

# SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THEIR ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC ACTIVITY OF THE UKRAINIAN YOUTH

Tatiana SAVRASOVA-V'UN

## ABSTRACT:

The research article aims to describe the overall strategy of the experimental studies aiming to provide a thorough set of knowledge on social networks' influence on the level of development of the Ukrainian youth's civic activity. The author presents the results of her own theoretical and research reflection on the structure and characteristics of the civic activity associated with the Ukrainian youth. The proposed criteria, indicators and diagnostic techniques have led to an empirical research on the Ukrainian youth's civic activity and its specifics. Firstly, the article refers to various theories and research materials by renowned scholars that reflect on the issue of social networking (social networks, their objectives and functioning in the online space, their impact on the personal development). Secondly, the research study aims to define and discuss the features of the social networks' influence on the Ukrainian youth's civic activity and its further development. The author also offers an overview of the level of the Ukrainian youth's civic activity that, as the presented research results reveal, is high in case of the majority of the research participants. The issues related to the use of social networks by young Ukrainian people, i.e. the facts that explain their attitude to this form of communication are also addressed thoroughly, as well as the need for defining the role of social networks in the process of education. The results of the included correlation analysis suggest that the level of the Ukrainian young people's civic activity and its further development are directly dependent on the use of online social networks. Many young Ukrainians who regularly use social networks are highly active in terms of the civic matters. The research results may help to effectively organise and implement various society-wide projects that would be aimed at the young people in Ukraine specifically.

## KEY WORDS:

civic activity, online communication, social networks, society, the Ukrainian youth



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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, the process of transformation of the modern Ukrainian society to a 'living civic activity organism' has taken place due to the spread of communication innovations and new forms of interaction

via the Internet and online social networks among the state's young population. According to the research by M. Castells, the forming of global civic society would be impossible without the development of social networks and their technical, organisational and legal aspects.<sup>1</sup>

The social networks allow people to communicate more often despite geographical distance that is hard to overcome without the Internet, to expand their circles of communication, to efficiently share information and data. As stated in the work of J. Barnes, a social network is a social structure made of nodes which generally include individuals or organisations, the term's definition indicates the ways people are connected through various 'social networks' ranging from casual dating to close familial bonds.<sup>2</sup> Social networks as an online service can be seen as a platform that people use to communicate with each other and with other groups in order to demonstrate and further develop special interests. The aim of the social networks is to provide their users with all possible ways of interacting with each other – through video, chat, pictures, music and weblogs.<sup>3</sup>

In the world there are many different online social networks, but only some of them have become popular. For example, *LinkedIn* is the best known project for professional communication in the sphere of work or rather human resources where people are able to establish and maintain contacts with their former, present or future colleagues, find new business partners or an interesting job opportunity. *Facebook*, the largest and most used social network in the world attracting millions of people – as of the fourth quarter of 2016, *Facebook* had 1.86 billion monthly active users worldwide<sup>4</sup> – is designed for active communication and sharing of information. *Vkontakte* is an online environment known for being focused on individual qualities; it also offers a significant amount of space for storing audio and video files. *Bebo* is a powerful media platform where users can share music, videos, books or other types of media content. *Classmates* is a platform providing a communication space for English-speaking users; it allows former classmates to find each other. *Friendster*'s purpose is related to reconnecting with old friends and finding new friends or people with the same interests. *Twitter* is the social network which is very well-known among civic activists, journalists, politicians, celebrities; its most interesting feature is the possibility to analyse the users' reactions to shared events. *Flickr* is a commonly used photo service where personal as well as professional photographs are stored. Many young people prefer *Instagram*, a social network that lets the users to share their photographs with the world.

