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Research article

Specifics of Information and Communication Component of Youth Political and Volunteer Leadership

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Abstract
Introduction. The research novelty consists in empirical justification of one substantive component of the theoretical model of youth leadership by performing comparative analysis of the information and communication component in political and volunteer youth leaders. **Methods**. At the current stage, the study involved 94 students of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) – representatives of socially minded youth, active in the area of political and volunteer leadership. In the process of psychodiagnostics, we used the Internet Behavior Questionnaire by A. E. Zhichkina and the methodology 'Ways of coping behavior' by R. Lazarus. Statistical processing of the data was performed using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis with a Mann–Whitney U-test in the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software. **Results and Discussion**. We identified common and specific characteristics of the information and communication component of the theoretical model of youth leadership. In the aspect of the information and communication component, youth political leaders and volunteer leaders are equally characterized by constructive coping strategies with active interaction in social media communities and creation of original content in them. Youth political leaders, in comparison with volunteer leaders, are more likely to get somewhat stuck in social media and addicted them, whereas for volunteers, social media act not as an end in itself, but rather as a tool for generating a united helping community. **Conclusions**. Research results can be used: (a) in developing recommendations for psychological support of youth political and socially oriented volunteer leadership; (b) in preparing training courses for the development of leadership qualities and effective coping skills in the conditions of potentially possible and only partly predictable stress factors of the Internet environment.

Keywords
youth leadership, leader psychology, psychology of elites, social and political leadership, socially oriented leadership, agent of politics, leadership models, volunteer

Highlights
➢ From the viewpoint of the information and communication component, youth political leaders and volunteer leaders are equally characterized by constructive coping strategies, high social

media activity, commitment to creating constructively interacting communities, and generation of original content.
➢ Youth political leaders, in comparison with socially oriented volunteer leaders, are more inclined to be active on social media and have a certain narcissistic dependence on them.
➢ For the volunteers, social media rather represent a tool for quick provision of information to the audience and conscious creation of a united value space for volunteering.

For citation

Introduction

The relevance of research on psychological specifics of youth political and socially oriented leaders is explained by an increasing role of youth communities in the development of modern civil society, implementation of social and economic innovations, intensification of technological progress, associated with further development of the country under the conditions of coping with a new global crisis. Youth activists need to be able to adapt to a rapidly changing social situation, to function effectively in the conditions of uncertainty and multitasking, to possess high tolerance for stress and resistance to risk-taking; at the same time, they need to broadcast the ideas of solidarity, humanity, and altruism through socially significant and international projects. In this regard, it becomes increasingly important to develop a managerial component among young leaders for improving the efficiency of their work with different population groups (Zyryanov, Aver'yanova, & Aldoshenko, 2016).

Modern leadership models regard this construct in terms of one of three concepts: (a) attributive leadership; (b) charismatic leadership; (c) transformational leadership (Sverdyuk & Kukartsev, 2013). The concept of transformational leadership appears to be the most promising in case of gradually increasing mindfulness of young activists for finding creative solutions to the problems, arising in crisis situations, and acquisition of required communication skills (Galkina & Pyatko, 2016; Galkina, 2020). In the scope of transformational leadership, various authors propose leadership models, which describe individual parts of this concept. For example, A. Keikha et al. propose a multicomponent conceptual model of intellectual leadership, comprised of rational, emotional, spiritual, and collective components (Keikha, Hoveida, & Yaghoubi, 2017). V. V. Belov develops a functional and structural model of a destructive leader personality in the context of his or her low communication literacy (Belov, 2018). A cognitive experimental model of leadership reflects a correlation between transformational leadership and behavioral coping, as well as relative independency of leadership in the context of rational thinking styles (Cerni, Curtis, & Colmar, 2014).

Based on the integration of various approaches to social and psychological analysis of the image of a modern elite member, we developed a theoretical model of youth leadership, which earlier has been described in detail from the position of its integrity due to interconnection of its relatively autonomous structural components (Karabuschenko, Shtyrev, & Petrovskaya, 2021). The model of youth leadership includes the following components:

1. *Information and communication component*, which includes communicative and conflictological competence of an individual, ability to navigate in the information space, to be open to new

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knowledge and discussion of acute social problems with a big audience; readiness to shape the public opinion and affect the sentiments of certain social groups; understanding how to foster dialogue with representatives of various social, ethnocultural, political, and other strata.

