve it despite difficulties. However, behind this stability there was often an internal feeling of dissatisfaction and emotional alienation, which was not always spoken out loud, but was felt at the level of latent conflicts.

The characters retreat into their personal experiences, thoughts about life, aging and the past. Unlike the characters of the "thaw" era, where there were attempts to actively change their lives, during the "stagnation" epoch, the characters more often retreat into the inner world, avoiding external conflicts. In addition, in the films of this time, there is some nostalgia for the past and an attempt to avoid real problems through memories, dreams or idealized images.

Many characters face questions of personal morality and the search for the meaning of life. In the conditions of stagnation, social activity lost its appeal, and characters began to think about more personal issues: personal happiness, the meaning of work, roles in society. At the same time,

heroes often find themselves in a dead end, unable to find a way out of the internal crisis, which corresponds to the stagnation in the social and cultural life of that time.

*The main stereotype of success in this world.*

The main stereotype of success in films about the family of the “stagnation” period was the achievement of external stability and social respectability despite internal crises or discontent. This stereotype reflected the public mood of the time, when Soviet society valued predictability and stability, especially in family life. In such films, success was measured not so much in personal happiness or self-realization, but in compliance with accepted norms and expectations.

Family well-being was considered the main indicator of success. Starting a family, having children, and maintaining outwardly harmonious relationships were often the highest goals. Even if there were problems within the family, they were usually resolved by compromise and a return to the norms of traditional values. The stereotype assumed that success meant preserving the family at any cost, even if crises, discontent, or internal conflicts arose. Divorce or family breakdown were seen as failures (*Vanity of Vanities / Suyeta Suyet*, 1979).

The character's success was often assessed through the prism of material well-being. This could include having an apartment (preferably with an improved layout), a dacha, a car, and other symbols of material success, which were scarce in the Soviet era. A family that had wealth, even if limited, was presented as stable and prosperous. Providing for the family was considered an important task, and characters who achieved this were perceived as successful. Characters considered successful often occupied a respected position in society – be it a prestigious job, the respect of colleagues, or participation in public life. Career or professional achievements also played an important role in the perception of success. The stereotype of success implied the fulfilment of social expectations. A man should be a responsible breadwinner, and a woman – a caring mother and housewife. Even if the heroine occupied a high position at work, she still had to maintain a traditional role in the family. Films often emphasized the importance of women finding a balance between career and family, and true success came when they returned to their main role – as homemakers.

Although the characters often achieved external success (a stable family, material well-being, a career), many of them felt internal dissatisfaction and a spiritual crisis. However, this theme was not always deeply explored, since the films usually led to the fact that family or social obligations were more important than personal needs. This created a typical stereotype: the film hero or heroine could experience personal doubts, but ultimately returned to generally accepted values – family and stability.

3. *Structure and narrative modes in media texts (dominant concepts: media categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations).*

a) *the location and time period in media texts.*

Stagnation films often depicted Soviet reality through familiar and typical locations for viewers. This helped to strengthen the connection between events on screen and people's everyday lives, thus creating a sense of familiarity and social stability. Cities, especially large ones such as Moscow and Leningrad, often became the centre of action. The urban landscape was presented as a space of progress and social life. However, many films did not show the central streets, but rather residential areas, factories, plants, and communal apartments – places where most of the population lived and worked. Rural life also played an important role in stagnation films. Films often featured scenes associated with communal apartments or Soviet apartment buildings. These places emphasized the collectivist way of life of Soviet people, where private and public space often intersected. The village was often contrasted with the city, presented as a more traditional, “true” space where traditional values – hard work, collectivism, and mutual assistance – were preserved. Characters who came to the village from the city often “cleansed themselves” and found a way to themselves. Stagnation films were mainly focused on the present – the 1970s and early 1980s. This was a time period that was actively supported by ideology as a “golden time” of stability achieved after the heroic victories of the past. Films often showed the everyday life of a modern Soviet person, their everyday worries and problems. The time context was also deliberately close to the viewer so that they could easily identify with what was happening on the screen.

b) *the environment typical for these media texts, household items.*

Films shot during the period of stagnation in the USSR, especially domestic dramas, actively depict the typical environment and objects of everyday life of those years (“Khrushchyovkas” or

panel houses, carpets on the walls, wall cabinets, desks with a table lamp, tulle curtains, pull-out sofas, crystal glassware, rotary telephones).

c) *genre modifications.*

Most films on the topic of family and family education were shot in the genre of drama or melodrama, but comedies and children's films were also shot (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024).

d) *(stereotyped) devices to depict reality.*

The family was portrayed as strong and harmonious, with relationships between spouses and children always maintained at the proper level. Often, the emphasis was on mutual support, assistance, trust and respect between family members. This reflected the ideology of the Soviet state, which viewed the family as the basic "unit of society". Films of the "stagnation" period contained many moral lessons about proper behaviour in the family, raising children and respect for elders. These lessons were conveyed through dialogues, the heroes' actions and their decisions, showing that following traditional Soviet values leads to success and happiness. For example, the film *The Elder Son/Starshiy Syn* (1975) emphasizes the importance of accepting parental responsibility, which is deduced as the main moral lesson for the younger generation. The image of the ideal father in films of this period was often portrayed as the head of the family, who is responsible for raising children and maintaining discipline. He was portrayed as a fair and wise mentor, sometimes strict, but always caring. In the film *Father and Son/Otets i Syn* (1971), the father is the embodiment of moral principles and stability, despite internal family conflicts. The stereotype that happiness and stability in the family come through honest work is often traced in films. The parents demonstrate hard work, which becomes a role model for their children. The family is formed as a work collective, where everyone makes their contribution (*Carnival/Karnaval*, 1981).

The stagnation cinema also used the motif of conflict between fathers and children, which was always resolved in favour of the older generation. Young people, carried away by new ideas or lifestyles, eventually realize that their elders are right and return to traditional values. "The stereotyped techniques of representing family life patterns are also interesting in comparison with the previous periods, and they undergo significant changes in films on the school theme. The generation gap and problems of teacher-parent relationships are more often touched upon (these models take place in *You Wouldn't Even Dream It/Vam i ne Snilos'*, 1980, etc.), also the crisis of family relations/single-parent families (*The Boys/Patsany*, 1983; *Other People's Letters/Chuzhiye Pis'ma*, 1975; etc.)" (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024: 136).

Stereotypical methods of depicting family and family upbringing in cinema were aimed at supporting traditional values corresponding to state ideology. Films were created in order to show that the Soviet family is strong and stable, despite temporary difficulties. Such films contributed to the creation of an idealized image of the family, which did not contradict the interests and goals of the state, despite some hidden problems and inconspicuous drawbacks.

e) *character typology (character traits, clothing, physique, vocabulary, facial expressions, key gestures, presence or absence of the stereotypical manner of representing the characters in these media texts):*

– *The age of characters:* the age range of children is 7–17, however, teenagers are more common. The age of the adult characters (parents, grandparents, etc.) can be anything;

– *The education level:* characters can have any level of education;

– *Social status, occupation:* the financial situation of children is approximately the same, they can be either from families of workers and farmers, or from the intelligentsia. The professions are different.

– *The marital status of the characters:* adult characters are mostly married; however, single parents also appear in films.

"The institution of the family was traditionally shown in films about school as a stronghold of society. We can see such healthy families in the film *Vice Versa/Naoborot* (1981), where the parents of the major characters are their children's best friends, they are wise and understanding people. Another variant of representing the character's family condition is in films where the character loses/ looks for/finds their families, for example, in such films as *The Orphans / Syroty* (1976), *Other People's Letters / Chuzhiye pis'ma*, (1975), etc." (Mikhaleva, Chelysheva, 2024: 136).

– *Appearance, clothes, body build, features of their characters, vocabulary.*

The film characters reflected the main social types of their time. Their appearance, clothes, physique and character were closely connected with the realities of Soviet life of that period.

The characters were distinguished by their external simplicity, practicality in clothes, restraint in character and conservatism in vocabulary. These elements created images that reflected the public demand for stability, collectivism and moral values. For example, *Office Romance/Sluzhebnyy Roman* (1977) is a film about the working days of office workers, in which the main characters (Novoseltsev and Kalugina) demonstrate typical features of that time: modesty, hard work and commitment to social norms.

*f) a significant change in the life of media characters.*

Significant changes in the lives of the characters concerned, first of all, their personal and family relationships, professional activities and reassessment of their values. These changes reflected both individual crises and the pressure of social norms. Despite all the changes, a characteristic feature of most characters was the desire to preserve family values. These films often ended with the characters finding a balance between their personal desires and social expectations, even if this process was accompanied by crises and difficulties.

*g) the challenge that the characters face.*

One of the key challenges for the characters is the contradiction between their personal aspirations and social responsibilities. Society emphasized collectivism, stability, and fulfilling social roles, but the heroes increasingly began to feel inner discord, striving for personal happiness and self-realization (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears/Moskva Slezam ne Verit*, 1979). Although the era of stagnation often emphasized stability and material security, the characters often faced real everyday problems: lack of housing, long lines for goods, and lack of personal space. These problems created tangible difficulties for the characters in everyday life: the film *Pokrovskie Vorota* (1982) shows several generations living in one apartment, which leads to numerous conflicts and misunderstandings. The characters are faced with the need to share not only space, but also personal boundaries, which becomes a challenge for their relationships.

Family relationships in films were often put to the test, especially when the characters faced domestic hardships, personal crises, or changes in circumstances. This could be due to adultery, a lack of mutual understanding, or even the characters' desire to find themselves outside the family (*Love and Doves/Lyubov' i Golubi*, 1984).

Films often reflected pressure from society and the need to meet collective expectations. The characters were forced to act within the framework of generally accepted norms, where personal aspirations sometimes had to be sacrificed for the public good. This created a conflict between individualism and collectivism, which was especially acute in the family and at work (*A Dormitory for Single Workers/Odinokim predostavlyatsya obshchezhitie*, 1983).

The characters often experience internal conflicts caused by the gap between their ideas about happiness and real life. In conditions of social stability and material wealth, many lacked emotional satisfaction, which gave rise to a search for meaning and personal happiness (*Autumn Marathon/Osenniy Marafon*, 1979).

The challenges faced by the characters of the stagnation era films reflect the key contradictions of the time: the gap between personal aspirations and social expectations, the crisis of family and professional relationships, the search for personal happiness in conditions of social stability. These challenges often lead to deep internal conflicts that the heroes overcome through personal changes, although sometimes they never find a complete solution to their problems.

*h) solving the problem.*

The characters solve their problems through open communication, rethinking priorities, accepting responsibility, finding compromises, support from loved ones, self-analysis and adaptation to new conditions. These approaches help them overcome difficulties, maintain family ties and find personal happiness, despite the challenges that society and time put before them. The characters suffer the consequences of their actions and learn to accept responsibility for them. This is an important step towards solving their problems. For example, Vasily, the main character of the comedy film *Love and Doves/Lyubov' i Golubi* (1984), after his betrayal, realizes the importance of family and decides to return to his wife. He understands that he must take responsibility for the destruction of the relationship and do everything possible to restore it.

## 5. Conclusion

Nowadays, the issues of family and family education are becoming especially relevant for a number of reasons related to social, economic and cultural changes. Family plays a key role in the

formation of personality, its moral values and social competence, which makes issues of family education critically important for the development of society as a whole.

Feature films about family life are powerful cultural artifacts that shape the upbringing of youth by modelling behaviour, reinforcing values, and addressing moral and ethical dilemmas. They provide young people with tools to navigate their own family relationships, foster empathy, and influence their aspirations for future family life. By portraying a range of family experiences, films help youth understand the complexity of relationships and the importance of communication, compassion, and responsibility in a family setting.

Our content analysis of Soviet feature films about family and family education during the period of “stagnation” showed that they reflected the desire of the Soviet government to maintain stability and order through the propaganda of the ideals of a strong and stable family. However, despite the official positive narratives, the films increasingly raised issues of the crisis of family relations, the conflict of generations and moral dilemmas, which spoke of the real problems of society.

The worldview of the film characters of the “stagnation” period is characterized by a combination of conformism, the desire for stability and an internal search for the meaning of life against the background of general social stagnation. The characters are torn between traditional family values and a feeling of internal dissatisfaction, which creates tension and forces them to solve personal and moral dilemmas.

The stereotype of success in films about the family of the “stagnation” period was reduced to external compliance with social expectations – a stable family, material well-being and social status. Even when the characters faced personal crises, the films led to the conclusion that success lay in maintaining traditional family values and stability despite internal doubts or discontent. During the period of “stagnation”, Soviet cinema often used stereotypical techniques to depict reality, especially in films about family and family education. These techniques emphasized the official ideals enshrined in state propaganda and reflected stability and traditional values. However, stereotyping made it possible to hide the real social and moral problems that families faced.

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## Academic Honesty of Students as a Media Educational Problem of Higher Education

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### Abstract

Compliance with the principles of academic honesty is a key factor in preserving the traditional values of higher education and maintaining the quality of the educational process. Large-scale introduction of digital technologies into the everyday practices of young people, easy access to neural networks create additional risks of violating the principles of academic honesty. The article presents the results of a survey of students (n=633) in order to determine changes in the academic honesty of young students. The results of the study showed that students have vague moral standards regarding the correct use of information and are frivolous about academic fraud. Almost half of the respondents answered that they resorted to cheating on the exam. A third of the respondents do not consider it necessary to memorize a large amount of information for the exam, the justification being of her the widespread availability. The study also revealed violations of the principles of academic honesty in the process of preparing final qualifying works. Students demonstrate a tolerant attitude towards incorrect borrowing of information, plagiarism, and the use of artificial intelligence in writing author's texts. The results of the study confirmed the hypothesis that the insufficient level of media competence of students distorts the perception of the principles of academic honesty, understanding the boundaries of acceptable behavior when working with media resources. The article concludes that it is necessary to develop media education in modern conditions. Media education of young people will help to form both the skills of correct use of media resources, generating author's texts based on the analysis and understanding of various sources, and ethical principles of working with information, intolerance towards academic fraud.

**Keywords:** academic honesty, ethics of behavior, student, higher education, media competence, academic fraud, digitalization of education.

### 1. Introduction

The study of academic honesty issues is one of the most relevant areas of modern scientific discourse. The semantic content of the concept of "academic honesty" is associated with the norms of ethical behavior in education, compliance with the principles of responsibility, fairness, conscientious attitude to learning, truthfulness, trust and respect. In contrast to the concept of "academic honesty", such terms as "academic negligence" and "academic fraud" are used. These destructive practices are expressed in the forms of various types of deception, plagiarism, attempts to gain an unfair advantage in the educational process (Summers et al., 2021). Academic dishonesty can be both intentional and unintentional. Intentional dishonesty is in most cases associated with the inversion of moral values and norms of behavior of students, the prevalence of justifying motives for their dishonest actions. Unintentional academic dishonesty is due to the low

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level of students' awareness of the principles of correct use of information, the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Both intentional and unintentional practices of violating academic honesty are largely initiated by the insufficient level of media education of students. The effectiveness of media education of young people ensures the formation of skills for working with information, correct consumption and production of media, principles of ethical behavior (Romero-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2021).

## 2. Materials and methods

The purpose of the study is to examine the transformation of students' academic honesty as a consequence of large-scale digitalization of the Russian education system. In the course of the study, academic honesty is considered as a set of principles of students' ethical behavior during knowledge testing, norms of mutual respect and responsibility of participants in the educational process for the learning outcome. This approach allowed us to formulate the research question put forward in the title of the article: are there any dysfunctions of academic honesty in students, can they be considered as a media-educational problem of higher education?

*The research tasks are formulated as follows:*

1. Description of key "blocks" of students' academic honesty, assessment of their level of development as part of the student's overall media competence.

2. Identification of problems and dysfunctions of transformation of students' academic honesty in the context of large-scale digitalization of education, their impact on the development of students' media skills.

*The research hypotheses are presented as follows:*

1. The development of digital technologies contributes to the distancing of students, reducing their involvement in the educational process. Such a perception of new digital educational realities becomes a predicate for the reduction of students' academic honesty and a barrier to the development of their media skills.

2. With reduced media skills, students develop a reduced perception of the need to maintain academic honesty in the educational process.

During the preparation of the study, a set of methods was used: analysis of secondary data, systematization, generalization, etc. The leading method of the study was a questionnaire survey of students of Russian universities. This article presents part of the collected research material devoted to the problems of violation of academic honesty of students in the media educational environment of the university.

The selection of students for the survey was carried out on a voluntary basis using the principle of personal appeal and the snowball method. The representativeness of the selection of students was carried out on the basis of "studying in a higher educational institution" at the time of the survey. Other features of representation were not introduced, the sample was not repaired according to socio-demographic characteristics. A total of 633 students were surveyed (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic profile of respondents (%)

<i>gender of the respondent</i>			
girls		young men	
59.4		40.6	
<i>territorial affiliation of the university</i>			
metropolitan university		regional university	
78.6		21.3	
<i>training profile</i>			
natural science	humanitarian	socio-economic	technical
32.5	17.2	26.1	24.2

The sample consists mainly of full-time students. The coverage of students by level of education is presented as widely as possible (bachelor's, master's, specialist). It is worth noting that the spontaneity of the selection of respondents can be considered as a certain limitation of the study, but the final composition of the sample fully meets the objectives of the study.

The survey results were supplemented by materials from focus groups conducted with students (2 focus groups of 10 people). Focus groups were formed according to the principle of

heterogeneity. The students of different profiles and forms of education took part, the proportions of boys/girls were equalized. Students who completed the questionnaire survey did not take part in the focus groups. The focus group guide was designed in such a way as to draw attention to the controversial aspects of the questionnaire survey results.

### 3. Discussion

The active introduction of digital technologies into all spheres of public life and the scaling of digitalization processes have significantly modified pedagogical practices, including the system of knowledge control and assessment. On the one hand, new opportunities are opening up for increasing the objectivity of the assessment process, and the risks of conflicts between students and teachers are reducing (Selwyn et al., 2023). On the other hand, access to digital technologies in the modern world significantly simplifies the process of illegitimate use of information for students. These negative trends call into question the validity of academic education (Singh, 2021). The spread of online learning makes it extremely difficult to track cases of violation of academic honesty (Balderas, Caballero-Hernández, 2020). The results show that the majority of students violated the principles of academic integrity in one form or another, namely, using cheat sheets, unfair borrowing from other sources, and assistance during exams from third parties (Jeergal et al., 2015; Ismail, 2018).

