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**COMMUNICATIONS BEHAVIOR OF RUSSIAN YOUTH AS A  
TARGET AUDIENCE**

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*Abstract*

The study of youth audience has been actualized in Russia. Such researches are conducted in the context of the worldview of young consumers and their behavior on media platforms. We combined both approaches in order to determine the communication behavior of youth consumer of educational services and the possible recommendations for a communication strategy to promote the university. The aim of our research was to determine the evaluation of the reputation of the Russian university brand by the target audience, the strengths and weaknesses of the education by point of view of the students and the description of the priority of communicative models of information consumption. In December 2016 the authors conducted a survey of the bachelor and master's degree students of the Institute of World Economy and Business of People Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University). The questionnaire consisted of several informative modules, including priority distribution channels of information, the type of content consumed, the dominant interest groups, etc. The results of the survey made it possible to assess the effectiveness of using various dissemination channels for this target audience, the priority of information content, and the idea about the compliance of a media channel to the needs of the audience. At the result of the study there was started the development of corporate communication strategy to improve the organization's reputation in the specific target audience - an audience of consumers of educational products.

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## **1. Introduction**

The last few decades there is an active transformation of the communication landscape. It has been significant from different aspects.

### **1.1. The impact of technological breakthrough in the communication**

A technological breakthrough one and a half century ago made possible to bridge the civilizational “gap” of the communication chronotope, when the time between encoding and decoding of a message ceased to depend directly from the distance between communicators that without exaggeration changed the world. The invention of radio and television consolidate these changes strengthening the system of mass media and approving the one-sided subject-object nature of the communication model. The situation changed fundamentally with the advent of the Internet: communications become bilateral. Both subjects of communication received the right to vote and the right to choose. “The meaning of the very popular term “new media” is variable. Nowadays, they usually mean by it ... the Internet, computer games, digital films and photographs, mobile telephony and the virtual world. New media take their place among other things generated by new technologies and changes in human behaviour” (Styns & Van Fucht, 2008).

The developments of communication processes and new approaches to information consumption also have an impact on the global economy. The transition to a knowledge economy or creative economy (Florida, 2005) continues to be debated in Russia. This paradigm shift is changing as a management model of organizations and the quality of the internal environment, the nature of the activities of their employees and the methods of communication with new members of the knowledge economy (Amabile & Mukti, 2008; Brem, Puente-Díaz, & Agogue, 2017; Isaksen & Ekvall, 2010; Lorenz & Moutchnik, 2016).

### **1.2. Reorganisation of communication models and change of communication behavior of target audiences**

Such reformations have led to a rethinking of many components of communication processes and allowed:

- evaluate alternatively the model of modern communications and not only from the ontological or axiological point of view, but in applied aspects. For example, such global restructuring of the communication system in terms of marketing, advertising and PR converts professional activities in the field of mass communications. The actual competencies of specialists in public relations include not only writing of press-releases and distributing them through the media, but also the ability to work with organizations' websites, the knowledge of working with audiences on social networks, etc. New specialties appear such as SMM-manager, content manager, blog-secretary and others.
- learn a new type of communicator for building effective communications. A person born and raised in the Internet age formed his communication behavior through this era. Of course, such an audience is youth.

## 2. Problem Statement

Recently the research interest in studying the youth audience has grown in Russia. The concentration of attention of scientists depends on the goals and objectives, which allow demonstrating certain aspects of the object of study.

- On the one hand, such studies conducted in the context of describing the worldview specifics of consumers aged 18 years and below to 25 years and above. Such approach may include, for example, a joint study of Sberbank of Russia and Validata. His result was a report on the life of today's youth, which presents various aspects of the life of young people from information processing and relationships with parents to values, frustration and sense of the future (Adindex, 2017). In the same line is a study conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center, where they dispel the myths of perception of modern youth (VCIOM, 2016).
- On the other hand, the study of youth audiences is carried out in the context of the dimension of their interest in a particular brand and user behavior on various media platforms. These include regular research by monitoring companies such as TNS Gallup Media (Mediascope since 2017), MediaHills, FortLine (part of the GS Group), Romir and others (Mediascope, 2017).

