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## **Non-users of Internet in the information society**

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### **Abstract**

Several surveys of Russian attitudes towards the Internet are examined. An official surveyor shows that the Internet audience is constantly growing in Russia. But surveys of ‘ordinary people’ demonstrate a symptom of Internet ‘hate’: many prefer to escape totally from social media and the Internet space. This audience needs to be investigated in order to answer the question: “are ‘non-users’ just ordinary ‘socio-phobic individuals’ or is their attitude a real trend in society and a new social behavior?”. This article is a preliminary investigation that does not provide answers to this question, but aims to open a discussion. The population of provincial Russia is a very special object of exploration with respect to their attitudes toward Internet because of three important factors: 1) recent penetration of the Internet in social practice; 2) strong tradition of collective life, making social media relatively unimportant; 3) special informational needs excluding the Internet as a satisfying means of information.

### **Keywords**

Internet-using; Non-users; Media-behavior; Russia, Provincialism; Surveys

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### **Introduction**

The analysis of the ‘Internet-penetration’ in the ontologic sense of this expression can be used as a way to understand national differences in such an important field of life as ‘informatization’. That is why we wish to devote our Introduction to the terminology of the subject.

Information society (or information wave) is now a commonly used term, and a review of opinions is no longer useful. Van Dijk in his well-known book ‘*The deepening divide: Inequality*

*in the information society*' (2005) tries to create 'formulae' for the information society: "It therefore remains the best option to relate the information society to other classifications of contemporary society: first of all, a capitalist society with a more or less free-market economy; a civil society with a more or less democratic politics; and a postmodern or high-modern culture with more or less diverse artifacts, media, and experiences. Other necessary classifications related to the information society refer to the technological and organizational means of contemporary society, such as the high-society and the network society" (Van Dijk, 2005). In this definition the mostly important words are 'more or less'. Van Dijk is absolutely right when he uses this 'quantification': we can call the particular society 'democratic, free-market, technological' etc; but inside this society we will find a 'deepening divide' in all fields, so the concept of 'information society' can be just a metaphor or a figurative expression.

The national specificity of the route toward 'informational society' is strong in every country. This is why it was especially important in this investigation to determine the significance and features of these different 'routes'. Of course, we can see similarities in different 'landscapes' ('imaginary landscapes' (Appadurai, 1996)) of people's lives in many countries. But the acceptance of the thesis "everything, in all countries, will be, for instance, like in America; it is only a question of time" seems rather primitive (Beck, 2002).

The data used in this article was collected in two different types of Russian cities – one is 'mega-provincial' and the other, 'ordinary provincial'. The former is Chelyabinsk (1 156 201 inhabitants in 2013, increasing), the latter is Karabash (12 255 inhabitants in 2013, diminishing). These cities can be described as 'typical provincial Russian', but of course every region in Russia has its own features so we will probably need other analogical investigations to compare them.

Our task was to analyze the information needs in these two cities and how these were satisfied. In this article we analyzed only part of these investigations: those related to the use of the Internet.

When comparing the two surveys one can observe differences, not only in the penetration of the Internet in provincial Russia but also in attitudes towards the new technologies. Surprisingly the young generation demonstrates a readiness to escape from the 'new world' of social media and Internet-communications.

## **Experimental part**

*What we know about today's Russian provincial life as a platform of 'information society'.* Contemporary Russian humanities avoid using the word and definition 'provincial' to characterize life in non-capital Russian cities. They use mainly the term 'regional'. But for the aim of this article the word 'provincial' is quite important because it contains not only a geo-

political but also geo-psychological and even mental connotation (according to the German *Mentalität* as the part of subconsciousness joining generations in one national ‘body’ through epochs, state systems, and above them, see also (Beck, 2002).

On one the hand, ‘provincialism’ is the identity complex of a person pretending to the highest value in the eyes of others whilst he is not worth that value. In this case, form is bigger than content: one of the best examples in fiction is Lucien Chardon (in Balzac’s ‘Lost illusions’) on his first days in the capital.

