Youth Self-Expression In The Digital Environment And The Formation Of Civic Activism: A Socio-Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract: Based on the results of a sociological survey conducted among 467 respondents aged 14–30 in Uzbekistan, this article analyzes young people's digital literacy, level of use of online educational platforms, their understanding of social activism, and their views on personal expression and safety in the digital environment from a socio-philosophical perspective. The research results show that young people need a complex set of factors to increase their civic engagement.

Keywords: Digital activism, youth activism, civic awareness, digital literacy, online education, community participation.

INTRODUCTION: Modern digital technologies are causing profound changes in all areas of human development. This process is especially evident in Uzbekistan, where young people make up about 60 percent of the population, and the digital environment allows young people not only to obtain information, but also to express their position in social life. However, digital activity does not automatically lead to civic activity. Therefore, a deep analysis of young people's participation in the Internet, their attitude to digital education, their trust in state and public institutions, and their understanding of security remains a pressing need.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of digital citizenship has become an integrated point of digital communications and civil society today. UNESCO (2021) considers digital literacy to be the foundation of democratic participation and civic engagement. Modern research emphasizes that,

although young people spend a lot of time in the digital environment, this is not directly related to their political engagement (Castells, 2013; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). At the same time, lack of communication with state and public organizations, problems of trust and concerns about security often limit the engagement of young people. It is socio-philosophically important to analyze this situation using the example of Uzbekistan.

METHODOLOGY

The study involved 467 respondents aged 14–30. The survey examined young people's online activity, trust in information, use of digital learning platforms, civic engagement and attitudes towards initiatives, as well as their views on digital security. The data was collected using closed-ended questions and summarized using graphical analysis methods. Tables and graphs are marked for placement in the relevant sections of the article.

RESULTS

Factors for increasing youth activity. One of the important questions of the survey was: "Which of the following do you consider important in increasing youth activity?" Several options were offered for this question: "Increasing digital literacy", "Supporting youth initiatives", "Increasing dialogue with state and public organizations", and "All". This will determine which areas young people believe they should focus on to increase their activity.

Factor in increasing youth activity
467 respondents
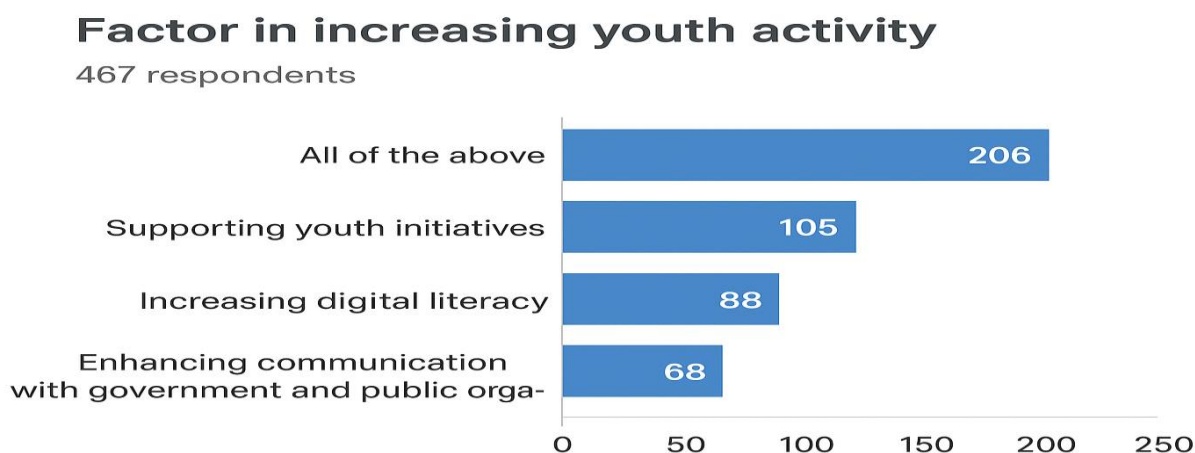
A noteworthy aspect of the distribution of answers is that most respondents consider all of them to be equally important. Those who chose the option "All" are 206, which is about 44%. That is, almost half of the young people believe that if all of the listed measures are implemented in a comprehensive manner, youth activity will increase. This view means that young people are in favor of an integrated approach to the problem - for them, digital literacy, support for initiatives, and strengthening institutional dialogue are equally important. If we analyze the remaining answers, among the individual factors, "Support for youth initiatives" is in the first place - 105 respondents (23%) consider it most important to help young people implement their ideas and projects.

