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"MENTAL TERRORISM" IN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT OF STUDENT YOUTH

The article is devoted to the study and analysis of the phenomenon of "mental terrorism" and the factors that generate it. The article examines the principles of information-psychological influence and the mechanisms by which destructive narratives are introduced into youth consciousness, potentially destabilizing cognitive resilience and value orientations. The object of the study is the social environment of a student as an active user of social networks, which is typical for most young people, as well as other environmental factors caused by the spread and influence of mental terrorism in modern society. The subjects of the study are the personal characteristics of a young man, a student, which determine his mental state, the peculiarities of the perception of destructive information, cognitive abilities for critical thinking in a situation of exposure to mental terrorism factors. In addition, in the context of globalization and worldwide informatization, mental terrorism, as one of the types of modern information weapons, poses a serious threat to the foundations of the state, which contributes to the spread of destructive beliefs, the instillation of fear and uncertainty in society. The article provides a socio-psychological analysis of the process of youth socialization, which allowed us to study the mechanism of the formation of destructive attitudes in the personality structure.

Keywords: mental terrorism, social networks, information, socialization, destructive behavior.

Introduction

The modern socio-cultural environment is characterized by rapid digitalization and global dissemination of information. In these conditions, student youth, going

through a difficult stage of socialization and identification, becomes especially vulnerable to influence of destructive ideologies and information pressure.

In last year's attention is paid to researchers who aimed on the concept of protective factors, which represent influence that modify the human reaction on the surrounding factors of stress, reducing the probability of suffering from negative consequences of its impact [1].

According to Lucy Foulkes, an excessive focus on mental health awareness can paradoxically lead to the overdiagnosis of minor distress as significant psychological disorders, further amplifying youth vulnerability [2].

Young people nowadays are impacted not only by information pressure but also by material disadvantage, deteriorating living standards, and a lack of protection for their rights to healthcare, education, and employment. A decrease in creative potential, a surge in substance misuse, gambling addiction, and criminality are all consequences of this confluence of forces. Without the assistance of a healthy lifestyle, such unfavorable circumstances can seriously impair psychological resilience, as Walsh highlights [3].

Among the numerous factors that negatively impact young people's mental health, mental terrorism stands out as a distinct phenomenon requiring precise conceptualization. In this study, we differentiate mental terrorism from related constructs such as "propaganda" or "information warfare". While propaganda aims to promote specific political doctrines and information warfare focuses on geopolitical objectives, mental terrorism is specifically designed to destabilize the cognitive and emotional spheres of the individual. Its primary goal is not merely the transmission of ideas but the creation of "psychological chaos" and the systematic erosion of the psyche's defensive mechanisms.

The operationalization of this concept in our research is based on the framework provided by P. I. Sidorov, which we supplement with the following criteria: 1) Technological sophistication (utilizing digital algorithms for targeted impact); 2) Destructiveness (aiming to legitimize violence as a social norm); and 3) Latency (the hidden nature of the impact, where the subject remains unaware of the manipulation).

As Ehrenberg (1998) emphasizes, the pressures of individualism and the constant pursuit of achievement in modern societies can lead to widespread psychological distress [4, p.241]. Mental terrorism exploits these vulnerabilities, particularly among student youth who may exhibit social nihilism or unformed life goals. Thus, we define mental terrorism as a concealed, technologically mediated impact on the psyche, the purpose of which is a radical transformation of value orientations and the justification of aggressive forms of social behavior.

Together with the information pressure on the consciousness of young people, there is a noticeable decline in the standard of living, their material disadvantage, lack of protection of rights to work, education and health, and as a result, there is a decline in physical activity, inhibition of creative potential, an increase in drug addiction, gambling addiction and crime in general. Among the numerous factors capable of exerting a maladaptive and stress-producing effect on the mental health of a young person, mental terrorism occupies a certain place.

An analysis of foreign studies, in particular Canadian ones, has shown that the spread of false information in the media and social networks poses the most serious risk to democracy. While mental attacks on citizens are a concern, the manipulation of information poses a much greater threat. In the absence of effective ways to combat this phenomenon, it can change public discourse, influence citizens' views, and even transform society itself [5].

In the modern world, where information is distributed instantly and everywhere, the impact of destructive information on the psycho-emotional state of a person becomes one of the serious problems. Socialization of university and college students is not an easy process. The essence of socialization is that in its process young people are formed as members of society.

