Mechanisms of Social Identity Formation: the Media and the Higher Education System

Irina Akimova
National Research University
Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU)
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: akimova@bmstu.ru

Irina Motorina
National Research University
Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU)
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: iemotorina@bmstu.ru

Anna Popova
National Research University
Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU)
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: popovaaa@bmstu.ru

Anna Chernysheva
National Research University
Bauman Moscow State Technical University (BMSTU)
Moscow, Russia
E-mail: chernysheva@bmstu.ru

Abstract—**The article deals with the problem of identity formation as one of the mechanisms of socialization and acculturation of personality. This work shows identification mechanisms in the framework of socialization. It defines the place and role of the media in the process of socialization and identification of the younger generation. The system of higher education is analyzed as a means of material and status self-determination of youth. The purpose of the article is to identify the problems of the formation of the sociocultural identity of the individual, the conditions and mechanisms of the identification process itself in our country, to determine the impact of the Internet on the young people's identity.**

Keywords—socialization; youth; identity; media; self-determination; higher education; socio-humanitarian component of education; computer-mediated communication

I.   INTRODUCTION

An important task of any society is the reproduction of sociality, and the mechanism of this process is socialization, especially the socialization of young people. It is in young ages that the establishment of social takes place in the individual through the assimilation of the system of values and traditions. The type of personality desired by society is being formed. But the formation of a certain type of personality does not explain the meaning of socialization. For society itself, it is very important that young people, assimilating certain standards of behavior and thinking, do not lose their inherent innovative, creative potential. After all, this will contribute to the development of society itself.

Student youth is a special socio-demographic group, similar to the social group of intellectuals and specialists in activities, interests, and orientation. It is in the process of becoming socially mature, and it has such features as social mobility, social activity, a tendency towards innovation, increased adaptive capacity, the need for self-identification and self-realization.

The main practical problem of socialization is to predict the social development of young people. What value orientations they prefer to choose, which in their behavior can potentially threaten society, and which should be supported as innovative [1]. In this process, the position of socialization agents is very important. Higher education is one of the influential agents of socialization. It is in higher education that a person receives professional knowledge and in many ways forms his social and cultural identity.

In recent years, in studies on youth, special attention is paid to changes in the system of value orientations, life goals and plans of modern students in the direction of greater pragmatization, "adaptation" to the conditions of the social environment. Mercantilism and the focus on the implementation of consumer behavior become dominant in most of the student youth under the influence of Western living standards, while higher education is considered by the majority as a means of material and status self-determination. Changes in Russian society associated with general economic and socio-cultural globalization also influence the socialization process of the younger generation.

II.   SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION

The identity formation is one of socialization and acculturation mechanisms of the individual, when the values, norms and ideals of certain sociocultural groups to which an individual belongs or wants to belong, are learned as his own. This is a long and, unfortunately, not always regulated process, the results of which may not always satisfy a particular society.

The identification mechanism is, first of all, an assessment of the existing circumstances of life or a specific situation that have become problematic, uncertain or unknown for the young person, so he relates them to some ideal ideas that determine the behavior that should be or is desired, possible or already happened.

In the modern multi-polar and multicultural world, the search for the identity becomes the most urgent requirement for survival and adaptation to this rapidly changing world, a requirement determining the emerging value system.

Modern social life provides a person with many status-role opportunities that he is trying to realize in his private, everyday life. Attempts to implement do not always lead to the manifestation of a new stable identity. Modern life is constantly making its own adjustments to the "rules of the game", not always the person has enough time to adapt to new conditions. Neurosis, depression, and destructive behavior are life companions of a modern person.

Man is a collective being, but the modern world destroys the craving for collectivism as a generic property of the individual. The desire for individualization of the personality is constantly growing, it is moving away from the age-old "we" to the attainment of a personal, authentic personal "Self".