This suggests that young people have more practical initiatives and believe that they can become more active in society if given the opportunity. The option "Increase digital literacy" was chosen by 88 (19%) – that is, a significant proportion believe that young people would be more active if they had higher technical and information literacy. Indeed, other studies have also highlighted that the lack of digital skills can be a factor that prevents many young people from being active online. "Increase communication with state and public organizations" is a priority for 68 (15%) young people. Although this indicator is relatively low, it is still important: a significant number of young people express hope that if effective communication with official structures and public associations is established, their voice is heard, and civic activity will increase. In particular, the gap between generations and structures, as well as the lack of communication, are cited as obstacles to youth activism. Respondents also show that they understand this problem. In short, young people consider a multifaceted approach to increasing their activism necessary. Digital literacy creates the basis for their effective and safe work in the online space, support for initiatives stimulates the emergence of new ideas and projects, and increased communication with official bodies increases the confidence of young people and encourages them to make real changes. If these three factors are considered and supported together, respondents highly assess the possibility of increasing the activity of young people both online and offline.
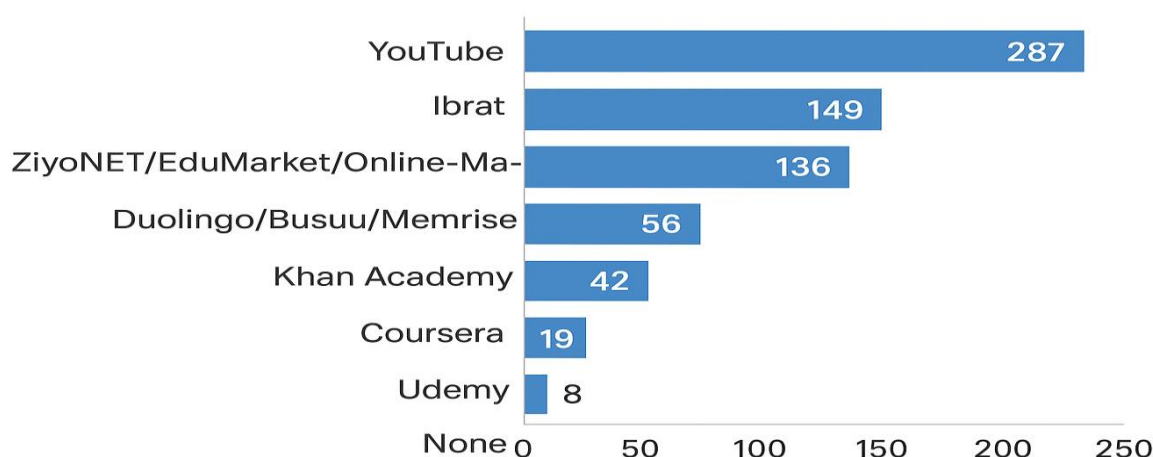
Digital education and socio-political activism. Digital technologies are not only a means of communication, but are also fundamentally changing the process of learning. The opportunities for young people to acquire new knowledge and skills on online platforms have expanded. As part of the survey, we examined this issue from two perspectives: first, we studied what digital educational platforms young people use, and then we studied their opinions on the impact of digital education on their socio-political activism.

Digital learning platforms used by young people.

Respondents were asked which online learning platforms they use and were given the option to select multiple answers. The options included learning via YouTube, local platforms such as Ibrat (a local online learning platform), ZiyoNET, EduMarket, Online-Maktab, international platforms such as Duolingo/Busuu/Memrise (foreign language learning apps), Khan Academy, Coursera, Udemy, and the option to not use.

Digital education platforms used by youth

n = 467

| Platform	Users
YouTube	287
Ibrat	149
ZiyoNET/EduMarket/Online-Ma-	136
Duolingo/Busuu/Memrise	56
Khan Academy	42
Coursera	19
Udemy	8
None	

The results also show an interesting trend in this regard. The most frequently used resource turned out to be YouTube: 287 respondents (i.e. almost 61%) said that they independently learn various knowledge and skills through YouTube. This indicator confirms the abundance of educational materials, textbooks and manuals on the YouTube platform and their popularity among young people. Next in line are the local educational platform "Ibrat" (149 users) and Uzbek online platforms such as ZiyoNET/EduMarket/Online-Maktab (136 users). This shows that, along with international platforms, local online resources also have a significant audience. Foreign language learning applications such as Duolingo/Busuu/Memrise are used by 56 young people - the language learning direction is also quite popular. While platforms such as Khan Academy (42), Coursera (19) and Udemy (8) have relatively few users, this may be due to the fact that these platforms are mainly in English and in some cases are paid services. Notably, 74 respondents (around 16%) stated that they do not use any digital learning platform. This figure indicates that a certain proportion of young people still rely on traditional education or independent learning or do not see the need for online learning. In summary, the use of digital learning is very widespread among young people, especially platforms such as YouTube, which are free and easy to use. Local online learning resources are also developing well. At the same time, the fact that almost one in six have not yet joined digital learning indicates that additional promotion and opportunities are needed to reach them.

Opinions on the impact of digital education on youth activism. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked, "Do you think digital education has an impact on the socio-political activism of young people?" The options for this question were "Yes, it has a significant impact," "In some cases it has an impact," "No, it has little impact," and "These two areas are not related." The goal was to find out whether young people's perceptions of their civic activism increased as a result of digital literacy and online education.

