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SOCIALIZATION OF THE DIGITAL GENERATION OF
STUDENTS IN A TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

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Abstract

The authors discuss the specifics of the digital generation of university students as a special social group that exists in mixed reality and hyperconnection to the Internet, social networks and instant messengers. It is found that the digital generation of students is in rather complex and contradictory conditions of modification of traditional socialization in the context of updating norms, samples, attitudes and behavioral models mediated by the virtual environment, mastering the new sociality in consumption and the formation of a new culture of knowledge and leisure and social and interpersonal communications in the unity of reality and virtuality. The paper presents the results of an empirical study carried out within the framework of a quantitative-qualitative methodology in order to identify the riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students. The analytical assessment of the most massive responses of students to the understanding of emerging risk situations during the use of the Internet, social networks, instant messengers in education, quasi-professional and social activities is given. The risks of the time interval of the use of various digital equipment by students are presented.

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Keywords: Digital generation of students, mixed online and offline reality, new ideology of sociality, organizational and personal risks of socialization, socialization, university

1. Introduction

Major socio-economic changes caused by globalization, informatization, the exponential effect of developing science-intensive and breakthrough technologies, automation and robotics (intellectualization), virtualization of space and time, have a significant impact on the changing process of socialization of the digital generation of university students. The forms of socialization processes of young people are being modified in connection with the penetration of new digital tools into various areas of educational, professional, social and individual life. The value orientations of life are changing and all cognitive, mental and cognitive-behavioral processes of maturing subjects are being transformed.

The socialization of the digital generation of university students, proceeding under the total influence of the digit, involvement in virtual social communications sets a new pace for the development, assimilation and appropriation of modified social norms and values (acquired in online contexts), behavioral methods in mixed online and offline reality and a new ideology of sociality of the digital world. At the same time, along with positive effects (development of mobility, creativity, awareness, innovation, subjectivity), the targeted influence of socialization agents (families, educational organizations, professional community) is reduced from the standpoint of increasing spontaneity, uncontrollability of expanded information resources and the possibilities of the digital world with vague standards and the boundaries of digital reality beyond the balance of the basic values of the socio-cultural system and the norms of humane relations, the harmonization of the development of digital innovations and the traditions of social life.

The need for a special attention to this topic is caused by the consideration that in modern transforming society, digital sources and services do not optimally implement socialization filters of accumulation and transmission of socio-cultural and historical experience and the memory of mankind. They preserve diverse digital content, turning the semiosphere of the modern culture of the digital society into a giant dump (Guzhova, 2019), predetermining the loss for the digital generation of university students of culturally important meanings of cognition, action and transformation of social reality as a result of the constant digitization of actions of young people, constructing insufficiently productive socialization trajectories beyond the full implementation of the functions of social regulation (social control) of virtual reality.

The abovementioned aspects indicate the growing attention of pedagogical science and educational practice to the identification of the riskiness of the process of socialization of the digital generation of university students in a transforming society.

2. Problem Statement

The digital generation of university students (called "Net-generation", "Homo virtualis", "Homoinformaticus", "Homo cyberus", "Digital Natives", "Z-Generation", "Millennium Generation") is a special social group characterized by the peculiarity of socio-cultural and temporary living conditions (a group of those born since 2000), the presence of common features, characteristics, semantic orientations and values associated with the digital lifestyle, a special worldview and attitude to the

integration unity of reality and virtuality. This social group, having absorbed the cultural sociocode of the virtual, digital and networked world, reflects the riskiness of the socialization process in terms of:

- i. the involvement of subjects from birth in digital technologies and the inability to interact with them within the framework of moral and ethical rules operating in a traditional society;
- ii. active development of virtual communication without taking into account the development of constructive communication in the realities of life;
- iii. the formation of a modified lifestyle that is not characteristic of the previous industrial civilization and the awareness of an updated “real-virtual”, different, in the style of network thinking;
- iv. the transformation of the entire system of development and transmission of cultural and historical heritage without taking into account the value-ideological foundations formed by the past generation.

The riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students leads to qualitative shifts in already instilled norms and their replacement with new models and ideals (Altynkovich, 2011), a break in the connection between the present and the past, cultural tradition and systems of social role and status – functional expectations and the rebirth of the character of young people from the standpoint of the culture of information consumption, modification of the construction of behavioral models, organizational forms of the structure of cognition and leisure and the content of social and interpersonal communications. This predetermines the emergence of phenomena of alienation of a new generation of students from the real society, deviating socialization while “securing their own positions in the virtual world, while losing their life skills in the real world, which poses a threat to the future of mankind” (Krasnorutsky, 2017). In this regard, it is necessary to solve the scientific problem of timely substantiation of the riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students in a transforming society, which allows determining problem areas of the social formation of subjects of higher education, the reduction and localization of which will significantly increase the methodological validity and practical productivity of the professional training of young people who are aware of the potential online – and offline risks of socialization and taking them into account in their educational, social, personal and professional activities.

