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University's Information Policy in a Mediatized Reality: Youth as the Main Target Audience

Anna N. Gureeva

Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia

ABSTRACT

One of the key challenges faced by Russian higher education institutions is the lack of effective long-term strategies for communicating their research, educational activities, and student development efforts to various target audiences such as scholars, students, prospective applicants, regulatory authorities, and international groups. This study aims to uncover the principles and key features of universities' information policies targeted at youth in Russia. The paper presents findings based on data obtained from a series of in-depth interviews ($n = 17$) with student representatives, vice-rectors, and department heads specializing in youth communication policy and pedagogical activities at Russian universities. Additionally, the study includes empirical data from a pilot survey conducted among students across four federal districts ($n = 150$). In the final section, the paper offers a set of key recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of media communication efforts with youth audiences.

KEYWORDS

mediatization, media communication, mediatization of research and education, university, information policy, youth

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Introduction

Efficient use of human capital is crucial for the strategic stability of states today, making it essential to educate the youth, who represent a key source of innovative potential for national progress. In the Russian context, this task is reflected in the document *Osnovy gosudarstvennoi molodezhnoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2025 goda* [Foundations of the state youth policy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2025]¹, which sets a strategic priority “to create conditions for the formation of a harmonious, constantly improving, erudite, competitive, and caring individual, possessing a strong moral core, capable of adapting to changing conditions and receptive to new creative ideas” (Ob utverzhdenii Osnov, 2014; Trans. by Anna Gureeva—A. G.).

The primary goal of state youth policy in Russia is “to educate patriotic youth with independent thinking, a creative worldview, professional knowledge, a high level of culture—including interethnic communication—and the responsibility and capability for independent decision-making aimed at the prosperity of the state, its people, and their own families.” The objectives specified in the document include “creating an information space that allows for personal growth, as well as enhancing the efficiency of information infrastructure use, aiming thereby to foster patriotic and civic upbringing of the youth, primarily accomplished by means of education” (Ob utverzhdenii Osnov, 2014; Trans. by A. G.).

Several researchers, notably Smirnov (2023), have advocated for a transforming model of state youth policy, highlighting the increasing role of the educational system, particularly higher educational institutions. A detailed analysis of youth policy concepts across leading Russian universities performed by the author of the present paper reveals several key focus areas: promotion of youth employment and entrepreneurship, fostering research and innovation engagement, and providing value-based guidance centered on patriotism, volunteerism, and public activism among young people. Additionally, universities prioritize socializing students through mechanisms like student self-governance and mentorship, empowering creativity, and promoting a healthy lifestyle to sustain young people’s interest in wellness. These efforts underscore universities’ evolving strategies in shaping youth policy and nurturing the development of young individuals in Russia.

The urgent need to study shifts in communication strategies among Russian universities is motivated by significant changes in the Russian higher education system. These changes include the sovereignization of science and higher education, which requires the development of comprehensive communication strategies to ensure the stability of the educational system. With full understanding of this task, the state has scaled up the support for universities that goes beyond financial and organizational aspects to include communication policy development (e.g., similar initiatives are embodied in the national project *Nauka*

¹ The document was approved by the Federal Government (Decree of November 11, 2014 No. 2403-r). The Russian Ministry of Education and Science, along with other relevant federal executive authorities, is responsible for its implementing.

i Universitety [Science and Universities]² and *Prioritet 2030* [Priority 2030] academic leadership program)³.

The rapid evolution of media trends requires universities to improve both internal and external communication strategies to effectively engage their target audiences. This is vital not only for the academic community but also for other stakeholders such as the state and society, who depend on well-functioning higher educational institutions. Since youth represent a primary audience for universities and are significant recipients of university communications, understanding their media consumption habits and communication preferences is essential for developing effective management strategies. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the principles and unique characteristics of university communication policies tailored specifically to youth.

Theoretical Framework

Mediatization as the Driving Force of University's Communication Efforts

In recent years, mediatization has become a crucial concept for studying the interaction between media, the state, and society. This theory has developed on multiple levels: it examines both the influence of media on society and social institutions, and the impact of technological and communication advancements on society (Arif, 2019; Hepp & Krotz, 2014; Hjarvard, 2008; Nim, 2017; Schulz, 2004; Silverstone, 2006).

We are now experiencing the third wave of mediatization, known as “deep mediatization.” Each wave, driven by technological developments such as the printing press, telephone, radio, television, Internet, personal computers, and big data, adds new dimensions while preserving previous ones. Deep mediatization, coinciding with digitalization and datafication, is characterized by the integration of social practices with digital media.

