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# **SPIRITUAL ORIENTATIONS OF RUSSIANS IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET RESULTS OF A NATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

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## **Abstract**

The article analyzes the influence of the Internet-communication on the formation of Russian youth values. The research methodology is based on the combination of methods of cybernetic analysis and focus group interview. The cyber metrics analysis allowed identifying of predominant value orientations of the Russians and their representation in the global electronic network. Focus group interviews provided understanding of meaning of different types of vital values of the Russians and the reason for these values to be an essential core of their identity. The main results of the article constitute a rating representing the consciousness and behavioural values of the Russians, the establishment of the realizable relationship values and socio-demographic characteristics of the Russians (gender, age, region of residence, occupation). The following were analysed as well: categories of values of the life strategy, social-political profile, the type of Internet communications, features of national identity. The research result in the conclusion revealed rapidly changing gender contacts reflected in the behaviour of women and men gender groups, improvement of patriotism, the degree of national identity positivity, domination and micro social values, the predominance of political indifferent attitude among the Russians.

*Keywords:* Internet, value orientation, communication, focus-group interviews, cyber metrics

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## **1. Introduction**

The influence of the global network on consciousness and behaviour of people increases. The Internet enters all spheres of activities and produces powerful impact on formation of the vital reference points of the users [1-5]. According to the results of the national research on tendencies in Internet

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communication development within the World Internet Project, more than two thirds of Russians are users of global electronic network [<http://www.worldinternetproject.net/#news>, 6]. Thus, the vital positions of the Russian Internet users forming a representative part of the population are presented. The Internet content is a space of unprovoked information, free from interviewer's influence. Therefore analysis of the Russian Internet content can serve as the way of objective examination of spiritual orientations of the Russians.

## **2. Methods**

Two methods were used in the research process:

- the cyber metrics analysis (including application of the resources of Yandex search engines, Google, Mail.ru and IQBuzz Internet online server for social media monitoring);
- the focus group interviews with the population of the cities of the Central Federal District of the Russian Federation (6 focus groups with 12 people in each).

At the first stage of analysis with use of the specified search engines and the specified servers the list of 138 questions most frequently asked by users of the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet was received. This list representing a typology and compliance between questions and the value orientations (Table 1) was established. At the second stage the interrelations between the values and gender and age characteristics of the users were established. At the third stage the research of the semantic fields revealing the users' dominating significant values was carried out. These data allows understanding the structure of value orientation and the meaning of the users' values by means of verbalization of this value.

## **3. Main results**

At the beginning we analysed the structural and semantic characteristics of the questions most frequently asked by the Russians according to the scheme: rank in the structure of the list of questions, gender and age correlations and values of semantic fields.

### ***3.1. Questions relating to the Internet technologies***

The analysis of gender and age features of the users who are interested in questions related to the Internet technologies allows drawing a conclusion that males are more interested in this type of questions (taking into account 100% of the users which gender is specified). The exception is made by the questions of so-called simple not hi-tech actions which is 'the territory of women interest'.

**Table 1.** Types of questions and corresponding value orientations of the users of the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet.

<b>Type of questions and the corresponding value orientation</b>	<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Questions about potential and the usage of the global network = Values of possession and using information technologies and the Internet	I	342 064 509
Questions about cooking and housekeeping = Values of possession of the information on housekeeping	III	45 760 237
Questions about markets of various goods and services = Values of possession of the information on rational consumer behaviour	IV	13 930 427
Questions about symptoms of diseases and ways of their treatment = Values of possession of the information on health maintenance and personal care	VI	7 739 588
Questions about leisure = Values of possession of the information on ways of recreation	V	11 500 473
Questions about communication with the opposite gender = Values of possession of the information on development and maintenance of the relations with the opposite gender	VIII	1 265 943
Questions about any scientific concepts and the reasons for the various phenomena, educational questions = Values of informative interest and education	II	75 301 947
Questions about location and dates = Values of information on orientation in time and space	VII	4 866 274
Questions about employment and the improvement of financial position = Values of material welfare	X	343 325
Questions about superstitions, rhetorical and idle questions = Values of information on answers to irrational questions	IX	489 731

As for the age specifics, the quite homogenous dominations of the users interested in ‘questions related to the Internet technologies’ aged 16-35 years (which is the social groups of youth) is observed.

