Internet and Social Media Use by Young People for Information about (Inter)National News and Politics in Russia and Kazakhstan

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Abstract

In this research note, I examine whether research conducted among young internet and social media users in Russia and Kazakhstan is representative of generalisable conclusions, particularly in relation to political participation studies. At present there is no reliable information on this topic in these societies. I commissioned four questions per country using omnibus surveys conducted in the 2020 autumn intake of the voting-age (18+) population using funding from the 'Bolashaq' programme. Based on the findings I procured through the omnibus surveys conducted by national public opinion poll companies (Levada Center and Central Asian Barometer) in Russia and Kazakhstan, my analysis shows that (1) more than 99% of all young people aged 18–29 use the internet and social media; and (2) nearly three out of four young people use social media for information about national and international news and politics. However, despite these high indicators, the frequency of the usage of social media for news and politics varies considerably in both countries. The paper with its up-to-date data as of 2021 fills a gap in Russian and Kazakhstani research, providing scholars with data to conduct further research about internet, social media, and politics among new media users. In addition, it provides a comparative analysis of the frequency of internet and social media use by young people for information about (inter)national news and politics in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Keywords: internet, social media, news, politics, young people, Russia, Kazakhstan.

Introduction

With the advancement of ICTs and social media, the prevalence of smartphones, and the accessibility of the internet, research about the internet and social media has been rising dramatically around the world. In recent decades, scholars have utilised various research methods, such as online surveys, cyber-ethnography, online interviews and focus groups, web-based experiments, and online content analysis, representing almost all the 'in-person' forms of research in their online versions. For instance, Comai (2017, p. 14) proposes 'a wider use of quantitative methods based on the analysis of word frequency in textual datasets extracted from the internet as a starting point for in-depth research with established qualitative methods'. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on these developments, shifting offline research to online.

Some scholars, such as Sterzing et al. (2018, p. 740), argue that internet-connected devices can provide scholars with excellent opportunities to overcome previous research limitations by protecting the anonymity and well-being of participants through such methods as anonymous online surveys. Selm and Jankowski (2006, p. 438) point out that online surveys are useful when 'the population under study is distributed across a large geographic region', which is, undoubtedly, true for very large areas of Russia (ranked by area as the largest place in the world) and Kazakhstan (the ninth largest place in the world). In addition, Selm and Jankowski (2006, p. 437) claim that using online surveys among young people might cause higher response rates in comparison with paper-based surveys.

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However, if one studies only internet and/or social media users, then in order to make more generalisable conclusions one needs to know the share of these users among the total population. Otherwise, the results could be inconsistent with overall population indicators. Considering this caution and the suggestion that the internet of things is most actively used among young people, a question arises as to whether it is possible to conduct representative research among internet and social media users in Russia and Kazakhstan, and particularly whether young people use the internet and social media in similar ways to their peers in Western countries on a daily basis. For example, Kilybayeva et al. (2017, p. 53) state that the younger generation is 'possibly encouraged by a wider access to information and social media through the internet' that might affect their political participation in Kazakhstan. However, at present there is no reliable information on this in these societies. One possible solution could be to obtain such information through omnibus surveys, which were used in this study to satisfy the research objective.

The role and relevance of the internet and social media in the political activism of young people have been well documented by scholars (e.g. Kim et al., 2017, p. 899; Sairambay, 2019, p. 50; Sairambay 2021). According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted between 31 August and 7 September 2020, more than eight-in-ten (86%) Americans get news from digital devices, and 42% of young people aged 18–29 use social media for news, apart from news websites, apps, podcasts, and internet searches (Shearer, 2021). 'In contemporary high-choice media environments, […] social media news consumers are more likely to participate in politics both offline and online' (Strömbäck et al., 2018, p. 413). Therefore, another research objective was to examine whether and how often young people use social media for information about (inter)national news and politics in Russia and Kazakhstan.