The idea of mediatization as social change through shifts in communication models was first introduced by M. McLuhan in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of*

² The national project *Nauka i Universitety* [Science and Universities] aims to elevate Russia into the top-ten countries globally for research and innovation. It operates under Presidential Decree No. 204 of May 7, 2018 *O natsionalnykh tseliakh i strategicheskikh zadachakh razvitiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2024 goda* [On the national goals and strategic objectives of the development of the Russian Federation for the period until 2024] (2018) and the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 474 of July 21, 2020 *O natsionalnykh tseliakh razvitiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2030 goda* [On the national development goals of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030]. The implementation period of the national project is from January 10, 2018 till December 31, 2024. The national project encompasses four federal initiatives: *Integratsiia* [Integration], aimed at integrating science, higher education, and industry; *Issledovatel'skoe liderstvo* [Research Leadership], focusing on large-scale scientific and technological projects in priority research areas; *Infrastruktura* [Infrastructure], dedicated to developing research and training infrastructure; and *Kadry* [Staff], which aims to enhance human capital for regional, industrial, and research and development sectors.

³ *Prioritet 2030* [Priority 2030] program aims to create over 100 progressive modern universities in Russia by 2030 that would serve as centres of scientific, technological, and socio-economic development. The selection of participants for the program is regulated by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 729 of May 13, 2021 *O merakh po realizatsii programmy strategicheskogo akademicheskogo liderstva "Prioritet 2030"* [On implementation measures of the Priority 2030 Strategic Academic Leadership].

Man (1964). The scholar invited particular attention to the role of the communication environment itself, expanding the focus beyond the channelled content, deviating from the concept of medium and arguing against the theory of mediation that views journalism merely as a channel of communication.

The term “mediatization” was coined by the British researcher J. Thompson in 1993 (Thompson, 1993) to describe attribution of media logics and media forms to the fundamental elements of socio-cultural reality. In modern research, the term serves as an umbrella concept (Kolomiets, 2014) referring to the growing influence of modern communication technologies and embracing the notions of media content, media organizations, media effects, media logics, as well as media consumption and its significance, individual and social. Mediatization captures the increasingly indispensable nature and vital importance of media for various areas of public life, resulting in qualitative changes in individual daily routines.

The ideas around mutual influence of media and social routines were advanced by a cohort of scholars including Krotz and Hepp (2014), Hjarvard (2008), Lundby (2014), etc. They further studied mediatization, querying specifically how communication environment and processes impact the society. At the end of the 20th century, multiple researchers including Porter and Millar (1985), Drucker (1988) first recognized the onset of “information revolution,” which has made a drastic impact on all aspects of organizational life that still reverberates today (Zammuto et al., 2007). For instance, information and ICT not only significantly enhance organizational performance (Choi et al., 2007; Hitt & Brynjolfsson, 1996), but they can also dramatically change organizational processes, structures and culture, as well as duty regulations for employees (Markus, 2004). Given its ever-increasing importance, information is often compared to the “DNA of the organization,” i.e., if the information flow is severely restricted or compromised, the organization can wither and die (Peppard et al., 2007).

Today, any social communication is predominantly mediated and cannot be isolated from its deeply mediatized nature. Communication of this kind is increasingly hosted on digital platforms, social media above all, joined recently by messengers. Most receptive to innovation and digital technology, the youth are the most active audience of such media (Gureeva, 2020). According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) for 2023, young people aged 18–24 normally spend more than eight hours on the Internet every day, which significantly exceeds the average for the Russians in general, that is 4.5 hours (Sotsial'nye Seti i Messendzhery, 2023). Success of digital media is primarily driven by the demand of the modern information society for fast access to information. Moreover, social networks are oftentimes treated by the modern youth not only as the major channel and source of information, but also as a platform where they develop and articulate their socio-political and civic stance.

A lasting concern among some researchers who study the impact of mediatization on society is media dependence and the resulting loss of autonomy (see, e.g. Scott & Orlikowski, 2014). The use of media gradually ceases to be perceived as an optional or additional choice, becoming mandatory. Deep mediatization implies that application of certain media technologies is no longer a matter of individual choice. Flexibility

generated by mediatization entails a peculiar dialectic between individual choice and compliance with the structural demands of digital transformation.

