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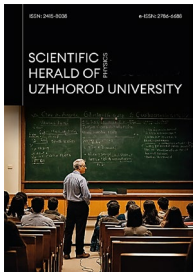

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The influence of the media on shaping the moral image of students

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Abstract

Relevance. The issue of student moral values is a significant problem for both the discipline of sociology and society. The existence of values supports social cohesion, ensures appropriate behavior, and creates a common ethos through media in today's world. The shaping of youth morality through the media is linked to the development of culture in different ways while forming a fundamental part of the set of principles, values, beliefs, and rules of society.

Purpose. The research aims to analyze the factors of the impact of media tools on the behavior of students in the society of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Methodology. To achieve the research objectives, the following methods were used: descriptive, interview, and comparative.

Results. The results of the research determined that the relationship between media environment and youth audience behavior goes beyond the analysis and intervention of individual behavior, conditioning an inclusive and interdisciplinary framework for explaining and predicting social effects. The media influence the educational phenomenon and the socialization process because they are part of the processes of group interaction and the identity construction of young people. Television, social media, and the internet have an important influence on student behavior, but questions remain as to the conditions under which this influence is manifested. The ability of the media to influence the cultural practices and behavior of young students is enhanced by the structure and control of the information sources that produce media content. This is reinforced in postmodern contexts using state and corporate communication forms that disseminate

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information. Information sources act as systems with expedient cultural practices, where the roles and actions of participants are fixed and predictable.

Conclusions. The result is an interconnected system of economic, social, and interpersonal circumstances that can influence student behavior and perspectives. The practical significance lies in the use of the research findings by academics, as well as specialists in journalism, media, and pedagogy.

Keywords: information impact; value system; social media; moral criteria; communication.

Introduction

Observing the attitudes and behavior of today's youth in Kazakhstan, it can be viewed that they are deeply influenced by the consumer mentality that has developed along with technological advances in television, the Internet, and social media – Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and mobile phones – voice and text messaging, which determine their lifestyle, relationships, and location in society. The media have a direct impact on students who adopt and imitate the stereotypes they have adopted. A prime example of this is television shows that feature characters' lives, where young people begin to identify and act, creating new socio-cultural, behavioral, and affective states. Confronted with this reality, through critical reflection, young people adapt to different forms of communication that have emerged through sociocultural practices, reflecting views of political, religious, familial, and social characters. Researchers A.S. Cardenal et al. [1] and A. Palmer and N. Koenig-Lewis [2] in their works consider the phenomenon of the expression of the moral image of young people, which is influenced by modern media, considering the symbols of events, training everyday life, as well as relations with the surrounding world and culture. However, the authors have not fully considered the impact of media tools on students' behavior in society.

Student age as an evolutionary stage is of interest to the social sciences and humanities in general since it is a product of multiple factors that influence this period of development and lead young people to a state of profound ambivalence in the face of norms imposed by society, the media, and the peer group. L. Winter et al. [3] and A. Absattar et al. [4] in their writings consider the media as a new element of accelerated development that affects social processes and phenomena and, in particular, the consciousness of young people, their thinking, and student activities. From the moment of society's existence, any kind of communicative representation becomes a sign that signifies, indicates, and marks something specific to the recipient, hence it is not only a physical form of communication but also involves a series of social and moral processes between sender and recipient. All types of communication carry an intention and meaning, and because of the complexity of human communication, one mark gives rise to another, resulting in one thought triggering another. The educational institution plays a defining role in these scenarios of communication and everyday interaction as a meeting place for peers, a space of everyday life that encourages other, more symbolic forms of communication. Still, researchers have studied little about the specifics of shaping students' moral character through contemporary media.

The media occupy a leading role in society. They are a source of knowledge, distribution, and construction of reality, which actors use to inform themselves and shape opinions on various topics, such as politics, education, culture, adolescence, and the economy. In other words, most of the ideas and discussions are mainly based on a biased and ideologically constructed image from the media. For this reason, reflecting on the role of media in reproducing stereotypes and fragmented visions of various social issues becomes valuable. The media environment plays a fundamental role in shaping the social consciousness of the public. This means that regardless of the direct impact of specific messages on users, the media become a source of opinions and interpretations relevant to relevant subjects and public discourse. There is no doubt that the media are nowadays one of the most important means of socialization for new generations, recognizing that both the role of the educational institution and the family are gradually being superseded by easy access to the tools of mass information, inevitably taking over the leading role as a source of knowledge and opinion-making. M. Laruelle and D. Royce [5] and D. Kudaibergenova [6] in their works consider different segments of society, in particular young people who suffer profound discrimination in the media, which limits their role and participation in aspects of public life. However, the researchers have not considered the prospects of further media impact on students in Kazakhstan.

