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The Role of Media in the Formation of Professional Identity of Young People (Case Study of Students Majoring in "State and Municipal Administration")

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Abstract

Modern media are a powerful tool for influencing attitudes, behavioral patterns, values of young people, including their professional orientations and professional identity. The media image of a profession performs rational-cognitive (gaining knowledge, ideas about professional activity) and emotional-evaluative functions (formation of an emotional framework of motivational attitudes). The author set the goal to determine the influence of media on the formation of professional identity of young people. As an example, a case of students of the training program "State and Municipal Administration" was taken. In the course of the work, qualitative research methods were used, the results of a focus group interview of students were analyzed. The results of the study showed that students experience a lack of comprehensive, complete and reliable information about the activities of municipal employees. Information in order to attract attention is often presented in a negative interpretation, the everyday nature of the work of municipal employees is excluded from the field of view of modern media. The negative media image of the profession has a destructive effect on the processes of formation of professional identity of students. The article presents the areas of media literacy education for students studying in the field of "State and municipal administration": the formation of an internal locus of control in the processes of searching and selecting information, understanding the selective specificity of the action of digital algorithms, subjective limitations in the practice of data analysis, development of ethical standards for working with information, anticipation of the consequences of the dissemination of information and its impact on various socio-demographic groups. Personal narrative stories of representatives of a professional group are of particular interest to students. The personalized nature of the information, according to students, allows for a correlation between personal attitudes and real requirements for professional activity, and an assessment of the prospects for implementing successful professional trajectories.

Keywords: media space, media literacy education, media image of the profession, professional identity, municipal service, information.

1. Introduction

The high dynamics of changes in the media sphere in recent years has focused the increasing attention of researchers to such topics as media competence, media manipulations, theoretical models of effective media educational activities. The characteristics of the modern media space include the intensification of the processes of production, exchange and consumption of information, the expansion of the circle of social subjects involved in communications. Despite fairly well-developed skills in navigating the Internet, modern youth have an insufficient level of media competence. First of all, scientists pay attention to the decline in cognitive functions in conditions of information overload,

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the lack of critical thinking in assessing information (Feijoo et al., 2023; Gálík et al., 2024; Gálíková Tolnaiová, Gálík, 2020; Shutenko et al., 2022). These deficiencies form the vulnerability of the younger generation in the process of interaction with the media. In this context, the relevance of media literacy education increases, which develops skills for analyzing and evaluating information and becomes a barrier to preventing the destructive influence of the media.

Modern media not only provide for the formation of the information agenda, the space of communication interactions, but also influence the needs, interests and value attitudes of individuals. Official media (television, radio, magazines, newspapers), which have traditional channels of interaction with the audience, act to a greater extent as a tool for broadcasting information, news content. In comparison with them, new media (blogs, social networks, Internet platforms) have a higher potential for influencing public opinion, as they ensure the active involvement of users in the media process (Goncharenko, 2020). Such properties of new media as openness, dynamism, immersion are their competitive advantage in the processes of influencing the opinions, values and attitudes of individuals.

At the same time, the risks of the development of the modern media space can be identified: the erosion of reality, the chaos of images and their interpretation, the manipulation of public consciousness, the destructive impact on the individual, the erosion of social identity (Gonotskaya, 2018). These risks can have the most negative consequences for young people and the processes of their socialization (Rogach et al., 2024). The unstable social and professional identity of young people can be subject to additional destructive impact from the media. "Fake" news, an aggressive agenda present in modern media to attract attention, can distort the meanings and values of professional culture, deform the perception of the activities of representatives of certain professional groups.

As rightly noted in scientific research, it is necessary to update pedagogical concepts for the development of media literacy education. New risks are associated with a selective approach to obtaining information, the action of algorithms that limit users in information navigation. Algorithms in social networks push to obtain information that coincides with a personal point of view, which reduces criticality in assessing the reliability of data (Nekmat et al., 2019). In this context, only media literacy education can be considered as an effective tool for forming an internal locus of control in assessing information, reducing the risks of manipulating public opinion.

