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**IDENTITY AND SELF-ESTEEM OF STUDENT YOUTH IN THE  
DIGITAL AGE**

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**Abstract**

In the information society, personality identity is subject to significant transformation, especially among young people. Due to the increasing sensitivity to the social comparison characteristic of young people, there is an imbalance in entry into certain social groups, which affects primary and secondary socialization. The article explores social identity – self-identity of the individual derived from belonging to social groups – and the dependence on it of self-esteem. It is proved that the individual, forming self-esteem, assesses the success of his actions and manifestations through the lens of his identity, i.e., what phenomena, social groups he relates to. The problem is that today the network identity of the student prevails over the real, in particular, the identity of the educational team, the university group. As a result, real self-installations show a significant gap from ideal self-installations. The purpose of the research is to study students' self-esteem by identifying the main social groups to which they relate themselves. It is obvious that the educational system should encourage the conversion of energy into healthy forms, since a healthy proportion of stress is necessary for human well-being. The educational process today is intended to be a kind of adventure, it should improve the ability that allows an individual to find unique meanings, to form values of creation, values of experience, values of attitude. This will teach the individual to make independent, authentic decisions. Like real life, the educational environment has to continuously create a series of unique situations, preventing sensory isolation.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Self-evaluation in the "self-concept" structure

In the age of inter-network intelligence – a satellite of the digital economy – many researchers have begun to note changes in the content and structure of personality identity. Of particular concern is the mental health of young people, and students in particular, who are active in the virtual space. Many studies have examined the concept of "identity". Erikson (2006), who introduced it into the scientific circulation, defined identity as "internal continuity in the time and space of personality belonging to a certain community" (p. 6).

The concept of identity is related to the synonymous concepts of "self-awareness" and "self-concept" that preceded it (Cote, 2018).

The first of psychologists who began to develop the "self-concept" was James (1890). He considered the global personality "self" to be a dual entity in which "self-conscious" and "I as an object" connect. The knowable in self and the knowing subject are different aspects of personality (James, 1890). According to the theory of Cooley (1902), the idea of a person about himself is formed strictly under the influence of surrounding people opinions (Cooley, 1902), and according to Mead (1934), it is due to real relations with them, their joint activities. Individual self, Mead (1934) emphasizes, is a kind of social structure generated by experience of human interaction with other people. Through the mastering of culture as a complex set of symbols with values common to members of society, a person also gets an idea of himself as a person, i.e. "self-concept." It is a reflection of his social roles and assessments of him as an individual by other people.

In the 1950s "self-concept" was considered in the writings of humanist psychologists Maslow (1954) and Rogers (1959) as personality setting with respect to herself. It is a stable system of perceptions of the individual about his qualities, abilities, appearance, social significance, which is a consequence of social interaction. The system also includes awareness of one's instincts, needs, interests, aspirations and experiences, thoughts and feelings; self-feeling as a unique entity. The main provisions of Rogers (1959), regarding the "self-concept" theory can be formulated as follows: "self-concept" is a system of self-perception of man, which acts as an important determinant of his reactions to the social environment, so through its prism man attributes certain meanings to what happens to him and around him. A person needs a positive "self-concept" to develop normally as an individual.

Burns (1982) introduces, along with the descriptive component of the "self-concept" – the totality of all the individual's self-representations – also a component related to a person's attitude towards himself or his peculiar qualities – self-esteem. Thus, «self-concept» has three components: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. The cognitive component of the "self-concept" is the totality of a person's knowledge of himself; the emotional component is the affective relationship of a person to himself; behavioral component – real or potential actions performed by a person in relation to himself.

Self-esteem is a crucial component of «self-concept» (Burns, 1982; Rosenberg, 1965; Wylie, 1974). It is defined as a person's judgment of one's own worth as a result of comparative cognition of oneself and represents an emotional-evaluation component of the "self-concept". Self-esteem reflects the attitude towards oneself as a whole or towards certain aspects of one's personality and activity, it can be adequate

and inadequate. The adequacy of self-esteem expresses the degree to which a person's perceptions of himself correspond to the objective grounds of these perceptions. Behind it is a positive attitude towards himself, self-respect, acceptance of himself, a sense of self-sufficiency. Adequate self-esteem is manifested in the ability to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses, one's abilities in relation to various life situations realistically. A person sets goals that are achievable and consistent with his own abilities, takes responsibility for his failures and successes, such person is self-confident, capable of self-realization in life.

In addition to adequate self-esteem, they stand out as overstated – with goals that do not correspond to real possibilities and underestimated – with underestimated goals with existing substantial real opportunities.