According to the research by A. Zuykovska, even though there are a wide variety of different social networks, the projects *Vkontakte*, *Facebook*, *Classmates* and *Twitter* are the most popular social networking platforms in Ukraine. As the author explains, the social networks are not only efficient in terms of friendly and entertaining communication but they are also intended for the mobilisation of the civic activity, the coordination of citizens, leaders and politicians and their actions during mass protests.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth noting that the civic activity of the youth is closely related to qualities and psychological traits of individual young persons; these contain specific sets of knowledge, skills, aptitudes, motives, feelings that are aimed at the effective implementation of social activities. That is why it is one of the driving forces shaping the formation of the civic society as a whole. The problem of psychological aspects of the civic activity has been studied by O. Barankov, A. Rogoza, L. Semenyuk, Y. Turanov; these authors have defined the essence and basic components of the given phenomenon. A. Onishchenko, V. Gorovoj, V. Popik and L. Chupryna have strived to address the question of the social networks and their influence on the development of civic society. According to their findings, these online services are an informational reflection of the people's civic activity.<sup>6</sup>

However, the ways young Ukrainians engage in the civic activities in relation to the use of social networks in everyday life have not been studied yet. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to present a research on the features of social networks and their influence on the level of the development of the Ukrainian youth's civic activity.

1 CASTELLS, M.: *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 141.

2 BARNES, J.: Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish. In *Human Relations*, 1954, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 44.

3 ПІШКОВЦІЙ, С.: *Що таке соціальні мережі?* [online]. [2017-01-08]. Available at: <<http://h.ua/story/93865/>>.

4 *Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 4th quarter 2016 (in millions)*. [online]. [2017-01-27]. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>>.

5 ЗУЙКОВСЬКА, А.: Соціальні мережі як середовище політичної комунікації. In *Наукові записки*, 2014, Vol. 69, No. 1, p. 273.

6 ОНИЩЕНКО, О. С. et al.: *Соціальні мережі як чинник розвитку громадянського суспільства*. Київ : Національна бібліотека України імені в. і. вернадського, 2013, p. 27.

## 2 Research Methodology

The second chapter aims to present the procedures and results of various studies on the social networks and their influence on the level of the development of Ukrainian youth's civic activity. Our aim was to find answers to the following questions:

1. *Does the modern Ukrainian youth use social networks?*
2. *What social networks are the most popular among these young users?*
3. *What is the attitude of the Ukrainian youth to online social networks?*
4. *What criteria and indicators help us to investigate the level of the civic activity of the young people?*
5. *Which methodological tools should be used for determination of the level of the civic activity of these young people?*
6. *Is there a relationship between the use of online social networks and the level of the civic activity of the Ukrainian youth?*

However, answering these questions would not be possible without formulation of the following research hypothesis:

*Young people who use the online social networks more often demonstrate a higher level of the civic activity.*

The empirical study was carried out at the Boris Grinchenko Kyiv University in 2016. The research sample involved 231 students aged 17 to 22 (specialising in philology). Considering that the civic activity of students, according to various related theoretical findings (philosophical, historical, social, political, legal and psychological: activities, student-centred axiological approaches) is studied through the criteria of «civic consciousness», «civic values», «civil experience», «civil competitiveness» and various indicators, the empirical research involves the use of several methods of inquiry and research techniques. The level of the development of the civic activity of students was examined in accordance with the following psycho-diagnostic techniques and criteria:

- the criterion of «civic consciousness»: the level of legal and civic knowledge (the author's technique «Study of the civic knowledge of students» was used), the level of civic consciousness (this data was obtained through the questionnaire «Civic consciousness»), the level of analytical and prognostic knowledge (the author's technique of «Defining success in dealing with life situations» was applied);
- the criterion of «civic values»: the level of motivation adequacy (the technique able to defined «Assertiveness of the personality» was implemented), the level of achievement of the goal (the technique of inquiring into «Motivation of passions» by M. Kubyschkina was used);
- the criterion of «civic experience»: the level of the attitude to social values (examined by the diagnostic questionnaire «Personal growth»), the level of relationship to yourself (the category of «Self-identity»), the level of attitude to the civic virtues («Determination of the level of formation of civic qualities of the person» by V. Tymchyshyn's test was applied), the level of emotional balance («Rapid diagnosis of the study of the emotional sphere of adolescents personality based on Luscher test»);
- the criterion of «civil competitiveness»: the level of determination and perseverance («Research technique related to personality organisation»), the level of leadership ability (the category of «Determination and evaluation of communicative and organisational abilities of the individual»), the level of development of responsibility (surveyed via the questionnaire «Study of subjective control» as proposed by J. Rotter), the level of capacity for civil activities (the author's technique of defining «Civic activity»);<sup>7</sup>

For studying the role of social networks in the lives of Ukrainian young people the author's own questionnaire «Me and social networks» was used; this data allowed us to identify the nature of the attitude to social networks, the amount of time spent in the online space and the use of Web sites in the process of educating young people.

