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## Representation of Student Life Strategies on the Internet

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### Abstract

Under the conditions of risk-related influence on globalization processes, as well as with the intensive development of information and communication technologies and the media sphere, the formation of students' life strategies for their effective group and individual implementation is one of the goals of the state and society. Life strategies, as a social phenomenon complex in nature, should be considered in the context of the choice of the person and the social group of life goals and ways of self-determination and self-realization. As the factors determining the choice of the personality relevant life strategies are the level of socio-economic development of society, cultural values and traditions, political institutions and structures, social strata and groups, socio-demographic parameters and other socially significant features. Life strategies act as socially determined, integrative and rational systems of individual orientation to the long-term perspective in individual, social and cultural plans (both in projective and retrospective aspects), objectified in individual behavior and activity. Types of life strategies have a set of such characteristics that can be used for the typology of visual data presented in the form of photographs. The article identifies and characterizes the life strategies of Belarusian student's community, as well as heuristic possibilities of visual sociology for their identification and analysis.

**Keywords:** life strategies, student life, visual studies, visual sociology, Instagram.

### 1. Introduction

The dynamic development of information and communication technologies transforms social interaction in modern society into a continuous and constantly reproducing process of media communications between individuals, communities and organizations. It forms a global media space, that refracts through a peculiar lens – models of communication – various political, economic, and socio-cultural processes, giving them additional symbolic and semantic content (McQuail, Windahl, 1993). This situation actualizes the identification of interrelations between real social processes and their virtual representation on the Internet, which explains the choice of the topic of this research.

In this case, such a phenomenon, as a life strategy, should be considered in the context of the choice of life goals and ways of life self-determination and self-realization by an individual and social group. Attention to the formation, actualization and representation on the Internet of students' life strategies is both theoretical and practical interest due to the following complex of reasons.

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Firstly, the life strategies of student youth can be viewed as an indicator of social processes, which characterizes the medium-term and long-term development trends of modern society as a whole, and particular social-professional groups.

Secondly, the process of formation of life strategies characterizes the dynamics of changes in the normative-value system of modern youth in the context of globalization. It operatively, and taking into account the ongoing changes in the economic, cultural, technological plan in society, modifies the conscious representations of the individual about their own future and the possibilities of achieving social goals.

Thirdly, in the conditions of formation of a global labor market will increase the importance of life strategies of workers, including from among the youth, as a factor of motivation social dynamics and professional self-realization.

Fourthly, life strategies characterize social aspirations that are typical for student community at a certain stage of social development, as independent established individual and group goals. In this case, social aspirations characterize the quality of the resource base of a particular community, as well as the boundaries of the design and implementation of life strategies of individuals.

Fifthly, the dynamic development of the media sphere creates favorable conditions for the wide dissemination of specific examples of students' life strategies, and their transformation into normative behavioral models that are reference for representatives of this group.

In this way, for the state and society, purposeful and systematic work on the formation of students' life strategies, as a normative regulator of individual and group behavior, is the key to the effective realization of the potential of the young generation. However, the solution of this task is a serious problem in both theoretical and practical aspects. This situation is caused by the influence of risk-based globalization processes, the intensive development of information and communication technologies and the media sphere, the complex nature of the life strategies themselves.

## 2. Materials and methods

The research issue has an interdisciplinary character, which has led to an appeal to the ideas, concepts and theoretical models of such researchers as S. Ball-Rokeach, M.L. DeFleur, D. McQuail, S. Windal, P. Sztompka, G. Rose, A.V. Fedorov, K.A. Abulkhanova-Slavskaya, Y. Reznik, E. Smirnov and others.

As a methodological base of research supports the theoretical model of media system dependency theory, developed by M.L. DeFleur and S. Ball-Rokeach (DeFleur, Ball-Rokeach, 1989), which analyzes the phenomenon of media impact, as a set of dynamic relationships between the mass-media (information system) and society (social system). This model represents the relationship and interaction between the mass-media, society and the audience as functionally necessary to ensure the stability of the institutional structure and normative-axiological system of society.

