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# The Value of Higher Education in a Population of Students of Marketing and Media Communication in the Stage of the Universalization of Education

## ABSTRACT

Higher education is undergoing a period of universalization, characterized by digitalization and shifting perceptions of study. This is characterized by accelerated digitalization of educational processes and significantly changing conceptions and perceptions of study. In this context, it is important to consider the value of study not only in terms of applying oneself economically, but also from the perspective of subjective experience, motivation, and the development of relevant competencies for life in the information society. This case study identifies the perception of higher education values among students at the University of Finance and Administration in Prague, based on Martin Trow's theoretical framework. It examines how these perceptions reflect students' motivation and readiness to develop critical competencies for life in a digitalized culture. A comparative analysis focuses on differences between students in programs with integrated media/digital literacy (Marketing/Media group – MM) and those without such training (Criminology/Law/Finance group – CLF). The quantitative survey (N=289) shows that while over 90% of respondents feel pride in their studies and exhibit goal orientation, the main findings indicate a shift toward pragmatic value and an erosion of academic ambitions. Significant findings include cognitive and emotional alienation: approximately one-third of students (34% MM, 29% CLF) feel bored in class. Most students (64% MM, 57% CLF) prioritize passing exams over achieving good grades, suggesting a weakening relationship to education as an intrinsic value. In the social-interactive dimension, MM students show a higher willingness to discuss course content (75%) compared to CLF students (63%). Furthermore, roughly 40% of students feel uncertainty about their professional future. These findings reinforce the thesis that intrinsic motivation is decisive for strengthening knowledge and skills in contemporary digital society.

## KEY WORDS

Critical Thinking. Digital Cultural Capital. Digital Literacy. Higher Education. Media Literacy. Student Motivation. Universalization.

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# 1 Introduction

Over the past several decades there have been significant changes in the sphere of higher education at both the institutional and value levels (Antonopoulou et al., 2023; Breetzke et al., 2024). The universalization of education, together with the increasing digitalization of educational processes, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is fundamentally changing the concept of higher education, forms of instruction, and students' very perceptions of their studies (Erdmann et al., 2021; Roubal, 2023a). In this context, there is a renewed need to review the value of higher education, not only in terms of applying oneself economically and meeting the needs of the labour market, but also from the perspective of the subjective experiences, motivations, and value orientations of the student population.

In the era of the information society, it is increasingly difficult to understand information and form it into a coherent, consistent, and objective body of knowledge that corresponds to the reality of events. Not only is it becoming more complicated to create knowledge capital from the excess of data, information, and the extension of digital communication platforms, but the demands are growing for understanding, sorting, verifying, and integrating information for the purpose of authentic comprehension and understanding of events in various contexts of social reality. At the same time, the ability of the individual to understand the surrounding world is diminishing, the level of disorientation is increasing, and feelings of alienation are growing, all resulting in the erosion of the integrity of a person's identity (Hiaeshutter-Rice et al., 2024; Arnold et al., 2023). The digitalization and virtualization of media and increasingly sophisticated technology are increasing the speed of production, the scope of information and communication platforms, and the reach of information distribution as part of a regimen of permanent online connection (Sarala et al., 2024). However, more information and more frequent communication and sharing of media content does not necessarily mean more truth and real knowledge.

In the context of to some extent justifiably sceptical reflection on the information society of the digital age, there is a growing need within (not only) higher education to increase media literacy, strengthen digital skills, and cultivate digital cultural capital (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). It can be assumed that one of the main conditions for meeting these needs and the requirements of education systems is the motivation of students to seek the truth, strive for knowledge, identify with traditional values of education, have self-confidence in the pursuit of knowledge, and be willing to think critically, discuss, and listen patiently. The fact that intrinsic and authentic motivation to become educated, and willingness to learn closely correspond to the development of media and digital literacy has been confirmed by certain recent studies (Lilian, 2022; Berestova et al., 2022; Tian & Park, 2022). These studies show that students with higher intrinsic motivation and a desire for knowledge achieve better digital competencies and abilities to distinguish, sort, and evaluate various media content. Academic motivation, specifically focused on self-improvement and a deeper understanding of reality, is also an important predictive factor in the development of critical thinking.

The discourse on media, information, and digital literacy has intensified in recent years. Most research interests focus on the systemic aspects of these phenomena, technological and institutional frameworks, or social and psychological impacts (Pangrazio et al., 2020; Damasceno, 2021; Tinmaz et al., 2022; Aydinlar et al., 2024). However, significantly less attention is paid to the actors themselves, i.e., the students who are both the recipients and bearers of changing educational and professional expectations. Marketing and media communication students, in particular, find themselves in a unique position. On the one hand, they are intensively prepared for professional performance in the digital economy, media industry, and information society; on the other hand, they are simultaneously being shaped by the structural pressures of the academic world, in which the current stage of massification and universalization of education is gradually blurring traditional ideas about the meaning and value of university education. The development of media literacy, critical thinking, and digital competencies cannot be understood

solely as a technical or institutional issue, but above all as a process deeply influenced and shaped by students' intrinsic motivation, their values, and how they perceive the meaning and benefits of higher education.

The current stage of the universalization of higher education, in the context of Trow's (2010) theory, is bringing about increased accessibility of study. At the same time, questions on the quality, relevance, and value of the educational process are being updated. The expansion of digitalized forms of teaching, the growing trend of converting the educational process to virtual online formats, and the pressure on students to assume individual responsibility, along with increasing demands on their ability to learn independently, self-regulate, and motivate themselves, are fundamentally transforming the traditional concept of study (Sikora et al., 2023). In the context of the universalization of higher education, without an active and positive relationship between students and education, it is not possible to expect a deeper acquisition of complex competencies, including media literacy, the ability to think critically, and qualified orientation in the digitalized and technologized reality of everyday life. The discourse on media and digital literacy should therefore not be limited to examining the narrative of the forms and content of media education, educational strategies for increasing digital competencies, and the institutional and technical conditions for strengthening digital competencies. It is crucial to understand the student population itself, identify their motivations for studying and their relationship to the value and meaning of education, detect the level of their ambitions, and understand their ideas about future career opportunities.

This study focuses on students at a private university in Prague, the University of Finance and Administration. The research problem focuses on determining how students of different bachelor's study programs subjectively perceive the value of higher education according to whether their studies include or exclude subjects relevant to media and digital literacy. The theoretical starting point is the thesis that intrinsic motivation to study, interest in knowledge, the desire to develop critical thinking, the courage to discuss, the willingness to express one's own opinion, and an overall positive and active approach to study, are the basic prerequisites for the development of media literacy and digital cultural capital. The theoretical argument is based on Trow's (2010) concept, which explains the process of transformation from elite to mass and universal higher education. A similarly oriented concept can be found in the domestic environment, for example, in the work of Keller and Tvrdý (2008). This conceptual framework allows us to understand how changes in the accessibility of study affect students' motivation and, at the same time, influence their attitudes toward the values of education. The empirical part allows us to compare and evaluate two different student populations. One group of students consists of students enrolled in study programs whose plans of study include subjects that directly or indirectly support media literacy, working with AI, sociological knowledge of the media environment, and the psychological consequences of its impact on people and society. The second group of students consists of those who are not undergoing this type of media training, and whose plans of study do not include the relevant subjects on media and digital literacy at all, or contain only marginal content in the form of elective courses. At the more general level of knowledge, it contributes to understanding the role of intrinsic motivation, purposefulness, ambition, aspirations, and attitudes toward the value of study in the development of abilities, skills, and knowledge for life in an era of the universalization and extensive democratization of access to higher education.