In contemporary Russia, one can see the same cultural pattern: Russian ‘capitalism’ is directly connected with the word ‘capital’ – the main city of the state. It is possible to make a full investigation of the Russian provincial complex in today’s culture (TV-programs, shows, anecdotes, jokes, proverbs, mass-media discourse, etc.). Surprisingly, there has currently been no investigation on this topic in Russian Humanities (as showed by Elibrary resource – the biggest collection of nowadays works in all branches of science and knowledge).

We can see the spreading of numerous neologisms with the root ‘MKAD’ ([mkad], from Moskovskaya Koltsevaya Automobilnaya Doroga = Moscow Circle Motorway = the territorial boundary of Moscow). ‘Zamkad’je’ (= everything behind the MKAD limit = out of Moscow) is the ‘collective name’ for all-Russia-except-the-capital. Symbolically this neologism implies that there is no difference if you live in Archangelsk or in Bryansk – this is all ‘zamkad’je’, all that manages to survive ‘out’ of the real life (which is possible only in the capital). This idea of a handicapping self-identity should be explored as part of Russian culture and its patterns. But at the same time – if we come back to the problem of provincial life, ontologically not symbolically – we could find a labyrinth of different signs, cultural marks of this life in every little village of Russia.

We have optimistic information from TNS-company about speed and growth of Internet-penetration in Russian provincial life (see Table 1).

Table 1. Internet-penetration in Russia

	<b>All of Russia</b>	<b>Cities with more than 100 000</b>	<b>Moscow</b>	<b>Saint-Petersburg</b>	<b>Novosibirsk</b>	<b>Ekaterinburg</b>
Population, (x1000) 12 to 64yrs	105756.8	53460.2	8766.9	3731.0	1143.3	1052.1
Internet penetration (x1000) 12to 64yrs	66533.9	39902.4	6842.8	2867.4	893.7	809.2
%	63	75	78	77	78	77

The data of October 2013 shows that penetration of the Internet in provincial megacities is the same as in the capital (and we can see the same percents even in cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants). The method TNS uses is not transparent (however they give some explanations). One can compare this data with other professional media-market investigations.

The FOM (Fond obshchestvennogo mnenija = Fund of public opinion) gives (in January 2013) 43 % of the population (50.1 million users) (FOM, <http://runet.fom.ru/posts/10853>). But the method is different: FOM takes all inhabitants over 18, that is 116 million. If we compare with previous calculation (105.756 million), proportionally (coefficient 0,9), we see that the difference in users is still quite big (60 vs. 50.1 million). It means that the data is not valid, and every time we have a lot of doubts even for simple questions such as: “how many Internet users in Russia now?” Truly, we need to remember that the calculation by TNS shows how many people use the Internet once *a month*, whilst FOM deals with *everyday* users.

One can take the TNS data of May 2011 (the survey was conducted at the same time as the local survey we use in this article) but TNS shows only a population between 12 and 54 years (so 30 330 300 habitants are Internet users from a total population of 43 235 700, i.e. 70 %).

In any case, we can see that Russian provincial population uses the Internet as much as the capital's (or at least it is comparable). When we compare the data of federal and local levels, we can see a difference, and this is the object of our investigation.

*Chelyabinsk – the city million +.* Chelyabinsk is one of the few cities in Russia with a population over one million. The complex of provincialism has the deepest roots here because, historically, the city, founded in 1736, was never even a ‘minicapital’ up to recent times – it became the ‘capital of South Urals’ and the centre of the Chelyabinskaya oblast (region) only in 1934. Being submitted to other administrative centers, Chelyabinsk was typically a place of ‘pre-career’: ambitious people tried to go from there to more interesting places (Sverdlovsk, Leningrad, Moscow). The fact that Sverdlovsk is situated only 200 km from Chelyabinsk makes the development of Chelyabinsk ambiguous: it should develop but cannot. The proximity of ‘big brother’ (Ekaterinburg/Sverdlovsk) presses the city, makes it ‘provincial’, ‘suburban’, ‘secondary’. This is what people can feel in Chelyabinsk.

