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### **SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS OF FORMING SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN UKRAINE**

**Анотація.** У статті здійснено соціально-психологічний аналіз формування підтримки політичного лідерства в сучасному українському суспільстві. Політичне лідерство розглядається не як формальна управлінська позиція або інституційно закріплений статус, а як психологічний процес впливу, що реалізується у взаємодії лідера з соціальними та політичними спільнотами. Такий підхід дозволяє зосередити увагу на внутрішніх психічних процесах, через які підтримка політичного лідера виникає, стабілізується та трансформується в умовах соціальної нестабільності, кризових викликів і цифровізації політичної комунікації.

Методологічну основу дослідження становить теоретико-аналітичний і системний підхід, що поєднує положення соціальної та політичної психології. У межах цього підходу політичне лідерство інтерпретується як форма групової взаємодії, зумовлена процесами соціальної ідентифікації, довіри, емоційного впливу, комунікативного конструювання смислів і персоніфікації політичних процесів.

Наукова новизна статті полягає в системному розгляді зазначених соціально-психологічних механізмів як взаємопов'язаної цілісності, що забезпечує формування, закріплення та стабілізацію підтримки політичного лідера. На відміну від фрагментарних підходів, у яких аналізуються окремі психологічні чинники, у статті обґрунтовано, що ефективність лідерського впливу визначається сукупною дією ідентифікаційних, довірчих, емоційних і комунікативних процесів у груповій свідомості.

Зроблено висновок, що в умовах кризових викликів і цифрового середовища підтримка політичного лідера дедалі більше набуває психологічної та компенсаторної функції, спрямованої на зниження соціальної напруженості й відновлення відчуття стабільності. Соціально-психологічний підхід дозволяє глибше зрозуміти динаміку, можливості та межі політичного лідерства в сучасному українському суспільстві й створює теоретичне підґрунтя для подальших емпіричних досліджень у сфері політичної психології.

**Ключові слова:** довіра; емоційний вплив; персоніфікація політики; політичне лідерство; політична комунікація; соціальна ідентифікація.

**Abstract.** The article presents a socio-psychological analysis of the formation of support for political leadership in contemporary Ukrainian society. Political leadership is conceptualized not as a formal managerial position or an institutionally fixed status, but as a psychological process of influence realized through interaction between the leader and social and political communities. This approach makes it possible to focus on internal psychological processes through which support for a political leader emerges, stabilizes, and transforms under conditions of social instability, crisis challenges, and the digitalization of political communication.

The purpose of the article is to identify and analyze the key socio-psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of support for political leadership in the contemporary Ukrainian social space. The methodological framework of the study is based on a theoretical-analytical and systemic approach integrating concepts from social and political psychology. Within this framework, political leadership is interpreted as a form of group interaction shaped by processes of social identification, trust, emotional influence, communicative construction of meanings, and the personalization of political processes.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in a systemic interpretation of these socio-psychological mechanisms as an interconnected whole that ensures the formation, consolidation, and stabilization of support for a political leader. Unlike fragmentary approaches that focus on isolated psychological factors, the article substantiates that the effectiveness of leadership influence is determined by the combined action of identification, trust-based, emotional, and communicative processes within group consciousness.

It is concluded that under conditions of crisis challenges and digital environments, support for political leadership increasingly acquires a psychological and compensatory function aimed at reducing social tension and restoring a sense of stability. The socio-psychological perspective provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics, possibilities, and limits of political leadership in contemporary Ukrainian society and creates a theoretical basis for further empirical research in the field of political psychology.

**Keywords:** emotional influence; personalization of politics; political communication; political leadership; social identification; trust.

In the contemporary Ukrainian academic space, the problem of political leadership is increasingly interpreted from the perspective of social psychology; however, it is predominantly examined through individual psychological characteristics or isolated aspects of influence. An analysis of scholarly publications from 2021–2025 indicates that researchers' attention is focused on such psychological phenomena as trust, the image of the leader, emotional states, perception of communication, and the reactions of social groups under crisis conditions. At the same time, a systemic analysis of the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying the formation of support for a political leader as an integral process remains insufficiently represented.

The psychological prerequisites for the perception of a leader and the regulation of his or her behavior are examined in the works of M. Yaremchyn, who analyzes the phenomenon of psychological responsibility as an internal regulator of the actions of a political subject. The author focuses on personal mechanisms of self-control, awareness of the consequences of decisions, and internal behavioral consistency, which directly influence the formation of trust and the acceptance of a leader by social groups [10].

The socio-psychological features of the formation of a political leader's image are explored in the works of Yu. Malovanova, A. Rudnieva, and N. Mosol, where image is interpreted as a mental construct formed in the process of communication and determining emotional attitudes, expectations, and evaluations on the part of the audience. Within these studies, image emerges as a psychological mediator between the personality of the leader and social perception, activating mechanisms of emotional influence and personalization [3].

