



The psychosemantic structure of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers

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◆ **Abstract.** The aim of the study was to examine the key differences in the semantic dimensions of law enforcement officers' perceptions of lawful behaviour by citizens. To achieve this aim content analysis methods were used to develop a conceptual psychosemantic model, and empirical assessments of law enforcement officers were used to identify the key elements of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers. The proposed conceptual model viewed legal consciousness as a multi-component structure that included cognitive, emotional-evaluative, value-motivational, and volitional-regulatory elements. The formation of the legal consciousness of employees of the justice system largely depended on their age and professional experience ($M = 6.43$ for employees with less than 5 years of experience versus $M = 6.07$ for employees with more than 5 years of experience), as well as activity values ($M = 5.74$ versus $M = 5.32$); This meant that the formation of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers was determined by aspects of social activity and initiative. Gender differences were less noticeable, which allowed to conclude that there are universal standards for the formation of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the law enforcement sphere. In the legal consciousness of the segment's employees, a clear differentiation was also found between the images of law-abiding, conditionally convicted and convicted citizens. The image of a “law-abiding citizen” was defined as the standard of moral responsibility and normative behaviour, while the images of conditionally convicted and convicted persons circulated in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers as potentially resocialised/capable of social activity and socially/normatively negative, respectively. The results obtained could be used in planning professional training and retraining of employees to strengthen public confidence in the national justice system

◆ **Keywords:** regulatory component; normative behaviour; gender analysis; psychosemantic approach; volitional element

◆ Introduction

In the context of the transformation of the rule of law and increased public attention to the activities of law enforcement agencies, the issue of legal awareness among their employees is becoming increasingly relevant. The image of a “law-abiding citizen” that is formed in the professional consciousness of law enforcement officers not only reflects normative ideas about law and order, but also significantly influences the style of professional interaction, decision-making and assessment of citizens' behaviour. Psychosemantic analysis of this image reveals hidden

meanings, stereotypes and value orientations that can both strengthen trust between the state and society and give rise to risks of bias. Based on this, the study of the psychosemantic structure of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officials is scientifically and socially significant. The issue of consciousness as a subject of philosophical reflection and scientific analysis has been reflected in previous works, in particular by A. Seisekenova *et al.* (2024), who explored key academic approaches to the study of consciousness in the 20th and

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21st centuries. According to the authors, consciousness has a social nature, as it arises as a consequence of living in society and is a prerequisite for building an individual's relationship with the world. H. Pae (2025) studied selected theories of consciousness, in particular the global workspace theory, integrated information theory, and predictive coding theory. Based on an analysis of key provisions, the researcher proposed a phenomenologically grounded structure that clarifies the explanatory scope of each theory, thus demonstrating the feasibility of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of consciousness. An analysis of individual theoretical approaches – integrated information theory, global workspace theory, higher-order theory, and representational theories of consciousness – was also conducted in the work of P.K. Sahu & A.C. Jena (2024). According to the authors, one of the challenges remains understanding the subjective perspective of consciousness, which requires an in-depth study of its evolutionary, cultural, and philosophical dimensions. Similar to H. Pae, P.K. Sahu & A.C. Jena advocated an interdisciplinary approach to studying individual aspects of consciousness, in particular its impact on the development of artificial intelligence. Specific philosophical challenges in the study of consciousness were considered in the work of S.D.F. Araujo (2011), who focused on the study of the so-called "hard problem" of consciousness, the solution to which could explain why decades of neuroscientific mapping have failed to bridge the explanatory gap between objective brain states and subjective experience. According to the author, the main philosophical challenges in this issue remain cracks in the materialistic foundation and a crisis of integration in the study of consciousness.

O. Bazayev (2024) explored the philosophical question of consciousness in the narrower context of legal consciousness. The researcher emphasised the absence of a single, comprehensive model that would highlight the multi-level structure of legal consciousness. After analysing previous studies, the author concluded that legal consciousness is an integrated socio-legal category that is not limited to philosophical and legal discourse, but also includes psychological and social aspects. Certain aspects of legal consciousness are also reflected in the work of S. Naoumowa (2024), who studied this phenomenon in the context of Professor A. Podguretsky's sociological theory of law. According to the chosen theory, the structure of legal consciousness includes such key elements as knowledge of current legal norms, assessment of mandatory laws, and postulates that help to define individual laws as good or desirable. Understanding these elements determines the empirical and socio-legal analysis of legal consciousness. The importance of studying legal consciousness was also emphasised by M. Hertogh (2024), who stressed that scientific research mainly focuses on citizens' compliance with the law, rather than on the public perception of these laws. After analysing the experience of clients of Dutch social security services, the author concluded that the relationship between legal consciousness and compliance with the norms of current legislation is not a unitary phenomenon, i.e. it must be considered in relation

to specific laws and social hierarchies. The link between legal awareness and society's willingness to comply with legislation and changes in the socio-legal sphere was also examined by V. Lomaka *et al.* (2024). The survey confirmed the link between Ukraine's European integration and the formation of legal awareness among its citizens. At the same time, the study found that this connection is formed under the influence of external factors such as the media; that is, it is advisable to conduct further correlation analysis based on the Media Trust Index and the Rule of Law Index. The influence of external factors on the formation of legal awareness was also proven by R. Vysochanskyi (2024), who studied socio-legal changes in Ukrainian society after the start of the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. The author argued that the escalation of the military conflict led to a transformation of public consciousness, which took the form of a renewal of value orientations. These updates are manifested in an increased number of volunteer and public initiatives, as well as an expanded set of digital participation tools that help strengthen trust in state institutions and increase the legal resilience of society. In this context, legal awareness serves to adapt the legal system to the challenges of wartime and the processes of European integration.