And accordingly, a person becomes more autonomous in relation to his social environment, to its life orientations and standards, and, therefore, more and more independent of them. "Super-industrialism demands and creates not a standard "mass person", but people and individuals differing from each other, and not robots" [2]. The dependence of an individual on the status characteristics "prescribed" by features and conditions of birth sharply decreases — property and class status, gender, residence, confession, etc. no longer matter that much. And the importance of personally acquired in the course of socialization and, especially, the subsequent re-socialization of status positions, increases. The effectiveness of identification processes increases, the positions acquired are also very relative and rotational. But not all individuals are removed from society and "go into themselves". A significant part is still very active, but this activity is of a special kind, which is alarming. Recently, in the modern world, there has been an explosive growth of egoistic individualism, "egocentrism", which gives rise to phenomena which is negative in its content and consequences. Moreover, according to Western researchers, a significant contribution to this "egoization" of society today is made not only by the growing influence of market relations in the social sphere, but also by the success of information technologies [3]. They make their obvious contribution to the new social situation (loneliness), generating a new interactive loneliness. It develops against the background of the increased inclusiveness of the individual in the virtual world of the Internet space, where live social contacts are replaced by virtual contacts.

Along with rapid and often negative changes in the world and society, the mass media influence expansion and the growth of its possibilities, a person feels the instability of his existence. The crisis of society leads to a crisis of identity.

A feature of the modern world, often assessed as its crisis state, is, as Z. Bauman notes, the vulnerability and unreliability of modern living conditions. It is a combination of personal experiences of "insecurity (in work, existing rights and means of subsistence), uncertainty (in their preservation and future stability) and unsafety (of own body,

own self, and their continuations: property, neighbors, community)" [4].

Constantly trying to adapt to these rapid changes, the young man feels the need to constantly build up his identity, to restore the feeling of his "Self". But the identity acquisition in the new conditions is no longer a complete process, this is not enough for life in this rapidly changing society, and again and again man tries to find his place in this world.

III. YOUTH'S SOCIAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE MASS COMMUNICATIONS ENVIRONMENT

In the process of socialization and identification of the younger generation an important role is played by the mass media, but this role is very ambiguous. On the one hand, it opens up wide opportunities for a person to become familiar with the world informational picture, and human experience is expanding on a global scale. Never before has information of such a wide range been available to a human. On the other hand, the ability of the media to construct a new fragmentary reality, sometimes very far from true, creating the illusion of participation and involvement in events and phenomena in the world and society, leads to the fact that a person begins to mythologically perceive the world. But the myth can both enrich the mental world of man and destroy it. The mythology of mass consumption, egoism, cosmopolitanism and entertainment, aggressively implanted by the media, destroys the mental world of the individual.

Through the means of mass communication, the individual gets the illusion of his own enlightenment and exclusivity. The fragmented nature of the proposed reality creates a "patchwork" and unstable identity. Every time trying to adapt to the requirements of the new media reality, a person feels the need to constantly build up his identity, to feel his "Self". But acquiring a stable identity is no longer a complete process, the mass media "speaks" that this is not enough for life in a modern, rapidly changing society, and again and again a person tries to find his place in the world. If until the middle of the XX century it was still possible to talk about a kind of "mono-identity" (although rather conditionally), today it is "poly-identity", but "poly-identity" is very unstable, "patchwork". Loss of stability, sustainability of being is the diagnosis of our time. Today it is no longer possible to remain as you were yesterday, and tomorrow will bring you new changes for which you may not be ready yet. And, above all, the enthusiastic admiration for the technical capabilities of the media is replaced by pessimistic forecasts for the future of man as a free-thinking being [5].

The end of the second millennium was marked by the entry of humanity into the information age. Wide distribution of personal computers, fiber-optic communication channels, e-mail and electronic journals, etc., makes it possible to receive various and wide information without leaving home, thanks to the computer system of the Internet. Without denying the positive aspects of this process, it should be noted that the breadth and diversity of the disseminated information is often not at all adequate to its high quality. As

well as the diversity of information puts a person in a situation where he is not able to comprehend the information received, he does not have time to draw conclusions, to embed it in the system of his outlook, he is only able to "consume". The mental world as an integral system is destroyed, acquiring the features of eclecticism and relativism. In this situation, the identity formation is complicated by the rupture of the sociocultural connections between the generations and the deep social inequality that has developed in society.