3. Research Questions

- i. The paper studies the issues related to the determination of the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of the digital generation of students, the identification of personal and organizational online and offline risks of socialization of the digital generation of university students.
- ii. The research object is the socialization of the digital generation of university students in a transforming society.
- iii. The research subject is the riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students from the standpoint of the guidelines for its minimization in the course of the personal-environmental interaction between the subjects of education and the digital society.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to substantiate the riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students in a transforming society and to determine the guidelines for minimizing it in the higher education system.

5. Research Methods

The authors use the following research methods: theoretical and methodological content analysis of Russian and foreign interdisciplinary literature, supplemented by synthesis, concretization, comparison and generalization; the analysis of information and educational resources, best practices on the research problem; the online survey and monitoring.

6. Findings

The modern digital generation of students can be described as a transitional (transit) generation, allocated to an independent generation, which is in rather complex and contradictory conditions of the transformation of traditional socialization and changes in the social situation of development, the formation of new relationships and ways of working with the social environment under the influence of a rapidly changing information reality (the immersion in the space of social networks, the global Internet, smartphones, tablets, etc.) and global trends in social development (Soldatova et al., 2017).

Western researchers are often critical in the assessment of the risks of socialization and way of life of a given generation. Bauerlein (2009) states that the digital age seriously overwhelms young Americans, leaves the digital generation without value orientations and threatens the future of the country. Small and Vorgan (2009) believe that in the digital generation, from birth the brain loses basic social skills through the development and adaptation to new information and communication technologies, which leads to unproductive social behavior in the realities of life. Bennett (2008) emphasizes that the values of civic duty have replaced the desire for self-presentation, self-realization, and self-actualization. Rosen (2007) suggests that digital generations are characterized by absent-mindedness, hyperactivity, attention deficits and a preference for visual symbols over logic and depth in text. According to the theory of Kato et al., (2018) and Saito (2013), due to the dissemination of information on the Internet, the lifestyle of “hikikomori” (from Japanese “being in solitude”) begins to strongly manifest itself – the voluntary stay of subjects in seclusion, unwillingness to communicate even with the closest people and refusal to fulfill the expectations of society.

Russian researchers support the conceptual ideas of the influence of “numbers” on the riskiness of the implementation of the socialization of young people and believe that: the digital generation of students is dominated by difficulties in remembering information, developing oral and written speech, insufficient development of semantic reading, scarcity of vocabulary (Zeer et al., 2021); the impoverishment of the ability to predict human behavior under conditions of uncertainty, the transformation of morality towards algorithmization, partly pragmatism was recorded (Panov & Patravov, 2020); the devaluation of the value system as a result of the exaggeration of virtual values, the formation

of consumer attitudes and the blurring of moral behavior, “Internet idiocy” or the inability to make reasonable decisions was revealed (Kasyanov et al., 2019). Growing up subjects do not always show interest in the world around them; it is important for them to stay online and be in touch. They are independent of adults in obtaining information and knowledge that are of interest to them and not always reliable (Miroshkina, 2017).

According to the analysis of interdisciplinary literature, the study revealed that the special uniqueness of the socialization of the digital generation of students in a transforming society and the emergence of new opportunities for the mental organization of maturing subjects has a positive meaning: broad awareness; instant adaptability to changing information flows and susceptibility to new information (network virtuosity); skillful possession of information and digital technologies, digital literacy; creative orientation; multitasking; active positioning of oneself in the public space and the activity of creating the information space; tolerance in interracial and interethnic interaction; the acquisition of new friends of interest, the expansion and maintenance of social ties, regardless of geographical location; acquisition of joint subjectivity; productive social integration into the information society.

At the same time, this process is not always characterized by the positive influences of the “numbers” and has a certain negative effect, the so-called online and offline risks of the socialization of the digital generation of university students in a transforming society:

- i. personal online and offline risks (alienation from the realities of life, the duration of being in the online context and virtual space; unsystematic consumption of information; dependence on gaining access to a computer system, activities on the Web; reduced criticality and systematic thinking – the phenomenon of “clip thinking”; destruction of algorithms for a holistic perception of reality, deformation of the “I-image”, mental disorders and depression; distortion of ethnicity and civic identity; reduction in the practice of live communication, accumulation of productive real life experience; “special” virtual emancipation and expansion of the boundaries of social permissibility; maladaptive patterns outside the Internet environment; “suicidal tendencies” and unconscious entry into destructive groups; psychological and physiological fatigue when addicted to the network and minimizing sleep; computer loneliness; redundancy of absorbed information flows, inability to critically understanding the objectivity and reliability of perceived facts; distortion of self-esteem and reflection; low orientation towards socio-political participation and collective social practices; high hedonistic orientation, desire to get everything possible in life);
- ii. organizational online and offline risks (competent manipulation of consciousness, the introduction of alien ideals and value orientations into the spiritual world of students; new ways of transmitting social experience by socialization agents (not always positive); expanding psychological distance between students and parents, teachers from the position of referential significance the omniscient Internet and the “digital split” of youth and adults, the competition of their lifestyles and values; obsessive mass network culture, the broadcast of fashionable patterns and norms of behavior; the growth of anti-humanity in the online communicative space; stimulation of feelings; blurring of boundaries and norms of social control).

