

## Conference Paper

# Media Discourse Space Effect on the Professional Development of University Students

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## Abstract

The mass media of the first decades of the new millennium (the new media) are characterized not only by the paramount informing function but they are also distinguished by their ability to interact and influence the target audience in both spontaneous and dramatized modes. Simple navigation and a quick and easy access to their content stand behind the increasing popularity of the new media among younger generation. Modern new media provide the discourse space where young people, or 'the millennials', feel as if they are in the center of various political, social and economic events; the so-called 'Big Brothers' having impact on people's life in the society. Taking into account the facts that are directly connected with the existence of the youth in the media discourse space, this article aims to track and analyze the influence of the new media on the bachelor's and master's students' professional self-concept. Our research introduces the working hypothesis that today's media discourse space affects both directly and indirectly on university students, no matter what their future specialization is. Our students' survey was conducted in three Russian higher education institutions: Institute of philology and foreign languages, Moscow Pedagogical State University (MPSU, Moscow); Faculty of Science and Technology, South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University (SUSHPU, Chelyabinsk); and Ecological faculty, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University, Moscow). The survey included the responses of the junior and senior bachelor's students as well as the first- and the second-year master's students. Young respondents were asked to evaluate the degree of the perceived information credibility, a positive and negative impact of present-day social networks on the younger generation and on their professional future; foreign languages and cultural knowledge; the students' ability to interact with a foreign media discourse space, reading and leaving comments about different events in the Russian and foreign new media. Therefore, we established the correlation between the various types of variables that compose the system of the media discourse space and the students' multiple reactions to their comprehension of the new media. The key influencing factors in the course of information exchange between students' world perception and the media world were defined. The main conclusions about the extent of the new media influence (or its absence) on bachelor's and master's students and their professional development were drawn in the research.

**Keywords:** new media, media discourse space, professional development, professional self-concept, undergraduate and graduate students

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## 1. Introduction

It is common knowledge that the mass media of the first quarter of the twenty-first century are characterized not only by their informative function, but also by their ability to influence the target audience interactively, immediately and imperceptibly; synchronously and asynchronously.

One of the trendiest theories to be inspired by the new media is the notion of 'the attention economy' [1]. The idea of this theory lies in the fact that at the age of information overload not only the perceived information plays a key role in human minds, but also the amount of attention it can attract: both cognitive and social attention.

The following mass media approach has a strong impact on a modern younger generation. A simple online navigation, an easy and quick round the clock access to unlimited information resources as well as multitasking (the simultaneous management of multiple activities) [2] in a virtual space becomes more and more popular and in demand among young millennials.

The present day mass media, whether they are favorable or unfavorable, are able to encourage and motivate young individuals in their political, social, academic and professional activities. Young people utilize the media space on a daily basis. Therefore, many researchers have been diving into a considerable amount of studies on how the new media world influences the youth and its social and professional development.

Taking into account our colleagues' experience and the observations which reveal young person's presence and existence in the media discourse space, it is necessary to study and analyze the level of the new media influence on the professional consciousness of university students.

Our research is focused on the media discourse space and its influence on Russian bachelor's and master's students' consciousness and their future career pathway. We hypothesize that at present the media discourse space affects Russian university students of any professional specialization in a direct and indirect way.

## 2. Media Discourse as an Impact Factor of Students' Future Career Pathway

The reason why the new media have such a powerful effect on the contemporary younger generation lies in the modern concept of the media discourse itself, the young millennials' behavior and lifestyle and the new professional incentives, objectives and challenges that people deal with in the new technological epoch.

The mechanisms and contexts of human communication are rapidly changing in the face of new domains of interaction, new technologies and new global cultures. Present day forms of the media discourse space often involve interaction with and through a plethora of technological tools and mechanisms. These mechanisms provide both new artefacts of study and new instruments for media discourse analysts. Russian as well as European and American researchers observe the new media discourse as a phenomenon which is radically transforming human communication [3-7] and constructing the new world of ethnic, cultural, social, economic and political diversity [7]. Evidently, people can no longer imagine their daily lives without media and communication technologies. The new digital media have ushered in a new and essentially unlimited set of frontiers [8]. Today's home is being transformed into the site of a multimedia culture as Henry Jenkins and colleagues define it, 'a participatory culture' which is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship. [9]. A media participatory culture is also the one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another [9] which is so important for university students and their future career choice.

