

The impact of involvement in Internet communication on the formation of orientations and socio-political profiles of young Russians

Elena Victorovna Brodovskaya and Anna Yurievna Dombrovskaya

Sholokhov Moscow State University for the humanities, Verkhnyaya radishchevskaya street, 16-18, Moscow, 109240, Russia

Abstract. The paper discovers the value preferences of young Internet users in Russia; defines the degree of involvement of young users in Internet communication; describes the most popular sources and gadgets, used for Internet connection; analyses the characteristics of the users' perception of their political status on the Internet; defines the correlations between the degree of involvement of young users in Internet communication and socio-demographic factors; characterizes social and political profiles of young Internet users in Russia.

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Introduction

The relevance of the topic is due to a number of important trends of the modern stage of social development. Among them acquired special importance to the development of value-forming resources of the Internet, the establishment of a global electronic networks as an instrument of social activity of young people.

The problem field of the research are:

- the value preferences of young Internet users in Russia;
- the degree of involvement of young users in Internet communication;
- the most popular sources and gadgets, used for Internet connection;
- the characteristics of the users' perception of their political status on the Internet;
- the correlations between the degree of involvement of young users in Internet communication and socio-demographic factors;
- the social and political profiles of young Internet users.

Today the leadership in the study of the Internet belongs to European and American researchers (B. Barber [1], Bimber B. [2], M. Castells [3], S. Coleman [4], P. Norris [5], Pavlyutenkova, M.Yu. [6] and other. These scientists studies humanitarian effects of the global network. In some works of scientists the Internet is perceived as a form of social identity and social capital (Clark S.J. [7], C. Ward [8], Weber, L. M., Loumakis, A., Bergman, J. [9] and others). There are no special researches of value-forming resources of the Wide World Network. The first trying to study these aspect of the Internet effects carries out the research group of Sholokhov Moscow state University for the humanities (V. Nechaev [10], E. Brodovskaya [11], A.

Dombrovskaya [12]). The article presents the main results of study concerns of the role of Internet-communication in the process of forming value orientation and social profiles of young Russians.

Method

The empirical model of research is based on methods triangulation due to the combination of qualitative (mass surveys, monitoring of social networks) and quantitative (in-depth interviews) methods. The present model allows the researcher to combine the data on the Russian Internet users with the description of their socio-political profiles and types of value orientations. The present model is combined with in-depth interviews which allow receiving a detailed picture of value preferences of Russian Internet users taking into account their personal characteristics, their communicative style on the Internet. The scientific expertise of the in-depth interviews was provided by Russian Public Opinion Research Centre, research committees in political sociology, Russian Association of Political Science and Russian Sociologists Society.

Sampling verification. The mass survey is based on multi-step sampling, which includes the procedure of the step-by-step selection of subjects. The selection units on this level comprise different types of settlements (urban/rural) in Federal Districts of Russia (Central, North-Western, Southern, North Caucasus, Ural, Siberian, Far Eastern). Sampling units in this level (secondary units) are chosen in accordance with the statistical data (quota parameters) on demographic characteristics (gender, age) of the subjects from the entire assembly. The sampling units are chosen with the help of random non-repeated selection (all units in the assembly have the same probability of being included into the

sampling). The total number of the sampling is 1100 people aged 15-30. The sampling error does not exceed 3%.

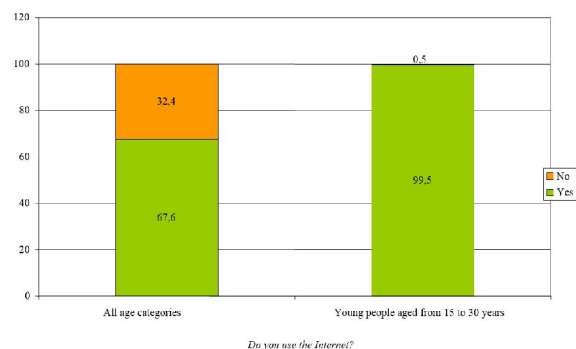
The qualitative (mass) research and quantitative (in-depth interviews) research are based on opposed principles. The first kind of research is mainly statistical and it is aimed at the search of a homogeneous group of respondents with the required characteristics (gender, age, type of settlement, region). The second kind uses the principle of heterogeneity: the choice of a new respondent, object or situation depends on their opposition and variability. The in-depth interview is based on the random sampling. The researchers use the targeted selection (method of typical representatives) which means that the selection is performed in accordance with certain criteria: individual characteristics (gender, age, level of education, occupation, federal district, and type of settlement), the degree of involvement of users in Internet communication (not less than 1 time a week), the account in social network(s). Therefore, the respondents from the mass survey who gave the most detailed positions participate in the in-depth interview. The sampling volume for the in-depth interview is 40 respondents aged 14-33.

