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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL COMPETENCE IN FUTURE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SPECIALISTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

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The article examines the problem of developing digital competence in future specialists of vocational education in the context of the information society. The relevance of the study is determined by the active digitalization of the educational environment and the need to train specialists capable of effectively using digital technologies in their professional activities. Particular attention is paid to social networks as an integral component of the modern digital environment of learners.

A theoretical analysis of scientific approaches to defining the essence of the concept of "digital competence" is carried out, and its structure and main components are characterized. It is substantiated that social networks serve as an effective tool for the development of digital competence due to the combination of informational, communicative, interactive, and motivational capabilities, as well as their ability to create conditions for both individual and collaborative activities in the digital environment.

The study analyzes the functional potential of social networks in the educational process, in particular their role in the development of digital communication, content creation, formation of information culture, and professional socialization of learners. At the same time, the risks associated with their use are outlined, including information overload, the spread of unreliable information, and a decrease in the effectiveness of learning activities.

The results of the empirical study are presented, which demonstrate a high level of social network use in students' learning activities; however, they also reveal the predominance of passive forms of interaction, an insufficient level of critical thinking development, and limited readiness for the professional use of social networks.

Based on the results obtained, the necessity of pedagogically appropriate integration of social networks into the educational process is substantiated. Methodological recommendations are proposed, aimed at enhancing students' activity, developing critical thinking, forming digital content creation skills, and ensuring the professional orientation of learning.

Keywords: *digital competence, social networks, vocational education, digitalization of education, future specialists, digital environment, information society, digital culture, media literacy.*

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ВПЛИВ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖ НА ФОРМУВАННЯ ЦИФРОВОЇ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТІ МАЙБУТНІХ ФАХІВЦІВ ПРОФЕСІЙНОЇ ОСВІТИ В УМОВАХ ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА

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У статті розглянуто проблему формування цифрової компетентності майбутніх фахівців професійної освіти в умовах інформаційного суспільства. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена активною цифровізацією освітнього середовища та необхідністю підготовки фахівців, здатних ефективно використовувати цифрові технології у професійній діяльності. Особливу увагу приділено соціальним мережам як невід'ємному компоненту сучасного цифрового простору здобувачів освіти.

Здійснено теоретичний аналіз наукових підходів до визначення сутності поняття "цифрова компетентність", охарактеризовано її структуру та основні компоненти. Обґрунтовано, що соціальні мережі виступають ефективним інструментом формування цифрової компетентності завдяки поєднанню інформаційних, комунікаційних, інтерактивних і мотиваційних можливостей, а також здатності забезпечувати умови для самостійної та колективної діяльності в цифровому середовищі.

У роботі проаналізовано функціональні можливості соціальних мереж у освітньому процесі, зокрема їх роль у розвитку цифрової комунікації, створенні контенту, формуванні інформаційної культури та професійної соціалізації здобувачів освіти. Водночас окреслено ризики їх використання, пов'язані з інформаційним перевантаженням, поширенням недостовірної інформації та зниженням ефективності навчальної діяльності.

Представлено результати емпіричного дослідження, які засвідчили високий рівень використання соціальних мереж у навчальній діяльності здобувачів освіти, однак виявили переважання пасивних форм взаємодії, недостатній рівень розвитку критичного мислення та обмежену готовність до професійного використання соціальних мереж.

На основі отриманих результатів обґрунтовано необхідність педагогічно доцільної інтеграції соціальних мереж у освітній процес. Запропоновано методичні рекомендації, які спрямовані на активізацію діяльності здобувачів освіти, розвиток критичного мислення, формування навичок створення цифрового контенту та забезпечення професійної спрямованості навчання.

Ключові слова: *цифрова компетентність, соціальні мережі, професійна освіта, цифровізація освіти, майбутні фахівці, цифрове середовище, інформаційне суспільство, цифрова культура, медіаграмотність.*

Introduction of the issue. The contemporary development of the information society is accompanied by the active digitalization of the educational environment, which necessitates a transformation of approaches to the professional training of future specialists. Under these conditions, the development of digital competence in future specialists of vocational education becomes particularly relevant, as they must not only possess digital tools but also be able to effectively integrate them into their professional activities.