2. *Social and psychological component*, which reflects elitological competence of an individual, stamina, well-developed emotional intelligence, gumption, and creative thinking.

3. *Organizational and managerial component*, which reveals an individual's ability to manage others, to exercise one's leadership skills, and ability to exert constructive influence on mindset formation of the modern youth by emphasizing the importance of universal human values, standards of behavior, and moral foundations of the society.

4. *Ethnocultural component*, which includes an individual's openness to multicultural dialogue, knowledge about traditions of other nations and ethnic groups, ability to recognize emotional states in representatives of various nations, religious tolerance and understanding of cultural codes, and ability to foster constructive cooperation taking into account ethnopsychological characteristics of all the parties involved.

5. *Value-semantic component*, which reveals maturity of the mindset of modern youth with regard to philanthropy, selfless individual and collective activities for socially beneficial purposes for the good of other people and the society; ability to make informed moral choices; significance of universal human values, standards of behavior and moral foundations of an individual and the society; experience of existential meanings of volunteering.

The authors of the paper carry out empirical study of the information and communication component of the theoretical model of youth leadership by comparing youth political and volunteer leaders as active representatives of modern civil society.

Certain aspects, which we included in the information and communication component of the theoretical model of youth leadership, have been partially addressed by other authors in the analysis of political and socially oriented volunteer leaders. For example, when E. V. Lazutkina speaks about communication, she sees the most important function of opinion leaders in their ability to influence the information agenda (Lazutkina, 2016). It is demonstrated that professional competences of a youth political leader should advisably include the ability to analyze recent news and create a novel information product as a result of this analysis (Sveshnikova, 2017).

G. V. Denisova notes the importance of improving skills of adequate cooperation with the media in the context of intercultural dialogue (Denisova, 2020). Shaping of news agenda by the activists is the most important tool of the leader, who can only be efficient in case of adequate analysis and consideration of sociocultural aspects of the problem at hand (Molchanov, Almazova, & Poskrebysheva, 2018). Youth political and socially oriented leaders inevitably face a lengthy process of informatization of the multinational Russian society, which is associated with the difficulty in transition of different social groups from traditional media to the modern information space (Kuznetsova & Kulikov, 2018).

A number of authors study the problems of forming a healthy competition among young leaders, the absence of which in the modern information space negatively affects their communicative skills (Zhdanova, 2020; Belyakova, 2017; Sidorov & Dubovitskii, 2017). It is demonstrated that, as the public opinion makes its transition to the Internet, a young leader faces such challenges, as making correct interpretation of the news agenda taking into account sociocultural problems and offsetting prejudiced bullying (Makarova, Makarova & Mahrina, 2016). Authors identify young leader's suppressed motivation to interact with the community online and offline because of

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potential cyberbullying (Leshchenko, Sokolova, & Teplova, 2019; Khlomov, Davydov, & Bochaver, 2019), propensity for hypocrisy, and rough treatment of other people in the offline world (Bendas & Shipulya, 2016). It is found out that the user of social media gains access to new forms of aggressive behavior as an attribute of manipulation (Marín-López, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, Hunter, & Llorent, 2020), which creates the need for young leaders to develop an adequate feedback (Bakshutova & Rulina, 2019).

From the viewpoint of the information and communication component, the following aspects have been studied: (a) factors of a trusting online relationship with the audience (Bicheva & Filatova, 2017); (b) tasks of creating and maintaining the image of a young leader in the public mind (Erofeeva, 2018); (c) difficulties in identifying a universal set of leadership image features in the Internet space (Mitina & Petrenko, 2018); (d) readiness to be creative on the Internet as the main channel of interaction with the young audience to increase its loyalty (Golikova, 2018); (e) increasing loyalty of the audience through immediate online communication of the leader in accordance with current expectation of the Internet users (Peck & Hogue, 2018). Authors also examined 'likes' as a way of receiving gratification and recognition, which function as an indicator of the individual's status (Farwaha & Obhi, 2019), as well as individual's popularity on the Internet (Martinez-Pecino & Garcia-Gavilán, 2019).

