

INTERGENERATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INVOLVEMENT IN THE INTERNET SPACE AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AMONG RUSSIANS

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Межпоколенный анализ взаимосвязи вовлеченности в интернет-пространство с институциональным доверием среди россиян

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Abstract

This study attempts to analyze the relationship between involvement in the Internet space and institutional trust among Russians of different generations. This study is based on data from Round 8 of the European Social Survey. The data was collected between 2016 and 2017. The sample for Russia includes 2,430 respondents. The analysis was carried out using the method of multiple linear regression. Our study showed that the nature of the relationship between Internet use and institutional trust varies depending on their generation. Young people (18–30 years old) are the most active Internet users and they also have the highest levels of institutional trust relative to other generations. Furthermore, an increase in the time

Резюме

В данном исследовании предпринимается попытка проанализировать связь между вовлеченностью в интернет-пространство и институциональным доверием среди россиян, принадлежащих к разным поколениям. Это исследование основано на данных 8-й волны Европейского социального исследования. Данные были собраны в период с 2016 по 2017 г. Выборка по России составила 2430 респондентов. Анализ проводился с использованием метода множественной линейной регрессии. Наше исследование показало, что характер взаимосвязи между использованием Интернета и институциональным доверием различается в зависимости от поколенческой принадлежности индивида. Молодые люди (18–30 лет) являются наиболее активными пользователями Интернета и при этом имеют самый высокий относительно других поколений уровень

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spent on the Internet is associated with an increase in institutional distrust among young people. Representatives of the middle (31–44 years old) and older (45–80) ages use the Internet relatively less frequently and have lower levels of trust in institutions. At the same time, the involvement of these age groups in the Internet space is associated with higher levels of institutional trust. Understanding the nature of the relationship between institutional trust and Internet use is important for the government policy planning and strengthening institutional trust among Russians.

Keywords: trust, institutional trust, Internet, generations, information and communication technologies, European Social Survey.

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институционального доверия. В то же время более длительное время пребывания в Интернете связано с ростом недоверия к государственным институтам среди молодежи. Представители среднего (31–44 лет) и старшего (45–80) возрастов относительно реже используют Интернет и имеют более низкий уровень доверия институтам. При этом в данных возрастных группах вовлеченность в интернет-пространство, напротив, связана с большим доверием государственным институтам. Понимание природы взаимосвязи между институциональным доверием и использованием Интернета важно для грамотного планирования государственной политики и укрепления институционального доверия среди россиян.

Ключевые слова: доверие, институциональное доверие, Интернет, поколения, информационно-коммуникационные технологии, Европейское социальное исследование.

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The development of information and communication technologies builds a new social reality and acts as a basis for new social practices. Some researchers compare the influence of information and communication technologies on the life of society with the revolution made by the invention of the wheel and sail (Levashov et al., 2016). Thanks to the emergence of new information technologies, in particular the Internet, a new social reality is built. What happens to trust in this new digital reality?

On the one hand, as society develops, one type of trust becomes a dominant as compared to other types of trust (Veselov, 2020). For example, in traditional societies, interpersonal trust was of the greatest importance. In industrial societies, institutional trust comes forward, since the life of an urban person involves frequent interaction with various strangers. To do this, the individual has to form the impersonal, role and functional trust. In post-industrial societies, the priority shifts from vertical social ties to horizontal ties (Granovetter, 1985). In information societies, a new kind of trust is emerging and becoming increasingly important — digital trust. Digital trust is defined as user confidence

in the ability of people, technologies and processes to create a secure digital world (Frenehard, 2019).

On the other hand, all types of trust are being transformed under the influence of digitalization. For example, with the emergence of “electronic government”, a new dimension of institutional trust arises (Veselov, 2020). So, new information and communication technologies define the form of interactions between individuals and institutions. Based on the data for East Asian countries, it was shown that the individual Internet use always has political implications, regardless of the individual motives and purposes of Internet using (Huang et al., 2017; Tang & Huhe, 2014). Besides, new Internet technologies activate citizens’ participation in civic and political affairs due to their networking capabilities (Huang et al., 2017). Along with it, consuming social and political news is one of the most popular Internet activities (Huang et al., 2020). Online news consumption contributes to a rapid increase in political awareness among the citizens (Tran, 2013; Edgerly et al., 2018).

In this study, we focus on investigating how the involvement in the Internet space is related to institutional trust.

Institutional trust is the confidence of citizens that institutions (for example, government, parliament, scientific establishments) act predictably, fairly and transparently and serve in the best interest of citizens (Putnam et al., 1993). Trust in institutions is also associated with the perceived legitimacy of institutions (Khodyakov, 2007) and compliance with formal and informal norms (Tyler, 2006). Institutional trust can be seen as a cognitive assessment of the relationship between trustors (citizens) and trustee (public institutions) due to the expected utility of the public institutions’ work (Garcia-Zamor, 1998). Citizens’ trust in state institutions is a basic foundation of political support, government legitimacy, and democratic stability (Easton, 1975). Understanding the nature of correlation between institutional trust and communication technology (in particular, Internet use) is essential for the government policy planning.