A significant factor influencing this process is social networks, which have become an integral component of the digital environment of learners. They perform informational, communicative, and educational functions, creating new opportunities for learning, interaction, and professional development. At the same time, their use is often spontaneous and not supported by appropriate pedagogical design.

In contemporary educational practice, several contradictions can be observed: between the high level of social network use and the insufficient level of digital competence development; between their considerable educational potential and the predominance of passive content consumption; as well as between the need to develop critical thinking and the

actual level of learners' information culture.

Therefore, the relevance of the study is determined by the need to scientifically substantiate effective approaches to the use of social networks as a tool for developing digital competence in future specialists of vocational education within the context of the information society.

Current state of the issue. An analysis of scientific sources indicates that the problem of developing digital competence is the subject of active research in contemporary pedagogical science. Issues related to digital competence, its content, and the peculiarities of its formation are addressed in the works of S. Alieksieieva, V. Andrusiv, T. Horokhivska [2], L. Havrilova [4], N. Henseruk [5], M. Zakharevych, V. Hryhorenko [8], and other researchers.

A separate line of research is represented by studies that examine the role of social networks in the educational process. In particular, R. Horbatiuk and V. Kabak substantiate the significance of social networks in shaping the information educational environment of higher education institutions. A. Humeniuk and O. Petrytska [7] emphasize their use in the context of the digitalization of education, while O. Nezhyva explores the potential of social networks as a means of organizing learning activities and enhancing students' motivation.

At the same time, the works of I. Batsurovska, H. Kashyna, V. Kuriepin, and V. Liubarets [3] consider the possibilities of using social networks for professional development, career advancement, and the formation of professional mobility, thereby expanding the understanding of their functional potential in the educational environment.

However, the analysis of scientific sources shows that, despite the considerable number of studies, the issue of the purposeful use of social networks specifically as a tool for developing digital competence in future specialists of vocational education remains insufficiently explored. In particular, further research is needed on methodological approaches to their integration into the educational process, as well as on determining the pedagogical conditions for the effective use of social networks in the professional training of learners.

Outline of unresolved issues brought up in the article. Despite the considerable number of scientific studies devoted to the problem of digital competence and the digitalization of education, the analysis of scientific sources reveals a number of unresolved or insufficiently developed aspects of this issue. In particular, in most studies, digital competence is considered as a general educational or professional characteristic of an individual; however, the issue of its development in the context of the active use of social networks has been studied only fragmentarily.

Although social networks have already become an integral part of the digital educational environment, in scientific research they are predominantly viewed as a means of communication or an additional tool for supporting learning. At the same time, their potential as a comprehensive pedagogical resource for developing digital competence, particularly in the context of the professional training of future vocational education specialists, remains insufficiently explored.

A separate issue is the lack of clearly defined pedagogical conditions and methodological approaches to the integration of social networks into the educational process. The scientific literature pays insufficient attention to the development of structured models for the use of social networks that would ensure the transition from spontaneous, predominantly entertainment-oriented use to purposeful educational and professional activities of learners.

Furthermore, the formation of specific components of digital competence in the context of social network use remains insufficiently investigated. In particular, this concerns the development of critical thinking skills, information and

analytical activities, the creation of digital content, as well as the formation of readiness for the professional use of social networks in future pedagogical practice. Existing studies address these aspects only partially and do not provide a comprehensive understanding of their interrelation.

Another limitation is the relatively small number of empirical studies aimed at examining the actual level of digital competence development among learners in the context of social network use. In most cases, scientific conclusions are of a theoretical or generalized nature, which complicates the identification of effective pedagogical strategies and the implementation of practical recommendations in the educational process.

Thus, the identified contradictions between the significant potential of social networks and the insufficient level of their pedagogically grounded use, between the high level of learners' engagement in the digital environment and the insufficient level of their digital competence development, as well as between the need for professionally oriented use of social networks and the lack of appropriate methodological approaches, determine the necessity for further comprehensive research on this issue.