2. Materials and methods

The purpose is to analyze the influence of media on the development of professional identity of students studying in the field of training "State and municipal administration".

Research objectives:

1. Analysis of subjective assessments of students in terms of their perception of media information characterizing various aspects of their future professional activity, study of the influence of media on the choice of a professional path.
2. Analysis of symbolic interpretations of municipal service as reflected in the media (according to student youth), determination of the media image of the profession of a municipal employee in the minds of young people.
3. Study of the role of media in the formation of professional identity of students, their readiness to work in local government bodies, the influence of media on the formation of the prestige of municipal service.
4. Analysis of the role of media literacy education in the preparation of students studying in the field of "State and municipal administration".

Considering the specific nature of collecting student assessments and the need for a qualitative description, a focus group discussion was chosen as the basic method. The use of qualitative research methods within the framework of this topic is due to the need to obtain detailed information, interpret the content and meanings of media consumption, and conduct a detailed assessment of the impact of media on the professional identity of the student. During the study, 1 focus group was held, participants – 7 third-year bachelor's students studying in the specialty "public and municipal administration". The reduction in the number of participants is due to the need to detail the information provided, and to remove time deficits when discussing issues.

3. Discussion

The profession of a municipal employee in modern conditions can be considered in two aspects that complement each other: as a social lift for young people who have entered the political

field and as public service, helping the local population in solving primary issues of life. Such socially significant professions as a doctor, teacher, municipal employee are at the forefront of working with people, their needs, requirements and problems (Amadsun, 2020). In this context, the analysis of the factors of the prestige of these professions, the dynamics of their demand in the eyes of young people is a relevant area of scientific research (Kraft, Lyon, 2024). The factors that form the prestige and demand for municipal service can include both internal motivational needs of the individual and external ones associated with the influence of family, school, social environment and various media. As rightly noted in Russian studies, media education tools are the most effective tool for shaping the worldview of young people and their professional orientations. The sustainable consolidation of value attitudes towards creative work and public service can be ensured through verbal forms, meanings and visual means presented in educational publications, mass media and the blogosphere.

The idea of civic media literacy, focusing the criteria for assessing information in the plane of public good (Mihailidis, 2018), is of great importance in new approaches to media literacy education. It seems important to develop not only the skills of content evaluation, but also its creation, transmission of information, reflection on the consequences of its dissemination, and subjective presence in the media environment (Festle, 2020).

In scientific discourse, attention is focused on the study of the media image of the profession. According to scientists, the media image of the profession is "metaphorical, symbolic and associative" (Frolova, 2018). The media image reflects typical features, behavioral models, and work values of representatives of a particular socio-professional group. Publicistic texts are based on factual material, its generalization and interpretation. In this context, it is appropriate to talk about the rational-cognitive function of the media image. It arms with knowledge about the basics of professional activity, focuses on the resources and limitations of the development of professional tracks in this area. At the same time, the media image concentrates the individual features of a specific representative of the profession, the hero of a publicistic text or a work of fiction. Both in a publicistic text and in a work of fiction, when describing the actions of a specific hero, there are subjective assessments of the author of the media content, narrative practices and reflection of individual professional experience. In this context, it is appropriate to talk about the emotional function of the media image of the profession. Maximization of the emotional component is characteristic of works of art, where the author's imagination and creative interpretations are used to a greater extent. Film production, which is a cultural artifact, a driver of the formation of value orientations of young people, plays a special role in the morphogenesis of emotions and impressions.

The key risks of media image formation are the focus of modern media on the values of consumer society. According to scientists, the information agenda was often characterized by the meanings of individualistic hedonism, epicureanism, mass consumption of goods and services (Davydova, 2021). The transfer of short-lived consumer values to media images of a profession impoverishes the semantic content of labor functions and devalues the significance of painstaking daily work. These destructions pose particular risks for socially significant professions, where public service and dedication are dominant in professional activity.