There are different points of view in scientific discourse on how the spread of new information and communication technologies is related to trust in general, and to institutional trust in particular. For example, a study on the relationship between Internet use and trust found that Internet use is associated with higher levels of trust even provided the control for individual characteristics such as income, education, and race (Pierce & Lovrich, 2003). Besides, it was shown that Internet facilitates digital democracy (Dahlberg, 2011). Internet technology can facilitate the increasing of knowledge, strengthen social ties, and expand capabilities for coordination and cooperation (Neves, 2013; Dimitrova et al., 2014; Lee, 2015). Using of e-government websites can enforce institutional trust (Kim & Lee, 2012; Song & Lee, 2016).

In other studies, it was found that there is a negative effect of Internet use on institutional trust (Im et al., 2014). Internet gives people the access to different information resources and critical viewpoints that can undermine political trust (Kim, 2010). Thanks to the big variety of online news beyond the institutional control, Internet using tends to develop more negative attitudes toward state institutions

(Guggenheim et al., 2011). It was shown that Internet using is associated with lower levels of democratic satisfaction, which can lead to lower institutional trust (Norris, 2011). Further, it was shown that Internet culture develops such individual values as freedom, connectivity, and self-expression (Kalathil & Boas, 2010; Lei, 2011). It can lead to political cynicism and reduce institutional trust.

Hypothesis 1: involvement in the Internet space has a significant relationship with institutional trust.

Based on the fact that representatives of different generations have different levels of institutional trust (Tatarko, 2012) and purposes of using the Internet (Kulagina & Tarasova, 2014; Voronin & Kuryachieva, 2018), it can be assumed that the nature of the relationship between the involvement in the Internet space and institutional trust will differ among representatives of different generations.

Hypothesis 2: the direction of the relationship between involvement in the Internet space and institutional trust differs across generations.

Study Methodology

Data

The study is based on data from Round 8 of the European Social Survey. The European Social Survey is a cross-national survey that is conducted every two years. Face-to-face interviews are conducted with newly selected cross-sectional samples. Round 8 of this survey (2016–2017) contains the most up-to-date data for Russia, since Russia did not participate in the Rounds 9 and 10. The Russian sample consisted of 2,430 respondents¹.

Variables and method

We have identified three age groups for different generations:

- “18-30 years old” – youth;
- “31-44 years old” – middle-aged;
- “45-80” – elderly.

For each of the three age groups, 12 linear regression equations were estimated.

The following six variables that determine the levels of institutional trust were dependent:

- confidence in own ability to participate in politics,
- trust in country’s parliament,
- trust in the legal system,
- trust in the police,
- trust in politicians,
- trust in political parties.

The degree of trust in each of the institutions above was assessed on a five-point scale, where 1 was “Not at all confident” and 5 was “Completely confident”.

¹ <https://ess-search.nsd.no/en/study/f8e11f55-0c14-4ab3-abde-96d3f14d3c76>

Among the independent variables measuring the involvement in the Internet space of an individual (with separate models built for each of these two variables):

- Internet use (how often: 1 – never, ..., 5 – every day),
- Internet use (how much time on a typical day, in minutes).

The following variables were used as controls:

- age of respondent,
- gender (1 – male, 0 – female),
- household's total net income (1 – the 1st decile, ..., 10 – the 10th decile).

Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the most active Internet users are representatives of the youngest generation (18–30 years old). Among young people, only 1% of those surveyed said they never use the Internet and over 75% said they use the Internet on a daily basis. Young people also lead the way in terms of how long they stay online. Thus, representatives of the younger generation spend an average of 258 minutes a day on the Internet.

Middle-aged people (31–44 years old) tend to use the Internet from time to time or several times a week. At the same time, a significant part (40%) of middle-aged people does not use the Internet at all. The average time spent online for this generation is 206 minutes.

More than a half of the elderly (45–80 years old) do not use the Internet at all. Moreover, among those who are still actively involved in Internet, about 40% use

Table 1

Сравнение показателей студентов педагогических (N = 20)

Variables	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<i>Internet use</i>				
Internet use (how often)	1	5	3.3	1.7
Internet use (how much time on typical day, minutes)	0	840	219	164
<i>Institutional trust</i>				
Confidence in own ability to participate in politics	1	5	1.8	0.97
Trust in country's parliament	0	10	4.2	2.7
Trust in the legal system	0	10	4.3	2.7
Trust in the police	0	10	4.4	2.7
Trust in politicians	0	10	3.5	2.5
Trust in political parties	0	10	3.6	2.6
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age of respondent	18	80	46	17
Gender	0	1	0.43	0.5
Household's total net income (decile)	1	10	5.2	2.7

the Internet on a daily basis. Compared to other generations, the older generation spends the least time on the Internet. Staying on the Internet for people of this age takes an average of 178 minutes a day.