The creation of such conditions in which young people can live and develop in a safe social environment, where their rights and dignity are protected from threats, including from destructive formation and extremist ideology, comes to the forefront of the state's domestic policy. In this regard, mental terrorism as a form of psychological threat requires a comprehensive approach to its diagnosis and prevention in order to protect the part of young people most susceptible to the influence of negative external factors.

In this context, a number of researchers have attempted to conceptualize and analyze the phenomenon of mental terrorism, offering various interpretations of its psychological nature, mechanisms, and impact. Their perspectives provide a deeper understanding of the roots and consequences of mental terrorism in modern society.

The problem of the presence of mental terrorism in society was studied by such scientists, specialists and experts as M.Ya. Yakhyayev, E.G. Isaeva and A. R. Sugaeva. In their opinion, "Intrapersonal conflicts, characterized by rigid self-reflection, a heightened focus on personal flaws, and an inability to manage one's own behavior, make an individual more susceptible to manipulation by others". [6, p.52]. It is these human weaknesses that are used by ideologists and recruiters of radical organizations.

R. S. Dzhindzholiya, M. M. Krachidogova note that modern terrorism is distinguished by its multifaceted nature, scale and breadth the tasks and goals facing (and being solved) them. For the most part, terrorism refuses to solve one-time

tasks of a protest, mobilization and other nature, and is marked by a transitioning to solving tasks of strategies importance [7].

Among the famous Western psychologists who have made a significant contribution to the study of this issue, it is worth highlighting R. Chaldini [8], F. Zimbardo and A. Bandura. Their works in the field of social psychology and psychology of influence have made a significant contribution to science for understanding the essence and mechanisms of psychological terrorism.

In addition, the studies of Russian scientists E. P. Korolev, A. L. Chernyshev, P. I. Sidorov, K. G. Gorbunov D. V., Olshansky [9], S. Kara-Murza [10] and others are significant. These authors cover various aspects of psychological influence and strategies for counteracting information-psychological terrorism.

Attention should also be paid to the works of Kazakhstani scientists and specialists in the field of prevention, prophylaxis and counteraction to terrorism. Among them are G. T. Kuzhabayeva, R. T. Zavoptayev, L. R. Karatayeva, K. Bgealinova, D. S. Absametova, S. A. Smanovam Z. M. Baimagambetova, Zh. Kartbayeva, G. S. Otarbayev, E. T. Rysbekov, A. A. Bulatbayeva, G. Zh. Dzhumanova, S. B. Kozhakhmetov, A. E. Saktapbergenov, S. R. Nazymbekova, E. A. Shchelokova, D. Ch. Kuramysov, E. M. Aubakirov, B. K. Kystaubayev and others. Their research covers a wide range of terrorism issues, including methods of its prevention and ways of effective response.

According to researcher P. I. Sidorov, there are several distinct factors in the world that contribute to mental terrorism, including: "the densification of the information environment; the increasing incompetence of the population in the context of the information explosion; globalization of ideological aggression and geopolitical confrontation; the mass production of popular culture and cultural disorientation; the growth of marginalization, loss of social ties, and alienation; the rapid rise of criminal subcultures, an increase in the volume of psychological violence as a means of committing crimes; the psychological illiteracy of the population as a prerequisite for any manipulation; the accessibility of psychotechnologies and widespread business consulting; the hysterodemonic renaissance manifested in the industrialization of activities of various mediums and psychics; the absence of effective and accessible institutions of psych hygiene and psychoprophylaxis" [11].

These and other studies make a significant contribution to the development of strategies to combat mental terrorism, and also allow for a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying this phenomenon. The importance of these studies lies in the attempt to analyze the specifics of mental terrorism and in raising the question of the relevance development of a comprehensive approach to overcoming it, both at the international and national levels.

Thus, based on the conducted analysis of the literature on the studied problem the authors of the article once again confirmed the accuracy of the definition proposed earlier in their previous works: "Mental terrorism is an impact on an individual that creates a negative consciousness with the aim of accepting and justifying violence as a social norm" [12]. The engine of the mental terrorism process is a mental attack. Mental attacks form ideologies and motives that violate moral norms and a harmoniously developing society, and lead to the implementation of actions that contradict social and moral norms.

The concept of "mental terrorism" describes a systematic destructive impact on the consciousness of an individual, carried out through negatively colored content, manipulation, psychological pressure, aimed at undermining psychological stability, moral values and civic identity. The problem of mental terrorism is actualized in the republican and global context, reflecting the challenges of cybersecurity, youth policy and the national strategy for sustainable development.