In our opinion, the media discourse space is now becoming an inextricable part of young people's lives. And although new communications media are often seen to pose threats and dangers to young people, but at the same time they also provide new opportunities for creativity and personal and professional self-determination [10].

As we start to look beyond the immediate hopes and fears that new technologies often provoke, there is a growing need for in-depth empirical research which we are going to present further.

### 3. Methodology and the Results of the Research

#### 3.1. Methods

Our study and scientific interpretations of the media discourse space influence on the professional development of bachelor's and master's students is based on the theoretical approach of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky who believed that the professional consciousness of the individual is not 'a static and fixed person's consciousness, but the consciousness of an evolving, spiritually growing person who is committing an effort and work on his development and spiritual liberation' [11].

On the other hand, we also support the phenomenological approach by Carl R. Rogers and Rosalind F. Dymond [12], which focuses on the social impact of the external environment (in our case it is the media environment) on the subjective perception of self, thus placing the individual's personal position in the foreground, making it more active and free in decision-making and being responsible for self-determination. The representatives of this scientific approach introduced the idea of self-concept.

### 3.2. Measures

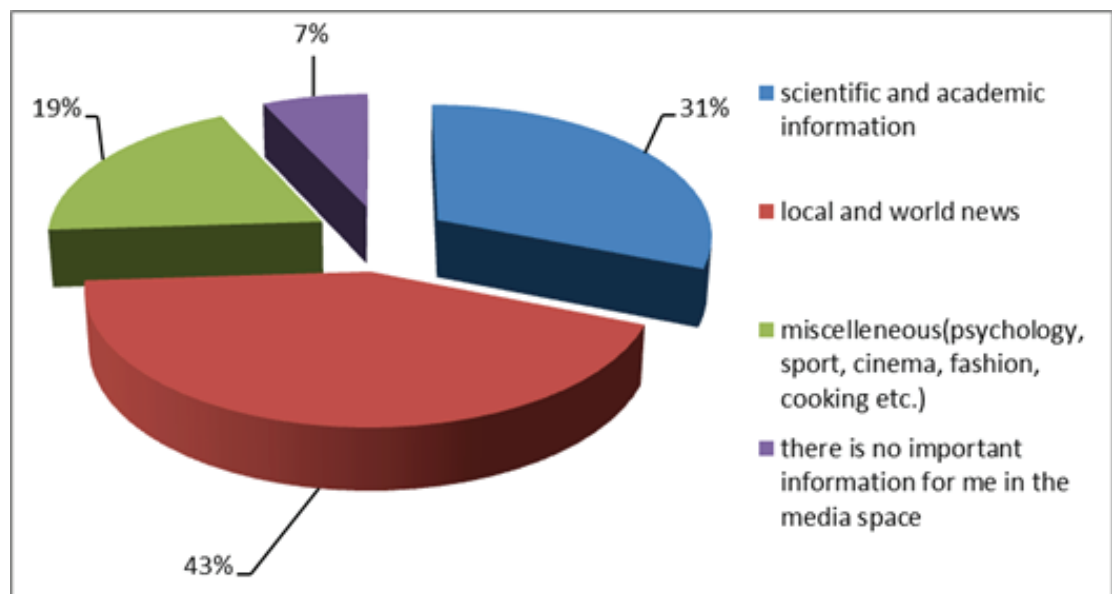
To estimate the influence of the media discourse space on the professional self-concept of the students a special survey was conducted. Our participants became bachelor's and master's students of three Russian universities (South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University (SUSHPU), Chelyabinsk; Moscow State Pedagogical University (MSPU) and Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow. The total number of respondents is 150. 70 young people study at the Faculty of Science and Technology, SUSHPU, while 40 respondents surveyed are the students of the Institute of Foreign languages and Philology, MSPU as well as 40 other students study at the Ecological faculty, RUDN University.