The issue of trust as a socio-psychological attitude is highlighted in the works of O. Palahniuk, where trust is considered as the result of the interaction of cognitive evaluations, emotional experiences, and social experience. These studies emphasize the psychological factors of the emergence and decline of trust, which is crucial for understanding support for leadership; however, trust itself is analyzed without integration with other mechanisms of group dynamics [4].

The psychological context of communication and message perception under crisis conditions is revealed in the works of H. Bukanov, where attention is focused on the psychological effects of informational influence, the peculiarities of message perception, and the emotional reactions of the audience. Although these studies do not directly focus on the personality of the leader, they provide an important foundation for analyzing the psychological mechanisms of communicative influence and the formation of emotional support [1].

Socio-psychological factors of political alienation and polarization are analyzed in the works of Z. Sievers, where these phenomena are considered as consequences of disrupted identification, decreased sense of involvement, and the weakening of psychological ties between the individual and social communities. Such studies are important for understanding the conditions under which support for a leader becomes unstable or fragmented [5].

The psychological features of behavior and emotional engagement in the online environment are examined in the works of N. Cherepovska, which analyze users' digital behavior and the role of content in shaping emotional reactions and social identification. These studies make it possible to consider online communities as a specific space for the actualization of psychological mechanisms of support and emotional influence [7].

The works of N. Shui are significant for the socio-psychological analysis of leadership, as they reveal mechanisms of emotional self-regulation and psychological resilience under conditions of increased stress. Although these studies focus on professional activity, their provisions are relevant for analyzing the

emotional influence of a leader and the ability to maintain psychological balance in interaction with social groups [9].

The psychological context is further complemented by the studies of O. Slobodyska, devoted to psychological reactions of individuals under conditions of crisis and traumatic social events. These works emphasize the role of emotional states and the need for security and stability, which form a demand for a figure capable of performing a stabilizing and consolidating function in the perception of social groups [6].

The reviewed scholarly works demonstrate the presence of significant research on individual psychological components of political leadership, in particular trust, the image of the leader, emotional influence, communication, and identification. At the same time, in contemporary Ukrainian psychological science, the issue of integrating these components into a coherent system of socio-psychological mechanisms for the formation of support for a political leader remains insufficiently developed, which determines the focus of this study.

**The aim of the article** is to identify and provide a socio-psychological analysis of the key mechanisms underlying the formation of support for a political leader in the contemporary Ukrainian social space.

Within the framework of this study, political leadership is considered as a form of socio-psychological interaction in which support is formed through a system of interrelated mechanisms: social identification, trust, emotional influence, communicative construction of meaning, and the personalization of political processes. Their coordinated action determines not only the emergence of support but also its stability or fragmentation under conditions of social instability and the digitalization of communication.

Support for a political leader has a group-based nature and is formed as a result of the alignment of individual evaluations with collective representations and emotional states. Its stability is determined by the nature of social identification, the level of trust, the intensity of emotional engagement, and the characteristics of communicative interaction.

To explain the stability and fluctuations of support, it is necessary to analyze the internal organization of the psychological mechanisms underlying its formation within group consciousness.

Support for a leader becomes stable when identification is reinforced by trust as a socio-psychological attitude. Trust performs a regulatory function by reducing the sense of uncertainty and psychological threat under conditions of social tension. As demonstrated by O. Palahniuk, trust is formed at the intersection of the emotional experience of security, cognitive evaluation of the consistency of actions, and prior social experience, which makes it a key resource for supporting authority. In the absence of trust, even strong identification remains fragmented and unstable.

The emotional component of support plays no less important a role than cognitive evaluations. Emotions provide rapid orientation within social reality and determine the group's readiness to accept leadership influence. Under crisis conditions, emotional reactions often precede rational comprehension, shaping the initial attitude toward political figures. Research by H. Bukanov [1] indicates that information messages saturated with emotional markers significantly enhance the effect of influence by activating collective experiences of fear, hope, or solidarity.

An important psychological factor of support is the perception of the internal consistency of the leader's behavior. The consistency of decisions and responsibility of actions are interpreted by the group as indicators of reliability, contributing to the consolidation of a positive attitude. M. Yaremchyshyn [10] emphasizes that the psychological responsibility of a political subject functions as an internal regulator of behavior, indirectly influencing the level of trust and acceptance by social groups. In its absence, support quickly transforms into situational or emotionally unstable forms.

In the digital environment, support for a leader is formed more rapidly and emotionally, as online communication accelerates identification processes and emotional engagement [7, p. 333].

