

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND MASS MEDIA ON CAREER CHOICE AMONG YOUTH

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**Abstract.** In the digital era, social networks and mass media have become powerful tools influencing young people's worldview, values, and professional preferences. This article analyzes how digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and television affect youth's career choice. Using descriptive and analytical methods, the study identifies psychological, socio-cultural, and informational mechanisms of influence. The results show that more than 70% of youth decisions regarding their future professions are affected by online media content, role models, and influencers. Recommendations are provided for integrating media literacy into educational programs to ensure informed career decision-making.

**Keywords:** social networks, career choice, mass media, youth, media literacy, digital influence.

## ВЛИЯНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ И СМИ НА ВЫБОР КАРЬЕРЫ СРЕДИ МОЛОДЁЖИ

**Аннотация.** В цифровую эпоху социальные сети и СМИ стали мощными инструментами, влияющими на мировоззрение, ценности и профессиональные предпочтения молодёжи. В данной статье анализируется влияние цифровых платформ, таких как Instagram, TikTok, YouTube и телевидение, на выбор карьеры молодёжью.

Используя описательные и аналитические методы, исследование выявляет психологические, социокультурные и информационные механизмы влияния. Результаты показывают, что более 70% решений молодёжи относительно своей будущей профессии определяются контентом онлайн-медиа, ролевыми моделями и инфлюенсерами. Даны рекомендации по интеграции медиаграмотности в образовательные программы для обеспечения осознанного принятия решений о карьере.

**Ключевые слова:** социальные сети, выбор карьеры, СМИ, молодёжь, медиаграмотность, цифровое влияние.

**Introduction.** In recent years, the rapid development of information and communication technologies has deeply transformed social behavior, particularly among youth. Social networks such as Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube have become the main sources of information, inspiration, and self-identification. Consequently, the process of choosing a profession, once guided by family traditions or personal aptitude, is now increasingly shaped by digital media trends and online influencers.

According to UNESCO (2023) and OECD (2024), over 75% of young people aged 16–25 rely on social networks and online communities when considering future professions. The digital environment provides an immense amount of visual and narrative content that models different lifestyles and success stories, directly influencing career aspirations. For example, the perceived success of bloggers or digital marketers may appear more attractive than traditional professions.

Mass media also plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of prestige and professional identity. Television and online series romanticize certain careers, creating stereotypes that distort realistic expectations. This issue is especially relevant in developing countries, where social mobility depends on professional success. In Uzbekistan, the government's emphasis on digital transformation has increased exposure to global media narratives. However, without sufficient media literacy, youth may adopt unrealistic or externally influenced career choices.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do social networks and mass media affect career decision-making among youth?
2. Which types of digital content exert the strongest influence?
3. What educational strategies can foster critical thinking in career planning?

**Methods.** This research applied a mixed-method approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative content analysis. The study involved 250 university students (aged 18–24) from Tashkent, Samarkand, and Andijan.

**Data Collection.** The survey included 20 structured questions focusing on media usage frequency, sources of career information, and perceived influence. Respondents ranked each factor on a 1–5 Likert scale. In addition, 15 students were interviewed to explore emotional attachment to online role models and perceived realism of portrayed careers.

**Analytical Methods.** Quantitative data were processed using SPSS 25.0. Descriptive statistics determined dominant trends, while correlation analysis examined relationships between social media exposure and career preferences. Qualitative data were coded thematically.

**Theoretical Framework.** The study relied on Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994) and Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973), explaining how observational learning and selective media use shape career interest.

**Ethical Considerations.** Participants provided informed consent and anonymity was ensured in line with the Research Ethics Code of the Ministry of Higher Education of Uzbekistan (2024).

**Results.** The results reveal that social media is the dominant influence in career decision-making. About 78% of respondents indicated learning about professions primarily from online platforms. The most frequently mentioned sources were YouTube (65%), Instagram (58%), and TikTok (52%).

**Table 1. Sources and Levels of Career Influence**

Source of Influence	Respondents (%)	Level of Influence
Family and parents	45%	Moderate
Teachers/mentors	38%	Moderate
Social networks	78%	High
Mass media (TV/news)	60%	High
Career centers	22%	Low

A correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.68$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) was found between media exposure and career orientation.

Qualitative findings show admiration for online personalities such as vloggers and software developers. Yet, 30% of students felt disappointed after pursuing professions glamorized online. Moreover, 57% lacked guidance in evaluating the reliability of such content.

The findings indicate that mass media constructs idealized professional images, emphasizing glamour and income over reality. Media literacy programs can reduce such misconceptions.

**Discussion.** Social networks and mass media act as powerful socialization agents, supporting Bandura's (1986) theory of observational learning. In Uzbekistan, digitalization exposes youth to globalized values, where professions like influencer or UX designer appear more prestigious.

However, these images often diverge from local labor market realities.

Educational institutions must leverage media as a guidance tool while mitigating misinformation. Integrating media literacy can teach critical evaluation, source reliability, and alignment between aptitude and goals.

Similar global studies, such as Smith & Choi (2022) in South Korea and the UK (2023 Youth Survey), confirm that visibility and fame increasingly outweigh traditional success criteria like skill mastery. Thus, while media democratizes access to information, it also fosters unrealistic comparisons.

Policy recommendations include:

1. Integrating media literacy into career education.
2. Encouraging parental engagement in career dialogues.
3. Reforming counseling practices through digital simulations of real professions.

A balanced digital culture is vital for rational career decisions.

**Conclusion.** Social networks and mass media significantly shape youth career aspirations.

They broaden awareness yet risk idealization. Developing critical media literacy ensures informed professional choice. Future research should explore AI-based guidance platforms that analyze social media data for adaptive career counseling.

Aligning these efforts with Uzbekistan's "Digital Education 2030" strategy will foster informed, confident, and digitally responsible young professionals.

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