

## INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE STUDENTS' ENVIRONMENT

### **Ethnoreligious attitudes of contemporary Russian students toward labor migrants as a social group**

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This article focuses on the role of the media in shaping the worldview of today's youth. In Part 1, social attitudes and social stereotypes are described in the context of ethnic relations. Part 2 describes the research into social distance and ethnic and religious stereotypes conducted by I.V. Abakumova and A.V. Grishina. The study was conducted in two stages. First we analyzed various TV and radio programs, articles in the press and on the Internet, about migrant workers, published from March 2009 to March 2012, to identify the image of migrant workers in the Russian media, for further study of the perceptions of migrant workers by students in different professional fields. In the second stage, we modified E. Bogardus's "Social Distance Scale" in order to assess respondents' attitudes toward media images of migrant workers and, more importantly, to determine the social distance at which the respondent tolerates the images and therefore the migrants themselves. The last part of the article reports the main findings and conclusions of the study.

**Keywords:** labor migrants, social attitude, social stereotype, ethnic and religious attitudes, social distance

Studies of the constantly changing reality in today's world are increasingly taking up the role of the media, a subject of continuing research by both Russian and foreign psychologists, political scientists, sociologists, and linguists since the 1950s.

Despite varied approaches to the study of the media, all researchers agree that the media has a huge psychological impact on its audience, both in people's activity and their value-semantic sphere, transforming its motives, needs, attitudes, and values, and forming stereotypes. The concept of "attitude" ("set") was introduced into Russian psychology by D.N. Uznadze of the Georgian school of psychology. He understood attitude as "a person's willingness, prior to any mental or behavioral acts, to perform them appropriately in a given situation". The person acquires most attitudes from subjective experience and culture, and in today's society, ready-made

attitudes are broadcast in the media, making it unnecessary for people to form their own attitudes to various subjects, processes, and phenomena, and thus greatly simplifying social interactions among those who have the same attitudes.

The basic attitudes are cognitive, affective, and behavioral. To differentiate among these functions, let us describe the “LaPiere paradox”. In 1934, the American psychologist R. LaPiere travelled through a considerable number of small American towns, accompanied by two Chinese students. They stayed in hotels, visited restaurants and cafés, and, with one exception, were received quite normally. After the trip, LaPiere sent a letter to the owners of these hotels and restaurants, asking, “Will you accept members of the Chinese race as guests in your establishment?” Ninety-three percent said “no”. LaPiere’s data was later confirmed by other researchers.

This example shows that a discriminatory attitude toward members of a particular ethnic group was superseded by the behavior of a hotel or restaurant owner toward a client (Evgenyeva, 2013). Thus, the actual social distance between the subjects conflicts with the discriminatory attitudes of one of the subjects; furthermore, this attitude turns out to be more stable than the previous subjective experience of interaction with the other ethnic group. But on the other hand, in real, not indirect, interaction between members of different ethnic groups, ethnic and religious attitudes can change, even becoming completely the opposite (Abakumova & Grishina, 2013).

Social attitudes are not stable and can be transformed under the influence of external and internal factors. Thus, ethnic and religious attitudes are influenced not only by subjective interaction with other ethnic groups, but by the media. In the cognitivist approach, a change in social attitudes is treated by the “theory of congruity” (F. Heider, T. Newcomb, L. Festinger, C. Osgood, P. Tannenbaum, G.M. Andreeva). This means that attitudinal changes occur every time an incongruity occurs in an individual’s cognitive structure — for example, when a negative attitude toward an object confronts a positive attitude to a person who describes this object positively. Incongruities can occur for various other reasons. It is important that the individual’s need to recover cognitive congruity, i.e., an orderly, “unambiguous” perception of the external world, is the incentive to change one’s attitude (Evgenyeva, 2013). For example, if a public figure or politician respected by the majority of media consumers expresses the opinion that Russia needs migrant workers, the audience’s negative ethnic and religious attitudes can change to positive ones.

The concept of social attitude is close to the concept of a social stereotype, understood as a simplified schematic image of the social object (for example, the image of a social group), widespread in a certain large social group, which is characterized by a high degree of consistency of individual views and emotional overtones in the group.

N.N. Bogomolova identifies certain characteristics of the stereotypes of large social groups:

- a schematic and simplistic image of the social object;
- the prevalence of certain stereotypes in the group, usually at a level of 60-80%;
- the emotional and evaluative nature of stereotypes;
- the stability and sustainability of stereotypes, their resistance to new information about the object;
- inaccurate stereotypes (Bogomolova, 2008).

