

## Adolescent Deviance in Online Communities

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** The article explores the characteristics of adolescent deviant behavior in online communities. This study is the first to examine the specific role dispositions of adolescents prone to online deviance. We analyzed the mechanisms through which real-world personalities transform in the digital environment, leading to the development of both normative and deviant digital identities. Our research focus was on teenagers, as they represent the most vulnerable group, with their value systems undergoing reformation in the real world while their new social experiences are shaped online. **Methods.** In the study, which involved a survey of 158 adolescents in both real and virtual spaces, the following methodologies were used: "Propensity for bullying in the Internet space" (Luchinkina, 2019); individual personality orientation diagnostic methodology (modified by N.P. Fetiskin); locus of role conflict diagnostic methodology by P. P. Gornostai. **Results.** Adolescents with an egoistic orientation are more prone to engage in online deviant behaviors such as harassment. Conversely, adolescents with a cooperative orientation are less likely to exhibit deviant behaviors, including verbal insults, harassment, disclosure of personal information, threats of physical violence, and social isolation. The desire for new online experiences, combined with a reduced interest in real-life interactions, contributes to both socially acceptable and deviant online roles. In contrast, adolescents with a marginalized orientation are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors such as harassment, insults, using fake names and profiles, social isolation, disclosing personal information, and making threats of violence. Furthermore, a correlation has been established between the locus of role conflict and specific forms of online deviant behavior. **Discussion.** Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping individual online

behavior patterns, influencing attitudes, values, and behavioral responses. Online activity can range from normative to deviant, with each influencing cognitive processes and online behavior.

### Keywords

adolescent, deviant behavior, cyber-aggression, personality traits, real and virtual spaces, role dispositions, locus of role conflict, Internet space, insults, social isolation

### For citation

Luchinkina, A. I., Yudeeva, T. V., Zhikhareva, L. V., Luchinkina, I. S., & Andreyev, A. S. (2024). Adolescent Deviance in Online Communities. *Russian Psychological Journal*, 21(4), 34–44. <https://doi.org/10.21702/zdz9bs08>

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### Introduction

The integration of information and communication technologies into all aspects of life marks a significant stage in scientific and technological progress. As communication processes become digitized, individuals are increasingly engaging with digital environments on a deeper level. This engagement may lead to the emergence of a new superstructure: the digital personality, which could either be a persona created by a real person or one generated by artificial intelligence, functioning as a chatbot and interacting with other entities in the digital realm (Brykov, 2023; Grebenyuk, 2020). Both the virtual persona created by a human and the digital persona generated by AI remain largely unexplored.

The research problem lies in identifying the mechanisms through which the real personality transforms in the digital environment, focusing on the mechanisms responsible for the development of both normative and deviant digital superstructures. Adolescents are the most vulnerable group, with their value systems being restructured in the real world, while, due to their age, they are simultaneously forming new social experiences in the online space. The desire to explore new experiences leads adolescents to experiment not only with socially acceptable roles but also with deviant ones (Soldatova, Rasskazova & Chigarkova, 2020; Sobkin & Fedotova, 2021). The novelty of the research lies in uncovering the connection between adolescents' deviant online behavior and their individual personality orientation, as well as the characteristics of role conflict.

The article **aims** to explore the role-specific dispositions of adolescents inclined toward deviant online behavior.

Research on adolescent deviant behavior remains inconclusive, with no consensus on its causes, forms, mechanisms, prevention strategies, or specific manifestations in the online environment. Additionally, there is no widely accepted framework for

identifying the personal attitudes of adolescents prone to deviant online behavior. While adolescence is often characterized by unstable relationships and internal conflicts, these factors alone cannot fully account for why some adolescents engage in destructive behavior (Bogdanovich & Delibalt, 2020; Bogomazova, 2022; Lazouski, 2020; Ryabov & Bochenkova, 2021; Solomatina, 2021; Fontalova & Turganova, 2019; Skornyakova, 2022; Ralnikova, 2015).

