

LIFELONG LEARNING AS A NEW VALUE ATTITUDE IN THE MESSAGES OF DIGITAL OPINION LEADERS OF YOUTH

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Abstract

Scientists in various fields of knowledge note a change in traditional values in society, including in the field of education. Therefore, the study of changes in the value-semantic sphere of youth is an important task. In the early 2000s, the idea of lifelong learning in Russia was something new and even exotic since the priority was to solve everyday issues related to impoverished living conditions. Today in Russia, the situation is changing. It is becoming fashionable to strive for lifelong learning. We can trace these changes in value preferences through the messages of youth opinion leaders that they broadcast to their users. Opinion leaders are those persons who, on the one hand, are sensitive to the needs of their audience, including value ones. On the other hand, they are personalities whose attitudes and behavior change traditional attitudes and offer completely new or transformed ones.

The purpose of our study was to identify and study the value messages of opinion leaders - bloggers regarding education, professional development, and public institutions. We assumed that their statements, activity, and image would carry calls for lifelong learning, leveling the importance of higher education and a stable job in the profession. Thus, they form new life meanings for young people. Content analysis, chi-square, and cluster analysis were used.

The study consisted of two stages. At the first stage, 1649 young people were interviewed to identify opinion leaders. At the second stage, video content offered by opinion leaders to determine value messages were analyzed. At this stage, 546 hours of content were released over the past three months (August-October 2021). In addition, the channel's content and interviews that opinion leaders gave to each other were analyzed. Lifelong Learning messages are the dominant (75%) among youth leaders' messages. They have an overall high level of coherence ($\chi^2 = 0.678$) and a high level of coherence between female and male leaders ($\chi^2 = 0.791$). Cluster analysis identified two groups of messages related to lifelong learning. The first group consists of messages concerning the importance of continuous education for professional development and self-development. The example is: "It is important not to stop. You need to develop in the profession by acquiring new knowledge". The second group consists of messages concerning personal characteristics that provide this need. The example is: "It is important not to be afraid to try something new, to be ready for a new experience." The study results showed that youth opinion leaders view lifelong learning as a lifestyle.

Keywords: digital opinion leaders, lifelong learning.

1 INTRODUCTION

The definition of the term lifelong learning and its leading ideas are described back in 1989 in the international manual "Lifelong Education for Adults. An International Handbook" [1]. The authors noted that education should be accessible, mobile, and continuous. In 2000, the European Commission proclaimed lifelong learning (LLL) a pan-European educational concept [2]. At the same time, the European Commission gave the following definition of lifelong learning: "all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence" [2 p.3]. In the UNESCO 2030 sustainable development agenda adopted by the United Nations, LLL and adult education are a key component of European society [3].

LLL is not some temporary event but rather a way of life. Another difference between LLL and classical fundamental learning is that life-long learning does not involve formalism and considerable time and financial costs. LLL changes the way you think about learning, turning it from a mandatory step into a pleasant habit at a convenient time. At the same time, LLL must meet the key criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability [4]. Today LLL is becoming mandatory for most professions in which long-term career growth is possible. And some studies show that LLL has a positive effect on life expectancy, develops neuroplasticity, and slows down the aging process [5].

Despite the high prevalence in European countries, in the early 2000s, the idea of lifelong learning in Russia was something new and even exotic since the priority was to solve everyday issues. However, LLL is now becoming a popular trend in Russia as well. Thus, according to Russian researchers, the Russian EdTech market grows by 20-25% per year. Half of its volume falls on the additional education of adults [6].

Traditionally, the concept of LLL has been about adult education. However, the European Commission noted that this concept should be implemented not only for adults but also for children and adolescents studying in schools and universities. The authors note that the idea of LLL is laid down in the school period to become an educational norm at an older age [7]. Modern authors note that the habit of self-education and LLL should be developed at the school education stage following students' interests. It should be taken into account that the formation of competence in a particular area for many adolescent students begins with observing idols and significant people [8].

Such idols and significant people can be digital opinion leaders of young people who produce various content that attracts attention and interest. Thus, they form their audience, users, and subscribers among young people, which can be several million.

The concept of 'opinion leader' was proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1955. The author defined an opinion leader as a person who actively spreads his point of view and can influence the opinions of others [9]. Modern opinion leaders are those persons who, on the one hand, are sensitive to the needs of their audience, including the value ones. But, on the other hand, these are individuals whose values and behavior change and modernize the traditional mass consciousness, characterized by conservatism and stability.

The authors identify opinion leaders - experts for a specific audience in a particular area (lifestyle, politics, cinema, health, etc.) [10]. Lazarsfeld and Katz singled out three elements necessary for the emergence of an "opinion leader": personal qualities, competence in the chosen issue, and a suitable social position [9]. In modern discourse, the term "influencer" has become synonymous with the concept of "opinion leader," which often characterizes a person from her popularity, not expertise.