The above-described effects of mediatization trigger reverse social mechanisms that dampen the pace and intensity by which media technologies and media logics spread into different areas of social life. Mechanisms of this sort form today's scholarly discourse on de-mediatization (Gavra & Bykova, 2022; Hepp, 2017; Rauch, 2014). However, academic discourse does not always oppose de-mediatization to the growing social impact of media. According to the famous mediatization theorist Hepp (2017), deep mediatization is neither homogeneous nor linear but a complex, intrinsically contradictory and sometimes conflicting process that integrates people's attempts to "cope" with their lives being completely infiltrated with media. Giving up on certain types of digital media, people resort to the "oases of de-mediatization" in order to disrupt the constant connection to the entire world at least for a short while. In other words, deep mediatization offers space for self-reflection and controlled escape, thus remaining manageable for people as individuals and media consumers (Hepp, 2017).

Information Policy of the Modern University: Primary Objectives and Development Trends

The term "information policy," originating in the field of public administration, refers to a power instrument whose significance has soared over the past decades, leading to the emergence of the concept "information state" (Braman, 2006). While the classic narrow definition of information policy focuses on access to government information, the term was first used by governments in the context of propaganda efforts during World War I (Braman, 2011).

Targeted information policy developed and applied by each educational institution proves key to efficiently solve a whole range of information transparency issues (Asmolova, 2020). Analysis of definitions around the concept of "information policy" reveals the underlying concepts of "system" and "activity" (Asmolova, 2019). Information strategy of an educational institution can be described as an organized process managed by the institution with a view to addressing users' information needs, developing structure and content of information resources in accordance with legal regulations, selecting efficient means to inform and assess the quality of information resources. As an actor of information and communication activities, the university pursues an information strategy through a sequence of actions aiming to achieve informative-motivational results and ensure participation in public dialogue.

Value system that lies at the core of an information strategy has its share in setting goals and objectives of the educational institution and in identifying the best methods and tools to achieve them. Studies show that in the discourse of foreign academic institutions, the term "information policy" does not describe strategies to build university's positive image, but normally refers to a set of rules on the use of information systems and a list of work standards concerned with safety and accessibility of information. Whereas promotion of socially significant information about the organization is commonly outlined by the rules of engagement with the press and termed as Media Relations (Kalachinskii, 2012).

Academic research is substantially lacking in large-scale studies centred on the analysis of information policy and media communication, in particular, in the higher educational setting. The issue of university's information policy in the competitive higher educational environment lies at the intersection of different theoretical and empirical areas, including media communication, journalism, education and communication sociology, marketing research and political science, international relations, etc. However, a number of papers on strategic management in higher school touches upon the problems of competitiveness and media communication work (Asaul & Kaparov, 2007; Bok, 2003; Clark, 1998; Faiustov, 2021; Fatkhutdinov, 2005; Filippov et al., 2005; Gorokhov et al., 2018; Grudzinskiy, 2004; Gureeva, 2017; Rosovsky, 1995; Shevchenko, 2017; Sokolov, 1996). The aforementioned papers explore methods and strategies for university promotion through various media, including social networks, official websites, and digital mass media platforms. They highlight specific promotion practices for each platform and provide extensive statistics on the communication effectiveness of leading Russian universities. Drawing on this experience, the scholars propose specific guidelines to improve university positioning.

Information dissemination has grown to become a centrepiece for strategic plans of universities. Troubled over their position in the specialized international rankings, universities begin to reflect on their information dissemination strategies and their institutional websites (Perez-Montoro, 2014). On the one hand, university's information resources are normally structured by types of audience (Morville & Rosenfeld, 2006), including five large target groups: future students (applicants), lecturers (teaching staff), researchers (scholarly community), students (and graduates), and administration. On the other hand, such classification is incomplete, since it fails to integrate business community, state authorities, and foreign target audiences.

The success of a university's administration, business operations, research, and educational activities largely depends on effectively creating and managing information assets. Universities should adhere to principles of freedom of information by allowing public access to records for legitimate research purposes. Managing information systems is one approach that can enhance universities' competitiveness (Dachyar & Dewi, 2015). However, many global rankings fall short in accurately evaluating the performance of Russian universities, as they fail to capture the full complexity of the national higher education system.

