

RUSSIANS' INVOLVEMENT IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY USING AND INTERCULTURAL ATTITUDES: THE ROLE OF ON-LINE INTRA- AND INTER-ETHNIC FRIENDSHIPS

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Вовлеченность россиян в использование информационно-коммуникационных технологий и межкультурные установки: роль моно- и межэтнических дружеских онлайн-контактов

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Abstract

The involvement of Russians in information and communication technologies using (ICTU) affects not only business relations and the search for information, but also friendly contacts in the online space. In this regard, it is important to understand the role of ICTU and on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendships in the intercultural attitudes of residents of the multicultural Russian society. We conducted a socio-psychological survey in 2019–2020, the sample included 337 residents of eight regions of Russia. Using

Резюме

Вовлеченность россиян в использование информационно-коммуникационных технологий (ИКТ) влияет не только на деловые отношения, поиск информации, но и на дружеские контакты в онлайн-пространстве. В этой связи важным является понимание роли вовлеченности в использование ИКТ и дружеских онлайн-контактов с представителями своей и других этнических групп в межкультурных установках жителей поликультурного российского общества. Исследование проводилось в 2019–2020 гг., выборка включала 337 жителей 8 регионов России. Используя моде-

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structural equation modeling and mediation analysis, we found that ICTU of Russians predicted the intensity of on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendships. On-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts had a direct positive effect on the attitudes supporting multicultural ideology and social equality and a negative direct effect on the intolerance of Russians. The more intensively Russians communicate with inter-ethnic friends in the virtual space, the more significant their readiness to accept cultural diversity, social equality and tolerance. This result allows us to speak of a universal role of intercultural on-line friendships for positive intercultural attitudes. Additionally, such contacts mediated the relationship of ICTU with intercultural attitudes. Friendly intra-ethnic contacts in the network were positively associated with attitudes supporting both multicultural ideology and intolerance. We can say that the creation of networks that include representatives of only one ethnic group and intensive communication of its members can potentially contribute to the intolerance of Russians. In general, the results of the study showed the importance of developing virtual space for intercultural communication.

Keywords: information and communication technology, on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendships, intercultural attitudes, Russians.

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лирование структурными уравнениями и медиационный анализ, мы установили, что вовлеченность россиян в использование ИКТ предсказывает интенсивность дружеских контактов в сети с представителями своей и других этнических групп. Дружеские межэтнические онлайн-контакты имеют прямой положительный эффект на поддержание мультикультурной идеологии и, социальное равенство и прямой отрицательный эффект на нетерпимость россиян. Можно сказать, что чем интенсивнее русские общаются с друзьями из других этнических групп в виртуальном пространстве, тем выше их готовность принять культурное разнообразие, социальное равенство и толерантность. Этот результат позволяет говорить об универсальной роли межкультурных онлайн-контактов с друзьями в позитивных межкультурных установках. Кроме этого, они медируют взаимосвязь вовлеченности в использование ИКТ с данными установками. Дружеские моноэтнические контакты в сети положительно связаны как с установками на поддержание мультикультурной идеологии, так и с нетерпимостью россиян. Можно сказать, что создание сетей, включающих представителей только одной этнической группы, и интенсивное общение ее членов потенциально могут способствовать нетерпимости. В целом, результаты исследования показали важность развития виртуального пространства для межкультурного общения.

Ключевые слова: информационно-коммуникационные технологии, моно- и межэтнические дружеские онлайн-контакты, межкультурные установки, Россия.

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According to the Global Digital annual report for 2021 (Kemp, 2021), more than half of the world population uses the Internet, social networks, various mobile devices. People are increasingly using information and communication technologies not only for work, searching for information, but also for communication.

Various studies have found that new, internet-based social networks are used to maintain pre-existing social ties and to create new connections (Tufekci, 2010). In addition, internet users have contacts with many friends and relatives than non-users do (Wang & Wellman, 2010; Hampton et al., 2011). The results of research conducted by Pollet, Roberts, Dunbar (2011) revealed that individuals who use social networking sites have greater group support, strong group sympathy, and much more friendship than those who do not use social media. Numerous research publications of PEW Research Center (as for example, Auxier & Anderson, 2021) support this conclusion.

Many researchers studied on-line inter- and intra-ethnic contacts in the context of migration. Some researchers (Hampton et al., 2011; Lee, 2017) found that information and communication technologies contribute to the diversity of a migrant's social networks and increase both their on-line intercultural (Chen, 2010) and intracultural contacts.

Studies, conducted among international students (Stefanone et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2012; Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017), revealed that social network sites enable students to maintain previous connections and build new relationships during their transitions to their new environment.

The above-mentioned results, on the one hand, and the involvement of Russian residents in the use of the Internet, social networks (Kemp, 2021), on the other hand, allow us to put forward the following hypothesis:

H1. Involvement in information and communication technology using (ICTU) of Russians is positively related to the on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendly contacts.