Modern psychology offers various perspectives on the phenomenon of deviant personality behavior. One approach views deviation as the result of stress-induced disruptions in mental adaptation, which activate defense mechanisms. The key concept in this approach is the 'adaptive mental boundary', which defines the limits of an individual's ability to adapt to external changes without compromising mental and physical health. Deviation, in this context, is seen as a disruption in the dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment (Rasskazova et al., 2019). Deviant adaptation may manifest as the fulfillment of personal needs without regard for the expectations and needs of others (Zhikhareva, Luchinkina & Kolchik, 2021; Zhikhareva, Luchinkina & Kolchik, 2021; Serkina & Yudeeva, 2023; Agosta, 2010; Dvoryanchikov, 2020; Eshelman, 2018).

While existing theoretical approaches are valuable, it is important to note that they are primarily designed for adults who have already developed psychological adaptation mechanisms and social experience. Consequently, adults tend to exhibit protective responses in times of crisis. In contrast, adolescents have underdeveloped defense mechanisms. Their violations of social norms may stem from insufficient understanding of these norms or a lack of a supportive environment. Unlike adults, where deviant behavior often results from failed adaptation, in children and adolescents, deviations themselves can create adaptation difficulties and disrupt the socialization process.

Special attention should be given to studying adolescents' adaptation processes in online communities, where teenagers often adopt non-normative roles due to the lack of established and clearly defined social norms. Internet activity serves as a mechanism for these adolescents' inclusion in the online community (Alekhin & Grekova, 2019; Zekeryaev, 2019; Luchinkina & Fazilova, 2021; Soldatova, Rasskazova & Chigarkova, 2020; Soldatova & Yarmina, 2019). In our study, Internet activity refers to the extent of a teenager's desire to 'settle' in virtual space. It includes the amount of time spent online, the number of online friends, and the activity level of their page (such as visits, post updates, and views).

## Methods

The study was conducted in both real and digital environments. The following psychodiagnostic techniques were used: «Propensity for bullying in the Internet space» (Luchinkina, 2019); individual personality orientation diagnostic methodology (modified by N. P. Fetiskin); locus of role conflict diagnostic methodology by P. P. Gornostai.

A total of 158 adolescents, aged 14 to 16 years, participated in the study.

## Results

It was found that most adolescents do not exhibit high levels of online deviant behavior.

We measured the averages for each form of online behavior, which are presented in the table below (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Mean values of the study results on forms of online deviant behavior (cyberbullying)*

Type of online deviant behavior	Mean value	Form of online deviant behavior	Mean value
Cyberstalking	5.21	Use of a fake name	5.24
Verbal insults	5.2	Disclosure of personal information	4.95
Harassment	4.86	Social isolation	5.03
Slander	5.24	Threats of physical violence	4.95

The forms of deviant behavior, such as the use of a fake name and slander, received higher scores, with an average of 5.24 out of 15. However, the averages for all other forms of online deviant behavior do not exceed one-third of the maximum possible score. Overall, the data suggests that teenagers tend to avoid maladaptive online behaviors and are not generally predisposed to cyber aggression, bullying, shaming, etc. Nevertheless, some individuals exhibit higher levels of deviant behavior.

The results of the adolescents' personality interactive orientation revealed the following distribution: 16% of respondents showed a high level of egoistic orientation, 65% had an average level, and 19% displayed a low level. In terms of cooperative orientation, 25% exhibited a high level, 56% had a medium level, and 19% showed a low level. For marginal orientation, the distribution was as follows: 4% at a high level, 33% at a medium level, and 63% at a low level. Analysis of the prevailing types of orientation showed that the cooperative type was dominant in 45% of adolescents, the egoistic type in 37%, the marginal type in 14%, and 4% had an undefined primary type of orientation.