People with excessive self-esteem overestimate their merits and practically exclude shortcomings. A person with excessive self-esteem is also characterized by inability to accept responsibility for his failures, arrogance towards people, conflict, constant dissatisfaction with his achievements, egocentrism. Inadequate self-esteem of capabilities and excessive claims lead to excessive self-confidence.

People with understated self-esteem usually hypertrophy the significance of failures. Low self-esteem implies self-rejection, self-denial, negative attitude towards their personality, which are due to underestimation of their successes and merits. With low self-esteem, uncertainty, often objectively unfounded, is a stable quality of personality and leads to the formation of such features as inertia, passivity, hesitation which ultimately create an inferiority complex in a person.

## **1.2. Self-esteem building through the lens of identity**

Self-esteem, which directly affects the regulation of personality behavior, consists of three settings: (a) real self-attitudes – an idea of one's physical data, actual abilities, status (what a person really is); b) social self – attitudes – perceptions of the individual about what other people see in him; c) perfect self – attitudes – ideas about what he would like to become. Comparing the image of the real self with the image of the ideal self plays a cardinal role in the self-esteem formation. There is an interiorization of the reactions of surrounding others to this person, which is most often surrounded by people of certain social groups with whom he identifies himself. It is obvious that the discrepancy between the real and ideal “self”, recognized by the individual, causes serious intrapersonal conflicts (Tkhostov & Emelin, 2010).

In modern youth, there is a shift of identity from ethnic, civil, social, towards a network identity. It is necessary to state the fact of psychological dependence on the mobile phone, which has become a kind of "technological prosthesis" that has significantly expanded the boundaries of reality. Students state a sense of anxiety and a sense of psychological discomfort in the case of forced absence of the smartphone, as if a vital organ was amputated (Emelin, et al., 2014). They give these means of communication the functions of information retrieval, oral and written counting, memorization, navigation, which contributes to the loss of their own cognitive abilities. Communication has moved to the virtual world, which negatively affects the quality of live communication (Zhuravleva et al., 2018). It is characteristic that among the smartphone services, the most popular among students is the social network.

Strong psychophysical dependence on gadgets and, in particular, on social networks leads to the formation of virtual values. Researcher R. Inglehart highlights, for example, such values as freedom of choice, individual independence, self-realization (Inglehart, 2018). In the ethics of hackers, there are values

of freedom of access to information, denial of trust in authority, anti-hierarchical decentralization, and the ability to create their own worlds (Himanen, 2019). Among cyberpunks, individualism, isolation from power and real social life, imitateness are distinguished (Emelin, 2018). Baeva (2014) believes that hedonism is the main value, since according to research, the main activities in the Internet are mainly games and entertainment networks that involve living alternative lives, a kind of surrogates for offline pleasures. In addition to meeting the need for which they were created, technological prostheses begin to satisfy other needs or even generate them (Tkhostov & Surnov, 2006). Baudrillard (2006) traced the metamorphosis of disembodied anonymity and militant narcissism. There is a disclosure of privacy, that is, exhibitionism and profit from the construction of their own image. According to Reinhold's (2006) conclusions, there is a convergence of the real and virtual, which is in clear contradiction with the traditional christian moral and religious worldview in Russia.

In the future, the phenomenon of intensive interpenetration of the virtual and real worlds may lead to the impossibility of differentiating between the real and virtual information substances in the consciousness of a young person, which will result in a weakening of orientation in time and space, levelling of critical thinking and complete trust in the virtual adviser. There are prerequisites for the formation of a new type of personality with a behavioral model that allows to manipulate consciousness. It is this mixture of accessibility from outside and inside that makes the core of an individual's self-identity blurry (Rasskazova et al., 2015).

Mikhail Epstein believes that the loss of identity, especially national and gender identity, corresponds to the trends of postmodernism with its growing absurdity and the spreading of the fabric of reality in unexpected places. The form is more important than the content, the sign is more important than the meaning. The "self" turned from a single and consistent one into a contradictory and ambiguous one, eclectic and fragmentary (Epstein, 2019).

The text of communication does not look whole and coherent, but splits into conscious and unconscious borrowings, cliches and quotes. The text is thought "intertextually". The identity of a person becomes multidimensional and scattered, the abundance of information produced and practically not assimilated by the individual threatens to break between man and humanity.

Martsinkovskaya (2019) speaks about the need for a continuous socialization process as a means of compensating for the accelerated variability of social space, the so-called transitivity. Changes in the content and structure of the identity of a young individual, due to the era of inter-network intelligence, are manifested in the inability to navigate unexpected social situations that arise in the offline world. The transformation of identity manifests itself in the need for self-promotion, in the phenomenon of narrative identity-an increase in the percentage of stories about oneself, rather than presenting oneself in action. Network communities just allow an individual to try out different roles and masks. Redesigning the surrounding space in real life so that it corresponds to the inner world of human desires requires a lot of effort, while in virtual space – it is quite easy. For a young individual, this virtual construction of his image, correlated with the image of the world, is a kind of self-confirmation, evidence of existence (Martsinkovskaya, 2019).

