

## Categorization Features of the Concept of «Sacrament» by Active Adult Internet Users

### Особливості класифікації концепту «Таїнство» активними дорослими користувачами Інтернету

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#### ABSTRACT

*The aim of the article is to analyze the specifics of categorization of abstract concepts by adults who use different information sources: traditional / printed and innovative / digital.*

*Methods.* An author used a questionnaire method with the open-ended type of questions as the primary tool to study the choice of the preferred information coding system by adults. To reconstruct the categorical structure of the respondents' consciousness in their understanding of the concept «sacrament», the method of the semantic differential was used. The differential includes 40 adjectives, which form 7 categories of an average consciousness according to their factorial structure («Assessment», «Strength», «Activity», «Complexity», «Orderliness», «Reality» and «Usuality»). The above categories have been

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*established in a previous study of individuals of different age groups and cultures.*

**Results of the research.** *The results of a comparative analysis of the category structure and the meaning of the concept «Sacrament» are contained in two groups of adults: the reading subjects and the active Internet users. It is determined that the cognitive complexity of consciousness of the web users is lower than the one of the reading subjects, according to two parameters: 1) decreasing of categories' quantity that form the concept; 2) simplifying the organization of the category, represented by only one pole. For the active Internet users, the content of the concept «sacrament» is close to the «secret».*

**Conclusions.** *The empirical data proves the tendency to simplify the categorization in understanding the abstract concepts of active Internet users. This allows designating a new scientific-practical issue of cognitive deformation of adults as the effect of Internet exposure.*

**Key words:** *abstract concept, categories of consciousness, cognitive complexity, semantic differential, cognitive deformation.*

## Introduction

The emergence and the rapid evolution of the Internet into new digital media (web 2.0, online media, etc.) have affected most spheres of human life significantly. Based on one of the leading postulates of Soviet psychology (about the sociocultural determination of all higher mental functions) it can be stated that new conditions of activity give rise to some new, previously unknown features of the psyche.

These new features have incrementally become an intense object of empirical study for recent decades. One of the first to draw attention to the specifics of the cognitive activity of representatives of the digital generation was the American writer and game designer M. Prensky (Prensky, 2001). Based on his observations, he revealed a contradiction between the capabilities of young people (the speed of reaction and thinking, the ability to instantly grasp a variety of information) and the traditional for an educational sphere (verbal, logically consistent) form of information representation. The classification of

generations of students and teachers as «Digital Natives» and «Digital Immigrants», proposed by M. Prensky, has become widespread among the specialists.

As a result of studying the cognitive processes of «digital natives», it was found that constant digital stimulation forms «the skill of simultaneous (nonlinear) perception, it is not step-by-step attention to details but instantaneous «grasping» of the entire image» (Golubinksaya, 2015: 163). This kind of superficial perception and erratic attention accustom the brain to a constant dopamine stimulation and lead to a deterioration in the development of the frontal lobes of the brain, which no doubt «impairs cognitive abilities and social skills» (Small, Vorgan, 2012: 13). There are also memory changes recorded (the Google effect). The active Internet users remember not as much the information itself as the place of its storage on the Internet (Sparrow, Liu, Wenger, 2011).

In this research, the studies of Russian clinical psychologists are of particular interest. Several years ago, they identified the problem of revising the normative indicators in pathopsychology diagnostics (Sultanova, Ivanova, 2017). The use of classical methods of studying the thinking («Classification of Objects», «Pictogram», «Interpretation of Proverbs») in a group of 50 mentally healthy people aged 20 to 39 years revealed such features of thinking, which the authors characterized as «the pathopsychology of everyday life», by analogy with the famous work of Z. Freud. These characteristics include a decrease in the critical assessment of the results of their activity, neurodynamic disorders (fatigue, difficulty in working out, difficulties in concentrating on the tasks), inconsistency and versatility of thinking, and a self-centered way of thinking.