The media image of the profession is also formed in the blogosphere, in the practices of narrative stories of representatives of certain professional groups. Cognitive-evaluative and emotional discourses perform a generative function in understanding the professional existence of an individual (Larson, Pearson, 2012). Foreign scientists also noted that an important role is played by "a conversation about disappointment in the profession." An emotional narrative does not narrow the boundaries of the formation of professional identity, but on the contrary, ensures the construction of a foundation for resolving subjective conflicts in the professional sphere (Mitra et al., 2024). Reflection on professional experience (including negative) crystallizes the media image of the profession, allows one to correlate individual professional expectations of the individual and the requirements of corporate professional ethics (Humphreys, Brown, 2002).

4. Results

The results of the study showed that in the process of choosing a profession, students did not use the means of analyzing the specifics of professional activity, its resources and limitations.

Olga: "When entering, I did not read much about the profession, I was more guided by the opinions of friends, parents. Well, and then it seemed interesting – to work in government bodies,

to implement projects ... Now you understand that the work of a state and municipal employee is difficult ... ".

Olesya: "Yes, I read something in public, local public about how it is to work in the City Administration ..."

It can be noted that the information that is in the media space did not have a significant impact on the choice of the professional path of the informants. The above circumstances serve as an indirect illustration of the problems of developing students' media competence, dysfunctions of media education in the area of developing young people's skills of purposeful activity in the practice of searching for professional information. On the other hand, students noted that the activities of municipal employees are insufficiently represented in modern media sources.

Nikita: "It's rare to read interesting material about municipal employees... At best, it will be some official report on the work done... There is no live information there..."

Oleg: "In blogs, for example, you often come across things like "I worked as a waiter" or "how my friend and I opened a cafe" or something else... But there are few places to read interesting experiences, where the everyday life of a municipal official is actually described..."

The results of the focus group are confirmed by quantitative research data. Thus, A.A. Bukhner notes that during the survey, student youth talk about the insufficient level of information coverage of the work of municipal employees in the media and the Internet. It is concluded that the media often incorrectly reflect the specifics of the activities of municipalities, there is inaccurate information (Bukhner, 2020). These dysfunctions not only create an information vacuum around the profession of a municipal employee, but also distort its value meanings. At the same time, the students noted that during their studies they began to pay more attention to the news agenda. Reports on the activities of municipal employees attracted their attention and became the subject of discussion in personal discussions.

Anna: "Now I read more information, I find it interesting, I can discuss it later with my mother, she is also a civil servant..."

Maria: "I read on Telegram, there is information there, official media – no, I practically don't read..."

It can be assumed that media literacy education should become an organic part of the professional training of state and municipal employees. The role of media literacy education is to create conditions that encourage young people to actively search for information, its critical perception, interpretation and evaluation.

During the focus group, students noted the need for more complete information about the chosen professional field, its limitations and deficiencies. Of particular interest to young people is reflection on the real work experience of representatives of this professional group.

Anna: "Recently, interesting blogs of deputies and managers have appeared, they write about how they solve various problems..."

Olesya: "When I entered, I had no clear idea about the profession..."

Students were asked whether the media helps them to form ideas not only about the advantages but also about the difficulties of professional activity. Opinions were expressed that the information is mostly of a reporting nature and does not allow for a holistic perception of the activities of municipal employees. It is difficult for students to form their ideas about the profession, their professional identity, relying on the media. An interesting opinion was expressed about the lack of objective information, the focus of media content on the emotional aspects of professional activity. The need to attract public attention orients journalists to publish materials that are action-packed. In this context, the role of media literacy education is seen in developing skills that allow differentiating between objective information and counterfeiting, and assessing the reliability of data.

During focus groups, students pointed out the lack of information:

Maria: "Unfortunately, it is the teachers who tell us more about the difficulties, about the cost of a mistake in work... Many of them themselves had experience working in the state or municipal service... They tell us about it... But there is little such information in the media. Well, or it is there, but it is more of an official language that it is difficult to understand right away..."

Oleg: "We had an event at the university, graduates who have been working in the municipal service for a long time came... Yes, there was a lot of necessary information, personal information about the difficulties, about how to build work... But in public groups or the media there is especially no such thing..."