As noted in modern studies, digital forms of academic dishonesty have a number of differences from their traditional counterparts. In particular, they are characterized by an expanded range of tools (Parks-Leduc et al., 2022) and the justifying tone of their use among students (Frolova, Rogach, 2022). New challenges to academic integrity standards are associated with the use of artificial intelligence. ChatGPT, which allows generating new texts, creates significant problems and risks of increasing academic dishonesty practices (Nam, Bai, 2023). The growing use of artificial intelligence capabilities in preparing students' written work raises serious concerns among educators, scientists, and university administrators (Filson, Atuase, 2024).

In modern conditions, the question of how universities should respond to new challenges and what tools to use to prevent cases of academic dishonesty is becoming especially relevant. An analysis of university documents in the western provinces of Canada indicates the dominance of punitive approaches to violations of academic ethics. At the same time, the issue of constructing educational resources that support the relevant values in the academic environment has been on the periphery of the university administration. Scientists draw attention to the role of media education in the practices of forming norms and ethical principles for the use of information, as well as reflection on issues of academic honesty (Stoesz, Eaton, 2022). A similar conclusion can be traced in other studies that illustrate the low level of students' awareness of the legal and ethical norms for the use of educational and extracurricular Internet resources (Cilliers, 2017). An anonymous survey of students at Zürich University of Applied Sciences showed that, on the one hand, students highly rate their knowledge in the field of media education. In particular, students believe that they are well aware of the ethical norms for the use of information. However, on the other hand, it was found that students had difficulty identifying clear instances of misconduct (Nortes et al., 2024).

In the new conditions of digitalization, the inclusion of artificial intelligence and neural networks in the daily educational routine of students, universities should strengthen the components of educational training aimed at developing the media competence of young people. As scientists rightly note, neural networks are a type of media, which implies an analysis of the ethical problems of their use in the subject field of media education (Kozlikhin, Demidov, 2024).

Media education of students should ensure work with the values and attitudes of students regarding the correct handling of media resources, standards for the use of information taken from various sources, the acceptable boundaries of honest academic behavior (Vasileva, Miklyaeva, 2023). Similar conclusions are presented in foreign studies that link academic honesty with such values as trust, fairness, respect (Werner, 2022). In this context, the role of the teacher, who should act as an example of ethical behavior, convey the ideas of honesty, responsibility and respect (Devine, Chin, 2018), is of great importance.

### 4. Results

According to the data obtained, students rate their motivation for studying very highly. In particular, 79.0 % of respondents expressed the opinion that they have such motivational

attitudes. Perhaps this is due to the fact that most students find studying interest (70.5 %) and easy (60.7 %). It can be assumed that the opinion of these students reflects their distorted idea of the simplicity of obtaining an education at the university, and also demonstrates inflated estimates of their media skills.

*Valentin S.: "I thought it would be more difficult to study, but no, it's fine, I work, and I find material for my reports myself when studying. They don't ask more from us."*

*Tatyana K.: "The point of studying is that we are constantly looking for information for reports, papers, essays, etc. Books on the subject? No, I don't read them, because I understand the topic well enough without them."*

The following distribution of respondents' answers can serve as an indirect confirmation of this conclusion. Despite the fact that 83.3 % of students consider themselves to be sufficiently organized and able to independently plan their study schedule, 47.1 % of respondents are often distracted, and 48.5 % do their own thing if they need to study online (Table 2). At the same time, 41.4 % of students will not watch the videos posted on the subject. The dysfunctionality of such an approach has a direct negative impact on the quality of preparation and media competence of students due to a decrease in the demands on themselves as participants in the educational process. On the one hand, the student still expects that it is the teacher who should captivate and focus their attention on the problematic aspects of the educational material, on the other hand – an excessively inflated assessment of their abilities in terms of data analysis and processing is formed. The survey results showed that 9 out of 10 respondents believe that they can systematize their search on information platforms with a high degree of efficiency, 87.2 % of respondents believe that they have the skill of critically understanding media products, and 86.1 % – even “gain knowledge through their own inferences” (self-reflection of the information found).

**Table 2.** Distribution of responses to the question: “Do you agree with the following statements...?” (%)

Answer option	yes	no
I am motivated to study	79.0	21.0
I am organized and can plan my own study schedule	83.3	16.7
I often get distracted if I need to study via video link	47.1	52.9
I often do my own things if classes are held online	48.5	51.5
If there are videos for a subject, I always watch them	58.6	41.4
Live communication with the teacher during the course is important to me	72.0	28.0
I don't see the point in memorizing a large amount of information for the exam, everything can be found on the Internet anyway	34.1	65.9
I don't think it's shameful to cheat on an exam	47.9	52.1

It can be assumed that it was the transition to online and the large-scale distribution of digital technologies that served as a predicate for the decrease in students' responsibility and the growth of their self-esteem in digital skills for working with media. Indirect confirmation can be the high proportion of respondents (72.0 %) for whom the importance of personal (live) communication with the teacher during the course of study remains.

*Konstantin A.: "Is live communication with the teacher important to me? Yes, of course, it is always easier to ask something about the assignment, to clarify, maybe he will tell you how to complete the task better. But do I always go to classes, no (laughs), I do not always succeed."*

During the study, students were asked to evaluate their behavior when preparing for and passing the session. Thus, it was found that a third of respondents (34.1 %) do not consider it necessary to memorize a large amount of information for the exam. Students will explain their behavior by the fact that everything "can be found on the Internet." At the same time, the proportion of those, who admit to cheating on the exam is even higher (47.9 %). Almost half! The study design did not allow some students to answer this question truthfully, but during the focus group discussion, students were more open.

*Dinara T.: "Of course I cheat, everyone cheats, it's normal, the main thing is to pass."*  
*Erbolat S.: "Everyone cheats, some people aren't very good at it, but there are a lot of opportunities now. Why not? t won't be useful later anyway, why waste time on unnecessary*

subjects? ... Those that are in the profile, here, of course, something may need to be learned, but if you went to classes, then know the basic part. And a good grade is needed."

In addition to traditional explanations of cheating practices, there were answer options that demonstrated the presence of a competitive effect: "whoever cheats will get a higher grade than you would have if you prepared yourself," "I prepare, but I still cheat so that my answer is no worse than others."

For our study, two aspects are of interest: whether the number of cheatings has increased (has it become the norm in the context of digitalization), and how has the decline in academic honesty affected students' media competence. Regarding the first point, it can be noted that, compared to the 2022 study, where a similar question was asked, the proportion of students who noted unethical behavior practices during the exam (cheating) was significantly lower – 27.5 % (Rogach et al., 2024). The dynamics of the growth of violations of ethical behavior were also reflected in the students' responses at the focus groups.

Matvey R.: "The transition to online made cheating easier, and although we are no longer distance learning, the habit has not changed, it will not be different."

Olga T.: "Of course, we began to cheat more, distance learning has relaxed us. Besides, it's become easier to cheat now anyway, you can find everything on the Internet, there are earphones and other gadgets... some teachers turn a blind eye to cheating, you pass and you pass."

Thus, the first hypothesis was partially confirmed. On the one hand, the development of digital technologies contributes to the distancing of students and a decrease in their involvement in the educational process. Students are more often distracted, do their own things and do not consider it necessary to watch video materials. At the same time, for some students, live communication with the teacher remains important, which calls into question the tendency towards distancing. Therefore, it can be assumed that with a decrease in student involvement, the ability to maintain interaction in the context of digitalization remains at a fairly good level. On the other hand, the perception of new digital educational realities has indeed become a predicate for a decrease in students' academic honesty. The proportion of those who demonstrate unethical behavior during the exam has increased. The situation is aggravated by the fact that students perceive this fact as a norm rather than a deviation, and the moral side of the practice of cheating is not addressed at all. The consequence of this kind of destruction is a decrease in the quality of students' media skills development. The reluctance to remember a large amount of information, overestimation of one's ability to reflect on information and the ability to critically comprehend digital communications products becomes a barrier limiting the development of media skills of a modern student.

The study paid special attention to the issues of decreasing the academic honesty of students in the context of preparing a final qualifying work. Pedagogical observation shows that the biggest problem is concentrated in plagiarism of students' diploma paper materials. However, what is the reason? Lack of knowledge and media skills in searching and working with materials? Or unwillingness to generate new knowledge when there are easier ways? Analysis of the materials of the author's study (Table 3) showed that these two aspects should be considered in a single bundle.

**Table 3.** Distribution of responses to the question: "How do you assess the need to comply with the requirements for maintaining the originality of the text (plagiarism) when preparing for a diploma/coursework? Do you agree with the following statements?" (%)

Answer option	yes	no
It is wrong demand originality of the text, since we cannot come up with anything new yet	57.0	43.0
I do not see the point in this requirement, since in the end we are engaged in meaningless work of paraphrasing the text	63.2	36.8
The development of artificial intelligence/neural networks makes this requirement unnecessary, it can be easily bypassed	64.5	35.5

Thus, more than half of the respondents (57.0 %) are of the opinion that they cannot yet come up with anything new – the lack of ability to critically understand the text, generate new

knowledge – and therefore the teacher should not demand originality of the diploma paper text from them. Despite the fact that 41.5 % of the respondents held a different opinion, in the next judgment they also demonstrate a negative tone. 63.2 % of respondents admit that they simply are engaged in paraphrasing the text, but do not analyze it and do not generate new ideas as a result. This means that among those who still consider the requirement to comply with the originality of the diploma paper text to be fair, there are those who do not consider it necessary to comply with it. In this case, the violation of academic honesty is more pronounced than in the case of simple disagreement with the requirement.

The scaling of digital technologies actualizes the need to intensify media education practices, allowing to focus on the ethical principles of working with information. However, as scientists rightly note, the gradual dominance of digital platforms and online services in education complicates the formation of knowledge, values and experience of “virtuous behavior” in the media environment. A comprehensive approach to media education of students is needed, allowing to integrate traditional pedagogy and the use of media resources (Shanley, 2020).

The share of those students who appreciated the potential of artificial intelligence in the practice of “bypassing” the requirements for maintaining the originality of the text when preparing for a diploma/coursework is even higher. 64.5 % of respondents agreed with the judgment that “the development of artificial intelligence/neural networks makes this requirement unnecessary, it can be easily bypassed”.

The results of the focus group study confirmed the dominance of these judgments. The students' reasoning often used formulations demonstrating the possibilities of using artificial intelligence to bypass the teacher's requirements: “*will select literature*”, “*will generate text*”, “*will process and generate, as if new ideas*”. At the same time, students also note possible disadvantages of these practices.

*Victor B.: “I made a request to the neural network, and it gave me a list of links to empty pages. Or I wanted to make a picture from part of the text, but what it gives is completely off topic”.*

Thus, the second hypothesis of the study was also confirmed. With reduced media skills (searching and analyzing texts, critically understanding different points of view, inability to draw conclusions and generate new knowledge), students have a reduced perception of the importance of maintaining academic honesty in the educational process. In this case, students are ready to resort to the capabilities of a neural network, rephrase the text and look for other workarounds to the requirement of originality of author's materials. It is worrying that with the development of digital technologies, the situation with academic honesty will only worsen. A promising area of research may be the digital potential of the media environment of an educational institution in the practices of monitoring students' knowledge.

## 5. Conclusion

The study revealed various forms violations of academic honesty from the students. Almost half of the respondents resort to cheating on exams. The justifying palette of opinions includes a number of judgments, including: maximum available information (no need to memorize it), as well as competitive risks (unwillingness to lose in comparison with others who resort to cheating). The development of artificial intelligence, the dynamics of the introduction of digital technologies in the educational process initiated the scaling of the processes of academic integrity violations. To the greatest extent, changes affected the practices of preparing final qualifying works. Students justify the practices of unfair borrowing, plagiarism, and the use of artificial intelligence in preparing their own texts. These destructive trends are the result of dysfunctions in students' media education. The low level of media competence of students is characterized by both a narrowing of practical skills in working with information (searching for information, analyzing various sources, critical thinking, generating new knowledge) and an insufficient level of development of ethical standards. The ethical component of media competence is characterized by problems in understanding the boundaries of acceptable behavior when working with media resources, and the correctness of using information. Of particular concern is the high level of tolerance among young people for violating the principles of academic honesty, and the spread of attitudes justifying academic fraud.

Media education can be considered as a key factor in the formation of ethical principles of behavior in the educational environment. Prevention of cases of academic dishonesty should be based not so much on tightening punitive sanctions, but on the development of media education,

which allows for the formation of understanding and experience of the legitimate use of information from various sources.

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## The Model of Cultural Identity, Represented in the Russian Cinema of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s

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### Abstract

The article reflects the results of a comparative hermeneutical analysis of Russian feature films of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s, including the study of cultural and historical contexts in order to consider their possible influence on the author's views, reflected in the specifics of the depiction of characters and reality, in the choice of plot motifs and other structural components of the film.

Based on the results of the analysis, we describe and systematize film images, types of character relationships and plot motifs that reflect the prevailing "points of view" about cultural values and traditions, and characterize stereotypical models of social interaction between characters in accordance with the five types of cinematic discourse (interpersonal, artistic-aesthetic, religious-ideological, historical-cultural, mythological) that make up the content of the structural-functional model of cultural identity developed by us

The analysis of research on the topic of the article has shown that the cultural traditions formed in centuries-old history were (with all the known losses) preserved in the Soviet period, remain relevant in modern conditions and are reflected in the feature films of "perestroika" and post-Soviet time.

**Keywords:** cinema, culture, identity, Soviet Union, "perestroika", Russia.

### 1. Introduction

From the mid-1980s to the 2010s, Russia experienced events that led to profound transformations in the social, political and cultural life of the country. The processes of decomposition of the state system and the dying of the communist ideology, which began in the perestroika years, led to the destruction of ties with the historical past and the present, the loss of not only common perceptions of life, but also the need to search for its meaning. In the post-perestroika period, Soviet values, built in the paternalistic system of socio-political relations, were actively replaced by democratic values, focused on individual freedom and responsibility, the market economy developed, which stimulated the formation of a consumer society in the 2000s and 2010s, there was a stratification of society, increasing economic, social and cultural inequality.

During this period, the image of Russian cinema was rapidly changing under the influence of a number of factors: the demythologization of Soviet history, changes in the systems of aesthetic and ethical evaluations, a spiritual and moral crisis, the borrowing of Western (Hollywood) film forms and genres, the commercialization of the film industry and the increasing share of mass cinema. All conditions have arisen for the weakening of its ties with national culture. Despite this, the basic features of Russian cultural identity were reflected in Russian cinema.

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## 2. Materials and methods

The article reflects the results of a comparative hermeneutical analysis of Soviet and Russian feature films of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s, including the study of cultural and historical contexts in order to consider their possible influence on the author's views, reflected in the specifics of the depiction of characters and reality, in the choice of plot motifs and other structural components of the film.

The technology of hermeneutical analysis of feature films in historical and cultural contexts that we used is based on the scientific developments of A.V. Fedorov (Fedorov, 2013; Fedorov, 2015), A. Silverblatt (Silverblatt, 2001: 80-81), and U. Eco (Eco, 2005: 209).

The phenomenon of cultural identity as a property of the human psyche is revealed in the systemic unity of discursive practices reflecting traditional and innovative for public consciousness forms and ways of relations between man and man, man and society, society and nature, constituting a system of functional blocks (which we formulate as interpersonal, social and being), ontologically connected with the processes of a person's search for his own place in society and the formation of his sense of cultural belonging.

Based on the obtained results of hermeneutic analysis of Soviet and Russian feature films of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s, we described and systematized film images, types of character relationships and plot motifs that reflect the prevailing "points of view" about cultural values, traditions and, characterizing stereotypical models of social interaction of characters in accordance with the five types of cinematic discourse (interpersonal, artistic-aesthetic, religious-ideological, historical-cultural, mythological).

## 3. Discussion

Certain aspects of the problem of cultural identity representation in Russian art cinema in the second half of the 1980s – 2010s were presented in scientific studies of the construction of the human image and socio-cultural reality on the Soviet and Russian cinema screen, carried out by culturologists, film historians and historians:

– A.M. Maler points to a trend towards an increase in Christian motifs in Soviet cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. In his opinion, it was caused by "an appeal to traditional culture through the development of Russian patriotism in general and the gradual actualization of the values... of the Russian people, kin, and especially the native family" (Maler, 2023: 215);

– A.S. Breitman considers the problem of preserving values and describes the leading trends of Russian culture in Russian cinema of the late XX – early XXI century. Drawing on the traditions of Russian artistic and philosophical thought, he characterizes the "axiological core" of Russian cinema, which is based on Christian virtues (Breitman, 2004);

– according to N.A. Khrenov, "in late Soviet cinema, man seems ready to overcome atheism and to revive Christianity" (Khrenov, 2022: 45-46). This occurs in the conditions of the destruction of the "Soviet empire", which provoked the spiritual impoverishment of the people, the onset of the era of "alienation of the people from the authorities, society from the state, man from society and the individual from himself" (Khrenov, 2022: 48);

– A.G. Kolesnikova analyzes the portrayal of the Soviet past on the screens of "perestroika". She shows how the attitude to socialist values has changed. Grotesque and absurd images of party figures appeared in the cinema, Soviet leaders appeared pathetic and comical, filmmakers ironized the propaganda slogans that lifted the spirit of the Soviet man (Kolesnikova, 2021);

– I.V. Chelysheva in her article about the artistic cinema of the "perestroika" era on the theme of school describes the fundamental transformations associated with the social role of the school in society, the alienation of the world of teachers and the world of schoolchildren, the atmosphere of indifference and formalism that emerged in the pedagogical society (Chelysheva, 2017);

– M.I. Brashinsky describes the impact of democratization and liberalization processes in the Soviet state and society on the language of Perestroika-era cinema. He points to the rupture of filmmakers' ties with their own artistic tradition and national culture, caused by the borrowing of postmodern elements, genre forms developed by Hollywood, and the lack of a strategy for artistic and creative activity (Brashinsky, 1994);

– Y.A. Parkhomenko analyzes the influence of cultural traditions on the dramaturgical and genre uniqueness of Russian cinema. In her opinion, the tendency of modern filmmakers to replicate "Hollywood schemes" and exploit superficial characteristics of the "Russian character" is alien to the Russian mentality. At the same time, "the problems of personality, human relationships

and virtually the entire spectrum of ethical issues continue to dominate in modern cinematic works" (Parkhomenko, 2009: 138);

– V.V. Voskresenskaya considers the reflection of the peculiarities of national identity in the depiction of the natural landscape by post-perestroika cinematography. In her opinion, "the characterization of the Russian muzhik's mentality is inseparable from what surrounds him and where he comes from – his native land... Harmonious rootedness in the landscape of the homeland determines the hero's living of his life" (Voskresenskaya, 2024: 540);

– V.F. Poznin examines the problem of interaction between "cultural globalization and national mentality" in Russian filmmakers' imitation of foreign genre samples and their search for self-identification. The author attributes the audience success of horror films to the peculiarities of the perception of "life and death, the earthly and transcendental", formed under the influence of Orthodoxy (Poznin, 2023);

– E.A. Chichina sees the reason for the crisis of contemporary Russian cinema in its loss of socio-cultural identity. In her opinion, "Russian cinema has lost its identity over the past two decades. This was the result of the disappearance of specific ideological staples that defined the spirit of Soviet cinema for about seventy years, and the obscurity of value attitudes characteristic of the post-perestroika years" (Chichina, 2014: 18). She understands the cultural identity of Russian cinema as "the weaving of cinema into the system of cultural values, its existence in culture, which is a response to the challenge of the time, expressed in the actualization of certain themes" (Chichina, 2014: 18).

