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**An indirect assessment of the similarity/dissimilarity of specific groups
of Ukrainians to Russians: The expected and the unexpected****Vadym Vasiutynskyi**

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Abstract. The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand the deep psychological and cultural processes of the Russification of Ukrainian identities, which is important for developing effective strategies of de-russification in the context of contemporary social and political change. The aim of the study was to attempt an indirect transfer of cognitive-behavioural constructs of similarity/dissimilarity between Ukrainians and Russians onto the evaluation of social groups of Ukrainians that differ in the degree of Russification of their consciousness. The empirical measurement of differences between representatives of various social groups was based on a procedure of indirect socio-cognitive assessment that determines perceived similarity/difference between

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groups. Traits were identified by which Ukrainians and Russians are perceived by students as least different, and these were used to assess employees of educational administration bodies, school teachers, university lecturers and students; consumers of Russian-language, English-language and Ukrainian-language culture; supporters of mass, elite and folk culture; believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, atheists; residents of large cities, small towns and villages; and representatives of older generations, middle-aged groups and youth. As expected, the groups assessed as most similar to Russians were consumers of Russian-language culture, believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and representatives of the older generation. Unexpected results requiring further interpretation included relatively high levels of Russification among school teachers, supporters of folk culture, and rural residents. The significance of the findings lies in identifying implicit and deeply rooted consequences of the Russification of Ukrainian identities. The development of de-russification measures is a critically important task for socio-psychological practice and further psychological research

Keywords: russification and de-russification of identities; cognitive and behavioural biases; indirect socio-cognitive assessments; traits of similarity/dissimilarity to Russians; empirically keyed scale; social groups of Ukrainians

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of studying the similarities and differences between Ukrainians and Russians is growing in the context of current socio-political changes, particularly against the backdrop of Russian aggression and the processes of national identity in Ukraine. An analysis of the social, cultural and psychological differences between these peoples helps to understand the underlying factors that determine their different paths of development, identity and political orientation. The study of aspects such as the role of language, culture, and political and moral values is of great importance for understanding not only internal processes in Ukraine but also foreign policy, particularly in the context of European integration and derussification.

The issue of similarities and differences between Ukrainians and Russians attracts the attention of many researchers – psychologists, cultural studies scholars, political scientists and other academics. In line with the contemporary socio-psychological and political-ideological context, Ukrainian researchers O. Radchenko (2022), I. Todorov (2022) and H. Pivtorak (2025) have focused primarily on the characteristics that distinguish Ukrainians from Russians. They highlight numerous differences, particularly in historical, political, national, mental, social, cultural, psychological and spiritual dimensions. Cultural differences, according to V. Zhelanova & O. Matvienko (2022), are determined by the different sociocultural practices, norms and values characteristic of each nation. Ukrainians have a more individualistic approach to social norms and values, reflected in an emphasis on individual rights, civic initiatives and social mobility.

Another important aspect is the mental and psychological differences between Ukrainians and Russians. H. Pivtorak (2025) emphasised that Ukrainians have more positive preferences, compared to Russians, regarding social norms, life priorities, moral values, traditions and habits. This includes greater flexibility in social relations, an emphasis on the importance of personal rights and freedoms, as well as a greater role

for family and community ties in society. O. Radchenko (2022) noted that Ukrainians are characterised by greater gender equality, a love of freedom, and a preference for non-authoritarian forms of government, which is reflected in greater social mobility and support for democracy. At the same time, I. Todorov (2022) drew attention to Ukrainians' affiliation with European and Euro-Atlantic civilisation, emphasising their orientation towards European values, democracy, the rule of law, and the aspiration for integration into European structures. These differences not only shape national identity but also determine the political course and social dynamics of each nation in the context of contemporary global and regional changes.

This study conducted a series of empirical investigations based on the premise that cognitive and behavioural biases may reflect mental differences between members of various social groups, including ethnic, political and others. Drawing on academic and journalistic materials, the areas of public life in which the processes of Russification of Ukrainian identities were particularly pronounced were identified: culture, education, religion, the urban environment and intergenerational interaction. The aim of the article was to highlight an attempt to indirectly transfer cognitive-behavioural constructs of similarity/dissimilarity between Ukrainians and Russians to the assessment of specific social groups of Ukrainians, which differ significantly in the degree of Russification of their consciousness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An analysis of the processes of Russification and de-russification in Ukraine must take into account their profound impact on the cultural, social and political structures that have taken shape under the influence of the Soviet past and contemporary transformations. Studying these processes provides a better understanding of how changes in Ukrainian identities are reflected at the level of national consciousness in the face of contemporary challenges. As noted by R. Suny (1993)

and R. Brubaker (1996) noted, during the Soviet period all the aforementioned social spheres were integrated into the ideological project of forming a “single Soviet people” – a supranational community designed to level out ethno-cultural differences and replace them with universalised Soviet values. Cultural forms – mass, elite and folk – were institutionally hierarchised and endowed with varying degrees of legitimacy. M. Bassin & C. Kelly (2012), as well as V. Mudrakov *et al.* (2020), noted that mass culture served as a key instrument in the formation of Homo Sovieticus, transmitting standardised models of thought, values and behaviour necessary for the reproduction of the Soviet way of life. Traditional folk culture, meanwhile, underwent folklorisation and depoliticisation. Elite culture, formally representing “high” forms of art, functioned as an instrument of symbolic legitimisation of the Soviet project, as emphasised by D. Eglitis (2002).