In the following two sections I describe the methodologies of the omnibus surveys conducted by the Levada Center (Moscow) and the Central Asia Barometer (Bishkek). They include basic information about omnibus surveys, sampling methods, weighting, fieldwork quality control, and other related information. Levada Center was chosen because it is 'a Russian non-governmental research organization … [that] regularly conducts sociological research' (Levada Center, 2020). It is 'one of the largest Russian centers in the field' that conducts monthly face-to-face omnibus surveys, which are called *Kur'er* (Courier) and carried out on a representative sample of the urban and rural population of Russia (Levada Center, 2020). The Central Asian Barometer was chosen because there was no sociological research centre that conducted omnibus surveys in Kazakhstan in autumn 2020, and it is 'a regional, independent, non-profit institution for applied social research and analytics on topics of public interest' based in Kyrgyzstan (Central Asian Barometer, 2020). It conducts surveys, including omnibus surveys, among voting-age (18+) respondents in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Levada Center omnibus survey methodology

This study's omnibus survey in Russia was conducted by Levada Center between 22 October and 28 October 2020, based on a nationwide, multi-stage, stratified, and probability sample (n=1601) that represents the voting-age (+18) population of Russia. The survey involved 37 regional partner organizations of the Levada Center and 158 interviewers. On average, each interviewer conducted 10 interviews (from 5 to 15 interviews). The average duration of one interview was 29 minutes. For each survey point (settlement), in accordance with the instructions of the Levada Center, the starting points of the route were set with a strictly fixed step. The survey was conducted on weekdays in the evening and weekends throughout the day; thus, an equal probability of the employed and unemployed population being included in the sample was ensured.

Sampling

The planned sample size was 1,602 respondents. The omnibus survey in Russia covered the country's urban and rural population aged 18 and over. Hard-to-reach and sparsely populated areas of the Far North (Nenets and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrugs, Kamchatka, Chukotka,

Sakhalin Oblast) were excluded from the sample. In total, five constituent entities of the Russian Federation were excluded from consideration, which represent about 2% of the adult population of Russia. In addition, the sample did not include residents of small settlements with a population of less than 50 people (about 1% of total adult population), people who were doing their military service by conscription (about 1% of total adult population), and under imprisonment before trial or convicted (0.8% of total adult population), as well as homeless people (1–1.5% of total adult population).

Sampling methods

During the first stage of sampling, municipalities were selected as primary sampling units (PSUs) – urban settlements (cities and urban-type settlements) and rural administrative regions (which may include several rural settlements such as villages). The data of *Rosstat*[1] were used for the calculations. First, preliminary stratification was carried out. All PSUs were distributed across 8 federal districts (North-Western, Central, Volga, Southern, North Caucasian, Ural, Siberian, and Far Eastern). In each federal district, the PSUs were grouped into strata in accordance with the size of the population living in them:

1. cities with a population of more than one million people;
2. cities with a population of 500 thousand to one million people;
3. cities with a population of 100 thousand to 500 thousand people;
4. urban settlements with a population of up to 100 thousand people;
5. rural administrative regions.

Taking into account the peculiarities of the settlement of the population (not all regions may contain, for example, cities with a population of 500 thousand or more people), 38 strata were formed. For each stratum, the number of permanently residing adults and the share of this stratum in the adult population of Russia were determined. The total sample size (1,602 respondents) was distributed among all strata in proportion to the size of the adult population in each stratum. Moscow and St. Petersburg were included in the sample as self-representative objects. The sample sizes in these cities were determined in proportion to their weight in the adult population of the Russian Federation.

In each of the remaining strata, from 1 to 10 cities/rural regions were randomly selected with a probability proportional to the size of the settlement, depending on the estimated number of respondents per stratum and based on the limitation on the average number of respondents in one urban or rural settlement (10–12 respondents). The sample included 97 urban settlements and 40 rural areas:

- 15 cities with a population of over 1 million people;
- 15 cities with a population of 500 thousand to 1 million people;
- 31 cities with a population of 100 to 500 thousand people;
- 36 urban settlements with a population of up to 100 thousand people;
- 40 rural administrative regions.