The analysis of the semantic fields which are forming the questions of the use of the Internet technologies revealed four major aspects:

1. the importance of the feeling of ‘the free benefits’;
2. the importance of feeling of consolidation, attachment, possibility of effective self-presentation and self-advertisement at global level;
3. virtualization: acceleration and simplification of significant and necessary actions;
4. awareness of need for information security.

### **3.2. Informative questions, questions asked for curiosity**

The gender analysis of data on this type of questions indicates the lack of obvious domination either of men or women among users interested in subjects

of informative sense. The users aged 26-35 years are the most characteristic age category of users showing interest in any scientific concept.

Semantic fields for this type of questions:

1. importance of knowledge and high intelligence,
2. projection of the high welfare status.

### **3.3. *Questions on housekeeping and cookery***

The gender and age analysis allows describing a typical user interested in the subject of culinary art as women aged 16-35 years. In other words, it is quite obvious that these questions are connected to the women gender group which representatives master or actively realize the social roles connected with housekeeping.

Studying of semantic fields of this type of questions revealed two contexts of discussion of a subject of cookery (and housekeeping in a broad sense):

1. ideality projection,
2. cookery considered as the only remaining stronghold of the modern family while the others traditions are destroyed or lost.

### **3.4. *Questions relating to the purchase***

The gender analysis of questions showed men are more interested in the information on serious and expensive purchases (apartment, car, etc.) In case with purchasing goods for the household purpose (first of all, household appliances) the interest is higher among women.

Among the users asking 'questions relating to the purchase' the majority are people aged 16-35 years.

Semantic fields for this type of questions:

1. the importance of obtaining independent information and objective reviews on offered goods;
2. projection of consumer ability to level the social status, acquisition of goods as the symbol and attribute of a high social status.

### **3.5. *Questions connected with searching of opportunities for interesting leisure in networks and offline***

Girls (young women) aged 16-35 years are interested in obtaining such kind of the information (the result is approximately the same for all ages).

Semantic fields for questions about leisure:

1. the importance of value of family leisure,
2. obtaining objective information on specific kind of production of the leisure industry,
3. collection of information for the purpose of picking books for reading.

### ***3.6. Questions about maintenance of health and treatment***

Semantic fields for questions about health maintenance and personal care:

1. demanding of information on nonconventional methods of treatment, traditional medicine;
2. addressing to spiritual practises for health recovery;
3. initiation and participation in charities for urgent treatment.

### ***3.7. Questions about momentary orientation in space and time, the most convenient by means of expeditious Internet communication***

Analysis of the gender distribution of users searching for this type of data taking people with identified gender revealed that men are slightly more interested in geolocation. As for the age of users asking similar questions the results are approximately the same for people aged 16-35 years. It is obvious that such age defines the biggest class of the Internet users.

Semantic fields for questions on orientation in space and time:

1. searching for the most optimum routes,
2. searching for the geographical information,
3. specification of significant dates,
4. demanding congratulatory content.

### ***3.8. Questions about development of the relations with the opposite gender***

The essential prevalence of women interested in this type of questions is shown. The information on the development of the desirable relations with the opposite gender is of the great importance for women.

The analysis of the users interested in relations between opposite genders is specific related to the rather big amount of people less than 16 years (in comparison with social and demographic maintenance in other questions).

Semantic fields for this type of questions:

1. choice of the correct gift,
2. instructions about specific actions on development of the relations,
3. instructions about specific actions on the termination of the relations,
4. discussion of private life of celebrities.

### ***3.9. So-called irrational and idle questions***

Results of the analysis among the focus groups revealed the fact that some certain part of Russians is ready to look for and pay for information on the inexplicable, confidential, sensational facts especially concerning the plane of the irrational. The 'women prevalence' among groups of users, is shown considering this type of questions. As for the age parameters of users of this content, no obvious domination of any age group is noticed.