Main results

According to the data of the mass opinion poll, 99,5 % of the respondents are Internet users. It is interesting that 32 % have been involved in the Internet communication for the last five years, 55,2 % have been using the Internet for about 6 – 10 years, 9,5 % have been online for more than 10 years and 1,3 % - for more than 15 years. Taking into consideration these statistics, we can assume that increase in the Internet proliferation in Russia is primarily effected due to the involvement of young people in the Internet communication (see picture 1).

The hierarchy of information sources for Russian young people includes (it is based on the sum of positive responses to “absolutely important” + “important”): the Internet (85,8 %); personal communication (84,5 %); television (53,3 %); press (50,6 %); radio (40,2 %). It is necessary to point out certain aspects. Firstly, proportions of those respondents who mentioned personal online communication as a significant source of information are identical in size. Apparently, this is determined by the fact that personal communication is more and more moving to the virtual space. Secondly, analysis of the priority level of various information sources (only the “absolutely important” response is taken into account) results in a significantly different hierarchy of preferences of young people: 44,7 % treat personal communication (with relatives and

friends) as an absolute priority, 28,7 % choose the Internet, 9,8 % prefer television, 8,2 % -the press (newspapers, magazines), 4,9 % - radio (see picture 2).

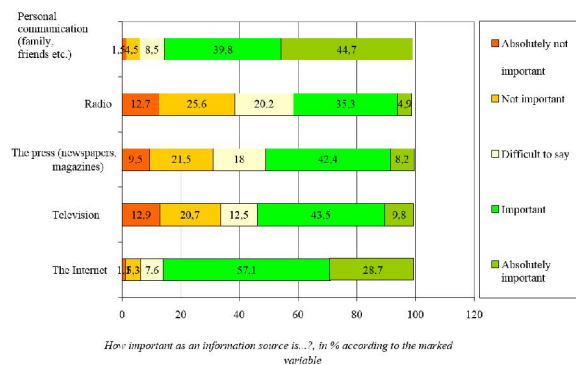


Picture 1. Proliferation of the Internet in Russia, %

In this respect it is pivotal to point out that the hypothesis is being confirmed according to which the majority of social networks is originally formed offline and then is transferred to the virtual space. Thirdly, the most substantial anti-rating (the sum of such negative responses as “absolutely not important” and “not important”) is identified with three information sources: radio (38,3 %), television (33,6 %), the press (31 %).

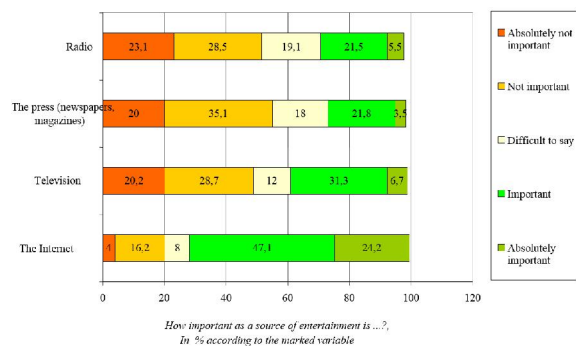
Hierarchy of the leisure activities sources reflects the focus of young Russian users on the entertaining functions of the Internet (picture 3). Thus, 71,3 % of the respondents are involved, in the first place, in the leisure space of the Internet (24,2 % out of them consider the Internet “absolutely important”), 38 % regard television as a significant source of entertainment, 27 % - radio, 25,3 % - the press (these data are generated on the basis of the sum of all positive responses). The most significant anti-rating values are characteristic of such entertainment sources as the press (55,1 %), radio (51,6 %), television (48,9 %). These data are yielded on the basis of the sum of all negative responses.

Speaking about the points of Internet connection, 95,6% of the respondents answered that they use the Internet from home. 71,8% of the respondents have Internet access at home (apart from mobile connection). 71,5% of the participants use the Internet at work, 62,4% use it outdoors (in Internet cafes, libraries, etc.), 57,3% use it in transport (cars, buses, etc.). The most unpopular places for using the Internet are educational institutions (schools, universities), only 33% of the respondents do it there. Therefore, Internet communication has become an integral part of young users’ lifestyle.



Picture 2. Priority information sources

Young people use a number of gadgets for logging on the Internet: computers (96,7%), mobile phones (74%), tablets and e-books (41,8%) – Diagram 13. The respondents, who fall into the 20-30 age groups, use their computers for Internet connection. The largest number of the respondents who do not use their phones for Internet connection belong to the oldest group of young people. Tablets are not affordable for 18% of the respondents aged 25-30; 14,5% - for the 20-24 age group, 10,5% - for the 15-19 age group. As a result, young users use far more mobile technologies.



