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Young People in the Information Society

Research shows that the digital divide among young Russians has almost disappeared, and differences according to gender, age, income, region of residence, and education are hardly noticeable. It would now be more useful to look for other kinds of gaps within the youth population regarding its ability to take full advantage of the Internet's potential.

In the summer of 2007, the Laboratory for the Social Problems of the Development of the Information Society, Institute for Socioeconomic Studies of the Population, Russian Academy of Sciences, in collaboration with the Modern Academy of the Humanities, carried out a survey of the level of use of information and communication technologies (ICT) by college students.¹

That survey proved to be an important stage in the process of investigating the information schism in Russian society: it made it possible to take advantage of a unique opportunity to find out how

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people who live in the different regions of the Russian Federation actually make use of ICT, directly from other citizens rather than from the mass media or from speeches given by politicians.

The term “information schism” is generally classified among the social-demographic differences in the analysis of ICT use. There is no precision in the measurements, which often are nothing more than making a comparison of levels of use of ICT devices and degree of involvement in the Internet.

The first scientific studies of the topic appeared in 1997. At the present time the multidimensional analysis of this phenomenon, and the search for interconnection between social and information inequality, is becoming more common. The digital schism is often cited as the factor that gives rise to widening social inequality.

These days it is primarily empirical studies that are linked to ICT use. The use of a personal computer, the Internet, and cell phones is usually investigated in connection with indicators of income, level of education, type of family, sex, and age. It is also possible that the “digital schism” might be a consequence of differences in people’s individual abilities and their experience in ICT use.

In this connection, the students enrolled in the Modern Academy of the Humanities, the survey participants, are represented as a single, unitary group that has an overall strategy of behavior when it comes to ICT use. But is this the case?

The survey found that 15.7 percent of the students surveyed did not have a computer in the home, and moreover the ratio between young men and young women was approximately the same. This indicates that the sex of the respondent, which played a major role in ICT use in the fairly recent past, has ceased to have a substantial influence. The parents of half the respondents who do not have a computer in the home do not have a higher education.

A total of 2.4 percent of all respondents did not have any ICT devices at all, even a television. This group is characterized by a low average per-capita income (2,000–6,000 rubles per month). In the case of half the students in this group, both parents have a higher education, while in the case of the rest the parents do not have a higher education. Students who do not have any ICT devices live in the following cities: Cheliabinsk, Tobolsk, Aginsk,

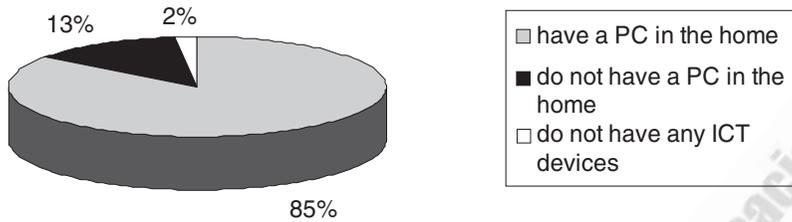


Figure 1. Possession of ICT Devices

Kurgan, Ivanovo, Omsk, Kursk, Nizhnii Novgorod, Kurchatov, and Astrakhan. The respondents in this group are distributed all over the territory of Russia, and their region's distance from Moscow does not have any influence on whether they have ICT devices. The main reason they are not involved in the information society, very likely, is their lack of financial resources (see Figure 1).

A total of 90 percent of the respondents are involved in the global network, while 10 percent do not use the Internet; that number includes 2 percent of all of the respondents who never work with a computer (see Figure 2). In the case of over half the students who do not use the Internet, neither parents has a higher education, and they have a relatively low average per-capita income, less than 11,000 rubles per month. For the most part, the regions where students who do not use the Internet live are quite far from Moscow: Aginsk, Kurchatov, Shadrinsk, and Barnaul. However, the respondents in other distant regions, such as Magadan, Tobol'sk, and Krasnoiarsk, do use the Internet.

A total of 7 percent of the respondents do not have a cell phone. Among that number, 70 percent are young men and only 30 percent are young women. Their parents' education does not have any influence on this issue. Students who do not have a cell phone live in these cities: Tobolsk, Sovetskaia Gavan, Zlatoust, and Rybinsk, indicating that the region's distance from the center is not that important when it comes to cell phone use (see Figure 3).

And finally, the respondents who are most advanced in the information society, 5.7 percent, have a wide array of ICT devices such as a computer, a notebook, a printer, a scanner, a digital camera, DVDs, a TV set, and so on (see Figure 4). In this group both

