SCTCMG 2021
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

PSYCHOLOGICAL PREREQUISITES FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF RUSSIAN YOUTH

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Abstract

The article discusses the involvement of modern Russian youth in socio-political activities. The article presents the results of an empirical study conducted in February 2021 against the background of the "second wave" of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and protest moods in different countries. The sample consisted of 100 Russian people aged 18 to 35 (M = 29.3, SD = 5.4) (St. Petersburg, northwestern Russia), of which 70 % were females. The study revealed the relationship between the socio-political participation of young people and psychological variables: the level of media competence, motives, ideas about the possibilities of self-fulfillment and the degree of satisfaction with life. Particular attention was paid to the cognitive foundations and behavioral manifestations of virtual political participation. The correlation of virtual forms with real political practices, reasons for the radicalization of judgments about politics or approval of the actions of representatives of the government are discussed. Mathematical and statistical processing of data made it possible to identify the main factors that determine the youth activity both in real political life and new virtual practices: "involvement in politics", "satisfaction with life", "virtualization of political participation", "participation in the official political agenda", "the influence of the inner circle", "political alienation". The use of psychological and political research methods and the cognitive approach made it possible to analyze the current forms of political behavior of modern youth in the context of constant expansion of the information field, as well as to identify the reasons for active involvement in politics.

Keywords: Media competence, motivation, socio-political participation, self-fulfillment, youth

1. Introduction

In recent years, the processes of politics mediatization have intensified in many countries, characterized by the emergence of multiple virtual forms of communication and political activity of citizens. The main elements of the model of social and political involvement of young people in the digital age are the exchange of information, access to it, and a feedback mechanism (Chirun, 2010; Momeni, 2017; Velasquez & LaRose, 2015).

Along with an increase in the number of possible online forms of participation, protest moods are observed (Kosov et al., 2019; Kruzhkova et al., 2019). Protest political behavior can acquire deviant outlines, systematic use of violent or "non-violent actions" in order to destabilize the power structures.

One of the forms of protests is a conscious refusal to participate in political actions (absenteeism), whose possible psychological factors may be rigidity of political attitudes, dissatisfaction with social needs, a low level of emotional saturation, frustration against the background of the negative information field (Kruzhkova et al., 2019; Samuylova, 2013; Shamionov, 2020; Shestopal, 2002). When studying the characteristics of the political behavior of young people, both active and passive forms of socio-political involvement are of particular interest.

2. Problem Statement

The main problem is to identify psychological reasons for the involvement of modern Russian youth in the socio-political life of society or alienation from it. Due to the active development of network forms of communication, the study paid special attention to the phenomenon of virtual political participation.

3. Research Questions

The key research question was the relationship of various forms of socio-political participation with psychological variables of young people. In particular, we were interested in cognitive foundations and behavioral manifestations of political participation, motives for political involvement, ideas about the possibilities of self-fulfillment in the country, as well as the levels of media competence, social subordination and social aggression. What involves modern young people in the socio-political life, and what pushes them away from it? What is the contribution of the level of media competence (the ability to choose, critically analyze and evaluate information) and information preferences in initiating the political activity of young people? What is the relationship between virtual political behavior and real political practices? What are the reasons for the radicalization of judgments about politics or approval of the actions of representatives of the current government?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is to study features of the socio-political participation of modern Russian youth in relation to the assessment of importance of information sources, as well as some

psychological variables (the level of media competence, motives for political participation, ideas about the possibilities of self-fulfillment and the degree of satisfaction with life).

In February 2021, an empirical study involving 100 people aged 18 to 35 years (M = 29.3, SD = 5.4), living in Russia (mainly from St. Petersburg) was conducted. The research was carried out remotely using special forms created and posted on the Internet (Google Forms service). Participants filled out these forms through a link posted on the VKontakte social network (www.vk.com) or distributed by the authors through the network of personal contacts. Involvement in the study was voluntary. The average filling time was 10–15 minutes. The processing of the data obtained, calculation of results and statistical analysis were carried out using the methods of mathematical statistics (descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), factor analysis, correlation analysis) in Microsoft Excel 2019 and IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0.0 software.

