

INVESTIGATING THE MAIN SOURCES OF POLITICAL ACQUISITION IN THE STUDENT ENVIRONMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article is an analysis of data obtained during a sociological survey conducted by the authors in the spring of 2017 among the students of the Kazan Federal University. The purpose of the study was to expose the students' preferences concerning the sources of obtaining political information. The topicality of the study is determined by a number of circumstances, such as: the need to engage young people in social and political relations, which is one of the most important aspects of the process of general socialization of young people in a democratic society; the problem of increasing the effectiveness of the process of political communication, which is of paramount importance in the run-up to the presidential elections of 2018 in Russia.

In the created situation, it is the use of the scientific, in this case sociological, toolkit that is a necessary prerequisite for the formation of effective channels of political communication with student youth and, in general, increasing the political activity of this part of society. The attention of researchers was focused on the main trends in changing the channels for obtaining political information among the students, namely, the transformation of the Internet into the main channel of political communication and the reasons that led to this process. The results of the research show that now the Internet has become the main source of information in the student environment of the Republic of Tatarstan, but the interest in foreign and domestic political information is more situational in the student environment and is associated with specific political events.

KEYWORDS

Sources of political information, Student body, Internet, Mass media, Kazan Federal University.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of a significant transformation of the information environment of modern society, the analysis of sources and methods of obtaining political information becomes a central problem of organizing an effective process of political communication and, ultimately, the development of the political system on the whole. Under the existing conditions, the sociological monitoring of the preferred ways and channels for obtaining information about the political life of society is intended to provide answers to the burning problems of the development of a modern democratic society, to design the ways of increasing the political activity of citizens, which, in turn, is a necessary condition for its stable existence.

A special place in the study of this range of problems should, in our opinion, be assigned to the student youth, which plays an important role in the long-term development of socio-political processes in the country. Note that the attitude of the student youth towards political communication and politics in general is acute for modern society and the state, since it is the specific position of the student youth which the future socio-political development of society depends on, and, in turn, the political views and selfawareness of young people determine the fate and future of the state on the whole (Morozova, Müller, & Fatykhova, 2015; Müller, Laptev, & Fatykhova, 2016; Mardani & Fallah, 2018).

At the same time, the modern “model” of interaction between the youth and the political system of society is far from ideal. Young people as a whole show a rather low political activity, which, on the one hand, is typical for the majority of developed democratic Western countries, and, on the other hand, represents a significant threat to the process of legitimizing the existing political system in the medium and long term (Etnel, 2010; Dafflon, 2009). The extremely low priority of politics in the rating of life values, the legal illiteracy of the younger generation, ineffective youth policy, in combination with confidence in their own inability to change anything in the current situation, are just some of the reasons explaining this state of affairs in the country (Milorava, 2017).

We can add one more important circumstance to this list, in our opinion, it is the crisis of the so-called “traditional” channels of political communication, which primarily affected the most “progressive” part of the society - student youth - in terms of sources of information. In the past decade, almost absolute leaders in “traditional” media space, primarily television, are the representatives of the party of power, while the Internet can provide a platform for posting information regardless of budget and political orientation (Sychenkova & Vakhrusheva, 2014). In the situation when Russian voters are increasingly moving away from “monotonous” political information, the content of which they cannot influence, the Internet space is becoming an increasingly attractive source of diverse social and political content, in the formation of which they take the most active part.

According to the results of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (RPORC) conducted in April 2017, the Internet as a source of information is coming close to TV. More than two-thirds of all respondents (69%) almost always use central television as a source of news and knowledge (reduction from 78% in 2012). However, the high popularity is supported mainly by the representatives of the older generation: for example, the federal channels are often watched by 87% in the group older the age of 60 and almost half by 48% in the group aged 18-24. Valery Fyodorov, General Director of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (RPORC), notes the trends of development of the Internet as an increasingly mass source of information for all layers and groups of Russian society and a lack of interest in television by the youngest part of the audience (Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 2017).

In turn, the Russian authorities, realizing the rapidly expanding opportunities for using the Internet, including for political struggle, are striving more and more to influence the Runet, which has become a new arena of information warfare. At the same time, attention is drawn to the fact that the Russian authorities are increasingly using a system of prohibitive and punitive measures against users, bloggers and owners of the Internet resources. So, in 2016 the representatives of the International Human Rights Group “Agora” registered 53004 facts of administrative pressure, 35019 restrictions on access to sites

and 298 criminal prosecutions of network users. In addition, 97 proposals of politicians and officials on the Internet regulation were registered (AGORA, 2017).

Certainly, the logic of the Russian authorities who take the Internet in as the theater of military operations is understandable and understandable, but the question arises whether these actions can attract the students to politics who have already voted for the diversity of content and want to communicate on the terms chosen by them themselves (Jaramillo, 2018).

In connection with the above circumstances, there is no doubt that it is important to identify the features and sources of obtaining political information among the students. This problem is covered in this article, based on the study of the issue on the example of the students of the Kazan Federal (Volga) University.

2. METHODS

A mass survey by questionnaire was chosen as the method of collecting primary sociological information in the course of the study. The authors developed the questionnaire, which was used during the survey. In the course of questioning, a quota sample was formed, representational in the age-sex respect. The students of the Kazan Federal University who were enrolled in full-time studies were chosen as a general population. The survey was held on the premises of the campus (the Village of Universiade) and in the University's academic buildings. In May of 2017, in all, 450 students of the Kazan Federal University were interviewed.

