

Personal Characteristics and Coping Strategies of Students Who Prefer Various Media Content

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the problems of interaction of young people with the modern information environment, the study of psychological reasons for choosing media content of various types. The article presents the results of an empirical study on a student sample (n = 87). The questionnaire of media content preferences developed by the authors is justified. It was found that the majority of students prefer information, the main features of which are novelty and entertainment. It was revealed that emotionally more mature students choose information of an educational nature that requires analysis. While students, that are more neurotic, less aware, and have a low level of control over emotions and behavior, prefer entertainment and new content. It was discovered that the choice of a particular group of genres reflects the personal characteristics of students.

Keywords: *information, media content, personal characteristics, coping strategy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern world can no longer be imagined without the Internet, mass communication systems, multiple sources of information, and a variety of content. The term “media content” means any information on the Internet presented in text, graphic and multimedia form that can be used to meet communicative, social-cognitive and other needs[1; 4]. More and more researchers are studying personality in the context of its interaction with the information environment, media studies, and the specifics of media culture [1; 3; 4; 5; 6]. The scientific literature describes the motivational background for choosing media messages (N. G. Voskresenskaya, 2013), the impact of cartoons on the moral attitudes of the viewer (M. I. Yanovsky, 2014); individual psychological characteristics of the modern movie watcher (T. A. Kubrak et al., 2017). Scientists described the psychological characteristics of gamers (A. A. Avetisova, 2011), the relations between the personal characteristics of players and their behavior in the virtual gaming space (O. V. Rubtsova et al., 2018), coping strategies of online players (O. V. Zaretskaya, 2016), the specificity of cognitive styles and the function of control of gamers (N. V. Bogacheva, A. E. Voiskunsky, 2014). The most active Internet users and consumers of information are young people. Due to the abundance of information and its accessibility, users often resort to viewing media content to distract or relax. It is among this category of population that the reproductive strategy of information consumption prevails [6]. In our study, we tried to answer the questions: is accessing certain content a way to cope with stress? Is the choice of a particular media content dependant on personal characteristics?

Based on the concept of R. Lazarus and S. Folkman, we understand coping as an individual's constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to eliminate or reduce stress. From their point of view, the coping strategy is implemented on the basis of personal and environmental coping resources. Following the authors, we consider relatively stable personal characteristics as personal coping resources. And as a medium - not only advice from the significant others, but also media content, which can act as a way to avoid the problem, and a source of information about new behaviors.

2. METHODS OF RESEARCH

The empirical study involved 87 third-year students of a university in Nizhny Tagil aged 18 to 22. The following diagnostic tools were used in the study: 1) the COPE questionnaire [2]; 2) the proactive coping behavior questionnaire [9]; 3) the 5-factor awareness questionnaire[10]; 4) the 16-factor personality questionnaire of R. Cattell; 5) the media preferences questionnaire, developed by us to identify preferences for certain types of media content. Media content preference is understood as the primary attention given by a person to a particular media content. The questionnaire included two main sections. *The first section* of the questionnaire opens with questions concerning the selection of generalized types of media content. The development of these questions was based on the classification bases proposed by I. V. Zhilavskaya [5]. The questionnaire

included questions about content preferences depending on the type and nature of activity (educational, professional, and entertainment) and the degree of audience activity in the perception of information (new and analytical media content). In addition, the questionnaire included a question based on the generally accepted classification of computer games - online and offline games. *The second section* of the questionnaire included questions constructed on the basis of dividing media content into two groups [3; 4]: linear (questions about preferences for music and video content) and nonlinear media (questions about preferences for online or offline computer games). The questionnaire also included items aimed at identifying genre preferences for video, music, and game content.

Statistical data processing was performed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov criteria, the Mann-Whitney U-test, and the factor analysis method.

