

**PERAET 2021****International Scientific Conference «PERISHABLE AND ETERNAL: Mythologies and Social Technologies of Digital Civilization-2021»****HISTORICAL MEMORY AS YOUNG PEOPLE CIVIC IDENTITY  
FORMATION RESOURCE IN DIGITALIZATION CONTEXT**

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**Abstract**

Under the conditions of digitalization, the thesis of focusing individuals on images of the past has become extremely important, and the value of historical memory as a binding resource of civic identity has increased. The expansion of the digital environment contributes to the fragmentation of historical memory, promoting many different narratives of the past, including those with destructive potential. The article summarizes the results of research on the influence of historical memory on the development of youth civic identity. Pilot studies conducted with the authors' participation among schoolchildren in Krasnodar, as well as students of two Kuban universities demonstrate the stabilizing potential of civic identity in the conditions of digitalization. It was found that young people with a civic-type identity were less likely to express their desire to take part in protests and had a higher level of social trust compared to young people with a different type of social identity. Along with this, the images of the family past have the value potential in the student environment, which indicates the influence of historical memory on the identity of young people. The authors of the article note the presence of a "threshold of experience" in the personal historical memory of students, due to the experience of their great-grandparents who survived the Great Patriotic War.

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## 1. Introduction

In modern humanitarian science, so-called "memory studies" are gaining weight. The leitmotif of the "memorial turn" that began in the social and political sciences was the thesis about the influence of memory on collective identity. Under the conditions of digitalization, the problem of focusing individuals on images of the past, where their solidarity is manifested, becomes extremely important. Elites and state institutions are able to use the experience of the past to mobilize populations in the present, as a result of which the memory becomes an instrument of policy and social change (Verovšek, 2020a, 2020b). For example, a study (Lee et al., 2019) argues that referring to historical analogies under certain circumstances can be a reason for people to discuss and challenge the significance of historical events.

There are difficult topics in recent Russian history, the complexity of which is due to the presence of traumatic experience in different generations, which can divide modern Russian society. Therefore, the task of the authorities is to construct a common "grand narrative" in which dangerous issues of the past are worked through: they fall into the zone of silence of historical memory or become the object of "constitutive oblivion" (Connerton, 2008), necessary for the creation and maintenance of a new Russian identity, which has a powerful consolidating potential. In relation to the Russian memory policy, the study of the translation of the events of the Great Patriotic War into contemporary ideological images occupies a special place.

In the era of digitalization, the process of social consolidation causes significant challenges, especially among Russian youth, who actively perceive highly diverse digital content. Social media provide new platforms for ideological categorization (Koiranen et al., 2020). Young people are less and less exposed to "living history" represented by eyewitness accounts, and more and more often to various interpretations of historical events that often contradict the historical truth to please the political goals of interest groups. As a result, official historical discourse and commemorations among young people may overlap, intermingle or clash with each other. Such correlations in historical memory contribute to the formation of "positive", "confused" or "negative" identities. The latter type of identity is the most dangerous, as it leads to a rejection of the old images of the past and strengthens the desire to discard all old perceptions in order to acquire a new "positive" identity.

## 2. Problem Statement

In modern humanitarian science the problems of historical memory are studied very actively, but there is an obvious lack of comprehensive studies of the potential of historical memory as a resource for the formation of civil identity of young people. One of the striking works in this direction is a study (Birkner & Donk, 2020) that deals with the problem of creating a new historical consciousness in the era of modern digital technology. There is an interesting study (Vodenko et al., 2020) that demonstrates the dangers of historical memory that consolidates communities along ethno-religious lines. In a study by Savin and Kasabutskaya (2019) the dangers of historical memory are noted, which can be a significant factor in ethno-confessional conflicts, which is extremely relevant for the multi-ethnic society of Russia.

Since images of the past may have a unique content for different generations, visions of the future may also differ, thus leading to social tensions. In addition, the contradictions between the official

historical discourse and the real experiences of young people can form an "identity crisis" or even a negative identity, which poses a danger to the sustainable development of society.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study raises the following questions:

- 1) Can civic identity confront information threats that influence the minds of young people who have a predisposition to obtain information in digital form?
- 2) Is state memory policy capable of shaping civic identity and resisting attempts to falsify history?
- 3) To what extent can civic identity become a consolidating factor for Russian youth?