The combination of these two approaches is the basis for comparing the communication behavior of two generations - millennials (Y) and generation Z. This comparison was carried out by specialists of the international communication agency PBN Hill+Knowlton Strategies with the independent research agency MAGRAM MR (MAGRAM MR, 2017). There is also meaningful the attempt to study the generation Z, made on the same grounds by Google in the United States in mid-2016 (Google..., 2017).

## 3. Research Questions

We also attempted to combine both approaches in our research. In this regard, in December 2016 we conducted a survey of students of the Institute of World Economy and Business of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (IWEB RUDN University) with the aim of assessing its reputation in this target audience, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of education from the point of view of students, young people's ideas about current political, economic, social and cultural processes, as well as descriptions of priority communicative models of information consumption. An analysis of the results will allow us to optimize the educational process, improve the educational program, develop a corporate communications strategy for the organization and, as a result, have a positive impact on its reputation in the specific target audience - the audience of consumers of the educational product. We made an attempt to answer the following questions by combining both approaches:

### 3.1. Question 1

What is the communication behavior of a typical representative of the youth audience as a consumer of educational services of Russian universities? How has it changed in today's conditions?

### **3.2. Question 2**

Is it possible to give recommendations for developing a communication strategy for promoting RUDN University on the basis of the gained knowledge? How can the organization correct its communication policy for a younger audience?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify the reputation level of the RUDN University in this target audience, the advantages and disadvantages of education from the students' point of view, as well as a description of priority communicative models of information consumption. In this regard, the tasks were as follows:

### **4.1. To study the communicative behavior of students of the IWEB RUDN University**

This allows us to understand the everyday communication practice of modern students, identify its regular parts and typology and describe the portrait of a typical representative of the target audience of students of the IWEB RUDN University.

### **4.2. To develop a system of recommendations for the formation of a communication strategy for promoting RUDN University**

For these reason we need to highlight the following aspects base on the identified communication patterns of a typical student at the IWEB RUDN University:

- priority channels of information consumption,
- types of consumed content,
- his key characteristics.

This can become the basis of an effective communication policy of RUDN University. Today the university's English-language account on the Facebook social network @RUDNUniverse has about 37 thousand followers, but the average response to publication is 40-50 likes per post.. At the same time this social network is the 2nd most popular among English-speaking millennials and is more popular among them in compare with other age groups (YouGov Ratings, 2019).

## **5. Research Methods**

In December 2016, the authors conducted the survey of bachelor's and master's degree students at the IWEB RUDN University. The students answered the questionnaire anonymously.

### **5.1. Questionnaire content**

The students were asked to answer the questionnaire. It consisted of several informative modules, including describing of user habits to different information channels, as well as priorities in the consumption of various types of content.

## 5.2. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire contained traditional blocks: an introductory part explaining the goals and objectives of the study, as also including instructions for filling in the questionnaire; part with information about the formal and demographic characteristics of the respondent, as well as an expression of gratitude for the attention and time spent for the questionnaire. The questions included in the survey were of various types:

- Open,
- Closed,
- Half-close.

The authors received the results after processing the information obtained as an impact of the survey of bachelor's and master's degree students of the direction "Advertising and Public Relations" in the IWEB RUDN University. They allow evaluating the effectiveness of using different dissemination channel for communication with the target audience.

## 6. Findings

The survey allowed us to assess the priority of existing media channels among the youth audience, the most popular media platforms and the information content corresponding to the needs of the audience.

### 6.1. Formalized results of the study

Formalization of the received answers gave the following picture:

- The respondents gave the following answers to the question "How much time do you watch TV per day?": 75 people (44.1%) answered "I don't look at all", 51 people (30%) mentioned "less than 1 hour", 26 people (15.3%) indicated "from 1 to 3 hours" and 7 people (4.1%) answered "more than 3 hours". 11 people (6.5%) did not answer.

It is worth noting that 20.6% of the total number of respondents chose the answer "I don't watch at all TV", but they have favorite TV shows. It seems that the refusal of watching TV is considered as more acceptable social behavior for this target audience.