Table 1 Differences in the expression of coping strategies and personal characteristics of students who prefer different types of media content

Indicator	Average rank		U-criterion	Significance level
	Students who prefer entertainment media content (n=60)	Students who prefer professional and educational media content (n=27)		
G	39,0	55,11	510,0	0,005
Q3	39,52	53,96	541,0	0,013
Religion	38,62	55,96	487,0	0,002
Evaluation free	50,31	29,98	431,5	0,001
Observation	36,0	47,8 *	331,0	0,036

* - calculation based only on data from a sample of respondents who prefer educational content

As can be seen from table 1, students who prefer entertainment media content have low scores on Q3 and G factors; they are less likely to use such a coping strategy as turning to religion, while they are much less evaluative

of their experience and focus less on internal and external stimuli.

Table 2 Differences in the expression of coping strategies and personal characteristics of students who prefer different types of media content

Indicator	Average rank		U-criterion	Significance level
	Students who prefer new information (n=68)	Students who prefer to analyze information (n=19)		
A	40,54	56,37	411,0	0,015
Active coping	41,10	54,39	448,5	0,040
Observation	40,03	58,21	376,0	0,005

Stating the results presented in table 2, we note that the respondents who prefer analytical media content have a

higher rating on factor A, use active coping, and tend to pay attention to external and internal stimuli.

Table 3 Differences in the expression of coping strategies and personal characteristics of students who prefer online and offline games

Indicator	Average rank		U-criterion	Significance level
	Respondents who prefer online games (n=21)	Respondents who prefer offline games (n=66)		
B	54,14	40,77	480,0	0,029
I	34,6	46,99	495,5	0,046
Q2	54,31	40,72	476,5	0,029
Search for tool support	33,71	47,43	476,5	0,024
The concentration on emotions	30,74	48,22	414,5	0,005
Instrumental social support	33,57	47,32	474,0	0,029
Observation	33,14	47,45	465,0	0,023

As follows from table 3, the respondents who prefer online games have a higher rating on factor B and factor Q2. The respondents who make their choice in favor of offline games have a higher rating on factor I. They are characterized by the use of coping strategies such as searching for social support of an instrumental nature, focusing on emotions and their active expression, searching for information from other people, as well as a tendency to focus on external and internal stimuli (as one of the manifestations of awareness).

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The empirical study showed that the vast majority of respondents (60 people) prefer information of an entertainment nature, 16 people prefer educational content and 11 people prefer information useful for professional activities.

The results of the empirical study suggest that the respondents who prefer *entertainment media* are characterized by a disdainful attitude to social standards of behavior, impermanence and refusal to commit themselves. They are characterized by impulsiveness, weak control of their desires, emotions, inability to manage time and effort to achieve their goals. They are less willing to turn to God for help when experiencing difficulties. However, they do not evaluate any of their thoughts, emotions, show their emotional state expressively. They are less likely to focus on their experiences and reflection. Thus, the respondents who prefer entertainment media content can be described as infantile, personally immature, having difficulties in behavior and adaptation. Moreover, the data obtained (especially the combination of low values for G and Q3 factors) suggest a risk of sociopath behavior in this group.

On the contrary, the respondents who *chose educational and professional content* have a more developed sense of duty, responsibility, ability to manage their time, emotions, and behavior. They are characterized by persistent overcoming of difficulties, completing the

started activity. When facing life’s difficulties, they can turn to God in prayer, actualizing the spiritual principle in themselves. They are more likely to be aware of focusing on external and internal stimuli - sounds, smells, images, bodily sensations, emotions, etc. Thanks to this, they are immersed in the present, the experience of the present moment. The obtained data draw us a portrait of an adult who is able to assess reality adequately, be aware of their emotions, take responsibility, organize their activities and overcome difficulties.

According to the degree of activity of respondents in the perception of information, the sample was distributed as follows: 68 students are focused on obtaining information, the main characteristic of which is novelty, and only 19 people choose information that requires its analysis. Students who prefer *analytical media content* are distinguished by a great emotional lability and expressiveness, richness and brightness of their inner life, sociability and willingness to cooperate. These respondents are more likely to focus on what is happening “here and now”, paying attention to their own body sensations, emotions, thoughts, and what is happening around them. They are ready to take active actions aimed at overcoming a difficult life situation.

The students who prefer to receive *new information* without a deep understanding of it can be described as individuals who are more formal and cold in interpersonal relationships; to a lesser extent, they use active self-control with a problem situation. It can be assumed that the desire to consume new information in this way allows the respondents to avoid informal communication with other people and does not allow time for reflection, development of their attitude to what is read or seen on the screen of the smart phone. Preoccupation with viewing information “takes” such a person out of the reality of living, real contact with others and themselves.