Another big problem is environmental. Chelyabinsk is an industrial center. It has several big plants that were built more than 70 years ago during the Industrialization period (so called ‘first pyatiletka’, the first five-year-plan of the Soviet Union) and a bit later, during the Great Patriotic War (WW2). There are no air-filtering systems or other ‘clever technologies’ in these plants, and the city suffers from air pollution. There is another mythical event about this region: Mayak Nuclear plant catastrophic explosion, 70 km from the city, in 1957. The growth of population in Chelyabinsk shows a positive trend of ‘quality of life’ but at the same time Chelyabinsk’s population ‘sense of self’ has declined.

This was particularly obvious in the reactions of social-media users after Chelyabinsk's meteorite event (15.02.2013). Users posted hundreds of memes, caricatures, jokes about the city showing the city's biggest 'myths' – industrial domination, pollutions and ecological problems. At the same time they were proud of their 'place of living' which they considered as an extreme territory for 'strong people only'.

The reader can find a few investigations about the correlation between Internet-activity and personal advantages (Johnson, 2008; Kanlaya, 2013; Leung & Lee, 2005; Ssu-Kuang, 2012; Tai-Quan et al., 2011).

We can interpret the unusual Internet activity of Chelyabinsk, after the meteorite-induced collective shock – the explosion of a fire-ball above the city in the morning of an ordinary working day and resulting in panic – as a sign of total provincial identity complex displayed by the inhabitants. In that case, the Internet is just the 'depository' of reactions such as this self-reflection: 'our city is full of disasters and terrible events'. The jokes of citizens show their provincial complex: 'we are bright because we have such a fatal happiness.' Events like these are inevitable in provincial cities but the only way to survive is to be optimistic. The correlation between social optimism and Internet-activity has never been studied in provincial Russia but we can get some ideas about future investigations from data we currently have.

## Method and procedure

In 2011, a survey was organized by the author and professor Ljudmila Zubanova (Betekhtin et al., 2011) on a sample of 550 people, according to a targeted quota (sex + age of the population of Chelyabinsk) (see Table 2).

Table 2. The sample

Gender	%	Numbers
Male	43.8	241
Female	56.2	309
Total	100	550

The number of respondents was 0.04 % of the city total population. The age of respondents correlates with the demography in the city. All the districts of the city are represented proportionally (sex, age). A deep interview method was used. A total of 24 questions were asked; we will show only a few of these, hereunder.

In order to compare the results with a small city's population, a survey in Karabash run in May, 2012 was used (not published yet). In total, 91 respondents were questioned. Two questions (from 21 in total) were relevant to this article.

## Questionnaire, results and interpretation

The first question in Chelyabinsk' questionnaire concerns the frequency of the Internet-activity, the second one is about personal attitudes toward the Internet. The answers on the first question are shown relative to the age group (see Table 3). The second question shows that the non-users are not only the "aged persons".

Table 3. Frequency of Internet-contacts (the age groups)

Answers	Age groups, %						
	18–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70 +
Every day, selective information	66.6	57.1	9.7	6.7	6.5	0.00	0.00
Several times a week, only the most interesting things	12.5	9.5	21.7	2.8	0.00	0.00	0.00
Every day everything	8.3	21.4	14.1	0.9	0.00	1.6	0.00
Not more often than twice a week	4.1	3.9	10.8	9.6	0.00	1.6	0.00
Less than once a week	0.00	3.9	14.1	6.7	14.4	0.00	0.00
No use of Internet	8.3	4.7	29.3	73	78.9	96.7	100

The penetration of the Internet in Chelyabinsk, in 2011, was only 47.3 % (much less than the official federal survey, i.e. TNS data, shows: 70 %, for Ekaterinburg – 78 %, <http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/index/index.wbp>). As expected, the elder part of population does not use the Internet (see Table 3, group of 70+ year old people). More surprisingly, the younger generation shows only 62 % of active Internet users (average for the 18–19 + 20–29 age groups: the two groups were studied together because the 18–19 group was too small and therefore unrepresentative with only 23 respondents, 4 % of the total sample, see Table 3). This data shows that the Internet-penetration in Chelyabinsk is lower than official information shows, and therefore the official data is questionable.