The obtained results may indirectly indicate the lack of media competence of young people, the lack of skills for targeted information search. In addition, it can be assumed that digital algorithms form individualized media worlds, "information bubbles" in which the user consumes familiar content that coincides with his behavioral choices and beliefs (Fletcher et al., 2021). Given these risks, pedagogical practices of media literacy education should create conditions for understanding the boundaries and risks of media consumption in modern conditions. These skills are of particular importance for specialists in the field of public and municipal administration. The social significance of the profession associated with making strategic management decisions places special demands on critical thinking and unbiased assessment of data. The scientific literature substantiates the importance of the following approaches in the updated concept of media literacy education (Cho et al., 2022):

- the presence of a relationship between the individual needs (interests) of the student and the disadvantages of searching for information content, choosing tools for selecting sources, and analyzing them.

- understanding by students of the algorithms of artificial intelligence in the process of selecting information, the functioning of social networks, awareness of the fact that the consolidation of familiar models of searching for information content narrows the horizons of objective perception of reality.

- awareness of the polysubjectivity of social networks, the commercial logic of the subjects of creating media content, understanding their explicit and latent motivation in the process of creating and broadcasting media content.

The media perform a dual function in increasing the attractiveness of municipal service. On the one hand, a positive image of a professional is formed, which ensures the demand for this area of training among young people. On the other hand, it is important to discuss in the media the problems and challenges that modern municipal employees face. This content contributes to the formation of a realistic picture of the world, a relevant perception of the difficulties of public service at work in the municipality. This function of the media ensures the formation of filters that limit the influx into the profession of those young people who are not ready to perform complex, systemic tasks for the development of territories and life support of the population. In particular, public discourse in the media draws attention (Dunn, 2018). Drawing public attention in the media, on the one hand, forms the basis for taking corrective actions, on the other hand, it equips students with a realistic view of the difficulties of professional activity.

During the study, students interpreted municipal service in such evaluative judgments as *"complicated"*, *"allows you to help people"*, *"important"*, *"responsible"*. However, negative associations were also expressed: *"bureaucracy"*, *"routine"*.

During the focus group discussion, issues of analyzing the news agenda in the media space were raised. Among the students, anxiety prevails in the perception of news content, which dominates today in the official media and informal online communities. In particular, students provide multiple examples of negative interpretation of municipal practices, corruption offenses and discontent of residents. According to some students, this contest forms a negative perception of the professional activities of a municipal employee in their immediate circle.

Anna: "... they whip up negativity... my friends, when they find out that I will work in government, immediately remember bribes, corruption... unpleasant..."

A.S. Nikitina and V.S. Kyazimova also came to the conclusion that attention is concentrated on negative facts and negative examples of the activities of employees of local government bodies. At the same time, positive experience and success in solving problems of local importance remain on the periphery of the media agenda (Nikitina, Kyazimova, 2018). It can be concluded that dysfunctions in the presentation of materials in the media negatively affect the professional orientations of young people and reduce the prestige of municipal service.

Similar conclusions are present in the works of foreign scientists. In their opinion, the negative image of the profession in the media limits the opportunities for strengthening a positive professional identity (Soral et al., 2022) and the effective performance of work functions. Based on the results of a study of the media image of the profession of a social worker in Sweden, it was concluded that the reflection of key aspects of the profession in public narratives socially and morally stigmatizes social work specialists (Nilsson et al., 2025).

The negative media image of socially significant professions, such as a doctor, teacher, social worker, municipal employee, destroys solidarity ties in society, raises doubts about the social reliability of these professional groups (Blomberg, 2019). Overcoming these destructions is

associated with the active development of media literacy education of young people. Filling the media space with "shock content" requires the development of skills for constructive assessment of the motives and interests of the authors broadcasting this information. In modern conditions, media literacy education should form a stable immunity of young people to "fake news" that have become an attribute of everyday life. Immunity to disinformation is especially important for future state and municipal employees. Distortions in the assessment of information when they make decisions can have extremely negative consequences for the economy and the social sphere.

The study found that the prestige of municipal service is not high enough in comparison with civil service. However, informants believe that modern media have not played a significant role in shaping the prestige of the profession. In their opinion, the key factor in shaping the prestige of a particular profession is objective conditions, primarily remuneration.