These aspects define the scientific novelty and practical significance of the present study, which is aimed at the theoretical substantiation and empirical investigation of the impact of social networks on the development of digital competence in future specialists of vocational education.

Aim of the research is to analyze the impact of social networks on the development of digital competence in future specialists of vocational education and to substantiate approaches to their effective use in the educational process.

Results and discussion. The concept of digital competence in contemporary scientific and educational discourse is becoming one of the central constructs within the context of the information society. This is due to the fact that digital technologies not only transform the ways of accessing information but also influence the modes of communication, learning, professional activity, and social interaction.

Digital competence as a scientific concept is formed at the intersection of pedagogy, psychology, and information sciences. It emerged as a response to the rapid development of digital technologies that have transformed communication, professional activity, and the educational process. Since the late twentieth century, access to the Internet and digital devices has required users to develop new types of capabilities – from basic technical skills to conscious, responsible, and effective use of the digital environment. This has subsequently led to the need for a clearer definition of digital competence as a system of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to function in the digital environment [9].

In a number of Ukrainian scholarly works, digital competence is defined as a complex of integrated knowledge, skills, abilities, modes of activity, value orientations, and attitudes that ensure an individual's ability to function effectively in the digital environment, solve tasks using digital technologies, and adapt to the dynamic changes of the digital space [4].

In particular, the study by L. Havrilova and Ya. Topolnyk emphasizes that digital competence is not limited to technical operations with digital tools but also encompasses cultural, social, and communicative aspects of digital interaction, which distinguishes it from the narrower concept of digital literacy [4].

This is also confirmed by other Ukrainian scholars, in particular H. Henseruk, who considers digital competence as a combination of knowledge and skills required to use digital technologies for organizing the educational process, critically evaluating information resources in terms of their appropriateness for application in future professional activities, and implementing technological innovations [5: 13].

It is important to note that Ukrainian researchers often emphasize the multidimensional nature of digital competence, which includes not only technical and informational skills but also the ability to create digital content, communicate and collaborate in online environments, as well as ensure personal digital security [11].

Within the broader scientific discourse, digital competence is related to such concepts as digital literacy, information literacy, and digital culture. In Ukrainian scholarly literature, digital literacy is generally understood as basic skills in using digital tools and resources (e.g., working with software, searching for information), whereas digital competence encompasses these skills as one of its components while also emphasizing the systematic application of digital tools in various life and professional contexts [8].

Digital culture, in turn, is considered a broader concept that encompasses the value-based, ethical, and social aspects of behavior in the digital environment, thus forming the cultural context within which digital competence is realized [4].

In particular, in the works of S. Alieksieieva, digital competence is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, ways of thinking, and attitudes that ensure an individual's ability to engage in socialization, professional activity, and lifelong learning through the use of digital technologies [1].

Thus, digital competence is not merely a technical ability to use digital tools, but rather an integrative capacity of an individual to consciously solve tasks in the digital environment, effectively integrate digital resources into their activities, and critically evaluate the possibilities and limitations of digital technologies.

In this context, social networks acquire particular significance, as under the conditions of the development of the information society they are transforming from a means of interpersonal communication into an important component of the digital educational environment. Their potential in the training of future specialists in vocational education is determined by the fact that modern learners carry out a substantial part of their educational, communicative, and cognitive activities within the digital space.

In this regard, social networks, combining informational, communicative, interactive, visual, and organizational capabilities, serve as an effective means of developing digital competence by providing conditions for active interaction, self-development, and the acquisition of experience in the digital environment.

Contemporary Ukrainian studies emphasize that the digitalization of education involves not only the technical implementation of digital tools but also "the selection of pedagogical technologies that contribute to achieving the main goal of education – the formation of an individual capable of self-realization in the conditions of the modern digital society" [7: 81]. In this context, social networks possess significant educational potential, as they facilitate information exchange, the creation of communities, support interaction among participants in the educational process, and enable the dissemination of educational content.