Social stereotypes researchers agree that these play useful socio-psychological functions, allowing the individual to organize and simplify the plethora of complex information received from the environment, while also protecting and preserving the individual's value-semantic system.

Bogomolova also notes another function of social stereotyping: intergroup differentiation in the process of intergroup perception. Such an evaluative comparison of social groups (one's own or someone else's) can take many forms: opposition, which implies a maximum preference of one's own group and at least a bias against other groups; or comparison, which B.F. Porshnev defined as "a form of peaceful identity". The relations between social groups affects the content and orientation of social stereotypes (Bogomolova, 2008).

The most common form of social stereotypes are ethnic stereotypes. The first psychological studies of ethnic stereotypes were published in the mid-1930s by O. Klineberg and J. Dollard in the context of their "frustration and aggression hypothesis". However, the greatest impact on the understanding of ethnic stereotypes was made by T. Adorno in his work *The Authoritarian Personality*, where it was shown that individuals of the same ethnic group have significant differences in the degree of their susceptibility to ethnic stereotyping. Adorno described the type of person most prone to the absorption and diffusion of ethnic prejudice as an "authoritarian personality". The authoritarian personality, according to Adorno, is characterized by rigid thinking, conformity to accepted values, intolerance toward any manifestation of weakness and empathy, a tendency toward repression, expressed suspicion, and worship of authority (Bogomolova, 2008).

T. Pettigrew believed that the basis for the formation of social stereotypes in general and ethnic stereotypes in particular is conformism, an unconditional surrender to the prevailing social norms.

The problem of ethnic stereotypes has been developed in Russian psychology by I.S. Kon, B.A. Dushkov, V.P. Levkovich, N.G. Pankova, A.G. Asmolov, E.I. Shlyagina, V.F. Petrenko, and G.U. Soldatova. Taking the psychosemantic approach of V.F. Petrenko, research has been conducted on the ethnic auto- and hetero-stereotypes of Russian students and the perceptions and attitudes of different social groups of Russian citizens regarding foreign countries and different nationalities, showing that the younger audience's perception of typical representatives of various nationalities (including their own) is dominated by a psychological group differentiation mechanism, not in the form of contrasting, but rather of comparing the groups, which leads to complementary images. Not only are none of the qualities repeated, but they are all bipolar opposites.

In today's information society, the process of mutual perception of large social groups moves to a new level, since the media is now one of the main mediators in contacts between two groups. And for some social groups, such as young people, who lack both mature mechanisms to counter the influence of the media, and subjective experience of interaction with other social groups, it is the media which broadcasts ready-made attitudes and stereotypes for mass consumption, especially ethnic and religious attitudes (Grishina, 2010).

To identify the image of migrant workers in the Russian media for further study of the perceptions of students in different professional fields of study, we analyzed

a variety of TV and radio programs, articles in the press and on the Internet, about migrant workers, published from March 2009 to March 2012. We found that in the Russian media, the images of national minorities are ridiculed, whereas the dominant social group exalts its own image through detraction from the image of minorities. The terms “guest workers” and “illegals” are used in all types of media with a pronounced negative connotation, much more often than other phrases, giving the audience a persistent negative attitude to all migrants, regardless of their actual professional affiliation, skills, etc. Images of migrants emphasize their incompetence, ignorance, lack of education, and absolute failure to integrate themselves within the host society. At the same time, negative information about migrants is often linked in the media with certain ethnic groups, inculcating ethnic stereotypes and prejudices among the audience.

In order to assess respondents’ attitudes toward media images of migrant workers and, more importantly, to determine the social distance at which the respondent tolerates the images and therefore the migrants themselves, we modified the Bogardus “Social Distance Scale.” The concept of social distance was introduced by the sociologist Georg Simmel as an indicator of social groups’ and individuals’ position in social space, their interrelationship — i.e., their proximity or remoteness from each other, their degree of interconnectedness.

The experiments were conducted at the state universities of Rostov-on-Don: the Southern Federal University (SFEDU), and the Rostov State Transport University. There were a total of 200 participants: students from the economics, law, physical science, and psychological departments; 147 women and 53 men. The study was carried out by the horizontal dimension and incorporated both group and individual work. All study participants were asked to fill out identical forms for testing and questioning.



**Picture 1.** Stimulus material for the Social Distance Scale (modified by L.V. Abakumova and A.V. Grishina)

The subjects were asked to rate 11 images taken from the media and to mark the distance at which they would willingly associate with members of the group (from “A close relationship, a marriage” to “Should not be allowed to enter my country”) (Picture 1).