Based on an analysis of previous studies, it was concluded that the issue of public consciousness, including legal consciousness, had been sufficiently studied. At the same time, insufficient attention has been paid to the analysis of the legal consciousness of law enforcement officials, whose activities determine the level of public trust in state institutions. The aim of the study was to examine the psychosemantic structure of the image of a "law-abiding citizen" in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officials. The following objectives contributed to the achievement of this aim: to investigate the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of legal consciousness of the individual and to analyse the psychosemantic features of legal consciousness of the individual in different life environments.

◆ Materials and Methods

The aim of the study was achieved through the application of a combination of theoretical and empirical methods, with content analysis serving as the principal approach. This method was employed to substantiate the conceptual model of the psychosemantic structure of the image of a "law-abiding citizen". The analytical material consisted of scholarly publications in social psychology and law addressing issues of legal consciousness, law-abiding behaviour, social representations, professional identity, and professional deformation among law enforcement personnel. Only sources meeting the criteria of relevance and scientific credibility were included in the sample. In particular, the publications by L. Zahrai & O. Fedoruk (2020), H. Fedoryshyn (2023), and the review by S. Martin (2023) were examined. Based on the results of the content analysis, a comparison was conducted between Eastern and Western philosophical approaches to defining consciousness across the following categories: "understanding of consciousness",

“boundaries between the self and the world”, “levels of functioning”, “dynamics of change”, and “ultimate purpose of interpretation”. The content analysis materials were also used to examine psychosemantic approaches to the academic study of consciousness, considered through key parameters of content and methodological contribution.

At the second stage, the identified categories were compared and generalised in order to reveal stable semantic constructs. The findings of the content analysis provided the basis for the operationalisation of the concept under study and for the development of empirical instruments, particularly a system of bipolar scales: “socially active-passive”, “initiative-inert”, “ready for cooperation-isolated”, “engaged in public life-detached”, “reliable-unreliable”, “fair-unfair”, and “honest-dishonest”, which were subsequently used for psychosemantic analysis. The empirical study was conducted among law enforcement officers working in criminal procedure, operational and investigative services, forensic and expert units, and public security divisions. A total of 30 participants took part in the study, including 15 men and 15 women, with a mean age of 35.6 years. The balanced distribution across age groups and length of professional experience enabled an unbiased understanding of the influence of age- and gender-related factors on the formation of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” within the legal consciousness of law enforcement personnel. Participants were eligible if they had at least one year of professional experience in the law enforcement system and provided informed consent. The study was conducted online using the Google Forms platform in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Sociological Association (2025). Participants were also asked to evaluate certain aspects of the legal consciousness of representatives of such legal professions as judges, defence lawyers, and prosecutors. Given the methodological limitations of directly surveying law-abiding citizens, probationers, and convicted individuals, an indirect expert-projective approach was applied. Law enforcement officers participating in the study were asked to assess generalised images of the respective social groups, formed on the basis of their professional experience, service observations, and repeated interactions with individuals from these categories in the course of law enforcement practice. The resulting evaluations were treated not as individual characteristics of specific persons, but as reflections of latent psychosemantic structures representing perceptions of the legal consciousness of these social groups within the professional awareness of law enforcement

personnel. This approach made it possible to reconstruct semantic models of group images of legal consciousness under conditions of limited access to direct respondents.

During the evaluation process, law enforcement officers used scales developed on the basis of the preliminary content analysis of academic sources and taking into account the classical three-factor model of meaning proposed by C.E. Osgood *et al.* (1957), which distinguishes the dimensions of “evaluation”, “potency”, and “activity”. In accordance with this model, the set of scales included characteristics reflecting the evaluative dimension of the image. Assessments were made using a seven-point scale, where the extreme values corresponded to the poles of the bipolar traits. Individual ratings were aggregated into group indicators, enabling the construction of a semantic space of the image of a “law-abiding citizen”. Further statistical processing was carried out using exploratory factor analysis in order to identify latent semantic dimensions within the psychosemantic structure of the image. The analysis included variables represented by mean group scores across all bipolar semantic differential scales. Factor extraction was performed using the principal components method followed by orthogonal Varimax rotation, which allowed for the achievement of a simple and interpretable factor structure.

◆ Results and Discussion

Theoretical and methodological foundations of research into legal consciousness. The problem of consciousness is traditionally considered fundamental in philosophy, psychology, and the humanities in general. It is regarded as a key category that mediates human interaction with the world and determines the ways of cognition, interpretation of reality, and regulation of behaviour. At the same time, within the framework of empirical psychological and legal research, consciousness cannot be reduced to an abstract metaphysical construct detached from the practice of social interaction, normative regulation, and the real behavioural choices of the subject. Consciousness in this sense is not a static structure, but functions as an open system that is constantly changing under the influence of social experience, communication, and normative expectations. This position can be traced in both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions, which emphasise the inseparable connection between consciousness and practice, action and context. A comparative analysis of philosophical approaches to defining and explaining consciousness is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of Eastern and Western approaches to defining consciousness

