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# CIVIL POSITION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN A DIVERSE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

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## Abstract

The article presents the results of research on the students' civil position in the context of information diversity. Development of a civil position is regarded as a part of civic education. The article provides various approaches to the definition of civic education and reveals its connection with patriotic education. The authors of the article cite data from an online survey in which 1.348 university students from Russia and the Republic of Belarus took part. The research allowed identifying the degree of students' social involvement in social and political processes and the level of their interest in political and cultural life events of the country and the region. The survey helped identify the sources that in a diverse information environment have the greatest impact on the development of civil position of university students. These are the Internet, social networks, and the mass media. The research has revealed the role positions of students in civil society and the socio-political life of the country. Most of the respondents prefer the positions of "observer" and "implementer". Only less than a third of the students surveyed take an active civil position and are active subjects of socio-political processes taking place in society. More than half of the respondents show partial interest in political, economic, and cultural events of the regional, national, and international scale. The results obtained could serve as an empirical basis for constructing effective models of civic education in a diverse information environment,

## 1. Introduction

Modern universities give high-quality education to students turning them into qualified professionals in demand by the labor market and also create conditions for the development of their active civil position. It is caused by the fact that the intensive socio-economic development of many world countries requires a restructuring of public consciousness, a shift in values and the change of civilizational development towards traditionalism, patriotism, and national consolidation (Selivanova, 2018). Today, Russia, the Republic of Belarus and other countries need citizens who possess not only deep professional knowledge and competencies, but also critical thinking, initiative, and active social position in the rule of law state. The system of civic education at the university is aimed at solving this problem in the conditions of political, cultural, religious, and informational diversity.

The Strategy for the Development of Education in the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025 contains the priority directions of civic and patriotic education of Russian youth. The most significant areas include the development of active civil positions and civil responsibilities of young people on the basis of the traditional cultural, spiritual, and moral values of Russian society; the increase in the level of legal knowledge and development of the ability to implement constitutional rights and obligations responsibly (Strategiya razvitiya, 2015). These goals correspond to the priorities of education in the Republic of Belarus, the major goal of which is to create a patriotic young generation with independent thinking, an active civil position, legal, political, and information culture (Gosudarstvennaya programma, 2016).

The problem of civic education is the topic of lively scientific discussions in various countries of the world. In the pedagogical literature there is a variety of interpretations of civic education as a multidimensional pedagogical phenomenon. Loginova (2009), for example, notes that, on the one hand, civic education is an independent direction of the educational system, and on the other hand, the general direction of the entire system, other directions of human upbringing. Dictionary on Social Pedagogy defines civic education as "the formation of civil-mindedness as an integrative personality trait that allows a person to feel legally, socially, morally, and politically capable" (Mardakhaev, 2002, p. 84). A number of researchers consider civic and patriotic education as essentially homogeneous categories. Gorbova (2007) considers civic education to be the pinnacle of patriotic education. Filonov (2007), on the contrary, regards patriotism as a part of civil consciousness. This approach is shared by Lebedeva (2014), who defines civic education as a system whose main function is to educate and to teach citizens who love their homeland. According to The Belarus Pedagogical Encyclopedia, civic education is a specially organized educational and extracurricular activity aimed at teaching the social role of a citizen to students (Samuel et al., 2015, p. 305).

Currently, in many countries of the world, the role of higher education in developing active citizenship of young people is growing. Polushina et al. (2018) in their research argue that it is modern universities that can create the most favorable conditions for the development of social activity, critical and reflective thinking of students, who in the future will be able to participate in various processes of managing a democratic society.

Research on the theoretical foundations of civic education of students in modern higher education made it possible to identify various aspects of this process. The researchers Balyaev et al. (2014) study the influence of students' legal consciousness on the development of their civil position. The variability of intellectual development in relation to different levels of civil identity among students in different socio-cultural environments is described by Akimova (2018). The research by Kuznetsova and Solovjeva (2018) proves that the students' participation in volunteer activities contributes to their spiritual and moral education, the development of a professional and general humanistic worldview, and allows them to form a stable civil position. Nazarova et al. (2018) formulated patterns, principles, and rules for development of social maturity of university students from the standpoint of a continual-synergetic approach. The object of research by Dvoryatkina et al. (2018) is the technology of introducing elements of spiritual and moral education into higher education through the integration of mathematical and humanitarian knowledge. The authors of this article have developed models of civic education for university students in the context of information diversity (Pevzner et al., 2019).