Next, let’s look at the personal characteristics of the respondents who prefer to play online (there were 21 of them) and offline computer games (66 people). Analyzing the data presented in table 3, we can say that the students who prefer *online games* are people who are self-

sufficient and practical, do not seek social contacts, are confident, as well as smart, fast learners and have broad intellectual interests. They are practical in business, rely rather on logic, thinking, and tend to rationalize. The game-play of the online games presented in our MMO research is as follows: the player, having created a character, finds himself in a large open world with a small basic set of equipment that is necessary to complete tasks. For completing tasks of different complexity, winning over creatures, the player can get things, money or rewards. In order to achieve the desired result - winning the game - the user must constantly analyze the situation, predict the development of events, relying primarily on logic. Since MMO players are rational and self-sufficient, they are less focused on their emotions and resort to using coping for social and instrumental support, directing their efforts to battle with players of the same or higher level in PvP battles (instead of cooperating to defeat bosses) experiencing competitive excitement.

The respondents who prefer *offline computer games* are characterized by a high level of emotion and desire for interpersonal contacts. Compared to the previous group, they are more gentle, imaginative, and good-natured; they are characterized by anxiety, emotional vulnerability, and focus on internal (feelings, images, emotions, thoughts) and external stimuli. They are more in need of love, care, and attention of the loved ones, and in a difficult situation, they prefer to seek help, information, and advice from another person. It can be assumed that the respondents in this group are aware that they are more emotionally fragile, do not have certain resources (qualities or behaviors needed in communication, coping with stress), and use offline play as a way to learn from models. For example, in story-oriented RPG games, you can choose a specific behavior model. In this game, you are given a lot of freedom of action, both in the manner of communication and in relation to the actions of other characters. By observing the consequences of actions, players receive indirect reinforcement, thereby implementing the coping of instrumental support. In addition, during the game, you can restart and try out a different behavior than the one that was implemented earlier, as well as use it outside of the game situation.

The next direction of the comparative analysis is to identify personal characteristics and coping strategies depending on the preferred *genres of media content*. The respondents expressed their attitude to nine genres of films, nine musical genres, and seventeen genres of computer games. In total, there were 35 genres. The factor analysis was used to reduce the dimensionality of empirical data with minimal loss of information. As a result of the component analysis with subsequent application of the maximum likelihood method, an eight-factor structure was identified. The factors were interpreted according to the table of factor loads after rotation.

The factors were assigned the following names:

- factor 1 "highly intellectual content" (the highest loads on the factor are the variables "Jazz" (the load on the

factor is 0.890), "Blues" (0.813), "Classical music" (0.409));

- factor 2 "Adventure game content" (variables "Adventure" (0.686), "Quest" (0.559), "Strategy" (0.517), "Simulator" (0.497), "Arcade" (0.497));

- factor 3 "Emotional content" (variables "Drama" (0.967), "Melodrama" (0.658), "Comedy" (0.445), "Pop music" (0.350));

- factor 4 "Fantasy content" (variables "Fiction" (0.831), "Fantasy" (0.771));

- factor 5 "Aggressive game content" (variables "Slasher" (0.630), "Shooter" (0.552), "RPG" (0.491), "Fighting" (0.419), "Traditional games" (0.404), "MMO" (0.353));

- factor 6 "Emotionally intense content" (variables "Thriller" (0.721), "Action movie" (0.582), "Detective" (0.482), "Action" (0.479), "Horror" (0.344));

- factor 7 "Protest content" (on the positive pole - variables "Rock" (0.724), "Metal" (0.666), "Classical music" (0.398), on the negative pole - variables "Pop music" (-0.472), "Rap" (-0.367));

- factor 8 "Detached content" (on the positive pole - variables "Russian chanson" (0.817), "Foreign chanson" (0.612), on the negative pole - variable "MMO" (-0.370)).