Criterion	Western philosophy of consciousness	Eastern philosophy of consciousness
Understanding consciousness	A relatively autonomous structure or property of the subject	Procedural, comprehensive and insubstantial
The boundaries between the “self” and the world	Clearly delineated, partially permeable	Conditional, changeable or absent
Levels of functioning	Hierarchical (neural → psychological → social)	Simultaneous and interpenetrating
The dynamics of change	Dialectical, often conflictual	Gradual, harmonising
The ultimate goal of understanding	Explanation and rational mastery of reality	Awareness of unity and liberation from illusions

Source: compiled by the author based on A.R. Booth *et al.* (2024), P.C. Mocombe (2024), A.K. Mukhopadhyay (2024), R.K. Verma (2024), C. Song & M. Wu (2025), A. Fuchs *et al.* (2025)

A comparative analysis has shown that Western and Eastern philosophical traditions offer different traditions of penetrating the boundaries of consciousness. The Western paradigm assumes the existence of relatively stable boundaries between the subject and the world, which allows for the analytical differentiation of different consciousnesses and the management of their interaction. Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, interprets consciousness as a continuous flow in which boundaries are conditional and can be removed through the practice of awareness. The use of the metaphor of boundary penetration, borrowed from hydrodynamics, allows to consider the analysed approaches not as mutually exclusive, but as different modes of describing the large-scale workings of consciousness. This opens up the possibility for integrative models capable of combining neural, psychological and cultural levels of analysis within a single theoretical framework. At the same time, within the scope of this study, philosophical concepts did not perform a self-sufficient explanatory function, but rather a methodological role: they created the basis for considering consciousness as a multi-level, contextually determined system of meanings that can be empirically reconstructed using psychological methods. An analysis of contemporary philosophical approaches to the problem of consciousness allows to identify a number of propositions that have direct methodological value for psychological and legal research. In particular, non-dualistic concepts of consciousness (Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Verma, 2024) emphasise its integrity and primacy over individual cognitive, emotional or bodily processes. This opens up the possibility of analysing legal meanings not only as a product of rational thinking, but as integrated meaningful formations that combine cognitive, emotional and volitional components. Methodological analysis has shown that the Eastern philosophical tradition treats consciousness as a procedural, dynamic formation that is constantly changing under the influence of individual experience. Within the scope of the study, this allowed to conclude that legal consciousness is not a constant feature of personality, but is formed and transformed depending on the social context, the nature of legal practice and the professional path of the subject. In contrast, Western materialistic and socio-critical approaches (Song & Wu, 2025; Mocombe, 2024) provided grounds for considering legal consciousness as a socially determined phenomenon that is formed through language, legal discourse and the functioning of institutions. The generalisation of these approaches has made it possible to substantiate an integrative methodological position, according to which legal consciousness appears

as a procedural system of meanings that combines individual psychological and socio-normative dimensions, ensuring a conceptual transition to its psychosemantic analysis.

In the study, legal consciousness was considered as a specialised subsystem of general consciousness, reflecting and regulating the interaction of the individual with legal reality. It includes not only knowledge of the law and legal norms, but also an emotional and evaluative attitude towards them, a system of value orientations, and a readiness for lawful or unlawful behaviour. This approach is consistent with the position of V.Yu. Shvachka (2019), who emphasised the multi-component nature of legal consciousness and the presence of intellectual, emotional, and volitional elements in its structure. At the same time, unlike purely normative or legal approaches, this study focused on the psychological mechanism of internalisation of legal norms. In this context, law appears not only as an external regulator of behaviour, but also as a system of meanings that acquires personal significance for the subject. The effectiveness of legal regulation depends to a large extent not only on the level of legal knowledge, but also on the formation of internal beliefs, ethical attitudes and a sense of professional and social responsibility. This means that legal consciousness cannot be reduced to the sum of knowledge about the law. It is a complex psychosocial formation that develops through processes of socialisation, professional activity and personal experience of interaction with legal institutions. This approach explains the discrepancy between formal knowledge of legal norms and actual behaviour in legal situations. The results of the study indicate that the application of the psychosemantic approach made it possible to reconstruct the internal semantic organisation of legal consciousness. It was found that the perception of legal reality is structured by a system of latent meanings, semantic oppositions and cognitive-emotional coordinates that are not captured by traditional survey methods and extend beyond declared attitudes. The object of psychosemantic analysis in this article is the legal consciousness of the individual, and the units of analysis are meanings, evaluations, and semantic dimensions associated with basic legal categories such as "law", "justice", "responsibility" and "offence." The logic of the analysis lies in the reconstruction of those semantic structures that mediate the subject's attitude to law and determine his behavioural strategies. A summary of the approaches to psychosemantic analysis relevant to this study is presented in Table 2 below and demonstrates the difference in approaches to defining consciousness in Ukrainian and foreign academic discourse.