## **2 Background**

The development of digital communication and information technologies has brought about fundamental changes at the social, cultural, political, and economic levels of contemporary society. They represent a challenge in a changing and fluctuating modern society, to which

it is necessary to respond systematically and comprehensively at all levels of education. This requires new skills and effective models for educational strategies that can respond directly to the conditions of digitalized online culture and the virtualization of everyday life. This does not consist solely of technical skills and user competence in digital technologies, but above all the ability to critically reflect on their social role, interpret media content, and evaluate and classify information. The tertiary education sector in particular must respond responsibly to these social demands when preparing future graduates.

Part of these competencies is the development of media literacy, based in an interdisciplinary way on sociological, anthropological, cultural, behavioural, and psychological knowledge, enabling the training of critical and reflective thinking, which is becoming essential for navigating the digital environment. An actor with media literacy is able to critically evaluate sources of information, verify these sources, and more aptly recognize disinformation, understand the mechanisms and motives behind the dissemination of media content, and be cognizant of the risk of manipulation (Voitovych et al., 2025). In the era of the information society, this strengthens the ability of citizens not only to consume but also to create high-quality and relevant content.

In addition, it is necessary to build digital cultural capital (Feng & Tan, 2024), i.e., a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable the effective use of digital technologies for carrying out a profession, education, and an active life in social dimensions of behaviour. Digital capital is not merely technical proficiency, but also the ability to navigate the social, ethical, and cultural aspects of online communication. The information society brings not only new opportunities for connecting people and sharing knowledge, but also serious risks in the form of the virtualization of interpersonal relationships, paradoxical feelings of isolation, the spread of disinformation, and the strengthening of social bubbles (Stein et al., 2023). If education systems do not pay sufficient attention to these phenomena, there is a risk of deepening digital inequality, increasing feelings of alienation, and eroding trust in social institutions. The role of universities is to moderate and motivate students to be active, courageous, and responsible, and to positively stimulate their interest in knowledge and education as universal cultural values. Only on this basis is it possible to further build lifelong development of media literacy and critical thinking.

In media and sociological discourse, there is relatively rich empirical evidence tracking various contexts of the importance of increasing media and digital literacy at the university level. At the same time, the discourse contains a rich source of knowledge about attitudes toward media literacy, the importance of digital competencies, and the ability to think critically among students and academics.

We observe a consensus in the belief that the development of media literacy is more important for students than at any time in the past. A monograph by Hobbs (2024) supports the role of critical thinking and offers strategies for reinforcing it in the form of motivating students to ask questions, distrust media content, and learn to question it. It draws attention to vulnerability to media influences due to digital addiction and the need for permanent online connection. The second edition addresses topics such as artificial intelligence, personalization of algorithms, data protection, and global regulation of media. Against the backdrop of this monograph, we can also recall Spitzer's (2012) highly critical and oft-cited reflection on digital society.

Wuyckens et al. (2022) provide a systematic review of scientific production focused on information, media, and digital literacy. Based on an analysis of expert review studies, they identify the main findings in the areas of these types of literacy. At the same time, they point out ambiguities and the lack of scientific consensus in the definitions and mutual delineation of these different types of literacy. They highlight the complexities of their theoretical integration and the problems with the methods for measuring, evaluating, and interpreting them.

One of the later, more comprehensive literature reviews analyzes empirical findings from international research over the past eleven years, tracking the digital literacy of university students, including those studying in pedagogical fields (Gutiérrez-Ángel et al., 2022). The results clearly demonstrate the irreplaceable role of courses that promote digital literacy and orientation in a

media-saturated environment. The importance of technological skills, working with databases, digital design of content, and the ability to edit, publish, and share online content is growing. It also identified more extensive studies focusing on digital competence and the use of the internet, social networks, Web 2.0, and digital risks. Some other studies link digital literacy to psychological factors such as motivation and attitudes towards learning. This confirms the assumption of this study about the relevance of the interrelationship between media literacy and digital cultural capital on the one hand, and attitudes towards the values of learning and student motivation on the other.

Lilian (2022) examines the relationship between motivational belief strategies and digital literacy in online university education. Motivational beliefs represent an intrinsic, authentic type of motivation that leads individuals to independently and purposefully develop certain specific competencies, as well as their overall personality. The objective of her research is to help students and academics identify appropriate motivational approaches for strengthening digital literacy. Although there are many studies on student motivation in general, research on specific motivational belief strategies for the development of digital competencies is still limited. Based on three research hypotheses, 583 responses were analyzed using the method of structural modelling (SEM-PLS). The results confirmed a positive and significant relationship between motivational belief strategies and levels of digital literacy. This shows that self-confidence and intrinsic motivation play a crucial role in cultivating digital skills and preparing students for the digital future. Similarly, Liu (2023) examines motivation, attitudes toward learning, self-confidence, and perceptions of credit-bearing information literacy courses among graduate students at a Chinese research university. A mixed methodological approach was used, involving 405 standardized questionnaires and ten in-depth interviews. The results showed that a higher level of intrinsic motivation and awareness of the usefulness of completing information literacy courses positively correlates with their self-confidence in working with information, as well as their ability to sort and evaluate information.

Given the doubts about the reliability of information on social networks and the epistemological beliefs of users, it is important to examine how the actors themselves evaluate information sources and the structure of knowledge. Uslu & Durak (2022) created a structural model examining the relationships between epistemological beliefs, online information search strategies, personality traits, and information literacy. Data were collected from 190 university students and analyzed using the SEM-PLS method. The results showed a significant relationship between social network-specific epistemological beliefs and information search strategies. Among personality traits, agreeableness and neuroticism were mainly associated with social network beliefs. Conscientiousness has the greatest influence on information search strategies.

At the same time, media discourse highlights the importance of the relationship between digital literacy, study motivation, and online education courses. Holm (2025) examines the relationship between digital literacy and student academic performance in an online anatomy and physiology course. He further evaluates how various aspects of digital literacy, such as age and prior education in the natural sciences, affect student grades. Analysis of the data using logistic regression showed that some dimensions of digital literacy are decisive for the quality of exam results. For example, students with a background in science achieved higher levels of digital skills, highlighting the importance of prior education in promoting digital literacy in online learning. The study's conclusions stress that digital literacy is a critical factor for success in online education, not only as a technical skill, but as a complex competency that influences academic performance.

Digital literacy is a skill for higher education and an essential component of a professional foundation. Given the deep and widespread penetration of digital technologies into everyday life, technological skills represent a set of competencies that can be applied in various spheres of professional and personal life. A study by Vodă et al. (2022) expands academic knowledge of digital literacy among different types of students in different contexts of their studies.

The research was conducted during the coronavirus pandemic, when there was significant progress in the use of digital technologies. The study took a quantitative approach and utilized ANOVA, CFA, and SEM analyses. The results showed that students in the social sciences develop more digital skills in the areas of communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and technical proficiency. In contrast, humanities students demonstrated a higher level of digital creativity and work with information.