The analysis of research on the topic of the article has shown that at the end of the Soviet era, the conditions for the revival of Orthodox traditions – the existential foundations of Russian culture – were formed. This was reflected in the cinema of the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, on the one hand, domestic cinematography was losing its national traits, which manifested itself in forgetting its own cultural traditions and imitating Western, Hollywood samples, and, on the other hand, caused some filmmakers to seek opportunities for self-identification. For example, in the feature films of the 1990s (*About Businessman Thomas* (Russia, 1993), *Don't play the fool...* (Russia, 1997), *Shall We Send a Messenger?* (1998) and others) reflected one of the key properties of the Russian mentality – the inseparability of man with nature and his native land.

#### 4. Results

##### *Features of the historical period of creation of feature films*

In the years of "perestroika" (1985–1991) the reforms proclaimed by M.S. Gorbachev and the "policy of glasnost" were implemented. The democratization processes affected all spheres of life in the country. The Soviet government established relations with the West, initiated the processes of military disarmament, legalized private enterprise in the form of cooperatives, and in 1988 began the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. In the same year, the national celebration of the millennium of the baptism of Russia took place, foreign radio stations were no longer jammed, and the novel by B. Pasternak *Dr. Zhivago* was published. Pasternak's novel *Dr. Zhivago* was published. In 1989, for the first time in the USSR, partially free elections of people's deputies with alternative candidates were held.

In the late 1980s, an economic crisis began. The growth of industrial and agricultural production was reduced, the budget and commodity deficit increased, the population's income decreased, and food stamps were introduced. Against this background, workers' strikes took place in the country.

At the end of 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

Radical economic reforms of the 1990s led to a decline in production and income, rising unemployment, corruption and crime, and criminalization of economic spheres. The unstable situation in the Caucasus, the first (1994–1996) and second Chechen war (1999–2009) became a source of terrorist threat. Over the past 30 years, major terrorist acts were committed in Budennovsk, Kaspiysk, Volgodonsk, Moscow, Beslan, and St. Petersburg.

In the 2000s, President V.V. Putin carried out an administrative reform to improve the efficiency of public administration. In the 2000s, President V.V. Putin carried out administrative reforms to improve the efficiency of public administration, establish mechanisms for interaction between business and government, and improve mechanisms for combating corruption. The country began to implement federal-target programs and national projects aimed at improving

the lives of citizens. The situation in the economy has stabilized, GDP and household incomes have been growing.

The early 2010s saw the growth of the protest movement in Russia. After the elections to the State Duma of the VI convocation in 2011 and to the President in 2012, mass actions and speeches took place in the country. Protesters expressed their disagreement with the election results, accusing the authorities of non-transparency and unfairness.

Economic growth and increased budget revenues allowed the implementation of a number of large-scale projects: construction of the Vostochny Cosmodrome (2012–2016) and the Crimean Bridge (2016–2018), holding the 22nd Winter Olympic Games in Sochi (2014) and the 21st FIFA World Cup (2018). In the spring of 2014, Crimea was annexed to Russia, which provoked the imposition of economic and political sanctions by the United States and the European Union.

In 2020, the Constitution was amended to strengthen Russia's sovereignty and authoritarian potential.

*The influence of historical events on the process of creating Soviet and Russian feature films of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s*

The relaxation of censorship, and later its abolition, and the election of a new leadership of the USSR Union of Cinematographers (May 1986), less dependent on the Party and on Communist ideology, gave freedom to film workers. During this period, the cinema screens began to come out feature films in various forms denouncing the Soviet reality. In Danelia's *Kin-dza-dza* (Russia, 1986), in the conventional genre of fiction, the images of a decaying state, destroyed communication, spiritually impoverished world are openly recreated. In *Little Vera* (Russia, 1988), which became a kind of symbol of "perestroika", a frank bed scene was shown for the first time. Social vices became a constant motif of perestroika cinema, which told about the problems of alcoholism, drug addiction, crime and prostitution.

The titles of feature films of the late 1980s characterized the state of society: *City of Zero* (Russia, 1988), *Days of Eclipse* (Russia, 1988), *Asthenic Syndrome* (Russia, 1989). Their characters seem to have lost touch with the surrounding reality, lost in the timelessness. According to A.V. Fedorov, the film *Asthenic Syndrome* "shows the Russian social situation... that has turned people into hardened, disillusioned, deprived individuals of the state 'contingent'" (Fedorov, 2022: 27).

At the end of perestroika and the 1990s, there was a sharp deterioration in the material situation of the population. This situation was widely reflected in many films. For example, the heroes of E. Ryazanov's *Heaven is Promised* (Russia, 1991) are intellectuals who find themselves at the social bottom. Artist Fima, PhD. Solomon, pianist Fedya live in the dump, begging for alms. In one episode Fima says to a passerby: "...before you is a victim of communist terror. Give material support". In A. Konchalovsky's movie *Kurochka Ryaba* (1994, Russia, France), the inhabitants of an impoverished village are getting drunk, the collective farm where they used to work is closed. The protagonist, Asya Klyachina in a fit of anger states "rebuilt. No order. No intelligence. No conscience. There is nothing."

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, uncertainty, instability, disorder and the state's unlimited freedom of speech and action reigned in the country. The reality that emerged under these conditions took on a surrealistic appearance on the movie screen. The films *Pantsir* (Russia, 1990), *Kiks* (Russia, 1991), *Fascinations* (Russia; Ukraine, 1995), *Shirley-myrlly* (Russia, 1995) and others recreated absurd and ridiculous situations, unmotivated actions of characters deprived of any notion of normal life.

Lawlessness and crime were pernicious phenomena for our society during this period, which took on a mass character. They were interpreted differently on the movie screen. If in the 1990s (*Beyond the last line* (Russia, 1991), *Cruel Time* (Russia, 1996), *Ghoul* (Russia, 1997), *Brother* (Russia, 1997), *Mother, do not grieve* (Russia, 1997), *the Country of the Deaf* (1997) and others) were portrayed in a negative way ruthless and cynical bandits who unceremoniously carried out reprisals against anyone and in any way, then in the 2000s. (*Brat 2* (Russia, 2000), *Antikiller* (Russia, 2002), *Brigada* (Russia, 2002), *Boomer* (Russia, 2003), *Zhmurki* (Russia, 2005) and others) they became positive heroes whose cruelty and murders were justified by the struggle for justice, and their screen life acquired a nostalgic tinge.

Another painful theme of Russian cinema in the 1990s and 2000s (*Afghan Rift* (Russia; Italy, 1991), *Muslim* (Russia, 1995), *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (Russia; Kazakhstan, 1996), *War* (Russia, 2002), *My Half-Brother Frankenstein* (Russia, 2004) and others) was the Afghan and Chechen wars. The filmmakers told the story of the broken fates of soldiers unable to adapt to society in

peacetime. With a sense of bitter irony, they showed the senselessness and injustice of military actions, misunderstanding and rejection of former soldiers by their loved ones and officials.

In the 2000s and 2010s, political, economic and cultural life in the country changed markedly. While the economic system was relatively stabilized and developed, the vertical of power was strengthened, funding for social spheres increased, censorship restrictions intensified, and the administrative system continued to be inert and corrupt. This situation caused a critical reaction among filmmakers. They began to create pessimistic and cruel pictures about the Russian reality, which lacked mutual understanding and mercy. In one case, the characters in their films (*Koktebel* (Russia, 2003), *Picturing the Victim* (Russia, 2006), *Free Swimming* (Russia, 2006), *Tambourine-Baraban* (Russia, 2009), *Live* (Russia, 2012) and others) were young and middle-aged people who were unable to communicate, had no goals in life, and were not looking for a place in it. And in another case, middle-aged men trying to resist officials despite their indifference and hopelessness of the situation (*Fool* (Russia, 2014), *Leviathan* (Russia, 2014), *Arrhythmia* (Russia, 2017) and others).

With active state support and protectionist policies in the cultural sphere, commercial cinema has developed in Russia over the past two decades, creating idealized and glamorous images of the pre-revolutionary (*Admiral* (Russia, 2008), *Sunstroke* (Russia, 2014), *The Duelist* (Russia, 2016) and others), the Soviet past (*Legend No. 17* (Russia, 2013), *Upward Movement* (Russia, 2017), *Streltsov* (Russia, 2020) and others) and modernity (*Glyanets* (Russia, 2007), *Dukhleess* (Russia, 2011), *Pro Lubov* (Russia, 2015) and others).

The Russian Orthodox Church provided assistance to the development of Russian cinematography. With its participation, films (*Ostrov* (Russia, 2006), *Pop* (Russia, 2009), *Horde* (Russia, 2012) and others) were released that tell the story of the role and significance of Orthodox faith and religion in the fate of the individual and Russian history.

#### *Ideology, worldview of the authors of feature films in the socio-cultural context*

In the years of "perestroika" (1985–1991), which came after twenty years of "stagnation", communist ideology was losing its position. Filmmakers began to openly depict the evils of socialist society (prostitution, drug addiction, crime, corruption) and to give critical assessments of it. Many films (*Go and See* (Russia, 1985), *Cold Summer of Fifty-Three...* (Russia, 1987), *Dear Elena Sergeevna* (Russia, 1988), *Little Vera* (1988), *Rock Tragedy* (Russia, 1988), *Interdevochka* (Russia, 1989) and others) featured violent and realistic scenes and images that destroyed the audience's idealistic view of the past and present of Soviet reality. The author's message of these films had an edifying meaning – it awakened the consciousness of the mass audience, which had been put to sleep by idealized images of socialist reality.

In the post-Soviet decade, among the filmmakers who depicted the vicious aspects of Russian life and romanticized crime stories with enthusiasm, there were also those who thought about the meaning and causes of the upheavals in Russia. For example, V. Sergeyev and E. Ryazanov in *Genius* (Russia, 1991) and *Heaven is Promised* (Russia, 1991) reflected on the fate of a lost generation of talented people in an indifferent consumer society, K. Shakhnazarov in *Kingslayer* (Russia; United Kingdom, 1991), N. Mikhalkov in *Weary Sun* (Russia; France, 1994), A. German in *Khrustalev, Car!* (Russia; France, 1998) told about personal and moral responsibility – questions that are raised in works of art at all times.

Against the background of the crisis state of society in the 1990s, a notable phenomenon was the reflection of the peculiarities of national culture in the eyes of foreigners who appeared on the movie screens of those years. In the films *Russian Business* (Russia, 1993), *Peculiarities of National Hunting* (Russia, 1995), *Don't play the fool...* (Russia, 1997), *Peculiarities of National Fishing* (Russia, 1998) they looked with amazement at the turbulent, paradoxical and irrational life in Russia. Unfortunately, the authors who shot these pictures in the comedy genre had little interest in Russian traditions and the depths of Russian consciousness. They surprised foreigners not with high examples of culture, but with a bear riding a bicycle, the immeasurable amount of vodka and alcohol drunk, the ability of Russian people to find themselves in stupid situations and not follow the laws, etc.

The new generation of filmmakers (Y. Bykov, A. Zvyagintsev, A. Popogrebsky, V. Sigarev, B. Khlebnikov, and others) working in the direction of auteur, non-commercial cinema, characterized by a pessimistic outlook, shooting social dramas in which there is no hope, interpersonal and social ties are lost, and the surrounding reality is faceless, expressed their

position quite definitely: it is impossible for a normal person to live in an environment of soulless characters and in the space of a cultural vacuum.

In the 2010s. Russia saw a boom in sports blockbusters (*Legend No. 17* (Russia, 2013), *Upward Movement* (Russia, 2017), *Coach* (Russia, 2018), *Streltsov* (Russia, 2020), *World Champion* (Russia, 2021) and others) and military history films (*Brest Fortress* (Belarus; Russia, 2010), *Weary Sun 2: Predstoyanie* (Russia, 2010), *Stalingrad* (Russia, 2013), *Battle for Sevastopol* (Russia; Ukraine, 2015), *28 Panfilovtsev* (Russia, 2016), *Devyataev* (Russia, 2021) and others), many of which aroused the interest of a wide audience. The authors of these films with their optimistic worldview created an idealized reality in which the heroes resembling fairy-tale characters, not knowing fear, demonstrated iron character and miracles of survivability, readiness for self-sacrifice to save the life of another person and protect the homeland.

In the post-Soviet period, films about the existential experiences of a person coming to faith and historically significant events in the history of Russian Orthodoxy were released (*Now the Son of Man is Glorified* (1990), *I Trust in You* (1992), *Ostrov* (2006), *I Believe* (2009), *Tsar* (2009) by Lungin, *Miracle* (2009) by A. Proshkin, *Pop* (2009) by Khotinenko, *Superior* (2010), *Horde* (2012), *Monk and Demon* (2016) and others). They embodied the religious worldview of the authors with its Christian values of love, compassion and mercy, philosophical and mystical attitude to the human personality and the need for a spiritual search for the meaning of life. For the first time the Russian cinema screen showed what was forbidden in Soviet cinema: the images of a metropolitan and a foolish man performing healing of the human soul and body, mystical phenomena (miracles) causing awe in unwilling witnesses, repentance of a sinner bringing him purification of the soul.

*Worldview of the characters portrayed in Soviet and Russian feature films of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s*

The liberalization and democratization carried out in the era of "perestroika" gave people of different generations freedom not only from outdated ideological norms, but also from eternal values, creating a worldview crisis in society. Young people lost their understanding of the significance of the concepts of honor and dignity. On the movie screen, they were portrayed as an aimless, indifferent generation, rebelling against social norms and having lost faith and hope for the best. In the films *Assa* (Russia, 1987), *The Burglar* (Russia, 1987), *The Red Rose is an Emblem of Sadness*, *The Black Rose is an Emblem of Love* (Russia, 1989) and others, there appeared characters who had gone into the world of dreams and fantasies, who had lost touch with the older generation, and who belonged to different subcultures (punks, rockers, metallists, breakers and others). E. Ryazanov's film *Dear Elena Sergeevna* (Russia, 1988) shows a group of high school students, devoid of moral principles, humiliating their math teacher and inducing her to commit forgery.

The Russian cinema screen of the 1990s recreated a world of lawlessness, dominated by criminals and gangsters who valued money and power and sought to satisfy primitive needs. Positive characters in this world felt hopelessness and confusion, looking for a way to earn money for sustenance. Among them were heroes resisting the forces of evil, striving to restore justice, challenging the corrupt system (*Dyuba-Dyuba* (Russia, 1995), *Love in Russian* (Russia, 1995), *Brother* (Russia, 1997), *Voroshilovsky Shooter* (Russia, 1999) and others).

The commodity-money relations established in post-Soviet Russia, the cultural crisis of the 1980s-1990s, the lack of purposeful educational programs in schools and universities, and the spread of the Western ideology of individualism have led to the formation of material values, materialism, the cult of consumption, a cynical attitude to intellectual work, and the oblivion of moral and aesthetic ideals among new generations. Authorial, non-commercial cinematography of the 2000s and 2010s (*Koktebel* (Russia, 2003), *Picturing the Victim* (Russia, 2006), *Simple Things* (Russia, 2006), *Free Swimming* (Russia, 2006), *Euphoria* (Russia, 2006), *Yuriev Day* (2008), *Buben-Baraban* (Russia, 2009), *My Happiness* (Russia, 2010), *Boomerang Hearts* (Russia, 2011), *Shopito-show* (Russia, 2011), *Live* (Russia, 2012), *The geographer drank the globe* (Russia, 2013), *Long Happy Life* (Russia, 2013), *Fool* (Russia, 2014) and others) recreated this spiritual emptiness, showed idle and initiativeless characters, indifferent and indifferent both to others and to themselves.

In films of sports and military-historical themes in this period, the heroes became purposeful athletes and morally upstanding soldiers overcoming severe trials. In the conditions of constant struggle, resistance and warfare, they show human warmth and care to those around them, trying to preserve honor and dignity.

In post-Soviet religious films, laypeople, priests and monks show sincere love and mercy to people and believe in the justice of God's judgment. They do not represent the ideal of morality, but demonstrate the desire to achieve moral purity in a cruel and aggressive world.

*Narrative structure and techniques in domestic feature films of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s*

*Place and time of action.* The place of action in feature films during the period under review changed markedly. If, for example, during the "perestroika" era and the first post-Soviet decade, scenes involving characters of different ages (schoolchildren, young people, adults and the elderly) were filmed on abandoned construction sites and rock concerts, in cramped rooms and dirty entrances, then in the 2000s and 2010s they were transferred to cozy apartments, houses and cafes, new gyms and playgrounds. The feature films of this period reflected several epochs of Russian history: the distant past – the pagan pre-Christian period, the 19th century, the Soviet past, modernity and the distant future.

*Characteristic settings and everyday objects.* The everyday life depicted in feature films of the late twentieth century is a symbol of decay. The characters live in modest conditions, in houses and apartments with peeling walls, old furniture, rusty bathtubs, in communal apartments with high ceilings and large doors, wooden closets and classical-style bureaux reminiscent of the passing Soviet era.

In the domestic environment in the films of the first two decades of the 20th century, the signs of division into the world of the "poor" and the world of the "rich" were clearly expressed: some characters have old dwellings with dilapidated furniture, while others have modern, expensive apartments and houses with exquisite interiors.

*Genre modifications.* In the second half of the 1980s–1990s, one of the signs of the times was the genre of social drama, which exposed the vices of society. During these years, films were made in the genre of social satire, "grassroots" variations of the genres of comedy and melodrama, telling about Russian life in the style of postmodern irony, absurdity, and phantasmagoria.