In recent years, there are active studies of the influence of computer-mediated communications (the Internet) both on the process of the personal identity formation (the user builds his image in the virtual space, the so-called "virtual personality") and social identity. These problems often become the subject of small sociological studies that our students conduct within the group and the university.

Attempts to change identity are quite common on the Internet - it is communication with noticeable elements of the game. The term "games with identity" has even appeared in the popular science literature. The Internet has such a feature that it is impossible not to pay attention, considering the problems of identity. It offers the user not only a wide choice of network communities with which you can identify yourself, but also gives you the opportunity to experiment with your own identity, creating virtual images of your own "Self", often different from the real subject [6].

The Internet is, in particular, a certain social community with which human is trying to identify himself. But this community has its own specifics. First of all, this is a virtual and imaginary community. But it is perceived as a very real communicative field. If we take into account that the overwhelming majority of users of the Network are young people, then you can see how the Internet as a factor of identity formation, introduces its own corrections to the process of traditional identification. In the modern conditions of the "global embrace" of the Internet, the influence of parental (or even "senior") behavior patterns drops sharply under the influence of the cyber youth subculture, in which computer literacy becomes one of the most important social norms. This skill allows you to determine the circle of "their", whose influence on the formation of identity becomes the leading one. In a situation of stability of sociocultural norms, young people, as a rule, reproduce parental behaviors, and in the context of sociocultural changes, a peer group may be decisive in shaping the identity of a young person.

The positive aspects of personal development when communicating through the Internet are the prospects of overcoming the communicative deficit and expanding the circle of contacts, raising awareness in the issues discussed, protection from the most gross manipulative actions when communicating in real time, sharing situational emotional states and moods. By the way, in the portals Palace or Cycosmos, for example, there is a way of visualizing communication with other portal visitors through various "avatars" and "props" which offer additional opportunities. Avatars are visual images that you can choose or design yourself as your representative. It may be a cartoon character,

a conditional character, an animal, your own picture, etc. The props are objects used in mediated communication, for example, avatars transmit them to each other. Avatars to a certain extent contribute to the expression of emotions during a conversation, and choosing a particular avatar or rejecting a previously chosen and designing a new avatar helps to demonstrate characteristic (or only desired) personality traits [7].

In most cases, researchers emphasize the compensatory nature of such behavior on the Web. A virtual personality acts as a self-presentation, the purpose of which is to compensate for the complexity of real interaction and communication. And for adolescent and young Web users, the creation of a virtual personality (in E.P. Belinskaya and A.E. Zhichkina's research) is aimed at getting new experience, which can be explained by the age-specific desire for self-expression, realized through "fitting" various roles.

Social support is carried out through a person's inclusion in a certain social group (chat, forum, etc.) on the Internet. Like any community, the Internet users' subculture has its own set of values, standards, language, symbols that are shared by some users. By joining such a group, a person receives certain support, which, in its turn, contributes to the formation of a positive social identity ("a friend among his own").

A number of applied researches identify the Web users' typology, which also reflects their identification [8]. Internet users are divided into "hackers", "lovers" and "pragmatists". "Pragmatists" are interested in the Network occasionally, in accordance with a specific task; interpersonal communication, active participation and identification with network communities play a secondary role for them. "Lovers" are not identified with the Network users or with specific network communities, but they do not use Web for narrowly pragmatic purposes. "Hackers" are identified with Internet users as a social category at most. For "hackers" virtual communication contributes to the formation of social identity, for "lovers" of personal identity and only for the "pragmatists" Internet communication do not affect identity. The impact of Internet communication on a person is not connected with the experience of virtual communication as such, but with the nature of the awareness of personal goals that computer-mediated communication satisfies.

IV. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SELF-IDENTIFICATION

One of the means of young person's material and status self-determination is the higher education system. The educational system should perform the function of socialization of generations, i.e. integration of the younger generation into the system of values and norms of social life, into civilization culture; in the world of professional knowledge and skills.

The problem of shaping the individual's sociocultural identity, the conditions and mechanisms of the identification process itself in our country is now becoming more relevant

as it is one of the most important problems of modern society as a whole and one of the higher education tasks [9].