In our research, social distance was defined not with respect to different ethnic groups, but the images of these groups as broadcast in the media in coverage of labor migration issues.

Images of athletes and coaches, depicted in pictures 9 and 11, were placed at the lowest social distance in all respondent groups, which signifies a close relationship through marriage or friendship. Images of teachers, researchers, nannies, shown in pictures 3, 4, and 5, were placed at an average social distance, which signifies membership in my professional group or neighborhood. The greatest social distance was identified by all groups with the images shown in pictures 6 and 7. The distance for the image of unemployed migrants from neighboring countries (picture 6) was the biggest, and respondents from all professional groups believe that such migrant workers should not be allowed to enter the Russian Federation.

The group of economics students displayed the smallest social distance for all the images (except picture 6), indicating their greater engagement with and tolerance toward labor migrants. The group of law students, on the other hand, showed the greatest social distance for all images, which indicates a generally negative attitude toward labor migrants (Abakumova & Grishina, 2011).

In the first stage of our study, we used the following diagnostic tests to investigate the value-semantic sphere of students from different professional fields: “Meaning of Life Orientations” (D.A. Leontiev), “Value Orientations” (M. Rokich), “Tolerance Index” (G.U. Soldatova). The results of the research into the students’ value-semantic sphere are given below.

We can identify these differences in value-semantic characteristics among students of different professional fields: Psychologists and lawyers showed higher scores on all scales compared with physicists and economists, which suggests greater comprehension of their lives to this point and satisfaction with life in general.

For psychologists, physicists, and economists, the priorities are terminal values in personal life, with concrete and abstract values equally represented. For lawyers, the priorities are specific values and values of professional fulfillment.

All the professional groups have their priority values, but, unlike terminal values, the hierarchy of instrumental values is identical for all groups surveyed. Thus, the hierarchy of instrumental values is not based on professional field, but is connected with the age of respondents. For students, the most important values of means are:

- 1) good manners, the ability to behave in accordance with social standards of behavior;
- 2) cheerfulness, optimism, sense of humor;
- 3) education, high cultural level;
- 4) responsibility, sense of duty, keeping one’s word;
- 5) honesty, truthfulness, sincerity.



For psychologists and lawyers, one of the priority values is courage in defending one's own opinions.

Significant differences among groups respecting different types of tolerance have not been identified. In all groups, tolerance is at an average level, which means a combination of tolerant and intolerant traits — in some social situations they behave tolerantly, in others intolerantly.

For a more complete picture of the image of migrant workers and the general attitude of students to labor migration, they were all given identical questionnaires. All students participated in the study voluntarily. Completion of all phases of the study took about two academic hours. Mathematical treatment of the data included standard statistical methods.

The first questionnaire contained questions about the students' attitude to labor migration as a social phenomenon. The following are significant answers:

- Russia does not need migrant workers;
- labor migrants "take away" local citizens' jobs;
- wages of migrant workers and the local population, for the same job, should be the same;
- employers bring in migrant workers as a "cheap labor force";
- according to physics students, Russia needs qualified specialists from abroad.

The second questionnaire studied students' attitudes to the media role in forming the image of migrants. The following were the answers:

- the media portrays migrants negatively;
- the most popular images of migrant workers in the media are the characters of the "Our Russia" TV program;
- attitudes to migrants are not shaped by the media;
- TV has the greatest impact on the image of migrant workers;
- discussion of labor migration in the media leads to intolerance, but it also draws attention and interest to this problem;
- the most commonly used terms in the discussion of labor migration are "illegal" and "guest worker".

This study allows us to draw a number of conclusions. Under the influence of stereotypes broadcast in the media, youth form stable images, which convey negative expectations in relation to different social groups. The images created about migrants emphasize their incompetence, ignorance, lack of education, and absolute failure to integrate themselves into the host society. At the same time, negative information about migrants is often linked in the media with certain ethnic groups, forming ethnic and religious stereotypes and attitudes in the audience. Students' image of a migrant worker is significantly distorted. Regardless of the students' professional field, in all groups there was a persistent aversion toward a particular migrant worker category (job classification), as well as unconditional acceptance of the other categories of migrants, which the subjects did not classify as "migrant

workers” although these are (skilled experts in various areas). This trend is becoming a social and psychological risk (Abakumova & Grishina, 2011).