Table 2. *The psychosemantic approach to the study of consciousness in academic literature*

Author	Brief summary	Methodological contribution
H. Fedoryshyn (2023)	Psychosemantic representation and analysis of the semantic structures of marital and family relationships in young people's consciousness	Psychosemantic reconstruction of meanings within real social contexts
L. Zahrai & O. Fedoruk (2020)	Empirical study of psychosemantic constructs of leadership in young people's consciousness, considering the gender dimension	Psychosemantic methods, including the semantic differential and the sentence completion technique
K. Vasyuk (2024)	Psychosemantic analysis of perceptions of a profession and the motivational meanings of learning	Systematisation of psychosemantic foundations and semantic structures

Table 2. Continued

Author	Brief summary	Methodological contribution
X.D. Arsiwalla (2024)	Study of the semantic nature of the phenomenal content of consciousness and its relationship to phenomenal experience	Formalisation of meaning as the basis of phenomenal experience
T. Niikawa (2020)	Mapping and systematisation of research directions in consciousness studies: ontology, phenomenology, and semantics	Methodological framework for classifying approaches to the study of consciousness
S. Martin (2023)	Analysis of the role of awareness in clinical psychology and psychotherapy through a review of key concepts	Presentation of the current discourse on self-awareness and meaning-making

Source: compiled by the author

An analysis of the materials presented in Table 2 shows that the psychosemantic approach in contemporary academic literature is used to study various types of semantic formations, ranging from everyday social representations and professional images to fundamental structures of conscious experience. The empirical studies presented demonstrate the potential of psychosemantic methods in reconstructing the semantic structures of socially significant concepts and identifying their gender, motivational, and value dimensions. Theoretical and review works, in turn, expand the methodological boundaries of psychosemantics, integrating it with phenomenological, semantic, and cognitive approaches to the analysis of consciousness. Taken together, these works confirm the feasibility of using psychosemantic analysis as a universal tool for studying consciousness, capable of combining empirical reconstruction of meanings with conceptual understanding of their place in the structure of individual and social experience. Based on the analysed philosophical and psychological approaches, the study created an author's conceptual

model of consciousness, according to which consciousness is viewed as a multi-level system of meaningful formations functioning in the interaction of four interrelated components: cognitive, value-emotional, regulatory-behavioural, and volitional-regulatory. These components do not exist in isolation but are in constant dynamic interaction, ensuring the integrity of subjective experience. Legal consciousness within this model appears as a specialised form of consciousness in which these components are filled with legal content. The cognitive component includes ideas about legal norms, principles and institutions; the emotional-affective component reflects the individual's subjective attitude towards law, laws and legal institutions; the value-motivational component combines internal values and motives that determine the legal orientation of the individual; and the volitional-regulatory component represents the individual's ability to consciously control their behaviour in accordance with legal norms. The structure and indicators of legal consciousness within the author's model were summarised in Figure 1.

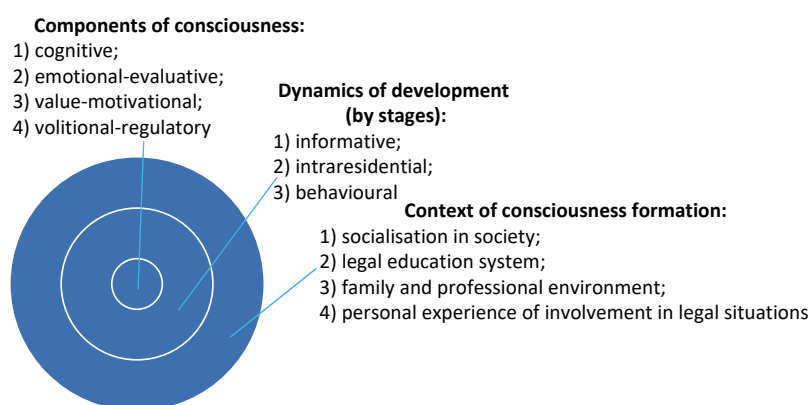


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the structure and development of legal consciousness of an individual

Source: compiled by the author based on V.Yu. Shvachka (2019), L. Spytka (2024)

An analysis of the integrative model of legal consciousness presented in Table 3 confirms its multidimensional nature and combination of structural and procedural approaches. The identification of cognitive, emotional-evaluative, value-motivational, and volitional-regulatory components allows for a comprehensive understanding of both the internal psychological mechanisms and external manifestations of legal consciousness. The proposed step-by-step logic of formation, covering the informative, internalisation and behavioural stages, reflects the dynamics of the transition

from the acquisition of legal knowledge to its practical implementation in behaviour. The inclusion of formation factors emphasises the role of the social environment, education and personal experience in the development of legal consciousness. Overall, the model creates a methodological basis for the empirical analysis of legal consciousness as a holistic, dynamic and socially conditioned system. A key feature of the proposed model is the combination of structural and stage approaches. Legal consciousness is viewed not only as a set of components, but also as a process that

goes through informative, internalisation and behavioural stages (Spytska, 2024). This allows to explain why the presence of legal knowledge does not always translate into lawful behaviour, as well as to outline the psychological mechanisms of the transition from knowledge to action. Thus, the theoretical and methodological analysis has made it possible to substantiate the understanding of consciousness as a procedural, multi-level system of meaningful formations, which is formed in the interaction of individual psychological and socio-normative factors. A comparative understanding of Eastern and Western philosophical approaches has created the methodological prerequisites for an integrative view of legal consciousness as a dynamic psychosocial phenomenon that cannot be reduced to either a set of legal knowledge or formal compliance with norms. The author's proposed model of legal consciousness serves as a theoretical basis for further empirical analysis and operationalisation of its structural and procedural components within the framework of psychosemantic research.

