Civic activism of russian youth: behavioral practices and attitudes in the digital space

Ativismo cívico da juventude russa: práticas comportamentais e atitudes no espaço digital

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Abstract

The article presents the results of the research conducted in the form of a mass online survey of Russian youth in 2022. The dynamics of digital civic activism of the young generation, its behavioral practices and attitudes are described. A separate aspect of the article is devoted to specific forms of digital civic activism. It presents the distribution of opinions of young respondents about their awareness in this direction, and the degree of their involvement in various forms of digital activism. The authors conclude that the participation of young people in socially significant activities influences the process of formation of an internally ordered set of civic qualities, strengthens the meaning of any performed action, and in the context of new challenges and opportunities of the digital environment contributes to the activation of the civic position of young people.

Keywords: Youth; Young Generation; Civic Activism; Digitalization; Practices; Attitudes.

Resumo

O artigo apresenta os resultados da pesquisa realizada na forma de uma pesquisa online em massa com jovens russos em 2022. São descritas a dinâmica do ativismo cívico digital da geração jovem, suas práticas comportamentais e atitudes. Um aspecto separado do artigo é dedicado a formas específicas de ativismo cívico digital. Apresenta a distribuição das opiniões dos jovens entrevistados sobre a sua consciência nesta direção e o grau do seu envolvimento nas diversas formas de ativismo digital. Os autores concluem que a participação dos jovens em atividades socialmente significativas influencia o processo de formação de um conjunto internamente ordenado de qualidades cívicas, fortalece o significado de qualquer ação realizada e, no contexto dos novos desafios e oportunidades do ambiente digital, contribui para a ativação da posição cívica dos jovens.

Palavras-chaves: Juventude; Geração Jovem; Ativismo Cívico; Digitalização; Práticas; Atitudes.

1 Introduction

Intensive digitalization of all spheres of social life, which has determined a rapid change in the quality and lifestyle of all representatives of the third millennium, is considered a key factor in the effective functioning of all life support systems of society and a necessary condition for the formation of fundamentally new ways of its organization.

Virtual space continues to involve each new generation in its expanses, promptly providing access to numerous sources of information, expanding the areas of use, demonstrating a high level of convenience for users, inexhaustibility and boundlessness of possibilities, openness to pluralistic opinions and assessments, advancement towards a new technological era of artificial intelligence. The scope and depth of the user audience and the spread of information technologies are such that various social actors can no longer even imagine life activities outside of everyday digital inclusion.

Behavioral practices of constant presence in the information environment are especially characteristic of young people as a social group that is most integrated into the process of mastering modern innovative achievements and, due to their age, is open to everything new. The mass movement of young people into the digital space has become a given of the present time, which is impossible to change and ineffective to prohibit, but it is necessary to analyze in order to determine the peculiarity of attitudes and specificity of behavioral practices formed under the influence of the information environment and implemented in it (Maximova; Eflova; Kulcha, 2018; Aleksandrovna; Iurievna; Olegovna, 2017).

Youth has its own special functions in society, no other socio-demographic group can be replaced and realized, it acts as a source of social activity, making it involved in the solution of strategic problems. Therefore, without understanding its state, aspirations and values, it is impossible to make forecasts about the future development of the country.

In all the variety of essential characteristics of modern youth, their civic activism is considered as one of the key ones, allowing, on the one hand, to assess the quality of functions performed by a social group, and on the other hand, to consider its leading role in the life of society. At the same time, civic activism should not be considered only in the political aspect related to the active understanding and realization of the rights and duties of a citizen by representatives of young generations, different degree of their participation in the political life of the country, since civic activism is related not only to politics, but also to socially significant actions, and is embedded in people's everyday life (Savelyeva, 2013), largely constructed by information processes. From this position, the authors of the article found interesting the sociological analysis of current scenarios of civic activism of Russian youth in the digital space.

2 Methods

The source of empirical data was a survey of Russian youth conducted in 2022 by a group of Russian researchers with the participation of the authors of the article. In the course of an online questionnaire survey, 1,100 people were interviewed, which made it possible to obtain representative data on the topic under study.

The purpose of the study was to identify the dominant types of behavioral practices and attitudes of digital civic activism of Russian youth in the information environment.

The object of the study was young people studying at schools, colleges and universities, aged 16 to 22 years old, men - 37.6%, women - 62.4%. According to the informants themselves, 21.9% assessed their computer skills as high, 38.4% as "above average", 35% as "average", and 6.8% as "low".

The analysis of the obtained results made it possible to focus on a number of key points of interest to researchers, to formulate provisions and conclusions that deepen the understanding of the analyzed issues.