Methodology

A major challenge faced by Russian universities is the lack of efficient long-term strategies for communicating their research, education, and student development activities to various target audiences, including scholars, students, applicants, regulatory authorities, and international groups. To address this challenge, an effective communication strategy should be based on leading research in the field. However, the mediatization of university activities in Russia remains understudied and underrepresented in academic publications. Consequently, most contemporary studies focus on case studies of the scholars' own universities, which results in a lack

of comprehensive analyses comparing multiple educational organizations using various criteria, especially qualitative ones. This gap is further compounded by the fact that while there is substantial research from 2010–2015, significant geopolitical, social, economic, and technological changes have occurred since then, necessitating updated and more robust communication strategies.

Due to the increased importance of universities' work with the younger generation, actively articulated at the state level, it is necessary to continue conceptualizing this target audience and specifying its characteristics. To build effective media communications with young people today, universities must consider emerging trends. The research question that is particularly relevant to the academic community and that has guided the purpose of this paper is to identify and systematize the features of young people as the target audience of university media communications.

The objectives of the study are (a) to describe the significant patterns of media consumption among modern students, (b) to identify their content, format, and platform preferences, and (c) to systematize the challenges universities face in building media communications. Additionally, the study aims to highlight effective practices to overcome these challenges. The novelty of this work stems from incorporating feedback not only from experts from several Russian universities but also from the young people themselves, the primary target audience of these media communications. This methodological strategy enabled us to formulate conclusions that reflect the perspectives of all actors involved.

The practical significance of the study lies in the recommendations for improving universities' information policy, presented in the conclusion.

This paper provides results drawing on data from a series of in-depth interviews ($n = 17$) with two groups of informants: information policy experts (vice-rectors of Russian federal universities and major higher educational institutions) and students of Russian universities aged 18–25; and a pilot survey ($n = 150$) among students aged 18–25 from four federal districts: Central, Volga, Southern, and Siberian. All in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face in the fall of 2023; a pilot survey carried out in the summer of 2023.

The first group of informants comprised information policy experts representing vice-rectors and heads of departments supervising information activities in Russian universities ($n = 9$). Jurisdiction of this kind often lies with the vice-rector for student development, which highlighting the crucial role of effective information management in the university's extracurricular and student development programs.

The second part of in-depth interviews features students aged 18–25, mostly majoring in journalism and media communications, believed to be the most informed and progressive media consumers ($n = 8$).

Questions for the expert interview are divided into clusters. The first cluster deals with the specifics of target audiences in university communication, in particular, information needs of young adults as key recipients of messages in this regard; while the second one centres on features of content published on Internet sources of educational organizations. The interviews were analysed using an open coding method, interpretations of in-depth interview informants are selectively presented in

this paper. To facilitate presentation of respondents from different groups, quotes by experts supervising communication policies in Russian universities are marked as E1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9, and quotes by students are marked as S1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8.

Students were also surveyed using an online questionnaire with closed questions, which included an “other” option for participants to provide their own answers if the available choices were not suitable. The first cluster of questions revolves around the patterns of youth media consumption, while the second aims to assess the respondents’ awareness of youth policy issues. The pilot nature of this study, along with its small sample size ($n = 150$) and representativity issues, can be considered limitations. However, the results presented in this paper can still contribute to the discussion on the efficiency of traditional communication approaches between universities and youth in social media spaces.

Results

University Media Communication With the Youth: Features and Trends as Perceived by the Expert Community and Young Audiences

The extent to which operations by different economic and social actors are mediated has become a key criterion for assessing their efficiency (Vartanova, 2009). Mediatized reality has brought about new professional activities as well as the need to communicate both general performance and significant achievements to the public. Consequently, the mediatization of Russian higher education, a critical social institution, is a priority in national educational policy.

The mediatization of university activities aims to create a positive image of higher education in Russia, encourage young people to obtain higher education, and promote specific training programs, particularly in fields such as IT and engineering, which are in high demand in the labor market. Through their mediatization efforts, universities also seek to attract younger teaching staff, showcase scientific achievements, and position themselves on international platforms. Currently, the information activities of Russian universities focus on several major areas of interaction, including communication with society, the state, and the professional community. As one of our experts has put it,

it is our duty as a university to efficiently convey values approved by the Russian Federation. Moreover, universities are communities that accumulate the highest knowledge, culture and depth, the cumulative knowledge and experience that they should bring home to the public. (E9; Trans. by A. G.)

A university’s target audiences can be divided into external and internal according to the vector of media communication. External target audiences include applicants and their parents, employers, state authorities and public structures, grantors, and larger academic community; whereas internal group is mainly represented by the university staff and students. In this context, media communication with external audiences such as applicants, parents, employers, state authorities, the academic community, and the public is a high priority. Both external and internal groups are predominantly composed of youth.