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

The study aims to explore historical memory as a resource for constructing the civic identity of young people in the conditions of digitalization. Since the image of the future is constructed on the basis of historical experience, its fuzziness and negative perception can be a symptom of the "disease" that lurks in the contradictions of historical memory. The problem is complicated by the fact that with contradictory versions of history, which increasingly clash in the modern information space, different images of the future are possible.

### **5. Research Methods**

The concept of Halbwachs (1967), which conceptualizes the notion of collective memory, as well as the ideas of Bauman and Donskis (2019), who link historical narrative to identity development are methodologically valuable for this work.

The empirical material of the article is based on the pilot study conducted by the authors in 2021 among schoolchildren and students of two Krasnodar universities (Kuban State University and Kuban State Agrarian University) (n=140). Age of respondents: 14-30, 26% – males, 74% – females, schoolchildren (n=82, 14-17 y.o.), students (n=58, 18-30 y.o.). Also, in order to demonstrate the stabilizing potential of civic identity in the context of digitalization and the danger of destructive information influences on the consciousness of young people, the article presents the results of a study conducted in Southern Russia in 2018 (Krasnodar Krai (n=380), Republic of Crimea (n=380)) by questionnaire survey (with the direct participation of one of the authors of this article). The sample consisted of young people aged 16 to 35, students and those in full-time employment.

### **6. Findings**

Under the conditions of digitalization, the formation of civic identity becomes the most important task in the context of ensuring Russia's information security. Falsification of historical facts and other threats increase the danger of undermining the identity integrity of Russia, which is constructed on the basis of solidarity around the heroic past, belonging to a power with a great history, a united people

regardless of nationality and religion. Attempts to falsify history are partly facilitated by the 'cyber revolution' in the information space, as confirmed by the results of VCIOM (2019), which demonstrate that young people in the 18-24 age group are markedly less likely to believe that the USSR made a major and very significant contribution to the outcome of World War 2 compared to other age cohorts (Puzanova et al., 2020). The dangers of digitalization and openness of information for young people, which consists primarily in the dissemination of extremist ideas, have been very accurately described by Lipset (2016).

One of the authors of the article (Dontsova, 2021) used empirical data from Krasnodar Krai and the Republic of Crimea to assess the exposure of young people to information threats through the study of a risk group that included young people. According to the study results, the risk group was  $20.7 \pm 4\%$  in Krasnodar Krai, and  $18.2 \pm 3.8\%$  in the Republic of Crimea. That is, approximately this number of young people could potentially become targets of destructive information currents. The materials of this study prove the stabilizing nature of civic identity: young people with a common civic identity are less likely to express their desire to take part in protests and have a higher level of social trust compared to young people with different types of social identity.

In the context of these theses, let us outline the main problems associated with the formation of civic identity of Russian youth under the influence of historical memory in the era of digitalization.

1. At this point, there is a clear predisposition among young people to receive information digitally. Even knowing that information on the Internet can be fake, students and schoolchildren turn to it because of the ease and speed of access.

2. The lack of a clear state position, "reference" knowledge, and authority figures in the field of history for young people makes it possible to question any facts, even scientifically substantiated and confirmed ones.

3. One of the attempts to create a positive all-Russian identity understandable to young people can be considered an active appeal of contemporary Russian cinema to the theme of the Great Patriotic War. However, savings on military and scientific consultants often result in pictures that are far from the historical truth. For young people who do not have clear moral guidelines and are not always able, due to their poor knowledge of history, to separate the author's fiction from real events, this can be a negative experience.

4. We cannot count out the targeted propaganda (primarily aimed at young people due to their marginal status and inexperience) carried out in virtual space by various groups in order to create a negative civic identity.

5. At the same time, digital technologies make it possible to preserve historical information (digitization of archival documents) and transfer it to a more accessible format for young people. It should also be noted that there are activities related to historical memory on the Russian Internet (holding the "Immortal Regiment" campaign in virtual space).