The research aims to examine the characteristics and effects of media exposure on students in Kazakhstan in terms of their value systems.

Materials and Methods

The following methods were used to achieve the research aims: descriptive, interview, and comparative. The descriptive method, at the stage of considering the factors influencing the formation of moral character during the student years, made it possible to determine the characteristics of young people regarding their communicative functions in society, family, and social groups. It helped determine the specifics of the subject's behavior with the media, given the active use of the Internet and social networks. Its elements led to the identification of the basic moral values that are the most important for student youth in the formation of a moral image. The method highlighted the elements of digital and information and communication technologies that give access to data, opinions, and debates, given the regional context of the state. The descriptive mechanism has helped to identify the social and cultural values that are disseminated through media content, which, in one way or another, influence the behavior and moral characteristics of student youth, as well as the characteristics of their acceptance of different situations and opinions, given the vulnerability and uncertainty of this social stratum.

The interview method during the information-gathering phase highlighted the main features concerning the use of the media, as well as the moral and ethical values presented by the media sphere in contemporary society. The oral interview was conducted in November 2022, with the participation of 105 students from Kazakhstan's higher educational institutions. Among them were: Innovative University of Eurasia (Pavlodar); Turan University (Astana); Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty). This method made it possible to determine which moral qualities are the most important for student youth in building a coherent image that fits modern standards. The interviews were conducted in educational institutions, where the respondents were divided into 5 groups, each consisting of 21 young people. The work with these groups included a pre-training phase for students to discuss the topic of the impact of media on their moral image and related materials regarding the use of communication tools and social media. Each discussion group lasted on average 50 minutes. The group was moderated by a facilitator and an assistant. Arguments on the topics of the discussion were encouraged, motivating the participation of all respondents. To reduce the artificiality of the situation, the discussion groups were held in the participants' learning centers.

The comparative method at the stage of considering the influence of the media on the shaping of students' moral character made it possible to identify the differences and similarities of young people's moral values, considering aspects of regional, digital, and social contexts. It helped to explore the different judgments of social and moral values of individuals while conditioning the capacity of young people to judge and absorb different information. Its elements have highlighted the main mechanisms of media influence on the personal characteristics of students, who are often victims of inappropriate information. This method conditioned the consideration of public awareness factors and the ability to resist the low-level culture provided by the media. The comparison made it possible to determine that the family, social group of communication, educational institutions, and the media should play a major guiding role in influencing the moral image of young people while developing their ability to recognize, manage and choose the right information. The comparative method helped to highlight the features of moral character formation, which should consider a good social, informational, and media environment to create an optimal social environment of public opinion.

Results

The media are among the most powerful sources of socialization in contemporary cultures, conditioning the important role of students' behavioral patterns in society. Due to their autonomy and personalization, the media are very popular among students and have even become an integral part of their professional development process [7]. In today's multicultural society, young people face more choices in terms of lifestyles, norms, and ways of thinking, have a wider space for expansion, and their value orientations are also diversified. Students are in a growth phase of active thinking, curiosity, and energy, eager to get in touch with new things [8]. Traditional and electronic media provide them with a convenient instantaneous online platform to connect with multiculturalism. With globalization, on the one hand, young people inherit the patriotism promoted by national culture and on the other hand, they are exposed to cultural hegemony at the expense of individualism in the unhealthy atmosphere of modern society [9]. In their use of the media, young people are exposed to different kinds of moral characterizations that represent the hedonism, utilitarianism, and consumerism introduced by mass culture. Such moral characterizations can be blinded and misled by low-level content such as parody or ridicule in the television or Internet arena.

Modern students grow up in a society where the material level is rapidly increasing and the spiritual civilization is constantly improving, an important role in the formation of which is played by their upbringing in the family, communication in the educational institution, as well as in the circle of friends [10]. In a market economy, some social evaluation systems are full of aspirations for quick success and instant gain. They tend to use material and legal achievements as criteria for evaluating success and ignore the importance of humanistic spirits such as beliefs, ideals, and morals for social development and the progress of civilization [11]. The transmission of online information is rapid and difficult to control amidst the mass media. Accordingly, the value judgment of student youths can easily be influenced by a poor social atmosphere. The media environment is a technological product of the rapid development of time. Its natural communicative advantages make it easy for young people to access external information and become the main medium for looking at the world and discovering themselves [12]. Standards and different content on the Internet also subtly influence the formation of students' moral values. In the media context, the rate of production and flow of public information continues to increase, and young people's ways of thinking and norms of behavior are constantly influenced by external information.

