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# INFORMATION WARS: RUSSIAN YOUTH AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF VALUE-SEMANTIC ORIENTATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

*In the twenty-first century, the problem of information wars and the transformation of value-semantic orientations has acquired particular urgency. The aim of this study is to analyze the value constructs and the hierarchy of values of contemporary Russian youth, as well as the main instruments employed in modern information wars aimed at transforming value-semantic orientations. The research methodology is based on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates socio-philosophical analysis, systems analysis, sociological research, analysis of contemporary scholarly data, and content analysis. The authors examine the phenomenon of information wars, which has gained particular relevance in the era of modern information and communication technologies and is primarily aimed at reshaping the value-semantic worldview of young people, as well as the factors influencing the formation and hierarchy of values among Russian youth. The authors argue that a fundamental instrument for the transformation of the spiritual and semantic values of Russian youth is the contemporary Russian education system, particularly its humanities component, which was formed in the 1990s as a result of educational reforms and is viewed as transmitting anti-values and fostering a negative perception of the country, its history, culture, and traditional values. Special attention is given to the analysis of social networks and cyberspace as key instruments of information wars that transform the spiritual and moral values of contemporary Russian youth. Results. The upbringing of young people capable of self-reflection and self-education is an important factor in the formation of a resilient personality able to withstand informational pressure. The most effective areas for the formation and preservation of traditional value-semantic orientations include volunteering, social entrepreneurship, as well as environmental and scientific activities. The study concludes that the most promising approach to counteracting information wars that transform the value-semantic orientations of contemporary Russian youth lies in a comprehensive set of measures combining both classical and innovative methods. Particular attention should be paid to the further development of tools that include both digital literacy and practical*

*experience, which contribute to overcoming media constraints and foster the development of stable values, as well as the formation of a harmonious and comprehensively developed personality.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Russian youth, traditional values, information war, value-semantic orientations, instruments of information wars.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, an era of total digitalization, the rapid development of information technologies and the growing volume of transmitted data have elevated the problem of information wars and the manipulation of consciousness to a new, global level. The increasing influence of information and communication and cognitive technologies, as well as social networks, is transforming the ways in which information is perceived and understood. This leads not only to changes in the mechanisms of public opinion formation but also to the transformation of the value-semantic orientations of society as a whole. In the context of global competition for resources, the phenomenon of information wars aimed at reshaping the value-semantic orientations of Russian youth acquires particular significance [1].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study analyzes the perspectives of contemporary Russian scholars on the phenomenon of information warfare, its characteristics and methods, as well as sociological studies focused on the value and moral orientations of modern Russian youth, and data from official documents. Given the interdisciplinary nature of information warfare studies, the methodological framework includes socio-philosophical analysis, the systems approach, content analysis, as well as descriptive, structural-functional, and comparative methods. In addition, methods of axiology and communication studies are employed to identify the essential relationships and characteristics of the value-semantic framework of contemporary digital generations.

## RESULTS

Information wars are conflicts in which the parties employ information technologies and mass communication tools to achieve their objectives. The primary goal of information wars is the manipulation of public opinion, the transformation of value orientations, and influence over decision-making processes [2]. The term "information war" emerged in the 1980s and refers to a fourth-generation type of warfare, in which the principal domain is virtual space rather than traditional domains such as land, air, or sea.

Such warfare is aimed at achieving information superiority while defending one's own information space. It does not involve the use of lethal weapons and avoids material and human losses; however, its primary target is human identity, influencing consciousness and decision-making. Despite relatively low costs, information wars have a more deeply penetrating destructive effect, making them economically advantageous and contributing to their widespread proliferation [3, p. 330].

Information wars have always been primarily directed at younger generations, as they constitute the foundation of the future; the present and future of society depend on the values and meanings internalized by young people as they mature.

Culturally conditioned notions of what is significant and important, which shape social relations and well-being (both objective and subjective), constitute the value core of society. Forming stable constructs, values implicitly influence the definition of life priorities and the selection of methods, resources, and means for achieving them across all spheres of life. This includes choices in interpersonal and family relationships, political and state orientations, religious views, and economic interactions.

Value constructs exist in three forms:

1. As deontological constructs, functioning as a social ideal and representing a priori notions of what ought to be. Deontological value constructs include an abstract understanding of universal human values (such as truth, beauty, and goodness) or values that come to the forefront in a particular historical period (such as democracy and equality);
2. As objects of material or cultural production that embody ethical, aesthetic, and political ideals;
3. As individual personal values, socially conditioned and acting as determinants of personal motivation across all spheres of activity.

