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International Scientific Conference**PSYCHOSEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLITICAL PROTESTS**

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**Abstract**

An empirical study is devoted to the psychosemantic analysis of young people's attitudes towards political protests in the city of Vladivostok, Russia. The relevance of this topic is due to the constant change of social structure, consciousness and the uneven dynamics of social protests in Russia during 2010-2020, especially among young people and residents of large cities. The study is based on an associative experiment to find out the reaction on words-stimuli such as rallies, uprisings, petitions, riots that are considered to be forms of political protest. The sample consisted of 130 young people aged from 18 to 30. As a result of the data obtained, young people aged from 18-24 turned out to have fewer ideas about petitions and riots than about rallies, uprisings, and strikes, while showing a higher level of emotional involvement in these forms of protest. They need to express their opinion and be heard. They tend to react negatively to sanctions from law enforcement authorities during protests. The lack of direct and stable communication with the authorities, the inability to convey their position to the government generates aggression, fueling the desire for resistance. Young people aged from 25-30 have a historical memory of political protests in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, as well as of major rallies in recent history, and their associations are often reflected in perceptions of different forms of protest. These young people value the presence of a leader of the political protest, its organization, and legality.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most important tasks of state bodies is to manage the society and the lives of its citizens, taking into account the interests of various social groups. In some circumstances, when the two parties - the government and the citizens of the state - cannot come to a single decision, people resort to a political protest to show their discontent with the authorities.

Researchers note that the dynamics of social protests in Russia at the turn of 2010-2020s were extremely uneven and it was more obvious among young people and residents of large cities (Titov, 2020). Accordingly, the data obtained 5 years ago are currently relevant only for comparative analysis. Political protests increase the general population's perception of the uncertainties of the future and the deterioration of mental health (Liu et al., 2019).

Therefore, the given research has scientific and practical significance, which is determined by the possibility of using the results obtained in the study to identify certain social stereotypes of young people and their attitudes towards various forms of political protest, forecasting the protest potential of the youth of the city of Vladivostok. The novelty of the research lies in the fact that for the first time the use of psychosemantic methods was carried out to study the protest consciousness of the youth of the city of Vladivostok.

## 2. Problem Statement

The protest consciousness of Russians has been actively studied in recent decades, including in the Russian Federation (Gaba, 2015; Gurylina, 2015). As Gurylina (2015) notes, the tendency of the citizens for mass involvement in protest actions has been manifested in Russian society in recent years (Gurylina, 2015). This trend is currently increasing, especially among young people.

There are certain features of this age group that determine the difficulties of studying the protest consciousness of young people. According to many scholars (Gaba, 2015; Kalugina, 2007; Shchenina, 2005), young people do not have a clear system of knowledge about the political reality, their ideas about politics are blurred, inaccurate and represent only a set of some basic concepts and definitions that are more related to the social structure, the protest mood of young people is attributive which is one of the main characteristics of this age.

In most of the studies conducted, protest moods are studied by sociological methods (a survey, in particular). In our research, we decided to study the ideas of political protests among young people from the perspective of a psychosemantic approach, which opens up opportunities for identifying the conscious basis and allows us to establish certain relationships between a specific concept and the consciousness of the subject (Serkin, 2008).

As a hypothesis of the study, we suggest, that there are differences in perceptions of political protests among students (aged from 18-24) and young adults (aged from 25-30).

### 3. Research Questions

The concept of political consciousness is one of the interdisciplinary, complex categories studied from the point of view of various approaches within the areas of political science.

A great contribution to the theoretical study of the essence of the concept of "political consciousness" was made by Russian psychologists and social scientists Uledov (1968), Diligensky (1996), Olshansky (2001), and others. Thus, Diligensky (1996) defines political consciousness as "a subsystem in the mass consciousness system that has its specific mechanisms of determination and, consequently, a certain relative autonomy within this system" (p.11). Olshansky (2001) proposed a structure of political self-consciousness consisting of three main components: cognitive, emotional, and evaluative-volitional.