The research presented in this paper identifies the specific features of adolescent role-playing behavior associated with deviant online activity. The internal locus of role conflict, manifested in adolescents' desire for self-assertion and the assertion of their own identity, even when in conflict with social roles, is closely tied to their need for independence and self-expression (Luchinkina, 2022). An external locus of role conflict

was identified in 34% of respondents. Thus, role behavior aligns with social expectations, and when it contradicts individual identity, it leads to the formation of internal conflict. In 29% of adolescents, no clear predominance of either type of conflict locus was observed.

### ***Correlation analysis***

Correlation analysis of the study results showed a statistically significant positive direct correlation between egoistic orientation and harassment ( $r = 0.199$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, it can be inferred that individuals with a higher level of egoistic orientation are more likely to engage in harassment in virtual spaces.

There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the 'Cooperative orientation' scale and the 'Verbal insults' scale ( $r = -0.252$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The correlation is negative, indicating that the higher the level of cooperative orientation, the less likely a person is to engage in offensive behavior in virtual space.

There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the 'Cooperative Orientation' scale and the 'Harassment' scale ( $r = -0.241$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This inverse correlation suggests that the higher the level of cooperative orientation, the less likely a person is to exhibit tendencies toward harassment in virtual spaces.

A statistically significant negative correlation was also found between the 'Cooperative orientation' scale and the 'Disclosure of personal information' scale ( $r = -0.245$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, adolescents with a pronounced cooperative orientation are less likely to publicly disclose personal information in virtual space. An inverse correlation was found between the 'Cooperative orientation' scale and the 'Social isolation' scale ( $r = -0.273$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This negative relationship suggests that the higher the level of cooperative orientation, the less likely a person is to exhibit tendencies toward social isolation in virtual spaces.

There is a statistically significant negative correlation between the 'Cooperative Orientation' scale and the 'Threats of Physical Violence' scale ( $r = -0.242$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that individuals with higher levels of cooperative orientation are less likely to exhibit a propensity for making threats of physical violence in virtual spaces.

A significant positive correlation was identified between the 'Marginal Orientation' scale and the 'Cyberstalking' scale ( $r = 0.361$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that adolescents with a pronounced marginal orientation are more likely to engage in stalking behavior in virtual spaces. A statistically significant positive correlation was also found between the 'Marginal Orientation' scale and the 'Verbal Insults' scale ( $r = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that individuals with higher levels of marginal orientation are more likely to exhibit a tendency toward using verbal insults in virtual spaces.

A significant positive correlation was identified between the 'Marginal Orientation' scale and the 'Use of a Fake Name' scale ( $r = 0.327$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that adolescents with a pronounced marginal orientation are more likely to use a fake name in virtual spaces.

A statistically significant positive correlation was found between the 'Marginal Orientation' scale and the 'Disclosure of Personal Information' scale ( $r = 0.242$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that individuals with a pronounced marginal orientation are more likely to disclose the personal information of others in virtual spaces. Additionally, a significant positive correlation was established between the 'Marginal Orientation' scale and the 'Social Isolation' scale ( $r = 0.362$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that the higher an individual's level of marginal orientation, the more likely they are to exhibit a tendency toward social isolation in virtual spaces.

A significant positive correlation was identified between the 'Marginal Orientation' scale and the 'Threats of Physical Violence' scale ( $r = 0.402$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that individuals with a predominant marginal orientation are more likely to exhibit a propensity for issuing threats of physical violence in online spaces.

A significant positive correlation was identified between the 'Locus of Role Conflict' scale and the 'Slander' scale ( $r = 0.323$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that individuals with an internalized locus of role conflict are more likely to experience vilification on social networks compared to those with an externalized locus of role conflict.

A significant positive correlation was identified between the 'Locus of Role Conflict' scale and the 'Threats of Physical Violence' scale ( $r = 0.323$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that individuals with an internal locus of role conflict are more likely to exhibit tendencies toward threats of physical violence on social networks compared to those with an external locus of role conflict.

## Discussion

The conclusion regarding the prevalence of high levels of cooperative or egoistic orientation among internet-active adolescents is open to debate. Considering adolescents' tendency to form groups in the real world, the phenomenon of isolation in the online environment presents an important area of research interest.

