

## COMMUNICATION PRACTICES AS A FACTOR OF YOUTH CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

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In the conditions of the information society the phenomenon of social communication becomes a key issue of the scientific research. Its function of a social system constructor, a semantic reproduction of the society, a means to achieve solidarity and stability in the society, hence a tool of the society self-reproduction is discussed and investigated. The approaches of the theory of social communication are applied to studying many social and psychological phenomena including those of self-identification. The article presents an attempt to outline the theoretical background for investigation of communication practices, and to analyze methodological approaches to interpretation of communication practices as a means of self-identification. Communication practice is viewed as a kind of social practice and is defined as a rational and socially regulated activity aimed at the exchange of the socially meaningful information; it is a means of interpretation of social norms, values and meanings, which enables individual identification in a social and cultural community. Communication practices in the information society have their specific features, which influence self-identification processes. Those features are individualization, splitting, socialization, institutionalization, standardization, and virtualization.

**Key words:** communication practice, social practice, communication, self-identification, citizenship and national self-identification.

**Theme.** Rapid changes caused by the information society evolution actualize the issues of developing and applying new methodological approaches and means to describe and explain its specific social and cultural phenomena. Among the present day conceptual models the theory of social communication has become one of the main methodological frameworks, in which social phenomena and processes are investigated. Society under that approach is viewed as a structure which reproduces itself and has a holistic and systemic nature due to the communication activities of its members. In that context a potential of the concept of communication practice is heuristically and methodologically determined and actualized [1].

The purpose of the article is to outline methodological approaches to interpretation of communication practices and self-identification, and therefore provide theoretical background for investigation of communication practices as a factor of youth citizenship and national self-identification.

The concept of communication practice is viewed as a kind of social practice, whose studying has a long tradition in social sciences. The modern interpretation of social practice is based on the theory of social action developed by M. Weber in his microsocial conception and T. Parsons in the macrosocial conception. The researchers formulated a common understanding of social action as a planned (deliberated) complex of actions and a means of social interaction using which an individual or a social group seeks to transform behavior, position, and believes of other people and groups [3; 4].

The concept of social practice is developed in the works of P. Bourdieu, E. Giddens, P. Berger and T. Luckmann, where they specifically emphasize the link between social practices and everyday life. P. Bourdieu states that practices can be not only well thought targeted actions, but also minor routine acts, which can not always be rationalized by an individual. In order to understand the concept of practice the researcher proposes to consider such phenomena as practical reason, habitus and behavior strategy. Habitus means a set of individual or group inclinations to behave in a certain manner. Such inclinations act as principles, which cause and organize social practices and representations, which are objectively adapted to obtaining certain results. They do not mean any conscientious goal orientation and do not require any skillfulness to be realized. On one hand, habitus links social practices with the social environment, and, on the other, lets them transform it [5].

P. Berger and T. Luckmann view social practices as habituated systems of actions thanks to which people reach consent about their expectations. Such consent ensures social order and its reproduction. So motives, values, norms and life orientations of individuals embodied in social practices in the long run determine the type of the society they lives in [6].

In a view of the analysis above social practices are interpreted as habituated routine actions based on the collective experience of an individual. Synthesizing the results of the scientific attempts to conceptualize social practices H. Garfinkel formulated their main features: collective nature, routine character, possibility of observation and reflectivity [7]. The researcher emphasized that social practices provide not only for the stability of social experience but also for the reproduction of social institutions.

A unique role of a social system constructor belongs to communication. Society, as stated by N. Luhmann, is a closed communication system. It constructs communication by means of communication itself. Society communicates. It gets consolidated by means of communication which is realized through resources of the past communication actions with a view to the future ones [8].

J. Habermas in his theory of communication action argues that communication is an attempt to preserve and renew consensus as one of the ways to achieve solidarity and stability in the society. If the communication participants comprehend the situation in which the communicative action is taking place, they can act purposefully and adequately, and can reach mutual understanding. Ideal communication is a combination of rationality, ethics and freedom. The fewer false symbols, simulation and manipulation there is in the interaction process, the more rational communication is, and the easier people's life is. J. Habermas interprets the concept of life experience as the context of a communication action, as "a storage" of meanings, which can be used to interpret different interaction situations aimed at reaching consensus. Therefore, the objective world is a constructive environment for deliberation and seeking mutual understanding, as well as reproduction and maintenance of sociality [9].

N. Luhmann focuses on such feature of communication as its being a tool of society self-reproduction (self-reference and autopoiesis principles) [8]. Communication is a semantic reproduction of the society. Semantic structuring of a social system ensures the bonding and holistic character of the society. An individual is a carrier of meanings, which the communication system reproduces itself for.