Social networks should be considered as an open digital space in which future specialists in vocational education not only consume information but also create, analyze, disseminate, and critically evaluate digital content. These activities are directly related to the structural components of digital competence, including information literacy, digital communication, collaboration, digital content creation, safe online behavior, and problem-solving in the digital environment. As noted by V. Andrusiv and T. Horokhivska, digital competence occupies a key place in the system of professional and general competencies of a future specialist, and its content correlates with such areas as working with information and data, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving [2].

Thus, social networks can be an effective tool for developing digital competence, provided their use is pedagogically appropriate. This implies not the spontaneous inclusion of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, YouTube, or others in the learning process, but rather the purposeful organization of educational activities, including searching for and verifying information, creating educational materials, participating in professional communities, completing project-based tasks, discussing academic issues, and presenting the results of one's own work.

An important advantage of social networks lies in their communicative function. They provide rapid feedback between instructors and learners, facilitate horizontal interaction within academic groups, and enable the organization of discussions, surveys, exchange of materials, and collective reflection on learning outcomes. In this regard, A. Humeniuk and O. Petrytska emphasize that the use of social networks enhances social interaction between students and instructors and positively affects the organization of the educational process [7].

For future specialists in vocational education, such interaction is of particular importance, as their future professional activity involves not only the possession of subject-specific knowledge but also the ability to organize the learning of others, communicate with diverse groups of learners, and adapt educational content to the digital environment. Thus, social networks create conditions for acquiring experience in professionally oriented digital communication.

The informational function of social networks is manifested in providing access to a vast amount of educational, scientific, methodological, and professional materials. Learners can follow the pages of educational institutions, research organizations, professional associations, educational platforms, as well as experts and practitioners. This expands the boundaries of the traditional learning environment and contributes to the development of the ability to independently select information sources. At the same time, it creates a need for the development of critical thinking, media literacy, and skills for verifying the reliability of information.

Social networks should not be considered a neutral environment. They contain both high-quality educational content and misinformation, manipulative messages, and superficial or unverified materials. Therefore, their use in vocational education should be accompanied by the development of learners' ability to analyze sources, identify authorship, verify facts, and distinguish scientific information from popular or promotional content. In this way, social networks become not only a source of educational information but also a space for the development of information culture.

The interactive function of social networks lies in the fact that learners are not limited to passively consuming content but can actively participate in its creation and discussion. For example, future specialists in vocational education can create educational posts, video tutorials, infographics, short explanatory videos, professional blogs, and thematic collections of resources. In her study, O. Nezhyva argues that platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and blogs can be used to present educational material in a mobile, individualized, and differentiated format [10].

This is particularly important for vocational education, as much of the learning content has practical orientation. Social networks make it possible to visualize production processes, demonstrate practical operations, create concise instructions, and model professional situations. For instance, a future vocational education teacher may prepare video explanations of technological operations, develop a series of posts on occupational safety rules, compile digital resource collections for learners, or organize online discussions of professional issues.

Special attention should also be paid to the motivational potential of social networks. Due to their familiar format for young people, visual appeal, rapid feedback, and the possibility of publicly presenting learning outcomes, social networks can enhance learners' engagement in educational activities. O. Nezhyva notes that the use of social networks can transform the perception of educational material, make it more attractive, and motivate students to engage in deeper learning [10].

At the same time, the motivational effect is not automatic. When social networks are used without clear educational objectives, they may distract learners, reduce concentration, and contribute to superficial learning. Therefore, the pedagogical value of social networks depends on the extent to which their use is aligned with learning outcomes, professional competencies, and specific educational tasks.

However, social networks also perform the function of professional socialization. They help future specialists engage in professional communities, become familiar with current industry trends, observe the activities of practitioners, and develop their own professional identity. I. Batsurovska et al. note that social networks can be used for professional networking, career development, personal branding, and self-development [3]. For future specialists in vocational education, this creates opportunities for gradual integration into the professional environment during their studies.