M. Läänemets (2023) noted that Western culture, institutionally restricted to ideologically “neutral” forms, functioned not so much as an aesthetic resource as a marker of freedom, otherness and an imagined alternative to the Soviet system. Soviet education fulfilled the important mission of cultivating the ideologically “correct” new Soviet individual, with teaching staff acting as conduits of state ideology. Alongside family upbringing, schools exerted a powerful influence on the formation of basic perceptions, values, and behavioural models, and their role in shaping the citizen was regarded as a priority of state policy, often even exceeding that of the family, as highlighted by Kaganov (2022). At the same time, the state actively combated religious beliefs prevalent in society. Teaching staff were also involved in this campaign, participating in atheist propaganda and the secularisation of the population, as noted by M. Kagalna (2015).

B. Kang (2020) and W. Partlett & H. Küpper (2022) analysed that, following the collapse of the USSR, post-Soviet states faced the task of re-evaluating the socio-cultural legacy of the colonial past and overcoming imperial-Soviet structures of influence. In the academic literature, these processes are increasingly interpreted as a specific form of Eurasian decolonisation, combining decommunisation, derussification and a broader redefinition of cultural and symbolic orders. In Ukraine, the process of purging the cultural sphere of Russian influence has long been uneven and fragmented in nature, driven by both internal socio-cultural inertia and external influences, as emphasised by V. Kulyk (2017). Under these conditions, culture continued to function as a channel for consolidating Russia’s symbolic presence, according to L. Iakubova (2018) and P. Artymyshyn & O. Kostyuk (2019). In the public perception, Russian culture is often portrayed as universal and normative, whilst Ukrainian culture is seen as secondary or confined to the realm of the traditional. Consequently, the “Russian world” ideologue was

internalised as a “natural” cultural backdrop, normalising asymmetrical notions of identity and perpetuating a sense of cultural inferiority.

The analysis of the development of domestic education conducted by M. Sliusarevskyi (2024) reflects both the process and the stages of its derussification. This involves the formation of a state education policy independent of the imperial centre, the creation of a nationally appropriate educational environment, the improvement of quality and restructuring of education, the modernisation of its content, and the establishment of a Ukrainian studies component. According to O. Danylevska (2020), legislative changes have laid the groundwork for de-russification in the field of education; however, research indicates a slow improvement in the linguistic situation within it. One of the main reasons for this is considered to be the post-totalitarian nature of education, which manifests itself in the double standards of behaviour among participants in the educational process and residual phenomena of totalitarianism.

An extremely important sphere of worldview and political self-determination for Ukrainians in wartime has become the confessional affiliation of the Orthodox majority. At the core of confessional choice lies identity – both religious and political. V. Volotovska (2024) defined religious identity as a complex, multifunctional phenomenon of identification with particular religious traditions, groups, and shared values; this identity evolves at both the societal and individual levels and constitutes a dynamic construct shaped by individuals and communities. In studying religious identity in contemporary Ukraine, P. Lakiichuk (2008) focused on the consequences of the long-term subordination of Ukrainian Orthodoxy to Moscow leadership, which led, among other things, to the erosion of ethnocultural and national layers of identification within Ukrainian society. Russian military aggression has intensified the issue of the status of religious organisations in Ukraine that are connected to Russian centres (Synchak, 2025). As any connection between churches in Ukraine and the Russian Orthodox Church is considered impossible and unacceptable, a balance must be sought between the needs of national security and the protection of believers’ rights and freedoms (Marchenko, 2025).

An important socio-psychological characteristic of the state of Ukrainian society is the relationship between believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), which, together with the Russian Orthodox Church, has been accused of promoting Russian interests (Danylenko, 2010), on the one hand, and supporters of pro-Ukrainian churches on the other. For example, notable differences were identified in the studies by T. Brik & J. Casanova (2021) and T. Kalenyshenko *et al.* (2023) regarding the influence of Orthodox churches on believers’ responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inability to reach mutual understanding generates

hostility between churches. The main actors in this confrontation are parishioners, who project their beliefs onto those around them. However, it is important to note that this confrontation is generally not radical in nature (Lakiichuk, 2008). It may be added that this confrontation was indeed milder in the pre-war period but intensified with the outbreak of war under the pressure of existential circumstances.

Historically, the Ukrainian city has been a key space of Russification, where imperial and Soviet models of modernity, prestige, and “normality” were internalised through everyday practices, the symbolic landscape, and informal social interactions. Russification functioned not only as linguistic assimilation but as a complex identity process, encompassing hierarchical thinking, paternalistic attitudes, emotional familiarity with colonial cultural codes, and the devaluation of local Ukrainian forms of sociality. In the urban environment, these patterns were long reproduced as “non-ideological” and neutral, as demonstrated in the studies of M. Certeau (1984), H. Lefebvre (1991), and M. Billig (2017). G. Breakwell (1986) and N. Ellemers *et al.* (2002) observed that the high emotional comfort associated with Russified practices, combined with a low level of reflective awareness, created persistent resistance to change, even when decolonial narratives were cognitively accepted. A key role in the overall process of de-russification is played by the informal urban environment as a space for transforming normalised identity practices: language choices, communication styles, symbolic orientations, and forms of agency. It is precisely repeated everyday practices, socially reinforced within urban space, that ensure not a situational shift but a sustained de-russification of identities, linked to the restoration of agency, horizontal solidarity, and the formation of a Ukrainian urban modernity. Discussion of de-russification in education is largely centred on the language issue. Alongside the media and the family, the school becomes an effective factor in strengthening the communicative use of the Ukrainian language (Danylevska, 2020). S. Boyko (2022) and O. Pometun (2023) associated the process of de-russification in education with cultural and national self-awareness, as well as with the formation of national-cultural identity, which should be grounded in historical truth, historical memory, national ideals, national dignity, national self-awareness, and patriotism.