The dynamics of information technology development is characterized by the emergence of new diverse forms and methods of destructive influence on the consciousness of social network users. In these conditions, a contradiction arises in the practice of counteracting information and mental aggression. It is due to the fact that modern scientific tools for analyzing and identifying symptoms of destructive information are often unable to ensure a timely and adequate response to threats. This contradiction causes a scientific problem, which is seen in the lack of existing knowledge necessary for identifying, analyzing and systematizing factors formations of threats for the purpose of their subsequent localization.

Materials and Methods

One of the main goals of the study is to identify right patterns and factors of the social environment that contribute to the formation of the phenomenon of MT in the minds of student youth and the different features of this kind of perception.

Based on the stated goal, the authors put forward the following tasks:

- 1) to specify the scientific understanding of the content of the concepts of "mental terror", "the psychological state of a young person in a situation of exposure to mental terrorism";
- 2) to identify several environmental factors that contribute to the formation of MT in the minds of young people.

The following approaches and methods are most significant for this study:

- 1) a method of socio-psychological analysis that allows us to consider the process of socialization of student youth as a holistic one psychological process and, meanwhile, analyse its constituent elements using sociological research methods;

2) an axiological approach that allows us to reveal the problem under study through the prism of the needs of young people, considering their interests and values as well;

3) a typological method that allows for the generalization of theoretical and empirical data in order to classify and put in order the interests and needs of young people in television programs and social networks, as well as preferences in their content.

Results and Discussion

The socio-psychological analysis was carried out based on the method of interviewing respondents online using the Google Forms platform.

Participants and Sampling

The final sample consisted of 410 students from various Kazakhstan universities (70 incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the initial 480). The sample included 350 females (85 %) and 60 males (15 %). The age distribution was as follows: 17–18 years (52 %), 19–20 years (25 %), and over 20 years (23 %). The gender imbalance (85 % female) is attributed to the demographic profile of the humanities and social science departments where the survey was primarily conducted. While this distribution is acknowledged as a limitation for the generalizability of the findings, it provides a detailed perspective on a demographic group that is highly represented in the digital social environment.

The study examined young people's perceptions and knowledge of the concept of "mental terrorism".

Research Instrument

Data collection was conducted via a structured online questionnaire on the Google Forms platform. To ensure the content validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire underwent a pilot testing phase (n=20) and was reviewed by three experts in social psychology. The survey was operationalized through seven thematic blocks:

1. Conceptual Awareness (definitions and forms of mental terrorism);
2. Information Exposure (frequency of encounters with destructive content);
3. Personal Experience and subjective encounters.
4. Recognition of Influence markers.
5. Self-assessment of Cognitive Filters (measured via 5-point Likert-type scales to evaluate critical thinking and suggestibility);
6. Prevention measures and the role of the educational environment.
7. Demographics.

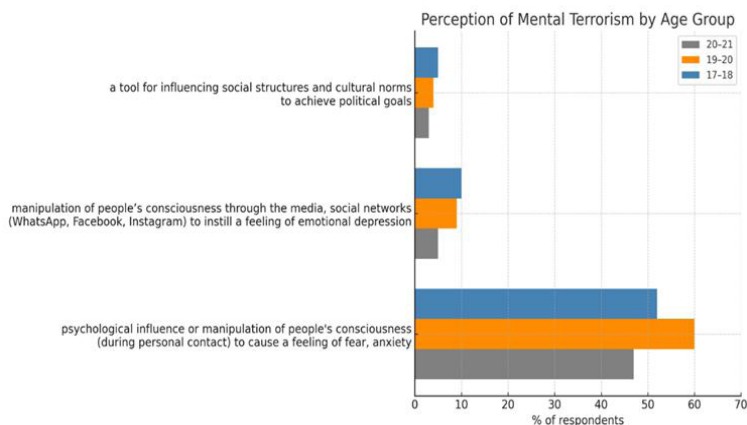


Diagram 1 – The concept of "Mental Terrorism"

The majority of respondents form a general idea of a concept that is new to them only by the second year of study (19-20 years). Moreover, in their view of mental terrorism, it is identified with psychological influence or manipulation of people's consciousness (during personal contact) to cause feelings of fear and anxiety (Diagram 1).