Belinskaya (2015) speaks about the possibility of constructing the desired "self – image" as the reason for young people's commitment to social networks, noting that the Internet provides an opportunity

for a kind of game with identity – it is a whole springboard for modeling various aspects of their "self". The researcher sees the specifics of network identity in the ability to direct the story of oneself, i.e. in self-directing. The most difficult thing in it is the process of correlation of real and virtual identities in a single structure of "self". In practice, it turns out that the virtual identity dominates, since the virtual space is a source of artificial self-reinforcement. Virtual self – creating is a variant of self-presentation, not a manifestation of the real self. Real and virtual identities do not coincide.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Almost every student today has pages in all social networks, primarily VKontakte and Instagram, which display their official network identities. The ability to analyze students' pages and other digital traces of their identities allows us to conclude that their self-presentations on the Internet and offline, real life, in the course of the educational process, are sharply inconsistent. We can talk about the fundamental dissonance of these identities in the majority of students.

A sense of freedom, not restrained by the conventions of the offline world, allows to build subjective ideas about reality and one's place in it, sometimes contradicting reality. Living many lives, performing roles that are not typical in reality, allow to experience feelings of belonging, community i.e. unity with other users of the same network, and at the same time, "distinguish yourself" – the imperative of consequences of using algorithms for the cognitive and emotional development of the individual. All this affect the coping strategy. Just as gadgets are means of expanding physical reality (Karacay & Alpan, 2019; Korobeinikova & Gil, 2018; Tkhostov & Emelin, 2010), network resources contribute to the formation of an expanded self-image: it is important how people perceive the individual in the network, where it is possible to compare oneself with other people on a huge number of physical, mental and social parameters that are products of self-direction.

Sensitivity to social comparison increases, which affects the primary and secondary socialization of the individual. Successful socialization of students is characterized by entering certain social groups, i.e. multiple social identities. Social identity is the self-identification of a person, derived from belonging to social groups, that is, from an individual's perception of what defines "we" (Kislyakov et al., 2018). Group membership creates a group identity that allows to achieve positive self-esteem by differentiating «own» group from the comparison group by some valuable criterion. This desire for a positive identity means that people's understanding of who they are is often defined in terms of "we" rather than "I" (Hogg & Vogan, 2017).

The prevailing life context (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), in which students are aware of themselves, provides the basis for identifying and comparing groups, and it is very important to identify these most obvious contexts for the study of their self-esteem through identity.

## **3. Research Questions**

- 3.1.** What social groups do modern students associate themselves with?
- 3.2.** Which social group is dominant?
- 3.3.** How does the dominance of a particular identity affect self esteem?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the research is to prove that modern digital methods of communication transform the consciousness of students by influencing their social identity. Priorities change in the choice of social groups that young people relate to, which, in turn, makes adjustments to their self-esteem. To show the relationship between students' social identity and self-esteem, between the prevailing virtual life context and self-perception in the real world, is a very important step in developing measures to strengthen the real self-attitudes of young people and improve the quality of their social adaptation.

#### **5. Research Methods**

We study the process of self-esteem forming in third-year students of the "Tourism" training direction, bearing in mind that an individual evaluates the success of their manifestations by means of what phenomena, social groups they relate themselves to, that is, through the prism of identity. The study involved a stream of Novosibirsk State Technical University students consisting of 53 people. The research was conducted by studying special literature, analyzing sources on the topic of social identity, methods of observation, classification, questioning, interviewing and testing ("Test of twenty statements by Kuhn and McPartland") (1984), as well as analyzing the materials obtained by comparison and generalization.

According to Kuhn and McPartland (1984), self-assessment is considered adequate if the ratio of positively evaluated qualities to negatively evaluated ("+" to "-") is 65-80% to 35-20%.

Self-esteem is considered inadequately inflated if the number of positively evaluated qualities in relation to negatively evaluated ("+" to "-") is 85-100%, that is, the person notes that he or she has no shortcomings, or their number reaches 15% (of the total number of "+" and "-").

Self-esteem is considered to be inadequately low if the number of negatively evaluated qualities in relation to the positively evaluated ("- to "+") is 50-100%, that is, the person notes that he or she either does not have any advantages, or their number reaches 50% (of the total number of "+" and "-").

Self-esteem is unstable if the number of positively evaluated qualities in relation to negatively evaluated ("+" to "-") is 50-55%. This ratio usually indicates internal instability and is uncomfortable.

