

PAPER

SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL ATTITUDES IN VIRTUAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Abstract

The article analyzes the socio-psychological processes related to the formation of social attitudes in the virtual social environment. The study highlights the three-component (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) structure of social attitudes and the mechanisms of stereotype and prejudice formation. Based on generational theory, the socio-psychological portrait of the "Millennial" generation is outlined, and the motivational drivers (striving for success, creativocentrism) defining their activity in the file-sharing virtual world are revealed. Within the context of A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the role of the social sphere in developing personal status, self-governance, and identity is assessed as high.

Key words: social attitude, virtual social network, Millennial generation, cognitive component, affective component, stereotype, prejudice, hierarchy, identification.

Introduction

The issue of mechanisms regulating individual behavior in society has always been one of the fundamental problems in social psychology, general psychology, personality psychology, and sociology. Such an interdisciplinary approach naturally employs similar conceptual apparatuses, sometimes adopting concepts and conceptual schemes from other theories while slightly modifying the concept

or adding a different meaning or nuance to it. In our work, we rely on the concept of social attitude as accepted in social psychology: a social attitude is a personal psychological construct with a three-component structure: a cognitive component, which includes knowledge and ideas about a social object; an affective component, which reflects an emotional-evaluative attitude towards the object; and a behavioral (povedencheskiy) component, which expresses the individual's potential readiness

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to perform specific behavior regarding the object.

It is appropriate to dwell separately on types of social attitudes such as stereotypes and prejudices (predrassudki), which are considered extreme forms of attitudinal thinking.

A stereotype is a social attitude with a rigid, often impoverished cognitive component. Stereotypes can be useful and necessary as a way to economize thinking and actions in relation to fairly simple and stable objects and situations, based on typical and empirically confirmed representations, enabling adequate interaction. However, if an object requires creative perception or has changed while the ideas about it remain outdated, the stereotype becomes an obstacle in the individual's processes of interaction with reality.

A prejudice (predrassudok) is a social attitude with a distorted content in its cognitive component, as a result of which the individual perceives certain social objects in an inadequate, distorted manner. Often, such a cognitive component is linked to a strong, emotionally saturated affective component. Consequently, prejudice leads not only to an uncritical rejection of certain elements of reality but also, under specific conditions, to inappropriate actions towards them.

The main reason for the formation of prejudices lies in the underdevelopment of an individual's cognitive sphere, which results in the person not critically accepting the influence of their environment. Therefore, prejudices often arise in childhood, when a child either lacks or has almost no adequate knowledge about a particular social object, but under the influence of parents and those close to them, a specific emotional-evaluative attitude towards it forms and becomes a pattern. Later, this attitude influences the developing content of the cognitive component, playing the role of a filter that only allows information that aligns with the already formed affective evaluation of the object. Lived emotional experiences that are not sufficiently critically interpreted can also contribute to the formation or reinforcement of a prejudice. For example, some Russians who have encountered criminal groups organized along ethnic lines transfer their negative attitude to the entire people to which the members of such groups belong.

To identify the foundations of social attitude

formation, it is necessary to provide a holistic socio-psychological portrait of modern youth. For this, we utilize the generational theory of N. Howe and W. Strauss. Based on this theory, many scholars study and expand upon the description of the "Millennial" generation, which is considered contemporary youth.

This generation was born between 1983 and 2000 and is currently considered youth by sociological definition. Precisely for this reason, "Millennials" attract special attention from researchers. The historical events that influenced the formation of their social and value-based attitudes include: the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the USSR, the emergence of a number of new states and a general redistribution of the world, and numerous economic and political crises. All of this led to a sense of transience, fear of the future and the unknown, a feeling of events passing quickly, and a denial of anything being permanent. Consequently, young people do not acknowledge any ideals and generally do not respect authority and prestige (authoritative figures).