The state and dynamics of Ukrainian identities are significantly shaped by intergenerational interaction. The experiences of the older generation are largely permeated by ideological stereotypes formed under the influence of Soviet ideology and the policy of Russification, which have shaped their values, views and way of life. Consequently, this experience often gives way to the bolder approaches adopted by youth in solving their problems. The younger generation's experience has largely been shaped during the era of information

technology and keeps pace with contemporary trends. The mechanism of transgeneration – the transfer of experience from the older generation to the younger – is ineffective in many situations and, in contemporary conditions, is replaced by prefiguration: the reverse process of experience transfer (Vovchuk-Blakytina, 2019; Dovhan, 2020; Senko, 2023). In family interactions between representatives of different generations, the process of experience transfer often takes on a conflictual nature (Halychanska, 2014; Makarova, 2019).

T. Seniushkina (2013) emphasised that resolving intergenerational conflict can be achieved by fostering a culture of solidarity, based on dialogue, which will enable a better understanding of the similarities and differences in acquired experience formed under different circumstances, develop a shared vision, or at least maintain respect for the positions of representatives of other generations and support from their side. The process of de-russification in the sphere of intergenerational interaction does not lie in the arguments of one generation's representatives becoming the sole solution to the problem, but in the emergence of several possible solutions and the right to choose between them without condemnation from the other generation's representatives. In general, it should be said that the transition from the ‘imperceptible’ dominance of Russified practices to their symbolic labelling creates conditions for reflection, recategorisation and a shift in the emotional valence of Ukrainian forms of identity. The latent nature of mental influence determines its persistence and highlights the need to analyse the cognitive, value-based and behavioural aspects of identity construction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The empirical study was based on a psycho-semantic procedure of indirect socio-cognitive assessment. Its essence lies in the fact that certain cognitive-behavioural traits are regarded not as attributive psychological characteristics of the groups being assessed, but as empirically selected (based on purely statistical, rather than content-related, criteria) indicators of intergroup differentiation. These indicators collectively form an empirically keyed scale. This scale is then used to determine the degree of similarity/dissimilarity between different groups as perceived by respondents. In other words, the focus is not on the actual similarity or difference of the assessed groups, but on the representation of their similarity/difference in social perceptions and categorisations. The use of psychosemantic methods has a long-standing tradition in psychological research. However, a relatively uncommon approach is the transfer of perceptual criteria developed for certain objects onto the evaluation of others, which lends the method a somewhat projective character.

At the previous stage of the empirical study, lists of cognitive and behavioural biases were reviewed in

the works of R. Nickerson (1998), G. Maccoun & R. Ratcliff (1998), M. Haselton & D. Nettle (2006), E. Pronin & M. Kugler (2007), E. Lee *et al.* (2019), R. Mohanani *et al.* (2020), Ch. Rastogi *et al.* (2022), M. Soprano *et al.* (2024), and R. Bedeley *et al.* (2025). As a result of evaluating more than 200 bias variants presented in the literature, 60 were selected that reflect similarities (or differences) in the mental characteristics of Ukrainians and Russians. The methodology of the empirical study included a survey of students from Ukrainian universities, in which 60 cognitive and behavioural characteristics of Ukrainians and Russians were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. The data were analysed using factor analysis (with varimax rotation) to identify key characteristics, as well as correlation analysis to assess relationships between the characteristics of the two groups. Assessments by students from different cultural, religious, and social groups were compared using one-way analysis of variance and the Friedman test to determine significant differences between them.

Data for the study were collected in several stages during 2025. The first stage took place in February 2025 and involved 168 students from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (109 participants) and Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (59 participants). The second stage was conducted in March 2025 and included 134 students from Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University, Izmail State University of Humanities, the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering, Uzhhorod National University, and Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. The third stage took place in May 2025 with the participation of 558 students from Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Oles Honchar Dnipro National University, Zaporizhzhia National University, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, I. I. Mechnikov Odesa National University, Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University, and Chernihiv Polytechnic National University. The empirical study programme was reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine (Protocol No. 5-VV022025). In reporting the study involving human participants, the authors state that the research was conducted in accordance with the provisions of The Declaration of Helsinki (2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At the first stage in February 2025, 168 psychology students were surveyed from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (109 individuals) and Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (59 individuals). Ukrainians and Russians were assessed in terms of the extent to which 60 cognitive and behavioural characteristics were attributed to them, using a 5-point Likert scale. A comparison of the students' assessments from the two

universities using the Mann-Whitney test revealed significant differences in only two out of the 60 characteristics: Kyiv students gave higher ratings to the trait "Ukrainians value most highly what they themselves have created" (3.91 vs 3.53), while Lviv students rated higher the trait "Russians present wishful thinking as reality" (4.36 vs 4.63; in both cases $p \leq 0.05$). Such a minimal number of differences justified treating the entire sample as homogeneous and analysing the data as a single dataset.

Significant correlations between the characteristics attributed to Ukrainians and Russians were identified for 21 out of the 60 traits. Positive correlation coefficients for 20 traits ranged from 0.154 ("Perceive random phenomena as significant"; $p \leq 0.05$) to 0.287 ("Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do"; $p \leq 0.01$). Only one trait showed a negative correlation: -0.171 ("Find strength in the unity of generations"; $p \leq 0.05$). A factor analysis (with varimax rotation) was then conducted separately for the evaluations of Ukrainians and Russians within the space of these 21 traits. In both cases, five factors were identified, explaining 54.1% and 56.2% of the total variance, respectively. Based on the results of the factor analysis, 10 traits were selected: first, those with substantial factor loadings; second, those that were strongly loaded in both analyses (for Ukrainians and Russians); and third, those representing all five factors.