Results of an empirical study of legal consciousness of individuals. Analysis of average values across all bipolar scales revealed a clear tendency towards positive polarisation of the image, manifested in a stable shift of assessments towards socially acceptable, normatively desirable and psychologically attractive characteristics. In general, the image of a “law-abiding citizen” appears as ethically positive, normatively reliable and socially acceptable, which indicates its high symbolic status in the legal consciousness of the professional group under study. At the same time, the structure of this image is not homogeneous: different dimensions of the semantic space have unequal semantic saturation and functional weight, which determines the expediency of their separate analysis. The evaluative dimension, according to the model by C.E. Osgood *et al.* (1957), reflects the overall emotional and moral assessment of the object and is an indicator of its social attractiveness, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Average values for the evaluative dimension of a “law-abiding citizen”

Bipolar scale	M	SD
Responsible-irresponsible	6.42	0.63
Reliable-unreliable	6.18	0.71
Fair-unfair	6.05	0.77
Honest-dishonest	6.31	0.66
Respectable-disrespectable	6.48	0.58

Note: M – median value; SD – standard deviation

Source: compiled by the author

The results obtained indicate the dominance of positive moral attribution of the image. A law-abiding citizen is associated primarily with responsibility, honesty and fairness, which indicates a close connection between lawful behaviour and moral categories in the minds of law enforcement officers. The analysis also revealed that the evaluative dimension is characterised not only by high average values, but also by a low level of dispersion,

which indicates a consensus of views within the group. This allows to consider the evaluative component as a stable core of the image, which serves as a value benchmark in the perception of citizens by law enforcement officials. The normative-status dimension reflects the perception of the object through the prism of social norms, controllability and compliance with legal requirements, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Average values by normative-status selection

Bipolar scale	M	SD
Law-abiding-prone to violations	6.71	0.49
Controllable-uncontrollable	6.02	0.82
Disciplined-undisciplined	6.36	0.61
Socially responsible-irresponsible	6.44	0.55
Norm-oriented-ignores norms	6.58	0.52

Source: compiled by the author

Based on Table 4, the normative-status dimension is polarised, which allows to draw conclusions about its central role in the structure of the image of a law-abiding citizen. Based on the data obtained, it was concluded that a law-abiding citizen is a subject with predictable behaviour based on an internal perception of legal norms. The table also shows that the bipolar scale “controllable-uncontrollable” received lower average values compared to other

scales, which suggests an ambivalent attitude towards external control. “Controllability-uncontrollability” is seen as a necessary element of law and order, but excessive controllability can be seen as a restriction of personal autonomy. When studying the activity dimension, the emphasis was placed on perceptions of the dynamic characteristics of the subject, their social inclusion and initiative. The values obtained are documented in Table 5.

Table 5. Average values for the activity dimension

Bipolar scale	M	SD
Socially active-passive	5.62	0.88
Initiative-taking-inert	5.41	0.91
Ready to cooperate-isolated	5.78	0.84
Engaged in social life-detached	5.55	0.87

Source: compiled by the author

Unlike previous measurements, the activity component is characterised by less pronounced positive polarisation and greater variability in responses. This indicates that social activity is not clearly integrated into the image of a law-abiding citizen in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers. Thus, law-abidingness is perceived as passive-normative rather than as an active civic position. This interpretation may be related to a professional attitude towards maintaining order and stability, where

initiative is not always identified with desirable behaviour. In order to identify latent semantic structures, a factor analysis was performed using the principal component method with varimax rotation. As a result, three factors were identified – moral and ethical reliability (factor 1), discipline and legal orientation (factor 2), and social activity and civic engagement (factor 3) – which together explain 68.4% of the total variance; these factors are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Factor structure of the image of a “law-abiding citizen”

Scales	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Responsible-irresponsible	0.81	0.24	0.18
Reliable-unreliable	0.78	0.31	0.21
Honest-dishonest	0.84	0.19	0.14
Respectable-disrespectable	0.76	0.28	0.22
Law-abiding-prone to violations	0.34	0.82	0.19
Disciplined-undisciplined	0.41	0.79	0.23
Controllable-uncontrollable	0.29	0.74	0.31
Socially active-passive	0.18	0.26	0.83
Initiative-taking-inert	0.22	0.19	0.81
Engaged in social life-detached	0.27	0.33	0.76

Source: compiled by the author

Interpretation of the results of factor analysis showed that the psychosemantic structure of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers has a clearly expressed multidimensional organisation, within which three relatively autonomous but at the same time substantively interrelated latent factors are distinguished. The leading factor in terms of specific weight was the evaluative-moral factor, which explains 29.7% of the total variance and combines characteristics related to ethical evaluation, social attractiveness and moral reliability of the image. Within this factor, a law-abiding citizen appears as a responsible, honest, fair person who inspires trust and respect. This interpretation indicates that, in the minds of law enforcement officers, lawful behaviour is closely linked to moral qualities and is perceived not only as formal compliance with norms, but as a manifestation of inner ethical maturity. The evaluative-moral factor thus serves as the emotional and value basis of legal consciousness, setting a generally positive framework for the perception of the image. The second most important factor is the normative-regulatory factor, which explains 22.1% of the variance and represents the perception of law-abidingness as an internally accepted normative position that ensures discipline, predictability and controllability of behaviour. The structure of this factor

is dominated by characteristics related to compliance with legal norms, rule orientation and the ability to self-regulate. This dimension was considered the semantic core of the image, as it directly reflects the perception of law as a basic mechanism of social regulation and order. The high saturation of this factor emphasises the professionally determined orientation of law enforcement officers towards normativity and control as key conditions for the stability of the social system. The third factor, social activity, which explains 16.6% of the total variance, reflects the perception of the degree of involvement of a law-abiding citizen in social life, their initiative and willingness to cooperate. At the same time, the relatively lower weight of this factor indicates that social activity is not a mandatory or decisive component of the image of law-abidingness in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers, but rather performs a secondary, auxiliary function.