The task of higher technical education is, above all, the training of highly qualified engineering personnel, and sometimes they are called the scientific and technical elite of society. But, in our opinion, the very state of modern society and the engineer's place in this society structure still requires a new understanding. The significance of globalization and the problems associated with it, the transitivity of society, the dynamism of social processes, the complication of interaction in the "society-group-personality" system, emphasizes the level of teaching social sciences in the non-profile, technical, university.

The higher education takes a strategic position in the process of forming a personality and has a significant impact on a person's future life. Young people entering higher education institutions, as a rule, do not have an established sense of moral and civic responsibility yet. And if the task of the technical departments of a technical university is the formation of a qualified engineer, then the task of socio-humanitarian departments is to educate a socially adapted and highly cultural specialist, a competent "public" person (but not as an addition to a "technical" person, but as an essential component of "social" and "acting" person) with the general task of forming a creatively active person [10] [11].

Since 2006, in parallel with the cultural studies course, a sociology course was introduced for students of the Bauman Moscow State Technical University. This is primarily due to the fact that there is an acute question about the young specialist's social adaptation to team work (sometimes virtual), the need to have at least basic knowledge about the management and interaction of the social process subjects, because potentially they are future leaders. To know the general and specific laws of change and the functioning of social reality, the engineer's significance and place in modern society, the laws and specifics of the social behavior of large and small social groups, to be able to professionally analyze modern social problems, as well as social connections and relationships (and many else) — all this is necessary for the future specialist because the technical university produces not only engineering specialists, but also a "public persons", highly and widely educated.

In our time, in a technical university, there is an actual problem of developing certain programs for the formation of not only special technical and engineering skillset, but also socio-humanitarian. It is the addition of the socio-humanitarian component to the higher technical education system that will contribute to the formation of real scientific and technical elite of society.

Since the higher education system forms a kind of society elite, in this case, it is technical, society cannot be indifferent to what the future specialist's sociocultural potential is, what his values, ideals and norms are, how much they meet the requirements of society and whether they are capable of serve the overall development of society or will this development be slowed.

The personal factor (teachers who teach a particular individual) and the sociocultural atmosphere that has developed in each particular institution of higher education have great importance in the process of forming the future engineer's sociocultural identity. But an equally important factor in this process is the understanding and development of certain programs for the formation of future engineer's special and humanitarian skillsets. This general program can contribute to the formation of the real elite of society.

V. CONCLUSION

One of the most important socialization outcomes is the acquisition of sociocultural identity. Sociocultural identity is a dynamic state of seeking consent regarding the assessment of one's own behavior among members of a group or community and belonging to a particular culture. Sociocultural identity is an individual's representation of himself as a member of a certain social and cultural group and is closely related to the approval and acceptance of those values, norms and ideals that are characteristic of this group, when belonging to a particular socio-cultural group acquires direct emotional significance for the individual.

A feature of the modern world, often assessed as its crisis state, is, as Z. Bauman notes, the vulnerability and unreliability of modern living conditions. It is a combination of personal experiences of "insecurity (in work, existing rights and means of subsistence), uncertainty (in their preservation and future stability) and unsafety (of own body, own self, and their continuations: property, neighbors, community)" [12].

Cardinal changes are taking place in the life of modern Russian society due to the influence of the post-industrial transformation in all spheres of life. Russia has embarked on the path of a postindustrial, information society development, and we can see all the negative consequences of this path that developed Western countries have felt before. The post-industrial transformation of society is also rebuilding the personal content of modern man [13]. In a situation where the world changes very quickly during the life of even one generation, the previously seemingly unshakable value systems are destroyed, even the closest in age generations do not share ideas about the meaning of life and the place of a person in society, older generations differ too much ("fathers and children"), the problem of finding identity has become one of the most important or even the most important one. The mass media, the Internet form a new type of personality — a digital personality and the problem of searching for identification mechanisms in an interactive environment is of primary importance for researchers.

The process of forming a sociocultural identity is closely connected with the main social institutions, and the higher education system plays a special role here. But higher education is specialized, highly professional education, which lays a certain imprint on the formation of the future specialist's sociocultural identity. For example, higher technical education has its own characteristics in the formation of the young human's personality.

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