Significant data were obtained in another clinical study (Kobzova, Zvereva, Shchelokova, 2018), where two fundamental facts were established using the Fourth Extra Technique. First, the characteristics based on which generalization is

being made changed compared to the data in the same age groups in the 1960s-90s. Second, there was no difference in answers between the groups of mentally healthy males aged 17 to 25 years and their peers with a schizotypic disorder of adolescence. Representatives of the first group demonstrated an orientation of attention towards the secondary, non-typical features of objects, which is traditionally considered as a diagnostic indicator of «disordered» thinking.

The modern youth thinking diagnosis the scientists characterized as «pseudo-psychopathological» thinking phenomena (PPF). The PPF is a thinking disorder similar to the pathological one (Schizophrenia), but it has a different cultural and historical genesis. (Grekova, 2018) The statistics show the PPF is more widespread among the modern youth in comparison with the adults who grew up in the pre-digital era. While the thinking of adults corresponds to the conventional hierarchy of generic and species characteristics, in the thinking of young people they are of equal order. «New thinking is flexible, comprehensive, multitasking. The measure of the ratio of symbols and meanings in terms of abstractness / concreteness is highly variable. Representatives of new thinking perceive symbols as hyperlinks, new symbols are layered over other symbols, on which new meanings are strung like beads» (Grekova, 2018: 35).

Thus, the studies of clinical psychologists prove that the thinking of young people differs from the thinking of representatives of the pre-digital era and moves towards the properties that are classical attributions of the thinking of subjects with a schizotypal disorder. According to the data, it can be assumed that Internet use affects not only «digital natives» cognitive activity but also «digital immigrants». The aim of the present empirical research is to check the hypothesis mentioned above. The object of the research is a process of categorization (as a basic cognitive process) and a perception of abstract concepts (as a product of a higher form of verbal and logical thinking). This article examines the structure and

content of the categories of consciousness that mediate the understanding of an abstract concept «sacrament» by adults.

### Research objective

This article contains a comparative analysis of the structure and content of a concept «sacrament» in adults' consciousness who prefer different information coding systems: traditional printed and new digital.

### Methods and methodology of the research

The study involved 720 respondents from 37 to 62 years, including females (n = 402) and males (n = 318). All respondents have higher education and work in the field of specialization (medical, economic, educational, and cultural spheres). The sample is homogeneous according to three criteria: 1) completion of basic processes of cognitive and personal development in equal social and cultural environment (the pre-digital era); 2) intellectual labor involved in everyday activity; 3) ability to use different coding systems on a professional level (both written-verbal and digital).

Homogeneity on the mentioned criteria is the key principle in the research of categorization since A. Luria proved in the 1930s that «the fundamental process of cognition – the formation of concepts – has a unique structure in the different historical conditions» (Luria, 2017). Data collection was carried out throughout 2019 and early 2020.

The differentiation of the homogeneous sample into two groups was carried out based on the respondents' preferences in the information carriers in their free time through an open-ended questionnaire. After processing the collected data, respondents were divided into three groups: 1) subjects who prefer printed sources and books as a main coding system (108 respondents or 15%); 2) subjects who choose the Internet as the most preferable source of information (252 respondents or 35%); 3) subjects who do not give preference to any spe-

cific type of information carrier (360 respondents or 50%). To achieve reliable data from the analysis, the last group was excluded from processing. Representatives of the first group previously mentioned will further be «reading subjects», representatives of the second group will be «active Internet users» respectively.

To model the categorical structure and content of the concept of «sacrament», the method of the semantic differential in the author's version was applied, the technology of creation of the author's version was described in the previous article (Medvedskaia, 2020: 175–176). Therefore, it would be reasonable to point out only the key features of the method. The descriptors were 40 adjectives, which imminently reflect the 7-factor structure of the concepts of different classes, which was revealed in earlier researches (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957; Bentler & LaVoie, 1972; Petrenko, 2005; etc.). Adjectives were monopolar. However, to avoid a specific answer pattern of the respondents, adjectives randomly had positive and negative connotations. Respondents used a 7-point rating system to answer the questionnaire where 1 point meant the absence of the quality and 7 points was a maximum expression of the quality.