3 Results and discussion

In the conditions of intensive life of young generations in the information and computer environment, reflecting all the real processes of social life, the process of socialization of young people is actively taking place, the formation of life meanings, priorities, comprehension of what is happening, the choice of life position. Indeed, the data of the study conducted in the fall of 2022 by the All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Research ("VCIOM") and indicating that among Internet users, the majority of young people are representatives of the Internet: from 18 to 24 years old - 66%, from 25 to 34 years old - 52% (VCIOM, 2022), confirm a fairly high level of its inclusion in the digital space.

The information environment has become so important in the lives of young people that it is not just a source of information, but a platform for them to articulate their interests. Therefore, in an effort to understand whether young people really believe that the Internet provides greater opportunities for civic initiatives, the survey asked the relevant question: "Does the Internet provide an opportunity to be more civically active?", the answers to which were distributed as follows: 39.4% of respondents convincingly answered "Definitely yes", 43.3% were rather ready to agree with this statement of the question, and only 11% of respondents answered negatively. At the same time, only 0.8% of respondents did not see any advantages of the digital space in the possibility of realizing civic engagement, and 10.2% were not confident enough to join such a point of view, choosing the answer option "Rather no". Thus, the majority of

respondents, which amounted to a total of 82.7%, expressed a fundamental conviction that the digital space definitely provides more opportunities for civic activism.

This position of youth representatives is indicative in the context of their regular, systematic presence in the digital environment and the length of time spent there, which is confirmed by the data of a mass survey of young people, mainly students, conducted in August-November 2021 by a group of Moscow researchers to identify the vectors of influence of the digital environment on the forms, levels and directions of socio-political activity of young people. The authors conclude that "the digital environment practically absorbs both the working and most of the free time of young people, regardless of their age and social status". They emphasize that "only 2.7% of respondents spend no more than 4 hours a day in the digital environment for work and/or study and leisure; on the contrary, 39.6% of respondents spend more than a third of the day in the digital environment (from 8 hours a day). The latter are dominated by bachelor's/specialization students (53.4%), students of technical schools and colleges (26.2%) (Leontieva; Kudina; Voronov, 2021).

Undoubtedly, the ability to use information tools is an undoubted advantage of young generations. It is actively involved in the implementation of various types of behavioral practices of young people - educational, labor, recreational and other and helps them to realize themselves in a certain social capacity, including as a subject of civic initiatives. The sociological analysis allowed us to find out what, in the opinion of young people, opportunities the Internet provides for expressing their civic activity.

Among the variety of answers received, the most typical points of view, reflecting the main content of opinions and assessments of the respondents and setting their tone, were some of which should be noted. For example, youth representatives believe that in the digital space it is possible to "Apply to online offices of different agencies", "Put forward initiatives", "Discuss topical issues", "Criticize the authorities, organize public associations", "Participate in discussions on various topics, express their civic position, participate in voting on political and socially important issues", "Find assistance programs and like-minded people". Respondents believe that the information field "Provides a platform for expressing one's opinion, informs about the events taking place in the country" and "There is an opportunity to write a post in a social network, which will be seen by thousands of people". As we can see, the presence of open-ended questions in the questionnaire, allowing respondents to formulate their own answers, allowed us to penetrate deeper into the meaning and content of civic positions and orientations of young people from the standpoint of qualitative methodology of sociological science and to draw a conclusion about the existing diversity of opinions regarding the ways of manifesting civic activity in the Internet space.

The respondents' answers demonstrated the multiplicity of combinations of behavioral practices in the digital environment, while identifying the following

directions. Some youth representatives interpret the expression of civic activism in the context of active political participation in the life of the country, interaction with the authorities, critical evaluation of their activities, participation in social and political movements, advocacy of their rights. Another part associates digital civic activism with informing and dissemination of information, the opportunity to draw attention to the problem, noting as one of the advantages of the Internet information field "Quick dissemination of information over a large territory". Another category of respondents points to the reality of solving problems in the digital space, associating with it positive, optimistic expectations regarding the possibility of "… due to the large number of participants in a movement to influence this or that event". It is also worth noting the group of opinions according to which "the Internet allows people to connect and share opinions", when representatives of younger generations use the possibilities of digital space purely as a means of communication.

Indeed, young people come to the Internet with different goals, have specific features of perception, processing and evaluation of information, and characteristic ways of communication, peculiar only to this social group. And it is all the more obvious that nowadays the digital space is able to meet a variety of needs in the implementation of behavioral practices, favoring the realization of the social potential of the young generation. It is no coincidence that the most vivid expression of the respondents' opinions was the point of view of one of them, who believes that "the Internet provides tremendous opportunities to express one's civic activity".

