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SOCIOLOGY OF INFORMATION CONSUMPTION: THE DIGITAL GENERATION AND THE PROBLEM OF DISINFORMATION

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Abstract:

This thesis analyzes the sociological aspects of information consumption in modern society, the communicative behavior of the digital generation, and the social consequences of disinformation. The study examines the concept of the “digital generation” from a sociological perspective, highlighting the process of forming information consumption culture among youth. The article explores the phenomena of disinformation, fake news, and information manipulation emerging in the global media environment, analyzing them in relation to the social transformations observed in Uzbekistan. It also investigates the criteria of trust in information sources, behavioral factors in selecting information flows, and the distinctive features of social consciousness developing in digital networks. The research results substantiate the need for sociological analysis of digital communication processes, as well as the importance of enhancing media literacy and building social immunity against disinformation. The thesis also provides scientific and practical recommendations for improving digital culture and information policy in the context of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: sociology, information consumption, digital generation, disinformation, fake news, media literacy, information culture, trust system, digital communication, Uzbekistan.

In the modern information society, information flows play a decisive role in shaping an individual’s social life, values, and collective consciousness. Especially in the 21st century, digital communications — the Internet, social networks, artificial intelligence, and algorithmic filtering systems- have fundamentally transformed the



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culture of information consumption. As a result of these processes, a new sociological phenomenon- the “digital generation”- has emerged. Unlike traditional mass media audiences, this generation receives, analyzes, and redistributes information primarily through digital platforms.

Uzbek society is no exception to this global transformation. In recent years, the sharp increase in the number of Internet users and the growing role of social networks as the primary source of information among young people have led to the emergence of an important sociological trend. Consequently, the issue of the “sociology of information consumption” has become not only a subject of scientific research but also an integral component of social policy.

The concept of the “digital generation” has been established in sociology since the 2000s. This term refers to a cohort of young people who have grown up with technology, perceive the Internet as their primary social environment, and carry out communication, learning, and information consumption in online spaces. The Canadian Scholar Marc Prensky (2001) coined the term “digital natives” to describe this group- individuals whose worldview, communication style, trust criteria, and social relationships are shaped by digital technologies.

From a sociological perspective, this generation relies more on network culture than on traditional social institutions such as schools, the media, or family upbringing when it comes to selecting, evaluating, and processing information. This shift has led to a transformation in the system of social trust, giving rise to new mechanisms of socialization and identity formation within the digital space.

As a result, a process of “digital socialization” has emerged, in which young people form their social identity primarily within virtual environments.

As the speed of information flow increases, the problem of disinformation-that is, the dissemination of false or manipulative information-has also intensified. Globally, this phenomenon has had a significant impact on political, economic, and cultural processes. For example, during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, the COVID-19 pandemic, and various international conflicts, the influence of fake information on public opinion has been deeply studied by sociologists around the world.



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In the context of Uzbekistan, disinformation is often widespread on social networks, particularly on Telegram and TikTok platforms. Young people tend to accept such information without critical analysis, which leads to the weakening of the system of social trust. Therefore, the issue of disinformation should be viewed not only as a technological phenomenon but also as a social-psychological and sociological problem.

Studying this problem requires a deep analysis of the digital generation's information consumption behavior, trust systems, and social consciousness. For this reason, the discipline of "Sociology of Information Consumption" serves as an important methodological foundation for understanding the transformations of the information environment in modern society.

Information consumption is a social phenomenon that reflects the process by which an individual or social group searches for, receives, analyzes, and uses information. Sociology examines this process not only from a technological or communicative perspective but also in connection with social consciousness, values, and social structure.

D. McQuail, in his work "Mass Communication Theory" (2010), interprets information consumption as a central element of the mass communication system. According to him, information consumption is not merely the reception of content but a process of satisfying social needs and constructing social identity. Thus, McQuail defines it as a "social process involving active participation by the user."

Manuel Castells, in his book "The Rise of the Network Society" (1996), analyzes information consumption within the context of global networking and identifies it as a core structural element of the network society. According to Castells' theory, the individual is not merely a consumer of information but also a producer and re-creator of it through network interactions. Therefore, in the digital era, information flow can be regarded as a form of social energy, a driving force that shapes social dynamics.

A. Giddens (1991), in his seminal work "Modernity and Self-Identity", emphasizes the decisive role of information flows in the process of self-understanding and identity formation of the modern individual. According to Giddens, information consumption becomes a key factor in constructing one's self-presentation and



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determining one's social status. In this sense, the sociology of information is directly linked not only to media studies but also to the concepts of social identity, trust systems, and collective consciousness.

Digital communication represents a new form of information exchange within social networks, fundamentally transforming the speed, scale, and quality of interpersonal relations. From a sociological perspective, digital communication has facilitated a transition from a vertical model (center-to-society) to a horizontal model (society-to-society), enabling more participatory and decentralized information interaction.

As noted by contemporary sociologists such as Jenkins, Boyd, and Shirky, the emergence of digital communication has transformed the concept of the "audience" into that of the "participatory user." Today's users do not merely receive information; they also create, distribute, and evaluate it, thereby becoming active agents in the social construction of meaning. In this regard, digital communication functions as a crucial mechanism for the formation of social capital.

Another distinctive sociological feature of digital communication is its borderless information flow and the phenomenon of the "filter bubble." Algorithmic systems narrow an individual's informational environment by selectively exposing them to content that aligns with their existing views. This process intensifies social polarization, reinforces confirmation bias, and creates a fertile ground for the spread of disinformation.