Primary data processing comprised compiling average assessment profiles in the groups of reading subjects and active Internet users. Secondary processing was to model a categorical structure of a concept «sacrament» in the consciousness of the respondents through the factor analysis (a centroid method with the extraction of the major components, including a varimax rotation technique). Mathematical and statistical analysis was carried out using the program SPSS v. 16.

## Results and their discussion

The construction of averaged rate profiles of reading subjects group and active Internet users group showed statistically identical results ( $t = 0.45$  at critical  $t = 2.02$  for  $p \leq 0.05$ ).

Table 1 depicts descriptors with max rates in both groups of respondents.

Table 1

Concept «Sacrament» max rates

№	Reading subjects		Active Internet users	
	Quality	M	Quality	M
1	Clean	5.38	Clean	5.21
2	Beautiful	5.38	Beautiful	5.13
3	Useful	5.09	Pleasant	5.06
4	Kind	5.02	Kind	4.95
5	Fantastic	4.64	Useful	4.86

The results presented in the table show the actual identity of the leading characteristics attributed to the concept of «sacrament», most of which are of an assessment category. Reading subjects turned out to be more realistic («useful», «fantastic») in assessing the concept than active Internet users.

Table 1 depicts descriptors with min rates in both groups of respondents.

Table 2

Concept «Sacrament» min rates

№	Reading subjects		Active Internet users	
	Quality	M	Quality	M
1	Silly	2.39	Silly	1.91
2	Miserable	2.63	Disgusting	2.16
3	Monotonous	2.66	Miserable	2.21
4	Bitter	2.69	Bitter	2.34
5	Banal	2.94	Banal	2.93

As expected, the data from Table 2 depicts the coincidence of the minimal rates in the assessments of both groups. Again, the dominant parameters are of an assessment type («miserable», «bitter», «banal»).

rable», «bitter», «disgusting»). Parameters of Strength («intelligent») and Ordinarity («banal») are also represented in the sample. In the reading subject group, another axis of coordinate appears – Activity («monotonous»).

The process of factor analysis detected 13 orthogonal factors in the reading subjects group and 11 factors in the active Internet users group, which are significant according to the Kaiser criterion. Only factors that are significantly essential in terms of valence will be used for further discussion (contribution to the total variance of which exceeds the randomness threshold). In the reading subjects group, there is one more factor than in the active Internet users group. The results of the factorization are presented in Table 3 for the convenience of comparative analysis. The names of the categories are according to their key descriptors, which represent categories of an everyday consciousness and were established in previous researches. Next to the category name, there is a percentage of the variance of the factor, and the characteristics that form it, which have a high level of statistical significance (for 40 variables,  $r = 0.4$  for  $p \leq 0.01$ ).

Table 3

A concept «Sacrement»: results of factorization

№	Reading Subjects		Active Internet users	
1	2		3	
1	«Negative assessment» – «Reality» (16.79%)		«Activity» (20.03%)	
	Miserable	0.836	Hot	0.801
	Disgusting	0.721	Silly	0.595
	Bitter	0.474	Fast	0.562
	Mysterious	-0.505	Massive	0.552
	Fantastic	-0.418	Active	0.532
			Banal	0.472
			Full	0.469
			Energetic	0.446