New media not only influence the form and content of information/messages, but also affect how people understand each other in the process of communication, especially those from different cultural or ethnic groups. Internet functions as a setting that expands diversity (Hampton et al., 2011).

On the one hand, interactions on-line social networking can serve as meanings of increasing interest to different cultural experiences and appreciation for diverse people's values, traditions, and perspectives (Ngai, 2019). One can say that involvement in the on-line space, social networks and the Internet use contributes to the acceptance of cultural diversity, multicultural ideology, the establishment of equal status relations, and the reduction of prejudice.

On the other hand, belonging to different cultures, religions, and education backgrounds might be the source of oppositions or conflicts in the online communication (Uzun, 2014). Additionally, platforms where individuals with different cultural backgrounds can meet usually include 'chatting' and/or 'gaming'. Both of these activities (chatting and gaming) involve opposition and competition by nature (Khairunisa, 2020).

Contradictions of the research results allow us to formulate the second and alternative hypotheses:

H2. IICTU of Russians is positively associated with their attitudes to support of multicultural ideology and social equality attitude, and is negatively associated with the ethnic intolerant attitudes.

Alternative hypothesis. IICTU of Russians is negatively associated with their attitudes to support of multicultural ideology and social equality attitude, and positively associated with the ethnic intolerant attitudes.

Numerous studies conducted among international students and migrants have shown that new media facilitate continuous contacts with distant family and co-ethnic friends while enabling individuals to stay abreast of the social, cultural, and political life of their home culture (Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017; Cemalcilar et al., 2005). Co-ethnic on-line contacts contribute to 'ethnic entrainment', which can increase cultural distance, and decrease tolerance. For example, a study by Lee (2017) found that immigrant involvement in intra-ethnic friendships was negatively associated with acceptance of the language and culture of the host society.

The intercultural relations' literature abounds with studies proving positive outcomes for individuals who make friendship with those from the host country (Bennett et al., 2013; Yusoff, 2012). Interaction with such friends via new media platforms leads to an increased understanding of host communities (Croucher, 2011). Sawyer and Chen (2012) found that the use of new media obviously helps international students to cope with cultural barriers in the process of intercultural adaptation. All these results allow us to make conclusions that intercultural friendships in social networks contribute to positive intercultural attitudes.

Based on the above-mentioned results, we formulate the third and fourth hypotheses:

H3. The on-line intra-ethnic friendly contacts are negatively associated with attitude to support the multicultural ideology, social equality attitude and are positively related to ethnic intolerant attitudes of Russians.

H4. The on-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts are positively associated with attitude to support a multicultural ideology, social equality attitudes and are negatively related to ethnic intolerant attitudes of Russians.

As studies have shown (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), the flexibility of information presented and shared in the new media can directly affect, either positively or negatively, the development of intercultural relationships in the virtual space, and indirectly, through the creation of a network of personal friendly connection. Based on this, we formulated a research question:

RQ1. What is the mediating role of on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendly contacts in the relationship of IICTU and intercultural attitude of Russians?

The analysis of previous studies showed that most of them were conducted in Europe and the USA and were associated with the adaptation of migrants and international students. Our study will test the proposed assumptions on a Russian sample of indigenous people.

Method

Participants

The sample included 337 respondents from the Russian Federation. Men made up 32% of the respondents. $M_{\text{age}} = 38.27$, ($SD = 11.54$; $\text{min} = 17$, $\text{max} = 70$). 65.4% of respondents had higher education, 25.2% specialized secondary education, 6.1% secondary education, 3.3% incomplete secondary education. Russians made up 80.1% of the respondents. The sample included respondents from all regions of Russia: Central ($N = 103$), Siberian ($N = 45$), Southern ($N = 25$), Northwestern ($N = 48$), Ural ($N = 24$), Far Eastern ($N = 20$), Volga ($N = 36$), and North Caucasian ($N = 25$).

Procedure

A socio-psychological survey was conducted in 2019-2020 on the 1ka on-line platform. Participation in the study was voluntary and did not involve remuneration.

Measures

The questionnaire included the following scales:

Involvement in information and communication technology using (ICTU) (Tatarko et al., 2020). The scale included 16 items, for example: 'How often do you use on-line applications for various types of services (taxi, online booking, ordering food, making an appointment, etc.)?' ($r = .71$)

The study used a questionnaire created within the framework of the Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies (MIRIPS) project (Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2009) for measuring the intensity of mediated intra- and inter-ethnic friendships and intercultural attitudes.