In the 2000s and 2010s, domestic films of mass genres were released in Russian distribution: comedy and action films, disaster films, military-historical dramas, melodramas, musicals, sci-fi, and horror. In the 2010s, about four dozen high-budget historical and sports-themed films were released in the drama and action genre. The dramaturgy of many of these films was built to Hollywood standards.

Non-commercial, auteur films during this period were made in the social drama genre.

*Stereotypical methods of depicting reality:* In the period from the beginning of "perestroika" to the 2000s, authors used the techniques of so-called "blackness", showing brutal violence, cold-blooded murders, drug addiction and prostitution. In the 2000s and 2010s, Russian cinema screens showed signs of socially critical portrayal of reality, on the one hand, and its embellishment and idealization, on the other.

*Character Typology:*

– *Social status, profession and marital status of the character:* In films of the late twentieth century, it is not uncommon for characters to occupy a marginal position in society, and single-parent families are shown. People of intellectual labor have either already lost their jobs or live modestly on low wages. School teachers are victimized by students. Many of them still act as a model of high morality and show patience and love for children. The idealized image of the Soviet policeman has gradually been replaced by the figure of a werewolf in pursuit, brutally killing everyone who gets in his way.

In the 2000s and 2010s, there were more positive characters in Russian feature films who had a profession, family and children, and medium and high social status.

– *The appearance, clothing, and personality traits of the characters.* Positive characters have an intelligent appearance, dressed modestly, sometimes unkempt and sometimes neat. Their character traits were different, sometimes even opposite: in some movies they show purposefulness, perseverance, in others, on the contrary, passivity and self-containment. In communication are polite and courteous, but occasionally allow foul language – in cases where they deeply feel injustice in any situation.

Negative characters are rude, deceitful, self-serving, with repulsive appearance. They are characterized by: laziness, greed, avarice, desire to achieve material wealth. In communication they use slang and slang expressions, foul language.



*The model of cultural identity represented in Russian cinema of the second half of the 1980s – 2010s* includes five types of cinematic discourse: interpersonal, artistic-aesthetic, religious-ideological, historical-cultural and mythological.

*An interpersonal type of cinematic discourse.*

Traditional in Russian culture features and types of diminutive-lascivious appeals were reflected in the feature films of "perestroika" and the post-Soviet period.

For example, the anthropomorphic address "dove", the tradition of using which was interrupted during the years of revolution and civil war, can be heard in postwar films: *Rumyantsev's Case* (Russia, 1955), *Carnaval Night* (Russia, 1956), *Beware, Grandma* (Russia, 1960), *Run* (Russia, 1970) and in modern screen adaptations of Russian classical literature (*Ragin* (Russia, 2004), *Ivanov* (Russia, 2010) and others).

Another address characterized by simplicity and trustworthiness are the words "father", "son", "my dear". They can be found in military-historical films, in which the relationship between junior and senior soldiers is warm and respectful. For example, in the films *Tired by the Sun-2. Predstoyanie* (Russia, 2010), *Tired by the Sun-3. Citadel* (Russia, 2011), *Stalingrad* (Russia, 2013) and others.

A distinctive feature of interpersonal communication in Russian culture is soulfulness and confessionality. However, in modern Russian films, the desire to speak out, to "talk to each other" is not common among the characters. One of the rare examples of such relationships is A. Konchalovsky's *White Nights*. Konchalovsky's *White Nights of the Postman Alexei Tryapitsyn* (Russia, 2014). Its characters – residents of a small village – tell each other about the difficulties in their lives and share their innermost feelings. In one of the scenes, an elderly man confesses to the local letter carrier: "there is pain in my soul all the time... I can't have fun... like everyone else. For some reason, my whole life has been spent in a kind of patience." The letter carrier replies: "Sometimes you lie down... such a longing comes over you."

For Russian people, the opinion of others is of great importance. Characters in Russian films, arguing their position, may refer to the opinion of neighbors, fellow villagers or acquaintances, appeal to "the people", in the presence of people may talk about their family relations, point out someone's advantages or disadvantages. For example, in the movies *Kurochka Ryaba* (Russia; France, 1994), *Don't play the fool...* (Russia, 1997), *Yar* (Russia, 2007) *Live and Remember* (Russia, 2008) and others there are such expressions: "people are kind", "what will people say?", "I live among people, what will I tell them?", "how can I look people in the eye?", "you live among people". In these phrases, the word people indicates collectivism, nationality – the features of Russian culture that retain their traditional meaning.

*Artistic and aesthetic type of cinematic discourse*

In many Russian films of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which tell about village life, the characteristic properties of Russian cultural identity are expressed: love of space, freedom-loving, unity with nature, asceticism and simplicity.

In the films of director V. Chikov (*About the Businessman Thomas* (Russia, 1993), *Don't Make a Fool of Yourself* (Russia, 1995), *Shall We Send a Messenger?* (Russia, 1998) images of rural life are created in the tradition of "village cinema" of the 1960s – 1970s. There are recognizable images of Russian nature in the frame: spring thaw and roadlessness, green flowering meadows stretching into the horizon, boundless sky and a wide river bend reflecting it, melting haze on the temple and wooden huts. Panoramic plans of measured village life recreate the idyll of the Russian province. The landscape "acts as the original bosom of life", and "harmonious rootedness in the landscape of the homeland conditions the hero's living of his life" (Voskresenskaya, 2024: 539-540).

In Soviet and Russian cinematography, the poetic tradition of idyllic depictions of nature is juxtaposed with the tradition of recreating melancholic Central Russian landscapes on the screen. This can be illustrated by the films *Smoke* (Germany; Russia, 1992), *Kurochka Ryaba* (Russia; France, 1994), *Ivanov's* (Russia, 2010), and *Once Upon a Time There Was a Woman* (Russia, 2011), which depict "Russian longing. The panoramic shots show fading autumn nature, gray sky reflected in the water surface of puddles, endless snow-covered fields and a dirt road running off into the distance. A long song sung by a lone female voice is heard in the background.

Another Russian image of nature was the scenes of fair festivities and folk fun in N. Mikhalkov's *The Barber of Siberia* (Russia; France; Italy; Czech Republic, 1998). The film embodies Kustodiev's landscapes. On the background of snow-white expanses bright colors of

balagans and carousel tents, skomorokhi and parsley, sable furs, pancakes with black caviar, fist fights, accordion playing, running of a horse troika and ringing of bells, circus bear and fireworks. The scope and spontaneity of the Shrovetide festivities recreates the atmosphere of merriment and unbridled joy that reigned in Russia during the holidays.

*Religious-ideological* type of cinematic discourse.

Despite the atheistic censorship that existed in our country for seven decades, the heritage and traditions of Orthodox culture were represented in Soviet cinema, and during the years of the Great Patriotic War and at the end of the "perestroika" era, it was possible to speak directly and openly about religious feelings and show church sacraments in movies. For example, in the last scene of S. Solovyov's film *Black Rose – Emblem of Sorrow, Red Rose – Emblem of Love* (Russia, 1989), a priest tells several characters the Gospel story of the Baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Baptist and shows a diafilm depicting its events. Then he performs the Sacrament of Baptism in a communal apartment over the main character, the teenager Mitya, a hereditary nobleman and Komsomol member who dreams of entering the Nakhimov Naval School. This is the epilogue of a surrealist movie that depicts an optimistic picture of a country experiencing yet another historical cataclysm.

In the 1990s and 2000s, films were released in Russia in which the authors addressed the problems of the search for God and the revival of Orthodox traditions. The final scene of *Boys* (Russia, 1990) shows the rite of consecration of a temple, in front of which people stand with lit candles – a symbolic image of Russia's spiritual revival. The hero of the film *Infinity* (Russia, 1991) is tormented by thoughts about the finiteness of life and a sense of fear of death, which leads him to the temple, to the priest, with whom he talks about events from his past. In the film *Don't play the fool...* (Russia, 1997), a burning barn collapses and behind it a view of the temple standing on a hill is revealed – a symbolic image of the renewal of life for the villagers and the whole country. In the movie *Diary of a Kamikaze* (Russia, 2002) the characters talk about sin and God's punishment, and one of the characters, Maxim Krivoshein, reads the Lord's Prayer before going to bed. The characters in *Yar* (Russia, 2007) make requests to God, to the Mother of God, asking for forgiveness, praying, quoting the Holy Scriptures.

Christian ideas were fully expressed in the film adaptation of Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* (Russia, 2003), in the films *Ostrov* (Russia, 2006) and *Pop* (Russia, 2009). In them, the authors moved away from external forms of morality to the inner space of the spiritual quest of the heroes. The depth and strength of their faith is revealed not so much in their deeds and actions as in their reflections (on sin and repentance, patience and humility, testing and purification, love and forgiveness, mercy and compassion), facial expressions, eye movements, and voice intonation.

A characteristic feature of Russian folk culture is dual faith – the coexistence of Orthodox and pagan traditions. Modern Russian cinematography demonstrates examples of folk beliefs, conspiracies, fortune-telling, and mystical phenomena. The authors of the film *Wild Field* (Russia, 2008) emphasize the Christian virtues of the protagonist, who heals local residents, leads an ascetic lifestyle, and performs rituals that help tame the natural elements. At the beginning of the movie *Once upon a time there was a woman* (Russia, 2011) two scenes are mounted in parallel, in one of which a wedding ceremony is performed in a church, and in the other elderly women perform a conspiracy over the newlyweds' bed: they spread straw, cover it with a sheet and a blanket, put a hen's egg under the blanket, beat the bed with a broom made of branches and ask the saints to banish the demon. The movie *White Tiger* (Russia, 2012) is based on the mystical story of the Great Patriotic War about an invincible German ghost tank, suddenly appearing and disappearing in different places of combat operations. The Soviet military command decided to send a crew headed by a mechanic-driver to destroy it, who is considered "conspiratorial" because "shells don't hit it".

Today, many people in Russia consider Orthodox rites to be a formality, a tribute to historical and cultural memory, and do not participate in them out of the "dictates of the heart. In V. Sigarev's movie *Live* (Russia, 2012), the rite of marriage is performed by people who do not believe and do not understand the meaning of this sacrament. They take this step in the hope of being cured of HIV infection. Symbolically, during the wedding, the atmosphere in the temple is not festive, the scene is shot in gray, the characters' faces are bored, and the candle goes out at Artem's wedding.

*Historical and cultural type of cinematic discourse.*

In the *post-perestroika* period of cultural and spiritual crisis, when society lost its ideas about the role and importance of morality and moral values, N. Mikhalkov made the film *The Barber of Siberia* (Russia, France, Italy, Czech Republic, 1998), which tells the story of pre-revolutionary times and people who highly value the concept of duty, defend their honor in duels, are ready to accept the heavy burden of fate and are able to sacrifice themselves to the Motherland. Russia in the movie appears as the territory of the broad Russian soul and brotherhood, strong spirit and high ideals, and the main character, Andrei Tolstoy – an exponent of moral purity and irrational spontaneity. Not tolerating the insult from the general, he struck him on the head with a violin bow, for which he was sent to penal servitude. The promotional slogan for the movie says, "He's Russian. That explains a lot..."

The images of Russian officers and noblemen demonstrating examples of high honor, duty and dignity are recreated in the films *Admiral* (Russia, 2008) and *The Duelist* (Russia, 2016).

In one of the scenes of the movie *Admiral*, the fighting officers of the Russian Imperial Navy in white tunics, with nobility and courage, keeping loyalty to the Tsar, are contrasted with the unshaven, insolent, cynical and uncouth sailors who joined the rebellious revolutionaries. Differences in their appearance and behavior are emphasized by the authors in order to express the images of high culture that was lost when the Bolsheviks came to power. The movie *Duelist* begins with a frame describing the dueling code of the Russian Empire. At the heart of its plot is the story of the relationship between the nobles, who have no right to lie, refuse to duel, and, restoring their honor in deadly duels.

The communal way of life was an inherent feature of the Russian people and manifested itself in family life. An example of family and clan communal relations is presented in the films *Roy* (Russia, 1990) and *Dom* (Russia, 2011). The movie *Roy* tells the story of the Zavarzin family, who settled and lived for decades in the Siberian lands with clear rivers and endless forests. At one of the feasts, the eldest son Ivan makes a speech: "We are the Zavarzins. We all left this house and must return to it, and we will live swarming...". But fate had its own way. The only income-generating family business - beekeeping - perished. A parasitic disease killed the bee family, and the Zavarzin family fell into the arms of fatalism, one of the inherent properties of the Russian soul.

The movie *House* (Russia, 2011) tells about the destruction of the Shamanov family living in a large house surrounded by the vast Don steppes. Not far from the house at night barking wolves, which are hunted by men. The overlord father beats his sons, the sons beat their wives. On the occasion of the centennial of the oldest man, his son, grandchildren and great-grandchildren gather in the house. Unexpectedly, his eldest grandson Victor arrives from Moscow, a bandit who brings assassins after him. Among the faceless landscape of fields receding into the horizon, they carry out the massacre of the Shamanov family. This is its fatal fate.

The idea of compassion for the weak, defenseless, "little" man is traditional for Russian culture. In Soviet cinema, the "little man" as a type of character was an exception, but in the perestroika and post-Soviet period he became the hero of the films *Boys* (Russia, 1990), *In That Country* (Russia, 1997), *The Land of the Deaf* (Russia; France, 1997), *Mu-mu* (Russia, 1998), *Voroshilovsky Rifleman* (Russia, 1999), *Secondary People* (Ukraine, 2001) and others. Gogol's Dostoevsky version of this character, who survived the transformation into a despot and a battering ram, is depicted in A. Sokurov's films *Moloch* (Russia, Germany, Japan, Italy, France, 1999) and *Taurus* (Russia, 2001). The actors in them were Hitler and Lenin – nervous, weak-willed, unable to cope with everyday affairs.

*A mythological type of cinematic discourse.*

In the middle of the 19th century, a philosophical and ideological trend was born in Russia, which was called "pochvennichestvo". It was based on Christian values and developed the ideas of rootedness of the people, their connection with their native land, traditional way of life and unity of different social strata of society. The main mythologemes that embodied these ideas in art include the images of the river, the tree, and the house. The river is an image of the ever-flowing life of the people, rooted in one place, the unity of their past, present and future. Tree – a symbol of life and family, the connection of the lower and higher worlds. The house is a repository of family traditions and family ties.

After several decades of oblivion in Soviet culture, the ideas of soilvennost have been revived in "rustic prose" and "rustic cinema". In contemporary Russian cinema, although they are no longer relevant, they are reflected in certain screen works. For example, in the movie *Don't play the*

*fool...* (Russia, 1997), "the river (the motif of current time, life, even eternity...), a quiet street, hilly banks, shoals" create "a natural environment that has existed 'always', supporting the image of the state of mind of a person: a person in eternity..." (Zaitseva, 2018: 150-151).

In M. Razbezhkina's film *Yar* (Russia, 2007), the viewer is confronted with "striking in its poetry and drama pictures of the folk-soil Russian life with its half-pagan – half-Christian coloring... It is in the people that the truths of life on earth are kept..., the idea of natural justice..., developed by the entire life of the people, inseparable from the existence of nature" (Gasheva, 2012: 93).

In the film by K. Serebrennikov's film *Yuriev Day* (Russia, 2008) the "Russian idea" was expressed, "which is presented in the figurative structure of the film as the need for the cultural personality to return to the "soil" in order to choose humility and suffering by sharing the people's fate, sacrificing oneself, renouncing oneself and one's own ambitions for exclusivity" (Gasheva, 2012: 93).

One of the key themes of Russian feature films is the Great Patriotic War, cherished by historical memory and called "sacred" in the song of the same name. Its image is recreated in the films *Brestskaya Fortress* (Belarus, Russia, 2010), *Weary Sun-2. Predstoyanie* (2010, directed by N. Mikhalkov), *White Tiger* (Russia, 2012), *Stalingrad* (Russia, 2013), *Battle for Sevastopol* (Russia, 2015), *28 Panfilovtsev* (Russia, 2016), *T-34* (Russia, 2018), *Rzhev* (Russia, 2018), magnifying the feat of the people who defeated fascism. Modern filmmakers give epic forms to military actions, depicting soldiers as mythological heroes defending their homeland to their last breath. They present the mythologized image of the people's exploit in a simplified and far from "trench truth" form. Meanwhile, the representation of the national mythologeme of the Great Patriotic War in a heroic way by art cinema is an effective tool for preserving collective memory.

## 5. Conclusion

The cultural traditions formed in centuries-old history were (with all known losses) preserved in the Soviet period, remain relevant in modern conditions and are reflected in the feature films of "perestroika" and post-Soviet times.

In the interpersonal relations of the characters in the feature films of the period under review, the manifestations of sincerity and frankness, soulfulness and confessionality, traditional for domestic culture, diminutive and affectionate types of address expressing kindness, warmth and tenderness ("dove", "father", "son", "my darling" and others) have become a rarer phenomenon compared to the "thaw" and "stagnation" eras.

The modern Russian cinema screen reflected and constructed the relationship between man and society in the context of the changing social and political situation. In the context of cultural crisis and economic recession, Orthodox traditions and the culture of the nobility became relevant. In different forms, they were embodied in films depicting church sacraments, narrating about characters on a spiritual quest, making requests to God, praying at home and in the temple, quoting the Holy Scriptures. The heroes of historical films about pre-revolutionary times are characters who highly value the concept of duty, show examples of high honor, are ready to accept the heavy burden of fate and are able to sacrifice themselves to the Motherland.

The Russian cinema reflects the ideas of soil science: the unity and rootedness of the people, their connection with their native land. Despite the loss of national flavor, the modern screen images of the Russian countryside retain the natural environment that conveys the feeling of life of "man in eternity".

The theme of the Great Patriotic War is one of the key themes for Russian cinema. Its images have changed over time and today have acquired a mythological tinge, having lost the poignancy of interpersonal relationships and plot lines of the films of the 1950s-1970s. Nevertheless, modern Russian military-historical films demonstrate the feat of the people, preserving the collective memory of it.

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## The Ideologeme of 'Labor' in Shaping the Perspective of Elementary School Children in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries through Media Education Practices

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### Abstract

The article deals with labor education as an urgent problem of the modern educational system. The authors analyze the ideological format of the primer, the first reading book. Stable verbal complexes, as well as visual means in educational publications, are studied as representatives of ideological attitudes that play an important role in shaping the worldview of younger schoolchildren. The basics of labor education and the change of priorities in relation to labor during the social changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are considered. The ideologeme "labor" is analyzed on the basis of the materials of alphabets and books of reading instruction published in the period from 1901 to the present.