1	2		3	
2	«Activity» – «Ordinariness» (10.81%)		«Assessment» (10.35%)	
	Energetic	0.708	Pleasant	0.825
	Pleasant	0.626	Good looking	0.791
	Brave	0.535	Strong	0.537
	Hard	-0.407	Clean	0.529
	Banal	-0.412	Kind	0.462
3	«Complexity» (7.42%)		«Strength» (6.69%)	
	Constructed	0.783	Hard	0.761
	Simple	0.747	Old	0.631
	Obvious	0.482	Certain	0.615
			Organized	0.540
			Constructed	0.517
		Long lasting	0.508	
4	«Positive assessment» (5.91%)		«Ordinariness» (5.81%)	
	Clean	0.870	Rare	0.765
	Kind	0.684	Mysterious	0.638
	Good looking	0.527	Useful	0.624
	Organized	0.425	Unique	0.525
			Exciting	0.448
5	«Strength» (5.06%)			
	Strong	0.665		
	Long lasting	0.631		
	Hard	0.629		
	Massive	0.595		
	Firm	0.469		

The most peculiar fact is that there is a complex 2 polar organization of the categories (1 and 2) in the group of reading subjects. A qualitative analysis of the content of the poles allows to designate them as «Negative reality» (1) and «Unusual activity» (2). There are not only fewer factors in the group of active Internet users but also they are all of a unipolar organization.

Thus, the greater cognitive complexity of the reading subjects testifies to their greater reflexivity over the existences, where the concept of «sacrament» belongs to. A sacrament is a touch to another world, which is beyond the space-time dimensions of reality, something extraordinary. A sacrament is (Losev, 1994) experienced as a participation in the world (Marcel, 2012), and only then it is realized, and as a result, it changes a person who has joined it and experienced exceptional events, relationships, states (Znakov, 2018).

There is another interpretation of the concept on a simpler level as «a secret, information», which is hidden till some moment. To reveal such a secret is to make it public (Gilmutdinova, 2020: 128). One can reveal and transmit the secret (while the sacrament can only be lived through), and it is rather a communicative process that does not affect the foundations of the personality of both its owner and recipient. A simpler categorical structure and the leading category «Activity» evidence that active Internet users have a more simplified understanding of a sacrament as a secret. It fully corresponds to the significance for the classification of signs «Movement – static» established in the studies of «digital natives». It may be assumed that one of the reasons is Internet use («Everything is on the Internet, you just need to know where to look for it»), which largely nullifies secrets, not to mention the sacredness of the sacrament. Observations of the philosophers prove this conclusion: «There are less and less secrets that are making the time of our existence super significant. With the loss of the secret, we lose the personality. The times of undifferentiated human are coming: when he is extremely standard, collective, and has absolutely nothing innermost» (Galmutdinova, 2020: 135).

It is necessary to draw the parallels between the results of the present research and research of V. Petrenko. According to his data, the connotative meanings of «sacrament» in terms of semantic space factors have the following loads in descending

order: «Complexity» (5.3), «Assessment» (4.9), «Strength» (4.7), «Activity» (4.1), «Ordinariness or frequency of occurrence» (3.2). (Petrenko, 2005: 95–96). Comparative analysis of different researches shows matching of three key coordinates of human consciousness («Assessment – Strength – Activity»). There are some differences as well, while in the study of V. Petrenko factor «Complexity» has the biggest load, there is a factor «Ordinariness» among other valent categories in the present study. The explanation of the difference mentioned above is in the respondents' age group rather than in the method of the research, as in the study of Petrenko respondents were 100 students from the 3rd course of the faculty of psychology. Obviously that a 20-year-old person has quite a modest life experience, especially in existential matters, therefore students' understanding of the concept «sacrament» is mediated by its complexity.

### Conclusions

Average rates of semantic differential scale are identical in both groups of respondents, category «Assessment» has the highest and lowest indexes.

As a result of factorization, 4 categories have been revealed. They represent the concept of «Sacrament» in everyday consciousness, and are as follows: three dominant categories of everyday consciousness («Assessment», «Strength», «Activity»), and the category «Ordinariness».

The categorical structure of reading subjects is more complex in comparison with the structure of active Internet users. It is expressed in a bigger quantity of categories and more complex organization. In the sample, the complication occurred due to the splitting of the leading category «Assessment» into two independent factors and the emergence of new categories «Complexity» and «Reality».

