INTERNET COMMUNICATION IN RUSSIA
(WORLD INTERNET PROJECT - 2012)

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The article presents some results of sociological studies of the Internet communication in modern Russia, conducted within the framework of the World Internet Project (WIP - 2012).

Keywords: Internet, Internet communication, World Internet Project, non-users and users, Runet.

Conference participants, National championship in scientific analytics

The Institute for High-Hume Technologies in Social Computing of the Sholokhov Moscow State University for the Humanities was chosen as the hosting center of the research project WIP - 2012. Nowadays the World Internet Project (WIP) has become the main international platform which unites researchers from all over the world. The project was launched in the Center of Political Communication, Los Angeles, US in 1999, which is currently transformed into the Center of Digital Future. The founders of the project considered the increasing influence of digital technologies and the Internet as a cross-national phenomenon which transforms social, political and economic aspects of life for individuals, societies, nations and the globe. The researchers set out an ambitious goal to annually supervise, register and analyze changes connected with the expansion of the Internet communications in different parts of the globe.

The research project has the following characteristics: scientists conduct massive national surveys using the same methods (it means that people in different countries respond to the same questions during interviews). The average number of respondents in one country is 1000, which corresponds to 30 000–40 000 respondents of WIP project in general. The respondents participate in the survey irrespective of their inclusion in the Internet communications, in other words their status of “user” or “non-user” is not important.

The data collection was fulfilled in cooperation with Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM). The research was based on the results of the four-level stratified regional selection of respondents (1600 people aged over 14) which reflects the population structure of the Russian Federation depending on gender, age, level of education, types of settlements and federal districts.

The regions of RF belong to the first level of selection. There are two clusters of RF regions which are based on various characteristics for the representative selection of the region. The research includes 80 RF regions except the Nenetskiy Autonomous Region (due to its small population and remote location); the Chechen Republic (due to the absence of reliable statistical data and complicated political situation); the Taymyr (Dolgano-Nenetskiy) Autonomous Region, the Evenkiyskiy Autonomous Region, the Buryatskiy Autonomous Region, the Koryakskiy Autonomous Region (because in reality these regions have nearly lost their independence) and the Chukotskiy Autonomous Region (due to its small population and remote location).

Cluster 1 – economic parameters of the region

The following parameters were analyzed:
- Economy, indices of development
- share of urban and rural population in the general population;
- number of people with the income lower than the breadline;
- general regional product per capita;
- retail trade turnover per capita;
- amount of paid services per capita;
- investment in the capital assets per capita;
- Social domain
- child mortality indices;
- indices of natural population growth;
- migration growth indices;
- level of economic activity of the population;
- unemployment rate;

Cluster 2 – political characteristics of the region

The research is based on the analysis of the official results of the election to the State Duma of RF in December 2011 and the Presidential election in March 2012.

Final distribution and selection of regions

Both clusterizations of regions are applied. As a result there are 19 groups of regions. The regions from the same group belong to the same cluster with its all clusterizations.

The further selection of regions was carried out in accordance with the following conditions:
- The region with the largest population is selected in each sampling.
- If there is a group of several regions, only about a half of them are chosen for sampling.

Each Federal District is represented by nearly a half of its regions. Consequently, there is a group of 46 RF regions which represent all kinds of regions (according to the types described above).

Distribution of respondents depending on the type of settlements

Each Federal District has a number of respondents proportional to its population size (the total number of respondents is 1600).

Within the Federal District the respondents are distributed into 7 groups which correspond to 7 types of settlements (cities with the population over 1 000 000, cities with the population 500 000 – 1 000 000, cities with the population 100 000 – 500 000, cities

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with the population 50 000 – 100 000, cities with the population below 50 000, villages, rural areas).

Respondents from each group are equally distributed among regions which belong to a certain Federal District and have a certain type of settlement.

**Selection of a settlement in the region**

If there is only one settlement of a particular type, it is surely included into the regional sampling.

If there are several settlements, which is always true for the rural areas and nearly always for villages and small towns, then there is a random selection of settlements.

The degree of inclusion of Russian people in the Internet communications, first and foremost, is reflected by the correlation between non-users and users: 32% and 66%. The number of users is twice as much as the number of those not using the Internet communication; 46% of respondents use the Internet every day, 16% do it several times a week, 4% 1 time every six months. The number of users is 5-6% higher than the data collected by other research centers. It can be explained by the fast growth of the Internet communication in Russia. 43% of respondents have been using the Internet over 5 years (30% of respondents chose the variant “5-7 years”, 13% – “over 8 years”), 41% of Russian people began to use the Internet not so long ago (2-4 years ago), only 5% of respondents have been using the Internet less than a year.