A unique feature of academic organizations is the high likelihood of audience members transitioning between internal and external groups. Therefore, developing corporate information resources that effectively attract and inform both internal and external audiences is crucial.

University target audiences can be grouped into several categories: applicants and their parents, including those applying for Master's, PhD, and second higher education programs; foreign students and applicants; the state, including the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education and various educational authorities; university management, including administration and the board of trustees; teaching staff and university members; students; the Russian and international academic community; graduates; employers; and the mass media.

The target audiences defined in research are further confirmed by the surveyed expert practitioners.

There are three major target audiences. The first group comprises applicants and their parents, with a subgroup of foreign students. Secondly, there is a group of students and their parents, followed by a third group represented by the teaching staff. These are the three core groups that are further supplemented by other clusters, such as academic community, industrial partners and potential employers, state, graduates, external students, schoolchildren, and the wider population of the region. (E1; Trans. by A. G.)

There are two groups of target audiences: external and internal, both including the youth—applicants, students, graduates and young scientists, who become primary focus of our media communication strategy. (E7; Trans. by A. G.)

The majority of universities combine different target audiences into larger groups: *Since not all applicants make their decisions independently, we do not separate them from their parents, and attempt to package information for both within one piece. (E7; Trans. by A. G.)*

The youth are mainly present in two groups of target audiences, applicants and students, whose paramount importance is highlighted by the experts:

Applicants are a vitally important target audience. These are high-schoolers of 10th and 11th grade. While students are certainly the most active audience, potential applicants and their parents hold more significance for us. ... I would prioritize applicants, since they are the future of the university. (E2; Trans. by A. G.)

Admission being essential to university functioning, applicants and their parents constitute two crucial audience groups that consume around 70% of our efforts. The third group in terms of importance is, naturally, the students. It is vital that they feel part of the university in all forms, be it research or any other area. Without students, their achievements, initiatives and complaints, there would be no education. (E4; Trans. by A. G.)

Students themselves highlight the particular importance of targeting applicants through media communication:

Taken together, applicants are a larger audience group that consumes content more greedily, as it is more relevant to them. I think students resort to university

resources for information less often, perhaps due to the fact that they have already entered the educational institution, and their ardent interest ... has subsided, or it might be due to more pressing information needs that are better satisfied by other resources. (S3; Trans. by A. G.)

Efficient information strategy for universities requires a nuanced approach towards target audiences, and the youth in particular. Beside applicants, universities strive to establish communication with their parents, who largely influence young people's choice of future specialization:

We have 23 institutes, all of them are different. ... Lawyers, for example, are more in tune with their parents, since legal education, oftentimes being a dynastic, family decision, is most frequently opted for by parents, ... paid education is also up to parents. Other institutes, such as the gastronomic faculty, are more focused on applicants. Still others consider students as their primary target audience. For some, partners constitute major target audience, so they are centred on building active interaction with companies lacking in human resources and technologies. There is no one-size-fits-all kind of scenario because the setting varies too much. Everyone is different—biologists, chemists, mathematicians, analysts, gastronomes, librarians, historians, philosophers, journalists, architects, and many more. (E5; Trans. by A. G.)

Apart from the youth and their parents, experts stress the importance of working with faculty as the main agents of young people's socialization during their studies.

If we group applicants and their parents into one category and students into another, then the third one will comprise the university staff. While being an internal audience, it is large in number and consists of the major ambassadors greeting students in classroom. They carry the university spirit and communicate with students, passing on knowledge; they work in direct contact with students. Their close communication with students makes them a highly important target audience. (E4; Trans. by A. G.)

Each target audience has preferred channels to access information about the educational institution. Applicants use social networks, their parents are informed primarily through traditional media, while faculty heavily rely on the website of their organization:

Based on their role in university communication, I would rank website, social media, and mass media the following way: first come social media, after that mass media, then the website. Why do social media come first? Since I mostly consume information on social media, such as VK⁴ and Telegram⁵, I have no need to look for information anywhere else. This platform is of higher priority, as it is convenient to communicate and consume content in one place. Next come mass media. Since my parents consume mass media content and share what they read/hear with me, I appear to indirectly consume mass media content as

⁴ VK (short for its original name VKontakte) is a Russian online social media and social networking service. <https://vk.com> VK™ is a trademark of VK.com Ltd.