Young people can be divided into protest-active and the ones who make up the protest potential, but who are currently passive (Zinkina, 2019). External factors of protest attitude and behavior include income, protest experience, and political effectiveness (Valdez et al., 2018). The inner ones include emotions (reflected in ideas about protest behavior) (Jasper, 2018) and personality traits of the so-called "Big Five". It was found out that contextual factors can interact with personality traits, influencing individual participation in the protest (Chang et al., 2020; Shlykova, 2015).

In psychology, representations mean mental formations that have different degrees of integrity, stability, and accuracy which are the result of the processing of various streams of information received in different situations and at different times by the human psyche. Representations can exist both at the individual level and the collective level.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to conduct a psychosemantic analysis of the ideas of political protest among modern youth.

### 5. Research Methods

5.1. The methodological basis of the research was the methods of psychosemantics including semantic differential and associative experiments, as well as projective drawing. But as the size of the article does not allow describing all the data, we will focus on the results of the associative experiment (word stimuli: rally, uprising, petition, riot), which will allow us to get the most common images of object measurement in the minds of the target group (Puzanova & Larina, 2015). Fisher's  $\phi$ -criterion was used as a method of statistical data processing.

5.2. Before the main study, a pilot one was conducted to check the quality of the prepared tools for data collection and to establish the number of semantic groups and diversity. The sample consisted of 25 people aged from 18 to 30. The words-stimuli for the associative experiment were as follows rally, uprising, strike, petition, and riot. These concepts represent different forms of political protest behavior.

As a result of the pilot study, the main types of associations were identified and grouped according to the following associative topics:

- 1) participants, people associated with the form of protest;

- 2) characteristics describing the form of political protest;
- 3) consequences, i.e. results and effectiveness of the form of political protest;
- 4) means that a protest needs to take place; the places where it takes place; the attributes of a protest;
- 5) goals and reasons;
- 6) associations, in which people name another form of protest that is not an incentive.

5.3. The study sample consisted of 130 young people aged from 18 to 30 living in Vladivostok. The empirical study was conducted in April-May 2020. The sample type was quota; initially, age range fitting the definition "youth" was specified and it was also decided to study each age group separately, then the same number of the respondents was set for each group. Respondents were selected at random within the groups, but the condition was stated: the ratio of women to men had to be the same. The study involved young people of different professions, with different levels of education: architects, economists, lawyers, firefighters, political scientists, and representatives of many other professions. This was an additional proof of the heterogeneity of the sample and brought it closer to the diversity of the general population.

Fisher's  $\phi$ -criterion was used as a method of statistical data processing.

## 6. Findings

**6.1. To analyze the results of the study, the entire sample was divided into 2 groups by age: 1st group included young people aged from 18-24 and 2nd group included young people aged from 25-30. The expert evaluation method was used to analyze the primary data**

### 6.2. Young people's ideas about a rally

In the first group (aged from 18-24) 325 associations were obtained, and in the second group (aged from 25-30) 292 associations were obtained. There was an imbalance in the fullness of the topics "Negative characteristics" and "Emotions and feelings": in the first group they were 5 times less than in the second, i.e. a group of young adults aged from 25-30 was less emotionally included in the concept of a rally as compared to the second group of young people aged from 18-24. In both age groups, a rally was associated with a large number of people and power, but for young people aged from 25-30, it was important to have a leader, a speaker. It was also interesting that the list of statistically significant associations of the second group included "militia" (Soviet name).

Differences were found on other topics ("Negative characteristics" ( $\phi$ \*EMP=3,593 at  $p=0.01$ ) and "Emotions and feelings" ( $\phi$ \*EMP=2,074  $p=0,05$ ): for the first group a rally was large-scale, aggressive, and meaningless, while for the second group it was characterized by legality and spontaneity; for people aged from 18-24 a rally was more associated with rebellion, struggle and confrontation, while for young people aged 25-30 it was more a calm and serious event.