At the same time, social networks also contribute to shaping the digital image of educational institutions. Researchers R. Horbatiuk and V. Kabak consider social networks as a tool for forming the information educational environment of higher education institutions and emphasize their potential in facilitating communication between learners and instructors [6]. This provides grounds to assert that social networks influence not only the individual development of learners but also the quality of digital communication within the entire educational environment.

Thus, in the development of digital competence in future specialists of vocational education, social networks perform several interrelated functions: informational, communicative, interactive, motivational, professional-socializing, and reflective. Through these functions, they contribute to the development of skills in working with information, creating digital content, communicating in online environments, adhering to digital ethics, critically evaluating media messages, and using digital tools for professional self-development.

Alongside their positive potential, it is necessary to consider the risks associated with the use of social networks. These include information overload, fragmented perception of knowledge, the spread of unreliable information, a decline in academic integrity, privacy violations, cyberbullying, dependence on digital approval, and inefficient use of study time. Therefore, the development of digital competence through social networks must necessarily include issues of digital security, ethical behavior, data protection, and the responsible use of digital resources.

In order to determine the effectiveness of using social networks in the development of digital competence among future specialists in vocational education, an empirical study was conducted among students of the educational and professional program «Vocational Education. Digital Technologies».

The study involved 56 students of the 1st-3rd years of study, which ensured the representativeness of the sample within a single educational program. The distribution of respondents by year of study was relatively even, allowing for the identification of certain trends depending on the stage of professional training.

A questionnaire was chosen as the method of data collection, consisting of 12 close-end and semi-open questions.

The content of the questionnaire was aimed at identifying the characteristics of social network use in learning activities, the level of development of the main components of digital competence, as well as students' attitudes toward the use of these platforms in their professional training.

The analysis of the obtained results demonstrated a high level of respondents' engagement in the use of social networks for educational purposes. Specifically, 87.5 % of respondents (49 individuals) indicated that they regularly use social networks for searching educational information, completing assignments, and communication within the educational process, while 12.5 % (7 individuals) reported using them occasionally. These findings indicate that social networks are effectively integrated into the everyday learning practices of students.

Regarding the preference for specific platforms, it was found that the most popular among respondents are Telegram (82.1 %), YouTube (76.8 %), Instagram (64.3 %), and TikTok (48.2 %). This pattern reflects the predominance of mobile and visually oriented channels of information consumption, which corresponds to current trends in digital media use.

At the same time, the analysis of students' activities on social networks revealed a significant imbalance between active and passive forms of use. In particular, 92.9 % of respondents use social networks for information search, 78.6 % for communication with peers and instructors, while only 39.3 % have experience in creating their own educational or professional digital content. This indicates the dominance of a consumer-oriented model of digital behavior, which limits the full development of digital competence.

The results related to the development of information evaluation skills are particularly indicative. In response to the question concerning the ability to verify the reliability of information on social networks, only 41.1 % of students reported possessing such skills at a sufficient level, 44.6% indicated a partial level, while 14.3 % do not, in fact, verify information. This points to an insufficient level of development of the information and analytical component of digital competence.

The analysis of responses regarding the motivational aspect showed that 73.2 % of respondents noted a positive impact of social networks on their learning activities, particularly due to the accessibility of educational materials, interactivity, and the opportunity to receive prompt feedback. At the same time, 26.8 % of respondents indicated the presence of distracting factors that negatively affect concentration and learning effectiveness.

An equally important indicator is the level of readiness for the professional use of social networks. Only 35.7 % of students reported being ready to use social networks as a tool for their future professional activity (in particular, for organizing the learning of others), while 64.3% lack sufficient experience or confidence in such use. This indicates a gap between personal use of social networks and their professional and pedagogical application.

The generalization of the obtained results allows us to state that, despite the high level of students' engagement in the use of social networks, their potential for developing digital competence is realized only partially. The predominance of passive forms of activity, an insufficient level of critical thinking development, limited experience in creating digital content, and insufficient readiness for the professional use of social networks were identified.