Values, simultaneously serving as indicators of societal development, markers of historical and cultural significance, and subjective projections of the individual, form the cultural-axiological system of society. It is precisely this "spiritual and moral infrastructure" that is crucial for shaping the worldview orientations of the younger generation, as the stability of society depends on these orientations. In contemporary social sciences and humanities, values are regarded as one of the fundamental

elements of the social structure, shaping cultural norms, regulating social relations, and determining the trajectory of societal development.

Contemporary geopolitical discourse has divided the world into two broad groups: societies grounded in traditional values and societies oriented toward a new ethical anthropology. Although both proclaim adherence to similar values, their substantive interpretations differ fundamentally. For example, the value of “family” in a traditional society is associated with monogamy, heterosexual marriage, respect for ancestors, and related principles, whereas in an innovation-oriented society it may encompass polygamy and same-sex unions.

The Russian position is associated with the protection of traditional values, which are regarded as a guarantee of preserving the unique cultural code of the Russian state.

According to the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of November 9, 2022, No. 809 “On the Approval of the Foundations of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values,” “traditional values are moral guidelines that shape the worldview of Russian citizens, are transmitted from generation to generation, form the basis of all-Russian civic identity and the unified cultural space of the country, strengthen civic unity, and have found their unique and distinctive expression in the spiritual, historical, and cultural development of the multinational people of Russia.”

At the same time, due to scientific and technological progress and new forms of social communication enabled by its products, global trends shaping the value constructs of contemporary youth inevitably influence the value orientations of Russian youth as well.

What, then, is the hierarchy of values among contemporary Russian youth?

The goals and values of young people are shaped by a range of factors, both external and internal. Considering that youth represent a socio-demographic group whose members are in the process of personal formation, self-discovery, and the determination of their own paths toward life success, this period can be characterized by experimentation, doubt, analysis, rejection, and reflection.

The formation of the value paradigm of youth is influenced by such factors as:

- family and the social environment;
- interpersonal relationships;
- economic, ethical, legal, and aesthetic relations;
- the educational environment;

- state ideology and policy;
- modern means of communication;
- the spiritual sphere.

The importance of creating conditions for the formation of a system of values among youth that would ensure the preservation of the culture and identity of Russian society is determined by the fact that it is precisely this system that will shape both the external image and the internal structure of Russia across all spheres (politics, economy, art, and the social sphere).

According to recent data from various Russian research centers, the value set of the younger generation does not differ significantly from that of older generations. However, differences are observed in the hierarchy of values.

According to a survey conducted by VTsIOM on July 8, 2025, a strong traditional family is a priority value for all generations of Russian society. The family is perceived as a guarantor of stability, which grants it priority in conditions of geopolitical and economic instability. Alongside this, collectivism and *sobornost* (collective spiritual unity) – frequently highlighted by representatives of Russian philosophy as a unique feature of Russian culture – also remain significant factors.

If the three main values across different youth age groups are identified, Generation Z prioritizes family, friendship, and self-realization; younger millennials prioritize family, life, human dignity and rights, and self-realization; older millennials prioritize family, life, human dignity and rights, and the unity of the peoples of Russia [4].

At the end of 2024, the Innovation Center for the Development and Education of Children and Youth conducted a study on the value orientations of contemporary Russian youth, the results of which showed that mental and physical health are of primary importance for young people [5]. Similar findings were obtained by the Institute for the Study of Childhood, Family, and Upbringing, where 65% of respondents identified health as the core value. Faithful friends ranked second, while fullness and emotional richness of life ranked third [6].

When selecting personal qualities, Russian youth tend to prioritize good manners, responsibility, and honesty.

Recent studies also indicate that a leading position in the hierarchy of youth values is occupied by the opportunity for self-realization and personal development. At the same time, self-realization is understood by the younger generation not only as

success in the professional sphere, but also as the development and realization of creative abilities.

Another significant value for young people is material well-being, which is necessary to ensure social security and a decent standard of living. At the same time, material well-being is perceived not as an end in itself, but as a means of achieving independence, freedom of choice, and opportunities for travel.