Empirical data were obtained during the "second wave" of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, as well as during the period of protests in Russia in support of Alexei Navalny who was arrested by law enforcement agencies in January 2021. This made it possible to identify public sentiments of young people on the eve of the start of the election campaign in the State Duma.

5.   Research Methods

The main research method was a questionnaire survey. Several sections were included in the questionnaire, which made it possible to diagnose the peculiarities of involvement of Russian youth in the socio-political life in relation to the informational preferences and psychological indicators. To obtain general information about the respondents, the socio-demographic block included questions about gender, age, education, and residence.

5.1.   Diagnostics of information preferences

A block of questions was presented in the questionnaire, including a list of 13 sources through which current socio-political information is transmitted (traditional media, Internet sources, social networks, government agencies, family, etc.). The question was as follows: "To what extent are the listed sources significant for you in terms of obtaining information about what is happening in the country and in the world?" The 5-point scale assessment was used.

5.2.   Diagnostics of media competence

Media competence was studied using the technique developed by Bakuleva based on the available theoretical data (Fedorov, 2007; Kazakov, 2017; Simakova & Topchiy, 2017) and aimed at assessing: 1) the degree of emotional involvement in the perception of media messages (affective component); 2) a propensity to analyze and interpret media information, knowledge about the features of the media (cognitive component); 3) frequency of contacts with the media (operational component). The methodology includes 24 statements that allow us to identify the level of political media competence of the respondents. The 5-point scale assessment was used. The total values ranged from 24 to 120 points. Indicators not exceeding 60 points were assessed as low, falling in the range from 61 to 80 points – as

average, and over 81 points – as high. The assessment of the internal consistency of the method indicates agreement (Cronbach's alpha (α) = .897). The indicators of consistency of the three parts of the methodology are high for each of the three factors ("cognitive" α = .826; "affective" α = .799; "operational" α = .791) (Bakuleva, 2014).

5.3. Diagnostics of political participation

Political participation was studied using the methods "Forms and motives of political participation" and "Virtual political participation" developed by Bakuleva and Samuylova on the basis of theoretical approaches (and classifications) to the traditional and new forms of political participation (Bakuleva, 2014; Kruzhkova et al., 2019; Samuylova, 2013; Shestopal, 2002; Waeterloos et al., 2021).

The methodology "Forms and motives of political participation " consists of two blocks and includes 16 statements aimed at diagnosing: 1) active and passive forms of political participation (9 statements); 2) value-oriented and instrumental motives of political participation (7 statements). For example: "I vote as a voter" (electoral activity), "I don't participate in politics because I has become disillusioned with the effectiveness of political institutions and I believe that my opinion means nothing" (passive form), "I am involved in political life, if someone's ideas are close to me, or I share someone's ideology" (ideological motive)," I participate in political events, if it allows me to change something, change the situation" (the motive for transforming the world). The 5-point scale assessment was used.

The methodology "Virtual political participation " is aimed at identifying features of the respondents' use of modern Internet resources and includes two blocks that diagnose the cognitive foundations and behavioral manifestations of virtual political participation (10 statements in total, 5 statements in each block). For example: "I am the author or moderator of an Internet resource with a political orientation (website, blog, chat, forum, Internet newspaper, magazine, channel, community, etc.): I post my own materials or moderate messages on the topic of politics." ("Virtual creativity"), "I post materials about the authorship policy of other users on my personal page (on my channel, in my account, etc.): links, hypertext, reposts, etc." ("Virtual retranslation"). The 5-point scale assessment was used.

5.4. Diagnostics of ideas about the possibilities of self-fulfillment

The methodology "Possibilities of self-fulfillment in the country" developed by Saidutova and Samuylova (2013) was used. The methodology consists of 16 statements; the 5-point scale assessment was used. The respondents were asked to answer the question: "To what extent does each of the judgments characterize modern Russia?" For example: "A person of any age can find himself in Russia" (age), "Emotionally I am quite satisfied with life in Russia" (affect), "Russian society welcomes originality of thinking and people's own point of view on current events" (thinking).