Summarizing various views of scientists on the goals and priorities of civic education of students, the authors of the article define civic education as a process and system of training and education aimed at forming an active civil position and social involvement among students on the basis of civic knowledge and moral values necessary for successful socialization and constructive participation in the life of the rule of law state and civil society.

## 2. Problem Statement

Due to the relevance of the study, its scientific problem is to identify the degree of social involvement of students in social and political processes, to determine the level of their interest in events taking place in the political, economic and cultural life of the country, region and educational institution. An important aspect of solving a scientific problem is the identification of information sources that have the greatest influence on the formation of the civil position of university students and on their assessment of the events covered in various media, social networks, and other information sources.

The authors made the assumption that in conditions of information diversity, such information sources as social networks and the media have the greatest influence on the civic position of students. The influence of these sources must be taken into account by teachers when building a system of civic education for students.

## 3. Research Questions

In accordance with the problem, the article answers the following research questions:

- What is the degree of university students' participation in the social and political life of the country, region, and university?

- How do young people assess current events in political, socio-economic, and cultural life?

- What is the attitude of student youth to fake information disseminated by various information sources?

- What information sources have the greatest influence on the development of students' civil position?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

To identify information sources having the greatest impact on the development of the civil position of university students.

## 5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the research is an informational approach, which allows identifying the most optimal means of getting information about the social activity and civil position of young people, their participation in the social and political life of the country, region, and university. The information approach helps to reveal the influence of information sources on the attitude of young people to current events taking place in the country and the region, as well as on the development of students' ideas about civil society institutions and their role in the rule of law state.

To achieve the research purpose, the following methods were used: theoretical analysis of scientific literature on research issues; methods of questioning, mathematical data processing, and generalization of the results of empirical research. Online surveys were conducted on an open online platformto identify the sources of information about political, economic, and cultural events, civil initiatives in the country and the region which are the most popular among students in Russia and the Republic of Belarus. An online survey questionnaire consisted of 24 informative and evaluative-reflective parts.

## 6. Findings

To solve the research problem, the authors conducted an online survey of students from five Russian universities, in which 1348 respondents from Vologda State University, Kuban State University, Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Ryazan State University named after S. Yesenin, and Tyumen State University took part. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 23 years old.

The analysis of the questionnaire results made it possible to define why the students search for information. It was revealed that many students are not limited to professional and educational needs while looking for the information. More than 70% of the respondents search for information in order to keep abreast of the latest events. Moreover, more than half of the respondents (51.3%) noted that they prefer to share information with other people.

Data analysis shows the sources from which university students most often receive information. Thus, almost all respondents indicated that they most often search for the necessary information on

websites (94.7%) and in social networks (87.6%). Quite often, students turn to teachers (72.5%), friends and acquaintances (71.6%), as well as to their parents (71.1%) for information. The survey showed that the mass media (58.6%) and communities of interest (55.1%) as information sources are currently less popular among students.

A separate group of questions was aimed at identifying the attitude of student youth to information about political, economic, and cultural events taking place in Russia and foreign countries. An analysis of the respondents' answers showed that only less than a third of the respondents (26.9%) constantly show interest in political, economic, and cultural events in Russia and abroad. More than half of the respondents (56%) indicated a partial interest in the public events mentioned in the questionnaire, and 8.8% of the survey participants unequivocally noted that they were not interested in the present political, economic, and cultural life of society at all.

Students who took part in the survey most often receive information about political, economic and cultural life in the country and abroad from the Internet sources (64.2%) and through the mass media (21.8%). These data correlate with the respondents' answers to the previous questions related to the sources of the information and their reliability. Young people are least likely to receive information about political, economic, and cultural events from acquaintances and friends (7.2%), university professors (1.3%) and from print media (1%). Most of the respondents do not comment on political, economic and cultural events on social networks. Only 18% of the respondents leave their comments on some issues.