Our survey consisted of 23 questions and was targeted at measuring the students' attitude toward the contemporary media discourse space and the Internet, the new media credibility as well as the level of the media discourse impact on the students' career opportunities. On a 4-point scale ranging from '1' (never) to '4' (always) young people were asked if they read traditional and online newspapers and magazines; if they are interested in local and world news; what information they find credible and significant for them; if information technologies help the students in their academic study and future career choice, etc. The results of the research by using content analysis, correlation and factor analyses were processed in Microsoft Excel and STATISTICA 13.

## 4. Results

The data analysis shows that 95% of all the respondents use the media space and the Internet which is a clear illustration of the importance of the new media in their everyday lives. Moreover, 76% of the students say that they don't imagine their lives without the media and the Internet. 94% of the young people read and listen to the local and world news. These figures confirm that the news media play a significant role

in educating and informing the students about different issues that are consequential to their lives. The pie chart (Figure 1) demonstrates the distribution of the most important information that our young respondents extract from the media discourse space and the Internet.



**Figure 1:** The bachelor's and master's students' choice of the significant information in the media discourse space.

As can be seen from Figure 1, students prefer to listen and read the local and world news (43% of all the respondents) and look for the information related to their academic and scientific needs (31%). The contemporary media discourse space is penetrating into students' culture, beginning to dominate their professional choice. Moreover, our research shows that 97% of the respondents consider the new media environment to be a very useful tool in their studies.

The central argument to support the concept of the media discourse dominance in the students' lifestyle is that young people born in the last two decades have always been surrounded by, and interacted with, the new media and other technologies. According to Prensky, one of the more radical consequences of this media rich environment is a hypothesized change in the brain structure that means that modern students think and process information in fundamentally different ways compared to previous generations [13, 14].

Taking into account these figures, we can assume that the media space doesn't only play an educational role for a younger generation, but is also responsible for shaping their self-evaluation and professional development in a direct and indirect way. 'The

medium is the message' [15] and this message has a tremendous effect on a student's future career choice.

Another powerful media instrument today which has a strong impact on the students is social networks. More and more of students' everyday interactions take place on social networking sites (Facebook, Google+, MySpace, Odnoklassniki, VKontakte, Twitter, Instagram etc.) and via other online social media. Our data analysis shows that approximately 95% of young respondents use social networks while 77% of our participants are subscribed for a global video-sharing website YOUTUBE. Perhaps, the most interesting fact about students' university life and social networks is that nowadays almost all academic institutions in Russia have their accounts and subscriptions in social networks and on YOUTUBE.

The official presence of the academic institutions in the media discourse space inspires students to be more enthusiastic and interactive with each other through the new media. Moreover, they are able to create their own social groups in the media space where it is possible to discuss and exchange their academic achievements, professional ideas and plans, share their viewpoints on different life issues.

Confirmatory correlation and factor analyses on the students' academic and professional needs and their media use motivations were conducted to assess our hypothesis validity of the media space effects on students' career choice.

The correlation analysis was conducted at the  $p < 0.05$  significance level. A summary of this analysis is shown in Table 1.

The data analysis shows that there is a correlation between students' interest toward traditional and online newspapers and magazines and their future professional choice (0.38). Moreover, 70% of our respondents believe that the media discourse space is going to change radically in a decade because people's lifestyle is also going to change dramatically. The correlation between these two variables is 0.43.

One of the most important issues about the mass media is how credible they can be, especially from the students' viewpoint. We established the correlation between the young individual's frequency of the media use, his or her ability to leave comments in the media discourse space and the level of the media credibility (0.36). We suggest that the more often young people are able to access the media space and share their opinions on different academic or life issues with their peers or others, the more they can trust the present day mass media.

Speculating about the media credibility, it is essential to mention the language factor which also plays a significant role in students' career choice. In modern Russian Federation the knowledge of foreign languages with English at the top gives young people

TABLE 1: Summary of Correlation Matrix of the media discourse space effect on bachelor’s and master’s students and their professional career choice.