The family continues to remain an important value; however, perceptions of what constitutes family life and the roles of family members differ somewhat from those of previous generations. Contemporary youth place great importance on emotional support, mutual understanding, and equality between partners.

In the study by Professor Krichinsky V.K., a relationship is identified between the value of "family" and material well-being, expressed through the financial and economic planning of individual institutional units—households. The author notes that the planning horizon and the degree of discounting in economic behavior vary depending on the presence or absence of a strong traditional family. The findings of Krichinsky V.K. demonstrate that in the economic behavior of Russians, the presence of a family acts as a factor shaping attitudes toward "long-term capital," understood as resources of long-term financing formed predominantly on a market basis, with sources in both the domestic economy and the external environment [17, p. 115]. Savings, as a form of material value, become significant in the presence of a family, serving as a guarantee of other values such as "security" and "freedom."

Freedom of choice and personal independence constitute important elements of the value system of youth. Young people strive to independently determine their life paths and make decisions free from external pressure. Global digital communication, which is shaping a new culture, reinforces this tendency.

The development strategy of the Russian state takes contemporary trends into account, and an analysis of the dynamics and structure of expenditures within the framework of national projects allows for several observations.

First, a significant share of total funding continues to be allocated to socially oriented projects, including "Family," "Youth and Children," and "Long and Active Life," which reflects the continuation of a policy of investing in human well-being and development as the foundation of long-term growth [18, p. 41].

The value paradigm of Russian youth represents a complex of contradictory components, which constitutes its distinctive feature. This is attributable to the fact that contemporary Russian society, on the one hand, seeks to preserve its cultural code, while on the other hand it cannot avoid adopting innovations necessary for its economic sustainability. The first contradiction lies in the combination—characteristic of Russian culture—of collectivist values and individualism, which is necessary for asserting one's position in the economic sphere and for self-realization.

The second contradiction is associated with the natural clash of established cultural norms with the values of the universal digital environment, where traditional values are transformed through processes of axiological assimilation or dissimilation.

Finally, there exists a gap between terminal and instrumental values, conditioned by economic circumstances and social barriers.

Social transformations, digitalization, and the global geopolitical situation—in which the role and position of Russia are interpreted in different ways—undoubtedly influence the value paradigm of contemporary Russian youth, rendering it a complex, dynamic, and vulnerable system.

The vulnerability of this system is explained by the fact that contemporary younger generations, the so-called "digital natives," represent a particularly susceptible target for cognitive influence, as their worldview has not yet fully formed, their psychological and emotional spheres remain unstable, and critical thinking is still in the process of development. At the same time, adolescent aggression, infantilism, and the traditional generational conflict between "fathers and children" create a favorable and convenient environment for successful information attacks and targeted informational injections, enabling the redirection of adolescent energy and activity into channels beneficial to interested actors.

Contemporary studies have identified the main groups of instruments used in information warfare [3, p. 330]. **These include:**

Cyberattacks that disrupt the functioning of enterprises, institutions, and public authorities, and are aimed at the theft of operational, personal, confidential, or classified information;

The deliberate creation of a negative social atmosphere, including anxiety, depression, panic, fear, heightened agitation, and negative expectations;

The creation of informational asymmetry, including the destabilization of the traditional academic and scientific environment, the degradation of the

education system, and the formation of conditions conducive to “brain drain”;

The transformation of value-semantic orientations and, more broadly, the distortion of the worldview, the formation of negative identities at both the individual and collective levels, and the reformatting of the traditional system of spiritual and moral values in Russia, replacing them with alien value systems and orientations.

However, one of the most important instruments of information warfare aimed at reshaping the value-semantic orientations of youth is the contemporary Russian education system. In the 1990s, the restructuring of the Soviet education system took place, a so-called fourth educational reform, which sought to rapidly produce a new generation with a different, pro-Western mentality.

In Russian education, textbooks and curricula in the humanities were subjected to revision; the country’s past was presented in a negative light, especially in comparison with “civilized” countries. A sense of national inferiority and secondary status was actively introduced into the consciousness of younger generations.

More than one and a half thousand authors and authorial collectives participated in the preparation of educational literature for Russian schools within the framework of the Open Society Foundation’s educational program (J. Soros). Two hundred and fifty books underwent pedagogical approbation, and twenty-four received the official approval stamp “for schools as textbooks and teaching aids” [7, p. 47]. In addition, new pedagogical personnel were trained from among scholars and educators who had received Soros grants and who transmitted a “new” worldview and interpretation of Russian history and culture to children.