The results obtained during the study allowed us to trace the transformation of components of the universal ideologeme "labor" from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Initially, labor was focused on benefiting one's family and then the collective or the state. Over time, this perspective has shifted towards working for the benefit of oneself and others.

In addition to this analysis, we also propose several media educational tools aimed at the development of diligence, which is regarded as one of the fundamental universal values in elementary education.

**Keywords:** education, elementary school, labor education, media education, ideology, ideologeme, ABC book, primer, first reader, diligence.

### 1. Introduction

Modern society is often characterized as a consumer society (Kralik, 2023; Seliverstova, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to cultivate a love for work in primary school. This involves fostering a positive and responsible attitude towards work and its outcomes. It is also important to understand the diverse nature of different professions and the specific responsibilities associated with various jobs. In addition, developing relevant skills and abilities is crucial. The child's worldview is formed in the family, preschool institutions, and at school. The information environment has also a significant impact on the child. Modern children receive most of their information from the media (Tulodziecki, 2021: 19), including their first school books, which are an important source of value orientations that form the spiritual and moral basis of a child's personality. Simple pictures and simple texts have an impact on the child's subconscious, form ideas about the environment and can be effectively used by state institutions as a means of influence and manipulation. In this regard, it seems important to consider and compare the means of representing the ideology of "labor" as a material for the formation of the worldview of younger schoolchildren in Russia of the XX-XXI centuries and to propose the use of media education tools

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in the learning process. Modern media education offers teachers a wide range of forms, methods and tools that can be effectively used in the process of developing a worldview and labor education of younger schoolchildren.

## 2. Materials and methods

The research material was the ABC books and alphabets published in Russian in pre-revolutionary, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. The choice of the primer as the research material was intentional. Experts consider the primer as "the first dictionary in a child's life recommended to him by the state and pedagogy of commonly used concepts of modern culture, society, value orientations of everyday life, ways of interacting with the world" (Barannikova, Bezrogova, 2010: 4). In total, 50 publications published in the period from 1901 to the present were analyzed. In accordance with the purpose and objectives of the study, the method of direct observation, descriptive and contextual-interpretative analysis were used as the main methods of analysis.

## 3. Discussion

Numerous works of outstanding scientists and teachers have been devoted to the role of labor in the formation of personality, e.g. J. Dewey (Dewey, 1900), G. Kerschensteiner (Kerschensteiner, 1901), A. Makarenko (Makarenko, 2003), M. Montessori (Montessori, 1912) and many others. Let's focus on the pedagogical theories of these specialists, since, according to UNESCO, they are among the scientists who defined pedagogical thinking in the twentieth century and continue to influence modern pedagogy.

The ideas of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey, who in his writings raised the issue of the introduction of labor into education as the main method of teaching, had a serious impact on the pedagogy of Russia in the early twentieth century. It was his pedagogical ideas that formed the basis for building a unified labor school in post-revolutionary Russia. A detailed overview of the educational concept of J. Dewey was published by Chinese scientists Yan–Hong Ye and Yi-Huang Shih, who divided the teacher's system of views into two periods: before the First World War and after. Before World War I, Dewey's educational focused on the nature of education in terms of "education as growth" and "education as life" (Yan, Yi, 2021: 878). The very theoretical content of the subject, according to Dewey, should not be presented as dogma. He believed that the learning material is an incentive to further knowledge, and it should be related to the student's personal experience, to help the child solve any life issue.

J. Dewey denied the class-based learning system logically built by the school or the teacher and believed that students should freely interact with society and in this interaction a request for certain knowledge directly related to its social life would naturally form. At the same time, the main method of teaching should be work, during which children should have questions about the mechanisms or rules of certain processes, as well as interest in finding a scientific rationale behind the actions.

The pedagogical theory of J. Dewey found its followers in Russia as well. However, Soviet teachers interpreted the idea of learning through work literally and reduced it to the formation of skills operating tools. After World War I, Dewey realized himself as a leader of social activities and proposed that school education should guide children to focus on fundamental factors that drive public unity and cooperation in various public lives (Yan, Yi, 2021: 882). At the same time, special attention was paid to the need for students to develop critical thinking, the ability to analyze, reason and predict. In the face of complex social issues, teachers must allow children to experience and think about a social life that is changing, which increases children's democratic literacy (Dewey, 1925: 17). Social issues can be used to promote democratic literacy in children's education (Yan, Yi, 2021: 886).

A great influence on pedagogy in Europe in the twentieth century was exerted by the ideas of the German teacher-reformer Georg Kerschensteiner, according to which the basis of school education was labor training in a game form at the early stages of education, and practical craft training at subsequent ones. The basis of the theory of labor schools was the Protestant ideologies of "labor", "religion", "conscience". For Kerschensteiner, the goal of education was to form citizens useful to society, i.e. a person should be given the opportunity for comprehensive education, not for his own sake, but in the interests of the prosperity of society and public culture. Meanwhile, the educator believed that properly organized labor education would allow to manage the views and feelings of the mass and the public for the public benefit (Yelkenci, 2022: 18), would contribute to

the formation of civic values among schoolchildren associated with such character traits as honesty, conscientiousness, diligence, and accuracy.

Kershensteiner's ideas have been expanded in the system of modern European education at the level of secondary vocational training: "there is a trace of Kerschensteiner's thinking in education in vocational schools today" (Sloane, 2022: 416), including the system of dual education, involving close interaction between an educational institution and a manufacturing enterprise. This system was borrowed from the Germans and is being successfully implemented in a number of European countries, including France, Austria, the Netherlands, Turkey, etc.

J. Dewey and G. Kershensteiner believed that the approach to education of the masses and the elite should be different. The minority needs systematic knowledge, while the majority needs work skills. Therefore the elite should be taught in gymnasiums from books, and the majority in workshops and laboratories, in the garden and in the kitchen, focusing on specific labor actions, manual work, and using particular tools. Attention was given not only to the work's outcome, such as obtaining a profession, but primarily to the process of civic education. This approach aimed to develop hardworking, active, and independent individuals (Sloane, 2022: 411), citizens devoted to the fatherland.

Speaking about the education reformers of the twentieth century, one must not overlook the pedagogical concept of the Italian teacher Maria Montessori, who proposed a game as the main principle of the child's labor education. A game gives to a child the freedom of movement, the right to independently choose activities and objects for games, the opportunity to get acquainted with materials in practice, and not in theory. Meanwhile, role-playing and competitive games that contribute to the creative development of the child were excluded. The Italian teacher was the first to publicly declare that the basis of successful work is the independence of the child from an early age. However, without orienting the child to understand what is Good and Evil, giving him complete freedom to independently determine the landmarks, the question arises whether he will be able to withstand the dangers existing in society, whether he will be able to recognize them if everything is acceptable, everything is normal.

Despite contradictory assessments of M. Montessori's pedagogical concept, it has been recognized as an alternative to the traditional education system in many countries of the world, according to the data from 2022, in 154 countries (Archer, 2024). The effectiveness of the Montessori system can be judged by the analysis of academic and non-academic performance, compared with the results observed using traditional teaching methods (Montessori education has a meaningful and positive impact on child outcomes, both academic and nonacademic, relative to outcomes seen when using traditional educational methods), according to research by American scientists (Randolph, 2023). Experts have also identified the positive impact of this learning system on the children's psychological resilience (Sezgin, Şener, 2024).

Educational models of J. Dewey, M. Montessori and other reformers subsequently found their development in Howard Gardner's theory of multimodal learning, which can be considered as a continuation of Dewey's progressive vision of classroom teaching and school organization (Leshkovska, Spaseva, 2016: 65).

Labor education also underpins the pedagogical concept of the outstanding Soviet teacher Anton Makarenko, whose main instrument of the educational system is a team in which the individual is organized and disciplined through work. Strong personal value orientations are formed through work and effective educational practice. The teacher considered labor education outside the political and social sphere ineffective (Braido, 1970: 185). In an environment of collective creative work, pupils first gain the rules of behavior and relationships, then laws, traditions, including labor, then value orientations. The main feature of the subsequent stages is that the perception and acceptance of values occurs not so much in the process of specially organized work activities and cases, as becomes the lifelong learning.

A. Makarenko's pedagogical theory has been recognized effective in other countries, for example, in the 1950s it was introduced in France (Savoye, 2011). Analyzing the educational system of A.S. Makarenko, many experts, including Emiliano Mettini, come to the conclusion that this system is in demand in modern society, since it is an effective way to overcome and solve educational and methodological issues related to the development of a full-fledged and versatile personality, ready for self-development and interaction with other members of society for a qualitative change in living conditions in society (Mettini, 2020: 80-81).



It should be noted that alternative pedagogical systems developed in response to the need to solve the problem of integrating children developing outside of society, whether it be the system of teaching children with developmental disabilities by M. Montessori, homeless children by A. Makarenko, etc., and subsequently, having proved their effectiveness, they were introduced into work at different levels of education for children and adolescents in public educational institutions.

At all times in pre- and post-revolutionary, Soviet and post-Soviet modern Russia, great attention was paid to the labor education of the younger generation. However, the priorities of society in relation to labor have undergone some changes in the course of historical development. The basis of labor education was the development of children's industriousness, i.e. a positive attitude to work in general, respect for the work of adults, the aspiration and ability to work hard. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia, the priority was work for the benefit of one's family. Well-to-do peasants were respected in society as successful farm business managers. It was work "in all social strata of the Russian world that was the most important source of material well-being and social recognition of a person. The essence of the social and moral formation of a child's personality in traditional Russian culture was the acquisition by a young man entering the adult world of his social and labor niche, which guaranteed a stable financial and economic situation of the family... Each person understood that the well-being and physical survival of the family were literally in his hands, which required him to work intensively every day, constant physical exertion. Russian Russians perceived and practically realized their understanding of moral duty in traditional Russian culture in this way.; this is how he treated his work duties, knowing that any "indulgence" in his work will certainly lead to economic problems in the life of the whole family" (Reprintsev, 2019).

The revolution of 1917 led to a change in the social paradigm and a shift in value orientations from work for the benefit of the family to work for the benefit of the state and society. The priority of educational work has become the formation of children's deep respect and willingness to work conscientiously for the common good. Individual work was condemned in every possible way, and collective work, on the contrary, was welcomed. In that historical period, the students were taught the attitude towards work as an interesting and joyful activity for the benefit of the whole country. With the outbreak of World War II, joy was replaced by sorrow. However, it was the war of 1941–1945 that became the most striking "criterion of truth" demonstrating the results of labor education in the 1930s: hundreds of thousands of Soviet schoolchildren replaced their parents in the factories, in the fields, in other sections of the labor front, showing miracles of labor heroism" (Grebnev et al., 2015: 217).

The upbringing of a citizen of a socialist society on the example of the labor feat of the older generation was preserved in the post-war years. In the 1970s, the vector of labor education shifted to the formation of an attitude to work as a need of a Soviet person, which was emphasized by the Minister of Education M.A. Prokofiev (Grebnev et al., 2015: 219).

On the eve of the period of perestroika (1985–1990), another attempt was made to reform the education system. In 1984, the "Main directions of the reform of general education and vocational schools" were adopted. According to this document, primary school was supposed to form elementary work skills, and incomplete secondary (grades 4-8) was to solve the tasks of general labor training, which, combined with measures for vocational guidance of schoolchildren, would create conditions for a conscious choice of the direction of future work. In the senior grades 8-9, labor training was provided in the most popular professions, taking into account the needs of the region. It should be completed by mastering a certain profession and passing qualification exams. The curriculum included the course "Fundamentals of production. Choosing a profession", which introduced schoolchildren to the main branches of the national economy, with the content of the work of workers of various professions. At the same time, this course gave an idea of the requirements of various types of work for the qualities of personality and professional training of employees of a particular profession. The main purpose of this course was to help students make a conscious choice of their future profession. The developed system of labor training for schoolchildren did not last long, only until 1988, although the document itself became invalid only with the adoption of the law on education in 2012.

In the Russian society of the 1980–1990s, work came "out of fashion", more specifically, hard work hard without caring about proper compensation. The manifestation of altruism was perceived as inanity. Nevertheless, elementary school maintained labor lessons, children made crafts, and in middle school, boys worked in school workshops while girls learned to sew and cook.

With the beginning of the new century, the subject of "Labor", work in workshops and workshops themselves began to gradually disappear from schools. The subject of "Technology" appeared in the curricula, where the emphasis was shifted on robotics and high-tech, which was justified from the point of view of technological progress. However an idea of technology could be obtained in the vast majority of cases only in theory, because schools couldn't afford high-tech equipment. At that time, not only labor activity disappeared from schools, as part of labor education, but also, as noted by prof. Savenkov, "under the influence of false democracy", schoolchildren were spared from participating in cleaning the classroom, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to acquire the skill of elementary self-service, maintaining cleanliness around themselves. The author emphasizes that "the main work of the child is primarily educational work, which for some reason is not considered to be labor in our country. But basic self-service skills are also necessary" (Agranovich, 2023).

At the moment, the state policy regarding labor education in schools is changing, as indicated by the introduction of amendments to the Federal Law on Education. So, if earlier it was only possible to involve children in work, for example, cleaning a classroom or school grounds, with the consent of students and their parents, today the teacher has the right to organize labor events without waiting for their consent.

In the legislative acts of modern Russia, the creation of conditions for the upbringing of a work-oriented personality is indicated as one of the main priorities of state policy in the field of education. The implementation of labor education is provided through: education of children's respect for work and people of work, labor achievements; formation of children's self-service skills, the need to work, conscientious, responsible and creative attitude to various types of work, including education and household chores; developing teamwork skills, the ability to work independently, mobilizing the necessary resources, correctly assessing the meaning and consequences of their actions; promoting professional self-determination, introducing children to socially significant activities for a meaningful choice of profession. As the main condition for the education of diligence in children, modern teachers designate the orientation of the labor education process to ensure that children understand the meaning of work, its necessity and benefits for themselves and others (Khanova et al., 2021: 283).

The change of the social paradigm and priorities of labor education of younger schoolchildren can be traced on the pages of the primer by analyzing the linguistic and iconic actualizers of the ideologeme "labor". In this article, we will not dwell in detail on the concepts of "ideologeme" and "ideology", since they were discussed in detail in previous publications (Seliverstova et al., 2022, 2023), we only note that the ideologeme is a unit of verbal embodiment of ideology in language, explication, a way of representing socio-political and universal values in a certain period of time.

Ideologemes can be used as a material for education, including labor education, since they focus students' attention on moral values cultivated in society. The tools of modern media education can be used as an effective tool for the formation of students' value orientations. According to the results of a study by Australian scientists who considered the role of media literacy in the life of society on the basis of a system of motivational values (Schwartz et al., 2012), it is media literacy education that is becoming the most important area in which students can not only discuss and affirm their own values, but also develop an understanding of the values held by others (Chambers et al., 2022: 2599).

#### 4. Results

Linguistic analysis of ideologemes from the point of view of the nature of their ideological content allowed us to identify units of different levels in their total volume: universal ideologemes, universal (moral) and socio-political ideologemes. The universal ones are basic, the socio-political ones are artificially created (phantom) (Seliverstova et al., 2022: 626). The basic ideologemes are unchangeable and constitute the content of universal ones, while the phantom ones are transformed in the course of social development, complying with the realities of the historical period and can be considered as a form, a kind of "packaging" of universal ideologemes.

Let's demonstrate this thesis using the example of the universal ideologeme "labor", which includes the basic ideologemes – "diligence", "respect for work", "teaching" – and socio-political ones – individual work (work for the benefit of one's family, clan), collective work (work for the benefit of the group, the state), gratuitous (socially useful) work, etc. in Russian-language textbooks. Meanwhile, we note that work for a Russian person is that universal category in which

physical and mental labor is accumulated. By engaging in joint work with adults, seeing how much work adults invest in the well-being of the family, what responsibility they bear on their shoulders, children inevitably begin to appreciate work, understand its role in human life, and respect the person of work (Reprintsev, 2019).

The patterns of behavior of children and adults demonstrated on the pages of the primer are offered to children as the only correct ones. Considering ideologemes based on the material of the primer, it should be noted that in the ABC books and the first books for reading, iconic signs do not so much complement as replace verbal ones. At the stage of mastering letters and letter combinations, they dominate the process of updating the meaningful (semantic) component, therefore, in this case we consider images as a tool for updating ideologies.

The interest in the ideology of "labor" is due to the understanding of the special role that labor occupies in a number of anthropological phenomena that accompany a person throughout his life. Russian farming culture was the core of Russian folk culture and pedagogy, according to experts. Agriculture has long been the main occupation of Russians, it was it that determined the whole way of life and way of life. Most of the holidays and rituals were of an agricultural nature, children were prepared very early for future work in the fields ... (Maltseva, 2009: 53). On the pages of the alphabets there are many images of work in the field: sowing, harvesting, mowing, etc.

The pictures are often accompanied by short sentences like: "The mower is mowing. Ploughmen plow the field with ploughs... Ploughs are better than ploughs: it's good to plow with them" (Alexandrovich, 1905: 7, 9). There are also texts about the labor of peasants: "This is the hardest time for the peasants; they have been in the field for days: they clean the hay, reap the grain, bind it into sheaves and carry it to the threshing floor. The threshing floor is threshed with trowels or threshing machines" (Ananyev, 1908: 40) and poems, for example: "Sow, peasant!" (Alexandrovich, 1905: 26) or "Peasant business to plow, yes to sow, harvest, thresh, yes to winnow" (Stepanov, 2017: 71).

It is noteworthy that in the publications of the early twentieth century, mostly adults were depicted at work (Alexandrovich, 1905: 26), whom children should imitate, in the ABC books of the early 40s of the twentieth century. In the pictures, child assistants work together with adults (Zykov, 1940: 98), then in post-war publications, children work themselves in the field, in the workshop (Kostin, 1947: 53), on the farm (Kostin, 1947: 92) as adults: "On the farm... Sema and Fima graze geese in the meadow. Fanya and Dasha feed the chickens" (Kostin, 1947: 92).

In modern publications, not only children help their parents at home and around the house, but also parents help children: "Fenya cooks fruit compote, mom helps" (Stepanov, 2017: 56).