⁵ Telegram™ is a trademark of Telegram Group Inc., its operational center is based in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates.

well. To my mind, website is visited least commonly, and faculty might be the only audience to actively use it. (S4; Trans. by A. G.)

We are aware that social networks are preferable for everyone, both for the youth and their parents, but we still try to give full attention to the website and its content in attempt to make it more appealing, because it is, as a matter of fact, our official representation on the Internet. (E6; Trans. by A. G.)

Data from our pilot survey also indicates that social media content dominates youth media consumption patterns: 98% of young people use social networks every day. Communication (52%) and latest news (24%) are major motives for using social media among the students. Of the respondents, 16% access social media primarily for entertainment, while 8% seek educational content. It is especially noteworthy that being active users of social networks, more than half of the respondents (54%) have already practiced digital detox, when they deliberately abstained from digital resources (social media, messengers, etc.) for a specific period. Moreover, every tenth person does this on a regular basis (12%), e.g., every weekend. Similar results indicating the growing popularity of digital detox practices among young people can be found in several national and foreign studies (Efimova & Semenov, 2020; Rauch, 2014; Syvertsen & Enli, 2020). Media use by the “digital youth” is marked by independence, thoughtfulness and awareness (Dunas, 2022).

Abstention from digital resources is motivated by the belief that they consume too much time that can be spent otherwise (30%), fatigue from online communication (26%), and abundance of content (22%). Some respondents limit social network access to prove they can spend time effectively without digital resources (8%). Of particular interest are responses of those who selected “other” (14%) in our online questionnaire and shared their reasons for temporary withdrawals from social networks. Some people perceive online platforms as work environment and strive to leave their “digital office” for the weekend: *“I use social networks and messengers primarily for work, while on weekends I try to put business aside and make time for myself and my loved ones in the offline world”; “my work is related to social media, so I need a break from time to time”, “rest, emotional discharge”* (Trans. by A. G.). Others find that “digital detox” is vital to improve the psycho-emotional background: *“I get tired of the Internet, yet, for me it is impossible due to work”; “news made me feel anxious, resulting further in physical discomfort and health issues”; “[social media] make me depressed”; “[I practised digital detox] to improve my mental well-being”* (Trans. by A. G.).

Universities play a vital role in modern society; they are essential for advancing knowledge and laying scientific foundations for future generations. Effective information policies in the digital age must uphold humanistic ethical ideals to achieve balance, ensure sustainable development, and protect the rights and freedoms of all individuals in society.

When discussing the specifics of interaction with the modern youth, many experts stressed the importance of channelling meaningful content:

We are now focusing more on promoting values, but this is our side of the story. As far as the audience is concerned, there is a demand for useful content packaged

in an entertaining, accessible format. They (the youth) have clip thinking, unable to perceive long formats, which also impacts our strategy. We witness frantic demand on podcasts, VK clips, YouTube⁶ shorts—these are very much in demand. Values are extremely important. Take one example, the last presidential decree, which has 21 values set out. Now it is impossible to talk about patriotism too much, as it often provokes rejection. Too many of them (the youth) have been raised in liberal tradition for too long. Values are an apt place to start, gently yet persistently, aligning them more with the state's interests. Apart from the state itself, these efforts should be spearheaded by those who influence opinions of adolescents: family, parents, community, faculty, professors. (E1; Trans. by A. G.)

Our experts point out that the youth have the following key features as a target audience of media communication:

First of all, they are passive. Secondly, young people are less toxic than those aged 20+, which is quite an advantage. This is somehow seen from the comments and their online behaviours. Perhaps being more passive, they write fewer comments. Moreover, their comments are not meaningful, they are more on an emotional side, so they can confine their opinion expression to emojis. I cannot say that this is a drawback, it is merely their own communication culture. (E1; Trans. by A. G.)

At the same time, such observation might as well be explained by a discrepancy between the content of university's social media and the needs of young people.

The survey among the youth revealed a relatively low level of students' awareness of the primary areas of the state youth policy: 44% indicated that they have a general understanding of but lack knowledge about the primary areas of the youth policy and specific measures undertaken in this regard. Only 24% of respondents have a detailed understanding of the youth policy, while 22% of survey participants rated their level of awareness as not high enough: *"I just know about the term, yet I struggle to explain its meaning and essence"*. Of the respondents, 10% found this concept unfamiliar. In most cases, young people first learned about the youth policy when studying (42%), from online media (20%) and traditional media (16%), and every tenth from family members, friends, or colleagues.