The resulting list of characteristics included the following: a frequent preference for widely known information received regularly and susceptibility to its influence; a tendency to focus on negative events and expectations, as well as to overestimate the extent to which others agree with their views; a tendency to regard those who disagree with them as unintelligent; pride in the achievements of their nation and the belief that others think and feel the same as they do; reluctance to change their views and a tendency to label others while ignoring negative information about themselves. In selecting these traits, the primary criterion was not their substantive meaning but their statistical properties. To this list, six additional traits were added that characterise specific spheres of social life associated with signs of Russification: valuing education; preferring an urban lifestyle; taking pride in one's culture; believing that one's religion is the best; finding strength in the unity of generations; and engaging in social media on the Internet.

This compiled set of characteristics was used in the next stage of the study. In March 2025, 134 students were surveyed from Drohobych Ivan Franko State Pedagogical University (40 individuals), Izmail State University of Humanities (10 individuals), the National University of Water and Environmental Engineering in Rivne (50 individuals), Uzhhorod National University (11 individuals), and Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University (23 individuals). Respondents were asked, for

each of the 16 characteristics, to assess Ukrainians and neighbouring peoples – Belarusians, Bulgarians, Moldovans, Poles, Russians, Romanians, Slovaks, and Hungarians. The assessment procedure required students, for each characteristic, to select from the ten listed nations between one and three to whom the characteristic was most applicable, and between one and three to whom it was least applicable. These selections were converted into a 3-point scale: most characteristic – 3 points, least characteristic – 1 point, and the remaining nations (not selected) were assigned 2 points. A series of statistical procedures was then applied to the obtained data. As expected, the closest and positively correlated evaluations were those of Ukrainians and Poles, while the most distant and negatively correlated were those of Ukrainians and Russians.

Next, five traits were selected for which the assessments of Ukrainians and Russians appeared relatively closer: “Are influenced by information that is received frequently” (Ukrainians were rated at 2.06 out of 3, Russians at 2.59, $p \leq 0.001$), “Believe that their religion is the best” (2.4 and 2.32, difference not significant), “Focus on negative events and expectations” (2.3 and 2.17, difference not significant), “Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do” (2.05 and 2.35, $p \leq 0.01$), and “Do not like changing their views” (2.13 and 2.53, $p \leq 0.001$). Only two of the five traits showed non-significant differences. Since an instrument consisting of only two items would have been of limited use for further assessment, it was decided to retain the remaining three traits as well, even though they differentiated Ukrainians and Russians more noticeably, albeit still less than other characteristics.

At the next stage, in May 2025, 558 students were surveyed from Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (58 individuals), Oles Honchar Dnipro National University (192 individuals), Zaporizhzhia National University (27 individuals), Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (126 individuals), Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (50 individuals), I.I. Mechnikov Odesa National University (79 individuals), Volodymyr Hnatiuk Ternopil National Pedagogical University (6 individuals), and Chernihiv Polytechnic National University (20 individuals). For comparative assessments based on the five aforementioned traits, students were asked to consider groups representing Ukrainian society, classified across six domains. The categories within each group were arranged according to hypothetical assumptions regarding their similarity or dissimilarity to Russians,

with those expected to be most similar listed first, followed by others in descending order. These included employees of educational administration bodies, secondary school teachers, higher education lecturers, and students. The next group comprised consumers of different cultures: Russian-language, English-language, and Ukrainian-language. Another category included supporters of different types of culture: mass (popular), elite (high), and folk (traditional). Further groups represented adherents of different confessions: the UOC (formerly and partially under the Moscow Patriarchate), atheists, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). Separate categories included residents of large cities, small towns and settlements, and rural areas. Finally, age groups were considered: representatives of the older generation, middle-aged individuals, and youth.

Within each group and for each of the five traits, respondents selected one category to which the trait applied more strongly compared to the others (assigned 3 points) and one to which it applied less strongly (assigned 1 point); the remaining one or two categories received 2 points. The total score across all five traits was then calculated. To assess differences between groups within each domain, the distributions of total scores were tested for normality. According to the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, all distributions differed statistically from normal; however, visual inspection of the corresponding graphs raised doubts about this result. Thus, normality was further examined graphically with the assistance of ChatGPT. This analysis confirmed normal or near-normal distributions for most indicators. However, non-normality was identified in the assessments of atheists, consumers of English-language culture, and residents of large cities. Accordingly, differences between groups in the domains of education, culture (by level), and age were assessed using one-way repeated measures analysis of variance, while differences between groups based on language of culture, religious affiliation, and type of settlement were analysed using the Friedman test. All observed differences were statistically significant at the level of $p < 0.001$. The evaluations assigned to different groups within Ukrainian society are presented in Tables 1-6. According to an indirect assessment, consumers of Russian-language culture were found to be the most similar to Russians, followed by consumers of Ukrainian-language culture, and then those of English-language culture (Table 1).

Table 1. Assessments of groups in the cultural sphere by language

Group	Consumers of Ukrainian-language culture	Consumers of Russian-language culture	Consumers of English-language culture
Are influenced by information that is received frequently	2.05	2.47	1.58
Believe that their religion is the best	2.17	2.38	1.53

Table 1, Continued

Group	Consumers of Ukrainian-language culture	Consumers of Russian-language culture	Consumers of English-language culture
Focus on negative events and expectations	2.28	2.28	1.52
Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do	2.14	2.27	1.66
Do not like changing their views	1.94	2.5	1.64
Overall (average) score	10.58 (2.12)	11.9 (2.38)	7.93 (1.59)

Source: compiled by the authors

In terms of their affinity for a particular type of culture, those most similar to Russians were found to be supporters of folk (traditional) culture; those less similar were supporters of mass (popular) culture; and furthest from Russians on this scale were supporters of elite (high) culture (Table 2).