Media literacy and digital skills are decisive for personal communication and social interaction not only among children and adolescents, but also among adults and, increasingly, the population of seniors (Roubal, 2023b). However, these skills are most often and most fluently developed in the family, among peers, at school, and in extracurricular activities. Šušterič et al. (2025) place media literacy within the broader framework of social power relations and interpret it as a form of digital cultural capital that influences media preferences, especially among children and adolescents. This study is based on a thematic analysis of interviews with 67 pupils and students aged 12-19 and examines how different social contexts contribute to the development of their media skills. They focus on parental approaches to media in the home, the limited opportunities for formal media education in schools, and the importance of peer networks for advanced media practices. The authors of the study demonstrate that media literacy is not an isolated and individualized phenomenon, but a socially conditioned type of digital capital, generated and shared in power relations and unequal social structures.

Design methods rank among innovative forms of education in the field of media literacy and new forms of combating disinformation. Design methods have long been used as tools in education and, ever more frequently, as approaches to addressing social issues. Meron (2024) examines how design approaches could be newly used in media literacy education, particularly in the context of combating disinformation. He draws on the theory of defamiliarization from the field of creative practice and design research and proposes the use of graphic design as a means of communication for working with media literacy. Based on case studies and theoretical frameworks, the author evaluates the effectiveness of defamiliarization and design as research and pedagogical tools. He emphasizes innovative design strategies capable of adequately responding to current problems and issues in the media environment.

Smith & Storrs (2023) concentrate their research focus on the university population and their attitudes toward digital literacy in the context of both study and everyday life. The research was conducted on a sample of 496 students at a Canadian university and focused on the relationship between digital literacy and social media use in various fields of study. Students consider social media to be a useful tool for collaboration, discussion, information retrieval, and learning. Data analysis confirms the hypothesis that while students attach great importance to digital literacy, they are lacking its stronger integration into the subjects of the curriculum. The authors of the study therefore recommend greater integration of digital literacy into teaching across disciplines and professional fields. The importance of educational support for digital literacy and the fight against disinformation, not only at the level of legal and technological solutions, but also in civic policies, is also emphasized by other studies (Sádaba & Salaverría, 2023; Lilja et al., 2024).

The basic conditions for increasing media literacy include the individual cultivation of critical thinking. However, there are relatively few studies in the scholarly literature that focus on the link between social media use, media literacy, and critical thinking among students. Shieh & Nasongkhla (2024) therefore examine the influence of motivation to use social networks on students' media literacy and critical thinking. The authors of the study assume that participation in social networks brings a number of potential benefits to university students. Online interaction provides them with an opportunity to develop self-control, tolerance for the opinions of others, healthy expression of emotions, and critical thinking and decision-making. The study involved 211 students from two universities in Bangkok. The results of the study show a significant positive correlation between motivation to use social networks and critical thinking. Students with higher scores in information literacy also demonstrated stronger abilities to think critically

and make rational decisions. According to the findings of the study, media literacy and critical thinking can be considered interrelated competencies.

In the digital age, media and information literacy are constantly evolving. Kutlu-Abu & Arslan (2023) analyze 776 scientific studies on media literacy from 2000–2021 using the VOSviewer program for bibliometric analysis. Here a clearly growing level of scientific interest was confirmed, as evidenced by the rapidly increasing number of citations in certain topics of media and communication studies. Over the past six years, media and information literacy, citizenship, anti-colonial approaches, and communication and education have ranked among the most frequently used keywords. The discussion focuses on the most cited authors and emerging subtopics that are expanding the research base. The most frequently cited institutions include Penn State University Harrisburg, the University of California in Los Angeles, the Salzburg Global Seminar, and Emerson College.

The current state of knowledge in the field of digital, information, and media literacy can be characterized as dynamically growing and highly interdisciplinary. An analysis of professional sources shows that these competencies are perceived as essential not only for successful study at universities, but also for professional employment and active civic participation. Several dominant thematic lines can be identified in the scholarly discourse. The first of these is the question of conceptualizing and terminologically defining the individual literacies and their mutual relationships, which is accompanied by methodological difficulties, overall ambiguity, and a lack of scholarly consensus in their evaluation and measurement. The second line consists of empirical studies emphasizing the links between digital or information literacy and academic performance, motivational factors, and the perception of one's own competencies. It is precisely under this line of research, which is lacking more specific empirical knowledge about the situation of student populations in different educational contexts and regions of the world, that we can classify this study. Another important area of research is the influence of digital technologies, social networks, and the online environment on the formation of critical thinking and the ability to resist disinformation. Last but not least, there is interest in the role of educational institutions, family environment, and peer groups in shaping these skills, whereas the results suggest that the process of developing digital and media literacy is comprehensively conditioned by the broader sociocultural context. At the same time, it appears that these competencies do not have only positive effects. Some studies point to their ambivalent effects, for example in connection with the problematic use of digital technologies. Overall, it can be said that the discourse emphasizes the need for a systematic, long-term, and interdisciplinary approach to the cultivation of digital, information, and media literacy that reflects both the opportunities and risks associated with the digital transformation of society.

### **3 Trow's Theory**

The quantitative expansion of higher education and its relative accessibility has been linked to many different processes of differentiation (e.g., diversification of the student and graduate population, higher education institutions, types of study programs) and integration (e.g., consolidation and mergers of universities, intensification of inter-university cooperation, interconnection of the international higher education space, implementation of the Bologna Process). Current processes of differentiation and integration of university education in European countries are taking place in different national contexts and cultures (Börjesson & Dalberg, 2021). The massification of higher education and its consequences can best be illustrated by Martin Trow's (1973, 2010) model of three types of higher education systems. Trow defined three basic stages of development of tertiary education, and thus three types of higher education systems: elite, mass, and universal. Incidentally, we see a certain parallel to this concept in Czech sociological thinking in the work of Keller and Tvrdý (2008), with the difference that they chose

specific metaphors to describe the stages of development of higher education: the temple, the elevator, and the insurance agency. Trow characterized and explained the individual phases of higher education in terms of their functions, goals, and other qualitative characteristics, but also in quantitative terms based on the proportion of enrolled students from the corresponding age group. He set the threshold for the transition from the elite to the mass type at 15% and the threshold for the transition from the mass type to the universal type at 50% (Trow, 1973).

The elite stage (education as a temple) is characterized by the participation of a maximum of 15% of students from the relevant age cohort. In this stage, higher education is considered a privilege reserved for the most talented individuals, usually from families with higher cultural, economic, and social capital. The main goal is to form a narrow professional elite that will hold decision-making and executive positions in society with a high degree of prestige. An emphasis is placed on character development and classical education of students in the spirit of the traditions and standards of knowledge of the academic world of universities. Relationships between students and teachers are often personal and intensive. Studies are mainly conducted in person, and students are enrolled full-time.

The mass phase (education as an elevator) occurs when the proportion of students reaches 15-50% of the relevant age group. At this stage, higher education becomes a right or entitlement for all those who meet the basic conditions for admission, such as passing a secondary school leaving exam. The function of higher education expands to include the preparation of a broader range of experts, consultants, managers, and technicians needed to manage and operate various sectors of the economy and society. Education systems undergo diversification with the aim of enabling the acquisition of specific skills and knowledge. Relationships between students and teachers are much more often anonymous and, given the growing number of students, increasingly lack a personal and intimate character. At the same time, the number of students combining their studies with gainful employment increases, the duration of studies generally lengthens, and interest grows in alternative forms of full-time study. The institutional infrastructure of higher education institutions becomes more professional and centralized in order to effectively manage the growing number of students and administrative tasks.