The results of diagnostics were subjected to statistical analysis with qualitative interpretation and a systematic generalization using mathematical and statistical methods of data processing using the SPSS statistical software (version 13.0).<sup>8</sup> A comparative correlation analysis of the level of civic activity of students was carried out using the method of mathematical processing of materials for psychological studies by A. Vinoslavskaya.<sup>9</sup>

### 3 Research Results

The results of the analysis of the indicators formation – in accordance with the previously defined criteria – provided an opportunity to identify high, medium and low levels of students' civic activities. For example, in Diagram 1 it is shown that the civic activity of students according to the criterion of «civic consciousness» is developed enough. The majority of students show a high level of civic consciousness (66.2%), one third of them (33.3%) is at a medium level; only 0.5% of the respondents are at a low level of civic consciousness. Given the results, it seems that the Ukrainian youth generally has a quite good awareness of the civic and legal matters; they are able to analyse them, process the related information, but they do not show enough civic participation in solving the problems of life.

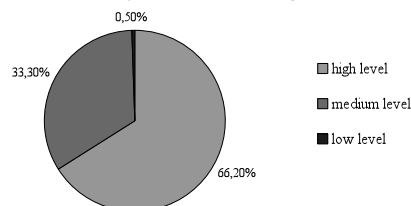


Diagram 1: The level of the civic activity of students according to the criterion of «civic consciousness»

Source: own processing

According to the criterion of «civic values», the civic activity of students is efficiently developed as well – a high level was identified in case of most of the students (66.7% of the respondents), 27.7% of the respondents are at a medium level instead while the remaining students' (5.6%) civic activity in terms of «civic values» is at a low level (Diagram 2). In general, the results of the research on the civic activity of students in relation to the presented criterion indicate that the surveyed students are able to sufficiently recognise civic values such as respecting the law and preserving the rights related to freedom of expression, i.e. they are ready to protect the individual and civil rights and freedoms as well as to show respect for the democratic views of others.

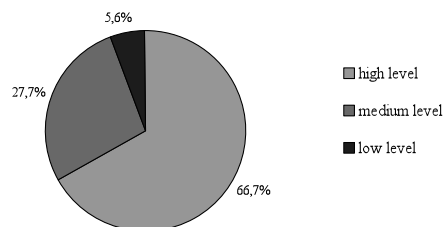


Diagram 2: The level of the civic activity of students according to the criterion of «civic values»

Source: own processing

активності старшокласників. Київ : Інтерсервіс, 2014, р. 59.

8 НАСЛЕДОВ, А. Д.: SPSS: Компьютерный анализ данных в психологии и социальных науках. Санкт-Петербург : Питер, 2007, р. 116.

9 ВИНОСЛАВСЬКА, О. В. et al.: Психологія. Київ : ІНККОС, 2005, р. 43.

The research data associated with the criterion of «civic experience» indicates a high level of its development (see Diagram 3). Most of the respondents (55.4%) have a high level of civic experience, 40.3% of the surveyed students are at a medium level, and the rest of them (4.3%) possess a low level of the civic activity development according to the presented criterion. It should be noted that the data points to the development of students' conscious emotional attitude to the events taking place on a society-wide scale – the civic experience which manifests itself in the form of kindness, care, compassion and sympathy for the civic community, a sense of responsibility, duty, honour, dignity, a sense of respect for the national culture, language and traditions.