For the explication of the visual components of media communication between the actors and their conceptualization serves the methodological and methodical tools of visual sociology, which focuses on the content and context of communication interaction (Rose, 2007). According to the Polish sociologist P. Sztompka, analysis of visual data on the object and subject of research arranged in time allows explicating social ideas, meanings and problems, to identify patterns in the development of the represented community (Sztompka, 2006). However, the adequacy of decoding socio-cultural content is a problem due to factors such as the heterogeneity of the audience and the dynamic changes in the context of communication interaction (Fedorov, 2012; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2019).

The concept of personality life strategies serves as the theoretical framework for this research, which provides for the selection of empirical data and their interpretation (Reznik, Smirnov, 2002). It focuses on the dynamic, self-regulating system of sociocultural ideas of the individual about his own life, which, together with the systems of motivation, volitional regulation and control, is part of the general system of individual orientation (Reznik, Smirnov, 2002: 174-175). This system involves the individual determination and/or acceptance by the individual of the most significant life orientations and priorities for the long term.

Thus, the object of the research is the modern Belarusian students, and the subject of the research is the life strategies of the representatives of this social group. However, they are considered as ideal models that characterize rationally constructed value and target priorities of the

individual, as well as ways of their practical achievement adequate to the resources of the individual and group.

The purpose of the study is to identify and characterize the main types of life strategies of the modern Belarusian students. Accordingly, the following tasks detail the aim of this research:

- to compare theoretical approaches to the interpretation of personality life strategies;
- to consider the possibilities of visual sociology to identify and classify life strategies of an individual represented on the Internet;
- to identify and characterize the types of life strategies of the modern Belarusian students (on the example of students of higher education institutions of Mogilev and Mogilev region).

In the course of the study, the identification and characterization of the main types of life strategies of the modern Belarusian students was implemented on a local empirical base – higher education institutions located in the city of Mogilev and the Mogilev region, due to the intelligence plan of this research.

So, in the city are the following universities, in which about 25.820 students are studying: Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University (MSU named A. Kuleshov); Mogilev State University of Food Technologies (MSUFT); Belarusian-Russian University (BRU); Belarusian State of the Orders of the October Revolution and the Order of the Labour Red Banner Agricultural Academy (BSAA); Mogilev Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus ([Statistical..., 2018](#)).

Accordingly, the empirical base of the research was a theoretical sample, which was presented in the form of 13117 photos published in 100 Instagram accounts of students and graduates of higher educational institutions of Mogilev and Mogilev Region, marked with the following geotags: “Mogilev State A. Kuleshov University”, “MGU im. Kuleshov”, “Mogilevskii gosudarstvennyj universitet imeni A.A. Kuleshova”, “Mogilevskii gosudarstvennyj universitet prodovolstvija – MGUP”, “Belorussko-Rossijslij universitet”, “BRU (Belorussko-Rossijslij universitet)”, “Belarusian-Russian University (BRU)”, “BIJ – Belarusian Institute of Jurisprudence”, “BIP – Belorusskij institute pravovedenija”, “BSAA Belarusian State Agricultural Academy”, “BGSJA Belorusskaja gosudarstvennaja academia selskogohoziajstva”; and hashtags: #msukuleshov #mguimkuleshova, #msuft\_mogilev #mgup\_mogilev, #bijmogilev #bipmogilev. It is worth noting the fact that cadets and graduates of the Mogilev Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Belarus did not get into the sample, because the methods used in this study could not identify their personal accounts on the Instagram.

The need to use a theoretical sample is determined by the selection parameters of research objects that possess information about aspects of empirical reality, which are the basis of theoretically relevant concepts. Personal photos from the Instagram students' accounts were considered in the logic of the individual choice of such personal life strategies as: well-being, self-realization, success.