- In general, respondents found it difficult to answer the question "What is your favorite TV show", 78 people (45.9%) answered "no". The top 10 most popular programs among the rest were "Heads and tails" (15 people among the respondents - 8.8%), "Voice" (8 people - 4.7%), "Dances on TNT channel" (8 people - 4.7%), "Evening Urgant" (7 people - 4.1%), "Battle of extrasensory" (6 people - 3.5%), "Pozner" (5 people - 3%), "House-2" (3 people - 1.8%), "Let them talk" (3 people - 1.8%), "Moscow Nights" (3 people - 1.8%), "I'm ashamed of my body" (3 people - 1.8%).

If we evaluate the genre composition of the leader programs, then we are seeing among them the dominance of entertainment shows, most of which are built with competitive models. However, the formats of talk shows, reality shows, as well as authorial interview show remain popular among this target audience.

- 105 respondents (61.8%) answered “I don’t listen at all” to the question “How much time do you listen to the radio per day”. 36 respondents (21.2%) listen to the radio per day “less than 1 hour”, 12 people (7%) use “from 1 to 3 hours”, 6 people (3.5%) run through “more than 3 hours”. 11 persons (6.5%) didn’t answer.
- 131 people (77%) didn’t respond or found it difficult to answer the question “What is your favorite broadcast”. At the same time, only 11 respondents (6.5%) named the program as their favorite, and not the radio station. This was largely due to the fact that the respondents yet tried to answer this question, although chose the option “do not listen at all”. However, low awareness about the content of modern radio stations didn’t allow them to correctly answer this question. Nevertheless, the leader in the number of votes among the radio was Love radio (3 people voted for it), as well as DFM (2 people), Energy (2 people), Like.FM (2 people), Radio Record (2 people) and Megapolis FM (2 people).

The most popular radio program was morning talk show on Europe + “Brigada U”. He was named by 3 respondents (1.8%) as his favorite broadcast. 2 respondents (1.2%) like “Morning with Black Pepper” with its linkman Black2White. The quiz on Road Radio, “Pearl Catcher” on RockFM, “Order Table” of Russian Radio, Mikhail Gudkov’s program and Alexei Gudoshnikov’s program on Moscow Says Radio, as well as radio performances were also among the favorite programs and collected 0.6 % of votes each. Therefore the dominant content of popular broadcasts is entertainment or game talk shows as in the case with TV.

- 81 people (47.6% of the total number of respondents) answered “I don’t read at all” to the question “How much time do you read newspapers and magazines per day”. “Less than 1 hour” per day is paid attention to this media channel by 59 people (34.7%), 15 people (8.8%) spend “1 to 3 hours”, 2 people (1.2%) read the press “more than 3 hours” per day. 13 people (7.6%) didn’t answer or found it difficult to answer.
- 110 respondents (64.7%) answered “I don’t buy the press” or found it difficult to answer to the question “What newspapers and magazines do you buy”. Another 7 people chose the option “do not buy, read on the Internet” (4.1%). The most purchased publications by respondents were Cosmopolitan (10 of the respondents – 6%), Vogue (9 people - 5.3%), SNC (5 people - 3%), Esquire (4 respondents - 2.4%), Russian Gazette (4 people - 2.4%), 7 days (3 people - 1.8%), Glamour (3 people - 1.8%), Tattler (3 people - 1.8%), GQ (3 people - 1.8%), Popular Mechanics (3 people - 1.8%) and Forbes, including Forbes Woman magazine (3 people - 1.8%).

No wonder that the leaders between the target audience are lifestyle publications in this media segment, since among the respondents of our study were 33 men (19.4%) and 137 women (80.6%) aged 18 to 25 years. It is the latter who makes up the core of the target audience for lifestyle periodical. In the first half of 2014 Cosmopolitan, owned by Sanoma Independent media holding, became the best-selling glossy print magazine according to the research of the CONSULT-CENTER company. The average circulation of sales of single copy in the 1st half of 2014 exceeded 500,000 copies in Russia (Media Guide, 2014). The magazine’s position has not changed in 2015. It has kept its leadership in the lifestyle category (Adindex, 2016).