Variable (Var.) and its definition	Marked correlations are significant at $p < 0.05000$ N = 150 (case wise deletion of missing data)
	<b>Correlation Links</b>
Var. 1 (traditional newspapers and magazines)	Var. 19 (0.47); Var. 21 (0.38); Var. 23 (0.32)
Var. 3 (online reviews, comments)	Var. 6 (0.36)
Var. 5 (social networks)	Var. 14 (0.33)
Var. 6 (mass media frequency use)	Var. 3 (0.36)
Var. 8 (mass media credibility)	Var. 11 (0.34)
Var. 10 (knowledge of foreign languages)	Var. 11(0.57)
Var. 11 (foreign media reading and understanding)	Var. 8 (0.34); Var. 10 (0.57); Var. 12 (0.42)
Var. 12 (the English language and its cultural and business dominance)	Var. 11 (0.42); Var. 13 (-0.38); Var. 21 (0.36); Var. 23 (0.30)
Var. 13 (the Russian language and its cultural and business dominance)	Var. 12 (-0.38)
Var. 14 (mass media support in students’ academic studies)	Var. 5 (0.33)
Var. 16 (radical media space and Internet change in 10 years)	Var. 18 (0.43)
Var. 18 (radical people’s lifestyle change in 10 years)	Var. 16 (0.43)
Var. 19 (online newspapers and magazines, video-sharing websites)	Var. 1 (0.47); Var. 8 (0.41)
Var. 21 (students’ professional specialization)	Var. 1 (0.38); Var. 12 (0.36); Var. 22 (0.65); Var. 23 (0.81)
Var. 22 (media and Internet technologies)	Var. 23 (0.66); Var. 21 (0.65)
Var. 23 (students’ activity in the media discourse space)	Var. 1 (0.32); Var. 12 (0.30); Var. 21 (0.81); Var. 22 (0.66)

a lot of opportunities in the professional world. Our research shows that 67% of our respondents speak English and use it in their academic and social life. Students also read English media resources as well as listen to the world news in English or watch English language videos. Having access to the media content in a foreign language and being able to understand this information, young people spend more time in the media discourse space (the correlation level is 0.57). Thus, they find the new media more credible in this case (the correlation level is 0.34).

Furthermore, the knowledge of the English language, its cultural and business dominance (variable 12) in the modern world influences the students’ professional career choice (variable 21). The correlation between these two variables is 0.36. Taking into account the fact that cutting edge media, Internet and computer technologies are basically imported in Russia from abroad and initially are introduced in English, to

TABLE 2: The confirmatory factor analysis of the effect of the media discourse space mechanisms on bachelor's and master's students' professional career choice.

Variable	Factor Loadings (Varimax raw) Extraction: Principal components (Marked loadings are > 0.700000)	
	Factor1	Factor2
Var. 1	0.236546321	<b>0.474500231</b>
Var. 2	-0.284483291	0.0806132089
Var. 3	0.00958690713	0.217136639
Var. 4	0.295420669	-0.11688806
Var. 5	0.0970077675	0.184928443
Var. 6	0.246559681	0.109522607
Var. 8	-0.0140775063	<b>0.708457999</b>
Var. 10	0.181352969	<b>0.531303539</b>
Var. 11	0.167668038	<b>0.707446591</b>
Var. 12	<b>0.421588851</b>	<b>0.329654752</b>
Var. 13	-0.18269568	-0.306853963
Var. 14	0.260108793	0.108544262
Var. 15	0.0142315287	-0.0348583508
Var. 16	0.247467968	0.0620351962
Var. 18	<b>0.324077131</b>	0.0350628955
Var. 19	-0.097723335	<b>0.655550725</b>
Var. 20	<b>0.345194955</b>	0.0357591803
Var. 21	<b>0.817794977</b>	0.0862764358
Var. 22	<b>0.775689785</b>	-0.00213687724
Var. 23	<b>0.875315718</b>	0.05195934
<b>Expl. Var.</b>	2.96626267	2.28541047
Prp. Totl	0.148313133	0.114270524

become media and technologically literate young people need to understand English as a foreign language. The better they know and speak English, the more media active they become. Consequently, the more time students spend in the media discourse space, the more credible they find the media content. At the end of the day, the media impacts the students' life, self- development and their professional choice whether they realize it or not. Our research demonstrates strong correlation links between these variables (0.65; 0.66; 0.81).