### 3. Discussion

Researchers have long viewed the Instagram as a space for (re)presentation of social practices, groups and individuals. Within the framework of the body culture studies Instagram is used by researchers as an experimental field, that allows testing hypotheses about the mutual influence of likes and comments on satisfaction with the body and face of users of this social network ([Tiggemann, Barbato, 2018](#), [Tiggemann et al, 2018](#)). For the reason, that the Instagram is popular among young people, some researchers consider it as a communicative platform for the dissemination of information, focusing on the visual specifics of this social network ([Arceneaux, Dinu, 2018](#)). Content analysis of the social media sites, including Instagram, also allows to identify some of the relationships of content and behavior of the individual, which can be traced in the study on the alcohol consumption of first-year college students ([Boyle et al, 2016](#)).

In the subject framework of social philosophy and philosophical anthropology, the life strategy of the individual is considered as a vector of self-development and self-realization, an instrument of constituting a unique life world. On the one hand, it actualizes the universal situation of the choice of the individual's life path and individual lifestyle. On the other hand, this vector characterizes in the long term the parameters of the social behavior and social adaptation of the individual in modern conditions.

From the prospective of psychology, a person's life strategy is interpreted as the ability to build a life scenario and develop a person's personality. In the subject aspect, this is ensured through the assessment, selection and combination of subjective priorities and objective living

conditions. With regard to student youth, the effectiveness of this process may be evidenced by the effectiveness of adaptation of young people to stress factors, generated by the educational process and academic work (Leipold et al., 2019). In addition, the personality's life strategy, along with a real reference group (family and friends), acts as a factor contributing to the health of university students (Yubero et al., 2019).

Representatives of the pedagogical sciences consider this problem in the aspect of creating a system of educational and educative activities, which ensure the interiorization of socially significant values and norms by the individual. At the same time, it is defined as a functionally necessary condition for the conscious determination of personal goals and objectives, the realization of a person's life plan. Attention to this phenomenon is due to the fact that the definition of the "strategy of life self-determination of student community at all stages of professional training at the university will allow individualizing the educational and educative process, correcting the program of psychology-psychological support for students' life self-determination" (Martynova, 2013: 62). In addition, the actualization of the ethical component of a person's life position serves as a factor orienting students to the corporate values of the higher professional education system and social responsibility (Galvão et al., 2019).

In the context of social geography, life strategies can be considered as one of the factors, that has an impact on migration processes, for example, S. Marcu notes the fact, that life strategies of students from the Eastern European countries, studying in exchange programs in the United Kingdom and Spain, are changing due to their life experience and learning in another country (Marcu, 2014).

The sociological perspective of research the problems of life strategies involves attention to the interaction of the objective and subjective components of the formation process of this phenomenon, which is characterized by dynamism and contradictory nature. In the first case, the focus is on characterizing the institutional capacity to realize personal potential, social norms, social behavior patterns, identifying social barriers and so on. In the second case – on individual needs, interests, values orientations and so on. An interesting fact is that the value systems of modern students, even from one geographic region, as evidenced by the results of sociological research, significantly different (Czakoń-Tralski, Borecka, 2018). So, for Belarusian students, work is most important in life, and for Polish students – free time and religion.

Thus, in the modern social and humanitarian knowledge there are many approaches to the typology of the life strategies of the individual, identified by researchers for various reasons. In general, we can talk about the following basic criteria for the classification of person's life strategies:

- by the criterion of socialization – passively assimilated (the norms and values adopted in a given society are at the basis of a person's life strategy), active-transforming (they assume an individual's creative attitude to the formation of life plans and value orientations);

- by the criterion of interaction with the social environment – conformal (imply the subordination of individual components of a life strategy to the interests of a particular community in particular or society as a whole), consensus (based on the interaction of individual and macro-social components of a life strategy), conflicting (presuppose strategies due to their multidirectionality);