The universal stage (education as insurance) occurs when more than 50% of the relevant age cohort enters tertiary education. At this stage, higher education is perceived as almost essential for successful integration into society and the labour market.

And when the proportion of the whole population comes to be about 50 percent, and in certain sectors of the society it is then of course much higher, attendance in higher education is increasingly seen as an obligation: for children from the middle and upper middle classes, in European countries as well as in the United States, failure to go on to higher education from secondary school is increasingly a mark of some defect of mind or character that has to be explained or justified or apologized for. (Trow, 1973, p. 7).

Tertiary education becomes part of continuing education, with students often combining their studies with work or family responsibilities, and in many cases, studying itself becomes one of numerous parallel and interconnected stages of life. The profiles of education systems become more flexible and individualized in order to meet the diverse life needs of students. Relationships between students and teachers are less intensive, and studies often take place in various distance-learning forms in regimens of online teaching or combined studies, adapted to the time capacities of employed students. The institutional dimension adapts to the high level of diversity of students and programs, requiring the functioning of effective systems of management and study support.

## 4 From Exclusivity to the Universalization of Education

The starting point for all Western tertiary education systems was the elite stage, in which only a few percent of the relevant age group studied at universities (Scott, 2019). According to Trow (1973), the institutions and structures created during this phase are capable of absorbing an increase in the number of students, up to approximately 15% of the relevant cohort. However, once this limit is reached, fundamental changes occur in all aspects of tertiary education and structures typical of the mass stage emerge. These are again capable of absorbing further growth of up to 30-50% of the relevant age cohort. Once this limit is exceeded, another systemic transformation takes place and the universal stage of tertiary education begins (Pabian, 2008).

Among other things, the meaning of higher education and its social value transform fundamentally. According to Trow (1973), the essence of elite higher education is the education and formation of a narrow professional elite concentrated in decision-making positions and in a few select professions (science, law, medicine). In the mass phase, tertiary education prepares graduates for an ever-expanding range of professions in post-industrial societies (Carnevale & Rose, 2015), in which services and the experience industry are generally the driving force of the economy. Universal tertiary education then increases graduates' adaptability and flexibility to constant social, cultural, and technological changes. In terms of perceptions of quality, elite systems are characterized by meritocratic academic standards. The quality of higher education thus lies in achieving a high level of academic knowledge, often of a theoretical nature, which frequently includes knowledge that is impractical or difficult to apply in practice. In the mass stage, along with the diversification of institutions and their functions, there is also a diversification of standards, which are no longer common to all institutions but vary according to their different functions. After the transition to the universal stage, the criterion of quality of education shifts from academic standards to a broader spectrum of competencies, in the form of specific knowledge, abilities, and skills responding to the current needs of the labour market. The question is no longer how students can achieve the required academic level, but what higher education can provide to a very diverse student population. Elite higher education systems tend to be highly unified; typical institutions tend to be relatively small and very similar universities. With the transition to mass tertiary education, non-university tertiary institutions emerge and institutional diversification takes place. Overall, institutional diversity increases significantly (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007).

The social perception of university graduates also undergoes a significant change. At the elite stage, the quality of graduates is essentially guaranteed by the high selectivity with which students are admitted and the presumed high level of unified higher learning institutions of the university type, often with a long tradition (Ding et al., 2021). At the mass and, even more so, at the universal stages, institutional heterogeneity increases, as does heterogeneity among the population of graduates (Bruni et al., 2020). There is much greater diversity in their interests, motivations, and life goals. The population of graduates are significantly differentiated demographically, socially, culturally, by type of family background, or by individual experience. They are graduates of different levels of education from varying higher education institutions, both in terms of their focus and their quality. In the present era, when higher education systems in virtually all developed countries have entered the mass or universal stage, an unprecedented proportion of the population is entering the labour market with higher education. This represents hope for innovation, creative industries, sustainability, the development of the knowledge economy, and the strengthening of social cohesion and its resilience in a time of political and economic imbalance, in a world shaken by war conflicts. Last but not least, the growth of education in society is closely linked to well-being and economic prosperity (Li et al., 2024). At the same time, the transition to mass higher education brings increased competition in the labour market and motivates graduates to acquire additional professional skills (Tomlinson, 2023). Higher education has traditionally been associated with better job prospects, higher income, and greater life ambitions (Carnevale et al., 2024). These relative advantages are now gradually being eroded by the increased number of

graduates with university degrees. In a way, the consequences of the massification of education on the situation in the labour market and the growing competition among graduates are an unintended externality, introducing a number of negative effects to the graduate population. University students are increasingly aware that formal university education in the form of an academic degree is not enough to succeed in finding a job after graduation. University graduates must strive to stand out and seek individual competitive advantages, for example in the form of various qualification certifications (Kovalev et al., 2025). After graduating from university, graduates find themselves undergoing a period of uncertainty as they face the challenge of a smooth and seamless transition from university to professional life (Mpangeva & De Braine, 2024). This uncertainty is partly due to the increasing flexibility that employers expect from their employees. Given the importance of understanding the factors for improving the transition of students from higher education to the global labour market, greater emphasis is now placed on students acquiring additional skills and abilities during their university studies that respond to the dynamics of cultural and technological changes. One of these key competencies is media literacy and the ability to navigate a digitalized society, not only as a passive participant in the world of information, but also as an active element in the creation of media content.

The question therefore remains as to how, in the current stage of universalization of education and growing uncertainty among graduates in the labour market, students at the private University of Finance and Administration in Prague approach certain aspects of their studies. We identify selected opinions and attitudes towards studying and compare these results at the level of two different groups of study programs, according to the presence or absence of courses that increase media literacy and digital cultural capital.

## 5 Methods

The empirical part of the study is based on primary data obtained through an anonymous questionnaire survey of students at the economics and law-oriented private university, the University of Finance and Administration (org. Vysoká škola finanční a správní or VŠFS) in Prague. With around 3,000 students and more than 20,000 graduates, VŠFS is currently one of the largest private universities in Czechia. VŠFS is divided into the Faculty of Economic Studies and the Faculty of Legal and Administrative Studies, which offer a total of 7 accredited study programs at various levels and in various forms of study. The student questionnaire survey was conducted in March 2025 for all study programs of both faculties, both in the bachelor's and master's full-time degree programs. At the same time, an identical questionnaire survey was conducted at the public Palacký University in Olomouc, specifically at the Faculty of Arts. At this phase of the research, there is no comparison of data or comparison of results between private and public universities, but only partial and, for the time being, independent analyses and interpretations of data from the individual schools. The common theoretical basis for the empirical survey is Martin Trow's theory, which explains the dynamics of the evolution of higher education from the elite stage, to the mass stage, to the universal stage. The question is how students perceive the values of higher education at the universalization stage and how strongly they actually demonstrate their motivation to study and learn. A more detailed understanding of these circumstances of study allows us to further understand students' willingness to develop critical thinking, the ability to solve problems independently, to distinguish and sort information, and thus to develop necessary media literacy and digital cultural capital competencies as essential equipment for university graduates in the setting of the digitalized life of an information society.