In studies examining adolescents' communicative activities in online spaces, it is noted that communication is the leading activity during adolescence. It is important for adolescents to expand their social circles and gain the approval of their peers, as well as establish authority among them (Soldatova et al., 2020; Luchinkina, 2022).

Egoistic orientation on the Internet, according to researchers, may be linked to the developmental characteristics of adolescence. During this stage, adolescents begin to actively explore their identity and emphasize their individuality. As their personal needs rapidly expand, this drives them to seek greater satisfaction of these needs (Bogdanovich & Delibalt, 2020). Moreover, current research emphasizes the impact of egocentrism on the development of certain difficulties in interactions with peers. Difficulties in peer interactions may manifest as a need to protect oneself from mistreatment by others (Brykov, 2023; Luchinkina & Fazilova, 2021). Marginal orientation, in turn, despite the emotional characteristics of this age, is less typical for adolescence.

An analysis of adolescent online behavior patterns showed a nearly equal distribution between conformists and non-conformists. The study confirms that an internalized locus of role conflict is correlated with manifestations of online deviant behavior, including slander and threats of physical violence. This indicates that role dispositions are crucial in shaping such behavior in adolescents. Данное исследование опирается на работы современных авторов (Serkina & Yudeeva, 2023), которые подчеркивают влияние ролевых диспозиций на онлайн-девиацию. It is also important to consider cultural factors that influence individual online behavioral traits, including attitudes, values, and behavior patterns (Lazouski, 2020; Ryabov & Bochenkova, 2021). Users' online behavior spans from socio-culturally normative to deviant, which influences their cognitive processes and actual actions (Zhikhareva, Luchinkina & Kolchik, 2021). The study confirms the interdependence between individual personality traits and online activity, as well as the influence of context and multiple online identities on online behavior (Fontalova & Turganova, 2019).

The behavior associated with roles is shaped by social expectations and the drive to meet them (Lazouski, 2020). In our view, role disposition refers to a set of social roles specific to an individual, developed through internalization, consolidation, and growth within activity and interaction.

The practical significance of the study lies in the effective identification of role dispositions in adolescents prone to online deviance. By considering the unique characteristics of adolescence, as well as contradictions in interpersonal relationships and internal conflicts, the study provides insights into how a maladaptive social role is formed.

## **Conclusion**

1. Online deviant behavior in the form of harassment is characteristic of adolescents with an egoistic orientation. This may be due to the fact that individuals with an egoistic orientation seek to fulfill their personal needs for self-assertion at the expense of others. One deviant way of achieving this satisfaction in virtual reality is through harassment. Furthermore, the nature of social networks allows for partial anonymity and the complete absence of physical contact, which in turn provides an easy way to fulfill self-assertion needs.

2. The opposite trends are observed in adolescents with a cooperative orientation. These adolescents do not exhibit forms of deviant online behavior such as verbal insults, harassment, disclosure of personal information, social isolation, or threats of violence. Adolescents with a cooperative orientation aim to maintain constructive relationships with others and seek to form new social connections. They are characterized by empathy and an interest in collaborative activities. These traits influence their choice of adaptive behavioral strategies in both real and virtual spaces.

3. The results of the study indicate a correlation between marginal orientation and

specific forms of online deviant behavior, including harassment, insults, the use of the fake names and profiles, social isolation, disclosure of personal information, and threats of physical violence. Key characteristics of personalities with marginal orientation include infantilism, impulsivity, lack of self-control, and imitateness. These personality traits may contribute to the development of maladaptive behavior.

4. The correlation between the locus of role conflict and forms of online deviant behavior was identified. Individuals with an internalized locus of role conflict are more likely to engage in deviant form of behaviors such as slander and threats of physical violence. These individuals tend to assert their role identity, even when it contradicts societal expectations.

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Received: 22.04.2024

Revised: 26.05.2024

Accepted: 12.08.2024

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### **Conflict of Interest Information**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.