As a result, generations of young people grew up lacking a clear national identity, demonstrating a negative attitude toward their own country, its history, and culture, with a restructured consciousness and altered moral values.

However, the main instrument of information warfare in which contemporary adolescents and young people are involved is undoubtedly cyberspace and, above all, social networks—platforms that play a key role not only in information dissemination but, more importantly, in shaping value-semantic orientations. It is here that contemporary trends are formed, communities of specific orientations and objectives are created, and active “mind manipulation” is carried out [8, p. 35].

According to contemporary Russian studies, social networks constitute an integral part of the life of

modern youth; 98% of students use them regularly. With age, the time adolescents spend on social networks increases, reaching 5–8 hours per day [9]. At the same time, according to the same studies from 2025, only 8% of adolescents feel unsafe on the Internet, while research identifies internet addiction in 15% of young people, and 47% are considered to be at risk [10, p. 68].

The informatization of all spheres of human life is an objective process associated with new technological capabilities. This phenomenon, in one way or another, affects all individuals, but its impact on the younger generation is more pronounced and often more negative. In the article by A.V. Shcherbakov, the development of important directions is proposed that allow for the maximization of the positive potential of information and digital platforms while limiting their misuse.

These directions include improving digital literacy, which primarily involves the development of critical thinking, the ability to question digital content, and to verify information across multiple sources. This may serve as a key factor in reducing vulnerability to manipulation.

The author notes that “the formation of digital immunity, which constitutes the basis of a culture of technology use, is essential. An analytical approach to algorithmic recommendations is what must be developed through educational initiatives by the state, universities, and the platforms themselves” [19, p. 66].

A distinctive feature of social networks that makes them a primary instrument of information warfare is the possibility of anonymous and remote influence on the consciousness of various youth groups through the deliberate use of well-developed methods and techniques, including:

- “viral” dissemination of information and rapid accumulation of followers;
- the deliberate organization of false discussions through comments and bots that exclude any alternative viewpoints, i.e., manipulation of public opinion, trolling, and bullying through which a certain position or opinion is subtly imposed, or any undesirable position for the sponsoring actor is discredited;
- the distribution of reels and memes with specific emotional charge and content;
- the creation of artificially constructed public opinion through the manipulation of positive or negative “likes”;
- informational and psychological attacks in the form of aggressive hostility and insults aimed at

discrediting authors of positive, state-supporting, and patriotic statements;

- mass dissemination of fake information aimed at discrediting the state, the country, or specific individuals;

- deletion, suppression, or distortion of unfavorable information by social media moderators;

- the use of various disinformation tools, including the omission of important messages and the injection of "informational noise," which makes it difficult to distinguish reliable information from unreliable content;

- the use of technologies of remote manipulation of youth groups, where protest activities are disguised as quests, cases, or interactive excursions;

- large-scale injections of fake and negative information that significantly outweigh positive content and create a destructive emotional background intended to generate distrust toward the current authorities;

- the instantaneous large-scale response of social networks, primarily by paid actors, to significant events, which neutralizes or offsets the response of official media [11].

As can be seen, in information wars aimed at reshaping the value-semantic orientations of youth, not only general instruments are used, but also a whole set of specialized tools developed for different target audiences. Moreover, according to recent studies, such audiences now include even preschool and primary school children.

For this reason, the issue of educational and upbringing work in the sphere of forming ideological and value-based orientations of youth occupies a central place in contemporary social and humanitarian research.

Within one of the classical approaches, four basic methods of educational influence are traditionally distinguished: persuasion, exercise, encouragement, and punishment (Boldyrev N.I., Goncharov N.K., Esipov B.P.) [12]. A more detailed typology is proposed by I.G. Shchukina, who classifies the methods into three broad groups: methods of forming consciousness (storytelling, explanation, clarification, lecture, ethical conversation, admonition, suggestion, instruction, debate, report, example), methods of organizing activity and forming behavioral experience (exercise, assignment, educative situations), and methods of stimulation (competition, encouragement, punishment) [13].

The more contemporary the research in the field of educational methodology becomes, the more educators turn to the development of tools that allow for a softer influence on the process of value and

moral formation of students. Thus, A.P. Tryapitsina proposes grouping methods into the following blocks: methods of forming self-awareness, moral feelings, and ethical values; methods of supporting and developing moral behavior and practical experience; and methods of stimulating and correcting processes of self-development and self-education [14].