The data was collected using a quantitative research method with a standardized questionnaire. After an initial pilot study on a sample of 20 randomly selected students and subsequent content adjustments and consultations with colleagues from Palacký University in Olomouc, the questionnaire was distributed en masse through the VŠFS Information System in

March 2025 to all full-time students of VŠFS. Students responded anonymously, and participation in this survey was entirely voluntary. Fourteen days after the questionnaire link was sent out, data collection was supported by a reminder with a request to complete the questionnaire. Data collection took place over 21 days and was completed at the beginning of April. The questions can be divided thematically into sections covering a) the value of higher education; b) the circumstances of one's own studies; c) social ties; d) the quality of instructors; e) the process of instruction. In this study, we focus primarily on perceptions of the value of higher education and attitudes towards the actual process of studies. The empirical data was processed using SPSS Statistics 19.0, with MS Excel used to create graphs. The graphs identify two different groups of students, categorized according to the type of study program. The graphs labelled Marketing and Media refer to the distribution of responses from the student population whose study plans include media, sociology, and other subjects that promote media literacy and orientation in digital culture. The graphs labelled Crime, Law, Finance track the distribution of responses from students who do not study such subjects

## **5.1 Characteristics of the Study Population**

The questionnaire was sent out by the VŠFS Study Department to a total of 2,681 student email addresses. The response rate was 10.7%. The data analysis was performed on a sample of 289 fully completed anonymous questionnaires. The reduced response rate among students was probably also influenced by a large-scale questionnaire survey being conducted at the same time by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport of the Czech Republic. The data set was divided into two parts based on the type of study program. The first group (MM), consisting of 102 respondents, consists of students of the study programs Marketing Communications (Bachelor's), New Media and Marketing Communication (Master's), Economics and Management (Bachelor's + Master's), and Applied Informatics (Bachelor's + Master's). Although these are different fields of study with different graduate profiles, they are characterized by at least a minimum of preparation in the areas of media sociology, media literacy, and working with data and information. Media training is clearly most intensively integrated into the study plans of the Marketing Communications bachelor's program and the New Media and Marketing Communication master's program. The second group (CLF), consisting of 187 respondents, consists of students of the programs Criminalistics and Forensic Disciplines (Bachelor's + Master's), Security and Legal Studies (Bachelor's + Master's), Finance (Bachelor's + Master's), and Business Law (Bachelor's), where media training is absent or appears only marginally on elective courses. When analyzing the data, we do not distinguish between the responses of bachelor's and master's degree students due to the overall size of the sample.

## **5.2 Data Collection Technique**

In addition to basic identification questions, the standardized questionnaire contains a total of 37 material questions. For the purposes of analysis, this study selected six material questions related to the perception of the value of higher education. A pilot test of the questionnaire conducted as part of a sociology course seminar revealed several minor shortcomings and led to revisions and adjustments to several material questions. All material questions were closed-ended, and a standardized Likert scale of responses was used to evaluate them. The questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter informing students about the purpose of the research and its objectives. The anonymity of the responses was emphasized.

### 5.3 Study Limitations

Several limitations must be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study. The questionnaire survey was conducted as a case study at a private university in Prague. This circumstance limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts of higher education and other populations of university students. The selection of respondents was based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study, which naturally resulted in a lower overall response rate. The study focuses on comparing students in programs with varying degrees of exposure to media and digital literacy, but it was not possible to fully control for factors such as prior education, family background, or individual experience with digital technologies. The quantitative approach provides a useful level of knowledge about the population of students in different study programs. However, it does not sufficiently capture the depth of individual experiences, motivations, or value orientation profiles. The empirical data of this study therefore has only limited scope and research value. Nevertheless, it empirically specifies the research problem, enables understanding of certain theoretical approaches, and to some extent verifies certain theoretical assumptions.

### 5.4 Research Questions

In this part of the study, we focus on the analysis and interpretation of several selected questions from the questionnaire survey, identifying the theme of more general value of higher education and attitudes towards the study process itself. We express the data using graphs and percentages and further interpret it in the context of a comparison between two different student populations, differentiated by type of study program. We observe how students who take courses in media education or media sociology perceive the value of higher education and what study motivations they express in comparison with students who do not undergo similar training during their studies.

RQ1: Are students proud to be able to study at a university?

RQ2: Do students care about the type of study program they are enrolled in?

RQ3: How do students envision their own professional future?

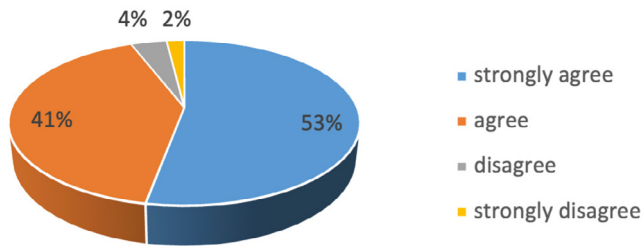
RQ4: Are the grades a student earns in an exam more important to the students, or is it more important that they simply pass the exam?

RQ5: Do students have discussions together about the content of teaching?

RQ6: Do students find teaching boring?

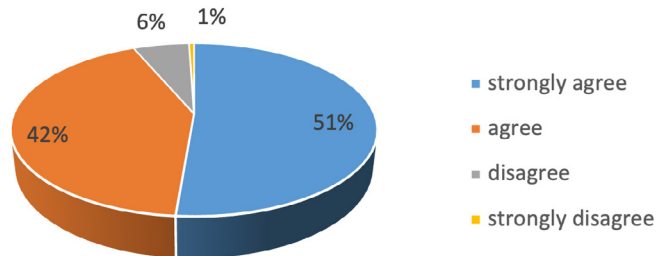
## 6 Results

The feeling of pride in being able to study at a university corresponds to the perception of the value of university education as a certain privilege. Are VŠFS students proud to be able to study at a university? In the questionnaire, we measured the degree of agreement with the statement “I am proud to be able to study at a university”. Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of responses from the MM and CLF groups of students, who in the vast majority of cases (more than 90% of respondents) agree that they feel proud to be studying at the university level. Even in the era of universal education, it is not necessarily true that studying at a university is perceived as a matter of course, a standard part of life, or something that is losing its social prestige and status of exclusivity.



**Figure 1:** "I am proud to be able to study at a university", Marketing Media (MM) students, total response frequencies in %

Source: own processing, 2026

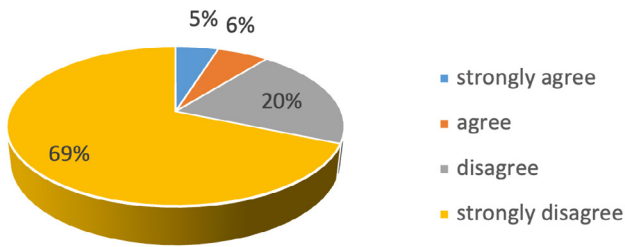


**Figure 2:** "I am proud to be able to study at a university", Crime, Law, Finance (CLF) students, total response frequencies in %

Source: own processing, 2026

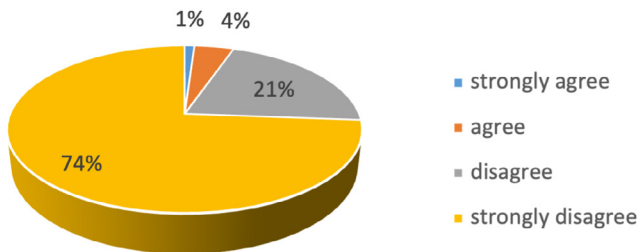
In the next question, we examine whether students care about the study program they have chosen. This question correlates with students' motivations for study, their interest, and their determination to pursue a specific profession in the future. Conversely, a lax attitude and downplaying the significance and importance of choosing a study program may indicate a superficial and short-term interest in study, as well as a lack of specific ideas about the purpose of study and future professional employment. University studies without a conscious interest in a specific study program suggest a lower overall motivation to study, reduced ambition, decreased interest in the value of knowledge, and indifference to building human capital. We measured this problem by the degree of agreement with the statement "The main thing is that I'm in school, I don't really care what the study program is".