At the next stage, factor estimates were calculated as new variables for further analysis. The average value (M) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated for each factor, and three subsamples were formed based on them. The Mann-Whitney U-test was used for comparative analysis of personal characteristics and coping behavior of students with high and low levels of preferences for a certain group of media content genres. Next, we will describe only significant differences in the expression of personal characteristics and coping strategies of the respondents who prefer a particular group of genres of film, music and computer games. The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the factor "highly intellectual music content" are characterized by a lower rating on factor E, higher indicators of the expression of such coping strategies as concentration on emotions and their expression, humor, and observation as one of the aspects of awareness. With a fast tempo, complex improvisations, jazz music is highly artistic and highly intellectual. In this regard, it is no accident that the respondents who gave it preference are rather modest, friendly and tactful people. When faced with a difficult situation, they turn to the content of the inner world, which gives them the opportunity to realize and adjust their emotional state. In addition, the strategy of using humor helps them cope with problems, feelings of helplessness and uncertainty. Probably, while listening to music of these genres, a person listens to their feelings and emotions. As the composition develops, the listener's feelings reach a certain peak, beyond which their further intensification is impossible, and the emotion experienced gradually fades. The end of the composition on an unexpected or optimistic note gives the opportunity to manifest a strategy of humor: "There is a lot of bad in the world, but not everything is definitely bad".

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the *“Adventure game content”* factor have higher ratings for MD, I, M, and Q1 factors. This means that they are prone to fantasy, artistic perception of the world, search for new impressions; full of original ideas and are distinguished by dreaminess, originality of outlook and a desire to test everything on their own experience, not trusting authorities. At the same time, they easily change their plans, get distracted, and plunge into their fantasies. Perhaps accepting difficult circumstances as a coping strategy is implemented because, on the one hand, they are open to new experiences, and on the other - they easily switch to new objects, knowing that everything will be over. Probably, because of these personal characteristics, respondents choose computer games of an adventure nature. So, the plot of the genre *“Adventure”* - adventures, most often associated with a global task or problem that the hero must solve; the mechanic of the genre *“Quest”* is associated with creative, non-standard puzzle solving; *“Strategy”*, *“Simulator”* and *“Arcade”* are aimed at building a certain line of behavior for solving an in-game problem, often without limiting the methods of its implementation.

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the factor *“Emotional content”* tend to have higher scores on factor F and a lower value of such a component of awareness as non-reaction. In other words, these respondents are characterized by an *“easy”* attitude to life, egocentricity, optimism, as well as a tendency to immerse themselves in emotions and thoughts, *“get used”* to the situation. Such genres of cinema as drama, melodrama, comedy reflect the relationships between people, their feelings and actions. Bright images of the characters, difficult circumstances and obstacles that they overcome, family and love vicissitudes accompanied by music are designed to strengthen the emotional experience - all this leaves no chance of consciously choosing your reaction to what is happening. The respondents of this group can be compared to the dragonfly from the fable of A. I. Krylov that *“sang through the red summer”*, because their behavior is dictated by the current moment and a strong optimistic emotion.

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the *“Fantasy content”* factor are characterized by higher scores on the personal G factor and lower indicators of the expression of such coping strategies as containment, suppression of competing activities, and planning. On the one hand, we see a person with a developed sense of responsibility, who is decent, acting according to existing norms of behavior. However, in order to cope with stress, they will act rather hastily, impulsively, without careful consideration of the problem situation, distracted by other activities instead of looking for solutions. Probably, due to the fact that these genres are less likely to reflect reality, they allow you to somewhat weaken the rigid Super-ego of the person, free themselves from controlling attitudes and behave spontaneously, impulsively, giving way to a rush of emotions.

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the factor *“Aggressive game content”* are characterized by

lower scores on the personal factor O, a higher indicator of the expression of such copings as the search for emotional support, concentration on emotions and their active expression but a higher indicator of such a component of awareness as lack of self-esteem. The specificity of the genres included in this factor is that the game-play is aimed at defeating the enemy in the available ways: with weapons or fists. A large number of constantly changing opponents do not allow time to perceive them as real people, the process itself takes up an important place. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the respondents who prefer these genres are characterized by self-confidence, activity, ability to cope with difficulties and easily experience failures, such people are not prone to experiencing fears, blaming themselves for inappropriate feelings, thoughts, and actions. Like the hero of these games, such a person will solve the problem (often in a physical way) actively and independently, with faith in their own strength, and not worry about it or ask for help from other people.

