

## Conference Paper

# Social Media As a Tool for Youth Involvement

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## Abstract

This article contains the results of the empirical study devoted to the problem of Russian youth political involvement and the influence of social media on the young people's political activities. The study was in years 2018–2019. The study used quantitative method for collecting primary data (survey). The sample of the survey was 600 respondents. The respondents were young people studying at colleges and universities in Russian central region (18 districts). The study examines the political involvement of youth and the impact of social media on the young people political involvement. The survey has revealed the specifics of young people using different information channels to obtain news, thematic features of the information consumed, the degree of confidence in information, the attitude of young people towards politics, characteristics of political behavior, specifics of decision-making in crisis situations and patriotic sentiment among young people. The study has fixed the active use of online communication channels by young people, and their contradictory opinions on this question. They actively consume political information, but believe that they are not interested in politics; they are not involved and do not want to get involved in political activities, but they are ready to participate in protest movements; they have patriotic sentiments, but are not ready to contribute to the solving of political problems in the country.

**Keywords:** youth, social media, information, interest, political involvement.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, researchers from different countries have received mixed information about the political involvement of young people [1, 10].

The aim of the study was to identify the specifics of political involvement of young people, to study the role of communication channels from the point of view of political news consumption.

The study used quantitative method for collecting primary data (survey). The sample of the survey was 600 respondents.

Part of the research indicates the passive position of youth in regard to participation in political processes: young people are distanced from political realities, passively consume political news and do not participate in political events and processes [2, 5].

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Another part of the research indicates the active position of young people in political processes: youth people join the political parties and organizations, participate in meetings, actively declare their political interests and achieve their political goals [3, 11]. A number of scientists are considered that young people are often being manipulated in political games [6–8]. In current realities which is characterized by multiple channels of communication, by accessibility of any information, when the distribution of news cannot be checked, the risk of non-constructive influence on the minds of young people increases, whether on political issues or any other [4]. The aim of the study was to identify the specifics of political involvement of young people, to study the role of communication channels from the point of view of political news consumption.

## 2. Methodology and Methods

The study used quantitative method for collecting primary data (survey). The sample of the survey was 600 respondents. The respondents were young people studying at colleges and at the universities in Russian's central region (Central Federal District of Russian Federation, 18 areas). The sample represents general population of young people living in central region of Russia. The questionnaire was developed to conduct the survey. The questionnaire included blocks of questions concerning the communication channels used by young people, the degree of confidence in information, questions about political interests of young people and questions about youth attitudes towards political activities, to decide problems situations, to patriot feelings. The questionnaire included closed, semi-closed and open questions in accordance with the aims and the purposes of the survey. The responses to open-ended questions were examined through the content analysis. Data processing was carried out using the software SPSS.

## 3. Results / Findings and Discussion

The study has shown that young people use different sources of information about social realities such as traditional media, the Internet and mobile communications and interpersonal communications. The majority of young people receive information about the world events through the Internet and mobile communications: 72% respondents from the news feeds in social networks; 61% — from the news and thematic Internet websites; one in three young people (35%) use Internet blogs and forums to get information about the world events. 24% of respondents receive information through news channels in messengers.

Also, young people use traditional media channels to obtain information about the events that take place in the world. 66.0% of respondents receive it from TV programs 20.0% — from radio broadcasts and 7.0% — from newspapers, magazines.

Young people actively use interpersonal communication to obtain information about events in the world. About half of the respondents (54.0%) indicates that they receive information through communication with friends and family members; 32% indicates that they get information from a teacher / educator / trainer.

It should be noted that young people actively use online communication to get news about current realities. Indeed, in the Internet there are more opportunities for the operative circulation of news, there are more opportunities to access news of different types, it is possible to get different aspects of the same information. However, there is a problem of trust to the information channels and resources.

Young people are interested in the following information: social activities and development (86%), political news (65.0%), economic news (42.0%), education news (45.0%), science and technology news (61.0%), leisure news (44.0%). Respondents' answers indicate that political news, and political monitoring are significant for young people.

Young people use Internet for different purposes, but a part of them are critical to the political information received from social media. 12.0% of respondents indicates that their attitudes to political events has changed and 25.0% indicates that they partly agree with the information. The majority of the respondents (63.0%) disagree that their attitudes to political events has changed.

The study has fixed that young people are not only passively monitoring political news from social media and other information sources, but are increasingly involved in political practices in order to understand political realities on their own.

One of the spheres of youth self-realization can be considered as the political sphere. Young people from Russian Federation can be involved in political activities They can participate in political parties and organizations. Some political organizations provide channels of social mobility for young people, increasing for them the access to social benefits [9].

The results of the research indicate that young people have a limited interest in politics.

Half of the respondents indicate that from time to time they are interested in politics (49.0%). Every third respondent (32.0%) thinks they are not interested in politics at all. Thus, the majority of young people are rather apolitical.

17.0% of respondents are closely monitoring information about political events in Russia and in the world. Some respondents are not only interested in politics, but also are included into real political actions: 4% of the respondents personally involved in political activities during the last year.