Figures 3 and 4 show that students generally disagree with this statement. We find more frequent disagreement with this statement among CLF students (95% of respondents), compared to 89% of respondents in the MM student group. This is a minimal difference, but it may point to a certain distinctiveness of criminalistics and security study programs and a more clearly defined future career path. Conversely, MM students have more open future career opportunities and are more adaptable due to the more universal scope of their studies. Overall, this finding indicates that students have a purposeful perspective on their field of interest, the importance of the content of their studies, and their professional focus. In the eyes of students, university studies therefore gain relevance through the orientation of the study program and the selection thereof. The status of a university student need not be attractive in itself; it becomes attractive only through the choice of a suitable study program.



**Figure 3:** "The main thing is that I'm in school, I don't really care what the study program is", Marketing Media (MM) students, total response frequencies in %

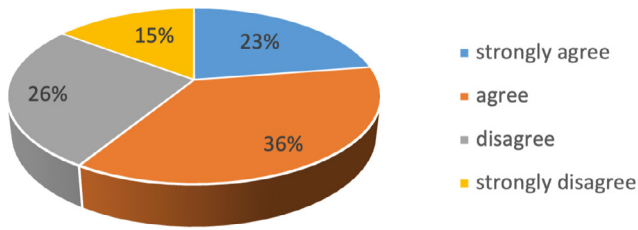
Source: own processing, 2026



**Figure 4:** "The main thing is that I'm in school, I don't really care what the study program is", Crime, Law, Finance (CLF) students, total response frequencies in %

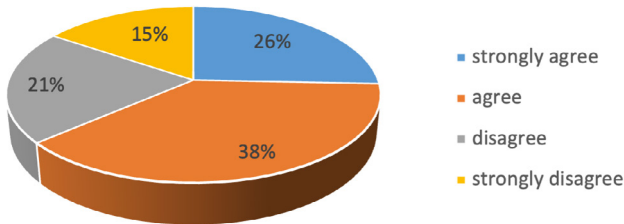
Source: own processing, 2026

We were also interested in how students envision their own professional future. Part of the value of university study is indeed purposeful vocational preparation for a future profession and the acceptance of study as a long-term commitment, culminating in employment in a specific profession that requires a university qualification and professional competence acquired through study. We measured this question by the level of agreement with the statement "I have a clear idea of my professional future". Figures 5 and 6 do not show any clear differences between the MM and CLF student groups. CLF students have a slightly more specific idea of their future profession. Preparation for positions such as police officers, security experts, investigators, or financial advisors probably seems somewhat more specific (64% of respondents) compared to future managers, marketers, media consultants, creatives, or IT specialists (59% of respondents), where career opportunities are broader and more variable. Around 40% of students experience a certain degree of uncertainty and lack of ideas about their future profession. This is most likely the result of a combination of various possible causes, such as limited contact with the practical sphere during study, unclear ideas about their own career prospects, awareness of the instability of the labour market, rapid changes in professions against the backdrop of technologization and automation of life, and, last but not least, perhaps a low level of self-confidence. All of this may be related to the growing need for flexibility as a life strategy, the ability to adapt to the rapidly changing reality of technological development, and growing social uncertainty in general. The value of higher education can be seen here in the fact that it prepares flexible and adaptable individuals for life in the dynamically changing terrain of the labour market.



**Figure 5:** "I have a clear idea of my professional future", Marketing Media (MM) students, total response frequencies in %

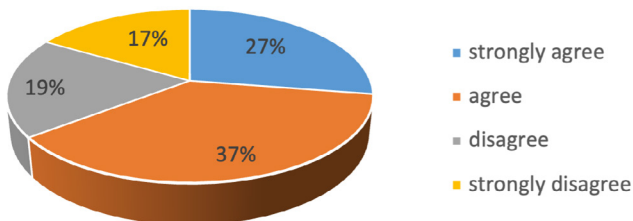
Source: own processing, 2026



**Figure 6:** "I have a clear idea of my professional future", Crime, Law, Finance (CLF) students, total response frequencies in %

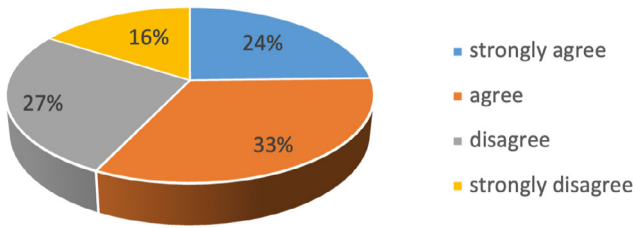
Source: own processing, 2026

We measured students' attitudes toward their own performance with the question "The final grade from the exam is not important to me, the main thing is to pass the exam". This question also allows us to monitor students' value orientation and their motivation to acquire knowledge. An exam can be perceived either as an opportunity for development, for applying one's study potential and confirming certain competencies and personal qualities, or as a mere formality, a necessity and an external condition enabling one to continue their studies. This circumstance of study indicates the diversity of students' attitudes towards their study obligations and different conceptions of the meaning of education as a means of personal and professional development. Figures 7 and 8 point to a certain erosion of ambition and the importance of external motivational factors for studying. In this case, the desire for knowledge and the effort to improve are giving way to a formal approach to studying and pragmatism. In both groups of study programs surveyed, the majority of students are convinced that the simple fact of passing an exam is more important than performance and results. Pragmatic value orientations, indicated by attitudes toward exam performance, are expressed by a total of 64% of respondents in the MM student group and 57% of CLF students. Overall, only about one in six students expressed a significantly negative attitude toward a pragmatic and formal approach to final exams. The value of performance, individual ambition, motivation to improve and achieve quality results is eroding under external pressure to meet study requirements and the need to fulfil study obligations, regardless of the quality of performance.



**Figure 7:** "The final grade from the exam is not important to me, the main thing is to pass the exam", Marketing Media (MM) students, total response frequencies in %

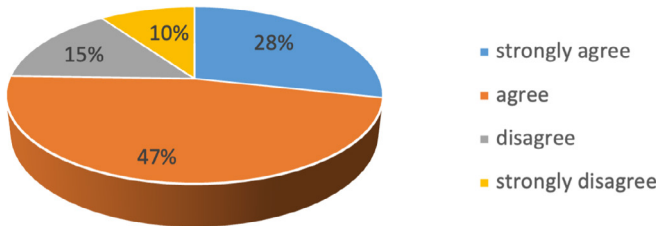
Source: own processing, 2026



**Figure 8:** “The final grade from the exam is not important to me, the main thing is to pass the exam”, Crime, Law, Finance (CLF) students, total response frequencies in %