In order to identify significant areas of riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students, the authors conducted an online survey developed and carried out within the framework of a quantitative and qualitative methodology using the Google service forms. The survey contained 16 open and closed questions. In total, 260 students (bachelor's and full-time master's programs) of three faculties/institutes (the Faculty of Philology, the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology, the Institute of Natural Science and Economics) of Orenburg State Pedagogical University participated in the survey.

One of the most important results of the study was the identification of students' opinions about the risks of the impact of digitalization on their socialization. The participants were asked “What risks do the use of the Internet, social networks and instant messengers lead to?”. Their answers were as follows: a negative impact on the worldview, thinking and views, dependence on the opinions of strangers and network culture (13.3 % of respondents); avoidance of real communication, difficulties in real communication, loss of reality and connection with society (12.7 % of respondents); dependence on social networks, the Internet, gadgets, computer games, complete absorption by the world of the Internet and removal from the reality (19.18 students); clutter with unnecessary and sometimes harmful information, the emergence of anxiety from a large flow of disinformation (8.72 % of students); health problems, bad eyesight, poor posture, inactive lifestyle (27.9 % of young people); information leakage, the possibility of personal information theft, the risk of being exposed to a virus attack, online fraud (15.1% of growing up persons) (Figure 01).

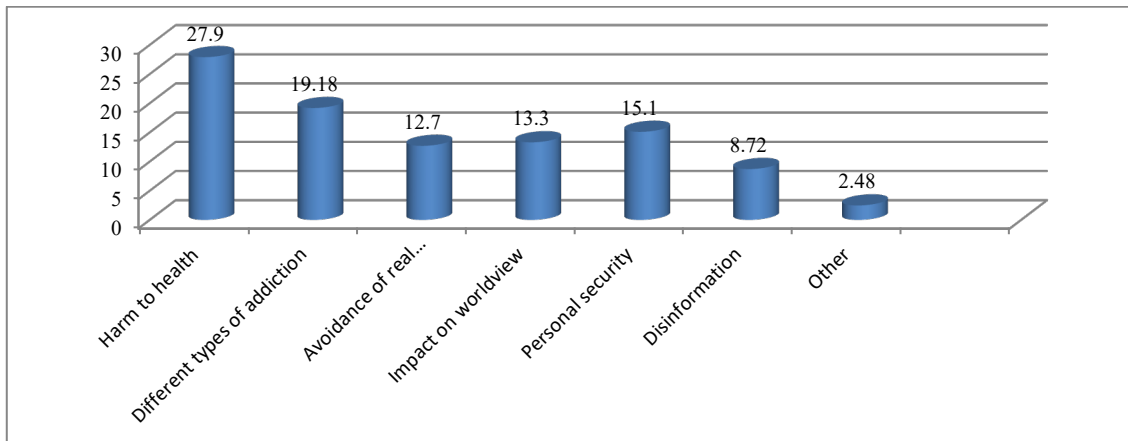


Figure 1. Risks caused by the use of the Internet, social networks and instant messengers, %

Our respondents showed in their answers a responsible approach to the risks of the use of elements of the digital environment and their consequences for socialization. As an illustration of the empirically obtained quantitative data, it is advisable to list the risks named by the students: “Gadgets distract from the necessary tasks, if you do not know how to sort information that comes from the Internet, you can mislead yourself and others. The unsecured Internet can have a detrimental effect on mental health” (Marina, the 3rd year undergraduate student, Faculty of Philology); “The ability to contact in person is deteriorating, people are disconnected” (Pavel, the 2nd year undergraduate student, Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology); “I think that the most dangerous and common risk for all students is the dependence on

gadgets. In most cases, it leads only to negative results and negative consequences in the life of every person in the modern world. The following symptoms are observed in students: they become unbalanced, nervous, irritable, aggressive, passive and unable to be adequate in everything that surrounds them” (Nikita, the 3rd year undergraduate student, Institute of Natural Science and Economics); “At first glance, the risks may seem quite harmless, like linguistic manipulation in advertisements or the incorrect use of metaphors. In the electronic environment, one cannot do without norms of behavior, as well as in real communication outside the Internet. Currently, there are many risks associated with computer-assisted environment. In turn, it can have not only a positive impact, helping people to quickly find the information they need on the Internet and learn something, but it can also have a detrimental effect on a person. The negative side of computer-assisted environment includes: possible addictions, such as gambling, Internet addiction, as well as harm to human health (impaired eyesight, information overload, fatigue, information stress)” (Anna, the 3rd year undergraduate student, Faculty of Philology).