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the factor *“Emotionally intense content”* are characterized by lower scores on the personal factor Q4 and the expression of such coping strategies as concentration on emotions and their active expression and conversion to religion. Here we see, at first glance, a strange picture. On the one hand, the respondents of this group are characterized by equanimity, satisfaction with the current state of affairs, and lack of desire to make changes in their lives. In the event of a crisis, they will be less likely to turn to their feelings and to God. Behind these manifestations, we see a picture of a certain stop of mental life, emotional deadness (*“I don’t want anything”*, *“I don’t feel anything”*), a reduced emotional-volitional tone (*“what is will, what is not will - all the same”*). In this regard, the choice of films that cause unpleasant emotions (fear, excitement, anxiety), are full of chases, shootouts, special effects and have a depressing plot, is probably to intensify, so wake up the inner life in such a strange way. Or maybe this emotional insensitivity is the result of a strong strain, a long presence in a stressful situation, and the choice of such films is a way to distract from the unbearable reality.

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the *“Protest music content”* factor tend to have higher scores on the Q1 factor, lower scores on the C factor. More pronounced use of the coping strategy is a mental departure from the problem and less pronounced awareness of actions. The data allow us to describe the respondents of this group as emotionally unstable, subject to mood fluctuations, prone to escape from reality or unpleasant thoughts about the problem through fantasy, sleep, and therefore personally immature. They tend to contradict existing views, to destroy or discard the well-established rules and habits. This is consistent with the characteristics of rock music, which is not only a musical genre, but also a certain subculture that arose in the environment of hippies and beatniks. It expresses a rebellion against the established orders of existing values and ideals, contradictory moods and emotional expression.

Probably, this kind of music allows a young person to express the storm of emotions that they cannot control, protest moods and youthful maximalism.

The respondents who prefer a group of genres united by the “*Detached content*” factor are characterized by lower scores on factors H, N, Q1 and a greater expression of such coping strategies as mental and behavioral withdrawal from the problem, turning to religion. Behind these data, we see a person who is rather timid, insecure, inclined to seclusion, naive, sentimental and emotionally sensitive, conservative and not loving change. When faced with difficulties, they will choose to withdraw into themselves (their fantasies, thoughts), turn to faith, or abandon the intended goal, rather than openly confront the

5. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the research results, we can say that emotionally more mature students choose information of an educational nature that requires analysis. While students who are more neurotic, less aware, and have a low level of control over emotions and behavior, prefer entertainment and new content.

Self-sufficient, pragmatic, logical students often choose online games. Offline games are preferred by individuals who are more emotional, socially oriented, kind, and looking for support and help from other people.

The choice of a particular genre group reflects the personal characteristics of the respondents. So, friendly and tactful people who are able to laugh at the problem will prefer to listen to jazz or classical music; dreamy students who are inclined to go into fantasy and search for

problem or seek support from other people. Musical works of the chanson genre tell about events, life difficulties faced by an ordinary person. As a rule, these songs are performed in the first person and are a kind of revelation of the author’s soul. It can be assumed that the choice of such music reflects the emotional sensitivity of the individual, as well as the tendency to take a position of observation, non-interference with life’s difficulties. In contrast, for example, to MMO players (the negative pole of the factor), who are more focused on communication in a large social group within gaming communities and tend to be active, do pragmatic actions.

new experiences will rather choose the adventure genre; students who live in the present and by their emotions will prefer drama or comedy; those who are confident in their abilities and overcoming difficulties easily, will choose online games; emotionally unstable, emotionally immature students can use rock music to express their protest moods and conflicting emotions; those who, when faced with difficulties, use a strategy of withdrawal, while being timid and sentimental, will prefer chanson. Perhaps the choice of fiction, thriller or action film reflects, to some extent, the psychological distress of students, and may be a way to resolve internal conflict.

So, based on the results of the research, we can paraphrase a well-known expression and say: tell me what content you prefer, and I will tell you who you are.

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