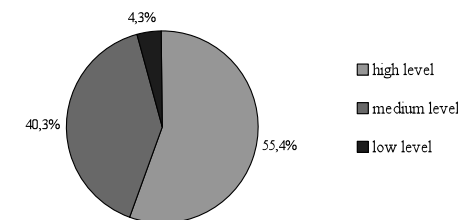


Diagram 3: The level of the civic activity of students according to the criterion of «civic experience»

Source: own processing

The overall civic activity of students according to the criterion of «civic competitiveness» (Diagram 4) is insufficiently developed, because most students reach only a medium level (55.0%); 40.7% of the surveyed students are at a high level, and the rest of the respondents (4.3%) are situated at a low level of the civic activity in terms of the given criterion. As we may observe, these research results indicate the necessity to develop the students' skills to ensure the effective implementation of social activities – civic competitiveness, which is manifested via personal traits such as diligence, self-reliance, tenacity, confidence, discipline, the ability to negotiate, the capability of evoking a sense of confidence, the ability to organise one's own activities.

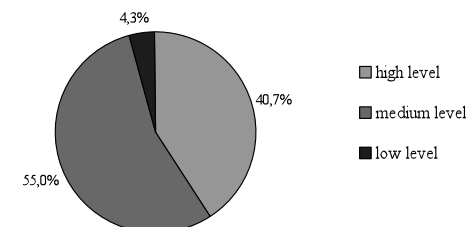


Diagram 4: The level of the civic activity of students according to the criterion of «civic competitiveness»

Source: own processing

The data included in Diagram 5 shows that, according to the research, the overall development of the students' civic activity is sufficient, since most of them (69.3%) are classified at a high level; 26.4% of the questioned students are at a medium level and the rest of them (4.3%) are placed at a low level of the civic activity. The results of the study on the overall level of the Ukrainian youth's civic activity show that their knowledge on the civic and legal issues as well as their awareness of the problems of society and of the necessity for finding efficient solutions to the public affairs are the prerequisites for the practical implementation of these students' general preparedness and ability to effectively, independently and responsibly engage in the civic activities.

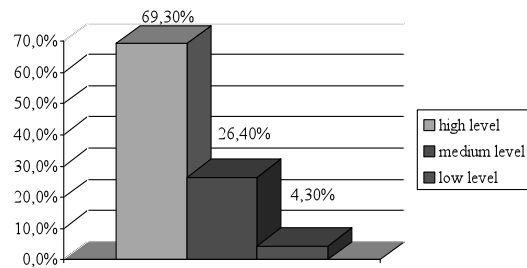


Diagram 5: The overall level of the civic activity of students

Source: own processing

Analysing the replies within the questionnaire's category «I and the social network», it was found that almost all participants (100%), although in various different ways, use online social networks. More specifically, 2.6% of the surveyed students use social networks for 30 minutes a day or less, 7.4% of them for up to 1 hour, 13.0% of the students spend from 1 to 2 hours a day on social networks. However, what is especially important here is the fact that 39.8% of the respondents spend 2 to 4 hours a day by using social networks, and 37.2% over 4 hours. The relevant data is processed in Diagram 6.

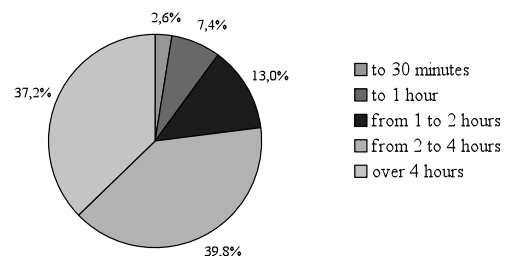


Diagram 6: The amount of time the students invest in social networking per day

Source: own processing

The most popular social networks among the Ukrainian users include *Vkontakte*, *Facebook*, *Classmates*, *Twitter*, *Instagram* and *LinkedIn*. Based on the provided answers, the Ukrainian youth's main reasons for visiting the social networking sites are: communication within social groups formed in the everyday life (with their classmates and fellow students), meeting new friends, getting news and updated information, searching for interest groups, watching, reading or listening to various media contents, using the ability to express themselves, playing online games and wasting time. The analysis of the responses provided an opportunity to find out that the majority of Ukrainian students (59.7%) express a positive attitude towards the use of social networks, 39.0% of the surveyed students perceive this matter neutrally and negative attitudes are stated by only 1.3% of the students (for more information, see Diagram 7 below).