Speaking of social media content on youth policy, 42% of respondents said that their feeds currently lack such content. This topic goes completely unnoticed by 30% of young people on social media, while 28% regularly encounter related posts. Understanding social media algorithms is crucial for effectively reaching young audiences, but it remains a challenging area, as noted by nearly all experts interviewed:

The Zen⁷, which is, from our perspective, the second most popular social media platform after VK, requires understanding of algorithms. If set up properly, Zen can help any content skyrocket. (E7; Trans. by A. G.)

I envision Telegram coming forward more and more, as it is very convenient, fast and efficient. VK's feed functions in a peculiar way, and after countless attempts to deconstruct the way promotion and targeting works on that platform, we have

⁶ YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

⁷ Zen™ is a trademark of Dzen.Platforma LLC.

come to realize that it is a toss of a dice. Which is why professional community that deals with media promotion will increasingly resort to Telegram. Clearly, Telegram is not for video uploads, but according to our experience, posting videos from VK on Telegram leads to growth in viewership because our content does not go unnoticed by the audience in Telegram. Whereas VK renders us invisible unless the audience deliberately chooses to access our channel's feed. It is not quite clear to us why but this happens. (E9; Trans. by A. G.)

The increasing media activity at Russian universities is closely tied to the expanding capabilities of the Internet as a vital platform for informing the public. To ensure a university's post stands out amidst a vast array of diverse content, it is crucial to select specific angles to present each topic.

Fast-growing and frequently changing, social media development is inconceivable without the factor of "emotion," emotional presentation of information. Entering the reader's (mindset) on social media constitutes an emotional aspect of a kind. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that social media are monitored by the wall (i.e., algorithmic content feed), and users do not access specific pages. Therefore, it is of vital importance to be aware of the criteria that underlie algorithmic prioritization of content in the user feed. (E7; Trans. by A. G.)

Being sensitive to the current trends of youth media consumption in terms of topics and formats would allow universities to be more efficient in building their information policy and making priority topics more "visible" for their target audience. Students stress the importance of exclusive educational content that advances their understanding of complex topics:

Educational content remains very popular with the youth. Naturally, there is also demand for news, agenda, and expert opinion, i.e. content from people who are well versed in certain areas. (S1; Trans. by A. G.)

Experts believe that universities should deliver serious content through personal stories and by highlighting the practical value of "complex" topics:

Entertaining content is important for young people, they "dig it" ... at the same time, they try to take on serious topics as well, driven by the need to scrutinize processes and understand underlying mechanisms. There is a common belief that they (the youth) are generally unconcerned with science, but they can be lured through technology transfer and technological entrepreneurship; there are entire infrastructures for this. Once they see how science can be applied, going beyond research for the sake of research, once they learn how it can be converted into startups. Our graduate biochemists have developed a line of ecological household chemicals becoming Forbes millionaires. Once they see that chemical laboratories can manufacture practical products, and there is an idea to be presented, funded, operationalized via technology, conveyed to consumers—they take interest and delve into the topic. There is a portion of students who are keenly interested in this, and when we talk about Master's programs that include scientific research, they wish to become "Elon Musks" of a kind, smart and commercially successful. This is what seems appealing to them. (E3; Trans. by A. G.)

As for specific content strategies, many experts stress the significance of content authorship:

Content produced by the youth works better, because they pay attention to people they know. The more content is produced by the students themselves, the better it will be perceived. To my mind, content policy should be changed through cultivating opinion leaders on social media who will convey the meanings. (E7; Trans. by A. G.)

Students' involvement in implementing the university's information policy positively influences the perception of the its brand within the youth community (Mukhamadullin et al., 2023).

The need to personalize content of university resources is also pointed out by the surveyed students.

Everyone wants to see and hear unique information that is not to be found anywhere else and that captures attention. People's attention is attracted by other people. Very few actually seek anonymized information. Personally, I would like to hear about successful people who went big, for instance, thanks to the project they created at our university from scratch. (S2; Trans. by A. G.)

I prefer to consume content through personal stories, that is when general information is told through personalization. (S4; Trans. by A. G.)

Conciseness and modern visual design can be cast as yet another key element of media communication between the university and the youth.

My information needs are as follows: text should be visually literate and well-designed, so as not to be too long. Simultaneously, supporting information should be present in cards or in audio format in the context of podcasting. Information should be verified and reliable, while its presentation should allow for the easy perception. My habits have changed with the development of the Internet. Previously not so important, today visualization holds everything together. And my needs have changed accordingly. (S4; Trans. by A. G.)