With the development of network technologies and the increasing number of users, the Internet has gradually become a convenient platform for receiving information, expressing opinions, and sharing data. Public opinion on the Internet has become an important part of the social formation of the moral image of young people, having an unpredictable influence on the structure of moral characteristics in society [13]. Students in educational institutions have been exposed to modern media since childhood and are strongly influenced by public opinion. They have the desire to express their emotions and experiences freely. With the rapid spread of information, young people may find it difficult to identify distortions and uncertainties in communication due to a lack of knowledge and experience [14]. Moreover, they identify internet opinion with the dominant public opinion in society, which negatively affects the healthy formation and development of personal values. Even in today's society with the rapid development of economic globalization, the exchange of information among young students based on Internet technology seems to have no boundaries, and the expression of public opinion through independent media platforms seems arbitrary, where social norms still pass through intangible and informal means to impose appropriate restrictions on people.

For a group of students whose consciousness is still developing, it is easier to submit to pressures set by certain norms [15]. However, online users are mixed with "good" and "bad" people, demonstrating different levels of online literacy and asymmetry of information, due to which it is easy to form the wrong moral image. The challenge of modern media in Kazakhstan is its role in cultural change at different levels of human social organization. The multiple psychological contexts of the media environment sometimes overlap in attempts to change social reality, and many intervention programs leave out the demonstration of the effects as well as the variables responsible for the moral image of young people. In this context, an oral interview was conducted with 105 students from Innovative University of Eurasia, Turan University, and Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in November 2022, identifying which moral qualities are most important in building a holistic image that fits the standards of contemporary society (Table 1).

Table 1. Respondents' core moral values

Moral and ethical values	Values, %
Family values	82%
Kindness	61%
Responsibility	73%
Self-development	81%
Discipline	63%

Source: compiled by the authors.

Thus, in the media industry, moral values can play an important role in helping students develop healthy attitudes toward their problems. Sensible use of characters and mastery of narrative style can provide sufficient elements to develop messages that are conducive to both learning and information in general. Social and cultural characteristics influence the length and content of media broadcasts and publications, which may correspond to family habits and the degree of integration of the peer group. Moral characteristics influence not only media exposure tendencies, but also the various consequences of young people's lives.

In terms of media, the openness and popularity of the internet have made communication with public information a normal part of students' lives. Since the threshold for creating and disseminating public information is extremely low, everyone has the right to spread information. Under the influence of such a huge amount of information in the direction of shaping moral character and cultural values, public information dominates students' communication processes. The vastness and complexity of public information provide manifold opportunities for the formation of strong and enduring moral attributes in young people. The popularization of internet technology has provided the public with a wider space to exchange ideas, views, and information, and the use of media has made people's communication instantaneous and community-based [16]. Online groups constantly emerge because of discussing or evaluating social events, hot issues, and other topics, where students informally exchange opinions or information, resulting in group communication. Due to the openness of the Internet, students in educational institutions are constantly accepting and understanding others' thoughts and attitudes in the process of expressing their personal opinions, which has a subtle effect on the formation of their values. Moral shaping through the media can be said to generate a worldview identity and emotional resonance, constantly creating a new and profound understanding of oneself.

Following the interviews conducted, young students most often draw information from the Internet, social networks, and television, but the situation does not vary significantly depending on the regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Table 2).

Table 2. The main media through which students receive information

Region	Values, %		
	Internet	Social media	TV
Pavlodar (Innovative University of Eurasia)	73	69	-
Astana (Turan University)	59	65	-
Almaty (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University)	-	58	52

Source: compiled by the authors.

Consequently, the influence of social values is limited, for its part, by the regional location of students, which determines the way they receive information and the positive or negative uses they can make of it in the media sphere. Although young people do not seem to be very interested in political information and broadcasts, they turn mainly to the Internet and social media when it comes to issues of public interest. In addition, they believe that TV as a source of information is more important than paper press and radio. Social and cultural constraints by region also influence the length and content of media programs and publications that young people find appropriate to their family habits and degree of integration into society. Although the function of the social environment is complex, when applying the information disseminated by the media environment, it is a fact that the lack of Internet support or a hostile social environment usually makes it impossible to make changes that should shape the right moral image of students through communication tools [17]. Thus, if arguments, reasoning, options, and behaviors are not adapted to the socio-cultural region they are aimed at, the young population does not accept or identify with

them. Rather than achieving a positive change in values, the process may harm young people, with consequences that are far more dangerous and visible than those that the media initially sought to prevent.