Semantic fields for idle questions:

1. possession information on the inexplicable phenomena,
2. possession information on confidential facts about state development,
3. explanation of superstitions,
4. details of scandals and scenes with famous people.

### **3.10. Questions about the improvement of the financial position**

In the gender relation women gravitate more to such matters. Besides the traditional job search, the women are more interested in the ways of enrichment and alternative strategies for improving the economic status. Users aged 16-35 years ask about job search ask more frequently.

Semantic fields for questions about improvement of material welfare:

1. money as means of freedom and independence;
2. the importance of lightweight income;
3. education: potential income or time loss?;
4. fast enrichment demands observance of rituals and existence of magic;
5. money – the main attribute of the social status.

At the following investigation phase we studied the content of the focused group interviews among Russians about value orientations realized by them. Formation of focus groups assumed the usage of not casual (target, not probabilistic) selections. Thus the direct selection (method of typical representatives) assuming the choice of units in accordance to the advance defined principle was used to allocate the individual characteristics (gender, age, education level, occupation).

Analysing the received results we must note that in the texts of interviews some semantic concepts which components are connected by the general idea are allocated as following:

- vital strategy,
- behaviour strategy in the sphere of using of the global network,
- socio-political profile [7].

Besides it is established that a keynote of the content of the interview practically in all research cases is internal installation of the identity of the informant, expressed in an individual slogan. The main idea of vital strategy allocated in this or that statement outlines the general semantic contour of reflections of participants of the interview on all subjects of conversation. Therefore in the beginning we reveal these valuable dominants of vital positions, demonstrated though the personal mottoes of the interview participants.

Slogans serve as modal concept of an active and positive spirit on achievement of success. These concepts can be accurately traced in such mottoes as ‘A journey of a thousand starts with a single step’, ‘He that would eat the fruit must climb the tree’, ‘The person who wants looks for the ways, the person who doesn’t want looks for the reasons’, ‘Keep moving forward’, ‘To achieve the objective at any cost’, ‘Always move to the goal’, ‘Whatever happens, happens for the best’, ‘Never give up!’, etc. Inclination to these reference points is determined more by age features, than by territorial or gender. In particular, the

specified living position characterizes strategy of the younger part of informants (less than 25 years). The senior participants of the interview (aged 26-33 years) show commitment to other mottoes connected with more reflexive strategies. Such mottoes as 'Everything passes with time' and 'It can't rain all the time' are significant.

Turning to the socio-political profiles of informants (realized political values) we must note that 3 positions were obviously allocated:

- passive centrists (online-centrists),
- passive oppositionists (online-oppositionists),
- the apolitical.

The offered typology of socio-political profiles is based on the synthesis of idea of traditional division of types of political orientations of Russians on pro-government-focused and oppositionists [8-10] and necessary criterion proceeding from our object of research of the preferred environment of manifestation of socio-political participation (online or offline), activity of political actions of the population.

The concept of political participation of passive centrists consists in search and the analysis of political information in the global network, the positive attitude to the existing power and belief in the correct direction of political development of the country. These informants express opinion that there is no sense to politicize there and 'let it happen as it happens'. At the same time, these informants do not prefer to transfer the political views from the online to offline. These are 'inactive' admirers of the power.

Passive oppositionists represent a community of the informants inclined to critical judgment of actions of the power. This part of Russians is interested in the oppositional content of the global network, writes and comments the articles about the assessment of certain parties of the Russian socio-political reality. At the same time, this part of informants considers sufficient so-called virtual political activity and isn't ready to transfer it to the offline mode.

A number of researches of domestic scientists show that modern Russians are inclined to the adaptation to the presence of any opportunities of quiet life and not to seek to support the interests by violent means [7]. At the same time it is necessary to consider internal incentive motives of special type of the personality – precariat which behaviour submits to logic of deviation and anomy (according to E. Durkheim). Individual vital circumstances can become those missing elements of the puzzle, capable of stimulating transition of oppositional activity from the virtual world to the real world.

The oppositionists aimed at individualistic values of self-knowledge, world general knowledge and critical evaluation of social reality are oriented on the Internet as mean of obtaining necessary information for their own conclusions and a platform for the transfer of socio-political views.