#### **6. Findings**

During the research students were asked which communities they most related to at the moment: the State", "ethnic group", "family", "sports team or other team according to a certain hobby", "educational group", "social network". The family was ranked first by 47% of respondents, the social network was in second place-20%, the student group was in third place –13%, 20% had to choose other groups.

Students were asked how much time they spent on the Internet during the day. The responses were distributed as follows:

I am not online – 0%; half an hour – 3%; 1-3 hours – 7%; 3-5 hours – 20%; 5-7 – 70%.

Then students were asked to analyze what resources they devoted the most time to, the results were as follows: social networks – 65%; online games – 23%; search for information for self-education –12%. It is obvious that social networks hold the lead in terms of time spent by students in Internet resources.

Then students were divided into three groups: those who spent less than an hour a day on social networks (9 people), from an hour to three (18), and from three to five or more (26). The "Test of twenty statements by M. Kuhn and T. McPartland" which used to study the content characteristics of an individual's identity, was conducted in groups. It asks respondents the question "Who am I?», they have to respond in a free form. The question is directly related to the characteristics of a person's own perception of himself, that is, with the "self-concept".

Testing was conducted in two stages. At the first stage, the task was given to describe own "self" as a representative of the student body, that is, a student study group, a University student with arbitrary characteristics. On the second stage, after a certain time interval, student had to describe himself as a representative of the group on Instagram or VKontakte, where the student regularly posts information about himself, thus forming his life story.

In both the first and second stages, students had to give as many answers as possible to one question related to the student: "Who am I?" Each new answer had to start with a new line, recording all the answers that came to mind. After fixing all the characteristics, the students had to number them, putting the serial number to the left of each answer. After that, each individual characteristic was evaluated using a two-digit system: "+" – the "plus" sign was placed if the student liked this characteristic; "-" – minus sign – if the student didn't like this characteristic in general. The mark of rating had to be placed to the left of the characteristic number. After evaluating all the characteristics, it was necessary to determine how many responses were obtained in total, and how many responses were obtained for each sign. Self-assessment was determined as a result of the ratio of the number of "+" and "-" marks that were formed when the student evaluated each of their responses at the quantitative processing stage.

The results of the study are following: students with multiple social identities highlight the three most important types of social identity: family member, student group member and VKontakte or other social network group member. Great satisfaction was caused by the dominance of the "family" group. However, it is not leading by a significant margin from the group "social network", which is substantially ahead of the group "student body". These last groups are relevant comparison groups: belonging to one of them clearly prevails – the preference for a certain identity is formed by the relative and absolute status of the ingroup. Students clearly manifest favoritism: a specific group is the central element of their self-determination and this comparison is significant for identifying the qualitative characteristics of their self-esteem.

Representatives of the group "from 3 to 5 hours" showed the largest discrepancy between the network and student identity. They found an overestimation of the network personality and low self-esteem of the student body representative. The average number of percentages of self-esteem in the context of network identity – 82 positive, 18 negative, in the context of the student body – 31 positive, 69 – negative.

Representatives of the group "from 1 hour to 3 hours" showed self-esteem closer to adequate, since there is less discrepancy between the two identities. There is a less inflated assessment of the network personality, while the student body is unstable, closer to adequate. The average number of percentages of self-esteem in the context of network identity – 74 positive, 26 negative, in the context of the student body – 55 positive, 45 negative.

Representatives of the group "from 0.5 hours to 1 hour" did not show differences in self-assessments coming from different contexts. An overestimated assessment of their network personality and an adequate assessment of themselves as a representative of the student body are shown. The average number of percentages of self-esteem in the context of network identity – 67 positive, 33 negative, in the context of the student body – 64 positive and 36 negative.

## 7. Conclusion

The main conclusion of the study is as follows: the prevalence of an individual's network identity affects the formation of an overestimated self-assessment as a representative of a social network and an understated one as a representative of the student body in real life. This imbalance is the cause of students' inadequate perception of themselves, which ultimately affects the quality of training and relationships in the training group.

The dominance of network identity contributes to the degradation of the individual offline: the ideal image conflicts with the real one, which is formed by excessive demands in the absence of resources to meet them. In the Internet, young people are engaged in self-directing of their life story, that is, creating their ideal image – the one that the individual would like to match in real life. Feeling themselves in the context of network identity, the individual tends to overestimate their real data, that is, network identity provokes an inflated self-esteem. Perceiving himself as a member of a student body, the individual is immersed in the world of daily overcoming difficulties, in the world of everyday life, which is much more difficult to influence than the virtual world. The self-assessments identified in the framework of network and student identity do not coincide, and the values deviate from each other the more time students spend online. A vicious circle is formed – young people spend their time where they receive positive reinforcement in the form of emojis and likes, so they identify themselves more with the network.

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