- by the criterion of domination of value orientations – pragmatic (characterized by the prevalence of pragmatic values and short-term planning of life perspectives), hedonistic (characterized by the prevalence of values of comfort and pleasure, the lack of temporary planning of life perspectives);

- by the criterion of social action – goal-rational (individual interests and goals determine the structure of life strategies), value-rational (macrosocial values determine the structure of life strategies), traditional (traditions, customs and norms determine the structure of life strategies);

- by the criterion of affiliation – individual (focused on personal activity in the social world and a certain distance of the individual from different communities), collectivist (assume the maximum inclusion of the individual in the livelihoods of various communities based on the adoption of collectivist values and practices);

- by time criterion – short-term (horizon of planning and implementation of life strategies does not exceed a month), medium-term (horizon of planning and implementation of life strategies does not exceed a year), long-term (horizon of planning and implementation of life strategies is calculated for a period of three years or more);

- by the criterion of the type of social adaptation – strategies of successful external adaptation (focused on the present and near future in the context of the inclusion of the individual in the livelihoods of primary and professional groups), strategies of effective internal adaptation (focused on the past and the distant future in the context of self-identification of the individual with the people, ethnic group and other large social groups), survival strategies (implying the consent of an individual with low social status and worsening financial position, self-identification with this kind of communities);

- by the criterion of creativity – creative (imply the active creative participation of the individual in the planning and design of his own life), ordinary (assume the reproduction of everyday practices and behaviors);

- by the criterion of awareness by the individual – conscious (based on the constant self-reflection of the social and intellectual activity of the individual), unconscious (suggest the routine following by the individual to regulative social behavior);

- by the criterion and quality of orientation of personal changes – progressive (characterize constructive personal changes), regressive (characterize destructive personal changes);

- by the criterion of the nature of an individual's activity – active (based on a high degree of rationally oriented individual involvement of the individual in various spheres of social life), reactive-adaptive (imply situational inclusiveness of the individual in various spheres of social life), passive (characterized by stereotyped and non-reflective individual behavior);

- by the criterion of locus of control – externalities (imply the transfer of responsibility for the development and implementation of individual life plans from the individual to social groups, communities and institutions), internality (based on a sense of duty, personal responsibility for the implementation of life plans);

- by the criterion of normative – prosocial (there is a high degree of coincidence of the normative-value component of the life strategy with the goals and objectives of society), antisocial (there is a low degree of coincidence of the normative-value component of the life strategy with the goals and objectives of society), antisocial (there is a conflict of the normative-value component of the life strategy with the goals and objectives of society);

- by the implementation criterion – effective (they imply the achievement of social success and well-being through the optimal use of individual resources), ineffective (differ by an unbalanced ratio of results obtained and resources expended), inefficient (are characterized by a failure to achieve the goals of a person's life strategies, regardless of the methods and resources used);

- by the criterion of priority in social exchange – assignment (focused on maximum satisfaction of individual needs, instrumental attitude to life), balanced (suppose harmonious relationships with others, personal self-restraint and creatively transforming principle of attitude to the life of a person);

- by the criterion of the form of manifestation – the strategy of one-dimensional consumption, the strategy of multi-dimensional consumption;

- by the criterion of purpose – a strategy of increasing well-being, a strategy of balanced well-being.

As the factors, determining the individual's choice of relevant life strategies are the level of socio-economic development of society, cultural values and traditions, political institutions and structures, social strata and groups, socio-demographic parameters and other socially significant features.

#### 4. Results

The question of determining the heuristic potential of visual sociology to identify and classify life strategies of an individual, represented on the Internet, actualizes an activist approach to a typology of life strategies that combines anthropological, institutional, and positional analysis (Reznik, 1995; 1996; Reznik, Smirnov, 2002). The basis of this approach is the principle of personal attitude of an individual to his own life, which determines his social activity, which can take three main typological forms: receptive activity (underlies the strategy of life well-being), motivational activity (is a prerequisite for the strategy of life success of the individual) and creative activity (characteristic of the strategy of self-realization of the individual) (Reznik, Smirnov, 2002: 173-174). In this way, life strategies act as socially determined, integrative and rational systems of

individual orientation to the long-term perspective in individual, social and cultural plans (both in projective and retrospective aspects), objectified in individual behavior and activity.