The analysis of the obtained results shows that young people associate the process of mental terrorism formation in their consciousness with the abundance of destructive content broadcast through the mass media, social networks, but due to their inexperience they do not see this process as a tool for influencing social structures, cultural norms to achieve political goals. Thus, we can talk about the lack of formation of critical perception of information, that is, there is no formed skill (barrier to blocking negative information), which prevents the active formation of mental terrorism in consciousness. This shows the existing vulnerability in the formation of youth consciousness (image), their complete trust in unverified sources of information.

In confirmation of the above, respondents unanimously acknowledge social networks as sources of the formation of mental terrorism – mass media and social networks (Diagram 2).

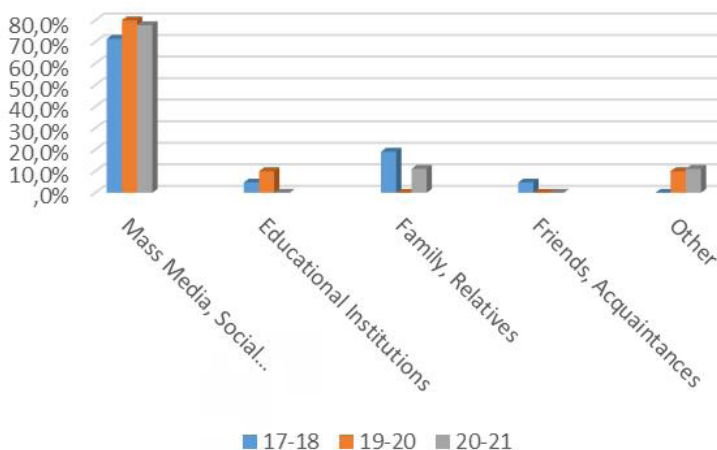


Diagram 2 – Sources of mental terrorism formation

When compared with the above results, it can be concluded that the source of the formation of the mental terrorism phenomenon in consciousness and the factor causing it is destructive information received via the Internet, which is not subject to filtering, i.e., criticism and evaluation.

Respondents acknowledge that the main factor in the spread of mental terrorism may be:

- the absence or presence of a low level of information culture;
- lack of development of critical thinking;
- emotional burnout (overload in studies, work)
- insufficient awareness of fundamental life goals, especially at the end of university education (20–21 years).

The listed factors can become fertile ground for the recruitment of new adherents' into destructive radical organizations and the emergence of various negative addictions.

The noted low information culture indicates that public institutions, the civil sector and authorized bodies in the sphere of implementing information policy do not pay due attention to the formation of the information field and resistance to the perception of information (Diagram 3).

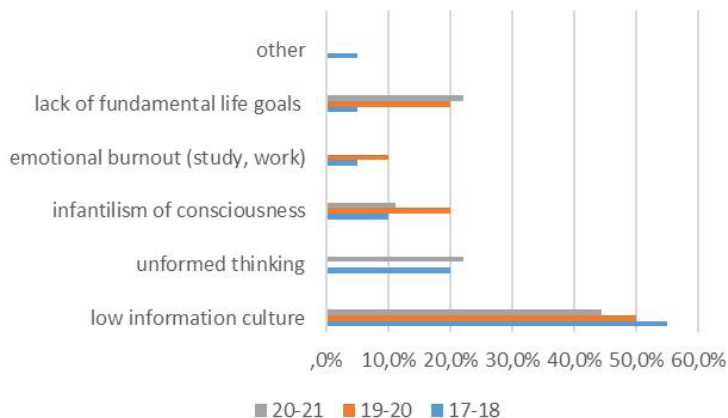


Diagram 3 – Factors contributing to the prevalence of mental terrorism

Factors influencing perception and formation of beliefs when receiving information from various sources are the main components of the worldview in the personality structure, performing the functions of filters on the path of negative information impact on the consciousness of the individual. According to the obtained empirical data, a high cognitive component is the most important obstacle to the penetration of mental terrorism. In addition, personal beliefs, value attitudes and emotional stability greatly influence the perception of the information flow (Diagram 4).