As a part of the identification of the riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students, a question was raised related to the period of the use of various digital equipment (desktop computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone and other mobile devices) (Figure 2).

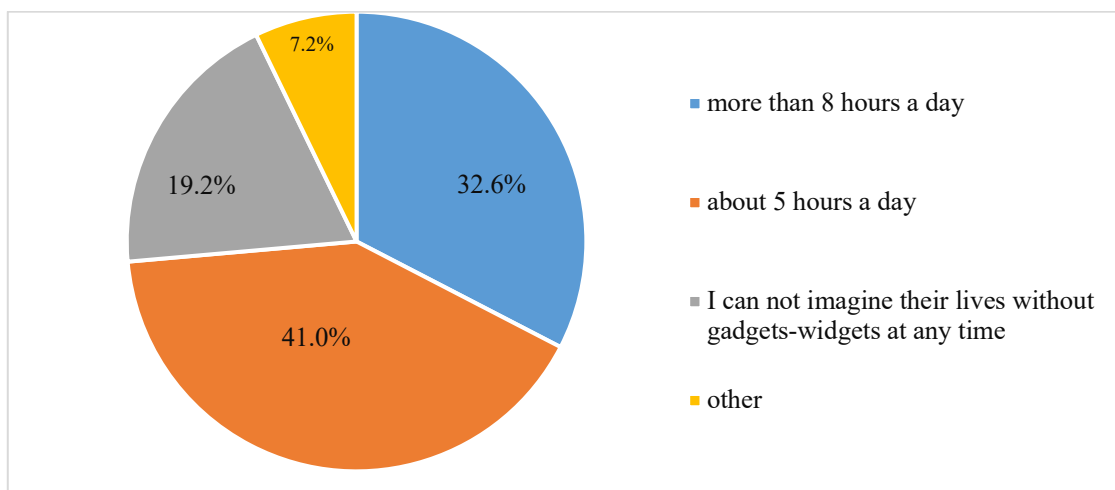


Figure 2. Time period of the use various digital equipment by students, %

According to the results of the answers, we can say that a greater number of choices prevail, indicating the preference of 41.0 % of respondents to use these devices for about 5 hours a day, compared with other options for longer "stay" of students with digital technology for more than 8 hours a day – 32.6 % of young people. 19.2 % of respondents answered that they can no longer imagine their lives without gadgets-widgets at any time (study, leisure, work, etc.). Other answers were: more than 14 hours on weekdays due to work, and up to 17 hours during exam weeks; less than 2 hours a day; 3–4 hours a day. This shows a rather risky long stay of students in contact with digital devices (as a part of instant messaging, photos; being aware of all events and news), and undoubtedly affects their health and psyche and leads to inactive lifestyle, removal from real "live" social communication and action practices.

7. Conclusion

The socialization of the digital generation of university students is a process that is significant for modern society and higher education system: active development and assimilation of knowledge related to find and productively use digital resources; formation of motives to develop constructive online network communication and real interaction in order to obtain a socially significant product (individual / collective), taking into account the social and moral norms of digital life; enriching the experience of using digital tools for cognition, communication and activity from the standpoint of reproducing the experience and culture of previous generations and innovations in the digital environment. In the conditions of a transforming society, this process is undergoing serious modifications and determines the emergence of personal and organizational risks of socialization of the digital generation of university students.

To minimize the riskiness of the process of socialization of the digital generation of university students, it is necessary to subordinate digital platforms and gadgets to the educational process of the university in accordance with the updated socialization trajectories of students and the needs of the digital economy; use new information technology approaches in the presentation of information to form student culture of usefulness and responsibility of action, culture of dialogue and interaction (in online and offline formats), culture of knowledge and continuous development in a transforming society (Pak, 2020).

Timely substantiation of the riskiness of the socialization of the digital generation of university students will predetermine the formation of a culture of responsible development and critical perception of the norms and attitudes of the digital world, value-based meaning formation and self-regulation of individual-collective functioning in the digital environment to find the optimal areas of self-realization, achieve educational, social and professional success, optimal integration into post-industrial society.

At the same time, the role of changing previous educational, sociocultural and educational practices is activated, taking into account the addition of traditional socialization with its digital version. A new version of social learning is being created, as well as the ways of transferring social experience and reproducing norms, values of modern society for the productive development of the sociocode of digital society.

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