### 6.3. Young people's ideas about an uprising

In the first group (aged from 18-24) 301 associations were obtained, and in the second group (aged from 25-30) 289 associations were obtained. There were no statistically significant differences in topics; young people present an uprising as active military actions initiated by people, leading to chaos and

revolution. The process of the uprising for young people aged from 18-24 was associated with discontent, anger, wrath (emotions of the participants of the uprising), and young people aged from 25-30 were more likely to associate the uprising with fear and horror (as the consequences of the uprising).

#### **6.4. Young people's ideas about a strike**

In the first group (aged from 18-24) 284 associations were obtained, and in the second group (aged from 25-30) 285 associations were obtained. Statistically significant differences were shown by the topics "Attributes" ( $\varphi^*emf=2.307$  at  $p=0.01$ ): in the second group, the most frequent association was "salary", and in the first group they were "shout" and "poster"; and "Positive characteristics" ( $\varphi^*emf=1.750$  at  $p=0.05$ ): a more neutral attitude to a strike was among young people aged from 25-30. The idea of a strike among all young people was content related to various kinds of enterprises (workers, management, trade union, bosses, and miners), as well as the variant of protest typical of Western culture.

#### **6.5. Young people's perception of a petition**

In the first group (aged from 18-24), 269 associations were obtained, and in the second group (aged from 25-30), 266 associations were obtained. The ratio of the content of the topics "Positive characteristics" ( $\varphi^*emf=2.566$  at  $p=0.01$ ) and "Negative characteristics" in both groups showed that the first group treated the petition more positively and emotionally (associated with consent), and the second group's attitude was neutral (as a result of disappointment). At the same time, the perception of this notion in both groups reflected its inefficiency and the futility of collecting petitions.

The differences lie in the fact that young people aged from 18-25 were likely to associate collecting petitions with an event taking place on the Internet that does not require a detailed study, while young adults aged from 25-30 associated a petition with an official event (the document), carried out in an offline format, on the streets, that requires serious and careful consideration. This aspect partly confirms a greater influence of the Internet technologies on young people aged from 18-25 and their greater activity on the Internet (Brodovskaya & Huang, 2019; Brodovskaya et al., 2017).

#### **6.6. Young people's ideas about a riot**

In the first group (aged from 18-24), 270 associations were obtained, and in the second group (aged from 25-30), 267 associations were obtained. Statistically significant differences were shown in the topic "Participants" ( $\varphi^*emf=2,392$  at  $p=0.01$ ): the second group (aged from 25-30) also showed a large number of "historical associations"; as well as the topics "Negative characteristics" ( $\varphi^*emf=1,902$  at  $p=0.05$ ): both groups treated a riot more negatively than positively and "Attributes" ( $\varphi^*emf=1,978$  at  $p=0.05$ ): the first group (aged from 18-24) among statistically significant associations called the "meme BUND».

## **7. Conclusion**

Summing up, we can draw the following conclusions:

7.1. The age group from 18-24 has fewer ideas about petitions and riots than about rallies, uprisings, and strikes while showing a higher level of emotional involvement in these forms of protest. These young

people need to express their opinions and be heard, they react sharply and negatively to sanctions from law enforcement authorities during protests. The lack of direct and stable communication with the authorities, the inability to convey their position to the government generates aggression, fueling the desire for resistance.

7.2. Young people aged from 25-30 have a historical memory of political protests in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, as well as of major rallies in recent history, and their associations are often reflected in ideas about different forms of protest. The presence of a leader of a political protest, its organization and legality, the absence of disorder and chaos are important for them, and therefore young people strive for more peaceful and calm forms of protest, even realizing their low effectiveness, so this age group will mainly use a rally as a form of political protest.

Based on the above, the following recommendations for working with young people have been made:

1. Reduce the gap between the government and citizens; increase the level of political socialization, especially in the age group from 18-24.
2. Increase the attention of the authorities to petitions and respond to them, justifying the trust of young people in this peaceful form of political protest.
3. Encourage sanctioned protest rallies, allow young people to satisfy the desire to speak out without unnecessarily applying sanctions.

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