The role that the media play in the acquisition of knowledge and moral attitudes among young students cannot be underestimated. Their dominant function is to shape the values and behavior of young people regardless of their age and gender. Following the interviews, it was determined that the main moral characteristics are disseminated by the media in the opinion of student youth (Figure 1).

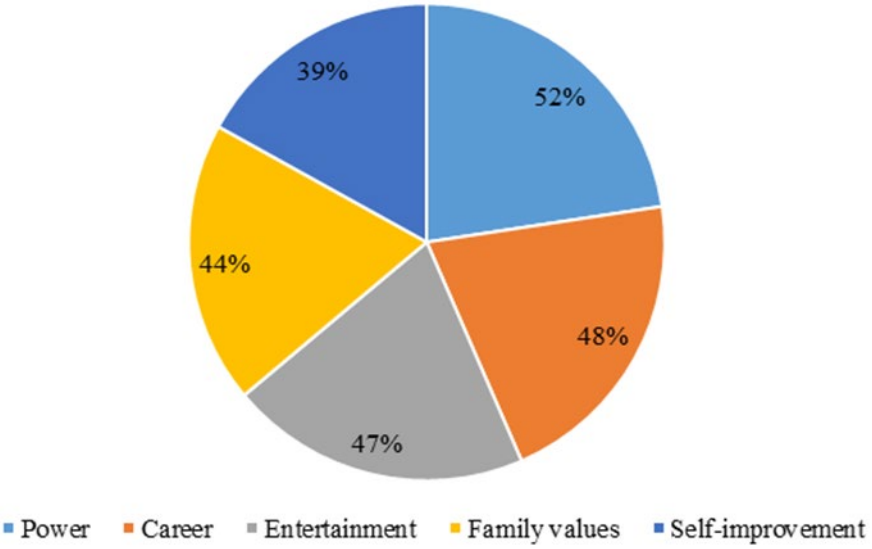

Figure 1. The main moral values, propagated by the mass media following student youth
Source: compiled by the authors.

Thus, it can be highlighted that the media actively uses the opportunity to reach out to students, especially in marginalized urban areas. Moral values in this case assume a central role in the construction and maintenance of young people's identities. They forge an image and evaluation of oneself. An individual who is aware of their values can see themselves as individuals, find their place in the world, have self-confidence, and interpret and evaluate their social environment through the resources of the media. The influence of the media on the values, attitudes, and behavior of student youth should increase support for the social and moral characteristics of the younger generation to become a powerful engine for innovation. Such influence should be used in an overtly positive way to support social justice and, above all, Kazakhstan's moral formation strategy.

Communication media should contribute to the development of youths' ability to properly organize their own lives, whether family, community, or social [18-20]. An effective way should be found to improve the dissemination and influence of the media on the values and behavior of students of both genders, always considering the geographical area in which they live and their socio-economic and cultural background. The relationship between media and students is governed by different moral characteristics, as the community sees young people as the embodiment of social and personal characteristics, which considers contemporary changes in the background of consciousness and globalization [21-23]. Values occupy an intermediate position between reality and the actor, individual or collective, conditioning the constituent elements of the media. The above considerations illustrate the need for a more inclusive paradigm, which assumes that the risks associated with media exposure depend on the content of the message combined with the characteristics of the viewer and his or her family, as well as the social and cultural environment in which it unfolds. Therefore, examining the impact of media on young students requires not only an analysis of certain types of actions but also a consideration of the contexts in which this impact is manifested. In turn, contexts depend on changing social, cultural, economic, and political conditions, which give rise to certain configurations of individuals' repertoires.