The purpose of the study was to identify the students' preferences regarding the sources of political information acquisition.

To achieve this goal, the following problems were consistently solved during the investigation:

1. To reveal the degree of students' trust in "traditional" mass media (press, radio, television);
2. To investigate the degree of popularity of the Internet as a source of political information;

3. To study the degree of interest of the students in the discussion of the issues related to the political agenda.
4. To identify the most popular topical online publications in the student environment.

The following hypotheses were used as working ones:

1. At the present stage, the Internet is the most popular source of political information in the student environment, which is directly related to its qualitative characteristics.
2. Essential characteristics of the Internet that meet the needs of the student youth in the field of political communication are free information exchange and the possibility of independent production of information content.

In the course of investigation, before processing the source information, the whole array was previously checked for quality of toolkit filling, correction of errors and rejection of poorly filled in questionnaires. As a result, 435 of 450 questionnaires were submitted for processing.

Preparation of data for processing included encryption, encoding and transfer of data to a .xls file (Excel spreadsheet). Encryption was made in numerical notation, the point of the scale in each specific question corresponded to the code of the answers in the question in the introductory program. Data processing and analysis were carried out in the form of layout drawings, tables and groupings, using the code marks of the characteristics. The SPSS Statistics program was used for data processing, one used the standard methods of information processing: simple distributions, percentages, averages, mode and variance of deviations, coefficients of association of qualitative characteristics, rank and pair coefficients of correlation.

3. RESULTS

According to the results of the survey, half of the total number of the respondents (50%) called the Internet as the main source of information, while only 21% of respondents preferred to use television. Radio (15%) and press (14%) occupy the third and fourth place, respectively. However, the question “Do you agree that in the modern world the popularity of traditional media is falling?” was answered affirmatively by more than half of the respondents (63%). The similar results are generally correlated with the previously voiced results obtained by the RPORC.

It should be noted that the respondents ranked news first (35%) in popularity, while entertainment information (29%) occupied the second place. At the same time, young people recognize that interest in news events is most often associated with specific events in the country (36%). Another 26% of the respondents watch the news frequently and regularly. These facts cause cautious optimism, indicating, in our opinion, the interest in the current public events from the student youth.

Almost a third of the respondents indicated bias of coverage of current events (30%) as the main problem of “traditional” mass media. Another 18% of the respondents said there was no interest and responsiveness when representing materials. At the same time, young people mentioned interesting information (31%), objectivity of presentation of materials (21%), as well as popularity of the publication (20%) as the main motives that influenced the choice of this or that Internet news resource. The respondents’ answers to the question of confidence in the Internet publications were as follows: 18% of the respondents unambiguously put their trust in the information received from the network; 35% rather trust it; 11% do not trust and 30% do not trust.

Turning to the block of questions directly related to the information of a political nature, it should be noted that 42% of the respondents are subscribed to thematic communities covering the discussion of the political issues. 21% of the respondents visit news “publics” with internal and foreign policy information every day, and another 31% do it at least 1-2 times a week. Less than a third of the respondents (27%)

visit rarely, and 15% - do not visit political publics in general. At the same time, attention is drawn to the fact that when answering the question “Do you participate in the discussion of political news on the Internet?” a significant part of the respondents answered negatively (39%); sometimes - 25%; in the events interesting for me - 22%; yes - 14%. These results point to the students’ changeable interest in the current political life and suggest that the motivation for active participation of the students in the political agenda has a situational character.

Among “the leaders” who can influence the political consciousness of the citizens, the respondents put the blogs of the leaders of opinions(30%) and social networks (28%) to the first place. It is interesting that the third place was taken by massively multiuser online games (21%), while the virtual thematic communities occupied only the fourth place (15%).A significant part of the respondents (48%) highly appreciates the possibilities of social networks as a factor of political mobilization, while those who disagree with this statement are twice less - 24%.

In addition to the traditional influence of authoritative opinion on the formation of political views of young people, these data are an indication, in our opinion, of the main priorities of the respondents in the field of information exchange. Obviously, as a motivator, in this case, political communication, for student youth is both a free exchange of information, and the ability to independently produce their own information content (Nikitina, 2016; Ingelhart & Welzel, 2009). It is these opportunities that the social networks provide.

4. SUMMARY

An important result of the study was the confirmation of data on the decrease in the interest of students in the “traditional” (television, radio and press) media, as the sources of news information. To date, 50% of the respondents regard the Internet as the preferred source of news. At the same time, the main disadvantage of “traditional” media, as the respondents indicate, is its bias, while the main advantages of the Internet are an interesting and objective information.

The interest in political information among the respondents has situational character and is connected mainly with major socio-political events. At the same time, it should be noted that a significant proportion of the respondents are interested in both news information in general and political information.

5. CONCLUSION

The respondents called the blogs of the leaders of an opinion and social networks to be the main sources of influence on the political consciousness of Russians, which in this case indicates the characteristics of information and communication needs of the respondents whose main motivators in the process of political communication are the free exchange of information and the possibility of independent production of it. In this connection, it should be noted that legislative initiatives aimed at toughening up the process of regulating the Internet are more likely to lead to the increase in political apathy and alienation of this socio-demographic group in the sphere of politics.

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