5.5. Diagnostics of satisfaction with life in the country

We used the express method for diagnosing indicators of social subordination and social aggression, developed by Samuilova based on Yuriev's approach to the psychological and political

stability of society (Strategic Psychology of Globalization ..., 2006). The technique consists of two blocks, there are four statements in each block; The 5-point scale assessment and eight statements were used. For example: "Life in my country suits me perfectly – it is no worse than in other countries" ("political conservatism"), "For life in my country to improve, radical changes are needed" ("political radicalism").

6. Findings

The factor analysis (principal component analysis) made it possible to identify six main factors that explain 67.5 % of the total variance.

The leading factor was "involvement in politics", which explains 23.3 % of the total variance. It included such indicators as value-oriented (r = .828) and instrumental (r = .573) motives, active forms of political participation (r = .750), cognitive foundations (r = .644) and behavioural manifestations (r = .672) of virtual political participation, as well as general indicators of virtual political participation (r = .744), social aggressiveness (r = .637) and the level of media competence (r = .600). Thus, it has been established that the involvement of young people in both real and virtual political activities is motivated by their interests in current events, the desire to acquire useful knowledge, to join a political ideology, to influence processes and events. The leading traditional active form of political participation is elections. The respondents are convinced that: 1) electronic resources make it possible to display new political activities (share political news, join various political communities, discuss current political events, find like-minded people, initiate new political projects and events, etc.); 2) The Internet is an environment where people can show real political activity (express their attitudes to politics, influence political processes, political decision-making, political programs and projects). The main reasons for the involvement of young people in political life are the motivation, political experience, the general level of activity in the media space and abilities and skills of interaction with media resources.

The second factor, explaining 18.5 % of the total variance ("satisfaction with life in the country"), included 4 blocks of the methodology for identifying ideas about the possibilities of self-fulfillment in the country, as well as the general indicator of social subordination (r = .630). This means that with a greater number of opportunities for self-fulfillment according to various psychological indicators (will, abilities, orientation, thinking, etc.), the level of support for the current policy increases.

The third factor, explaining 8.3 % of the total variance, is "virtualization of political participation". It included such indicators as the degree of importance of social networks (r = .797), the Internet (r = .775) and messengers (r = .570), as well as the overall indicator of virtual political participation (r = .476) and its cognitive foundations (r = .485). This shows that the frequency of using network forms of communication is associated with the desire to expand the information field and satisfy the need for orientation, increasing the number of available media resources.

The fourth factor, describing 6.9 % of the total variance, is "involvement in the official political agenda". It included the use of such sources as traditional media (television, radio, print) (r = .745), government agencies (r = .737), official sources (r = .599). This means that despite the low assessment, these sources are used by young people as potentially important resources for obtaining homogeneous socially significant information.

The fifth factor, explaining 5.7 % of the total variance, is the "inner circle" factor which involved the degree of significance of such sources of information as the immediate environment (friends, colleagues, acquaintances, r = .787), family (relatives, r = .768) and social organizations (r = .460). This indicates a deliberate division of available sources according to the criterion of direct access and the feedback possibility.

The sixth factor explaining 4.7 % of the total variance is "political alienation". It involved the general indicator of passive political participation, r = .745) and instrumental motives (r = .583). This means that the conscious alienation of young people from politics may be due to the predominance of pragmatic motives (mercantile, traditional, transforming the world) over the value-oriented ones (interests, knowledge, power, ideology).

7. Conclusion

The empirical study of the socio-political involvement of modern Russian youth made it possible to identify factors influencing their activities both in real political life and in a virtual communication environment. Important for the manifestation of active forms of youth participation is the value-oriented motivation, as well as the level of media competence, which ensures the high-quality interaction with information. The degree of satisfaction with life in the country and the idea of a large number of opportunities for self-fulfilment are associated with the approval of the current policy and adoption of the current political system. Despite the modest list of information sources that are important for young people, they continue to focus on those that allow them to join the official political agenda or to provide effective feedback.

Further use of psychological and political research methods and application of the cognitive approach to the problem of socio-political participation will improve the understanding of specificity of political behavior of modern youth in expanding the information field, as well as to identify the reasons for involvement in politics or alienation from it.

Acknowledgments

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