It is demonstrated that increased attention of the leader to the subject of interaction allows to improve communicative skills of the former and represents a tool for effective leadership development (Arendt, Verdorfer, & Kugler, 2019). Moreover, it is revealed that team performance is correlated with the general background of leader's mood (Shemla, Kearney, Wegge, & Stegmann, 2020). It is noted that the information space of social media significantly increases the audience that follows a novice leader and to a certain extent promotes narcissistic personality disorder (Agadullina, 2015); in its turn, narcissism of young leaders can affect the reaction to and assessment of their actions by their followers (Barry, Chaplin, & Grafeman, 2006). As demonstrated by foreign researchers, negative reaction of leaders to the assessment of their efforts can detrimentally affect their identity (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012) and further promotion as a result of ignoring the opinions of the immediate circle and absence of an adequate feedback (Liao, Zhou, Guo, & Li, 2019).

It can be seen that despite the availability of research on individual aspects of the information and communication component of youth leadership, comparative characteristics of this sphere in individuals that make important political and socially significant decisions remain underexplored.

Practical significance of the results of this study consists in the possibility of using obtained data to create conditions for a constructive dialogue, as well as to develop programs for psychological support of young leaders and volunteers in order to increase their communicative and conflictological competence, their ability to navigate in the information space, to be open to new knowledge and its verification, and to discuss acute social problems on various platforms.

Hence, *the goal* of our study at the current stage of research is comparative analysis of the information and communication component in political and volunteer youth leaders.

In the scope of the study, we formulated the following *hypotheses:*
1. Representatives of socially minded youth, active in the area of political and socially oriented volunteer leadership, can be characterized by common and specific manifestations of the information and communication component of the theoretical model of youth leadership.
2. Youth political leaders, in comparison with volunteer leaders, are more likely to be active on social media.

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Methods

The study involved anonymous volunteers among young men and women, in total 94 students of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (Russia, Moscow) – representatives of socially minded youth, active in the area of political (46 respondents) and socially oriented volunteer leadership (48 respondents). The age of respondents in both samples ranged between 21 and 26 years old, with an average value of 22 years old. Primary data were collected using psychodiagnostic methods, which included the Internet Behavior Questionnaire (A. E. Zhichkina) and the methodology 'Ways of coping behavior' by R. Lazarus (Zhichkina, 2004; Lazarus, 1993). For statistical processing of research results, we successively used descriptive statistics and comparative analysis (Mann–Whitney U-test in the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software).

Results and Discussion

Based on comparative analysis of two samples using the Internet Behavior Questionnaire by A. E. Zhichkina, we identified statistically significant differences along the scales 'Activity in Action' and 'Internet-Dependent Behavior'. Along the first scale, we observe high activity of future political leaders (Av = 48.04) compared to representatives of volunteer leadership (Av = 36.65), the statistics of Mann–Whitney U-test equals 1093 (at $p = 0.031$). Overall, politically oriented young people are less inclined to be committed to social roles; they can go beyond existing patterns and requirements, therefore for them it is easier to adapt to various Internet communities and to create new communication platforms. On the other hand, volunteers are rather focused on fulfilling their own social function, recognize their place and value in the society; they spend more time on social media dedicated to volunteering, hence their activity is less diverse, compared to the activity of political leaders.

Differences along the scale of 'Internet-Dependent Behavior' are also statistically significant (U = 1112 at $p = 0.020$). Specifically, young political leaders are more prone to Internet addiction (Av = 48.51) than volunteers (Av = 36.23). Apparently, this is explained by the fact that future politicians expand their social circle, attend various platforms of Internet communication, create their own channels, and actively promote them. The goal of this type of leaders is expanding their loyal audience and forming their own team of supporters. By contrast, volunteers carry out most of their activities offline, they are characterized by teamwork orientation, readiness to help people in dire need of assistance, and ability to perform tasks set by higher management.

No statistically significant differences were observed along the scale 'Activity in the Perception of Alternatives' (U = 1060 at $p = 0.059$), but at the level of trends we can say that the desire to obtain new Internet experience is more characteristic of youth political leaders (Av = 47.19) than of volunteer ones (Av = 37.40). Under uncertainty, achievement of one's ego ideal does not regulate individual's behavior. Respondents of both groups find it important to search for various ways of interaction and to gain unique communication experience in various Internet communities.

In the Internet environment, characterized by a high level of uncertainty, as well as under the conditions of high competition, individuals experience psychological stress, and only by overcoming it they can achieve desired results. However, stress factors that arise in the communication process interfere with constructive cooperation. Individuals who are fulfilling their leadership potential often face obstacles that require additional psychological resources to overcome them.