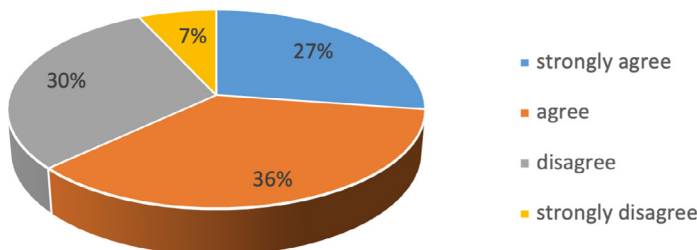
Source: own processing, 2026

The social and motivational dimensions of learning were measured by the question “I like to discuss what we are learning with other students”. An important part of study is the willingness and capability to be open to cooperation, mutual communication, and knowledge sharing. An active approach to discussing the content of studies with other students indicates a cooperative approach to learning, an interactive style of study, the courage to express and defend one’s own opinions, and communication skills. Figures 9 and 10 show the more significant differences in the social-interactive dimension of the study attitudes of the monitored groups of students. In the case of the MM group of students, a clearly stronger element of communicative openness and a need for mutual social interaction as part of sharing, but also confronting knowledge and opinions with other classmates, was expressed by a total of 75% of respondents (compared to 63% of CLF students). As expected, students in study programs that integrate subjects with an emphasis on communication and teamwork show stronger participatory and interactive attitudes toward learning. This finding points to the positive values of intrinsic motivation to study, willingness to cooperate, and need to develop thinking skills. On the other hand, 7% of CLF students and 10% of MM students express a resolute unwillingness to discuss the content of learning with other students. Therefore, we cannot ignore the portion of students who prefer an individualistic, i.e., less cooperative and interactive approach to studying.



**Figure 9:** “I like to discuss what we are learning with other students”, Marketing Media (MM) students, total response frequencies in %

Source: own processing, 2026



**Figure 10:** “I like to discuss what we are learning with other students”, Crime, Law, Finance (CLF) students, total response frequencies in %

Source: own processing, 2026

Part of measuring study motivation is also the need to understand perceptions of the quality and attractiveness of instruction. The question in the questionnaire “I am usually bored in class” was used to assess not only intrinsic motivation to study, but also the degree of cognitive and emotional involvement of students in the form of their engagement, as well as their general attitude towards school as an institution. A long-term feeling of boredom can be an indicator of an overall alienation from studies and a weak relationship to education as a value. The proportion of students expressing feelings of boredom during instruction is shown in Figures 11 and 12. A total of 34% of MM students and 29% of CLF students describe instruction as boring. On the other hand, one in five students - in both groups of students surveyed - resolutely deny that they are bored in class.

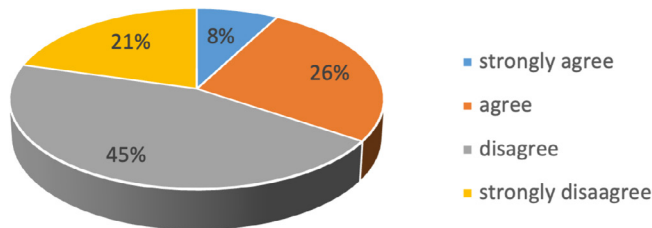


Figure 11: “I am usually bored in class”, Marketing Media (MM) students, total response frequencies in %

Source: own processing, 2026

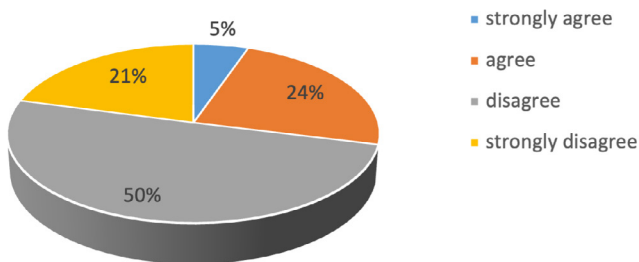


Figure 12: “I am usually bored in class”, Crime, Law, Finance (CLF) students, total response frequencies in %

Source: own processing, 2026

However, the causes of boredom may not only be a lack of intrinsic motivation among students, low interest in studying, or resignation from education as a value. The subject structure, teaching style, and pedagogical abilities of teachers to stimulate and activate students through an interactive approach to teaching and the attractiveness of their content may play an important role here. However, this is a question for separate research.

RQ1 - _RQ6	Pearson Chi-Square - Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
RQ1: Are students proud to be able to study at a university?	.308
RQ2: Do students care about the type of study program they are enrolled in?	.155
RQ3: How do students envision their own professional future?	.018
RQ4: Are the grades a student earns in an exam more important to the students, or is it more important that they simply pass the exam?	.314
RQ5: Do students have discussions together about the content of teaching?	.018
RQ6: Do students find teaching boring?	.704

Table 1: Chi-square test

Source: own processing, 2026, according to SPSS Version 19.0

Based on the results of the Pearson's chi-square test, it can be concluded that statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in respondents' answers based on their study programs were observed only for questions RQ3 (perceptions of professional future) and RQ5 (discussion of teaching content), where the p-value reached 0.018. For the remaining questions, specifically RQ1 (0.308), RQ2 (0.155), RQ4 (0.314), and RQ6 (0.704) statistical significance was not confirmed.

While most of these results did not reach statistical significance, a descriptive comparison of response between the MM (Marketing and Media, with ML/DL courses) and CLF (Criminalistics, Law, Finance, without ML/DL courses) groups reveals several noteworthy trends.

The first difference is in the purposefulness of program selection (RQ2). CLF students showed a slightly stronger rejection of the statement about indifference to their field of study (95% disagreement compared to 89% for MM). This subtle difference can be explained by the greater specificity and lesser adaptability of professions associated with CLF (police officers, investigators) as compared to the broader and more variable employment opportunities for marketers and IT specialists (MM).

The second difference is evident in willingness to discuss and cooperate (RQ5). This is where the most significant difference appeared. MM students showed a significantly stronger tendency to discuss the content of learning (75% agreement) compared to CLF students (63% agreement). An active approach to discussion indicates a cooperative style of study, the courage to defend one's own opinions, and an overall willingness to cultivate critical thinking. This finding strongly supports the hypothesis that the presence of subjects focused on communication, media sociology, and media literacy in study plans positively shapes the intrinsic motivation and interactive study attitudes necessary for the creation of digital cultural capital.

A third, more subtle difference can be observed in the perception of boredom during instruction (RQ6). Although one might expect students preparing for a dynamic media environment (MM) to be more engaged, the MM group reports somewhat higher feelings of boredom in class (34% compared to 29% for CLF).

While the basic value orientations (pride, choice of study program) are similar, intrinsic and interactive motivational factors, closely correlated with the development of media literacy and critical thinking, are stronger among MM students. An educational emphasis on media and digital competencies is therefore reflected not only in knowledge, but also in a more active and cooperative approach to study.

## 7 Discussion

Data analysis shows that despite the transition to the universal stage of education in the context of Trow's theory, VŠFS students show a high degree of pride in the opportunity to study at a university (over 90%). The status of a university student is therefore perceived as prestigious and not to be taken for granted. However, in the more in-depth examination of the perception of the quality and attractiveness of instruction (RQ6), a significant proportion of students feel bored in class (34% in the MM group and 29% in the CLF group). This phenomenon can also be interpreted as a manifestation of cognitive and emotional alienation from studies, which is a risk factor for the universalized stage of education, where relationships between actors become less personal and more formal. Boredom during instruction and lack of interest in the content of studies are logically determined by the pedagogical skills of teachers, their personality types, teaching styles, socio-psychological competencies, technical knowledge, or abilities to communicate and implement interactive teaching. Another reason may be the type of accreditation according to academic (more theoretical) and professional (more practical) focus. Last but not least, the type of subject may also be a reason for boredom. Some subjects may, after all, seem distant from the field of study in the eyes of students and may appear impractical or irrelevant or fail to meet overall study expectations. It is an interconnected and intricately combined structure

of institutional, technical, pedagogical, and socio-psychological factors that determine the intensity of student engagement, and thus the potential presence of feelings of boredom and disinterest. However, if the feeling of boredom is long-term and appears across subjects in study plan, it may be an indicator of deeper and more serious motives for alienation from study and a subjective feeling of the declining value of education. This finding would therefore be worth investigating in further detail.