Social identification is a fundamental psychological mechanism through which a political leader acquires significance for a social group. At the level of group consciousness, it ensures a sense of commonality, belonging, and symbolic unity, within which the figure of the leader is integrated into the image of the collective "we." Support arises not as a reaction to individual personality traits but as a result of attributing to the leader the function of representing group values, experiences, and expectations. Within such a psychological framework, the leader is perceived as a bearer of shared identity, which reduces critical distance and weakens the need for rational verification of his or her actions. Disruption of the identification link leads to increased alienation and the activation of oppositional emotions, as confirmed by the analysis of political polarization in the works of Z. Sievers [5, p. 150], where the breakdown of psychological belonging is considered a key factor in the destabilization of support.

Trust acts as a central mechanism of the psychological legitimation of leadership. It is formed as a stable socio-psychological attitude that combines the emotional experience of security, cognitive evaluation of consistency, and prior social experience of interaction. O. Palahniuk emphasizes that trust in political authority is not reducible to rational choice but is consolidated as an internal state of psychological readiness to accept influence and delegate responsibility. For the group, trust reduces the level of anxiety associated with uncertainty in the social environment and creates an illusion of control over the situation. In the absence of trust, even a symbolically strong leader image does not ensure stable support, as every action is interpreted through the prism of suspicion and threat [4, p. 127].

Emotional influence is a mechanism that ensures the rapid mobilization and consolidation of supporters. Emotions perform a regulatory function, directing behavior toward or away from the leader even before rational evaluations are engaged. In group dynamics, emotional states tend to resonate and spread, forming a shared emotional background. It is precisely this background that determines the willingness to support leadership initiatives or, conversely, to distance oneself from them. H. Bakanov demonstrates that in a crisis information environment, emotionally saturated messages possess significantly higher persuasive potential than neutral or analytical ones, as they activate basic psychological reactions such as fear, hope, or solidarity. In this context, emotional influence becomes a key resource of leadership, especially during periods of social tension [1, p. 74].

Communicative interaction functions as a mechanism for the formation and consolidation of psychological meanings. Through language, metaphors, symbols, and recurring narratives, the leader sets the frameworks for interpreting social events within which the group constructs its understanding of reality. Communication is not limited to the transmission of information but influences the structure of perception, determining what is considered significant, dangerous, or promising. Studies by Yu. Malovanova, A. Rudnieva, and N. Mosol show that the image of a political actor is formed as a mental construct that combines cognitive representations with emotional attitudes and becomes a foundation for group expectations [3]. Through communicative interaction, this image is stabilized and reproduced, acquiring the character of socially shared meaning.

The personalization of political processes acts as a mechanism of cognitive and emotional simplification of complex social reality. Social groups tend to focus on specific figures, as this reduces cognitive load and allows responsibility to be localized. Through personalization, the leader becomes the focal point of collective hopes, fears, and disappointments, which significantly enhances emotional engagement. At the same time, this mechanism increases the psychological vulnerability of support: any inconsistency with expectations is interpreted as a personal deficiency rather than as a consequence of systemic constraints. This is evidenced by studies of political alienation, where personalized disappointment is considered a factor in the sharp decline of trust.

The internal consistency and psychological responsibility of the leader function as a stabilizing mechanism of support. The perception of consistency in actions, the ability to understand the consequences of decisions, and the capacity to maintain emotional balance create a sense of reliability within the group. M. Yaremchshyn emphasizes psychological responsibility as an internal regulator of the behavior of a political subject, which indirectly influences trust and acceptance by social groups. The absence of this mechanism leads to the fragmentation of support and the intensification of situational emotional fluctuations [10, p. 80].

The influence of the digital environment alters both the speed and the form of operation of support mechanisms. Online communication reduces the distance between stimulus and response: identification and emotional engagement are activated rapidly, while reflective comprehension recedes into the background.

These mechanisms function as an interconnected system, within which the strengthening or weakening of one element reshapes the overall configuration of support.

In crisis conditions, social identification acquires a protective character. Belonging to a group serves to reduce anxiety and restore a sense of integrity, while the figure of the leader is perceived as the embodiment of this integrity. Identification becomes less associated with the sharing of programmatic positions and more with the emotional sense of "one's own." This intensifies the polarization of the social space, in which support for a leader becomes a marker of group loyalty. It is within this framework that Z. Sievers describes political alienation as a consequence of disrupted psychological belonging and weakened identification ties [5].

Under conditions of social instability, trust transforms from a rational attitude into an affective form of psychological support. It is based less on the verification of the effectiveness of decisions and more on the experience of emotional closeness and predictability. As shown by O. Palahniuk [4, p. 120], in situations

of high uncertainty, trust is formed more rapidly through repeated symbolic signals and emotional confirmations than through analytical reflection on the actions of authorities. This determines its ambivalence: support may be intense, yet at the same time vulnerable to emotional shifts.