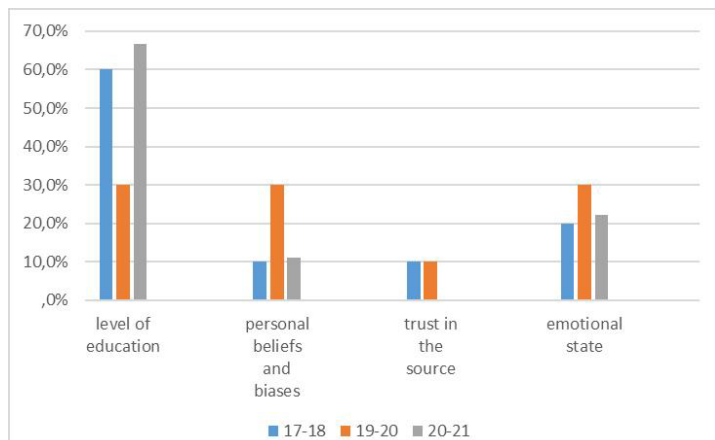


Diagram 4 – Factors influencing perceptions and beliefs

Factors for leveling the destructive impact of mental terrorism were studied separately. Respondents were asked the question: “What measures could be effective in preventing mental terrorism (psychological impact of information on consciousness, manipulation, persecution, threat) in the student environment?”.

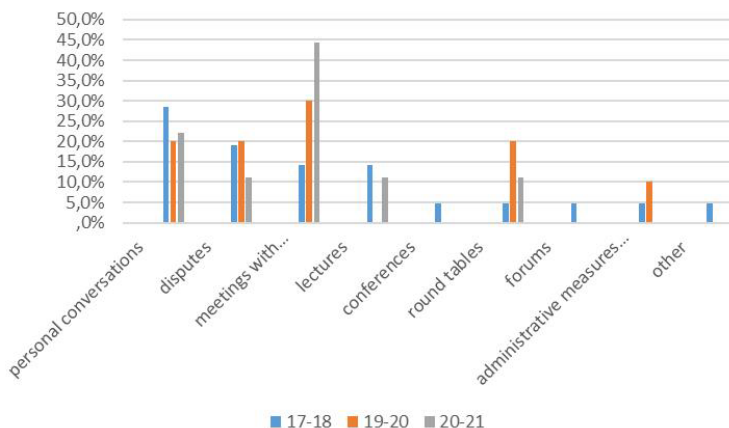


Diagram 5 – Measures to prevent mental terrorism

As follows from the analysis of the data obtained, the effect of certain events is different for each group age group. Thus, for students aged 17–18, personal (individual) conversations will be the most effective. Based on age characteristics, it is the individual approach and the opportunity to express personal opinion that play a major role in the formation of the worldview positions of this youth period.

At the age of 20–21, respondents are most impressed by meetings with law enforcement officials and the possibility of personal conversations with this category of specialists, which allow you to get qualified answers to questions of interest.

This format of events allows achieving greater effect in the prevention of mental terrorism.

Personal conversations are still crucial for preserving a normal emotional state between the ages of 19 and 20, but meetings with the administration of the school and law enforcement officials at open spaces and round tables have the biggest impact. The growth of the skill of conducting talks and the formation of legal consciousness lead to this degree of perception. Young individuals learn how to listen, articulate their opinions clearly, and engage in active debate at this age. At the same time, they become totally disinterested in such monologues that express a point of view, such as researchers' lectures and conference addresses.

At this age, young people are just forming their value semantic space, the chosen forms of events meet their needs (Diagram 5).

Thus, we see how a gradual change in the forms and methods of influences depending on the age categories of respondents, from simple, relaxed conversations to meetings with professionals and representatives of law enforcement agencies, has a positive effect on the formation of a healthy worldview and helps to strengthen immunity to destructive information and psychological influences.

Such a differentiated approach gives us the opportunity to take into account the identified age preferences in order to achieve the greatest pedagogical and psychological effect from certain activities when organizing the educational process.

In this regard, it is important to raise awareness among young people, conduct conversations, discussions, meetings with competent authorities, while respecting the age characteristics of the audience. These events develop student youth skills to resist manipulation allowing them to create a supportive environment where everyone can feel safe and receive the necessary help.

Conclusion

In the contemporary digital age, the phenomenon of mental terrorism represents a significant challenge to the psycho-emotional stability of student youth. This study conceptualizes mental terrorism as a complex form of information-psychological influence that targets the cognitive filters of the individual. Our findings indicate that the primary vulnerabilities among students are linked to a deficiency in information culture and critical thinking, rather than a lack of ideological engagement.

A key outcome of this research is the proposal of a structured, four-stage framework for the prevention of destructive information influence. Instead of direct counter-propaganda, this framework emphasizes a sequential psychological approach:

- Objective informing;
- Analytical explanation;
- Value-based reinforcement;
- Strategic communication.