Historical memory can become a conflict-causing and mobilizing factor: political, territorial, ethnic and confessional clashes in the past remain in the memory of the group and affect the current behavior of its representatives and attitude to "others" (Savin & Kasabutskaya, 2019). At the same time, it

can also be a factor of integration when positive experience of past interaction helps to make mutual concessions in the present.

Historical memory is heterogeneous and presents itself in several dimensions: in the form of personal (family) historical memory, which is spontaneously formed by the social environment, in the form of a common historical memory, which is constructed and supported by the state (Polozhentseva & Kashchenko, 2014; Shnirelman, 2016) and in the form of regional historical memory, which is formed within the boundaries of the locus of residence. But if the narratives of different dimensions of historical memory do not agree with each other, then there may be a "torn memory effect", causing the loss of interest in the past, the emergence of a negative attitude to history, the birth of conflicts of personality, region and state (Barclay & Koefoed, 2021; Mazur, 2019; Purdeková, 2020). Such desynchronization poses threats to the existence of a positive civic identity.

In 2016-2017, scientists of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences under the guidance of academician V.A. Tishkov in the course of field research in Southern Russia identified several types of identity represented in Krasnodar Krai. These include Kuban (Cossack), urban (cosmopolitan), Adyg (Shapsug) and coastal identities. According to research results, the students of Krasnodar Krai who concentrate in such large multiethnic cities as Krasnodar, Novorossiysk, and Sochi, are characterized by an urban or civic identity, which does not have a rigid link to historical images of the regional past, but correlates with the events of all-Russian history (Savin, 2017). A pilot study conducted by the authors of this article in 2021 among the students of the two above-mentioned universities in Krasnodar, confirms this conclusion: the results showed that Krasnodar students continue to adhere to the civic identity, as the students of Krasnodar universities are much more aware of the events of all-Russian history rather than the historical past of the regional scale (Runayev, 2021).

At the same time, a focus group study by political scientists of the Kuban State University in 2017 showed that the Kuban youth sees as the main subject of constructing regional historical memory not so much state and municipal authorities, but rather Internet communities and the family. This partly explains why young people are indifferent to such academic disciplines as "Kuban studies" and "History of Kuban» and much more interested in family stories about the region's past (Borisko & Mirontseva, 2017). However, like any other generation, young people have an "experience threshold" - a memory limit beyond which it is difficult to dive. It is shaped by the extraordinary practices experienced by a generation of predecessors (Wydra, 2018). As long as these boundary memories of the past circulate in intergenerational communication, the memory remains "alive," but over time they tend to dissipate and be forgotten, or retreat to a deeper memory layer, becoming a memorial canon - the most valuable image of the past that influences identity formation (Assmann, 2004).

With the "new wave of mediatization" caused by the emergence and expansion of the digital environment, which destroys the distance between past and present, truth and fiction, global and local (Hoskins, 2018), the risk of losing the value of historical memory as a linking resource of civic identity is increasing. Digital space contributes to memory fragmentation. It promotes many different narratives of the past, where there is no filter that lets past versions with destructive potential through (Khlevnyuk, 2019). Therefore, the degree of risk caused by the "mediatization of memory" depends on the level of trust in traditional channels of information about history. As our pilot study shows, the Internet, as part of

the digital space, occupies an intermediate position in terms of trust among student youth today: it is not yet the leader, but it is already catching up with traditional sources of historical information (Runayev, 2021).

## 7. Conclusion

The expansion of the digital environment has an ambiguous impact on the preservation of historical memory. On the one hand, its fragmentation and detachment from the "live" carriers increases, there are no filters of information, due to which different interpretations of historical events spread; on the other hand, there is an opportunity to bring digitized historical sources to young people through the usual channels of communication and to create a shared historical memory.

The digitalization of modern society causes the risks of desacralization of historical memory, the emergence of contradictory interpretations of the past images that have a conflictogenic potential. Therefore, young people, being active participants in the digital space, are capable of experiencing difficulties in the process of self-identification. Under these circumstances, there is a growing need for individuals to focus on solidarizing images of the past. With a strong civic identity underpinned by a coherent historical memory, young people are less likely to be exposed to disruptive digital content.

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