Driven by this sense of transience, "Millennials" are inclined to make decisions very quickly because they fear there might be no other opportunity. This approach fosters stability in the face of change and the ability to react to unexpected challenges, but on the other hand, excessively high decision-making speed often does not allow for a full assessment of the situation and negatively impacts the quality of the decisions made. The maturation of "Millennials" also occurred very rapidly, leading to a tendency towards fast and constant consumption and a desire for quick achievement of high results. The possibility of achieving success and financial prosperity quickly and with little effort is becoming an ideal for Millennials [5], confirmed by some examples in the society surrounding them.

Political and economic crises led to cultural and social crises, which intensified the desire of Generation X parents to protect "Millennials" from any and all risks. This resulted in the delayed maturation of modern youth and their reluctance to leave parental oversight. Thus, obtaining an education often becomes not a preparation for professional activity, but a postponement of it.

In the value system of youth, "freedom, creativity," and "entertainment" are considered

central values. For "Millennials," immediate reward takes first place.

It is worth noting that in the modern world, the abundance of opportunities for self-expression has led each "Millennial" to begin feeling unique and one-of-a-kind. As a result, they find it difficult to compromise with those around them, including employers, are unwilling to settle for less—such as a low-paying job—and consider themselves worthy of more.

"Millennials" demonstrate a high level and pace of mental development, but are distinguished by a low capacity for adaptation. The characteristics of their social intelligence also differ significantly from those of previous generations.

The attachment of "Millennials" to computer games should also be emphasized. As a rule, such games have a linear structure, a clear connection between actions and subsequent rewards or punishments, and the ability to save. They unconsciously transfer game mechanics to real life, which is why their behavior may exhibit tendencies such as: a need for clear instructions and an inability to act without oversight, a reluctance to do anything without clear benefit, an orientation towards the process of action rather than a specific result, and a tendency to withdraw if something doesn't suit them.

Modern youth witnessed the emergence, formation, and widespread adoption of computer and cloud technologies, which has made them heavily dependent on modern technology. Constant access to large volumes of open and structured information allows "Millennials" to avoid excessive deliberation and analysis, which in turn can lead to an inability to process complex information in large volumes. "Millennials" have a characteristic desire to receive information through simplified channels: images, videos, audio files.

The development of technology led to the development of the internet and the internet environment. Many of the "Millennials" social connections have shifted to the virtual realm. Online communication is more convenient, requires less effort, and is therefore often preferred over real communication. Having become accustomed to certain mechanisms of interaction on social networks, they may unconsciously transfer them to reality, which certainly affects the quality

of social interactions. Later, "Millennials" may develop a fear of personal contact and difficulties in communicating with real people.

This situation leads to a dichotomous (two-sided) contradiction: "Millennials" constantly need communication, yet at the same time, they do not know how to communicate, express their thoughts, or establish contact with people in the real world. This can lead to the disruption of some mental functions, deterioration of mental state, and difficulties in relationships with others.

Thus, we can identify the main characteristics typical of modern youth. Based on the personality structure proposed by V.N. Voronin, three groups can be distinguished: characteristics describing the individual's cognitive sphere, characteristics describing the affective sphere, and characteristics describing the individual's value-motivational sphere.

The cognitive sphere of modern youth is characterized by a high level of development of social skills within the framework of virtual communication and social networks, but in reality, they are generally socially maladaptive (unable to adapt). Young people are proactive and inclined to communicate, but prefer indirect communication—via social networks and mobile phones—because they have had access to digital technologies since childhood and understand them well. Despite the desire to communicate and be in society, they tend towards individualism; expressing their point of view and defining their place in the world is important to them. "Millennials" are inclined to make decisions very quickly for a reason, because they fear there will be no other opportunity.

The virtual environment, the volume of information, and the way it is presented have also affected the perceptual abilities of young people: they struggle to absorb complex information in large volumes; they have a characteristic desire to receive information not through textual documents, but through images, videos, and audio files. The constant use of social networks, which provide broad opportunities for self-expression while also limiting youth (e.g., 144 characters for a post), has also affected their speech abilities: many note that they cannot express their thoughts in a coherent and structured manner, cannot draw complex conclusions, and cannot speak in public.