Discussion

From the point of view of M. Johnen et al. [24], the social control of media and culture conditions a symbiotic relationship between the student's moral identity, which implies the reproduction of social characteristics responsible for order and governance. These aspects of social construction are also responsible for the creation and dissemination of primary definitions or events, their participants, context, and means of reproduction. News scenes share a common set of elements, images, actions, and characteristics to describe and fragment media perceptions and representations in the context of sociocultural cognition. In other words, some hierarchies order media perception [25; 26]. Among others, age range, level of education, and gender identity are priority elements. Similarly, adolescence seems to be linked to a process of chronologisation of life, with age, gender, and socioeconomic level influencing the effectiveness of trajectories and social devices in the conformation of desirable subjects. Media show a marked tendency to associate adolescents, minorities, and the oppressed with problems, conflicts, deviations, and even threats to society [27-29]. At the same time, they cover acts of violence, drugs, fights, and risky behavior more than positive or noteworthy events. Thus, they set up and reinforce various processes of discrimination, stigmatization, and social segmentation that contribute to maintaining the existing

system. The analysis of the data highlights the importance of proper reporting of the moral characteristics of society by the media, considering the specificities of Kazakhstan's student population.

M.T. Bastos and D. Mercea [30] believe that, over time, the media have adopted a vision of adolescence characterized by two main contradictory images: an idealized one, often in advertising (youth are presented as a value in terms of aesthetics, health or lifestyle) and a stigmatized one (students are often viewed through the lens of selfish, hedonistic and cruel characteristics in information sources). Media coverage of young people constantly oscillates between two quite opposite positions. Thus, forms of news selection and coverage of issues related to young people legitimize a view of adolescence from the perspective of institutions of social control and adults. This may explain students' progressive lack of interest in information from traditional media and the dissatisfaction they express. Young people do not identify with the stereotypical images offered by social media, where the dissemination of a biased, manipulated, or incomplete version of youth reality contributes to their increased marginalization and a reduced chance of critical engagement with society [31; 32]. The media environment acts as a limited set of events and characters in which the journalist and, on the other hand, society intervene, where there will always be traces of utterance beyond the assumed objectivity, from which reactions and modifications of social cognition can be traced [33-35]. In reviewing the data, it is noticed that there is a particular connection between the media and student youth in the Republic of Kazakhstan, reinforcing this effect through social media and the Internet.

Following researchers D.A. Scheufele and N.M. Krause [36], it is important to consider that the moral image turns out to be strictly subordinated to the adult world, which conditions the prevalence of stability, agreement, and self-control, contributing to full social autonomy. The influence of media discourse is related to cognitive processes that intervene in both its production and its understanding. Thus, the mental operations of subjects to produce or understand texts are included in what is called social cognition, integrating the cultural system of patterns, stereotypes, values, and beliefs existing in society. Media discourse tends to homogenize the student phase of life, perpetuating the stereotypes associated with this phase of development [37-39]. To construct representation, young people resort to social identity mechanisms, making sense of group characteristics based on the self-categorization and inter-group comparison. In this context of moral characterization, young people are viewed as part of a modernized life course, indicating differentiated expressions and styles, identity seeking, peer group orientation, the relative freedom of action and movement, and a penchant for experimentation. All of these elements explain self-categorization, which refers to an understanding of internal group patterns or psychosocial characteristics. In the background are the media as a cultural agent that is seen as an attack on all morality, a factor of disintegration and risk, referring to content that legitimizes parental control. In analyzing the data, the relationship between the environment, the internal state, and the media, which leads to the social formation and situation of the student youth, is highlighted.

As J. Abbas et al. [40] point out, it is a media-based intergenerational conflict that differentiates and reinforces the role of the peer group, emphasizing a persuasive effect-oriented toward risk-taking behavior. The subordinate social position perceives young people, typical of a society in the process of modernization, as a product of the dissolution of the traditional world, which in the name of media leads to a modification of child-parent relationships. This enables an understanding of generational conflict, which involves the construction of progressively opposing life sketches of moral and ethical characteristics. Students may be particularly sensitive to comments, fake news, or information that makes them question their identity. In other words, with the help of social media and the Internet, there is no longer just a gradual breakdown of traditional patterns of life, but a kind of corresponding autonomy for social groups. It implies an even more gradual privatization in the formation of individual life contours supported by society, which individualizes aspects of legitimacy in both the economic and the state-institutional field. This is expressed in the access to new technologies that mark insurmountable differences between generations while implying the use of information and communication possibilities. In this context of media influence, the determining mechanisms are not contextual, but rather psychological factors that are within the world of traditional life, which depends on the personal characteristics of parents and the environment. When considering information, students' vulnerability to media and news and opinion in social media is emphasized.