Table 2. Assessments of groups in the cultural sphere by level

Group	Supporters of elite (high) culture	Supporters of mass (popular) culture	Supporters of folk (traditional) culture
Are influenced by information that is received frequently	1.56	2.49	2.03
Believe that their religion is the best	1.88	1.68	2.5
Focus on negative events and expectations	1.67	2.2	2.19
Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do	1.63	2.26	2.15
Do not like changing their views	1.98	1.65	2.42
Overall (average) score	8.72 (1.74)	10.28 (2.06)	11.29 (2.26)

Source: compiled by the authors

In the students' unconscious perceptions, teachers of secondary education institutions were found to be the most similar to Russians; employees of educational administration bodies came next, followed by higher education lecturers and, lastly, the students themselves (Table 3).

Table 3. Assessments of groups in the field of education

Group	Teachers of secondary education institutions	Lecturers of higher education institutions	Employees of educational administration bodies	Students of higher education institutions
Are influenced by information that is received frequently	2.31	1.88	1.84	2.05
Believe that their religion is the best	2.29	2.06	2.2	1.48
Focus on negative events and expectations	2.25	1.9	1.79	2.14
Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do	2.23	1.94	2.01	1.87
Do not like changing their views	2.3	2.11	2.19	1.45
Overall (average) score	11.38 (2.28)	9.89 (1.98)	10.03 (2.01)	8.99 (1.8)

Source: compiled by the authors

By the criterion of similarity to Russians, representatives of confessional groups were arranged in the following order: believers of the UOC, believers of the OCU, believers of the UGCC, while atheists were found

to be the least similar (Table 4). Students consider rural residents to be the most similar to Russians, followed by residents of small towns and villages, whilst residents of large cities are seen as the least similar (Table 5).

Table 4. Assessments of confessional groups

Group	Atheists	Believers of the OCU	Believers of the UOC	Believers of the UGCC
Are influenced by information that is received frequently	1.51	2.17	2.38	2.01
Believe that their religion is the best	1.54	2.17	2.38	1.98
Focus on negative events and expectations	1.63	2.09	2.38	1.93
Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do	1.48	2.23	2.32	2.02
Do not like changing their views	1.73	2.06	2.32	1.96
Overall (average) score	7.89 (1.58)	10.72 (2.14)	11.78 (2.36)	9.9 (1.98)

Source: compiled by the authors

Table 5. Assessments by residents of settlements of different types

Group	Rural residents	Residents of small towns and villages	Residents of large cities
Are influenced by information that is received frequently	2.43	1.99	1.66
Believe that their religion is the best	2.66	1.99	1.41
Focus on negative events and expectations	2.05	2.07	1.94
Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do	2.34	2.06	1.66
Do not like changing their views	2.61	1.91	1.52
Overall (average) score	12.09 (2.42)	10.02 (2)	8.19 (1.64)

Source: compiled by the authors

Members of the older generation were rated as most similar to Russians, middle-aged people ranked somewhere in between, whilst youth were rated as the least similar to Russians (Table 6).

To provide a more generalised view of the comparative ratings of all the groups of Ukrainians described, the relevant data has been compiled in Figure 1.

Table 6. Views of representatives of different generations

Group	Youth	Middle-aged people	Older people
Are influenced by information that is received frequently	1.82	1.78	2.49
Believe that their religion is the best	1.34	1.9	2.82
Focus on negative events and expectations	1.76	1.96	2.34
Are convinced that others think and feel the same as they do	1.96	2.02	2.08
Do not like changing their views	1.44	1.9	2.7
Overall (average) score	8.32 (1.66)	9.56 (1.91)	12.43 (2.49)