The affective sphere is sufficiently well-developed: young people are emotionally open and inclined to initiate communication, but overall, the emphasis is on the self ("me"), which can be both a result of self-doubt and life insecurity and the influence of the information environment. The developed sense of uniqueness and being one-of-a-kind is a result of the increased opportunities for self-expression and self-presentation. However, simultaneously, the number and quality of people with whom an individual compares themselves has increased many times over, which in turn has led to the development of an inferiority complex or lack of self-confidence. In relationships with other people, they take a sufficiently selfish (egoistic) and egocentric position, preferring an avoidance strategy in conflicts because they face difficulties in finding compromise solutions when communicating with others. Family is of great importance; the concept of a "decent life" is primarily about work and family. They strive for new emotions and knowledge, but this striving is not aimed at the depth of the subject, and overall, their knowledge is rather superficial because they find it difficult to focus their attention on anything for a long time.

Overall, the "Millennial" generation is more optimistic than older generations. They were born and live in a relatively prosperous period, but this generation has also witnessed many terrorist attacks, which has shaped a sense of the world's fragility and the brevity of life. Young people possess a high level and pace of mental development but are distinguished by reduced adaptability to real and social life.

The value-motivational sphere is characterized primarily by a constant search for something new: young people dislike being engaged in the same work for long periods; they do not want to work in one place or one profession for a long time. As employees, they aspire to a flexible schedule and the possibility of remote work, so that they have sufficient time for other interests and for self-development and realization outside of work. "Millennials" expect immediate reward, instant feedback, and results for any action. Video games have conditioned them to expect clear instructions and control, so in real-world activities, they cannot act independently and are unwilling to do anything

without clear benefit. Their actions are often aimed not at a specific result but at the process itself, which is why they prefer to retreat when faced with difficulties.

Based on the socio-psychological portrait, we can identify the following substantive characteristics of modern youth:

1. Success-Orientation
2. Creativity as an obligatory trait of personality
3. Increasing self-importance and value, emphasis on one's own personality (accentuation)
4. Focus on the "Here and Now"

Let's examine these characteristics in more detail.

Success-Orientation. All social attitudes are realized in activity, especially in professional activity and social relationships. Currently, for young people, the concept of success, often linked to social status in the eyes of others, is very important, because the opinion of others matters to "Generation Y." The concept of success often includes a good job or personal business—entrepreneurship has become easier due to the development of social networks and society, and the example of people who have become rich through social networks or specific software products encourages others to replicate this social experience. Another aspect of success is the opportunity to travel with relatively flexible work conditions: this way, the individual focuses on their life and has the opportunity to engage in work they enjoy. This characteristic is felt in the social patterns and life expectations of Generation Y. The absence of success in the generally accepted sense leads to a decrease in self-esteem and personal significance, which causes frustration. Attention should also be paid to the motivation to achieve success and the aspect of self-motivation: young people consider the necessity of doing a certain task without desire as negative and therefore pay maximum attention to motivating themselves to act. Without the ability to self-motivate for necessary tasks, an individual tends to postpone them indefinitely, which leads to chronic procrastination, further decline in self-esteem, and the emergence of neuroses.

Creativity as an obligatory personality trait. The development of the internet network not only provided users with the possibility of free communication but also created more opportunities for self-expression, including creative expression.

Many earn money by selling the results of their labor online; many artists and writers have become famous for posting their work on the Network. This social experience, as in the case of startups and innovations, attracts youth with its simplicity and the opportunity to do what they love (one of the key needs of Generation Y). Creativity is becoming not a pastime for a goal or a need of any person, but something obligatory. A creative person is becoming a popular social status that allows an individual to distinguish themselves against the background of others, increase their value, and attract attention to themselves.