At the same time, it is noteworthy that the aspiration to the digital environment and the degree of trust in it among young people is so high that respondents are confident that "There is freedom of speech on the Internet", there you can "Openly express your position, spread it, find like-minded people and get information about other positions", it gives you the opportunity to "Write angry and dissatisfied comments", there is "No censorship, I can freely write about it in social networks, express my position".

Answering the question about why people are civically active on the Internet, 50.3% of the respondents thought that "Because it is safer". There is young people's confidence in the ability of the Internet environment to provide them with security, perceiving it as a kind of protective field, which "Gives people a kind of self-confidence, allows them to be what they cannot be in real life", where they are free to express their feelings, thoughts, opinions, to express themselves. This confidence forms a level of comfort that allows us not only to talk about the personal significance of the digital environment for each youth representative, a high level of adaptation in it, but also about the blurring of security boundaries, sometimes not allowing us to see and feel the threats coming from it.

In conditions of saturation of the modern information environment, when the Internet is considered as a force capable of controlling not only the consciousness,

but also the actions of people, and modern youth demonstrates Internet activity bordering on Internet addiction, it was necessary to find out from young people the reasons that are able to encourage their representatives to be civically active in the digital environment. The dominant opinion was that "the Internet allows you to influence more people", as 60.5% of respondents said, the second most important was the previously mentioned point of view regarding the safety of civic activity on the Internet (50.3%), and the top three answers were "No one wants to take part in offline demonstrations and rallies" (47.4%). Next in the hierarchical structure of answers are the opinions of respondents, which received fewer approvals, but which have not lost their significance for the research analysis. Thus, for example, respondents noted that they would prefer to demonstrate civic activity in the digital environment because "uniting in real life requires too many resources" (46.6% of respondents), "Digital media contribute to more powerful and effective mobilization of people" (40.6%), "All ways to solve society's problems have moved to the online space, there are not so many offline channels" (17.9%).

In this case, for the respondents, one of the significant criteria determining the reason for civic activism in the digital environment was the indicator of audience reach and high speed of information dissemination. The answers show the conviction and confidence of young people, although not so significant in percentage terms (18.2%), that "Users' actions on the Internet can change the world", and therefore it is more appropriate to be civically active on its expanses.

Respondents express the same opinion when answering the question about whether posting information on the Internet about various problems in the city, region helps in solving real problems. The majority of respondents (81.8%) agree with this statement, while 25.3% are firmly convinced, and 56.5% of respondents believe that it "rather helps". Against the background of positive assessments of the interviewees, we can conclude that young people of the digital age have a clear idea that interactions in the information space should be built taking into account the admissibility of expressing their own assessments, broadcasting opinions and making independent decisions in accordance with their personal civic position and attitudes, so the form of solving various issues and problems in the digital space is also approved by young people. Probably, it could not be otherwise in the age of digitalization, when even the source of information about significant events in the life of society for young generations are for 77.3% of respondents - forums, blogs, social networking sites, for 73.6% - news sites on the Internet. And such mass media as television, radio, printed press (newspapers, magazines) have moved to the periphery of information sources.

The desire to analyze and understand how typical some or other behavioral practices of digital civic activism of young people are, to what extent they are widespread and considered as priorities was the reason for the inclusion of relevant

questions in the research questionnaire. Thus, in response to the question about what respondents had to do on the Internet over the past six months to a year, 73.3% of respondents said that they had signed petitions, bills, and appeals on the Internet, including 39.7% of those who did it regularly, 16.4% who did it "from time to time", and 19% who did it "only once". Regularly participated in Internet voting on political and (or) socially important issues 12.7% of respondents, 42.2% did it from time to time and 16.7% only once; joined groups of public (non-profit) organizations, initiatives to solve public problems and help the needy in social networks on a regular basis and periodically 11.6% of respondents and 16.4% respectively; disseminated information about public and political problems and events (regularly and occasionally - 10.5% and 22.1% respectively); spoke out on public and political issues in blogs, social networks, news sites (similarly regularly and periodically - 8.8% and 19.3%, respectively); donated money/time for the realization of projects (e.g., online media, release of a music album, holding events) - 8.2% of respondents regularly and 19% occasionally; donated money to charity funds, to strangers in need (7.4% of respondents do it regularly, 37.7% do it occasionally and 22.1% did it once in the last six months/year); posted information about local problems on centralized services (e.g., garbage dump, broken playground, etc.) 5.7%, 18.7%, 18.1%, etc.). etc.) 5.7%, 18.7% and 17.3% of respondents, respectively; joined groups of parties/political leaders in social networks (5.7% regularly, 13.3% periodically, 9.1% once).