Source: compiled by the authors

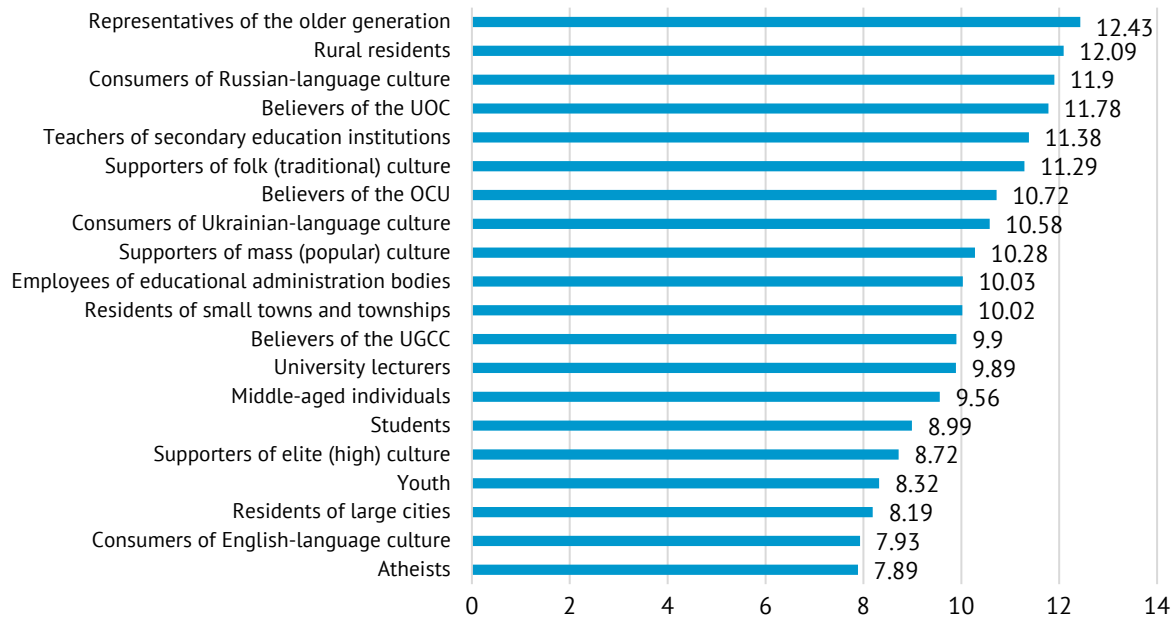


Figure 5. Total scores for all assessed group

Source: compiled by the authors

At the pole of similarity to Russians are representatives of the older generation, rural residents, consumers of Russian-language culture, and believers of the UOC. At the opposite pole are atheists, consumers of English-language culture, residents of large cities, and young people. The empirical data obtained provide grounds for conclusions about the specific nature of unconscious perceptions held by student youth towards different groups of Ukrainians in terms of their similarity/dissimilarity to Russians. In the cultural sphere, stable differences were identified between the images of various groups of cultural consumers. Assessments of consumers of Russian-language culture consistently show higher scores across all traits reflecting cognitive rigidity, a tendency towards normative thinking and conformity, inertia in cultural orientations, and heightened sensitivity to repeated informational influences. Such a profile of consumers of Russian-language cultural products reveals a structural similarity to models of cultural consumption formed during the Soviet period. Mass culture functions as a “normative background” that does not require reflection but is reproduced through habit, accessibility, and symbolic “obviousness”.

By contrast, consumers of Ukrainian-language culture occupy an intermediate position. Their scores are lower than those of the Russian-language group but higher than those of consumers of English-language cultural products. This configuration may indicate the transitional nature of the Ukrainian-language cultural space, which simultaneously bears traces of prolonged Russification and is undergoing active redefinition and internalisation of new cultural meanings. Ukrainian culture partly appears as an inertial “norm” tied to the

past, and partly as a space of choice requiring symbolic effort, conscious identification, and a rejection of established hierarchies of prestige. The results concerning levels of culture are particularly thought-provoking. The highest values were recorded among supporters of folk (traditional) culture, who therefore intuitively appear to young respondents as most similar to Russians. During the Soviet period, traditional culture was folklorised, depoliticised, and stripped of its identity-related content, effectively turning it into an ethnographic adjunct to the “great” Russian culture. In the contemporary context, traditional culture is gradually acquiring a different symbolic meaning, increasingly appearing not as a relic of the past but as a resource for cultural continuity and the restoration of agency.

The lowest scores across all traits are characteristic of supporters of elite (high) culture, making their image in students’ perceptions the most distant from that of Russians. This aligns with its historical function as a space of reflection, critical thinking, and individualised meanings, which, although subject to strict ideological control during the Soviet period, retained a potential for alternative perspectives. High scores among supporters of mass culture reproduce the logic of the Soviet cultural project, in which mass culture served as the primary instrument for the unification of consciousness and the normalisation of “correct” patterns of thinking and behaviour. In students’ assessments of groups within Ukrainian society in the field of education, teachers were found to be cognitively and behaviourally closest to Russians, followed by employees of educational administration bodies, then lecturers of higher education institutions, while student youth appeared to be the least influenced by Russian mental patterns.

These results can likely be explained by the fact that students perceive the activities of representatives of the teaching profession, especially school teachers, as subordinated to strict normative requirements, regulations, and social stereotypes. Interpreting this rather unfavourable image of teachers requires attention to their contradictory position in society. Teachers are expected, on the one hand, to comply with educational standards, and on the other, to demonstrate initiative and creativity; to adhere to prescribed curricula, principles, and demands, while also being tolerant and empathetic; to exhibit high moral qualities while simultaneously showing conformity and a willingness to compromise in the interests of the majority; and to maintain both physical and mental well-being despite often low material and economic conditions. Behind the declared values of democracy, innovation, social reflexivity, a mature system of values, and student-centredness, there may in reality emerge authoritarianism, rigidity, resistance to change, blurred values, and a lack of reflexivity (Petrunko, 2016).

The teaching community operates under the influence of complex and often challenging factors, as well as contradictory social trends that it cannot manage independently. As a result, its members may more readily resort to simpler, more familiar, and more stereotypical patterns of behaviour and self-definition, which can lead students to perceive them, to some extent, as somewhat outdated figures associated with the Soviet-Russian past. The most general conclusion regarding perceptions within the sphere of religious confessions is that, in students' assessments, believers of the UOC appear cognitively and behaviourally closest to Russians. This is unsurprising and logical, given that both the followers and leadership of this church are often characterised by a stronger orientation towards influences associated with Russian contexts. They are followed by believers of the OCU, whose proximity to UOC adherents may seem somewhat unexpected in light of their mutual ideological and confessional opposition. This may be explained, on the one hand, by political differences that distinguish these two confessions, and on the other, by shared Orthodox religious norms and stereotypes that bring their followers closer together.

Next on this scale are believers of the UGCC, who, in line with expectations, appear more distant from Russian influences and, it may be assumed, closer to their European Catholic counterparts. Respondents identified atheists as the least influenced by Russian mental patterns, which may seem surprising, given that contemporary atheism is often viewed as a legacy of Soviet ideological anti-religious pressure – an influence that historically affected Russians even more strongly than Ukrainians. Assessments of residents of different types of settlements reveal a paradox: rural inhabitants appear most similar to Russians, while residents of large cities appear the least similar, despite the fact that

urban environments have historically been – and often remain – spaces where the Russian language, culture, and, to some extent, identity have been dominant. This may be explained by the fact that living in an urban environment is associated with greater social differentiation, broader access to diverse sources of information, and more frequent interaction with people holding different views. In turn, this tends to reduce susceptibility to cognitive simplifications and categorical judgements.