Tony Harcup in the Dictionary of Journalism, published by Oxford University Press, defines lifestyles journalism or tabloid as “a very vague term encompassing “easy news ”and material on topics such as cooking, fashion, travel, sex, and shopping” (Harcup, 2014). In this regard, it seems obvious that the content of such publications doesn’t concern acute political, economic or social problems.

- 15 respondents (8.8%) answered “I do not watch at all” to the question “How much time per day do you watch news on the Internet”. “Less than 1 hour” per day is spent by 64 people from among the respondents (37.6%), 39 people (23%) spent “from 1 to 3 hours”, 38 people (22.4%) watch the news “more than 3 hours”. 14 people didn’t answer or found it difficult to answer this question (8.2%).
- 42 respondents (24.7%) didn’t answer or were undecided to answer the question “What sites do you visit daily (name 3 to 5)”. One of the respondents noted “I find all the necessary news on social networks”. The top 10 most visited sites were vk.com (68 respondents), yandex.ru and news.yandex.ru (25 respondents), instagram.com (20 respondents), adme.ru (19 respondents), mail.ru (14 respondents), the-village.ru (13 respondents), youtube.com (13 respondents), ria.ru (13 respondents), rbc.ru (12 respondents), facebook.com (13 respondents).

We can note on the results of the study of the most visited website by our target audience that these included 2 Russian search engines with the function of news aggregators, 3 social networks and video hosting, 4 media platforms including 2 national news agencies, industry media and a city Internet portal based on a blog about urban life.

- The answers to the question “In which social networks do you have working accounts?” were follows: VKontakte - 159 people, Instagram - 144 people, Facebook - 120 people, Twitter - 56 people, Classmates - 12 people, Tumblr - 4 people, LinkedIn - 3 people, Pinterest - 2 people, Snapchat - 2 people, Deviantart - 1 person, Poetry.ru - 1 person, What's app - 1 person, My World - 1 person, Youtube - 1 person, Periscope - 1 person , Reddit - 1 person. 8 people didn’t answer this question.
- 78 respondents answered in the affirmative (46%) to the question “Do you agree with the statement that traditional media are dying”, 77 people (45.3%) gave a negative answer. 15 respondents (8.8%) found it difficult to answer.

## **6.2. Key trends identified based on formalized results**

Foremost the identified trends are consistent with global communication practice. In light of this, we can also focus on the research of youth audiences in other countries. The key trends are follows.

- The dominating of Internet communications, the reducing the role of the print media, the narrow audience of radio listeners and others are nondevelopmental indicators of the transformation of the communication that takes place all over the world.
- At the same time the youth audience tends to exaggerate their communication preferences. For example television still attracts them, but due to the prevailing opinion about his high role for the audience of 45+, many young people prefer to downplay their television viewing.
- Russian youth is highly oriented towards Russian media platforms and media content even studying at international universities.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of the study allowed us to formulate recommendations for the optimization of the educational process and the improvement of the educational program. The development of the corporate communications strategy was begun with aim to improve its reputation in a specific target audience, as the audience of educational product consumers.

### 7.1. Communication portrait of a typical student of IWEB RUDN University

A typical representative of the target audience of students of the Institute of World Economy and Business of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia is a girl aged 18 to 25 who is an active Internet user. She likes TV shows but doesn't make a show of it. From time to time she reads thick glossy magazines. She prefers light entertainment content and avoids the serious problems or complex questions. She practically doesn't listen to the radio and doesn't imagine what her profession will be like in 5 or 10 years.

### 7.2. General audience guidelines

In this regard, the corporate communications strategy of IWEB RUDN University for improving the reputation of the educational structure in a specific target audience should especially involve active work with students in social networks, which should correspond to the following characteristics:

- system,
- regular,
- full-format (including high-quality video and photo materials),
- prevailing entertainment content.

The results of the study were taken as the base of communication campaigns conducted by the IWEB RUDN University. The specifics of media consumption and communication behavior of the youth audience were taken into account in the further communication campaign.

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