According to Figure 2, the levels of trust in different institutions do not differ much across generations. However, some differences are statistically significant.

Figure 1

Frequency of Internet Use among Different Generations

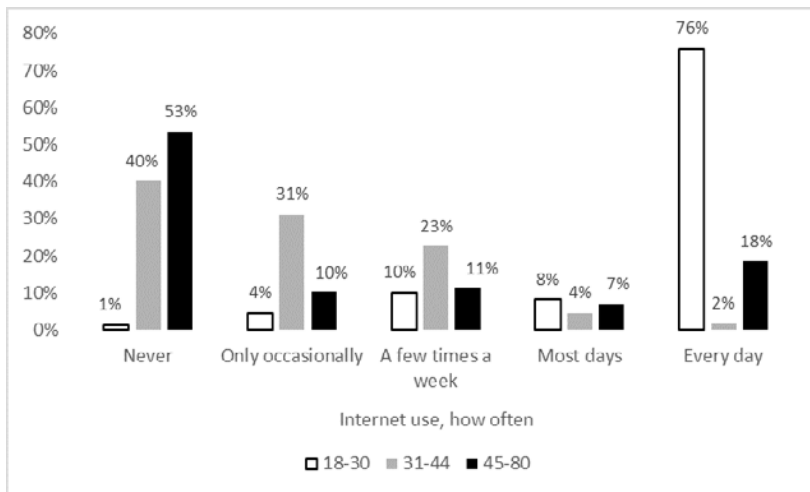
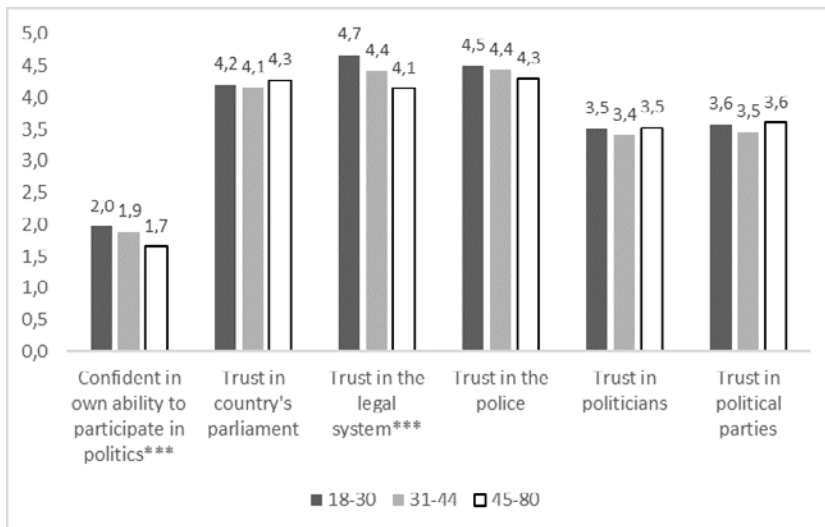


Figure 2

Mean Value of Different Types of Institutional Trust among Generations



Note. *** The differences are statistically significant ($p \leq .001$).

Between the groups the variation is statistically significant for such types of institutional trust as confidence in own ability to participate in politics and trust in the legal system. For these two types of institutional trust, the following pattern is true: the levels of trust decrease as people become older.

To analyze the relationship between institutional trust and the involvement in the Internet space, a multiple regression analysis was carried out. Not all constructed regression models are statistically significant. We shall consider significant regression models.

For the age group "18–30 years":

Internet use (how much time on a typical day, in minutes) is negatively ($\beta = -0.15^{**2}$) correlated with trust in politicians (characteristics of the regression model: $R^2 = .09$, $F = 6.7$, $p < .001$),

Internet use (how much time on a typical day, in minutes) is negatively ($\beta = -0.18^{***}$) correlated with trust in political parties (characteristics of the regression model: $R^2 = .08$, $F = 6.4$, $p < .001$).

For the age group "31–44 years":

Internet use (how often) is positively ($\beta = 0.18^{***}$) correlated with confidence in own ability to participate in politics (characteristics of the regression model: $R^2 = .04$, $F = 4.2$, $p < .01$),

Internet use (how often) is positively ($\beta = 0.22^{***}$) correlated with trust in the legal system (characteristics of the regression model: $R^2 = .07$, $F = 8.7$, $p < .001$),

Internet use (how often) is positively ($\beta = 0.19^{***}$) correlated with trust in the police (characteristics of the regression model: $R^2 = .06$, $F = 7.2$, $p < .001$).