In the ABC books of the early twentieth century, when working, a person is praying to God, for example, in the "Plowman's Song": "I eat with a quiet prayer. I'll plow, I'll sow. Provide me, God! bread is my wealth!" (Russkaya azbuka, 1903: 3). Or in a lullaby sung by a mother to her son on Saturday evening before going to church: "Sleep, son, and tomorrow we will go to church, bring a candle and a prayer to God. God will see the candle, God will hear us, and it will rain at the right time" (Alexandrovich, 1905: 29). This assumption is confirmed by other examples: "Whoever gets up early, God gives it to him" (Alexandrovich, 1905: 39). "God has commanded us to work" (Avilova, 1904); "Believe, pray and work" (Lukashevich, 1915: 21). Gradually, the emphasis shifts from God's patronage to the tool of labor: "The plow feeds the plowman" (Lukashevich, 1915: 29), and then to the worker himself: "The plow does not plow, the plowman does. It's not a hammer, it's a man" (Vahterov, 1922: 40) "It's not a needle that sews, hands sew" (Vahterov, 1922: 62).

In the early 1930s, the period of collectivization led to the transition from work for the benefit of the individual to work for the benefit of the collective and the state, which was reflected on the pages of the Soviet period's ABC books and first reading books. The collective is based on the values of interpersonal relations, mutual support and mutual understanding, readiness to cooperate for the realization of common goals and objectives. The main values of the collectivistic culture include traditions, obedience, and a sense of duty, which contribute to the preservation of the unity of the group. Group norms are a more important regulator of behavior than social attitudes. Individual peasant farms were united into collective farms. In N.M. Golovin's 1937 primer, the text "Our collective farm" appears, in which "fishermen catch fish ..., give them to collective farmers and take them to the market" (Golovin, 1937: 35), in the 1944 edition, collective farmers catch fish independently (Golovin, 1944: 37). A prosperous life on the collective farm is also narrated in the postwar period textbooks: "There is a nursery on the collective farm... Children are happy in the nursery" (Kostin, 1947: 79); "There is a farm on the collective farm. There are a lot of chickens,

ducks and geese on the farm" (Kostin, 1947: 92); "We have a cinema and radio on the collective farm. From the collective farm there is a road to the city, they write about us in the newspapers" (Voskresenskaya, 1952: 76). Soviet workers have all the conditions for good work not only in collective farms, but also in factories and plants: "Father and brother Foma work in a factory. It's clean and bright. There are lanterns around the factory" (Voskresenskaya, 1952: 70); "Six minutes – and the plant produces a new car... Earlier, this would have been a miracle. and now they work like this in our factories and plants" (Voskresenskaya, 1952: 90).

The principles of collective work are being explained to children while they are learning to read: "The collective farmers cheerfully harvested a rich harvest from the fields. They handed over part of the harvest to the state. The other part was put aside for sowing and in reserve. The collective farmers divided the rest of the bread among themselves according to their workdays" (Voskresenskaya, 1952: 89).

After the war, the determining factor in school education was an ideology that provided for a preferential attitude to work as a matter of honor, glory, valor and heroism. Orders were awarded for labor exploits: "Nina Fomina works at a factory. ... She received an order for excellent work" (Svadkovsky, 1962: 37); "My mother has an order. She was awarded for her hard work" (Goreckij, 1977: 75). Imbuing the desire for highly productive work also occupies an important place in the primer. Thus, in the edition of A.I. Voskresenskaya, Stakhanov's movement, which began in 1935 and was aimed at increasing the production efficiency, is mentioned: "Father works in a factory. He is a Stakhanovite," and in general, "There are many Stakhanovites at the factory," and not only at the factory, but also on the collective farm there is a place for selfless, hard work, for example, "Here is the smithery. A collective farm blacksmith works there. Our blacksmith works very well. He is a Stakhanovite" (Voskresenskaya, 1952: 68-71). Half a century later, work is still in high esteem, the father works in the forge: "He is a blacksmith... My father works well". This time, he does not have to be a Stakhanovite, "He is doing a good job" (Voronkova, 1996: 118).

The basic ideologeme "Diligence" is directly related to prosperity, well-being: "Bread is my wealth!" (Russkaya azbuka, 1903: 3); "Work till sweat, and you'll eat with appetite" (Lukashevich, 1915: 59); "What you sow, you reap" (Vahterov, 1919: 13); "Labor feeds, but laziness spoils" (Golovin, 1937: 39) and even happiness:

- "Tell me, Father, how can one achieve happiness?"

- "There's no better way than to work hard physically and mentally" (Lukashevich, 1915: 68).

Bread is a symbol of prosperity: "We sing a song to bread, We honor it. Glory forever and ever, glory!" (Nikiforov, 2013).

Bread continues to be glorified in the first children's textbooks of the late 70s -early 80s: Glory to peace on earth!

Glory to the bread on the table! Glory to those who grew bread, Spared no effort! (Goreckij, 1977: 77; 1982: 103).

Verbal and nonverbal markers of the ideologeme "Labor" on the pages of the primers of the studied period allow us to trace the course of technological development of society due to the change of tools, types of labor activity, and the jobs: from a sickle, a harrow, a spinning wheel to a combine harvester; from a mower, a reaper, a plowman and a coachman to a builder, a steelworker, an airplane pilot, an astronaut.

In the ABC books, one can trace the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial one and the change of manual labor to machine labor: "Collective farmers work all year round... Autumn is coming... A lot of cars enter the fields at once: tractors, mowers, combines. What a good harvester machine! He reaps, threshes, and blows" (Goreckij, 1977: 77) and the development of technology: "The Giant all-terrain vehicle was built at the factory. He is being sent to Antarctica" (Svadkovsky, 1962: 79). "New factories are being built. Tractors plow the fields. Trains and cars are rushing by. Ships are sailing. High, high in the sky fly the fast-winged "IL", "TU", "Yaks", "Anas". The USSR is a country of peace and labor" (Goreckij, 1982: 77).

The universal ideology of "Labor" embraces the basic ideology of "Learning". The outstanding teacher K.D. Ushinsky, reflecting on work, wrote that "learning is work and should remain work, but work full of thought" (Ushinsky, 2002: 54). At the beginning of the XX century learning, as work in general, was assisted by God so people asked for God's help: "Children are going to school early. Before the beginning of learning, a prayer is read" (Ananyev, 1908: 37); "Dunya prays and studies" (Bortnevskaya, 1915). It was customary to bless the learning: "The Father went with Peter to the church. A prayer service was served in the church. After the service, the father

accompanied Peter to school. And Peter began to study well, to gain intelligence" (Alexandrovich, 1905: 15). The ABC books contained entire sections of spiritual and moral reading with texts not only of prayers, but explaining what love for one's neighbor, patience, mercy, humility, and other virtues are (Baranov, 1900, 1909; Alexandrovich, 1905, Bublikov, 1909). Children were instilled with a love for physical, mental and spiritual work.

After the October Revolution of 1917, Russian pedagogy developed exclusively in the anti-religious paradigm. In the primer of the new national school, published in Petrograd in 1917, there was no longer a single word about religion (Borisov, 1917). Atheism replaced Orthodox education, and the new political course assumed a struggle for the destruction of the Russian Orthodox Church and its dogmas (Yashina, 2011: 202). With the expulsion of the clergy from school and the abolition of the teaching of the Law of God, all mention of the church and religion disappeared from the pages of alphabet books and primers, but the very idea of educating a hardworking, merciful, and honest person did not disappear.

Among other things, the primer taught to be grateful. First, they thanked God and his viceroy on earth, the king, for education: "The Sovereign is the anointed of God... He takes care that we all feel good and calm" (Baranov, 1900: 42). After the lessons, they turned to God with a prayer of thanks: "Thank you, Creator, for deigning us to study. Bless our superiors, parents and teachers who led us to knowledge..." (Bublikov, 1909: 64). After the revolution, portraits of the tsar and his wife were replaced by portraits of the leaders of the revolution V.I. Lenin, I.V. Stalin and their associates M.I. Kalinin, V.M. Molotov, etc. Children were taught to say thank you for the opportunity to study to the Soviet government: "Dad explained to me that in our country the Soviet government opened the doors of schools to all children of workers and peasants, and this had not happened before". "We are children of factories and arable lands, our path is clear to us, thank you for our happy childhood, our native country!" (Golovin, 1937: 60-61.) and to the leaders: "October gave us a school. Thanks to the great Stalin" (Zykov, 1940: 119). In this case, the lexeme "October" is a figurative means. The author of the publication emphasizes that the October Revolution of 1917 provided access to schools for children regardless of their class background. In their songs, children sing "Thank you, Stalin" (Golovin, 1944: 49); "Let's say thank you to Stalin for a joyful life!" (Redozubov, 1951: 90).

The ideological format of the last century can also be seen in the images of the school. It provides for the existence of a certain idealized personality – the head of state, as a rule. Over time, only the ideological attributes change, but the tools remain unchanged: portraits of idols, symbols of state ideology. Thus, in the primer of the early twentieth century, one can observe clergymen at school, icons, and a portrait of the tsar (Baranov, 1900: 46). In the publications of Soviet Russia, we see the same class, the same children, only instead of a portrait of the tsar, there is now a portrait of the leader of the revolution; instead of church attributes, icons and candles, there're symbols of the revolution - a hammer and a sickle (Zykov, 1940: 119).

In contrast, there are no attributes of state ideology in the images of the school of the modern period (Aksenova, 2017: 3). Compared with the publications of the twentieth century. in the ABC books of the 21st century, the ideology of "diligence" is given much less attention. It is actualized only in the mention of household chores: "Zakhar mows. And Sima feeds the goat" (Zhukova, 2014: 41); "Mom has a hot iron. Dad has a heavy cart. Grandma has warm rolls" (Zhukova, 2014: 83), in proverbs and sayings: "If you want to eat rolls, do not lie on the stove" (Andrianova, 2011: 92), "Like a master, such is the work" (Andrianova, 2011: 60), "Work feeds, but laziness spoils" (Andrianova, 2011: 64). Attention is focused on the independence of children: "Ivan washed the cups himself" (Aksenova, 2017: 73), "Anton sewed himself" (Aksenova, 2017: 101), as well as joint friendly work: "Rita sewed a bathrobe. Lara was embroidering leaves. Zina sewed on a pocket" (Aksenova, 2017: 111). The basic ideology of "learning", oddly enough, is presented in an even smaller amount, for example, in the publications of A.K. Aksenova, V.A. Stepanov; sometimes it is absent altogether, as for example, in the primer by N.S. Zhukova.

From the position of a mass recipient of information and a combination of verbal signs with iconic ones, the primer, like any other texts, along with newspapers and magazines, can be considered as a media text and used in the process of teaching reading skills and also the development of particular values, such as diligence. The actualizers of the ideologeme "labor" in the primer allow the teacher to focus the attention of students on respect for work, labor traditions and thereby form an up-to-date system of labor values among the younger generation. In this regard, we suggest paying attention to the possibilities of using media education methods in the process of

labor education of younger schoolchildren at the stage of learning to read. Elements of media education can be included in both lessons and extracurricular activities.

Experts identify the following methods of media education: verbal (story, lecture, conversation, mutually enriching dialogue, discussion, analysis, discussion, etc.); visual (illustration and demonstration of media texts); reproductive; research (organization of students' research activities); heuristic; problematic (problem analysis of certain situations or media text in order to develop critical thinking); gaming (Fedorov, 2001: 360). The vast majority of these methods can also be used in elementary school.

Special attention should be paid to game forms, as the most effective at the initial stage of education. First-graders can be offered a game "What is good and what is bad", in which children must choose pictures in the primer illustrating patterns of "good"/"bad" behavior. Among them, it is necessary to single out those which demonstrate hard work and laziness, as worthy and unworthy of imitation. We need to involve the children in a discussion of why working is good and being lazy is bad. Such a problematic discussion will contribute to the formation of students' ability to critically evaluate and assimilate patterns of behavior from the standpoint of morality, culture, and ethics.

Work education is an important component of the moral development of the younger generation and is of an active nature, therefore, a conversation on the topic "I am an helper" will be appropriate in the lesson, within which children can reflect on what household duties they perform, and what else they can be useful to the family, the team, and society.

Proverbs and sayings about work can be found in most of the analyzed editions of the alphabets. A teacher can suggest recalling other proverbs on the topic of diligence and talk about the importance of all professions without exception. Children might recall a movie, cartoon or a fairy tale about people of a particular profession, for example: "Uncle Stepa", "The Brave Little Tailor", "The Secret of the Third Planet", etc. The teacher then can resort to a visual method of media education and show an excerpt of a cartoon or fairy tale in the lesson, and then discuss it with the children.

More complex forms of work may be used, for example, schoolchildren may act as a journalist and interview parents and other adults on the topic of choosing a profession. This activity requires the teacher's preliminary work, students should be explained what an interview is and helped to prepare questions. Since first graders cannot write down the answers on paper, they can use a voice recorder in their mobile phone or ask their parents for help.

As part of the organization of extracurricular activities, students can be invited to create their own media texts: a collage about various professions, a poster, a wall newspaper "My future job". You can organize a drawing contest for the day of a teacher, a cosmonaut, a metallurgist, etc., an exhibition-fair of children's creative crafts or a meeting with representatives of a particular profession. The results of the students' work and photo reports on the events can be posted in the classroom and on the school's website.

Below is a sample lesson plan on the topic "Bred is the staff of life".

The purpose of the lesson: to cultivate diligence, to teach how to take care of bread as a result of work, to form ideas about different professions.

Lesson objectives: expanding vocabulary and general horizons, developing critical thinking, increasing motivation to learn, and developing teamwork skills.

Materials needed: a board, a projector, a computer, markers.

Lesson progress: the screen features a painting by Salvador Dali "A basket of bread" (1945, Dali Theater Museum in Figueres). Children describe the image in the picture and guess what the lesson will be dedicated to. Students answer the question: "What do you think about when you see bread?" and build associations with the word "bread". On the board, the lesson topic is shown in the form of the proverb "Bred is the staff of life".

The teacher explains that in many Slavic languages the words "head" and "main" have the same root. That is why the Russian proverb "Bread is the head of everything" can be interpreted as "bread is the most important product on the table." Bread production is a complex and multi-stage process involving people of different professions. In order to make bread, you first need to grow wheat. Previously, peasants did everything with their own hands, the work was manual: they plowed the land, sowed, mowed, etc. Today, an agronomist is engaged in the planning of the field. After the place for sowing wheat is determined, the soil is prepared: a tractor driver plows and cultivates the field. The finished crop is harvested by a combine harvester. In order to grind wheat

into flour, it used to take a miller. Today, flour mills are engaged in this. The baker is busy making bread. It can be said that the seller is also connected with the production of bread, without him the goods would not reach the buyer.

Each of the stages of bread making can be illustrated with images from the paintings by the great artists Grigory Myasoedov "The Mowers" 1887 (State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg), Peter Brueghel's "Harvest" 1565 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), Tatiana Yablonskaya's "Bread", 1949 (Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow), Boris Kustodiev's "The Baker" 1920 (I.I. Brodsky's Apartment Museum, St. Petersburg), etc.

Next, students solve a crossword puzzle compiled using an aggregator <https://crossmaker.ru/ru/> from a set of words: loaf, mower, miller, plowman, baker, bakery, agronomist, farmer; make up words from the word "grain grower" and sentences with this word.

At the next stage, students work in small groups, namely, they compose compositions on the themes "Work in the field", "Baking bread", "Bread on the table" in a collage technique from pictures prepared by the teacher.

Summing up:

1. What have we learned about bread?
2. What professions are people involved in bread production?
3. Do I want to choose the profession of an agronomist, combine harvester, baker in the future?

As an independent extracurricular work, students are invited to find proverbs about bread and draw a picture. The teacher may sum up the lesson by making a slide show or a video clip using children's collages.

The plan suggested above is just one of the many approaches. Modern media education offers teachers a wide range of forms, methods and tools that can be effectively used in the process of shaping a worldview and developing attitude to labor of younger schoolchildren.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the study led to the conclusion that stable verbal complexes, as well as visual means in educational publications, can act as representatives of ideological attitudes. At the same time, the concept of "ideology" goes beyond the framework of political discourse, acquiring an axiological mode. Value meanings characterized by national specificity, dynamism, and pragmatism find expression in manipulative verbal and nonverbal units – ideologemes. The universal ideology of "work" consists of the basic "diligence", "respect for work" and "learning". The basic ideologies have not changed over time, but socio-political ones have transformed from work for the benefit of the family to work for the benefit of the collective and the state, then gratuitous work and work for the benefit of oneself and others.

Based on the results of the analysis, we consider it necessary to pay attention to the absence or poor representation of the ideologeme "labor", as well as other basic universal ideologemes in modern textbooks, which could be effectively used as a tool for educating younger schoolchildren. Teachers of the initial stage of education should actively use the forms and methods of media education in the classroom and in extracurricular activities in order to educate a hardworking personality, since the tools developed specifically in the field of media education seem to be the most effective in the process of forming the value orientations of schoolchildren. Important components of the successful functioning of any state, regardless of the ideological conjuncture, are such internal attitudes as the realization of socially significant personality qualities in work, responsibility for the assigned task, and a negative attitude towards idleness. It is these elements that should be given special attention in the process of school education, and they should be embodied in educational literature, including the first book for reading.

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## Connection of Features of Identification with Cartoon Characters with the Understanding of Emotions in Older Preschoolers

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### Abstract

This work is a part of the series of studies devoted to the perception of animated films by preschoolers and is aimed at studying the characteristics of children's identification in connection with their understanding of emotions. The relevance of the topic is due, on the one hand, to the generally recognized fact of the close connection of art with human feelings, and, on the other, to the extremely low level of knowledge of issues in this area, especially with regard to young children. In this paper, it was suggested that the identification of preschoolers with various cartoon characters is based on the relationship between the personal attitude of children to these characters and the characteristics of their understanding of emotions. The study included children watching the cartoon *Old Toy* (1971; timing: 9:42; screenplay by V. Livanov, director of photography V. Samsonov), then the children were offered tests: a modified method of personal constructs by J. Kelly and the Test of Emotion Comprehension. The results of the factor analysis allowed us to identify three bipolar factors that determine the peculiarities of the perception of cartoons by children who identify themselves with the main characters or do not identify themselves with any of them. The results obtained can become the basis for further research, and can also be used for educational purposes.

**Keywords:** cartoons, cartoon characters, personal constructs, perception of cartoons, understanding of cartoons, art education, test of emotion comprehension, preschool age.