At the same time, students actively perceive the importance of choosing a study program. These results indicate the presence of strong intrinsic motivation, purposefulness, and personal engagement. It is precisely this fact that is considered in professional discourse to be a decisive prerequisite for the cultivation of critical thinking, media literacy, and other digital competencies. This finding correlates with the results of methodologically similar foreign empirical studies. Lilian (2022) confirmed a positive and significant relationship between motivational belief strategies (intrinsic motivation/self-confidence) and the level of digital literacy among university students. Intrinsic motivation, focused on self-improvement and a deeper understanding of the content of teaching, can thus be understood as a predictor of the cultivation of critical thinking. Incidentally, Shieh and Nasongkhla (2024) demonstrate a significant positive correlation between motivation to use social networks and critical thinking as well as media literacy among students.

However, despite their declared pride and targeted interest in the study program, this study further reveals a certain erosion of ambition and a predominance of the pragmatic approach to academic performance (RQ4). Most students (MM: 64%, CLF: 57%) prefer simply passing the exam to achieving a high-quality result in the form of an above-average grade. This instrumental approach, where education serves primarily as a means of obtaining qualifications or fulfilling formal obligations, corresponds to the situation of the universalized stage of education, including attributes typically present such as a utilitarian and intensely pragmatic attitude towards study. While on one hand the need for intrinsic motivation to seek truth and strive for knowledge is emphasized for cultivating critical thinking, in the case of VŠFS students, it appears that this intrinsic motivation is often overwhelmed by external pressure to meet study requirements regardless of the quality of performance.

Higher education is considered almost essential for employment in a highly volatile labor market. However, the massification of university education has also brought increased competition to the labour market. The number of graduates is logically growing on an international scale across various fields (see Portocarrero Ramos et al., 2025 or Łuczak et al., 2026). The results of this study, in which approximately 40% of students experience a certain degree of uncertainty and lack of ideas about their future profession, strongly resonate with this global trend, fundamentally changing the conditions of the labour market and the career paths of graduates. For example Tomlinson (2023) or Angheluță et al. (2023) empirically demonstrate that the transition to mass education creates increased competition in the labour market, which weakens the traditional advantages of a university degree. As a result, graduates realize that they need individual competitive advantages (e.g., qualification certifications) in order to stand out and succeed among the growing number of college-educated individuals. In this context, it can be argued that the value of higher education lies more in preparing flexible and adaptable individuals for life in uncertainty than in a strictly defined career path in a given field. This need for adaptability and the ability to quickly absorb new knowledge in a technologized world is related to the general requirements for the development of digital cultural capital and the ability to navigate the social and cultural aspects of the digital environment (Shirvanian et al., 2025).

Our findings on students' willingness to discuss the content of their learning (RQ5) point to a more significant difference between study programs. Marketing and Media (MM) students, who take courses relevant to media and information literacy, show a stronger element of communicative openness and a need for social interaction (75% agreement) when compared to Criminal Justice, Law, and Finance (CLF) students (63% agreement). This difference supports the hypothesis that the integration of subjects focused on media, sociology, and communication effectively

strengthens participatory and interactive attitudes toward study and cultivates critical thinking. These findings are consistent with similarly oriented research. Vodá et al. (2022) found that social sciences students (which includes media communication) are more successful in developing digital skills in the areas of communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. Šušterič et al. (2025) point out that the development of media literacy is deeply influenced by the broader sociocultural context, where peer networks play a key role in the development of digital capital and advanced media practices. Openness to discussion (RQ5) is therefore a manifestation of this social dimension of learning. The identified differences in openness to discussion (RQ5) between MM and CLF students confirm that systematic support for media education has a direct impact on the cultivation of students' interactive and communication skills. This potentially improves their ability to actively participate as citizens and strengthens their resilience to disinformation.

## 8 Conclusion

In Trow's theory, the universalization of tertiary education is defined as a shift from the quality criteria of traditional academic standards to a greater emphasis on competencies in the form of specific abilities and skills. These should be able to respond in particular to the needs for adaptability and flexibility in an environment of constant social, cultural, and technological change. Sociological and media discourse highlights the need to develop competencies for life in the information society and digitalized everyday life, including media literacy, critical thinking, interdisciplinary skills, creativity, willingness to engage in continuous learning, and ability to continuously improve one's qualifications. The role of digital cultural capital is emphasized, which is far from being merely a technical and institutional circumstance, but a matter of students' intrinsic motivation, their values, and their receptiveness to knowledge.

The empirical findings of this case study show that despite the universalization of education, where studying is perceived as a social norm, higher education remains a prestigious and valued life goal in the eyes of students. Over 90% of respondents feel proud of the opportunity to study at university and at the same time show a high degree of determination in their choice and final selection of a study program. This challenges the often uncritically accepted thesis that, in the era of universal education, higher education is perceived as a matter of course without any deeper meaning, purpose, or intrinsic significance. Despite this declared pride and determination of the respondents, the results of the study reveal signs of a pragmatic, instrumental, and purposeful orientation among students and a certain erosion of their academic ambitions. Most students (64% in MM and 57% in CLF) consider it more important to simply pass an exam than to achieve a good grade and the best possible grade. This finding indicates a shift from traditional academic standards to a more utilitarian conception of study as a tool for obtaining a formal qualification in the form of an academic degree. The value of study thus acquires an ambivalent character. On the one hand, it remains a source of prestige, identity, and social recognition; on the other hand, it is a pragmatic necessity for finding employment in an uncertain and volatile labour market. A total of 40% of students feel concerned about their future career direction.

Further findings of this study confirm the role of intrinsic motivation and an active approach to study as predictors of the development of media literacy and digital cultural capital. A comparative analysis of study programs shows a significant difference in the social-interactive dimension of study. Students in the MM study program group show a stronger willingness to discuss the content of learning (75%) when compared to students in programs without a media component (63%). This finding suggests that plans of study that include media and sociological training positively shape communicative openness and critical thinking.

A worrying finding is the degree of cognitive alienation manifesting with boredom in class. Approximately one-third of all students surveyed (34% in MM and 29% in CLF) feel bored in class. The feeling of boredom during instruction is therefore relatively widespread and indicates

low engagement and interest in teaching in certain subjects. This finding is probably related to a certain level of purposefulness in attitudes towards study and its own intrinsic interpretation as essential for achieving the necessary formal qualifications.

For the effective fulfillment of the goals of contemporary higher education, the primary focus is not on the technical parameters of digital literacy, but on the systematic reinforcement of intrinsic motivation and initiation of students into discussions and problem solving that require critical thinking. Findings from a comparison of MM and CLF student groups show that the thoughtful integration of courses reinforcing critical reflection on media content and understanding information, and the contexts of its creation and distribution, have a measurable positive impact on the attitudes toward study necessary for the development of competencies in the information society. Further research should verify and develop these partial findings in order to provide a deeper and more detailed explanation of the role of individual motivational strategies and the influence of pedagogical approaches.

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