On-line intra-ethnic friendly contacts were assessed by two questions: the number of friends of own ethnic group in the virtual space and the frequency of mediated (on-line) contacts with them. "How many intra-ethnic friends do you have on-line/on the Internet?" (Answers: 1 – None; 2 – Only one; 3 – Not enough; 4 – Several; 5 – Many). "How often do you communicate with intra-ethnic friends on-line/on the Internet?" (1 – Never; 2 – Rarely; 3 – Sometimes; 4 – Often; 5 – Every day).

On-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts. It was assessed by two questions: the number of friends of other ethnic groups in the virtual space and the frequency of mediated (on-line) contacts with them. "How many inter-ethnic friends do you have

online/on the Internet?”, “How often do you communicate with inter-ethnic friends on-line/on the Internet?” The answers were the same as in the scale ‘Intensity of mediated intra-ethnic friendship’.

Attitudes to Support Multicultural Ideology. We used the scale ‘Multicultural Ideology’ (six items), for example, ‘We should recognize that cultural diversity is a fundamental characteristic of the Russian Federation’ ($\alpha = .76$).

Social Equality Attitudes. The scale included three items, for example: “We should promote equality among all groups, regardless of racial or ethnic origin”, ($\alpha = .72$).

Ethnic Intolerant Attitudes. The scale included three items, for example: “Interethnic couples are a bad idea”, ($\alpha = .69$).

In the process of the survey, respondents answered the questionnaire using 5-point Likert scales spanning from 1, “I completely disagree”, to 5, “I fully agree”.

Demographic variables. We used a number of questions aimed at assessing the demographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, ethnicity, education. Additionally, we measured the cultural diversity of the region. We used statistical data: the percentage of ethnic minorities and the number of ethnic minority groups. The higher both of these indicators, the higher the cultural diversity of the region. We ranked the regions: Central – 8, Siberian – 7, Southern – 6, Northwestern – 5, Ural – 4, Far Eastern – 3, Volga – 2, and North Caucasian – 1.

Data Processing

Methods of descriptive statistics, scales reliability indicators (Cronbach’ α), regression analysis in SPSS version 22, structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS version 20.0.

Results

The results of descriptive statistics of variables were presented in Table 1. The analysis showed that IICTU, the on-line intra-ethnic friendships, attitudes to support multicultural ideology and social equality attitudes had above mean scores. The means of the on-line inter-ethnic friendships and ethnical intolerant attitudes scales were below means.

Table 1

Means of All Variables

Variables	M	SD
Involvement in Information and Communication Technology Using (IICTU)	3.23	0.48
On-Line Intra-Ethnic Friendly Contacts	3.57	1.00
On-Line Inter-Ethnic Friendly Contacts	2.70	1.06
Attitudes to Support Multicultural Ideology	3.89	0.80
Social Equality Attitudes	3.79	0.94
Ethnic Intolerant Attitudes	2.61	1.03

We controlled the effect of gender, age, education, ethnic status, and cultural diversity of the region on all variables. The results of the regression analysis showed that the age ($\beta = .16; p = .006$) and cultural diversity of the region ($\beta = .12; p = .029$) increased the significant of attitudes to support multicultural ideology. The gender ($\beta = -.13; p = .013$) and age ($\beta = .18; p = .001$) of the respondents influenced ethnic intolerant attitudes (these attitudes were less significant among women than among men, and the significance of these attitudes increased with age). We “cleaned up” these variables, using regression analysis, and then used standardized residuals in structural equation modeling.

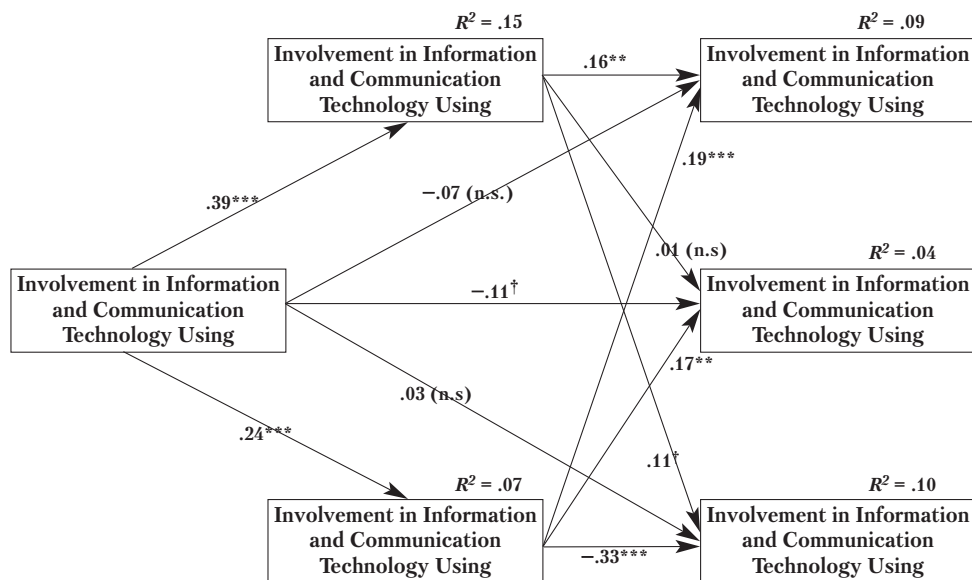
Results of the path analysis were presented in Figure 1. IICTU was positively related to the intra- and inter-ethnic contacts in the virtual space, online. Our first hypothesis was fully confirmed.