Picture 3. Priority sources of entertainment

Typology of the Russian young people who took part in the mass opinion poll was conducted with the help of the K-means cluster Special pocket for social statistics for Windows 17.0 (SPSS for Windows 17.0) method. Application of this type of cluster analysis is determined by a substantial amount of research cases for typology as well as by a rank codification of questions which serve as the basis for creating clusters, which justifies the expediency of the abovementioned method.

The analysis resulted in identification of 5 clusters on the basis of the properties of spiritual values and objectives and of the online behavior (Table 1). Interpretation of these empirical types is based on reconsidering the theoretical conclusions which were made in the frames of numerous

researches of the social portrait of the younger generation carried out by the research teams of the Sociology Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences and of the Institute of Social and Political Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences (V.I. Chuprov [13], M.K. Gorshkov [14], Ju.A. Zubok, [15]).

Table 1. Types of the Russian young people according to the properties of spiritual values and online behavior

Clusters	Specific weight (%)
Pragmatic individuals	32,7
Contemplating individuals	12,7
Micro socials	43,5
Macro socials	6,2
Potential precariat	4,9
Total	100

There are certain specific features of the Internet behavior of the identified clusters of young people. The connection between the spiritual values and a certain type of behavior is two-way. There exists some interdependence between the existing spiritual values and peculiarities of the informational behavior which they induce. On the one hand, value priorities determine motives for using the global network and certain attitude toward the issues of confidentiality, credibility and control on the Internet. On the other hand, dominance of the worldwide web as the main source of information, which was identified in young people, obviously affects the system of values and needs of the younger generation.

Formation of the types of Russian young people is determined by several factors:

- reproduction of values and moral references by the successive generations;
- specific properties of regional socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural reality;
- peculiarities of the contemporary gender contract in the Russian society;
- characteristics of the Internet space as the dominating factor which influences the consciousness and behavior of modern Russian young people.

Summing up the main results of the content-analysis carried out on the basis of the transcripts of the deep interview with young Russian people, we would like to point out that an advantage of the data generated with the help of the applied method lies in a higher heuristic potential of all hypothesis and conclusions which, in turn, enable the researchers to gain a better insight into the specific features of values and needs formation of the contemporary younger generation in Russia.

Formation of the life values and goals of young people is primarily affected by their age and another criterion connected with it, namely, kind of employment. Thus, young people in their student period (younger than 25 years), whose dominant value is getting proper education, are focused on optimistic views on the image of their future and on opportunities of their social mobility. Moreover, they are also self-confident and motivated to achieve success which is perceived, in the first place, as social acknowledgement and recognition. Those young people who work after graduating from an educational institution of higher education express more balanced and mature views which are characteristic of people who face real life problems and have to solve them. Their life principles are formed under the influence of their striving to obtain financial stability in order to support their family.

Life strategy of contemporary young people is formed differently in different federal districts as well as in cities and towns of different scale. Thus, problems of small towns predetermine in young people the existence of inner motivation to migrate to a larger city with a good infrastructure and a good labor market. Territorial proximity with the European countries as well as a more intensive internalization of the western values by young people who live in the Central and North-Western federal districts determine the dominance of practical values to utilize and to achieve. Traditions of the social and cultural regions of the Ural, Siberian, Far Eastern and Southern federal districts, which tend to preserve traditional and universal values of family life and interpersonal communication, determine in young people living there the dominance of micro social values and objectives, which is proved by the findings of the mass opinion poll.

Qualitative characteristics of the involvement of young Russian people into the Internet communication are determined, on the one hand, by their system of values, and, on the other hand, by the social and demographic criteria. Thus, young people from the Central and North-Western federal districts are pragmatically-minded, so their online activities are utilitarian and aim, for instance, at earning money. Whereas representatives of feminine and even masculine gender groups of young people living in the Southern and Far Eastern federal districts have interpersonal and family values and, consequently, are involved in the Internet communication in order to entertain and socialize “endlessly” there. Young representatives of the Northern Caucasus, Ural and Siberian federal districts are characterized by the values of self-reflection and learning about the world, therefore, they treat the Internet as a source of information and

a means of publishing their own thoughts and ideas. Having said that, we can describe involvement in the Internet communication in terms of the forming Internet addiction which determines lack of a systematic approach as well as a superficial and fragmentary character of the cognitive part in the personality of a young person (young people don't consider it important and necessary to allocate enough time in order to study large expanses of text information thoroughly and to interiorize new knowledge because they can get access to any needed fact online at any time).