To better and deeper understand the reasons that stand behind the media discourse impact on university students, the factor analysis was conducted in our research which let us reveal hidden mechanisms of the media space influence. The results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 2 as follows.



Table 2 demonstrates the existence of two factors – *the factor of professional activity in the media discourse space* and *the media discourse credibility factor* - which confirm the media impact on students' career opportunities.

*The factor of professional activity in the media discourse space* explains why university students are so actively involved in the media discourse space today. The evolution of digital technologies changes human life and affects the way people live, study and work in a modern society. In Russia university students' academic education is being built on the usage of multimedia technologies. This approach allows young people to interact with the media for their professional purposes. The media shape students' professional consciousness by penetrating into their daily academic routine. Thus, we can conclude that students are a part of the media discourse space as well as the media world belongs to the younger generation.

*The media discourse space credibility factor* shows that when choosing a professional career our respondents refer to the media advice. Nowadays there are a lot of publications about job opportunities for the youth. We can often see the headlines in the press such as 'Job Hunting in the Digital Age' [16] or 'The 10 Best Careers Right Now For Recent College Graduates' [17] or '10 well paid jobs of the future' [18].

Newspaper and magazine articles, interviews with successful people, films with charismatic actors and actresses about different types of jobs or occupations inspire students to focus on a particular professional area or change their specialization and move forward. We believe that almost every young person has a role model and for many present day university students this role model exists in the media discourse space.

Last but not least, there is one more important phenomenon to mention again. Our findings show that the English language dominance in the modern digital world binds the technological and the media credibility factors as it can be seen in our factor analysis (variable 12). English as a leading international language of culture, science and business affects the media discourse space. Its presence in the Russian media space is currently increasing and also changing some academic principles of Russian higher education. One of the vivid examples of such changes is an obligatory defense of bachelor's and master's thesis in English for undergraduate and graduate students at RUDN University.

In summary, we expected and found that the present day media discourse space influences university students' professional self-concept and define their future career specialization. Thus, our hypothesis is completely supported.

## 5. Conclusions and Discussion

The most important things in a student's life are studying and gaining knowledge to become a true professional in their chosen career pathways. Regarding the relationship between university students and their interaction with the media discourse space, our research has revealed that young people are likely to be affected by the modern media world due to the factors of the professional activity in the media discourse space and the media discourse space credibility. The media space is attractive and important for the generation of 'digital natives'. It can have a variety of effects on how well students succeed in their academic and professional lives.

The official presence of Russian academic institutions in social networks, on video-sharing channels, in traditional and online newspapers and magazines increases the media credibility in young individuals' minds and thus motivates students to become more media active. They are able to join different social and professional groups, establish a virtual community of learners with peers that can further help to ultimately increase their overall learning, self-development and professional communication. The knowledge of foreign languages, especially the English language, which is officially supported by the Russian government policy, also improves students' multilingual ability in their cross-cultural media communication. Therefore, students' engagement with the media discourse space expands their learning environment, creating and sharing professional knowledge with other sources beyond their academic departments, faculties and universities.

The findings and limitations of this study generate a set of research questions that future work should seek to address. For example, we don't differentiate the groups of bachelor's and master's students, although it will be interesting to analyze these students' categories separately and reveal the differences in the media impact on undergraduate and graduate students. The second question that can be discussed in future studies is the gender factor. Who is more involved in the media discourse space and more exposed to its influence: male or female students? Researchers should consider the role that gender plays in the present day media use. Finally, taking into account a geographical factor in such a large sovereign state as Russian Federation, next studies may focus on students' engagement with the media discourse space in different regions of one country.

Overall, since students vary in their level of media engagement concerning their academic and professional needs, future studies may concentrate on examining and

measuring how a student's personal and psychological characteristics influence professional motivations for the mass media use.

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