### 1. Introduction

In contemporary society, cartoons are a foundational part of early childhood experiences, representing one of the first art forms that young children engage with actively. This phenomenon has garnered significant attention within developmental psychology and the psychology of art (Barak et al., 2011; De Leeuw, Van der Laan, 2017; Demir, Sisman, 2021; Smirnova et al., 2014; Sobkin et al., 2013; Sobkin, 1989a; Sobkin, 1989b; Sobkin, 1991; Sobkin, 2006; Sobkin, Kolmanovskaya, 1990; Sobkin, Skobel'cina, 2014; Usov, 2000).

Given that children frequently identify with cartoon characters, often imitating the behaviors displayed, understanding how they perceive and emotionally relate to these characters is essential (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, 1985; Habib, Tarek, 2015; Mahmood et al., 2020; Zhang, 2021).

Further, studies indicate that character identification can significantly impact children's comprehension of a cartoon's narrative and central themes (Antufueva, 2024; Sobkin, 2014), offering insights valuable to child psychology, early childhood education, and the formation of an artistic worldview.

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The identification process with film characters is intricately linked to the viewer's "internal point of view" (Lotman, 1992; Lotman, Civ'yan, 1994), wherein adopting the character's perspective allows children to interpret events from that character's worldview. Of particular importance to the psychology of art is the fact that the ability to adopt another's perspective is a crucial quality leading to empathy for the characters and, an overall deeper understanding of the narrative.

The "internal" or "external" view of a particular position is established through the medium of film, primarily through camerawork and editing. Thus, if the viewer is asked to look at events from a character's point of view, the camera will take a certain position, encouraging the viewer to identify their perspective with that of the character. Our previous works show that, when identifying with characters through whose eyes the viewer is invited to observe events, children most often rely on subjective attitudes towards the characters (Sobkin, 2006; Sobkin, 2014; Sobkin, Markina, 2010).

The cartoon that served as the expositional material in this study, *The Old Toy*, invites the viewer to perceive events from the perspective of a particular character, the Teddy Bear. The Teddy Bear is the Girl's good old favorite toy. She has a few other old toys, but one day she receives a new one as a gift, a Clown. The main conflict in the cartoon revolves around the relationship between the Girl and the Teddy Bear, who is jealous of her attachment to the Clown, feels abandoned, and struggles to cope with these difficult emotions. The cartoon is structured in such a way that the viewer is invited to experience events primarily through the Teddy Bear's subjective viewpoint, contrasting it with an objective view of the Girl, who is shown from an external perspective. Thus, the film establishes two opposing viewer perspectives, represented by the two main characters — the Teddy Bear (internal, subjective point of view) and the Girl (external, objective). This structure, which involves the dynamics of changing perspectives, allows us to explore pertinent issues related to preschoolers' identification with the characters. This was the decisive factor in choosing the cartoon *The Old Toy* for our study, which began in the 1980s under the guidance of Y.N. Usov in the "Cinema and Television" laboratory of the Institute of Art Education of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. The study employed a modified version of J. Kelly's personal construct methodology to explore how preschoolers form identification with film characters, shedding light on the personal constructs underlying their perspectives (Sobkin, Kolmanovskaya, 1990).

The modified methodology used in this study is based on a triadic choice procedure, wherein children chose two similar characters and distinguished a third from each set of three cards representing characters from *The Old Toy*. Besides the character cards (the Girl, Teddy Bear, Clown, Doll, and Doggie), a "You" card was also included to represent the child. In addition to grouping two characters and excluding the third, children were asked to explain how the two were similar and how the third differed from them. For example, a child is offered a choice of three cards — "Teddy Bear," "Girl," and "You" (the card representing the child), and is asked to put two of them together and one apart, then explain their choice. The explanation represents a *personal construct*, which can be either objective (based on formal characteristics — "Cartoon characters," "People," "Alive," etc.) or subjective (differing on personal grounds — "I like them," "They are good," "They play with each other"). The total number of choices presented to the child, involving all possible combinations of the six cards, was 20 triads.

In addition to identifying the personal constructs used by the child, the methodology also reveals the nature of their identification with cartoon characters based on how frequently the "You" card is grouped with the two main characters. The data analysis resulted in four viewer identification groups: "with the Girl," "with the Teddy Bear," "Decentered position" — children who equally often identify with both main characters (the Girl and the Teddy Bear), and "Detached position" — children who rarely identify with either of these characters. For each of the four identification groups, the frequency with which the objective and subjective personal constructs were used was analyzed. Findings indicate that children identifying with the Girl or assuming a detached position were statistically less inclined to use subjective personal constructs than those identifying with the Teddy Bear or assuming a decentered position.

Additional qualitative analysis further revealed seven distinct categories of subjective personal constructs according to their thematic content.

1. *Character traits*. This subgroup included statements related to the personal traits of the characters in the film and their emotional states, for example, "The Doll is mean," "The Clown is loud," "The Doggie likes to laugh," and "The Teddy Bear was sad."

2. *The child's reality*. This subgroup of constructs includes statements related to the

children's own world, to the stimuli around them. For example, "I love doggies, but I'm allergic," "Because I want to get my sister a clown," or "I have two doggies and lots of dolls."

3. *Positive conflict resolution*. This subgroup includes statements related to the child's desired (imagined) resolution of the conflict, e.g., "The Teddy Bear and the Doll are getting married" or "The Girl and the Teddy Bear should be together."

4. *The child's attitude toward the character*. This subgroup includes statements related to the child's expressed attitude toward the cartoon characters: "I liked the Teddy Bear" or "The Girl probably doesn't like boys" (boy's answer), "I want a Teddy Bear like the one in the film," "The Teddy Bear is the most important character and is cute," "I don't like the way it chuckles" (about the Clown), "We would help each other if I were in the cartoon."

5. *Relationships between the characters*. This subgroup included statements related to the attitude of characters to one another: "the Teddy Bear and the Girl were friends" or "The Clown loved the Doll," "The Girl was happy to have the Clown," "The Doll helped the Teddy Bear," "They love each other."

6. *Actions*. This subgroup includes statements reflecting directly on actions, e.g., "The Clown and the Girl were together," "The Doll is walking the Doggie."

7. *Ethical Assessments*. This subgroup includes statements containing ethical assessments both about what was directly seen in the cartoon and matters indirectly related to it: "I want the Teddy Bear to have a better companion than he had in Doggie," "the Teddy Bear needs someone."

The study showed that the use of different types of subjective personal constructs varied among children from different identification groups, supporting the hypothesis that children's involvement in the emotional space of the film depends on how exactly they identify themselves. Moreover, age-specific features were found that clearly reflect the dynamics of preschoolers' emotional development. This allowed us to move on to the next step in our study.

*Hypothesis*. The findings allowed us to formulate the following research question: are identification with characters and the use of personal constructs related to the particularities of a preschooler's emotional intelligence? In other words, the hypothesis can be formulated as follows: the basis of preschoolers' identification with certain cartoon characters is the interrelation between the children's personal attitudes towards these characters and the particularities of their emotional intelligence.

## 2. Materials and methods

To test this assumption, an additional study was conducted. The sample consisted of 60 preschoolers aged 5 to 7 years (60 to 86 months;  $M = 72.3$ ,  $SD = 7.63$ ): 30 boys (60 to 86 months;  $M = 73.3$ ,  $SD = 7.94$ ) and 30 girls (62 to 86 months;  $M = 71.3$ ,  $SD = 7.31$ ) attending kindergartens following the general education curricula.

The study applied J. Kelly's personal construct methodology (Kozlova, 1976; Petrenko, 1983), previously described, alongside the Test of Emotion Comprehension (TEC). The TEC, which was adapted for use in Russia by Veraksa and colleagues in 2019–2020 with a sample of 596 children aged 5–6 years (Veraksa et al., 2021), assesses multiple dimensions of children's emotional understanding.

These include:

- The ability to recognize emotions,
- Understanding that emotions can be triggered by external situations,
- Understanding that people tend to experience different emotions in the same circumstances depending on their desires,
- Understanding that perceptions can affect emotions,
- Understanding that emotions can be triggered by memories,
- Understanding that real emotions may not match their outward expressions,
- Understanding that a person can experience conflicting emotions toward a single situation,
- Understanding that emotions can be controlled,
- Understanding that emotions can be influenced by moral norms.

The test is administered using the ChildStudy MSU e-app (Emotion Understanding Test Complex), which presents children with visual stimuli and questions. Children responded by selecting the most fitting image on-screen and advancing to the next question, with results automatically compiled into a data table for analysis.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28.0.1.1) to examine statistical significance and patterns within the results.

Research Procedure. The study was conducted individually with each child in two kindergarten settings: Smart Team, a private kindergarten in Krasnogorsk, and Kindergarten No. 1344 in Moscow.

In a quiet room designated for the study, each child watched the cartoon *The Old Toy* on a laptop, after which they completed the J. Kelly and TEC assessments. To capture responses accurately, a tape recorder was used throughout the testing session.

### 3. Discussion and Results

The results of the study on preschoolers' emotional understanding, assessed through the Test of Emotion Comprehension (TEC), were compared with the children's attitudes toward characters in the cartoon *The Old Toy*, evaluated using J. Kelly's methodology. Identification with the main characters served as the basis for this comparative analysis. To facilitate the comparison, an initial data matrix was developed with columns representing different identification groups ("with the Girl," "with the Teddy Bear," "Decentered position," and "Detached position"). The rows of the matrix corresponded to personal constructs (objective and seven subjective constructs) and TEC task performance indicators (eleven indicators). Each cell within this matrix recorded the percentage of children using the corresponding construct or correctly completing a TEC task within each identification group. The compiled data matrix, structured as a 4x19 array (identification groups x test performance results), underwent factor analysis (Principal Component Method with Kaiser's Varimax rotation). This yielded three bipolar factors with a combined cumulative variance of 99.9 %.

The primary results of the factor analysis are shown in [Tables 1](#) and [Tables 2](#).

[Table 1](#) presents the factor loadings of personal constructs and TEC task performance across the identified factors, while [Table 2](#) displays the values for the four groups along the factor axes.

**Table 1.** Factor loadings for personal constructs and TEC task performance on the factors identified

<i>Use of personal constructs and successful completion of TEC tasks</i>	F1+/- (42.3%)	F2+/- (32.7%)	F3+/- (24.9%)
Character Traits	.943	-.047	.331
Child's Reality	.405	.697	.591
Positive Conflict Resolution	.681	-.614	-.399
Child's Attitude Towards the Character	-.793	.605	-.067
Relationships Between Characters	-.145	-.969	-.200
Action	.384	-.077	-.920
Objective Personal Constructs	.015	.299	.954
Ethical Grounds	.773	.381	.507
Recognizing Emotions	.927	.374	.004
Understanding the External Causes of Emotions	.348	-.236	.907
Understanding Desires as Causes of Emotions (Task 1)	.541	-.820	.187
Understanding Desires as Causes of Emotions (Task 2)	.968	-.248	-.020
Understanding Beliefs as Causes of Emotions	.680	-.668	-.302
Understanding the Impact of Memories on Emotions	.523	.782	-.339
Emotion Regulation Strategies	-.925	-.366	-.100
Understanding Hidden Emotions	.158	.977	.142
Understanding Mixed Emotions	-.139	.821	-.554
Understanding Moral Emotions: Self-regulation	.993	.052	.108
Understanding Moral Emotions: Communicative Situation	-.546	.218	-.809

To interpret these factors meaningfully, we first consider Factor F1, the most influential bipolar factor, accounting for 42.3 % of the total cumulative variance. This considerable variance highlights Factor F1's critical role in understanding preschoolers' perceptions of the cartoon. Let's examine it in more detail.

**Table 2.** Values on the axes of the factors identified for the four groups of children differing in their identification with the cartoon characters

<i>Identification Group</i>	F1+/-	F2+/-	F3+/-
with the Girl	0.5	1.0	1.0
with the Teddy Bear	-1.0	0.6	-1.0
Decentered Position	1.2	-0.6	-0.8
Detached Position	-0.7	-1.1	0.7

On the positive pole of the first bipolar factor F1, three subjective personal constructs are grouped: "character traits" (e.g., "The Doll is mean," "The Clown is loud," "The Teddy Bear was sad"); "ethical grounds" ("the Teddy Bear was sad and thought that the Girl wouldn't play with him, and that was wrong," "The Doggie can bite if you hit him, but if you don't hit him, he won't bite," etc.); "positive conflict resolution" (e.g., "The Clown and the Doll will get married," "The Girl and the Teddy Bear should be together"). It's easy to see that the combination of these three subjective personal constructs is associated with the tendency to evaluate the character's uniqueness in relation to the main conflict of the film and the use of moral and ethical norms in resolving it ("You shouldn't abandon an old toy").

Notably, these personal constructs correlate with the successful completion of four types of TEC tasks: 1) "understanding desires as the causes of emotions," i.e., understanding that a person will be happy (or sad) depending on whether the situation meets their desires; 2) "recognizing emotions" (ability to distinguish manifestations of basic emotions — joy, sadness, fear, etc.); 3) "understanding beliefs as causes of emotions" (i.e., understanding that knowledge and ideas about something influence one's emotional state, for example, a bunny who doesn't know there's a wolf nearby doesn't feel fear); 4) "understanding moral emotions: self-regulation" (understanding that acting in accordance with rules brings a sense of satisfaction). Overall, this set of indicators for understanding emotions reflects a feature of the child's emotional intelligence, which consists in their ability to *relate different aspects of emotional well-being to moral and ethical norms of behavior*. It is in relation to conformity with norms that the emotional state of others is interpreted and evaluated from an external position. In general, this represents an evaluative stance.

Thus, the positive pole of the factor characterizes the child's inclination towards an ethical evaluation of the characters from an external position. The interpretation of their emotional states, intentions, and characteristics is conditioned by their correlation *with moral models and the main moral and ethical conflict of the film*. Children in this position rely not on personal sympathies but on recognized moral standards and behavioral expectations; it is an orientation towards following a moral example. It is important to emphasize that the groups identifying with the Girl and those assuming a decentered position scored high on the positive pole of Factor F1 (see Table 2).

The *negative* pole of this factor is defined by the subjective personal construct "child's attitude towards the character," where the dominant feature is the child's personal attitude towards the cartoon characters, for example, "I liked the Teddy Bear," "I want a Teddy Bear like in the movie," "I don't like such silly things" (about the Clown). This construct was associated with the successful completion of the TEC task "emotion regulation strategies," which suggests that one can cope with negative experiences by shifting attention from one thought to another (start thinking about something else). Success in this task essentially indicates the child's ability to make a volitional decision and follow it, regulating their emotional states. Meanwhile, when interpreting the content of this factor pole, two variants are possible, based on two fundamentally different attitudes towards the character: adjustment to their emotional situation (sympathy, empathy — a "warm" attitude) and a detached egocentric position (a "cold" attitude). In one case, the attitude towards the character is based on the child's understanding of the dynamics of the character's actions aimed at self-regulating its emotional states. In the other case (the detached egocentric position), the very switching from one emotional state of the character to another is fragmentary, leaving the viewer in an "external" position in relation to the general logic of the cartoon character's experiences. In this respect, it is quite indicative that the negative pole of this factor with high values was occupied by the groups of children identifying with the Teddy Bear or occupying a detached position (see Table 2).

Overall, Factor F1 represents a contrast between "*Adherence to moral standards and Self-focus*."

Factor F2 (32.7 %). The positive pole of this factor is defined by the subject's use of the subjective personal construct "*child's reality*," where the dominant aspect in comparing characters

according to J. Kelly's methodology relates the similarity of the film characters to one's own life experiences, such as "I have a doggie like that too" or "Because I want to buy my sister a clown." The findings indicate that this strategy of connecting the film's reality to one's own is linked to three aspects of emotional intelligence: "understanding how memories influence emotions," "recognizing hidden emotions," and "comprehending mixed emotions." In other words, relating the film's situation to one's own life experience is based on a complex set of intellectual abilities that enable the emotional aspect of perceiving the work. Thus, transferring the film's situation to one's own lived reality implies a special development of the child's *emotional memory*, where the child understands that past events can influence their current emotional state. However, this feature of memory alone is not enough to relate the cartoon's situation to one's own life. It requires a special ability to "read" hidden emotions in behavior, to *see real inner feelings* rather than those another person tries to show, i.e., to distinguish between the "outer" and "inner." Finally, transferring the film's events to one's own reality involves developing an aspect of emotional intelligence: the *ability to discern complex ambivalent reactions*, some related to real situations and others to probable, imagined, or mental ones.

Thus, the positive pole of factor F2, which determines how a child transfers the film's situation to their own lived reality, indicates that this transfer is based on a set of abilities related to emotional intelligence: emotional memory, distinguishing between real and hidden emotional expressions, and understanding the ambivalence of experiences. Overall, this factor can be labeled as "Self in the given circumstances." It captures the richness of emotional connections that the child can "catch" when watching a cartoon, their understanding of the characters' emotional dynamics and their sensitivity to the film's meanings, and also reflects how the child relates what's happening on screen to their personal experience. Such a viewer empathizes with the range of characters' emotional experiences, "putting themselves in the shoes" of the cartoon characters. Notably, the positive pole of this factor is occupied by groups of children who identify themselves with the Girl and with the Teddy Bear (see [Table 2](#)).

The *negative pole* of this factor is characterized by the use of the subjective personal construct "relationships between characters," which focuses on the child's orientation to the cartoon characters' relationships: "The Clown loved the Doll," "The Doll helped the Teddy Bear," "The Teddy Bear and the Doggie are friends," etc. This personal construct was associated with successfully completing the task "understanding desires as causes of emotions." The negative pole of F2 reflects a viewer's position where the characters' relationships with each other come to the forefront, with their understanding of the meaning of these relationships arising through modeling the characters' motivation from an "external position" ([Sobkin, 2014](#); [Sobkin, Markina, 2010](#)).

In other words, understanding the cartoon's main conflict relies on interpreting the desires of the characters that shape their relationships. The groups of children with detached and decentered positions were placed on the negative pole of this factor (see [Table 2](#)).

Thus, F2 can be considered a key factor in film perception as it directly relates to aesthetic response: "*The self in the given circumstances – Understanding motivation in relationships.*"

Let's consider the content of the *third bipolar factor F3* (24.9 %). Its positive pole is defined by a focus on using *objective* personal constructs. This indicates that when solving triadic tasks on Kelly's test, the child mainly uses parameters such as "animate/inanimate," "toy/non-toy," "boy/girl," etc. This approach to comparing characters' similarities and differences correlates with successfully completing the task "understanding external causes of emotions" in the TEC methodology, where the child needs to understand how emotions depend on *external causes*. This external focus implies that these children remain *uninvolved* in the narrative's *semantic space*, concentrating on cause-and-effect without emotionally investing in the events, while the experiential aspect of events remains outside the child's attention. It can be said that such a preschool viewer's perception remains *at the level of meanings rather than personal significance* while viewing. This pole of the F3 factor is occupied by children who identify themselves with the Girl and those who take a detached position (see [Table 2](#)).