The distinguished correlations between the findings of the deep interview and the mass opinion poll on the types of value and socio-political profiles of young people determined the existence of four major kinds of political activity of the younger generation in Russia. Those young people who are focused on the traditional values of the family and interpersonal relationship mainly belong to the type which is indifferent to politics (the majority are primarily women from the Southern, Ural and Siberian federal districts). Pragmatically-minded young people most often stick to passive political online participation which is characterized by the support of the current government (the majority are citizens of the North-Eastern federal district). Guided by the values of the common good and macro-social achievements young people most frequently become active centrists who are able to transfer their online-activity into offline actions, for instance, to become leaders of the branches of political parties for young people, to participate in political rallies held in support of the current reforms (the majority of these people are from the Ural, Siberian and Far Eastern federal districts).

Passive oppositional strategy is characteristic of the following two types of young people: firstly, those who are focused on the values of self-reflection and learning about the world and, secondly, the so-called “potentially dangerous”. Having said that, it can be pointed out that at the moment their oppositional strategy is represented exclusively online and there is no explicit evidence that they are going to transfer their virtual political activity into offline actions (the majority of such passive opposition members are young people from the Central federal district).

Findings

We can draw a conclusion that the target audience of young users is characterized by substantial activity and technological effectiveness of online communication.

There is a common trend that, like all Russian users in general, young people are more

likely to consume copy and disseminate Internet content, rather than create new one. Nevertheless, the younger generation typically tends to learn about news and events online, because the Internet can be identified as the major source of entertainment and information.

Every day young Russian users resort to various parts on the global network in such activities as playing computer games, studying online, doing the shopping, effecting payments, downloading entertaining content, surfing the net etc. The larger is the scope of the Internet communication chosen by users, the larger is the number of roles and corresponding needs which they have in the virtual reality.

On the whole, young Russian users are profoundly more conscious of the political functions of the Internet in comparison with other age groups. The majority of representatives of the younger generation have a positive attitude to the realization of one's political subjectness on the global network understanding it primarily as enhancing opportunities for defending political rights and freedoms as well as for conducting open political communication. Nonetheless, young Russian users are more reserved in their assessment of the potential of the public opinion which is formed on the global net to have any significant impact on the decisions of the authorities.

In comparison with other groups of citizens, young Internet users in Russia demonstrate a higher level of trust toward the credibility and reliability of the Internet content which, in turn, leads to positive perception of the political subjectness of the Internet users. This fact is discordant with the negative assessment of the confidentiality and insufficient protection of the privacy of all online activities.

Contradictory assessment of the boundaries of online freedom and security divides the audience of young Russian users into supporters and opponents of restricting the freedom of the Internet communication. Differentiation of opinions doesn't reflect only explicit expression of the positive assessment of one's political subjectness, but rather the character of the Internet activity and types of the Internet content consumed by users. Those respondents, who are focused on entertainment, rather than on political functions, feel "insecure" online.

The supporters of the increased control of the authorities over the Internet communication are made up by those young Russian users who can provisionally be referred to "the party of the TV-set". The supporters of "the absolute freedom of speech" online are those Russian users who are primarily focused on criticizing the authorities and who are

accustomed to expressing their views on politics and politicians in their routine everyday online communication.

While tolerant attitude towards extremist discourse is to a lesser extent connected with the orientation of some young Russian users on the political functions of the Internet and on positive perception of the political subjectness online, it to a greater extent reflects critical attitude towards any actions taken by the authorities and politicians.

Cluster analysis is determined by a significant amount of cases for investigating and classifying as well as by the rank codification of the questions which serve as the basis for clustering, which, in turn, justifies the expediency of the abovementioned method. The analysis resulted in distinguishing the following five clusters according to such characteristics as the system of values and involvement into the Internet communication: pragmatic individuals, contemplating individuals, micro socials, macro socials, and potential precariats. There is a two-way character of the interconnection between the system of values and involvement into the Internet communication. We can identify some interdependence between the existing spiritual values of young people and some peculiarities of their online behavior which are encouraged by these values. On the one hand, value priorities determine the motives for using the global network, attitude to the problems of confidentiality, credibility and control on the Internet. On the other hand, the identified dominance of the global network as the leading source of information obviously affects the system of values and needs of the younger generation.

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Corresponding Author:

Dr. Brodovskaya Elena Victorovna
Sholokhov Moscow State University for the humanities
Verkhnyaya radishchevskaya street, 16-18, Moscow,
109240, Russia

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