In an ideally-typical aspect, T. Reznik and Y. Reznik distinguish the following types of life strategies (Reznik, 1995: 104), possessing a set of universal characteristics (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Typological characteristics of life strategies

<b>Elements of life strategies of individual</b>	<b>The main type of life strategies</b>		
	<b>strategies of life well-being</b>	<b>strategies of life success</b>	<b>Strategies of life self-realization</b>
1. Perceptual orientations	Provided, full of necessary goods and comfort, quiet, measured and stable life	Active, effective, eventful, socially significant and prosperous life	Beautiful, harmonious, creative life, close in its content to the artistic art
2. Life-purpose orientations	Acquisition and consumption of various benefits of life, the desire for material or moral psychological comfort	Ascension to the desired, recognized by the public and providing a strong financial position top (level) of life	Free creativity and the development of their own spiritual and physical strength; self-improvement achieved through changing the life world
3. Value orientations	Desire to get and learn the meaningful for the person (desired or prestigious set of life benefits)	Achievement of skill, high professionalism and competence in the chosen field of activity: value criteria of success: organization and self-discipline, efficiency and enterprise	Aspiration for personal autonomy and creativity; tendency to constantly search for alternatives and in-depth self-analysis; selective attitude towards others; pluralism of life position
4. Normative orientations	Acceptance of principles and rules establishing the priority of certain life benefits	Acceptance of principles and rules leading to success or promoting personal and professional growth, advancement along the social scale	Absence of clear and well-established rules, while respecting generally accepted norms and restrictions; respect for the freedom and lifestyle of other people
5. Purposeful orientations	Aspiration for the maximum possible or acceptable satisfaction of their needs for certain life benefits	Definition and achievement of large-scale goals with transformative orientation and leading to success in life	Limited use of goal-setting as an instrument for concretization and practical implementation of life meanings

It seems that these types of life strategies have a set of such characteristics that can be used for the typology of visual data presented in the form of photos. So, within the framework of this research, the task of identifying and characterizing the main types of life strategies of modern Belarusian students actualized the methodological principles of visual sociology, considered in the context of the qualitative research methodology. The emphasis on an interpretative approach, widespread in visual sociology, means the analysis of finished visual data selected in accordance with the goals and objectives of the research, openly or implicitly reflecting the studied social events or phenomena.

In the framework of this research, an axiological approach was used, which allowed identifying a set of values for each life strategy on the basis of the revealed values, represented by students and graduates in personal accounts on Instagram. Wherein a strict distinction between life strategies that are not independent units, but layered on one another, not possible due to the ambiguity and polysemantic nature of the empirical material.

In general, the following distributions were obtained for the sample: the life well-being strategy was actualized as an individual priority by 71 % of accounts, the life success strategy – 23 %, the life self-realization strategy – 6 %. At the same time, certain gender differences were revealed: the strategy of life well-being as a target and value priority was actualized in 76 % of women and 54 % of men; life success strategy – 21 % of women and 29 % of men; life self-realization strategy – 3 % of women and 17 % of men.

Generally, the following values were identified as attributes of the strategy of life well-being: family, external physical beauty, recreation, friends, hobbies (art, travel, sports), study. So, consider in more detail each of them.

The key value identified is the family, which makes it possible to talk about the orientation of the student youth towards marriage and family creation, as a normative model of social being in its traditional format. This aspect emphasizes the sociocultural conservatism of the Belarusian society, in terms of meaningful life orientations, almost inherent in all age cohorts.