Common thesaurus (typical perception and reflection of the environment) and shared habitus (a set of common behavior patterns) help an individual or a group save efforts and maintain a more effective communication on different social levels. [2]. The communicators who do not possess common knowledge may have misunderstanding problems caused by inability to correctly perceive one another's communication intentions.

The society members may not be aware of the actual thesaurus despite the fact that they strictly observe it. The symbolic meaning of a phenomenon may not be acceptable in other cultures – it may not be understandable or may get a somewhat unusual interpretation.

Communication is not just an exchange of information based on a set on common meanings but also a process of generating those meanings [10]. It is a process of establishing a human community, in the course of which individuals comprehend the information and compare it with the meanings translated by their communication partners in order to achieve mutual understanding. At the same time communication partners not only express themselves and translate/receive information but also create common meanings. The actual course of a communication act is always a dialogic and dynamic process, which is why the meaning being constructed is also dialogic and dynamic. [11].

Communication is an action. It is a practice, in the course of which an individual makes a choice of the communication actions to ensure the most adequate reception and translation of the information in every concrete situation. A communicator represents the system of knowledge, norms, values and behavior patterns typical for the given communication environment [2].

Therefore, *communication as practice* can be viewed as an instrument of reproduction, interpretation and construction of meanings with regards to goals, ways, norms and rules of social interaction. Communication practice is an intentional, rational and socially regulated activity aimed at translation/reception of the socially meaningful information and reproduction of the communication systems of different levels.

Communication practice is based on the collective experience and reflects three main aspects of communication: *dialogic* (the process of constructing new meanings, interpretation and creation of new social norms and rules), *action-related* (common activities of the communication participants), and *semiotic* (objectivation of the social environment by means of signs and symbols, and transformation of meanings in space and time) [2].

In the framework of the communication and discourse approach to studying communication, communication practices are conceptualized as a means of interpretation of the social norms, systems of values and meanings, which enables an individual to determine and substantiate his/her belonging to a socio-cultural community and give purpose to his/her actions. Accordingly, communication practices are viewed as a factor of the individual identity development, presentation and protection of his/her interests as well as interests of social groups and the society as a whole, social participation, determination of individual and group orientations, and, finally, shaping their social identity.

Communication practices in the information society have their specific features, which influence the quality and ways of people's social interaction. Those features are individualization, splitting, socialization, institutionalization, standardization, and virtualization. Their contradictory nature and relateness reflect the contradictory nature of the socio-political processes and the socio-political discourse, which is overwhelmed, instrumental, strategically rational and informationally marginalized [12].

Virtualization of the social life or the so called socio-cultural virtualization is another feature of the information society that has a strong influence on communication practices. The researcher mention such transformations of communication practices as increasing socialization possibilities, growing complexity of the identity construction mechanisms, and expansion of the individual modeling space in different spheres of his/her social and cultural activities. The everyday cultural themes significantly broaden, new meanings are produced, the way of thinking and the structure of value priorities change [1].

Another feature of the modern society which has an impact on communication and communication practices is postmodernity with its multisemantic nature and value and interpretation relativity. Language becomes the only reality that can be accessed. According to R. Barthes and J. Baudrillard, we live in the reality created by the language, information and communication. Symbols do not represent anything real and material any more, they only simulate it.

When communicating and realizing communication practices an individual constructs not only his or her social and political environment but also his or her "self" as a socio-cultural and socio-political construct, which constantly interacts with others in different contexts and roles (a citizen in particular) and develops ideas about him-/herself. An individual evaluates him-/herself, which is partly a reflection of "the generalized other" [11]. Thus, communication practices can be viewed as a factor of citizenship and national self-identification.

Representatives of social approaches to communication in the context of the tradition of symbolic interactionism (G. H. Mead and E. Goffman) consider self-identification not a fixed inner construct, but a social and cultural phenomenon, which constantly modifies depending on who with and how one interacts. In other words, an individual may have different ideas about him-/herself when communicating with different people in different contexts [11].

*Self-identification* is one's awareness of being a social actor, who acts within a certain system of motives and goals. In the context of our research following T. Sobol, it is proposed to put emphasis on understanding identification as a mechanism of interpersonal perception thanks to which a communication actor models his/her partner's semantic field and constructs his/her own relevant behavior models. Self-identification structures self-awareness, personification, acceptance of social roles and solidarization with the group.