The Russian society has the following communicative hierarchy: personal communication (informal communication) – television – Internet – the press – the radio. The difference between the audiences can be 13-17%. 50% of respondents find the first three sources (communication, television and the Internet) rather important and consequently they should be considered as the most important components of the Russian information space. There is a certain degree of “polarization” in the attitude of the Russian people towards the Internet as the source of information. 57% of respondents say that it is rather important, 18% - rather unimportant, more than 23% do not receive any information. This difference proves the «digital disruption» in the Russian society between users interested in the Internet opportunities and social segments which prefer the printed media and informal communication to the Internet. This «digital disruption» depends on the age: for the majority of young people (younger than 33 years old) the Internet is an important source of information, whereas older age groups (older than 54 years old) do not use this communicative format.

The analysis of the Internet search content and its structure allows to single out several aspects of the information consumption in Russia: news search (more than 75%), fun-content (73%), health (65%), self-education (60%), tourism and travel (50%), work (42%). Thus, Russian users, like other users in the world, appreciate fast and unlimited access to news information. The Internet-communication has a number of informational effects. First, the improvement of standards of social services (for example, healthcare) reflects the immersion in the problem (every second Russian user searches for the information about health). Second, we can expect that the great users’ interest in the development of a certain segment of the market (every second Russian traveler who participates in the Internet communication prepares travels with the help of the Internet) actively influences the quality of supply. The transparency of information about touristic services in Russia has become the locomotive for its development.

The content and formats of informational consumption on the Internet show its influence on the structure of leisure activities in Russia. The Internet has become so popular because of its opportunities for entertainment and it is still an important element of fun industry. The results help to describe the typical roles of the majority of participants of the Internet communication which dominate the leisure segment of Runet: 24% out of 60% of the respondents are active gamers (once a day or more often), 14% out of 58% - are active shoppers (once a month or more often), 9% out of 80 % music fans listen to the music on the Internet several times a day.

Does this structure of the Internet leisure activities serve as a factor which substitutes the interpersonal communication? The users themselves say that the Internet communication has not changed the intensity of their communication with primary (family, friends, colleagues) and secondary (people with similar interests, political and religious beliefs) groups with which a person usually associates his or her values, norms and rules of behavior. They communicate as much as they used to. Alongside with the above mentioned results quite a large number of respondents (15-25%) think that the Internet has intensified their contacts with their family, friends, colleagues and people with similar interests and hobbies.

To a great extent it is gamers who are excluded from real interpersonal communication. Game addiction is typical for people who play computer games once a day or more often. The results show that 24% of the respondents belong to this group. It is not surprising that most gamers are 14-18 years old. However, the Internet-games which have the online multi users services affect not only teenagers but also people aged 43 (though the most active participants are respondents aged 34). This result shows that games as a leisure activity are also popular among middle-aged respondents. This conclusion is supported by the analysis of the World of Tanks accounts, the most popular game in Russia; the number of its participants has reached 40 000 000 people.

In their turn shoppers and other users interested in economic opportunities of the Internet greatly influence the economy of Runet as well as the economy of Russia. Modern users are quite active: 23% do the shopping online, 21% pay their bills on the Internet (every third user), 17% of the respondents use the Internet-banking, 10% invest money online. The number of users of the economic Internet-services reveals the influence of online retailers on the Runet economy which tends to grow. The market of educational services looks rather modest: 15% of users study online (respondents aged 14-33). Being another important indicator which reflects frequency and quality of the Internet use, the web-surfeing intensity shows that
the subculture of the Internet behavior is actively evolving. The Internet is no longer a tool. It is gradually becoming a lifestyle for a great part of Russian people.

The information landscape of the Runet is changing. Growing consumption of video materials has caused reformatting of the traditional ways of posting information, changing them into video and, thus, increasing the share of video, virus and educational commercials, establishing a rapid development of the Internet television.

An active process of merging of various blogs, social networks, audio and video services is taking place in the Runet. It results in the growth of the number of Internet users. Integral services based on the social networks offer an opportunity to meet the demands for communication, self-expression, searching for any information and working with it simultaneously.

Evidently, the Internet has raised the level of our information awareness and, as a consequence, has increased the level of our requirements and claims to the quality of services provided by state institutions and private corporations. Some market spheres are dynamically changing under the influence of the user-consumers’ opinions. Administrative establishments are trying to comply with the principle of transparency.

Apart from some evident changes connected with intensification of the information consumption, emergence of new formats and priorities in the communication focus and orientation and involvement in the global network are exerting the impact on everyday routine and lifestyle of a significant part of the Russians. Every day active Internet-users communicate, search for some information, study, pay their bills, buy various goods, set up and promote business companies online. As a rule, this description can be referred to a younger, more educated and relatively successful audience – the so-called “party of the Internet”. This party is conditionally opposed by the so-called “party of the television” which comprises mainly non-users. A considerable share of its members belongs to groups with limited economic and social resources. These two parties are divided not only by significant social distance, but also by conflicts of values.

References:

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