An even more detailed and complex system is proposed by M.I. Rozhkov and L.V. Baiborodova, who emphasize the binary nature of educational methods. According to their view, each educational method corresponds to a related method of self-education. Thus, binarity in the educational process "implies the two-sided activity of participants in the pedagogical process" [15, p. 78].

I.Yu. Shustova identifies four groups of methods: cognitive (aimed at forming consciousness and worldview); activity-based (focused on acquiring social experience, mastering practical skills, and forming the required type of behavior); relational (aimed at developing the motivational and moral sphere of the individual, shaping life position, values, and meanings); and self-oriented methods (aimed at developing self-awareness, self-attitude, self-education, and self-development) [15, pp. 114–115].

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

At the same time, as pedagogical and educational methodologies evolve, increasing importance is attached to the process of self-education, when conditions and situations related to social activity encourage young people to form internal values that can serve as their moral and ethical foundation throughout life.

Self-education and the development of an internal moral core are directly associated with an important psychological process known as self-actualization, that is, the individual's striving to fully realize and develop their personal potential and abilities, to recognize their own worth, and to honestly acknowledge and accept their shortcomings. An empirical study conducted among university students with a mean age of 20.31 years revealed a "positive correlation between the indicators of the 'self-worth' scale and the level of students' self-actualization" [16, p. 162]. Thus, the education of young people capable of self-reflection and self-education, and who can objectively assess their strengths and weaknesses, represents an important contribution to the formation of a resilient personality capable of resisting informational pressure.

In interaction with contemporary youth, it is important to recognize that their communication and perception of the world are largely shaped by Internet use. Here, a significant contradiction emerges in the consciousness of young people. On the one hand, access to the Internet provides them with vast opportunities to search for any type of information; on the other hand, algorithmic systems that select, recommend, and transmit information across platforms are based on the user's previous activity. As a result, once individuals enter a certain "track" of perception, they find themselves fully enclosed within it, regardless of the platform used, experiencing an illusion of access to complete and comprehensive information. Such total synchronization often leads to a distorted perception of reality and the formation of unrealistic expectations—either excessively high or low—toward oneself and the world, as well as frustration arising from the comparison between idealized online representations and everyday reality.

The intensity of this contradiction is further amplified by the primary developmental goal of youth, namely the search for one's place in society and the need to feel a sense of belonging and significance in contributing to something valuable and meaningful. However, the question arises: how can this be achieved while perceiving the world through the narrow informational spectrum provided by digital platforms?

It appears that an effective way to overcome this self-referential informational enclosure may lie in real-life experience, including experience acquired in educational and socially oriented contexts.

Among the most effective areas of youth engagement aimed at the formation and preservation of traditional value-semantic orientations are: volunteering (experience in organizing events of various levels and themes); social entrepreneurship (developing ideas that address socially significant problems, preparing business plans, and implementing them); work with the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups (providing consultations in legal clinics and participating in charitable activities); environmental activities (participation in environmental protection initiatives);

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scientific work (publishing academic papers, presenting at conferences, and gaining experience in their organization).

## CONCLUSIONS

The diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches to the classification of educational methods indicates the active development of this research field in Russian scholarship. At the same time, a characteristic and widespread feature of contemporary methods and tools of youth engagement is their orientation toward the formation of a self-sufficient personality with an internal moral core, capable of productive interaction and co-creation.

Involvement of young people in socially oriented activities and professional practices, on the one hand, creates conditions for the formation of realistic perceptions of contemporary Russian society, broadens their worldview, and provides opportunities for personal interaction with successful entrepreneurs, scientists, and highly qualified specialists. On the other hand, it enables them to gain practical experience in supporting those in need and the most vulnerable groups of the population. The use of soft, incentive-based instruments that take into account the personal and professional interests of young people represents the most effective way of shaping ideological and value-based orientations of Russian youth in the context of digitalization and global information warfare.

Thus, the most promising approach to counteracting information wars that distort value-semantic orientations appears to be a comprehensive set of measures combining both classical and innovative educational methods. At the same time, particular attention should be paid to the further development of tools that include both digital literacy and practical experience, contributing to overcoming media constraints, fostering the development of stable values, and forming a harmonious and comprehensively developed personality.

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