Youth perception of the impact of digital education on civic engagement

n = 467
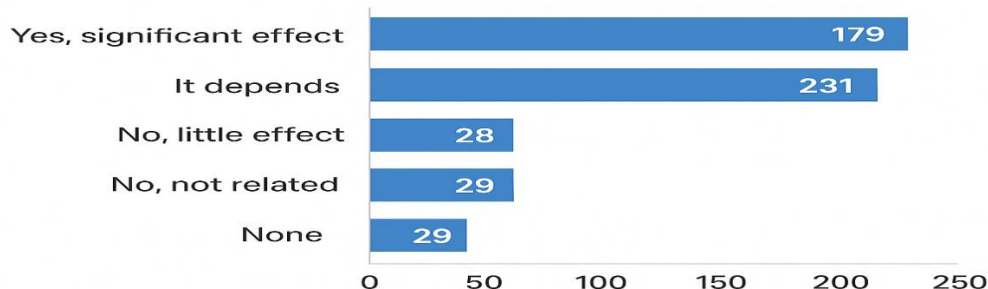
The results show that respondents believe that there is a certain connection between digital education and civic engagement. The most frequently selected answer is "In some cases, it has an impact" (231 or 49%). That is, almost half of young people believe that digital education can be an incentive for socio-political engagement in some situations, for some young people, but this cannot be said to be for everyone and permanently. The next largest group is those who believe that "Yes, it has a significant impact" (179 or 38%). In their opinion, digital education significantly strengthens the worldview and engagement of young people, for example, young people who have received online education are more knowledgeable and therefore take a more active position in society. Those who believe that "it has little impact" are very few – 28 (6%), and those who firmly say "it is not related" are 29 (6%). This distribution shows that the majority of young people (about 87%) believe that digital education has at least some impact on civic engagement. Only a very small proportion say that there is no connection between these two areas or that the impact is insignificant. This opinion of the respondents is not without reason - modern digital education teaches the younger generation to think independently, understand the global information space, and have an analytical approach. These skills, in turn, directly serve to increase the activity of young people in society. However, the fact that about half of young people limit this impact to "in some cases", means that not every young person who has received digital education will necessarily become active. This opinion has a logical basis: civic engagement depends on many factors, and education is only one of them. Young people who have received online education but have low personal motivation or are not interested in public affairs may still not be active. Or, conversely, young people with a strong civic stance may be active in society, even if they have not received digital education. Therefore, respondents approached this issue in a moderate manner, acknowledging the connection in many cases, and were wary of generalizations. The results of the above analysis show that, although young people are widely involved in the digital environment, their direct socio-political activity is still low. The majority (75%) of the 467 young people surveyed are only observers on social networks, and only about 12% have participated in online petitions or digital campaigns. Although young people spend a lot of time on public platforms such as Telegram, YouTube, and Instagram, this time is often spent only for information and entertainment purposes. It was found that very few people with an active civic stance are engaged in blogging or advocacy.

At the same time, the survey results also indicate that there is a significant potential for social activism in the minds of young people. More than half of the respondents follow information on socio-political topics at least occasionally, and many are not indifferent to injustices and rights issues in society. This means that even among the "silent observers" there is a layer that is deeply concerned and ready to express its attitude. However, they are mainly cautious about security and trust in the digital space: most young people are selective and skeptical about online information, as they feel very well the high risk of disinformation and manipulation. Indeed, regional studies also note that young people, addressing the general public via the Internet, often encounter cyber threats, harassment and waves of false information. Our survey participants are also aware of such risks and deeply understand the "double" – positive and negative – impact of digital activism.

According to young people, it is necessary to take a wide-ranging approach to increasing their engagement in society. Improving digital literacy is one of the important tools in this direction, and it is this lack of which is said to be limiting the online engagement of many young people. It is also necessary to create opportunities for young people to implement their own initiatives, encourage them, and establish effective dialogue with state and public organizations. These

views reflect the desire of young people to create a comfortable and safe civic space for themselves. In particular, young activists in the Europe and Central Asia region emphasize that using online platforms alone is not enough, and that they only give real results when combined with real-life cooperation and dialogue - according to research, 82% of young people said that online engagement should be combined with offline activities. Our young people also support this point of view, expressing confidence that if channels of communication and support expand, their role in society will increase.

CONCLUSION

The analysis in this study shows that the digital activism of young people is a huge untapped potential. Although most of them are currently "silent observers" in the digital world, if the necessary conditions are created, this "silence" can turn into a beneficial process for society. To do this, as noted above, it is necessary to increase the digital literacy of young people, support their initiatives as long as possible, and most importantly, create an inclusive social environment and communication platforms that will hear their voices, accept their suggestions and criticisms. Young people, armed with digital technologies, with critical thinking, are the driving force of the future society. Their correct guidance and support will serve not only the interests of young people, but also the prosperity of society as a whole. Thus, it is natural that the voice of today's youth, described as the "digital generation", will become increasingly stronger in society - and the positive development of this process will depend on the conditions that we create now.

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