The study highlights that maintaining this sequence is essential to avoid "psychological reactance" or public alienation, which often occurs when information is perceived as overly prescriptive.

The results align with the strategic objectives of national information security (e.g., the Information Doctrine of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023), particularly regarding the cultivation of a resilient media environment [13]. Practically, these findings provide a methodological basis for developing educational programs aimed at enhancing the psychological resilience of students against manipulative

digital content. Future research should focus on a more gender-balanced sample to further validate the universality of these preventive measures.

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«МЕНТАЛДЫ ТЕРРОРИЗМ» СТУДЕНТ ЖАСТАРДЫҢ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК-МӘДЕНИ ОРТАСЫНДА

Мақалада қазіргі социомәдени ортадағы «менталды терроризм» феномені мен оны тудыратын факторларды зерттеулері және талданады арналған. Жаппай санаға әсер ету қағидаттары, жастардың рухани-адамгершілік құндылықтарын бұзатын бөгде идеяларды санаға енгізу әдістері жан-жақты қарастырылады. Зерттеудің нысаны – студенттердің әлеуметтік ортасы, яғни әлеуметтік желілерді белсенді пайдаланатын жастардың типтік өкілі ретінде, сондай-ақ менталды терроризмнің таралуы мен ықпалына себеп болатын басқа да сыртқы факторлар. Зерттеу пәні – жастардың, әсіресе студенттердің психикалық күйін, деструктивті ақпаратты қабылдау ерекшеліктерін және менталды

терроризм факторларына қарсы тұру жағдайында сыни ойлау қабілетін анықтайтын жеке тұлғалық сипаттары. Ғаламдану мен жаппай ақпараттандыру жағдайында менталды терроризм – заманауи ақпараттық қарудың бір түрі ретінде – мемлекет негіздеріне елеулі қауіп төндіріп, деструктивті көзқарастардың таралуына, қоғамда қорқыныш пен белгісіздіктің орнығуына ықпал етеді. Мақалада жастарды әлеуметтендіру процесінің әлеуметтік-психологиялық талдауы берілген, бұл тұлға құрылымында деструктивті көзқарастардың қалыптасу механизмдерін түсінуге мүмкіндік берді. Сонымен қатар, менталды терроризмге жеке, қоғамдық және мемлекеттік деңгейлерде қарсы тұру шараларын әзірлеу қажеттілігі атап өтілген. Қазіргі ақпараттық қоғамда жастарды деструктивті әсерлерден қорғау үшін тиімді алдын алу мен психопрофилактика әдістерін дамыту маңызды.

Кілтті сөздер: менталдық терроризм, әлеуметтік желілер, ақпарат, социализация, деструктивті мінез-құлық.

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«МЕНТАЛЬНЫЙ ТЕРРОРИЗМ» В СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНОЙ СРЕДЕ СТУДЕНЧЕСКОЙ МОЛОДЕЖИ

В статье рассматривается феномен «ментального терроризма» в современном социокультурном контексте и факторы, способствующие его распространению. Особое внимание уделяется принципам воздействия на сознание широких масс, методом внедрения чуждых идей в сознание молодежи, что разрушает ее духовно-нравственные ценности. Объектом исследования является социальная среда студента как активного пользователя социальных сетей, что является типичным для большинства молодежи, а также другие внешние факторы, вызванные распространением и воздействием ментального терроризма в современном обществе. Предметом исследования являются личностные особенности студента, определяющие его психическое состояние, особенности

восприятия деструктивной информации, а также когнитивные способности к критическому мышлению в условиях воздействия факторов ментального терроризма. В условиях глобализации и повсеместной информатизации ментальный терроризм как один из видов современного информационного оружия представляет собой серьезную угрозу основам государства, способствуя распространению деструктивных убеждений, внедрению страха и неопределенности в обществе. В статье представлен социально-психологический анализ процесса социализации молодежи, который позволил изучить механизмы формирования деструктивных установок в структуре личности. В заключение подчеркивается необходимость разработки эффективных мер противодействия ментальному терроризму на личном, общественном и государственном уровнях, а также улучшения методов профилактики и психогигиенической работы с молодежью для защиты от разрушительного воздействия деструктивной информации.

Ключевые слова: ментальный терроризм, социальные сети, информация, социализация, деструктивное поведение.

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