The subject of national self-identification takes a special place in reflections of the Russians about the vital reference points. We notice that the national feeling of informants has some features dictated by social and psychological effects. In particular, discrimination orientations of Russians in

relation to 'non-Russian' migrants are revealed. These orientations are shown in effect of bigger condemnation for crimes committed by non-Russian people. In other words, there is an impression that 'the right for a crime is declared only for the Russians'. Similar results were received by E.V. Brodovskaya, Y.A. Zubok, V.I. Chuprov, [7, 8, 10].

Turning to the connection from conversation about national feelings to the migratory potential of informants, we must note that frequency distributions of the answers of respondents to appropriate questions show absence of pronounced external migratory installations among the Russians. The desire to make territorial mobility is generally limited by the country borders. At the same time, representatives from big cities more often than other informants express focus on possible moving abroad.

Orientation to internal migration, the most characteristic for inhabitants of the Russia small cities, is expressed in aspiration to move to larger cities not to the capital, which is characteristic. Formation of internal migratory orientations of the participants of the interview is defined by at least two factors:

- idea that Russia is the most desirable country for life;
- preferences for those cities in which there is a possibility of professional and personal self-realization, but not having the scale of the capital and life intensity level.

Turning to the integration of the relation to all previous subjects to the analysis direction – vital strategy of informants, we must consider dominating value orientations of Russians, its vital purposes and ways of their achievement.

The dominating vital value of Russians is happiness. This concept has the tag cloud and includes career, prosperity and family welfare. Speaking about the family as the significant value and the vital purpose, participants of the interview of both gender groups show certain pragmatism. Women don't reduce the position of traditional roles and functions in the family and are focused on full participation in economic providing a family that testifies to their aspiration to create an egalitarian family. Men regard family existence as an important condition of career and professional success, often verbalizing a utilitarian position in relation to women: 'Behind every great man there's a great woman'.

Moving to the analysis of strategy of achievement of the important vital purposes of informants, we must emphasize some prevalence of the dependant orientations. Russians are convinced that strong state support is necessary for receiving the worthy education and a desirable place to work, live as well as the other benefits. Dependant value orientations show researches Russian Public Opinion Research Center are characteristic for the whole population of Russia and for youth a little less than for other citizens [7]. Thus, the general contours of spiritual priorities of Russians are described in terms of merge pragmatic and traditional values.



#### **4. Conclusions**

Summarizing the main results of the research received by methods of the cybernetic analysis and the qualitative content analysis of focused group interview of Russians, we must note that advantage of the data obtained by means of specified methods consists in higher heuristic potential of the conclusions which allow to understand and explain specifics of formation of the valuable characteristics of the modern Russians. We can list the main conclusions of the present research:

- The absolute vital value of Russians is the family that is confirmed by domination of the family focused subjects and inquiries on the Internet and offline reasoning. Many of the most rated questions asked in the Russian Internet have a direct connection to the family sphere: housekeeping, cookery, the relations between genders, and ways of improvement of the material status. In other words, micro social values as a vital dominant appear in data of research both online and offline.
- Qualitative characteristics of an inclusiveness of Russians in Internet-communication are determined, on the one hand by valuable reference points, and on the other hand by social and demographic indicators. Thus the young Russians are focused on pragmatic approach and Russians of middle age are focused on utilitarian application of a global network, in particular, earning money. With the directivity on the interpersonal and family relations women gender groups less often than men gender groups are involved in Internet-communication on the purposes of boundless communication and entertainment;
- Research revealed three main types of socio-political activity of the Russians having correlation with valuable reference points. The Russians focused on traditional values mostly are of the apolitical type. Pragmatically adjusted Russians most often adhere to the passive political participation of a pro-governmental orientation in the online mode. Passive oppositional strategy is presented only online in the absence of obvious tendencies of the transfer of virtual political activity into offline activity.
- Russians are characterized by rather high level of patriotism and by having intrinsic interrelation with positive national self-identification and lack of bias on external migration;
- The women groups' vital position as part of gender contract is actively changing today which assumes intensive inclusion of women to the sphere of professional self-realization and full participation in family maintenance.

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