To understand information consumption more comprehensively, the concept of the "Information Society" plays a vital role. Scholars such as D. Bell, Y. Masuda, and M. Castells have argued that in this new societal paradigm, information and knowledge rather than capital serve as the primary economic resources. In the information society, an individual's social success depends largely on their ability to search, analyze, and effectively utilize information, making information literacy a critical social competency.

However, this process has also intensified the problem of the "digital divide." This term refers to inequalities in access to and use of information technologies within society. The digital divide manifests itself not only in technical but also in social, economic, and cultural forms of inequality. For example, the technological gap between younger and older generations, disparities in Internet access between urban



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and rural populations, and differences in media literacy between men and women—all of these represent crucial issues for sociological analysis.

In the context of Uzbekistan, the digital divide is closely linked to questions of social justice, equal access to knowledge, and information literacy. Therefore, the sociology of information consumption highlights the necessity of aligning the country's digital transformation policies with the principles of social stability and inclusivity.

Uzbekistan, as one of the countries actively pursuing digital transformation, has witnessed a sharp increase in the volume of information flows in recent years. At the same time, false or manipulative information disseminated through social networks, Telegram channels, and YouTube blogs has begun to significantly influence public opinion.

Since 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread misinformation such as “traditional medicine against coronavirus,” “microchip implantation,” or “vaccines are dangerous” has circulated widely. In subsequent years, similar trends have also been observed in relation to political events, economic reforms, and social issues.

Local mass media, especially online publications, have not always been able to effectively apply fact-checking mechanisms, and in some cases, by citing unverified sources, they have inadvertently contributed to the spread of disinformation.

A sociological survey conducted among young people revealed the following findings:

72% of respondents cited social networks as their main source of information;

48% admitted that they do not always verify the authenticity of the information they consume;

63% acknowledged that within the past six months, they had believed at least one piece of fake news.

These results indicate that among representatives of the digital generation in Uzbekistan, the level of information culture and media literacy remains insufficient.

In Uzbekistan's digital policy, initiatives to enhance media literacy have been given special attention by the government under the “Digital Uzbekistan- 2030” Strategy, which aims to reduce the digital divide, improve Internet culture, modernize the



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information environment, and promote the development of media literacy throughout the country.

“A comprehensive analysis of global mega-trends, demographic changes, and geo-economic factors, as well as the application of foresight methodology, provides practical effectiveness in developing Uzbekistan’s strategic scenarios. The study proposes optimistic, moderate, and pessimistic scenarios, demonstrating how decision-makers can choose appropriate strategic directions under various conditions. Recommendations: rapid development of digital infrastructure—expanding broadband Internet coverage, introducing satellite Internet accessibility, full digitalization of public services, and strengthening information security.”¹

In 2022, the Agency for Information and Mass Communications, the Ministry of Education, and UNESCO jointly organized the “Media and Information Literacy Week.” In addition, higher education institutions have gradually introduced courses such as “Media Culture” and “Fundamentals of Information Security.” These initiatives aim to protect young people from disinformation, encourage independent thinking, and develop the ability to distinguish reliable sources.

Based on these developments, it can be stated that Uzbek society, within the process of the “sociology of information consumption,” is facing social challenges typical of the post-industrial stage—a reality that requires a scientifically grounded approach to finding its place in the global media landscape.

In the current era of globalization and digital transformation, the sociology of information consumption has become a complex social phenomenon directly affecting all spheres of human life. The research shows that in Uzbekistan, representatives of the digital generation primarily receive information through social networks. However, the majority of them lack fully developed analytical skills to assess the credibility and authenticity of information sources.

Consequently, disinformation, manipulative news, and algorithmic filter bubbles are increasingly becoming tools for influencing and shaping social consciousness among youth. This situation underscores the urgent need to strengthen information culture and media literacy across society.

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Information consumption culture is not merely a technical skill but a synthesis of social awareness, analytical thinking, and ethical responsibility. The following mechanisms are essential for its development:

Introducing courses on information culture into the education system- integrating subjects such as “Information Culture” and “Media Sociology” into school and university curricula;

Fact-checking and analytical thinking training- promoting independent source analysis, comparison of information, and contextual understanding among young people;

Strengthening ethical codes for mass media- enhancing regulatory frameworks that increase information responsibility among journalists and bloggers.

Young people are the most active consumers and promoters of information flows. Therefore, the following practical programs are of great importance for them:

Developing a national program titled “Media Literacy for Youth” and gradually implementing it in schools, colleges, and higher education institutions;

Creating interactive online courses that introduce young people to information-filtering algorithms and methods of identifying fake news;

Increasing youth social engagement through annual competitions, trainings, and debates held within the framework of the Media and Information Literacy Week.

In the digital environment, every user is not only a consumer of information but also a producer of information, and therefore bears responsibility for it. Hence, introducing the concept of “digital ethics” into the education system has become a necessity of the present time. This discipline should aim to:

- shape norms of online behavior;
- ensure the protection of personal data;
- reduce cyberbullying, online hate, and discrimination;
- enhance social responsibility in the digital sphere.

Thus, the sociology of information consumption in Uzbekistan should be regarded not only as an academic research field but also as a strategic area ensuring social stability. A society that harmoniously integrates media literacy, digital ethics, and information culture will be prepared to face the complex social challenges of the digital age.



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