The concept of self-identification can be treated as a synonym of self-categorization introduced by G. Turner [13]. Social identity is not an individual identity reflected in social interaction. It is a subjective collective identity, which includes "others" as members of one's group.

According to S. P. Potseluev, any type of social identity and individual identity in particular is based on a self-identification act, i. e. a projection of a simple subjectivity structure on the environment. Self-identification means that identity recognizes itself in any experience it gets. However, human conscience has a limited capacity, whereas social and political realities are complex, unlimited and confusing. That is why it needs cognitive means, which would enable conscience to develop and preserve its identity [15].

When it comes to citizenship and national identification [15], we would argue that like in the case of political identification an individual or a group identifies him-/herself or itself first of all with the symbols that have some apolitical, legal and socio-cultural meanings. Investigating political identification issues M. Edelman wrote that for the vast majority of people politics is an endless "parade of abstract symbols" [16, 4]. Similarly when individuals construct their citizenship or national identity they identify themselves not with some concrete people or events, but with the personalities and the events that have a symbolic meaning for them. Symbol here has an important communication function. It is a concentrated representation of the meanings, images and emotional experiences, which unite civic and national communities and help to maintain their stability and development. Symbols are the results of cognitive selection, which "unifies" (15, 108) the perception of the social and political environment of those who identify themselves with it. Hence every community should have its own unique set of symbols and its own unique symbolic language.

Self-identification, which is viewed as one's rational identification with a social community, does not always coincide with the identity and is only one of its manifestations. This is emphasized by T. G. Stefanenko when the researcher analyzes ethnic identity [14]. The same emphasis is made by C. P. Potseluev in his study of ethnic identity. The latter argues that the above mentioned statement is applicable to any type of social identification. In the context of our research it can also be referred to the processes of citizenship and national identification. It seems that such spheres of social involvement unlike everyday interaction must to be based on definiteness and synthesis of goals, means of their achievement, methods of activities, and reflected identification. The role of the rational component of social identification as well as orientation towards separation of an individual and a group, self-reflection and self-identification is stressed in many studies devoted to social identity. However, as stated by S. P. Potseluev, it is important not to overestimate the possibilities of individual self-cognition in the process of social identity construction. The limitations of such approach are, firstly, an important role of unconscious mechanisms of identity development and, secondly, modern manipulation technologies, which set up "right" symbolic links between the society members, and unify identification with the most important social and political symbols. Besides self-identification, identity can comprise other identifications: individual's spontaneous involvement in unstable social groups or indirect or partial involvement in a group on the basis of (interception of) some judgments, scenarios, and stereotypes [15].

Therefore social identity is not just the result of single acts of "self-cognition", that is self-identification. It is an open and incomplete sequence of identifications. Identification of "self" with certain political, civic or national

symbols is not a goal in itself. Such self-identification of individuals is “only metaphors of their subjective fears and aspirations” [15, 111]. Identity does not only mean identification of “self” with some social categories. It also implies that “self” tries to prove its uniqueness in the social environment by means of different identifications. All social identifications are dual by nature and contain a political aspect, argues S. P. Potseluev [15]. Referring to B. Anderson, the researcher notes people’s readiness to rather die for their (nation, state, and ethnic group) than for their class or town. The reason for that may be the fact that those affiliations are symbolically more convincing for people than identification with other communities. One of the authors of a psychological concept of the nation, E. Renan, wrote that a part of humanity builds up a nation when people are united by common sentiments, which they do not share with other people. That nation feeling can have different causes, which often are the same race and a similar ancestry, common language, religion, and geographical borders. But the most important factor is shared memories – shared history of pride and humiliation, joy and pity which people lived through [17].

The overview of the ideas with regards to the processes of social identification and self-identification prove the role of the semiotic aspect of communication and the semiotic function of communication practices, which lies in social environment objectivation by means of signs and symbols and transformation of meanings in social space and time.

Another important aspect of studying self-identification in the framework of our research is the trends of maintaining positive social identification by an individual. In that context social identification is not only a cognitive, but also a motivational phenomenon since intergroup discrimination, which is positively valenced of one’s own group, satisfies people’s needs to have a positive attitude and respect to themselves. As it is stated by H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner [18], it is in people’s nature to have a positive image of themselves. That is why a desire of an individual to construct and maintain a positive social identity is one of the main trends in the social identification dynamics. A social group here is viewed as a safe environment, which provides human existence with the necessary level of comfort.

Among the strategies of maintaining a positive social identity one considers the following: individual mobility (an attempt to quit a low-status group and join a high-status one), social creative work (reevaluation of the criteria used to compare different groups), social competition (assigning of the desired characteristics to one’s group as compared to another) [18, 19].