In a crisis environment, emotional influence becomes the leading mechanism regulating attitudes toward the leader. Emotions not only accompany political perception but also determine its direction. Fear, hope, indignation, or empathy structure representations of social reality even before cognitive analysis is engaged. Studies by H. Bukanov indicate that in wartime and post-crisis information environments, emotionally saturated messages form stable affective reactions that are gradually internalized as personal beliefs. In such cases, emotional influence performs the function of collective emotional stabilization [1, p. 74].

Communicative interaction shifts from an explanatory to a narrative-affective mode: the key factors become the recognizability of meanings, emotional coherence, and the repetition of core images. The image of a political leader is stabilized through emotionally saturated narratives and serves as a foundation for group expectations [3, p. 113].

The personalization of political processes under crisis conditions intensifies and extends beyond mere cognitive simplification. Social reality becomes concentrated around a specific figure, creating a sense of comprehensibility and manageability of complex processes. The leader becomes the bearer of collective hopes and fears, which increases the level of emotional engagement. At the same time, personalization heightens the vulnerability of support, as disappointment in the leader is perceived as a loss of psychological support rather than as a consequence of systemic constraints.

The digital environment intensifies the operation of support mechanisms by reducing the distance between informational stimuli and psychological reactions. Repetitive images and emotional triggers are rapidly integrated into group consciousness, forming stable attitudes [7]. Under such conditions, support for a leader largely depends on the ability to maintain emotional resonance and symbolic unity.

In crisis and digital environments, support mechanisms retain their structure but change their mode of operation: the role of affective stabilization, symbolic unity, and the reduction of subjective uncertainty is strengthened.

Prolonged crisis experience transforms not only the intensity of support for a political leader but also its psychological quality. Under conditions of chronic threat, support increasingly performs a compensatory function related to the regulation of emotional states and the restoration of a sense of security. In this context, the leader is perceived as a figure that symbolically structures social reality and reduces the subjective sense of uncertainty, which is consistent with the conclusions of O. Slobodyska [6, p. 896].

The shift of support toward emotional stabilization increases its dependence on the psychological resources of the community. As emotional resources are depleted, sensitivity to symbolic signals that previously ensured consolidation decreases. Under such conditions, a rapid transition from affective acceptance to alienation becomes possible, with the latter having a predominantly emotionally defensive character.

Trust as a form of psychological legitimation of power acquires particular significance. It functions not only as an attitude toward a specific leader but also as a generalized orientation toward the acceptance of authority's influence. Yu. Shaigorodskiy demonstrates in his scholarly work that legitimation at the psychological level is based on the experience of the acceptability of authority as such, rather than solely on the evaluation of its effectiveness [8, p. 23]. Under conditions of prolonged crisis, this legitimation becomes vulnerable: a decline in trust is accompanied not merely by criticism but by a loss of internal readiness to recognize any form of leadership influence.

The combination of emotional exhaustion and the erosion of trust creates the limits of stability for socio-psychological mechanisms of support. Identification loses its protective potential, emotional influence ceases to perform a mobilizing function, communication is perceived as repetitive and lacking substantive content, and personalization transforms into a focus of disappointment. In such a configuration, support ceases to function as a stabilizing factor and begins to play a disintegrative role.

The socio-psychological analysis of support for a political leader demonstrates its group-based nature and its dependence on internal psychological processes formed within a shared symbolic space. It is constructed through psychological interaction between the leader and social communities, within which processes of identification, trust, emotional engagement, communicative construction of meaning, and the personalization of political reality play a decisive role.

Crisis and digital contexts do not alter the structure of these mechanisms but transform their mode of operation. Under such conditions, the role of support in reducing psychological tension and restoring a sense of security increases. Under prolonged stress, the importance of emotional and symbolic factors

grows, while cognitive evaluations lose their leading role. This increases the intensity of support while simultaneously reducing its stability.

The psychological limits of support are determined by the state of the community's emotional resources and the level of trust in leadership influence. Emotional exhaustion and the erosion of trust lead to an imbalance of mechanisms, as a result of which support may transform from a factor of consolidation into a source of alienation and disappointment. Under such conditions, political leadership loses its stabilizing potential and becomes vulnerable to sharp psychological fluctuations.

The obtained results expand the possibilities of socio-psychological analysis of political leadership in contemporary Ukrainian society and provide a foundation for further empirical research. A promising direction is the study of indicators of the functioning of each support mechanism in different social groups and digital environments, as well as the analysis of the conditions under which psychological interaction between the leader and the community remains stable or transitions into a phase of disintegration.

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