Higher scores among rural residents – particularly in terms of confidence in their own views, lower willingness to change them, and greater sensitivity to informational influence – may be explained by a more homogeneous social environment, stronger traditional norms, and more limited access to alternative sources of information. Rural communities have historically remained more Ukrainian-speaking, culturally homogeneous, and traditional, with a more pronounced role of shared values, religion, and local identity. In such conditions, there is typically a stronger orientation towards consensus, stability, and a shared perception of reality, which may manifest in greater confidence in one's beliefs, less readiness to revise them, and increased responsiveness to information that reinforces established views. As expected, representatives of the older generation were found to be most similar to Russians. In addition to having experienced the strongest Russification influences, another factor likely played a role: when evaluating different generations, students may have implicitly identified themselves with younger people, whose views and behaviours they regarded as a kind of benchmark. The perception of the older generation as closer to Russians may, on the one hand, indicate a certain value gap between age groups and, on the other, reflect age-related biases present among some young people.

An interesting finding is that the older generation is characterised both by susceptibility to informational influence and by a reluctance to change their views. This suggests that older individuals may be less critical in their reception of information and more prone to drawing inaccurate conclusions. The ways in which representatives of the older generation interact with information were shaped during the Soviet period, when the dominant ideology required unconditional trust in information disseminated through mass communication or by authorised figures. Accordingly, the observed similarity between Ukrainians and Russians whose identities were formed in that historical period appears logical. The relatively small distance between younger and middle-aged individuals indicates their mental proximity in the eyes of students, alongside their shared distance from Russians. In their interaction with information, as in many other areas, middle-aged individuals serve as a kind of bridge between generations. Early in their lives, they were influenced by Soviet censorship and restrictions; their youth coincided with independence and the emergence of informational

freedom; and their most active years have taken place during the expansion of the Internet and social media. This diversity of contexts has provided this generation with the greatest cognitive and behavioural flexibility in engaging with information.

Young people differ from middle-aged individuals in the relative lack of such contextual diversity. They have been born and raised in the era of the Internet and social media, where real and virtual life are not merely complementary but form parts of a single whole. Accordingly, their level of trust in repeated information is somewhat higher, as their exposure to information is more constant and immediate. One consequence of this may be increased vulnerability to propaganda – not through past experience, as with the older generation, but through its concealment within contemporary mass culture. This makes the issue of de-russification not less, but even more relevant. Within the broader societal context shared by all the groups assessed, those found to be most similar to Russians were representatives of the older generation, rural residents, consumers of Russian-language culture, believers of the UOC, teachers, and supporters of folk culture. These groups may, to some extent, be broadly characterised as the most traditional within Ukrainian society of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. The most unexpected findings here are the assessments of rural residents and supporters of folk culture as similar to Russians.

At the opposite pole are students, supporters of elite culture, young people, residents of large cities, consumers of English-language culture, and atheists. These groups are more strongly associated with images of modernity, dynamism, and a future-oriented outlook. Particularly surprising are the positions assigned to residents of large cities and, to some extent, supporters of elite culture and atheists. The main limitation of the study lies in the complexity and only relative validity of the indirect assessment method employed. Transferring a scale derived from one set of groups to another gives the method a strongly projective character and reduces the objectivity of the conclusions. The precision of the scale is also limited, as it is based on respondents' subjective selection of more and less appropriate objects of evaluation, subsequently converted into ordinal scores. Further reservations may be raised regarding the structure of the student samples at different stages of the study, which were either random or convenience-based.

The study also revealed the significant influence of modern information technologies on the development of Ukrainian identities, particularly in the context of Russification and de-russification. The findings provide a basis for comparison with other studies examining similar aspects of media and technological influence on national identities. As noted by T. Hurlieva (2019) and O. Sorokina (2025), trust in information depends on individual knowledge, media literacy, and critical thinking, which is reflected in the high level of distrust

towards information sources among Ukrainians during wartime. This aligns with the findings of Boyko (2025), which also indicate a low level of trust, representing a new dimension in understanding de-russification. At the same time, the importance of religious identity as a complex, multifunctional phenomenon has been emphasised by V. Volotovska (2024), while the role of Orthodoxy in Ukraine during wartime has also been explored in the works of P. Lakiichuk (2008) and other researchers, including B. Synchak (2025) and A. Marchenko (2025).

Another important aspect is intergenerational interaction, where research by O. Vovchyk-Blakytina (2019) and N. Dovhan (2020) has highlighted a shift in the mechanism by which experience is passed on from the older to the younger generation, particularly through prefiguration, which underscores a new approach to learning and the transmission of values in the contemporary context. Research findings on intergenerational conflicts, notably the works of A. Halychanska (2014) and M. Makarova (2019), have confirmed the importance of fostering a culture of solidarity and dialogue to overcome these differences. At the same time, this study expands on these arguments, pointing to the symbolic marking of Russified practices and the need for changes in the mental sphere, which allows for the formation of new identities through reflection and recategorisation.

R. Bedeley *et al.* (2025) analysed how cognitive biases influence the perception and dissemination of information on online opinion platforms. The authors demonstrate that biases such as confirmation bias, the groupthink effect and algorithmic “bubbles” significantly shape what people consider to be “authoritative” content. This is directly linked to the fact that trust in information depends on individual knowledge, context and media literacy, as R. Bedeley *et al.* (2025) demonstrate that it is precisely cognitive biases that can limit the ability to critically evaluate sources. In the context of Russification/de-russification, this emphasises that informational influences are not only technological but also cognitive: Ukrainians may perceive messages differently depending on their own biases, creating heterogeneous visualisations of reality. Thus, the study by R. Bedeley *et al.* (2025) confirmed the thesis regarding the importance of critical thinking and information literacy, but expands upon it by demonstrating that technological platforms themselves structurally bias information flows. M. Billig (2017) developed the concept of “banal nationalism” – almost imperceptible everyday practices through which national identity is constantly reproduced and maintained. M. Billig (2017) argues that national identity is not always expressed through major symbolic events or conflicts, but rather in the mundane, routine use of language, symbols, cultural markers, ways of thinking, and even everyday media practices. This correlates very well with the fact that the

processes of Russification/de-russification were not “visible” until a certain point, but became dominant precisely through the constant daily practices taking place in the information space. M. Billig (2017) reinforced the argument that the transition from latent Russification to its symbolic visibility is not merely the result of war, but a logical continuation of the daily reproduction of narratives (often unconscious). Overall, this study aligns with previous works, reinforcing conclusions regarding changes in cultural identities, yet offers new approaches to analysing the influence of information technologies and intergenerational interactions in the process of de-russification.