Thus, the psychosemantic structure of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers is characterised by a clear hierarchy of semantic dimensions, dominated by normative-regulatory and evaluative-moral components. The active component plays a secondary role and is not an essential part of the concept of law-abidingness. The results obtained allowed to conclude that in the professional consciousness, a

law-abiding citizen appears primarily as a bearer of norms and rules, rather than as an active subject of civic initiative, which has important implications for understanding the interaction between the state and civil society.

Age and gender aspects of the psychosemantic structure of an individual's legal consciousness. The results showed that younger employees with less experience demonstrate a more polarised and idealised psychosemantic structure of the image of a law-abiding citizen. In particular, the average values for the assessment measure in this group are higher ($M = 6.43$) than in the group of more experienced employees ($M = 6.07$). A similar trend can be observed in the activity component: younger employees associate law-abiding behaviour with social activity and initiative ($M = 5.74$), while in the group with more than 5 years of experience, these characteristics receive lower ratings ($M = 5.32$). This indicates a tendency among younger employees to equate lawful behaviour with moral integrity and active citizenship, which can be interpreted as a manifestation of a normative-idealistic perception of law, characteristic of the early stages of professional development. In contrast, in the group of more experienced employees, legal awareness has a more differentiated and pragmatic structure. They are characterised by an increase in the importance of the normative-regulatory dimension, with an average value of $M = 6.48$, while in the younger group this indicator is slightly lower ($M = 6.21$). At the same time, there is a decrease in the significance of the activity component, which indicates a reorientation of the concept of a law-abiding citizen from an active social subject to a normatively predictable and disciplined participant in legal relations. This dynamic indicates a gradual rationalisation of legal perceptions under the influence of professional experience and practical encounters with various forms of offences.

The results obtained partially coincide with previous studies, in particular by N. Kitoshvili (2023), who investigated the evolution of legal consciousness among certain categories of citizens. According to the author, the formation of legal consciousness occurs under the influence of worldview as a set of social relations in society; perception, which is an interpretation of events in society; and conclusions about events that have occurred. Based on an understanding of the essence of worldview, it was concluded that the formation of legal consciousness is a prolonged process. R. Harding & A. Keeling (2024) emphasised in their work that the evolution of legal consciousness occurs under the influence of social structures and hierarchies, the formation and development of which requires a certain amount of time. The cited study allowed to conclude that there is a relationship between the complexity and development of social hierarchies and the degree of formation of legal consciousness. Despite partial correspondence with previous works, the presented study contributes to the understanding of the peculiarities of the formation of legal consciousness, as it focuses on a previously under-studied group of subjects – law enforcement officers belonging to different age groups.

Gender analysis revealed moderate but relatively stable differences in the structure of the psychosemantic image. Female respondents were slightly more likely to give higher ratings to the moral and ethical characteristics of a law-abiding citizen, particularly on the "honest-dishonest" ($M = 6.52$ versus $M = 6.21$ for men) and "respectable-disrespectable" ($M = 6.61$ versus $M = 6.39$). Men, in turn, placed greater emphasis on normativity, discipline and controllability of behaviour, which is reflected in higher mean values on the normative-regulatory dimension ($M = 6.46$ versus $M = 6.31$ for women). At the same time, the differences between gender groups are not pronounced, which allows to conclude that professional factors dominate over gender factors in the formation of the psychosemantic structure of the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers. The conclusions made in the course of the study were only partially confirmed in previous works, in particular by O. Chumak (2023), who studied the peculiarities of the formation and development of gender worldview. According to the author, studying these features allows to understand the influence of gender consciousness on the harmonisation of various spheres of life, in particular social and political ones. G. Kozak-Isik (2025) explored the relational nature of legal consciousness and emphasised that it is formed, among other things, through the social relationships of individuals. The cited results allowed to conclude that gender worldview, as an integral part of social relations, influences the formation of legal consciousness. Unlike previous works, this study has a narrowly specific focus on law enforcement officers. The absence of pronounced differences between gender groups allows to conclude that there is a relatively unbiased approach to the formation of professional consciousness among law enforcement officers. Summarising the results of the age and gender analysis, it can be concluded that the psychosemantic structure of the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers is formed primarily under the influence of professional experience and processes of professional socialisation, while age and gender factors are secondary and modulating in nature. Employees with less than 5 years of work experience were more inclined to a normative-idealistic perception of the image of a law-abiding citizen, combining it with moral integrity and an active civic position, while with the growth of professional experience, there is a rationalisation and differentiation of legal ideas with a strengthening of the normative-regulatory component. Gender differences are moderate and do not have a systemic significance, which indicates the dominance of professional standards and a common legal field over individual gender characteristics. Overall, the results confirm the dynamic nature of legal consciousness and its sensitivity to the long-term inclusion of the subject in the institutionalised legal environment of law enforcement activities.