Political involvement of youth is revealed through the membership in various political organizations. 3.0% of respondents are members of political parties and youth political organizations. Almost half of the respondents (48.0%) have no desire to become a member of any political party or youth political organization. Every fifth respondent (25.0%) note that they would like to become a member of a political party or a youth political organization. While listing political organizations that young people would like to become members, respondents often call non-existing organizations, indicating its ideological focus, for example: a political party that fights for justice; the party that will change the political system to the better and will help their country; a party against corruption, abuse; any party that really defends their rights.

It should be noted that 24.0% of young people had difficulties in answering the question about their desire to become a member of a political party or a youth political organization. This situation can be explained in terms of the lack of information about the activities of political parties, youth political organizations, as well as opportunities and perspectives that may be provided by participation in the activities of political organizations.

Young people have different opinions about how they will act in case of unplanned social shocks.

36.0% of respondents indicate that in a case of a social shock, they would look for the ways of surviving in Russia. Also, a third of young people (36%) indicate that they would do the same as their parents. 21.0% of respondents will make a decision of leaving Russia in case of social shocks. Also, every fifth respondent (21.0%) will take part in protest actions. 14.0% of respondents indicate that they would not do anything in this case, they would endure further. 14.0% of young people are ready to defend their interests with the arms. 13.0% of respondents indicate that they would join a political party. A significant number of young people is at a loss with the answer (17.0%).

Thus, the study has fixed in two opposite positions: firstly, young people active position, expressed in the readiness for action, to make and follow their own decisions; secondly, a passive position, expressed in a desire to avoid specific decisions, to follow the example of their social community.

Studies by other authors reveal that young people are afraid of expressing their political and civil interests, they try to distance themselves from offline and online

political participation. Young people in some countries do not subscribe to accounts in social media, which cover political and crisis situations, do not express their own positions in the format of likes, comments, reposting in social media.

Young people demonstrate a rather high level of protest behavior. This conclusion based on the analysis of their answers to the question of how young people will act in the situation of a violation of their rights. In case of violation of their rights, the majority of young people (67.0%) will apply to the law enforcement agencies (police, prosecutor's office, the Federal Security Service). Just over half of the respondents (53.0%) will seek help from the state authorities in case of violation of their rights. 38.0% of respondents will attract public attention (turn to the media, to public organizations). 38.0% of respondents will use personal contacts. 18.0% of respondents will participate in protest actions. 16.% of respondents indicated that they would not undertake anything in described situation, as they were sure that any actions were unsuccessful.

The respondents' answers to this question, on the one hand, demonstrate a high level of trust in state institutions, on the other hand, they demonstrate confidence that these problems will have to be solved by themselves, without the assistance of state structures and organizations. Also, some respondents take a passive position in their answers, which is expressed in the belief that nothing should be done and nothing should be defended, because no action will lead to the solution of the problem of young people's rights violation.

Despite the revealed differences of opinion among young people, a significant part of them consider themselves as patriots of their country.

Three-quarters of the respondents in a varying degree consider themselves patriots of Russia: 33.0% of respondents fully agree that they are patriots; 42% indicate that they rather consider themselves as patriots than they do not.

However, every sixth respondent cannot attribute himself / herself to be the patriots of Russia: 10.0% of respondents do not consider themselves to be patriots of Russia rather than consider; 7.0% — do not consider themselves as patriots in general.

On the one hand, young people choose alternatives that testify to the so-called passive patriotism: to love their homeland (79.0%), to be proud of the great achievements of the country (73.0%), to know and be proud of the country's culture (57.0%), to believe in the great future of the country (47%), to experience nostalgia far from the motherland (25.0%).

On the other hand, active patriotism is also a characteristic of respondents: 62.0% of respondents are ready to act for the good of their country; if necessary, defend their country with the deadly force (58.0%); to fulfill the duties of a citizen, to comply the state

laws (57%) and to lead an active struggle against the threats that destroy the country from within (35.0%).

## 4. Conclusions

The survey has revealed that young people use different channels for getting information. Online channels are most often used by young people. Young people use Internet for different purposes, but a part of them are critical to the political information received from social media.

The youth's information trust is low. Young people are critically reflective of the information they receive from different sources. A few of the young people believe that they change their attitudes or behavior because of the information they receive.

The survey has fixed that young people have different opinions about political issues, themes and problems. A number of respondents' answers contradict each other.

On the one hand, the majority of young people note that monitoring of political events plays a significant role in the information they get. On the other hand, young people mention that they are not interested in politics.

The study has revealed that young people demonstrate a rather high level of protest behavior.

It should be noted that young people's moods and interests are dynamic (whether political or not) and influenced by various external and internal factors.

The problem of analyzing young peoples' attitudes to political realities and political involvement requires further research, not only using quantitative methods of primary data collecting, but also qualitative methods, that will answer questions about the reasons of such youth's mood and interests and about the behavioral insights.

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