Alexander: "Payment – I think this is the main factor. Even if the media doesn't write anything, but the youth knows that there is an opportunity for good pay, then yes... everyone will go there..."

Nikita: "Yes, the media plays a role, but not the most important one... Prestige is formed differently... It's a complicated story."

An opposite point of view was also expressed, according to which the media has a powerful authority in shaping the attractiveness of a profession, its prestige.

Olesya: "It seems to me that the media and online reports are all important. We discuss this, and this is how the prestige of the profession is formed. Or, on the contrary, when you read some negative reviews, you think, well, no, I don't need to go there... Everything is rotten there... But I think if you are really interested in this, you will find objective information..."

Anna: "It is important to be interested in the profession, to search for more information... I recently read about the "Service to society" award for municipal officials. The teacher first told us about it in class. And about the competition for the best municipal practice. All this is on the Internet... And there really is good experience there..."

It can be concluded that the teacher plays a significant role in developing the skills of searching for and systematizing professional information. In the conditions of chaotic information flows, the struggle for the attention of the reading audience, young people find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position in front of unverified and unreliable information. The role of the teacher is to develop the skills of assessing the reliability of information, and, what is especially important, the skills of searching for information on professional information resources.

The results of the study showed that municipal service is perceived as a social lift, allowing one to master professional competencies and develop one's career. Students noted that the reflection of this aspect in personal stories or interviews had a positive impact on their perception of their professional role and career prospects. However, a low level of trust distorts the perception of information about the activities of government bodies and devalues even highly professional journalistic content (Rogach, Frolova, 2023).

5. Conclusion

The theoretical analysis illustrates the importance of media in developing students' professional identity and shaping the prestige of the profession. The media image of the profession performs rational-cognitive and emotional-evaluative functions. Rational-cognitive functions consist in forming a realistic picture of the perception of the profession and various aspects of professional activity. Based on media materials, a student can form an objective idea of the difficulties, risks of the profession, and limitations in implementing their career trajectories. This information helps prevent such negative phenomena as disappointment in professional activity and professional burnout. The emotional-evaluative potential of the media image of the profession appeals to feelings, emotions, and inner experiences. Analysis of personal stories and achievements of representatives of a professional group, reflection of their subjective experience becomes the foundation of motivation to master professional knowledge and skills. Emotional-evaluative functions of the media image of the profession form a stable professional identity of a future specialist.

The media image of the profession in students' assessments is quite contradictory. There is an understanding of the importance of municipal service, on the other hand, a negative symbolic interpretation of such aspects as bureaucracy, routine nature of activities, and corruption risks has been formed. The study found that information in modern media is often contradictory and aimed at attracting the attention of the audience. These trends exclude everyday practices of municipal

employees from the focus of media attention. Particular risks are associated with distortion of information, the prevalence of negative connotations in the presentation of material.

These risks highlight the role of media literacy education in training students majoring in "State and municipal administration". In particular, special attention should be paid to the following aspects:

- formation of an internal locus of control in the processes of searching and selection of information, understanding the specifics of the action of artificial intelligence algorithms, which reinforces the usual logic of providing standard, familiar user content;
- development of critical thinking skills, analysis of the needs of subjects of media content creation, assessment of their motives, commercial interests;
- development of critical thinking skills, analysis of the needs and motives of authors broadcasting aggressive media content;
- formation of skills in assessing the reliability of information, the ability to distinguish reliable data from falsified;
- formation of skills in analyzing the consequences of dissemination of media information, anticipation of possible negative effects;
- establishment of standards for information search and fact checking;
- consolidation of ethical norms of behavior in the media environment.

Students are more interested in reflecting on personal narrative stories of municipal employees. Personification of information allows satisfying not only the cognitive needs of students, but also forms an emotional framework of motivational attitudes to creative work. Personal narratives illustrating the limitations and advantages of municipal service act as a factor in the formation of a stable professional identity.

Further areas of research may be the following: analysis of factors in the formation of a media image of a profession, study of the role of media education in the formation of stable professional orientations and professional identity of students.

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