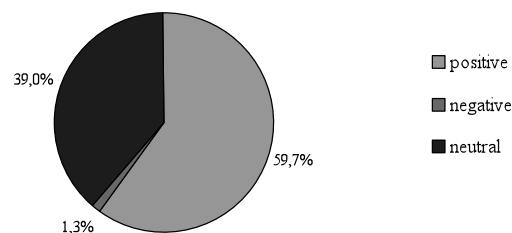


Diagram 7: The attitude of the students to online social networks

Source: own processing

An interesting fact is that 38.5% of the research participants agreed with the statement that online social networks helped them to learn; however, 9.1% of them disagreed and 52.4% of the surveyed students found it difficult to answer unambiguously (see Diagram 8).

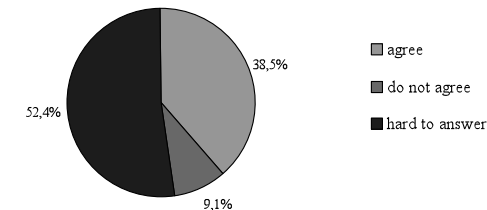


Diagram 8: Students' opinion on online social networks as helpful tools for studying

Source: own processing

As we were interested in finding out more about the relationship between the level of the civic activity of the Ukrainian youth and the use of online social networks and their role in the development of the given problem, a correlation analysis (criterion  $\chi^2$ ) was used. The results – based on the data according to the criterion  $\chi^2$  and the rank correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) – showed that there was a statistical connection between the level of the civic activity of students and the time these young people spent on online social networks ( $p < 0.5$ ).

Furthermore, it was found that the students who use social networks for 30 minutes a day or less are rather inactive in terms of the civic activity. The levels of development of their civic activity were determined as follows: a high level – 16.7%, a medium level – 0%, a low level – 83.3%. On the contrary, the development of the civic activity of students who spend up to 1 hour per day on social networks reached a high level in 82.4% of cases, a medium level was absent completely (0%) and a low level was identified in relation to 17.6% of the respondents. The students who are much more active on social networks (from 1 to 2 hours per day) are ranked as follows: a high level of the civic activity – 83.3% of the given group, a medium level – 16.7%, a low level – 0%. Surprisingly, the students who use social networking sites from 2 to 4 hours a day reach a high level of the civic activity in 69.6% of cases, a medium level is related to 29.3% of them and a low level is relevant only in association with 1.1% of these respondents. The large group of the research sample consisting of the students who spend over 4 hours a day on social networks includes 65.1% of the respondents with a high level of the civic activity, 33.7% of them are at a medium level and the remaining 1.2% reach a low level of the civic activity.

The identified connection between the amount of time young people spend on social networks and the level of their civic activity development (as visualised by Diagram 9) confirms the opinion of Leonid Chuprina who notes that “social networks as a communicative environment is an organic component of the civic society's development mechanism”.<sup>10</sup> According to the author, the social networks play a substantial role in the formation of civic identity; they provide a strong potential for social self-organisation, which can be used for developing the civic society.<sup>11</sup>

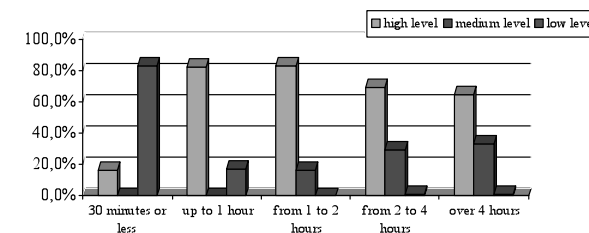


Diagram 9: The relationship between the level of the civic activity of students and the amount of time they spend on online social networks

Note:  $p < 0.05$

Source: own processing

10 ЧУПРИНА, Л.: Соціальні мережі як інструмент реалізації громадських ініціатив. In *Наукові праці Національної бібліотеки України імені В. І. Вернадського*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 62.

11 ЧУПРИНА, Л.: Соціальні мережі як інструмент реалізації громадських ініціатив. In *Наукові праці Національної бібліотеки України імені В. І. Вернадського*, 2015, Vol. 41, No. 1, p. 64.