The opposite situation is observed at the negative pole of factor F3, which combines an orientation towards the *subjective* personal construct "*action*" and successful completion of the TEC task "understanding moral emotions (in a communicative situation)." Note that the "action" construct reflects a situation where, when comparing characters with each other and with themselves, the child focuses on action in relation to others: "They *were* together," "The Doll *walks* the Doggie," etc. Notably, the use of this personal construct was linked to understanding an



emotional state arising from a communicative moral situation (for example, a child misbehaved but doesn't admit it to their mother). Successfully completing this task involves the child understanding that they are not only being *dishonest* by deceiving their mother but also feel *upset* about the deception. It's clear that the negative pole, unlike the positive one, is characterized by the viewer taking an active position based on the emotional evaluation of an ethical action, i.e., a *deed*. In this regard, we can specify that such a viewer is characterized not simply by empathizing with the film characters through *involvement* (Zaporozhets, 1986), but precisely through emotionally experiencing the meaning of the character's *action*.

Overall, this factor generally defines the characteristics of the child's engagement with the cartoon's content: "*Emotional detachment* (positive pole) – *Emotional involvement* (negative pole)." Note that the group of children who identify themselves with the Girl and the group of those who take a detached stance were placed on the positive pole with high values. On the negative pole, however, are groups of children who identify themselves with the Teddy Bear and those who take a decentered position (see Table 2).

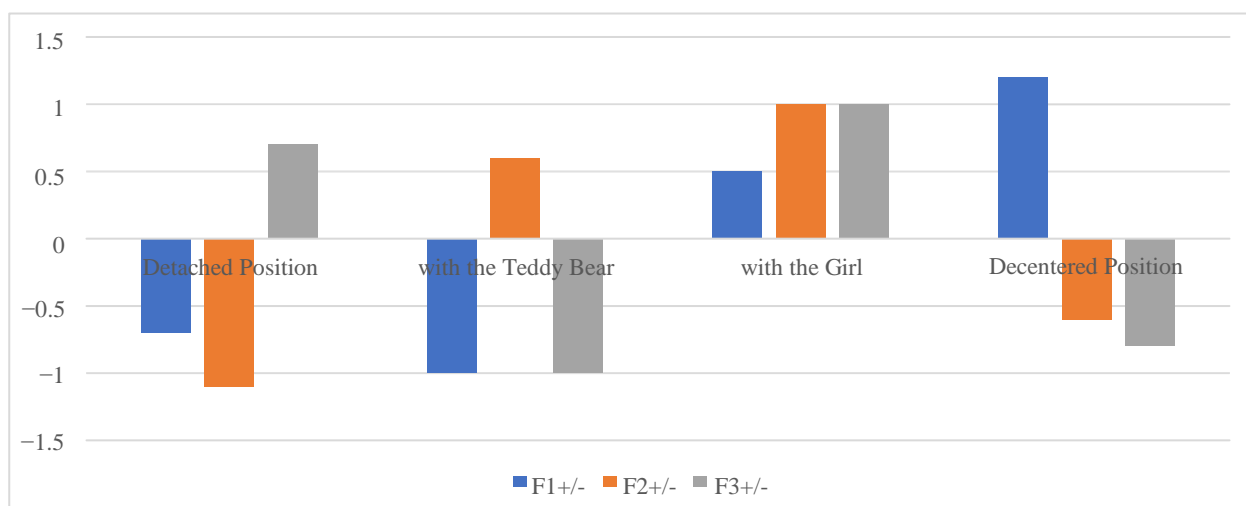
Thus, factor analysis allowed us to identify the following three factors that characterize the unique relationships between certain personal constructs when evaluating characters and the features of emotional intelligence among preschoolers who differ in their identification with the main characters of a cartoon:

F1 – "*Following a moral pattern* (+) – *Self-focus*" (–);

F2 – "*The self in the given circumstances* (+) – *Understanding motivation in relationships*" (–);

F3 – "*Emotional detachment* (+) – *Emotional involvement*" (–).

In characterizing the factors identified, we noted the positioning of different groups of children, categorized by their identification with the cartoon's main characters, along the factor axes. The following discussion examines how each of the three factors manifests in the four groups of children, aiming to reveal how varying identification profiles influence *viewer positions*. These positions derive from the relationship between character assessments (using objective and subjective personal constructs) and the distinct features of children's emotional intelligence. Based on the values along each factor axis for each group (Figure 1), we explore the implications of these differences in identification.



**Fig. 1.** Expression of values on the axes of selected factors F1, F2, and F3 for children from different groups identifying with the cartoon characters

F1 – "*Following a moral pattern* (+) – *Self-focus*" (–);

F2 – "*The self in the given circumstances* (+) – *Understanding motivation in relationships*" (–);

F3 – "*Emotional detachment* (+) – *Emotional involvement*" (–).

*Detached position.* Let's consider the profile of factor values for this group of children (see Figure 1). We'll start with the positive indicator for factor F3, which, as we see, largely corresponds to the main characteristic of this group and indicates children's "emotional detachment" from the cartoon characters. Typically, these children use objective personal constructs (people/animals, animate/inanimate, etc.), correlating with an emotional intelligence

feature that explains emotions through external causes. This relationship implies a viewing style focused on *objective event recording* and cause-effect relationships, while experiential elements remain peripheral. It should be added that children in this group show a negative score on Factor F1, indicating an ability to manage negative emotions by shifting their focus. Since this group of children is characterized by a lack of strong identification with any of the film's main characters, we can assume that this fragmented emotional perception causes their "disengagement" and prevents them from emotionally accepting and experiencing the position of any character in the film's main conflict. Finally, children with a detached position typically do not relate the film's situations to their own experiences, as indicated by the negative score on Factor F2, reflecting a preference for maintaining an external stance toward character motivations and relationships.

Overall, the analysis shows that the way that children with a detached position perceive the cartoon is based on their inability to follow a character's complete behavioral arc. Their perception is *fragmented*. This is related to a feature of their intelligence: the ability to emotionally switch from one state to another. In other words, while watching the film, they focus on individual episodes, emphasizing external causes of behavior and explicitly expressed desires when grasping the characters' emotional states. Note that many children's cartoons are designed for this type of perception, built on a series of short, simple episodes that don't require any deeper interpretation or strong empathy with the characters (for example, cartoons like *Well, Just You Wait!*, *Masha and the Bear*, *Tom and Jerry*, etc.).

*Identification with the Teddy Bear.* The unique nature of this group's relationship to the cartoon is defined by a positive value on the factor F2 axis, "The self in the given circumstances." This suggests that children who identify with the Teddy Bear perceive the film from an *internal perspective*. As we noted when describing this factor, the strong positive values here indicate that these children *apply* the film's events to their own reality. Note that such a transfer is related to the development of the child's emotional memory as a special characteristic of their intelligence. This ability leads to these children recalling emotional events from their personal experience during the film, which they "overlay" onto the cartoon's plot. At the same time, they are particularly sensitive to the *ambivalent* emotional experiences of the character they identify with (in this case, the Teddy Bear). It is important to emphasize their developed ability to "read" such hidden emotional feelings that the character doesn't explicitly express. Thus, a characteristic feature of these viewers is that they place themselves in the character's emotional situation and *perceive the film's events from the character's perspective*.

Another aspect of their perception of the film is the negative value for factor F1 ("Self-focus"), which manifests in *their own* personal attitude towards the cartoon characters. We must emphasize that this attitude is based on a special strategic ability of emotional intelligence, manifesting in the ability to "catch" the dynamics of negative feelings and cope with them by shifting attention to other thoughts. In this respect, speaking of the unique identification with the Teddy Bear, we can assume that these children are particularly sensitive to scenes where the Teddy Bear, after being hurt by the Girl, closes his eyes and imagines the forest, or when he puts on the clown "mask" and looks at his reflection in the fountain water. Let's emphasize that in defining their personal relationship to the character, they "reproduce in themselves" the dynamics of his emotional experiences. Thus, we can conclude that these viewers, in addition to relating the film's situations to their personal experience, are also very sensitive to the *emotional range of the character's experiences* (they live through the dynamics of his emotional states "themselves").

Finally, this category of children shows clearly negative values on the factor F3 axis "Emotional involvement," which is based on the special attention they give to the character's actions towards others and their moral evaluation. In other words, they assess the moral meaning of the character's behavior through their emotional engagement with him.

Thus, children who identify with the Teddy Bear represent a type of viewer perception based on the ability to transfer affective events from their life experience to situations in the creative work, the ability to recognize and reproduce the emotional range of the character's experiences as the plot develops, and to make moral judgments about his actions. Overall, these features of emotional intelligence characterize an *emotionally engaged, empathetic type of viewer*.

*Identification with the Girl.* Let's consider the profile of factor values for this group of children (see [Figure 1](#)). As with the previous group, we'll start the analysis with the positive pole of factor F2 ("The self in the given circumstances"). In this regard, we can conclude that children who identify with the Girl perceive the film (like those who identify with the Teddy Bear) by applying its

events to their own lived reality. In doing so, they rely on the ability to feel and understand the ambivalence of the emotional experiences of the film character with whom they identify (in this case, the Girl). Consequently, and this is perhaps the key point, such viewers clearly put themselves in the character's shoes and *see the film's events through her eyes*. However, it's important to note that this is where the similarities with viewers who identify with the Teddy Bear end.

As a result, significant differences in the F1 factor became apparent. Here we observe a pronounced tendency represented by the positive pole: "Adherence to a moral standard." This is evidenced by the fact that attitudes towards cartoon characters are built on the significance of three subjective personal constructs ("character traits," "ethical grounds," and "positive conflict resolution"). These constructs characterize viewers' approach to assessing a character's personality in relation to the main conflict of the film and the use of moral and ethical norms as a means of conflict resolution. It is worth noting that this approach to character perception is also linked to a wide range of emotional intelligence features ("understanding moral emotions: self-regulation," "understanding desires as causes of emotions," "understanding beliefs as causes of emotions," and "recognizing emotions"). These generally indicate the ability *to connect different aspects of emotional well-being with moral and ethical behavioral norms*. In other words, such a viewer, when perceiving characters, relies not on personal sympathies, but on an assessment of their behavior based on known *norms and rules*.

Finally, for factor F3, children who identify with the Girl show a clear tendency to use characteristics represented by the positive pole: "Emotional detachment." These children are characterized by a reliance on objective personal constructs and a feature of emotional intelligence that focuses on explaining emotional expressions through external causes. This correlation indicates that the child focuses on *objectively recording events* and searching for cause-and-effect relationships, while the emotional experience of the events remains outside the child's attention.

Thus, if we compare the profiles of children identifying with the Teddy Bear and the Girl in terms of their scores on the three factors (see [Figure 1](#)), we can observe quite fundamental differences in their viewing positions. The first important thing to note is the ability of representatives from both groups to transfer affective events from their life experiences to the context of the creative work. However, the nature of how the children identifying with the Girl reference life experience is fundamentally different, despite the outward similarity in the significance of this aspect when perceiving the film, when compared to the group identifying with the Teddy Bear. Indeed, for these viewers, relating their affective life experiences to the film's situations is associated with a desire to understand the character's situation from an "external," detached position. This approach relies on evaluating the character's behavior based on objective cause-and-effect relationships between their actions, external circumstances, and moral standards.

Thus, comparing the two groups of children's identification with the main characters (the Teddy Bear and the Girl) leads to an important conclusion about two different ways children *"process" their life experiences*. In the first group (children identifying with the Teddy Bear), life experience is "processed" through affective mechanisms of sympathetic understanding of the character while viewing the film. For the second group (identification with the Girl), abilities to process life experience involving logical explanations of the character's behavior based on moral and ethical models are activated.

We must emphasize that these differences, in our opinion, are based precisely on how the characters are presented in the film's structure — from "external" or "internal" *points of view*. In other words, identifying with characters portrayed differently in a creative work "triggers" different emotional intelligence mechanisms within the viewers for processing their life experiences. In one case, art as a *social technique for feeling* ([Vygotskij, 1986](#)) involves emotionally experiencing oneself (testing one's feelings) in a new (artistic) situation. In the other case, the main content of the "art technique" is understanding the moral and ethical grounds that determine the choice of behavioral strategies.

*Decentered Position* Based on the data presented in [Figure 1](#), this group of children is fundamentally different from the two discussed above. The main difference lies in a fundamentally different attitude towards the significance of one's own personal experience when watching the cartoon ("The self in the given circumstances"). Instead of relating the film's situations to their own reality (positive pole on factor F2), children in this group emphasize the relationships between the characters (negative pole on factor F2). We must emphasize again that this distinction seems fundamental, as the child doesn't simply perceive the situation "from the outside" (as when

identifying with the Girl), but considers the different positions of the two main characters (the Teddy Bear and the Girl), alternately shifting between them. This positional shift is based not only on actively using the personal construct of "relationships between characters," but also on activating the emotional intelligence ability to understand that emotional expressions are influenced by corresponding desires. In other words, at the core of the decentered stance is the intellectual ability to understand the motivation behind the characters' behavior as the reason for their emotional expressions.

But this doesn't fully capture the uniqueness of the decentered position, as it raises the question of what enables the shift from the Teddy Bear's position (emotional involvement, internal point of view) to the Girl's position (reliance on moral and ethical models, external point of view) and back again. Thus, detachment from the Teddy Bear's position is associated with a refusal to focus on oneself and one's personal attitude, and a desire to follow moral norms (factor F1 (+)). Moreover, moving away from this position is linked to activating emotional intelligence features such as: "understanding moral emotions (self-regulation)," "understanding desires as causes of emotions," "understanding beliefs as causes of emotions" and "recognizing emotions." In turn, we note that these intellectual features are characteristic of the group of children who identify with the Girl.

A different principle governs the shift from the Girl's position, which is related to emotional involvement (factor F3 (-)). Here, the viewer's focus on emotionally supporting the character and his or her understanding the moral meaning of the latter's actions plays a crucial role. Furthermore, this "exit" from the Girl's position leads to a partial acceptance of the Teddy Bear's position in a situation of decentered identification.

Thus, analyzing the characteristics of a child's adoption of a decentered position towards the main cartoon characters reveals two extremely important points. One is related to the refusal to rely on personal experience when watching the cartoon and shifting attention to the relationships between characters. The other concerns the ability to *disidentify with* the character, allowing the viewer to shift between the positions of different characters while watching the film, as this type of viewer partially retains features of identification with both the Girl (according to factor F1) and the Teddy Bear (according to factor F3). It should be emphasized that in this case, we are touching upon a fundamental psychological theme related to the development of preschoolers' intelligence – the theme of decentration (Vygotskij, 2004; Piaget, 2001).

At the same time, it's equally important to discuss the decentered position of cartoon viewers apart from comparing the groups of children who identify with the Teddy Bear or Girl. Considering the similarities and differences with children taking a detached stance is also important. As shown in Figure 1, there is one fundamental similarity between these two groups. That is, children in both groups lack the tendency to relate the film's situations to their personal experiences. Instead, they focus on the relationships between the cartoon characters. Thus, they perceive the cartoon's reality as a special "not their own" but someone else's – artistic – reality. However, the attitude toward this "other," fictional reality is fundamentally different.

While some (children in a detached position) are unengaged with the cartoon's reality and actively distance themselves from it, others (children with a decentered position) are, on the contrary, actively involved in the film's events. Another important difference is that, for children with a decentered position, the focus is on considering moral norms in character relationships (allowing them to grasp the meaningful conflict underlying the work). In contrast, children with a detached position rely on fragmented reactions related to their attitudes towards the characters in specific situations.

#### 4. Conclusion

Let's recall once again one of L.S. Vygotsky's key statements about art as a *social technique of feeling* and try to view our results from this perspective.

Even the title of the short cartoon we showed the children, *The Old Toy*, embeds a moral norm that the young viewer learns by experiencing a certain moral dilemma. To us adults, the film seems understandable, and its moral problem appears obvious. But is it really so? Surprisingly, the experiment's results show that children's reactions reveal aspects of the multiple meanings hidden within this "simple" ten-minute film. First and foremost, this multiplicity is connected to our ability to immerse ourselves in a fictional reality and experience it – perhaps with the same naivety as children do. And perhaps behind their naivety lies the depth essential for a creative experience of art.

Indeed, all four types of viewer perception of the cartoon show, on one hand, the fundamental features of intelligence that underlie the criteria for relating to the characters, and on the other hand, unique ways of identifying with them. Both the character's positions in their relationships with other characters and how they are presented on screen (from an external or internal point of view) are crucial for understanding the results obtained. In other words, we can assume that these features of viewer perception are characteristic of us adults as well. Who knows, perhaps adult subjects would reproduce the same four identification patterns. Could we be encountering a fundamental aspect of artistic perception here? It would be interesting to conduct such an experiment not only with younger students or teenagers but also with adults.

There is another aspect of the types identified that is worth discussing, that is, how and why they emerge. Perhaps, following Piaget's concept of how moral consciousness develops in preschool age, the initial type of artistic conflict perception is characteristic of the group of children who identify with the Girl (Piaget, 2006). This is the pre-conventional level, where the child perceives the conflict of character relationships through the lens of simple moral norms given by adults ("If a nasty bully beats a weak boy, I wouldn't even want to put such a boy in a book" (Mayakovskij, 2023). Then the child discovers the complex emotional world of others, relating the character's experiences to their personal feelings, and *sympathizing* with them (identification with the Teddy Bear). Having mastered these ways of perceiving a creative work, they become capable of holding different perspectives in character relationships (the decentered position). In essence, this is the transition from *inter to intra*, when the "miracle" occurs that Kant never tired of wondering about: the moral law "within me" (Kant, 1999).

As for the detached position, it characterizes the mechanism of refusing to get emotionally involved in the film's plot. On one hand, this might be the mechanism underlying the ability to resist emotional pressure. This is an important point that can be conventionally labeled as a defensive reaction to the emotional impact of a creative work. On the other hand, such a reaction may indicate an underdeveloped artistic sense. And that is a wake-up call for both parents and educators. How can we enable a child to relate their life experience to what they see on screen, and not only view the situation from different perspectives but actually *experience* the "rightness" of each character in search of their own position? After all, this search, based on the affective experience of contradictions in the characters' actions and relationships, determines the special cathartic experience that underlies the artistic perception of a creative work and sets the direction for developing art education.

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