At the present stage, research related to the identification of opinion leaders is carried out in several directions: business, marketing goals, the field of public health, and order [10]. However, one of the most promising areas of research on opinion leaders among young people is the study of the influence of leaders on the formation of the worldview and value attitudes of young people, including their philosophy to specific social guidelines.

The study of youth life scenarios shows that, on the one hand, their content is based on traditions that meet conservative views on life, and on the other hand, it takes into account the trends of social change. Social transformations affect the life plan of young people unevenly, leaving some areas of life more conservative (the sphere of close relationships) and adjusting others to the "zeitgeist" (professional sphere). Young people are building a traditional life scenario based on the older generation's experience. While peers and the digital space, including digital opinion leaders, contribute to its transformation.

In a previous study of attitudes about education broadcast by youth opinion leaders in Russia, four groups of messages were identified: "conservative," "innovative," "nihilistic," "contradictory." It was found that statements of the 'innovative' and 'conservative' types are more common [11].

The purpose of this study was to explore what digital influencers are conveying LLL-related values to their audience and how their behavior and content can demonstrate their attitude towards LLL ideas.

2 METHODOLOGY

This research consisted of two studies. In the first study, we identified digital opinion leaders of young people on the Internet. 1649 people aged 11 to 20 years old took part in it, among them 709 boys and 940 girls. All participants were divided into three age groups: 11-14 years old, 15-17 years old, and 18-20 years old. We carried out the distribution by age groups for several reasons:

- According to the age criterion associated with the difference in interests and needs due to the age period;
- By intergroup comparison, which allows assessing the homogeneity of opinion leaders for generation Z or their diversity;

We did it to identify leaders in each age period and familiar influential people, regardless of age.

The first survey was conducted in August 2020. The second survey was conducted in October 2021. The survey was conducted using Google forms, and the respondents who participated in it lived in different regions of Russia. Table 1 shows the age distribution of respondents in two surveys.

Table 1. Age distribution of respondents in surveys related to the identification of opinion leaders among the youth.

	11-14 years	15-17 years	18-20 years
Survey #1 (N=1084)	227	390	467
Survey #2 (N=585)	94	187	304

In the survey, respondents were asked to choose bloggers from a list. It was necessary to indicate which influencer content attracts respondents the most for the selected personas. There were three areas to choose from: professional development, lifestyle, and interpersonal relationships. Respondents had the opportunity to indicate other bloggers they watch regularly. Respondents were also asked to answer the following questions:

- Do they listen to the opinions and advice of famous people they follow;
- In what area respondents are interested in the advice and opinions of famous people.

We assumed that this is how you can identify opinion leaders in a particular area.

In the second study, we singled out value attitudes about professional development and education, but the focus was on attitudes related to LLL. To do this, we looked at the content offered by bloggers for their users and studied the interviews conducted with these persons. We assumed that their statements, activity, and image would call for continuous learning and neutralize the importance of higher education and stable work in the profession. Therefore, we watched 546 videos posted on the YouTube social network by these persons over three months (from March to May 2021) and 72 hours of interviews given by them (all interviews were conducted in 2021).

The speech of each opinion leader was analyzed. First, the broadcasted statements about values in different areas were highlighted. Then these phrases were divided into separate thematic speech segments (quotes), reflecting the opinion of the leaders about what is significant in the field of profession, personal development, and relationships. Finally, explicitly and implicitly expressed values were taken into account.

Each quote was assigned to a specific category, reflecting one central semantic theme. We took into account the breadth of the topic (how many bloggers broadcast it in their content and interviews) and frequency (how often bloggers broadcast this topic). The type of content was also categorized: entertaining, informational, educational, and eventful.

Thematic and discursive content analysis methods were used to process the video content. In addition, data processing was carried out using the Mann-Whitney test, Pearson's test of goodness, and cluster analysis.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Search and identification of opinion leaders in the social networks

Both surveys showed similar results: respondents chose the same influencers. It indicates the relative constancy of the interests and choices for the youth audience.

In this survey, we asked 'Do you listen to the opinions and advice of popular people you follow' and found that 87% of teenagers aged 11-14, 89.5% of teenagers aged 15-17, and 81% of young people aged 18-20 years answered that they rather listen to the opinion of the bloggers they watch. Only 13% of respondents aged 11-14, 10.5% of respondents aged 15-17, and 19% of respondents aged 18-20 answered "no". A high percentage of respondents was revealed among all groups who noted that they listen to the opinion of popular people. Personal development was the sphere of the greatest interest in all ages (55.6% of respondents aged 11-14, 68.6% of respondents aged 15-17, and 63.3% of respondents aged 18-20). In second place was the area of professional development (40.7% of respondents aged 11-14, 45.3% of respondents aged 15-17, and 50.2% of respondents aged 18-20). The sphere of relationships was the least interesting.