Analysis of students' opinions on the degree of influence of various information sources on their personal position in society made it possible to divide the respondents into several groups. The largest group (35%) included respondents who chose social networks as the most influential source of information for them. The second group was made up of young people (26.7%), who claim that no one has any influence on their personal position in society. Representatives of the third group (19.8%) indicated in the questionnaire that they are influenced by the mass media. The smallest group was made up of survey participants (9.7%), who name their acquaintances and friends as information sources having the greatest impact on their personal position in society. It should be noted that only 2.3% of the students surveyed reported that they listen to the opinion of university teachers when forming their social position.

The analysis of students' attitudes towards elections both at the state and local levels revealed two groups of respondents, approximately the same in number, with opposite positions in relation to participation in the electoral process. About 48% of respondents participate in the elections, thereby demonstrating an active civil position. The same group includes the survey participants who noted that they work in election bodies (2.2%) and take part in the work of party headquarters (1.8%). The second group of young people (47%) showed their passive attitude towards elections, pointing out their lack of desire to take part in voting in any elections at the federal, regional, and municipal levels.

The previously noted decrease in the students' interest in the social and political events taking place in the country had a negative impact on the students' involvement in the university life. The results of the survey showed that 45.1% of the respondents do not participate in social activities at all; 21.3% of students participate only in leisure, cultural and sports events organized at universities. A small number of respondents indicated that they take part in various volunteer movements (12.5%) and carry out some

public assignments (11.6%). The least number of young people is attracted by charity (2.2%) and socio-political (0.6%) events.

While answering the question "What is your role position in the university life?" more than half of the respondents (54.5%) described their own position as an "observer", and 24.3% of the respondents - as an "implementer". Only an insignificant part of the survey participants confirmed their personal involvement in the social activities of universities, choosing the following answers to the above question: "mastermind" (7%), "organizer" (4.5%), "emotional leader" (4.2%), "constructive critic"(3.6%).

Besides the reliable information coming from official sources, the so-called "fake", i.e. deliberately distorted, information is often posted on the Internet. The majority of survey participants (89.7%) are aware that posting false information on social networks implies personal responsibility; however, the respondents were divided on this issue. The largest group of students (41.8%) believes that this responsibility is borne by the group member who posted content with inaccurate information. A slightly smaller number of respondents (30.6%) indicated that it is the group administrator on the social Internet network that is responsible for the information posted in it. A small part of the respondents blame the network users who post reposts with false information (13.3%) and group members who leave comments on inaccurate information on the networks (4%). The survey revealed a variety of students' opinions about personal responsibility for providing inaccurate information on social Internet networks. Some survey participants demonstrated a liberal position in relation to this issue. 10.3% of the respondents, assuming that everyone has the right to post any information on the Internet, chose an answer option that users do not bear any responsibility for posting false information.

The results of the April-May 2020 online questionnaires of 840 Belarusian students from Vitebsk State University named after P.M. Masherov and Brest State University named after A.S. Pushkin correlate with data obtained in Russia.

## 7. Conclusion

The conducted empirical research has confirmed the authors' assumption that social networks and the mass media have the greatest influence on the development of students' civil position. This correlates with the results of studies by other authors, whose research demonstrate the influence of the Internet and the media on the public consciousness of modern youth. Dolganova and Smirnova (2019), using the results of sociological surveys, argue that the media are one of the main mechanisms of influence on the public opinion and public consciousness of citizens in many countries of the world. Ilchenko and Maikova (2018) examine in detail the features of the media, the Internet and their influence on the formation of public opinion and public consciousness of the Russian citizens. Appealing to the results of their research, the authors conclude that the growing interest of the younger generation in important events covered in the media and the Internet leads to the development of the civic position of young people.

An online survey conducted by the authors of the article made it possible to determine the degree of student participation in the socio-political life of the country, region and university, as well as their role position in civil society. Unfortunately, most of the interviewed respondents found themselves in the

position of either "observer" or "performer", but not an active participant in the social and political activities of the university and the region. The results obtained encourage dwelling on the need to develop and implement new models of civic education that contribute to the development of an active social position of students in the context of information diversity.

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