Increasing the importance of one's own life, emphasis on one's personality. From the portrait of the "Millennial" generation, we can see that this tendency is widespread and is one of the most important characteristics of modern youth. This can be both a cause and a consequence of the development of the internet environment, the emergence of a huge information field where a person can easily get lost and their individuality diminishes. This striving for distinction is characteristic specifically of Generation Y: it has many opportunities, high self-esteem, and it can protect its individuality. At the same time, "Gen Y" is overly self-absorbed, has reduced empathy, strives to communicate and express itself, but sometimes cannot manage it. All of their behavior is aimed at defining themselves in this world, leaving their mark, because "Gen Y" fears "disappearing" in the information and virtual space that has become a filled reality for them.

Focus on the "Here and Now." This describes modern youth's reluctance to think about tomorrow and the future. Partly, this is a consequence of the global economic and political crises that "Millennials" have experienced and are experiencing. "Millennials" strive to take everything today and distance themselves from tomorrow: this helps them overcome the frustration of an uncertain "tomorrow." Therefore, many modern youth undertake risky ventures, they are not afraid to take chances because they consciously and often subconsciously do not accept "tomorrow" and do not believe in long-term prospects. Focusing on "Today" helps them feel the fullness of life, to feel themselves and their place in this world—which is a necessary need for "Gen Y."

These characteristics, common to all social attitudes of modern youth, are reflected in the social needs considered fundamental for them.

There are various approaches to defining the concept of need, but Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains the most developed and widely recognized approach.

Maslow divided needs into five levels:

1. Physiological (Vital) Needs – the need for food, sleep, etc.
2. Safety and Security Needs – stability, order, protection, freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos.
3. Love and Belongingness Needs – family, friendship, one's circle, a reference group.
4. Esteem Needs – self-respect, respect from others, prestige and reputation, status, fame.
5. Self-Actualization Needs – the development of one's abilities.

The hierarchical system is structured such that higher-level needs cannot be met until the lower-level ones are satisfied.

Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we can conclude that social networks satisfy third and fourth-level needs. The first and second levels are satisfied by the user in reality, and if they are not sufficiently met, there is no need for the virtual realm. The need for self-actualization also falls outside the scope of virtual social networks, as people actualizing their abilities do not use virtuality as a means to satisfy needs, since all four lower levels of needs would already be satisfied according to the hierarchy.

Thus, we can identify the primary user needs satisfied within virtual social networks:

1. The need to enhance and maintain social status.
2. The need to enhance and maintain self-esteem.
3. The need for success.
4. The need for identification.

However, even when using social networks, some of these needs may not be fully satisfied by the user due to various psychological and social reasons: constant negative comparisons, external pressure, complexes, etc. If a need remains unmet for a long time or reappears after a certain period, it becomes an accentuated (intensified) need, influencing the user's perception and making its satisfaction a primary goal. Such a need may be singular, as the user spends a significant portion of their time trying to fulfill it.

Thus, the basis for the formation of social attitudes in virtual social networks is provided by accentuated needs for: enhancing and maintaining social status, enhancing and maintaining self-esteem, success, and identification. Based on the description of the holistic socio-psychological portrait of modern youth, these needs encompass all the substantive characteristics inherent in their social attitudes: success-orientation, creativity as an obligatory personality trait, increasing self-importance and value with an emphasis on one's personality; and a focus on the "here and now."

Conclusion

The article analyzes the socio-psychological mechanisms of forming social attitudes within virtual social networks. The research examines the three-component structure of social attitudes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) and identifies the impact of stereotypes and prejudices on individual perception. Based on generational theory (N. Howe and W. Strauss), the author constructs the psychological portrait of the "Millennial" generation, highlighting their specific cognitive and emotional characteristics such as success-orientation, obligatory creativity, and focus on the "present." Using A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the study concludes that social networks primarily serve to satisfy needs for social status, self-esteem, and identification. The article emphasizes that unmet, accentuated needs in the virtual environment significantly influence the formation of social attitudes in modern youth.

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