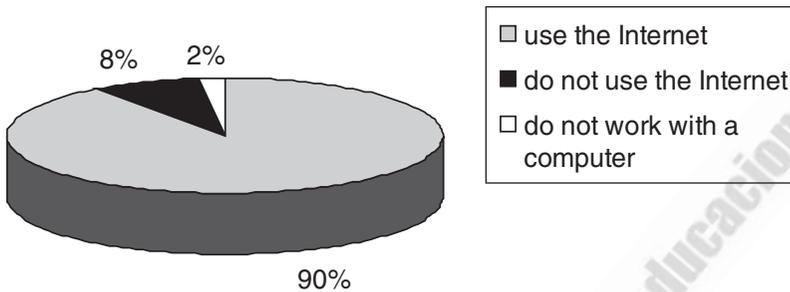


Figure 2. Use of the Internet

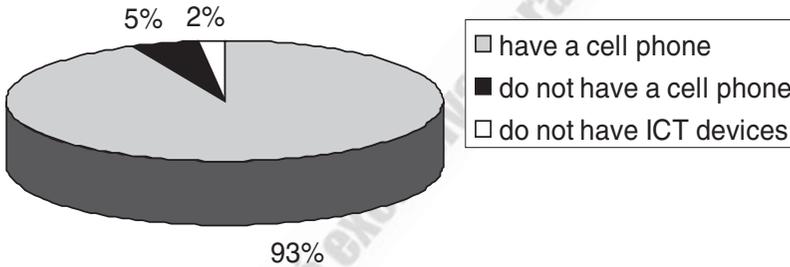


Figure 3. Possession of a Cellphone

parents of more than half the students have a higher education. The average per-capita income of the respondents in this group is 10,000–50,000 rubles per month. The cities of residence of the students who have a wide array of ICT devices are the following: Magadan, Eisk, Novgorod Velikii, Saratov, and Rybinsk. Consequently, distance from the center does not influence whether the students have ICT devices. For example, both the students who have a wide array of ICT devices and those who do not have a cell phone live in Rybinsk.

On the whole, a major portion of the students (74 percent of respondents) have a computer in the home and a cell phone.

The survey has shown that any gender differences between the respondents in regard to ICT use are not really significant. In the group of respondents characterized by having the most ICT devices there is a predominance of students whose parents have a

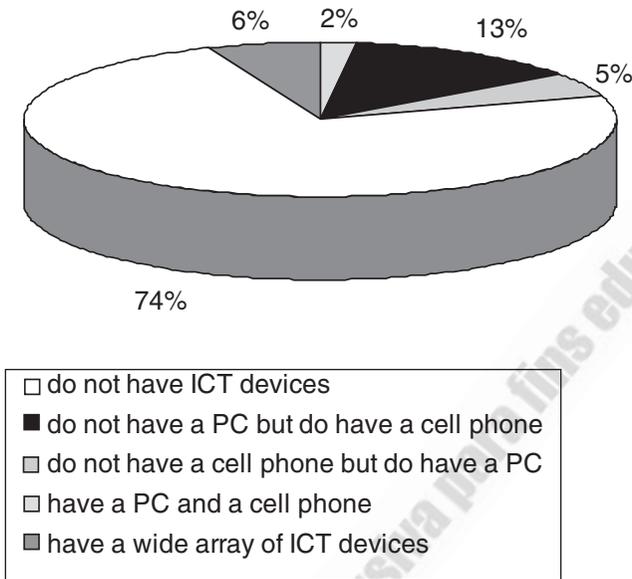


Figure 4. Distribution into Groups by Level of ICT Use

higher education; in the other groups this factor does not have any significant influence. The region of residence also has very little influence on ICT use.

A total of 2 percent of the students surveyed who do not have any ICT devices belong to the low-income group of the population, but there are also low-income individuals among those who make active use of the computer, the Internet, and cell phones. Hence, the economic factor, as well, does not seem to have any significant influence on ICT use among young people.

During the survey no significant differences were found in ICT use among college students of different ages, or among students in the first year and the fifth year of study.

All of these factors provide evidence that the first wave of the “digital schism” among young people is weakly discernible. Differences having to do with the traditional parameters of surveys, such as sex, age, income, region of residence, and education, are hardly noticeable. Hence, it is urgently necessary to make an in-depth study of this question, to come up with new parameters that

will provide a more detailed characterization of the behavior of the different groups of young people in the virtual world.

Note

1. The main objective of the study was to clarify the extent to which today's Russian college students use the computer, the Internet, and cell phones, and also to attempt to determine the patterns of the use of these things.

The survey included 458 students enrolled in the faculties of law and psychology and the faculties of economics, administration, and also information science and computer technology in forty-five branches of the Modern Academy of the Humanities located in the following cities: Abakan, Aginsk, Arzamas, Astrakhan, Balakovo, Barnaul, Velikie Luki, Velsk, Vladimir, Volzhsk, Dzerzhinsk, Dmitrovgrad, Eisk, Ekaterinburg, Zheleznogorsk, Zlatoust, Ivanovo, Kazan, Kaliningrad, Kirov, Kovrov, Kostroma, Krasnoiarsk, Kurgan, Kursk, Kurchatov, Magadan, Moscow, Murmansk, Naberezhnye Chelny, Nizhnii Novgorod, Novgorod Velikii, Novosibirsk, Novocherkassk, Omsk, Pushkin, Rostov, Rybinsk, Saratov, Sovetskaia Gavan, Syktyvkar, Tobolsk, Troitsk, Ufa, Cheliabinsk, and Shadrinsk. The students ranged in age from seventeen to thirty-six.

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