There is also a number of studies devoted to the issues of self-attitude – both positive and negative. They mainly accentuate the process of self-verification, under which tendencies to prove both positive and negative ideas about oneself are equally treated. People choose the interaction partners who confirm their self-representations even if those representations are negative [20].

Finally, it makes sense to mention another thesis dealing with the attempts of the scientists to identify specific features of different components of social identity including those of citizenship, national and ethnic identities. Studying ethnic identity N. G. Stefanenko wrote with the reference to S. V. Cheshko [21], “...in order not to turn scientific conceptions into the religion like ideas about “the ethnic” typical for the common mindset, one should keep in mind that there is no specific ethnic identity which is not characteristic of any other social identity component”. [15, 25]. N. G. Stefanenko argues, that it is not the peculiarities of a single social identity component that underlie the idea of its typicality. It is a structural correlation of the social identity components that makes a single identity component (citizenship, national or ethnic identity) typical in the social context.

**Conclusions.** Application of the communication and discourse approach to studying citizenship and national self-identification provides a framework to investigate communication practices as a means of self-identification, realizing which individuals constructs not only their social and political environment but also their “self”, which interacts with others in different roles and contexts.

Communication practice is conceptualized as an intentional, rational and socially regulated action aimed at translation/reception of the socially meaningful information and is a means of interpretation of social norms, values and meanings, which enables an individual to determine and substantiate his/her belonging to a socio-cultural community.

Operationalization of the concept of communication practice and identification of the communication practices that determine citizenship and national self-identification of young people will be the objective of the empirical study, whose findings could be instrumental for outlining trends of communication practices transformation.

### Literature

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**Позняк С. І. Комунікативні практики як чинник громадянської та національної самоідентифікації молоді: теоретичні основи дослідження**

В умовах інформаційного суспільства феномен соціальної комунікації стає однією з ключових наукових проблем. Предметом наукового дослідження та обговорення є функції комунікації як конструктора соціальної системи, семантичного відтворення суспільства, засобу досягнення соціальної солідарності та стабільності і, відповідно, інструменту самовідтворення суспільства. Підходи, запропоновані теорією соціальної комунікації, застосовуються до дослідження багатьох соціально-психологічних феноменів і самоідентифікації зокрема. У статті представлено спробу окреслити теоретичні основи дослідження комунікативних практик, а також проаналізувати методологічні підходи до інтерпретації комунікативних практик як засобу самоідентифікації. Комунікативна практика розглядається як вид соціальної практики і визначається як раціональна, соціально регульована дія, спрямована на обмін соціально значущою інформацією; комунікативна практика є засобом інтерпретації соціальних норм, цінностей та смислів, що уможливорює ідентифікацію особистості в соціально-культурному середовищі. Комунікативні практики інформаційного суспільства мають специфічні ознаки, які впливають на процес самоідентифікації. Це – індивідуалізація, розщеплення, соціалізація, інституціоналізація, стандартизація та віртуалізація.

**Ключові слова:** комунікативна практика, соціальна практика, комунікація, самоідентифікація, громадянська та національна самоідентифікація.

**Позняк С. И. Коммуникативные практики как фактор гражданской и национальной самоидентификации молодежи: теоретические основы исследования**

В условиях информационного общества феномен социальной коммуникации становится одной из ключевых научных проблем. Предметом научного исследования и обсуждения являются функции коммуникации как конструктора социальной системы, семантического воспроизводства общества, средства достижения социальной солидарности и стабильности и, соответственно, инструмента самовоспроизводства общества. Подходы, предложенные теорией социальной коммуникации, применяются к исследованию многих социально-психологических феноменов и самоидентификации в частности. В статье представлена попытка обозначить теоретические основы исследования коммуникативных практик, а также проанализировать методологические подходы к интерпретации коммуникативных практик как средства самоидентификации. Коммуникативная практика рассматривается как вид социальной практики и определяется как рациональное, социально регулируемое действие, направленное на обмен социально значимой информацией; коммуникативная практика является средством интерпретации социальных норм, ценностей и смыслов, что создает условия для идентификации личности в социально-культурном пространстве. Коммуникативные практики в информационном обществе имеют специфические признаки, которые влияют на процесс самоидентификации. Это – индивидуализация, расщепление, социализация, институционализация, стандартизация и виртуализация.

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникативная практика, социальная практика, коммуникация, самоидентификация, гражданская и национальная самоидентификация.