Further analysis of the results (according to the criterion  $\chi^2$ ) and the rank correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) found statistical connection ( $\rho < 0.05$ ) between the level of the civic activity of students and the attitude of the Ukrainian youth to social networks (see Diagram 10). As the data suggests, 73.9% of the students who have a positive attitude to online social networks are at a high level of the civic activity; 21.7% of them are categorised on a medium level and only 4.4% of these respondents with a positive attitude to online social networks are defined as those with a low level of the civic activity. However, the students who have a negative attitude to online social networks are much less interested in the civic activities – only 36.2% of these respondents are highly active, 45.3% of the given students are at a middle level, and many of them (18.5%) are even of a low level. The students who are rather indifferent to online social networks include 26.4% of participants demonstrating a high level of the civic activity, 69.3% of them are at a middle level and 4.3% of this group indicate a low level of the civic activity.

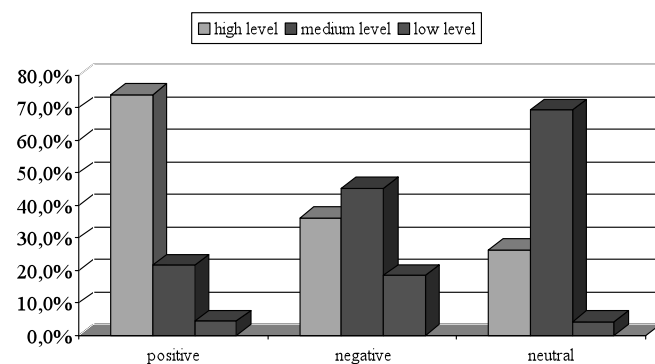


Diagram 10: The relationship between the level of the civic activity and the students' overall attitude to online social networks

Note:  $\rho < 0.05$

Source: own processing

If we take into account the findings above, the results are similar to research data obtained and discussed by Vasil Melnic and Sergey Cheb who are studying the patterns of the impact of social networks on the personal development of students. The authors have noted that the attitude of students to online social networks is rather ambiguous. According to their research discoveries, most students consider online social networks as a necessary thing needed for communicating, sharing and seeking information, finding new friends, organising events. However, a rather negative attitude of some young adults is based on the fact that online social networks, if used excessively, may separate their users from the real world.<sup>12</sup>

## Discussion and Conclusions

The research study revealed the features outlining the influence of online social networks on the level of development of the Ukrainian youth's civic activity and awareness. The brief theoretical reflection on the well-known experts' opinions on the issues of the civic activity helped us to better understand the definition of the young people's civic activity as the quality of a person that includes a set of knowledge, skills, aptitudes, strong-willed efforts, motives and feelings aimed at the development of an effective public discussion and civic awareness. The research into the Ukrainian youth's civic activity and its structure allowed us to implement the criteria that are relevant for any research on the studied phenomenon: «civic consciousness», «civic value», «civic experience» and «civic competitiveness». The article also contains a short description of social networks which reveals that the most popular online social networks – among the Ukrainian youth, of course – are *Vkontakte*, *Facebook*, *Odnoklassniki* and *Twitter*.

<sup>12</sup> МЕЛЬНИК, В., ЧЕБ, С.: Характеристика деяких закономірностей впливу у соціальній мережі Інтернет на особистісний розвиток студентів. In *Молодь і ринок*, 2011, Vol. 83, No. 12, p. 102.

Given the main purpose of the article, i.e. to verify the research hypothesis stated in the second chapter, we found out that the Ukrainian youth's civic activity is at a rather sufficient level of its development. Thanks to the survey it was revealed that almost all of the research participants use online social networks in one way or another. By establishing the statistically determined connection between the level of Ukrainian youth's civic activity and their use of online social networks, we were able to confirm that the young people in Ukraine reach a higher level of the civic activity if they use social networks regularly and express a positive attitude towards them. The hypothesis that the young adults who use social networks more often express a higher level of the civic activity in comparison with those who spend less time using social networks. The analysis of the given results allows us to better understand the peculiarities of the Ukrainian youth's civic activity in order to highlight the psychological aspects related to the impact of social networks that need to be taken into consideration through the effective organisation and realisation of the civic and society-wide projects aimed at young adults.

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