The use of constructive coping strategies allows an individual to overcome stress and to move

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forward towards the goal. In light of this, we used the methodology 'Ways of coping behavior' by R. Lazarus to study the information and communication component of the theoretical model of youth leadership. Comparative analysis of two samples did not reveal any statistically significant differences, but on the level of trends, individual scales demonstrate results that can serve as starting points for deeper analysis of identified specifics. Along the scale of 'Self-Control', indicators of youth political leaders were slightly higher (Av = 43.62) in comparison with volunteer leaders (Av = 40.57). Without any doubt, in politics leaders are expected to have significant control over their feelings and actions, ability to regulate their emotional states. Young politicians try to control their expression and hold back (hide) their emotions. However, being in the process of their professional becoming, they do not use the strategy of self-control too often (U = 921 at p = 0.562). It would be reasonable to compare the indicators of self-control in youth leaders and mature adult leaders – this will define the milestones for future research.

The scale 'Acceptance of Responsibility' does not demonstrate any statistically significant differences either (U = 924 at p = 0.543), but this strategy is more expressed in youth political leaders (Av = 43.69) than in volunteers (Av = 40.50). Apparently, this trend is explained by the fact that youth political leaders are more inclined to recognize their leading role in the society and to make efforts in order to overcome difficulties. They focus on searching for solutions to the problems, weigh the alternatives, and find optimal ways of coping by using compromise strategies as they gain political experience.

The readiness of young political leaders to accept responsibility is also conformed by the scale of 'Problem Solving Planning' (U = 955 at p = 0.373). Youth political leaders focus their attention on the analysis of arising problems, selection of strategies for solving them, development of an incremental program, and visualization of desired results. Therefore, a coping strategy of planning is more often used by young politicians (Av = 44.49) than by volunteers (Av = 39.80). Volunteers are more oriented towards working in a team and performing the tasks at hand, which somewhat decreases their level of personal responsibility.

We did not detect any statistically significant differences along the scale of 'Positive Reassessment of the Situation' (U = 797 at p = 0.580), but the use of this strategy is higher in the group of volunteers (Av = 43.38) compared with youth political leaders (Av = 40.45). Obtained results are probably explained by the fact that for volunteers it is more typical to encounter problems that occur to complete strangers, along with their grief, suffering, and emotions. By providing assistance and support, volunteers gain necessary experience that helps in their personal development and shaping of a sustainable mindset.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of obtained results of the performed empirical study, the following *conclusions* can be drawn:

1. The *common features* between two studied groups have been demonstrated. Both groups are characterized by high activity on social media, readiness for information exchange, organization of task-specific communities, and creation of original content to attract the audience that shares the attitudes of the blogger. In the Internet environment, representatives of both groups are inclined to use coping strategies aimed at reducing psychological stress.

2. The *characteristic features* have been identified. Youth political leaders demonstrate greater Internet activity, which is explained by the fact that representatives of this group wish to generate

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and broadcast their ideas, cover pressing political, economic, and social issues, create and promote original content, expand the audience of their supporters, etc. Therefore, propensity for Internet-addictive behavior is higher among the respondents of this group compared with the volunteers, for whom social media represent a resource for quick provision of information and creating a community of people, who are passionate about volunteering, share the interests and values of this circle.

Respondents of both groups use various strategies of coping with stress and uncertainty. Youth political leaders are more oriented towards accepting responsibility for their words and actions, they are capable of controlling and holding down their emotions in provocative and conflict situations. When they solve problems, they do this according to a plan, determine stages and individual steps to overcome difficulties. For young socially oriented volunteer leaders, it is more typical to encounter human need and suffering; they prefer the strategy of positive reassessment as they gain necessary life experience in various situations.

3. *The research prospects* consist in further examination of all components of the youth leadership model using members of political and volunteer elite of Russia as an example. Research results can be used in developing recommendations for psychological support of youth political and socially oriented volunteer leadership, in preparing individual programs and training courses for the development of leadership qualities and effective coping skills in the conditions of potentially possible and hardly predictable stress factors of the Internet environment.

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N. B. Karabuschenko developed methodology and design of theoretical and empirical research, elaborated the general concept of the research, prepared the original draft of the manuscript.
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M. M. Shtyrev prepared empirical part of the research, performed statistical processing of the data.

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