We recommend taking a special approach to the selection and broadcasting of ethnic information in the media, in order to promote tolerance and to prevent such negative social phenomena as xenophobia against immigrants. It is important not to allow in the media the tendentious selection of ethnically tinted facts, leading to the bifurcation of society into “us” and “foreigners,” “friend” and “enemy”. Some steps in this direction have already been taken. Article 51 of the Russian Federation Law “On Mass Media” prohibits the use of the journalist’s right to disseminate information in order to discredit a citizen or individual categories of citizens on the basis of gender, age, race or ethnic origin, language, religion, profession, place of residence and work, or in connection with their political beliefs.

Many experts in the field of migration agree that it is necessary to overcome one-sided media coverage of migration processes. Along with the reflection of negative issues associated with these processes, the media has to protect the rights of migrants and to promote their integration into Russian society.

Another important issue in changing the attitude of young people to labor migration is to refrain from characterizing migrants as competitors against native Russians in the labor market. For a young student audience, one of the most important requirements is professional self-realization and finding a good job. Emphasis in the media on “an uncontrollable number of labor migrants”, “their willingness to do any kind of work”, and, most importantly, the media’s exaggerated claims about the desire of employers to recruit migrant workers, lead to a persistent negative stereotype that “the migrant worker is our main competitor in the labor market”.

We recommend that the media present information about the qualifications of migrant workers and the desired salary that corresponds to their skill levels, showing that this is what determines whether they are hired. As shown by our studies (2006, 2008, 2010), businessmen who hire migrant workers believe “that migrant workers are working where the local population is unable to work” and that “the Russian population does not work well and asks for high wages” (Abakumova & Grishina, 2011). In this connection, media reporting on highly skilled migrants will not only reduce social tensions and the social distance between these social groups, but will also create an appropriate representation of young people in the competitive labor market, which will likely increase their motivation to get vocational training and increase their skills within their specialty.

The mechanism for forming such a positive image should be developed using impact technologies that produce a convincing effect.

To translate persuasive information (Abakumova & Voskoboev, 2010), which is still significant only for the broadcaster of state and public values, into something that is also personally significant for youth, the latter must be shown that behavior based on this information will not only not be contrary to their values, but will also help to meet their specific needs and will correspond to their expectations.

Using persuasive technologies lessens the alienation of the young person from the subjects who are the focus of the broadcast. This result can be achieved by di-

rected action of the broadcaster, using value-semantic difficulties to clarify meanings, as a means to overcome value-semantic barriers; if this is not done, each person begins to feel conflict or duality about the situation (Abakumova & Bakulin, 2010).

While solving a «task about meaning», overcoming value-semantic barriers and creating a positive expectation by accepting the assimilated content, there occurs an inner change in the personality, because of the interrelationships of motives on several overlapping planes (Abakumova, 2003):

- the motive for the personality to overcome internal and external obstacles for the sake of its achievement;
- comparing the motive with other possible motives for the same activity in the subject's mind;
- in evaluating the motive in its relation to the norms and ideals adopted by the personality; the interrelationship of the motive with real personal opportunities.

The subjective experience of comprehending information predicated upon objective values or objectified meanings, is characterized by semantic increments, the dynamics of which can also be called a product of persuasion — that is, a values-based increment.

Legislative regulation of the coverage of labor migration issues in the media is certainly useful. However, the main factor determining the reasonableness of a media report is the personality of the journalist himself, his moral qualities, citizenship, and sense of social responsibility. Let's draw up a list of questions that a journalist should ask himself before submitting his story on the subject of international relations in general and labor migration in particular:

1. Can I be objective in covering this subject?

2. Does my personal attitude to a particular ethnic or social group affect the material I am submitting?

If one is intolerant oneself toward certain ethnic groups or all other ethnic groups, the professionalism and responsibility of a journalist requires either a complete withdrawal from writing about a whole range of issues affecting international relations, or maximum exclusion from one's texts of all value judgments, presenting only reliable facts.

3. How will this information be regarded by the ordinary spectator?

4. Who is the target audience for this material?

Here we should consider developing recommendations for media materials narrowly aimed at a specific target audience, depending on professional field.

Our study shows that despite an externally imposed stereotyping process, students who represent various professional groups are ready to entertain different attitudes toward migrant workers, due to the significant differences identified in their value-semantic sphere.

In addition, it is necessary to organize work with students at the universities (both from the host population and migrants) to develop mutually tolerant attitudes, which is an important component in the spread of anti-terrorist ideology and the development of anti-extremist values in the younger generation.



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