Thus, vulnerable groups, especially student youth, need to take a critical stance on the information they receive from the media. Media representations relate to young people not only from a modernized context but also within an individualized society, as a product of cultural differentiation, economic determination of the lifeworld, and family relations. The influence of the media on student youth can be explained by contextual factors related to the type of immediate social environment, various favorable forms of self-expression, and historical changes related to social modernization and technological advances that make generational differences evident. Moral value is recognized as something that is given particular importance in determining the guiding criteria for behavior and the relationships established with the world and society through social media, the Internet, television, radio, and the press. Thus, young people in a globalized world are faced with a range of problems and decisions that reflect the complexity of human life. In these decisions, values are at stake as guiding forces for action. The task of development and education, and with them the nurturing of moral values, is not confined to the environment of the educational institution. The family, the community, and the media are social spaces firmly committed to this responsibility.

Conclusions

The research determined that the development of the media sphere in the Republic of Kazakhstan has had an enormous impact on the formation of the moral character of student youth through new models of communication. Currently,

the media, such as the Internet, social networks, television, radio, and newspapers, have penetrated all aspects of public life and have had a great impact on the moral values of young people, being the carriers between the main objects of communication and moral education, conveying social and cultural information, which has an impact on students. To shape the moral cognition, emotions, and behavior of young people, media tools perform the function of collecting and transmitting information most often through the Internet, television, and social media, regardless of the region of the state, which the interview conducted highlights. Because of the current diversity of social strata, the subjective needs, and choices of members of society influence the content and role of the media. It was established that the main aspects of interest for young people are power, which occupies more than 50% of the media environment, followed by careers at 48% and entertainment at 47%.

It has also been determined that young people, especially university students, are in a period of diverse value orientations. Their worldview, outlook on life, values, and morals are not yet fully formed, and their discrimination against different cultures, values, and information is not high. For example, following the interviews conducted, family values are the main value orientation for student youth, which covered 82% of the respondents. The media plays an important role in conveying information and guiding public opinion. Therefore, the media in Kazakhstan, first, should establish a high sense of responsibility, promote positive deeds and noble morality of leading figures, promote the basic moral image of positivity and enterprise, self-improvement and self-sufficiency, fairness, honesty, and friendliness, and provide the public with moral role models to follow. Also, media need to carry out in-depth processing and production so that information can be developed and used many times, and to form and disseminate information products with different characteristics, levels, positioning, and personalities. Thus, it can be concluded that the research aim has been achieved. However, the concepts of the influence of the media in Kazakhstan on student youth require further research in the field of media, pedagogy, and journalism.

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Conflict of Interest
None.

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Вплив засобів масової інформації на формування морального образу студентської молоді

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Анотація

Актуальність. Питання моральних цінностей студентів є важливою проблемою як для соціології, так і для суспільства. У сучасному світі існування цінностей підтримує соціальну згуртованість, забезпечує належну поведінку та створює спільний етос через засоби масової інформації. Формування моралі молоді через медіа по-різному пов'язане з розвитком культури, будучи фундаментальною частиною набору принципів, цінностей, переконань і правил суспільства.

Мета. Метою дослідження є аналіз чинників впливу медіа-інструментів на поведінку студентської молоді в суспільстві Республіки Казахстан.

Методологія. Для досягнення цілей дослідження було використано такі методи: описовий, інтерв'ю, порівняльний.

Результати. Результати дослідження визначили, що взаємозв'язок між медіасередовищем та поведінкою молодіжної аудиторії виходить за межі аналізу та втручання в індивідуальну поведінку, обумовлюючи інклюзивні та міждисциплінарні рамки для пояснення та прогнозування соціальних ефектів. Медіа впливають на освітній феномен і процес соціалізації, оскільки вони є частиною процесів групової взаємодії та конструювання ідентичності молодих людей. Телебачення, соціальні мережі та інтернет мають важливий вплив на поведінку студентів, але залишаються питання щодо умов, за яких цей вплив проявляється. Здатність медіа впливати на культурні практики та поведінку студентської молоді посилюється структурою та контролем над джерелами інформації, які виробляють медіа-контент. У постмодерному контексті це посилюється за допомогою державних і корпоративних форм комунікації, які поширюють інформацію. Джерела інформації виступають як системи з доцільними культурними практиками, де ролі та дії учасників фіксовані та передбачувані.

Висновки. Результатом є взаємопов'язана система економічних, соціальних та міжособистісних обставин, які можуть впливати на поведінку та перспективи студентів. Практичне значення полягає у використанні результатів дослідження науковцями, а також фахівцями в галузі журналістики, медіа та педагогіки.

Ключові слова: інформаційний вплив; система цінностей; соціальні медіа; моральні критерії; комунікація.