Table 4. Self-definition of the Internet-activity

Answers	%
Active and advanced users constantly using the Internet-resources and having good searching-skills	14.1
Use the Internet resources only for their work but at the same time feel comfortable when traveling in the web-space	17.8
Use the Internet resources only episodically and need special advice or help	13.3
Need the Internet-information but know little or nothing about Internet-technologies	9.6
No need for Internet-information and will never be an Internet user	32.3
Do not know	12.9

Table 4 shows a really big percentage of people who hate Internet-communication in general. The answer “I do not need Internet-information and will never be an Internet user” was chosen by 32.3 % of the respondents. This is a confirmation that the big city Chelyabinsk is on a ‘provincial’ trajectory of Internet-interaction (see FOM data: 55 % ‘refuse’ Internet people, the same result can be observed (54.8 %) in Table 4: if one sums up the group that “need the Internet-information but know little or nothing about Internet-technologies”, the group with “no need for Internet-information and will never be an Internet user” and the group “Do not know”). At the same time, it is possible to suggest that when people say they do not need Internet or will never use it, it is not so much that they ‘hate’ it, but rather that they do not understand it, are afraid to admit that, or are afraid they will not be able to learn to use it (they would look stupid or backward) and prefer say they hate it or do not use it. The reasons of Internet neglect are not described in this article but they must be investigated in details in the future works.

*Karabash as the small provincial city.* The second investigation was also run by the author of this article and T. Kozhevnikova. It took place in May, 2012 (one year after case 1, see above), in Karabash (Chelyabinsk Region).

Karabash is one of the most polluted cities of Chelyabinsk’s region. There is a legend that says that some time ago, UNESCO included this city in the list of the most polluted cities of the planet. But nobody can confirm this information. Citizens have asked many times the administrative authorities to take measures for the protection of the population against the pollution generated by the local Copper Plant, the sole industry of this place. The main activity of this plant is the production of blister copper from copper concentrate, with a preliminary enrichment of copper-zinc ores, as well as from secondary copper raw materials. The plant was built in 1910. It was later modified before the first ‘pyatiletka’ (five-year-plan) in 1925. Since then, the plant has practically the same equipment. The plant was closed in 1989 and a city recession followed. It was restarted in 1998.

The most important and dangerous problem of the city is the air pollution generated by the plant (7 tons of sulfur dioxide per person per year). People leave the city as they do not wish to continue living in such a poor and unhealthy environment. ‘Russia Today’ published some information of the city: “Despite millions in investment to modernize the plant, its working conditions still seem inadequate. At times it is hard to breathe”.

The provincial life in small cities is a priori quite different from that in megacities. There are a few if any ‘cultural centers’, people spend most of their time in front of their TV sets, they have not enough income to travel or to have bright forms of leisure. That is why the question “How often do you use the Internet?” has the expected answer. Technically speaking, they have the opportunity to use the Internet, including with their mobiles.

Table 5. Karabash. How often do you use the Internet?

Answer	Number	%
Constantly	37	40.7
Not often	21	23
Never	33	36.3

As one can see the Internet use is not something exotic in this small provincial city. Obviously the situation is similar to Chelyabinsk's where the number of active users is superior to that in Karabash by only 7 %. The number of the Internet non-users is also comparable (36.3 % against 32.3 % in Chelyabinsk). Table 6 monitors different types of the Internet-activity of respondents.