For the age group "45–80 years":

Internet use (how often) is positively ($\beta = 0.25^{***}$) correlated with confidence in own ability to participate in politics (characteristics of the regression model: $R^2 = .09$, $F = 22.5$, $p < .001$).

In all these models age, gender and household's total net income were controls variables. For the age group «18–30 years» age, and gender were significantly negatively correlated with trust in politicians. Age was significantly negatively correlated with trust in political parties. For the age group «31–44 years» age, gender and household's total net income have no significant correlation with confidence in own ability to participate in politics, trust in the police and trust in the legal system. For the age group "45–80 years" gender and household's total net income were significantly positively correlated with confidence in own ability to participate in politics.

Discussion

Our study shows that in terms of relationship with institutional trust among young people (18–30 years old), time spent on the Internet (how much time on a typical day, in minutes) turned out to be a significant indicator of involvement in the Internet space. Meanwhile for the representatives of the middle-age (31–44

² * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

years old) and elderly generations (45–80 years old) a significant indicator of the involvement in the Internet space is the frequency of using the Internet (how often). This can be explained by the fact that the vast majority (about 80%) of young people aged 18 to 30 uses the Internet on a daily basis. In view of this, the frequency of Internet use is almost the same for most representatives of this generation and cannot be a differentiating factor explaining differences in the levels of institutional trust among young people. For representatives of older generations, who have significant reserves for increasing the frequency of using the Internet, this indicator played the role of a significant factor that determines the variation in the levels of institutional trust.

The nature of the relationship between the involvement in the Internet space and institutional trust differs depending on the generation of an individual. Among young people aged 18–30, the intensity of Internet use is negatively related to the levels of institutional trust. On the contrary, among people of middle (31–44 years old) and older (45–80 years old) age, the relationship between the intensity of Internet use and institutional trust turned out to be positive.

Intergenerational differences in the nature of the relationship between the involvement in the Internet space and institutional trust may be due to the fact that representatives of different generations may have different goals for using the Internet. People over 50 years of age mainly use the Internet in order to obtain news, broaden their horizons and access reference materials. Thus, for people over 50 years old, the information aspect is of greatest interest (Voronin & Kuryachieva, 2018). Perhaps, for older people, the Internet is a resource that allows them to obtain the missing information, including on issues related to various state institutions (for example, on the calculation of pensions and state benefits, on utility tariffs, on the operation of the public services system, etc.). Therefore, in this case, the levels of institutional trust grow with the increased frequency of Internet use.

As for young people, their priority purposes of using the Internet include communication, watching and downloading films, listening to and downloading music, online shopping, and online games (Kulagina & Tarasova, 2014). Thus, the consumption of information or services that can affect the levels of institutional trust is not a priority goal of Internet use among young people. Perhaps, only after the main goals of being online are realized, young people can switch their attention to the Internet content that can influence their attitudes towards state institutions. Therefore, it was the time spent on the Internet that turned out to be a significant determinant of the levels of institutional trust among young people.

Our study showed that even though young people have relatively higher levels of institutional trust as compared to representatives of other generations, an increase in the time spent on the Internet is negatively correlated with the levels of institutional trust of young people. Possibly this is due to the fact that today's youth prefer information (including information about the actions of government departments and the political situation) from the Internet to other sources, as they believe that the information resources of the Internet are less engaged with the authorities and have lower levels of political censorship (Kamnev, 2013). Perhaps the use of the Internet, replete with critical information on the political and social

development of the country, makes young people doubt that state institutions are trustworthy. Moreover, criticism of the authorities (including its radical forms) is one of the dominant forms of implementing the political subjectness of Russians on the Internet. The global network is perceived by Russians primarily as a space of freedom, in connection with which such parameters and functions as openness to expressing positions and unlimited criticism of the authorities and politicians are considered as the norm (Nechaev & Brodovskaya, 2013).

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made to answer the question of how the involvement in the Internet space and institutional trust among representatives of different generations are related. Our hypotheses were confirmed: involvement in the Internet space is significantly related to institutional trust, and the nature of this relationship differs among generations. Young people are the most active Internet users and they also demonstrate the highest levels of institutional trust as compared to other generations. Furthermore, an increase in the time spent on the Internet is associated with increased distrust to state institutions among young people. Representatives of middle-age and elderly generations use the Internet relatively less often and have lower levels of trust in institutions. On the contrary, their involvement in the Internet space helps them strengthen their faith in state institutions.

The results of this study might be useful for expanding the understanding of the relationship between institutional trust and the involvement in the Internet space; they might be applied in the planning of state policies aimed at strengthening institutional trust among Russians.

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