We have not identified a direct significant effect of the IICTU on multicultural ideology and ethnic intolerant attitude. However, IICTU was negatively associated with social equity attitude ($p = .06$). These data partly confirmed our alternative hypothesis. This could mean that the more a person is involved in the virtual space, the more he or she uses the Internet resources, as well as various gadgets (computer, telephone, etc.), the lower his/her social equity attitude.

The results showed that the on-line communication with friends of own ethnic group was positively related with support of multicultural ideology and with ethnic intolerant attitude. This result partly confirms our third hypothesis.

Figure 1

Results of the Path Analysis for Association IICTU, On-Line Intra- and Inter-Ethnic Friendships and Intercultural Attitudes



† $p < 0.06$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Note. Indicators of the model: $\chi^2/df = 3.7$; CFI = .98; SRMR = .03; RMSEA = .08; PCLOSE = .132.

The on-line communication with friends of other ethnic groups was positively associated with multicultural ideology and social equity attitude and negatively with ethnic intolerant attitude. Our fourth hypothesis was fully confirmed.

Answering the research question, we identified the mediating role of on-line contacts with intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic friends in the relationship between IICTU and intercultural attitudes. Both on-line intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic friendly contacts fully mediated the positive relationship between IICTU and multicultural ideology (indirect effect $\beta = .15, p = .001, [.06; .23]$; $\beta = .11, p = .001, [.05; .17]$). We obtained the full mediation of the relationship between IICTU and ethnic intolerant attitudes by on-line inter-ethnic friendships (negative indirect effect $\beta = -.16, p = .001, [-.25; -.08]$) as well. On-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts partially mediated the relationship between IICTU and social equity attitudes (positive indirect effect $\beta = .09, p = .002, [.02; .17]$). The direct effect was negative in this case. We can conclude that IICTU increased multicultural ideology and social equality attitudes and reduced ethnic intolerant attitudes through on-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts. On-line intra-ethnic friendships were a mediator only for IICTU and the multicultural ideology.

Discussion

This study identified the relationship between IICTU and intercultural attitudes, as well as the role of on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendly contacts in this relationship among Russians. We found that IICTU contributes to the intensity of friendly contacts in social networks, the Internet, both with intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic friends. Our results are consistent with data obtained in different countries on different samples (Hampton et al., 2011; Lee, 2017; Hendrickson & Rosen, 2017). Thus, the involvement of Russians in social networks, blogging, and the use of mobile phone, computer and laptop increases their mediated communication with friends of own and other ethnic groups.

Our results showed that IICTU had the direct negative effect only on social equality attitude, and this effect was at the trend level. In principle, we can say that IICTU itself was not a factor that influenced the intercultural attitudes of Russians. However, we found that IICTU had the effect on intercultural attitude through on-line contacts with friends. On-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts played the role of a mediator for the positive relationship between IICTU and attitude to support multicultural ideology and social equality attitude and the negative relationship between IICTU and ethnic intolerant attitude. Perhaps on-line communication with friends from different cultures helps to accept different opinions, varying cultural values and norms, and more consciously understand the information received from the Internet, social networks, blogs, etc. On-line communication with co-ethnic friends mediated a positive relationship between IICTU and multicultural ideology only. Our results are consistent with the other studies (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

On-line inter-ethnic friendly contacts were positively related to multicultural ideology and social equality attitude and were negatively related to intolerance.

The more intensively Russians communicate with inter-ethnic friends in the virtual space, the more significant their readiness to accept cultural diversity, social equality and tolerance. Previously, similar results were obtained among migrants and international students (Croucher, 2011; Sawyer & Chen, 2012). This result allows us to speak of the universal role of intercultural on-line friendships for positive intercultural attitudes.

On-line intra-ethnic friendships played a dual role: they contributed to the acceptance of cultural diversity, but they also increased intolerant attitudes (at the trend level). Based on these results, it is important to understand that the creation of networks that include representatives of only one ethnic group and intensive communication of its members can potentially contribute to the intolerance of Russians.

Conclusion

Summarizing our research results, we can conclude that IICTU of Russians contributes to their on-line friendly contacts, but only inter-ethnic friendly on-line contacts mediate the positive relationship between IICTU and intercultural attitudes. Therefore, it is important to develop virtual spaces and platforms for the development of intercultural friendship.

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