The discovered phenomenon of flattening of an abstract concept categorization is a basis for further study of cogni-

tive abilities of adults who prefer different information coding systems (written-verbal and digital). Possibly, the Internet-environment not only forms «digital natives» with the new parameters of thinking but also affects cognitive abilities of «digital immigrants», causing deformation.

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**Медведська Олена. Особливості класифікації концепту «Таїнство» активними дорослими користувачами Інтернету**

## АНОТАЦІЯ

**Мета статті** – проаналізувати особливості класифікації абстрактних понять дорослими, які використовують різні джерела інформації: традиційні / друковані й інноваційні / цифрові.

**Методи дослідження.** Використано метод опитування з відкритим типом питань як основний інструмент для вивчення вибору переважної системи кодування інформації дорослими. Для реконструкції категоріальної структури свідомості респондентів у розумінні ними поняття «Таїнство» було використано метод семантичного диференціалу. Диференціал включає 40 прикметників, що утворюють 7 категорій свідомості за своєю факторіальною структурою («Оцінка», «Сила», «Активність», «Складність», «Упорядкованість», «Реальність» і «Звичайність»). Вищезазначені категорії були встановлені в попередньому дослідженні осіб різних вікових груп і культур.

**Результати дослідження.** Порівняльний аналіз структури категорії та значення концепту «Таїнство» було здійснено у двох групах дорослих: суб'єкти читання й активні користувачі Інтернету. Визначено, що когнітивна складність свідомості користувачів Інтернету нижча, ніж у суб'єктів читання, за двома параметрами: 1) зменшення кількості категорій, що формують концепт; 2) спрощення організації категорії, представленої лише одним полюсом. Для активних користувачів Інтернету зміст поняття «Таїнство» є близьким до «секрету».

**Висновки.** Емпіричні дані доводять тенденцію до спрощення категоризації в розумінні абстрактних концептів активних користувачів Інтернету. Це дає підстави позначити нову науково-практичну проблему когнітивної деформації дорослих як вплив Інтернету.

**Ключові слова:** абстрактне поняття, категорії свідомості, когнітивна складність, семантичний диференціал, когнітивна деформація.

**Медведская Елена. Особенности классификации концепта «Таинство» активными взрослыми пользователями Интернета**

**АННОТАЦИЯ**

**Цель статьи** – проанализировать особенности классификации абстрактных понятий взрослыми, использующими различные источники информации: традиционные / печатные и инновационные / цифровые.

**Методы исследования.** Использован метод опроса с открытым типом вопросов как основной инструмент для изучения выбора подавляющей системы кодирования информации взрослыми. Для реконструкции категориальной структуры сознания респондентов в понимании ими понятия «Таинство» был использован метод семантического дифференциала. Дифференциал включает 40 прилагательных, образующих 7 категорий сознания по своей факториальной структуре («Оценка», «Сила», «Активность», «Сложность», «Упорядоченность», «Реальность» и «Обыкновенность»). Вышеупомянутые категории были установлены в предыдущем исследовании лиц различных возрастных групп и культур.

**Результаты исследования.** Сравнительный анализ структуры категории и значения концепта «Таинство» был осуществлен в двух группах взрослых: субъекты чтения и активные пользователи Интернета. Определено, что когнитивная сложность сознания пользователей Интернета ниже, чем у субъектов чтения, по двум параметрам: 1) уменьшение количества категорий, формирующих концепт; 2) упрощение организации категории, представленной только одним полюсом. Для активных пользователей Интернета содержание понятия «Таинство» близко к «секрету».

**Выводы.** Эмпирические данные показывают тенденцию к упрощению категоризации в понимании абстрактных концептов активных пользователей Интернета. Это позволяет обозначить новую научно-практическую проблему когнитивной деформации взрослых как влияние Интернета.

**Ключевые слова:** абстрактное понятие, категории сознания, когнитивная сложность, семантический дифференциал, когнитивная деформация.

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