Keeping up with young audiences' demands for quality audiovisual content helps universities increase the engagement of their audiences on social networks. Recent content analysis reveals that photos published by the top 50 universities from Shanghai Ranking on their social media accounts generate the highest number of likes and shares, and video posts generate more shares than text-only messages (Fährnich et al., 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

A key goal of Russia's state youth policy is to create an information space that promotes personal growth and efficiently uses the information infrastructure, fostering professional development and patriotic and civic education through educational means. Thus, new methods of engaging the target audience and improving media communication between universities and their youth audience are crucial for academia, the state, and society.

The information policy of Russian universities requires significant revision. On the one hand, universities are key to implementing state policies; on the other, they are engaged in constant competition for students, human resources, and funding. This competition complicates strategies for the dissemination of information in academia, especially given the deep mediatization of social routines.

Mediatization, a defining feature of modern society, has deeply penetrated social routines, making any activity without media coverage effectively invisible. External audiences, not directly involved in university activities, cannot access the true reality of life in the university community. However, accessible university news especially regarding scientific discoveries, achievements, business reputation, and educational pathways is crucial in influencing young people's decisions to pursue higher education and choose specific institutions. Public information about university events and achievements serves as the primary connection between society and the academic world.

Mediatization in all spheres of public life has influenced state efforts as well. One of the priority tasks of state youth policy is to create an information space that promotes personal growth and efficiently uses the information infrastructure, aiming thereby to foster professional development and patriotic and civic education among young people. The education sector, especially higher educational institutions, is primarily responsible for addressing these challenges. Therefore, proper management of universities' information assets is critical for the effective implementation of state youth policy.

To ensure the success of a university's information policy, proper allowance must be made for the impact of "de-mediatization" on all target audiences, specifically on the youth. According to the 2021 survey, the modern youth all over the world revisit their media consumption habits more frequently than other age groups, striving to build healthier relationships with social media by limiting the time of use (The Ultimate Social Media Trends Report, n.d.). It is, therefore, necessary to realign information flows and content strategies with the latest trends and specifics, including social media algorithms.

The following recommendations to enhance digital communication between universities and the youth might be proposed based on the data obtained through our interviews with experts and students as well as an online survey of Russian students.

First of all, a university's information policy requires a nuanced approach towards target audiences. Modern media communication strategies are multilayered, involving not only efforts to engage applicants and students but also separate work with their parents and faculty, who are key influencers on young people's identity formation. Target audiences vary in preferred information channels: applicants primarily use social media and spend over eight hours online daily, parents rely more on mass media, and faculty extensively use their institution's website. Therefore, universities should develop official social media resources to cater to young people and create a network of informal blogs to share student perspectives on university life.

Secondly, a clear understanding of target audiences' information needs in terms of content, format, and technology is necessary to increase youth engagement with universities. Although entertainment is often more popular with young people, it is essential to create meaningful information flows and guide the audience through complex topics. Additionally, the trend of de-mediatization, where young people aim

to limit their media consumption, calls for a more selective approach to content. This trend includes individual and collective practices of deliberate limitation or avoidance of mediatized communication and conscious media withdrawal in certain contexts. In their media use, the “digital youth” demonstrate independence, thoughtfulness, and awareness. Our research shows that more than half of students from different parts of Russia have practiced digital detox, consciously abstaining from social networks and messengers for a certain period. Moreover, one in ten does this regularly, for example, every weekend. By independently controlling their engagement and being selective in media consumption, young people act as active stakeholders in the media communication space.

As far as social media are concerned, understanding mechanisms behind algorithms remains a daunting challenge to building an efficient information strategy. At the same time, experts generally agree that, when dealing with serious and complex information, universities should present content primarily through short personal multimedia stories, preferably authored by young people, and necessarily marked by a strong emotional component and articulated practical significance. Conciseness and modern visual design are other important components of media communication between universities and the youth because it greatly increases the chances that such content will be shared on social media, going “viral.”

Modern universities are keenly focused on establishing effective communication with their target audiences, which requires a structured vision of their diverse interests and research into their behaviors and media preferences. The youth represent the largest and most dynamically shifting audience for universities. Implementing a systematic information strategy based on technological trends and modern media consumption patterns will not only enhance media communication with the youth but also bolster the overall effectiveness of initiatives supporting Russian youth.

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⁸ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

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