Comparative psychosemantic study of legal consciousness among representatives of various legal professions. The results showed that in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers, the image of a law-abiding

citizen has a much more pronounced evaluative and moral component compared to the images of professional lawyers. Thus, the average value for the evaluative dimension for the image of a law-abiding citizen is $M = 6.29$, while for judges this indicator is $M = 5.84$, for prosecutors – $M = 5.76$, and for lawyers – $M = 5.68$. This indicates that law-abiding citizens are associated primarily with internally accepted moral qualities – responsibility, honesty and dignity – while professional legal activity is perceived more neutrally from an emotional and value perspective. At the same time, the normative-status dimension proved to be dominant for images of representatives of the legal professions. In particular, the average values for this dimension are $M = 6.62$ for judges, $M = 6.54$ for prosecutors, and $M = 6.21$ for lawyers, while for the image of a law-abiding citizen this indicator is slightly lower ($M = 6.41$). This allows to conclude that the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers clearly distinguishes between the internally motivated law-abidingness of citizens and the formalised, role-determined legal behaviour of professional lawyers, which is viewed primarily through the prism of institutional norms, status and official powers. In addition, the activity dimension of perceptions of law-abiding citizens is characterised by greater variability in assessments compared to professional images of lawyers. Thus, the average value of the activity dimension for the image of a law-abiding citizen is $M = 5.57$ with relatively high dispersion, while for judges ($M = 5.12$), prosecutors ($M = 5.08$) and lawyers ($M = 5.19$) this indicator is lower and more homogeneous. This indicates less certainty about expectations regarding the social activity of citizens in the legal field and, at the same time, more clearly regulated ideas about the activity of representatives of the legal professions, which is perceived as limited by professional roles and regulatory frameworks.

The results obtained partially coincide with the conclusions of previous studies, in particular, the work of A. Romanova (2024), who investigated the moral and ethical aspects of the activities of political communities. According to the author, the ethical standards of conduct of law enforcement officials are regulated by relevant rules and are largely determined by disciplinary requirements. Similar to the present study, A. Romanova's work confirmed that the specifics of professional activity have an impact on the formation of the legal consciousness of law enforcement

officials. The main difference, though, is that A. Romanova focused on the moral and ethical sphere, which is just one aspect of legal awareness. The specifics of how legal awareness is formed in law enforcement officers were also studied by Y. Kozar *et al.* (2024), whose conclusions pretty much match the results of this study. According to the cited author, the legal awareness of law enforcement officers varies depending on their level of professional education and training. Accordingly, the legal awareness, or at least its subjective perception, of lawyers may differ from that of employees of, for example, the prosecutor's office. The key feature of this study, however, is its focus on the subjective perception of the legal awareness of lawyers, judges and prosecutors by individual representatives of law enforcement agencies. In the context of Ukrainian realities, the need for such research is due to the connection between the level of legal awareness of law enforcement officials, the quality and transparency of their work, and public trust in individual state bodies and institutions. Thus, the results confirm that the legal consciousness of law enforcement officials structurally distinguishes between the image of a law-abiding citizen and the image of professional lawyers, assigning them different semantic emphases: moral and value-based in the first case and normative and status-based in the second.

Psychosemantic characteristics of law-abiding, convicted and conditionally convicted persons in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers. The results obtained show that a clear hierarchy of images is formed in the psychosemantic space of the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers: from a normatively and morally positive law-abiding citizen to a negatively marked image of a convicted person with a transitional position of persons on probation. Table 7 reflects the psychosemantic assessments of law-abiding citizens, conditionally convicted persons and convicted persons obtained from law enforcement officers based on their professional experience and observations of the behaviour of these groups. The assessments reflect the evaluative, normative-regulatory and active components of legal consciousness, allowing to reconstruct latent semantic structures and compare levels of legal consciousness. This approach is justified by the expert validity of observations, when direct questioning of convicts may be limited or insufficiently informative.

Table 7. Psychosemantic characteristics of law-abiding, convicted and conditionally convicted persons in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers

Image of a social entity	Evaluation	Potency	Activity
Law-abiding citizen	6.29	6.41	5.57
Conditionally convicted	4.28	4.12	4.34
Convicted	2.63	2.41	2.78

Source: compiled by the author

Based on Table 7, the image of a law-abiding citizen is characterised by high scores on all three dimensions, reflecting a combination of moral reliability, internal discipline and social activity. Conditionally convicted persons occupy

an intermediate position in the psychosemantic space: their image combines elements of normative deviation with the potential for resocialisation, which is reflected in average scores for the evaluative ($M = 4.28$), normative-regulatory

($M = 4.12$) and activity ($M = 4.34$) components. The image of a convicted person has a sharply negative polarisation, which is reflected in low average ratings: evaluative $M = 2.63$, normative-regulatory $M = 2.41$, activity $M = 2.78$, which indicates that these individuals are perceived as uncontrollable, prone to violating norms and with limited capacity for social activity and self-regulation.