In particular, the Ukrainian mental space contains a tension between inherited models of Soviet-Russian cultural hegemony and new forms of symbolic self-determination. The mass consciousness of Ukrainians continues to reproduce cognitive and behavioural patterns formed under conditions of Russification, yet at the same time becomes a space for rethinking and re-discovering identity. It is within this dynamic that the deeper meaning of the processes of de-russification emerges, not merely as a linguistic or political phenomenon, but above all as a socio-psychological one, reflecting the transition from an inertial mental heritage to the active (re)construction of national identity.

CONCLUSIONS

A generalisation of the obtained indicators provided grounds for concluding that, among the six groups described, the expected assessments (as the most Russified according to the relevant traits) were those of consumers of Russian-language culture, believers of the UOC, and representatives of the older generation. The first group displayed a natural inclination towards Russian meanings that constitute the core content of Russian/Russian-language culture. For the second group, such an inclination is both a cause and a consequence of their heightened attachment to “everything Russian”. Older individuals appeared more closely tied to Russianness primarily due to an age-related factor: their youth took place under the influence of Soviet-era Russification. By contrast, relatively high assessments of school teachers, supporters of folk (traditional) culture, and rural residents (who are predominantly ethnic Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speaking) should be regarded as rather unexpected. It is likely that teachers appear as the most mentally Russified due to their well-internalised hierarchical dependence on official trends and requirements, as well as a considerable degree of stereotyped thinking and behaviour, at least in comparison with students, university lecturers, and even employees of educational administration bodies.

The images of supporters of folk (traditional) culture and rural residents substantially overlap: in the analysed context, they appear similar to one another in terms of the level of mental Russification, while

simultaneously differing in this respect from supporters of both mass (popular) and elite (high) culture, as well as from residents of small towns and large cities. From a common-sense perspective, the opposite might have been expected. It is possible that an effect of normativity and traditionalism operated here as a shared feature in the evaluation of these groups and Russians. It was found that residents of large cities were assessed as the least Russified, despite their greatest involvement in the Russian-language and Russian cultural space. In the eyes of student youth, urban residents represent a more attractive social group as carriers of contemporary Ukrainisation trends. As for the perception of atheists as dissimilar to Russians, it may be assumed that their lower susceptibility to Russifying influences is seen as a manifestation of their internal mental independence from authority.

The main significance of the results lies in identifying implicit and deep-rooted consequences of the Russification of Ukrainian identities. Notable discrepancies emerge between widespread social perceptions of the positions of particular groups of Ukrainians on the scale of Russification and the recorded data on the unconscious attribution of corresponding traits to them. Accordingly, clarifying the possibilities of de-russification, as well as developing and applying appropriate measures, is an extremely important task for socio-psychological practice and psychological research. This should take into account not only the obvious and visible manifestations of Russification but also the subtle, deep psychological characteristics of carriers of Ukrainian identities. Further research should focus on a more in-depth study of the psychological mechanisms that contribute to subtle yet powerful processes of Russification, as well as on the development of effective methods of de-russification, focusing not only on explicit cultural changes but also on profound psychological and mental transformations.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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Опосередкована оцінка схожості/несхожості окремих груп українців на росіян: очікуване і несподіване

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Анотація. Актуальність цього дослідження полягає в необхідності розуміння глибинних психологічних та культурних процесів русифікації українських ідентичностей, що є важливим для розробки ефективних стратегій дерусифікації в умовах сучасних соціальних і політичних змін. Мета дослідження полягала в спробі опосередкованого перенесення когнітивно-поведінкових конструктів схожості/несхожості українців і росіян на оцінку соціальних груп українців, які різняться за ступенем русифікації їхньої свідомості. Емпіричне вимірювання відмінностей між представниками різних соціальних груп базувалося на процедурі непрямой соціально-когнітивної оцінки, що визначає сприйману подібність/відмінність між групами. Було визначено риси, за якими українці та росіяни найменше відрізняються у сприйнятті студентами, що використовуються для оцінки працівників органів управління освіти, шкільних учителів, викладачів університетів і студентів, споживачів російськомовної, англomовної та україномовної культури, прихильників масової, елітної та народної культури; віруючих Української Православної Церкви, Православної Церкви України, Української Греко-Католицької Церкви, атеїстів, мешканців великих міст, малих міст та сіл; представників старших поколінь, середнього віку та молоді. Очікувано, що групи, які оцінювалися як найбільш подібні до росіян, були споживачами російськомовної культури, віруючими Української Православної Церкви та представниками старшого покоління. Неочікувані результати, які потребують додаткового тлумачення, включали відносно високі оцінки русифікації серед шкільних учителів, прихильників народної культури та сільських мешканців. Значення отриманих результатів полягає у виявленні неявних та глибоко вкорінених наслідків русифікації українських ідентичностей. Розробка засобів дерусифікації є критично важливим завданням для соціально-психологічної практики та подальших психологічних досліджень

Ключові слова: русифікація і дерусифікація ідентичностей; когнітивні та поведінкові упередження; опосередковані соціально-когнітивні оцінки; риси схожості/несхожості на росіян; емпірично ключована шкала; соціальні групи українців