It is also necessary to note one more frequently represented value – friends, which is a sign of both the presence and the formation of strong social ties among the youth. In relation to students, the actualization of this value indicates both the absence of anomic processes in this group and the capacity of the reference group as a mechanism for the social integration of young people.

There is a whole complex of values that are interrelated in terms of meaning and function: external physical beauty, hobbies (art, leisure, travel, sport). In the framework of the strategy of life well-being, external physical beauty was revealed only as a hobby (semi-professional makeup, amateur playing sports). Traveling with friends and family can also be considered a hobby, while the main identified travel destinations are the countries of the European Union, which are for student's youth a kind of standard of economic, cultural and political structure of society. Art is also represented as one value, which can be attributed to a hobby, but only in the context of the cultural consumption of artifacts of painting, sculpture, architecture.

Learning as a value is presented in the framework of the strategy of life well-being as follows – the educational process is represented as an analogue of employment. Accordingly, the successful completion of higher education is considered by respondents as a guarantee of future success in the professional sphere.

The values that make up the life success strategy can be summarized as follows: values of the of life well-being strategy plus such values as activism, professionalism, creativity.

The value of activism includes various aspects of university activities, which include the organization of mass events, volunteer activities in the framework of such state-public organizations as the Belarusian Republican Youth Union and the FTUB (at the local level), membership in student self-management. The involvement of young people in student self-management and the activities of non-profit organizations has a positive impact on the creation of active youth communities, as well as on the development and popularization of volunteering among young people.

Professionalism as a value, represented by youth on the Instagram, can be viewed in the aspect of professionalizing one's own activities. In particular, it is possible to single out the professionalization of sport within the framework of the strategy of life success, which is reflected in receiving awards at sport competitions of various levels in athletics and weightlifting, mixed martial arts, and rhythmic gymnastics. In addition, in this context one can consider such components of individual life activity as educational success, modeling, makeup, business.

The value of creativity is reflected in the visual data by the representation of the facts of the participation of young people in the activities of various student dance, theater and other communities. The involvement of students in creative activities is often intra-university, which imposes some restrictions on the development of the individual in the creative field.

The life strategy of self-realization in the axiological sense focuses on such values as science and research activities, outside university activism, creative activity. So, consider the values inherent in this life strategy.

The value of activism mentioned in the strategy of life success within the framework of the strategy of self-realization acquires a slightly different character, since the field of its realization is outside university activism. Frequently, this is often manifested in the interaction of students with such non-profit organizations as the Belarus Red Cross Society, Y-PEER, UNAIDS, UNFPA and others, which is deployed outside the educational process.

Science and research activities as a value in the framework of the self-realization strategy are presented with visual data, which represent the participation of young people in scientific events (seminars, conferences and others). In some cases, this value is represented together with such value, as business (student participation in start-up competitions). It should be noted, that the orientation of students on science and research, indicates the presence in regional universities of valuable personnel for the Belarusian economy, science and industry.

## 5. Conclusion

In this way, the research of the life strategies of the modern Belarusian students, characterizing in an ideally-typical aspect the value and purposeful priorities of the individual, the ways and mechanisms of their practical achievement, revealed the priority importance of the strategy of life well-being, which is significantly ahead of the importance of the strategy of life success and self-realization. However, in the conditions of the dynamic development of the Internet and the media sphere, the representation of these priorities means the prevalence of the context of communication interaction over its content, which creates a specific communication model. For students youth, as the most qualified part of the country's Internet audience, this situation means emphasizing terminal values (material well-being and life comfort) as reference axiological priorities to the detriment of instrumental values (professional achievements, personal success in business, creative self-realization and so on). It seems that the symbolic prevalence of receptive activity, represented on the Internet, creates certain limitations for young people to actualize motivational and creative activity as factors of personal self-realization. Nevertheless, the exploration plan of the research and its limited empirical base do not allow generalizing these conclusions, but they do actualize the need for further research of an interdisciplinary nature on these problems.

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