The results obtained only partially correlate with the conclusions of previous studies, given the rather specific emphasis on reconstructing the perception of convicts and conditionally convicted persons in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officials. S.X. Liu (2025), in particular, studied the interpretation of hate crime victims of relevant laws and the peculiarities of interaction with the law enforcement system. The studies selected for comparison show that the legal awareness of parties involved in law enforcement in one way or another determines the level of their trust in each other and the effectiveness of their interaction. A significant difference, however, lies in the subjects whose legal awareness was chosen as the object of study. A partial correspondence was also found between this study and the work of T.G. Crump (2024), who examined the characteristics of legal awareness in a sample of 3,500 citizens who were unlawfully convicted in the United States between 1989 and 2024. One of the findings of T.G. Crump’s work is the conclusion that certain categories of citizens have a low level of trust in the impartiality of the national justice system. In the context of the study, the identified connection is significant, as it allowed to understand the influence of law enforcement officers’ attitudes towards convicts and probationers on the formation of their legal consciousness, including their willingness to cooperate and avoid recidivism. Thus, the results of the study confirmed that the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers structurally distinguishes three categories of social actors in the legal field, assigning them different semantic emphases. The image of a law-abiding citizen emerges as a benchmark of moral responsibility and normative behaviour; those on probation are perceived as potentially resocialised and capable of social activity; convicts are perceived as socially and normatively negatively marked. This demonstrates a professionally conditioned system of categorisation of the hierarchy of legal and social statuses in the psychosemantic consciousness of law enforcement officers.

◆ Conclusions

The use of the psychosemantic approach has made it possible to identify consciousness as a multidimensional system of semantic structures formed under the influence of individual, social, and cultural meanings. The influence of cultural meanings determines the existence of different approaches to the definition and interpretation of consciousness in Western and Eastern philosophical traditions. Consciousness takes various forms, including legal consciousness, the key components of which are cognitive, emotional-evaluative, value-motivational,

volitional-regulatory, behavioural and reflective. The model proposed in the study suggests that legal consciousness is formed as a result of three phases – informative, internalisation and behavioural – under the influence of factors such as socialisation, legal education, family and professional environment, as well as personal experience of legal situations. According to the results of empirical assessments by law enforcement officials, the psychosemantic structure of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” includes a hierarchy of semantic dimensions dominated by normative-regulatory and evaluative-moral components, while the activity dimension plays a secondary role, since not all respondents perceived active citizen involvement in society as a sign of legal awareness.

An analysis of the influence of demographic characteristics showed that the formation of the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officials is influenced by their professional experience and certain processes of professional socialisation. The younger and less experienced group recorded higher average scores both in terms of the evaluative dimension ($M = 6.43$ versus $M = 6.07$ among more experienced employees) and the active dimension ($M = 5.74$ versus $M = 5.32$), which indicates a stronger connection between the image of law-abidingness and social activity and initiative. This configuration reflects the tendency of younger employees to interpret lawful behaviour through the prism of moral ideals and active civic engagement, which is typical for the early stages of professional development. Gender differences, however, were much less noticeable, which allowed to conclude that there are universal professional standards for forming the image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers. The study also revealed different semantic emphases in the images of a law-abiding citizen and a law enforcement officer – moral-value and normative-status, respectively. The results of the study also confirmed the existence in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers of three categories of subjects in the legal field: law-abiding citizens, convicted citizens, and citizens on probation. The image of a law-abiding citizen serves as a benchmark for moral responsibility and normative behaviour, while the images of citizens on probation and convicted citizens serve as potentially resocialised and capable of social activity or socially and normatively negative, respectively. Thus, in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers, there is a clear hierarchy of legal and social statuses of different categories of citizens. In further studies, this limitation could be overcome by expanding and diversifying the sample to include different categories of law enforcement officers. It would also be useful to conduct a comparative analysis of the psychosemantic image of a “law-abiding citizen” in the legal consciousness of law enforcement officers in Ukraine and other countries.

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Психосемантична структура образу «законослухняного громадянина» у правовій свідомості працівників правоохоронних органів

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✦ **Анотація.** Метою дослідження було вивчення ключових відмінностей у смислових вимірах уявлень працівників правоохоронних органів про правомірну поведінку громадян. Для досягнення мети були використані методи контент-аналізу, обраного для розробки концептуальної психосемантичної моделі, та метод емпіричних оцінок співробітників правоохоронних органів для виявлення ключових елементів образу «законослухняного громадянина» у правовій свідомості правоохоронців. Запропонована концептуальна модель розглядала правову свідомість як багатокомпонентну структуру, що включала когнітивний, емоційно-оцінний, ціннісно-мотиваційний та вольово-регулятивний елементи. Формування правової свідомості співробітників системи правосуддя великою мірою залежало від їхнього віку та професійного стажу ($M = 6,43$ у працівників зі стажем менше 5 років проти $M = 6,07$ у працівників зі стажем більше 5 років), а також активнісних цінностей ($M = 5,74$ проти $M = 5,32$); і це означало, що формування образу «законослухняного громадянина» у правовій свідомості співробітників правоохоронних органів було обумовлене аспектами соціальної активності та ініціативності. Гендерні відмінності були менш помітними, що дозволило зробити висновок про існування універсальних стандартів формування образу «законослухняного громадянина» в правоохоронній сфері. У правовій свідомості співробітників сегменту була також виявлена чітка диференціація між образами законослухняних, умовно засуджених та засуджених громадян. Образ «законослухняного громадянина» був визначений як еталон моральної відповідальності та нормативної поведінки, тоді як образи умовно засуджених та засуджених осіб циркулювали у правовій свідомості працівників правоохоронних органів як потенційно ресоціалізовані/здатні до соціальної активності та соціально/нормативно негативні, відповідно. Отримані результати можуть бути використані при плануванні професійної підготовки та перепідготовки працівників для зміцнення довіри суспільства до національної системи правосуддя.

✦ **Ключові слова:** регулятивний компонент; нормативна поведінка; гендерний аналіз; психосемантичний підхід; вольовий елемент