Modern Russian youth is quite actively involved in socio-political processes, and even a far from complete list of individual behavioral practices of civic activism, implemented in the information environment, demonstrates a wide range of their types, the presence of certain orientations, value meanings, interests, supplemented by specific activities. Perhaps, young people do not yet fully utilize their potential for initiation and implementation of civic initiatives, but they are fully aware of this fact and assess themselves critically enough from the position of fulfilling the role of a socially active person. For example, answering the question "Can you or cannot say about yourself that you are a socially active person?", 17% of respondents answered that they definitely cannot characterize themselves in this way, 47.4% decided that, most likely, it is impossible to say so about them, but for 27.3% of respondents this characteristic quite reflects their life position - for 7.7% it is absolutely certain, for 19.6% - with a higher degree of probability. The percentage indicator indicating an insufficiently high number of respondents claiming to be civically active is sociologically explained by the fact that, when making an assessment, young people probably mean the discrepancy between their inner readiness to participate in solving actual problems and putting them into practice. Therefore, it is not by chance that the need to support as many youth endeavors as possible, according to the data of the All-Russian poll VCIOM, is more often said by 25-34 year olds, i.e. as representatives of youth themselves, and 45-59 year olds (47-45%) (VCIOM, n.d.), older generations.

Only voluntary socially useful activity with awareness of its meaning, a positive emotional attitude to it, and visible results of one's own efforts, regardless of whether it is carried out in real social life or in a digital environment, can change young people's awareness of their social position, improve their understanding of their own role and place in the life of society and the state, and create a sense of self-actualization and satisfaction with their own actions. In this regard, it was important to understand how young people assess their readiness to demonstrate any civic activity. The assessment was proposed to be carried out in accordance with the proposed scale with values from 1 to 5, where "1" - absolutely not ready, and "5" - definitely ready. The respondents' priority spheres, in which, in their opinion, they are ready to demonstrate civic activity, were (in descending order of indicators): education, with the indicator 3.04, ecology (3.02), charity (2.88), civil rights and freedoms (2.81), health care (2.81), urban problems (housing and utilities, transportation, etc.) (2.56). Such a distribution of opinions seems to be very logical, given that the sample population was mainly made up of student youth, they are absolutely right in understanding that, fulfilling the main task of the current life moment to obtain knowledge necessary for further professional activity, the source of their initiatives can be the sphere of education.

In general, as the analysis of the survey results has shown, representatives of the younger generation see it possible and are ready to spread the practice of using the digital environment to solve various socially significant problems and participate in charity.

Thus, today's Russian youth fully shares the concern of the world community about the state of the environment. Youth, as a social group, which in the social structure of society is assigned the role of the future of the country, cannot stay away from solving socially significant problems, so they strive for independent endeavors in the sphere of interaction with the natural environment, taking initiative in the implementation of various types of environmental activities, solving environmental problems in the most accessible to them information environment. Charity issues are also quite actualized in the youth environment. In the totality of personal characteristics of Russians there has traditionally been the quality of empathy, mercy and sympathy for people, the desire to help, support in a difficult moment, passed on to each new generation. Therefore, charity, realized in various forms, has become a practice supported by young people. The transformation of the culture of charity in the post-Soviet Russian society contributed to the activation of such a form of it as volunteering among young people, reflecting the measure of inclusion of representatives of young generations in the civil environment.

4 Conclusion

A powerful means of initiation and realization of digital civic activism of Russian youth can be project activities aimed at solving specific, relevant to society problems, designed to unite young people in teamwork to solve them, to implement all creative designs and ideas. All the more so that nowadays the Russian state actively supports all youth endeavors, creates conditions for public, project and socially useful activities (OPRF, 2022). Involvement of young people in the practice of implementing various projects - research, educational, creative, leisure, etc., at the level of interested participation in them with the use of the latest information technologies, can activate young people, form behavioral practices with a positive civic beginning.

Among the types of youth activity, enshrined as the main directions of volunteering and volunteerism of the Russian movement of children and youth "Movement of the First", created in 2022, the concept of "cybervolunteering" has appeared (Russian Movement of Children and Youth "Movement of the Firsts", n.d.), which allows to fully realize digital competence in practically useful activities.

In modern conditions Russian youth seeks to be civically active in solving various problems, so it is necessary to direct youth initiatives in the direction of creative activity, the formation of behavioral practices and attitudes that correspond to the realities of modern information society and the challenges facing the country in the era of new geopolitical realities.

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