The results of the empirical study confirm that, despite the high level of social network use among students, their potential in the development of digital competence is not fully realized. The identified trends – particularly the dominance of passive information consumption (92.9 %), the insufficient level of development of critical evaluation skills (only 41.1 % at a sufficient level), and the low readiness for professional use of social networks (35.7 %) –

necessitate the development of appropriate methodological recommendations for their pedagogically sound application.

In this context, ensuring the *systematic integration of social networks into the educational process* becomes of primary importance. This involves a transition from fragmented use to the purposeful incorporation of social networks into the structure of academic disciplines. It requires the definition of specific educational objectives related to the development of digital competence, as well as the design of tasks that promote active interaction of learners within the digital environment.

Given the identified imbalance between content consumption and creation, it is advisable to introduce *practice-oriented tasks aimed at creating learners' own digital products.* In particular, effective forms of activity may include the development of educational video tutorials, the creation of thematic educational pages on social networks, the preparation of digital case studies, maintaining professional blogs, or producing series of educational posts. The implementation of such tasks contributes to the development of the content-creation component of digital competence, which, as the results of the study indicate, remains insufficiently developed.

Special attention should be given to the formation of the *information and analytical component of digital competence*, particularly the skills of critical information evaluation. For this purpose, it is appropriate to introduce tasks focused on analyzing information sources, identifying manipulative content, comparing data from different resources, and verifying facts. Such tasks may be implemented through the analysis of social media publications, discussions on the reliability of information, or case-based activities related to detecting fake content.

Considering that a significant proportion of learners are not ready for the professional use of social networks, an important direction is to ensure the *professional orientation of learning activities.* This involves modeling situations of future professional practice in which social networks are used as tools for teaching, communication, and the organization of the educational process. For example, students may design lesson segments incorporating social networks, create instructional materials for learners, or organize online discussions of professional issues.

No less important is the implementation of *pedagogical support of learners' activities on social networks.* In this process, the teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students' activities, provides feedback, stimulates engagement, and fosters a reflective attitude toward learning outcomes. The absence of such support, as practice shows, leads to superficial use of social networks and a decrease in their educational effectiveness.

Given the current challenges of the digital environment, the development of *digital safety and the culture of online communication* become particularly relevant. This involves fostering skills related to personal data protection, adherence to ethical standards of interaction, awareness of the consequences of one's digital footprint, as well as the responsible use of information resources.

In addition, it is advisable to implement *integrated forms of learning* that combine in-class and extracurricular activities with the use of social networks. Such an approach ensures the continuity of the learning process, expands opportunities for interaction, and enhances the flexibility of the educational environment.

Thus, the effective integration of social networks into the process of developing digital competence in future specialists of vocational education requires a comprehensive approach that includes systematic use, practical orientation of tasks, the development of critical thinking, pedagogical support, and the formation of digital culture. The proposed methodological recommendations are aimed at

addressing the contradictions identified during the study between the high level of social network use and the insufficient level of digital competence development among students.

Conclusions and research perspectives. The problem of developing digital competence in future specialists of vocational education in the context of the digitalization of the educational environment is becoming increasingly relevant and requires a reconsideration of traditional approaches to organizing the educational process. Social networks, as they are integrated into the educational space, function not only as a means of communication but also as a multifunctional pedagogical tool capable of supporting the development of key components of digital competence.

At the same time, their potential can be realized only under conditions of pedagogically justified use, oriented toward active learner engagement, the development of critical thinking, the ability to create digital content, and the professionally oriented application of digital technologies. Otherwise, social networks remain predominantly an environment for information consumption, which limits their educational effectiveness.

Thus, the development of digital competence requires a transition to a systematic organization of educational activities, within which social networks serve as tools for learning, professional interaction, and self-development. This makes it possible to consider them as a component of the modern educational environment that contributes to the training of competitive specialists.

Prospects for further research are associated with the development of models for integrating social networks into professional training, the identification of effective methods for developing digital competence, as well as the study of the impact of various forms of digital interaction on the professional development of future specialists.

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