Table 6. Using of most popular Internet-resources in Karabash

Answers	%
I use a search engine to seek information (Google, Yandex, Rambler)	24
I use mail-services (mail.ru)	1.1
I am constantly in the social media (vkontakte.ru, odnoklassniki.ru)	24
I use video and music (YouTube)	4.4
I have my blog, I participate in a Live Journal	0
I look at the news (gazeta.ru, lenta.ru)	8.8
I look at thematic sites (my own interests)	10.1
I never use Internet-resources	36.3

One can see that the 'small' city gives us the same picture as the big one. It means that the situation with respect to the Internet-penetration in Russia is more or less the same through all of 'zmkad'e' (all Russia minus Moscow). These results are neither as optimistic as the TNS or FOM surveys show nor as pessimistic as one could have imagined. The same percentages of the Internet-haters (or people who do not need IT-communication at all) are observed. But we can see that in Karabash, passive rather than active Internet is more prevalent. If in the Chelyabinsk survey we can see that 5 age groups are Internet-active (4.1 % in the 18–19 years old users group; 3.1 % in the 20–29 group; 7.6 % in the 30–39 group; 1.9 % in the 40–49 group and, surprisingly, 6.5 % in the 50–59 years old users group, see Table 3), in Karabash, there is not a single respondent that has an active Internet life (i.e., a creating Internet content). Generally speaking, it is well known that only 1 % of users are so-called 'active'. Brandtzaeg quoting Arthur and Van Dijk showed that only one from 100 users will create content, 10 others will comment and the remaining 89 will just view the Internet (Brandtzaeg, 2012a). The same author has created a '90–1–9' rule which states that 1 % of people account for most of the user-generated contributions online, 9 % of users contribute from time to time, and 90 % only view the contents without contributing (i.e., read or observe, but don't contribute). His theory is that "more people will lurk in an SNS than will participate" (item).

In the case of Karabash, we can see that the ‘provincialism’ factor is strong in the inequality of participation: the big provincial city gives a bigger number of active users than the small city. It is interesting that the rule ‘90–1–9’ does not work in Chelyabinsk (the total number of active users in survey data of Chelyabinsk is 8 people, which is more than 2 % of active users from total number of users-respondents – 374).

But in Brandtzaeg’s surveys, we see that so-called advanced users represent 5 % of the users. We believe that the formula giving active users (the 90-1-90 rule, see (Brandtzaeg, 2012b)) could be revised.

## Conclusions

The penetration of Internet in Russia still requests further investigation. One can see that city-size is not an influencing factor (the small city survey shows the same percentage as the large city survey) but the interest in the Internet is lower in the small city. At the same time non-usage of the Internet is explained by respondents of both cities as a personal decision (as opposed to the idea of digital inequality). One can find also that the young generation does not get involved in the Internet-activity as deeply as it could be expected. The importance of this conclusion is confirmed by the difference between the official ‘big data’ and the real situation one can see now in provincial Russia. Obviously, provincialism should be explored as a very important factor of the social life.

The investigation of the Internet-activity in Russia has several problematic fields:

- there is no trustful data that could be relevant to the current situation (the data surveys of big agencies probably submits to the advertising tasks, and local surveys are too different by the method used, and the number of respondents, so not representative);
- there is no clear interpretation of Internet-use in Russia;
- there is no understanding of the future trends in the Internet-usage.

We now have the right questions that should be asked in order to build a good investigation. Even a superficial overview of the survey results shows that we have doubts over ambiguous information: non-users in Russia are not only old people, or, poor people, but also provincial people. That is why we can include provincialism in the list of factors of using of the Internet. It is important to conduct a complete investigation of this factor. This article is just an initial one to this investigation.

This study revealed the following findings:

1. There is a big difference between the Internet-use data in Russia, depending on the surveyors.
2. Special cross-regional investigations are necessary.

3. Many refuse the Internet, not necessarily old and poor people. This must be investigated.
4. The Internet-creativity in Russia is higher than in Europe and needs to be explored.
5. Provincialism can be included in the list of factors of the Internet-activity.

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