We also identified the most popular persons in each of the age groups. We found that most of the highlighted personas are popular across all age groups.

The results of this survey did not confirm our hypothesis. It is impossible to single out unique opinion leaders in specific areas across different age groups. Therefore, the bloggers' statements that scored the most significant number of choices among respondents of all ages were studied at the second stage. A total of seventeen digital influencers were identified, including ten men and seven women.

3.2 Values about professional development and education broadcast by Generation Z opinion leaders on social networks

3.2.1 The main themes of education messages broadcasted by opinion leaders

It was revealed that in the fields of professional development and self-development, statements about education and LLL are dominant (75%) among the messages of youth leaders. Among them, we can distinguish the following groups of statements:

- About the importance of education in general (29.71%),
- About the importance of professional development in different ways (26.57%);
- About continuous self-development to achieve success in life (24.52%),
- About the importance of regular improvement of professional competencies (11, 79%),
- About the qualities necessary for self-development and professional development (7.41%).

None of the identified leaders spoke directly about the futility of higher education. However, there were statements that if studying at the university is not satisfactory, either the university or the specialty should be changed. The same applied to the professional sphere. For example, bloggers said that if something does not suit you at work, you need to look for how to change it, starting with your needs and hobbies. On the other hand, influencers did not directly criticize stable work. Therefore, this survey did not confirm our hypothesis about the decrease in the importance of higher education and regular employment in the profession.

Education reports have an overall high level of agreement with each other ($\chi^2 = 0.678$) and a high level of agreement between female leaders and male leaders ($\chi^2 = 0.791$). All leaders, men and women, in one way or another broadcast messages related to LLL, and these messages are more likely to have a similar semantic character. In simple terms, most leaders broadcast identical values concerning education and self-development.

3.2.2 Results of a Comparative Analysis of Attitudes About Education Broadcast by Opinion Leaders

Cluster analysis revealed two groups of messages related to lifelong learning. The first group included bloggers broadcasting values about the importance of continuous education (10 bloggers). Examples of this kind of value messages could be:

- "You can become a professional only by constantly learning,"
- "At any age, it's not a shame to study,"
- "Constantly learning new things is to be on the vibe,"
- "I study all my life,"
- "Training is always needed, people who say 'I'm 30, I can do everything' do not achieve any heights."

The second group consists of bloggers who more often broadcast attitudes about the value of personal characteristics that allow them to follow the principles of LLL. Examples of such settings could be:

- "It is important not to be afraid to try something new, to be ready for new experiences,"
- "Activity and the desire to learn something about this world, how it works, helps me to master new activities and constantly learn,"
- "Independence from the opinions of others allows you not to be afraid to make mistakes, learns and make mistakes again."
- "If you don't like something, you need to try to change it, for example, learn a new specialty," etc.

We calculated the frequency of educational, informational, event, and entertainment content for further comparative analysis. After that, we determined the share of each category among the entire array of publications and compared them using the Mann-Whitney test. Differences were found in all four types of broadcast content. For example, bloggers broadcasting installations about the importance of LLL (group 1) are more likely to have informational and educational content. On the other hand, bloggers promoting personal qualities that contribute to successful LLL (group 2) are more likely to have event and entertainment content. The results of the comparative analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of broadcast contents.

<i>Content type</i>	<i>group 1</i>	<i>group 2</i>	<i>U-test</i>
Informational	37,2%	25,1%	0,023
Educational	33,5%	6,4%	0,001
Event	17,3%	43,18%	0,001
Entertainment	12%	25,32%	0,018

4 CONCLUSIONS

Youth opinion leaders talk a lot about LLL values as a new trend. Their way of life and professional activities are an illustration of their words. Many youth opinion leaders came from small towns, started working early, studied different specialties before blogging. But they continued their development, mastering new forms and genres in this type of activity and new ones. In particular, they received additional competencies in directing, writing scripts, learning technology, mastering advertising, marketing, sales skills, etc. Many of them said that they could not stay in a routine for a long time, and it was vital for them to learn something new to enjoy life.

We found that they often talk about the importance of professional development in different ways, about the constant self-development to achieve success in life and their goals, about the importance of accumulating a variety of professional competencies. They also talk about the qualities necessary for self-development and professional development. These qualities include vital activity, readiness for new experience, risk, the ability to be independent of the opinions of others, and are not afraid to make mistakes. We managed to distinguish two groups among the opinion leaders: those who talk about the importance of living following LLL and those who speak more about personal characteristics that make it possible to follow LLL.

They differ in the broadcast messages and like the content shown.

Based on the idea that society creates opinion leaders for them to take on the role of those who make new value orientations or transform traditional ones in their development, we assume that soon the ideas of LLL will become a generational trend for youth representatives.

The study results showed that youth opinion leaders view lifelong learning as a lifestyle.

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