The second stage of sampling was the selection of polling stations in urban areas and rural areas such as villages. The number of selected survey areas was determined based on the following condition: an average of 8–12 respondents should be interviewed in each survey area. Therefore, 14 polling stations were selected for the survey in Moscow, six polling stations in St. Petersburg, two–three polling stations in each city with a population of more than 750 thousand people, one polling station in other urban settlements, and one village in rural areas. For organizational reasons, the study used four additional survey points (40 respondents), and later, when processing the data, deviations from the planned sample structure were corrected using a weighting procedure. A total of 166 polling stations were selected and included in the sample, including 124 urban and 42 rural polling stations.

1 The Federal State Statistics Service

At the next stage of sampling, interviewers selected households along a given route using a systematic method with a fixed step. The route was developed by regional managers in accordance with the instructions of the Levada Center in such a way that it fully covered the territory of the selected polling station (in urban and rural settlements). The selection step was strictly fixed and was equal to seven households in urban and six in rural areas.

At the last stage of sampling, respondents were selected for a household survey, where one household member aged 18 and older was selected in accordance with the quota task (gender-age and gender-education). If the selected household member was unattainable, the interviewer proceeded to the next household as instructed.

Polling toolkit

The survey was conducted in a personal interview mode at the respondent's place of residence (face-to-face). Before the start of the field work, the interviewers were instructed in filling out the questionnaire, during which the logic of the questionnaire and the content of the questions were analysed. The instructions for the interviewers contained a description of the algorithm for selecting households on the route, recording the results of the contact with respondents, a description of the main blocks of the questionnaire and instructions for filling it out, and rules for conducting the interviews.

Unattainability

To achieve the sample, the total number of visited addresses was 6,370. Of these, failed contacts such as when a house/apartment was uninhabited, it was impossible to access the residence, or no one was at home, were recorded at 2,313 addresses. The level of refusal to participate in the survey among respondents of households contacted was 37% (22% at the household level and 15% at the level of the selected respondent); 13% of households were not included in the sample due to non-compliance with quotas of any of the members living in it. Other reasons preventing participation in the survey accounted for 8%. The share of successful interviews in the total number of visited addresses included in the sample was 25% (Table 1).

Table 1: Reasons for unattainability

Reasons	Number of addresses	% of all addresses	% of addresses where contact was made (n=4057)
non-residential house/apartment	107	2	
impossible to enter the house/apartment	163	3	
nobody was at home	2,043	32	
refusal to open the door / let the interviewer in	908	14	23
out of quotas	535	8	13
the selected household member was not at home (on a long trip)	249	4	6
the selected household member was unable to answer (drunk, did not speak Russian, inadequate)	56	1	1
the selected household member refused to answer the questions	627	10	16
interrupted interviews	58	1	1
successful interviews	1,624	25	40
Total	**6,370**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: own design based on omnibus survey conducted by Levada Center

Fieldwork control

The fieldwork control was carried out using the following methods:

- selective control of interviews conducted by listening to audio recordings (25% of questionnaires);
- compliance with survey points by GPS locations;
- logical control of the data file using special computer programs (data consistency, control of extreme values, the degree of coincidence of answers to questions in the questionnaires).

If falsified interviews were found with any interviewer, then all interviews conducted by this interviewer were checked for falsification. All interviews performed by this interviewer, including falsified ones, were excluded from the data file. As a result of the control, 23 questionnaires were rejected.

Sample implementation

Based on the control results, 1,601 interviews were included in the final array. The analysis of deviations of the sample from the general population by the size of the settlement and the federal district showed that the deviations did not exceed 0.8%.

Weighting

To bring the characteristics of the surveyed population into line with the characteristics of the general population, the survey data were weighted by gender, age, and education, with control over the distribution of the sample on the basis of federal districts and type of settlement. The data were weighted independently in each stratum of each federal district.

The total expected number of respondents N for each stratum was calculated using the following formula: **N = N0 * P**, where N0 is the total sample size and P is the share of the stratum among the total population. When weighting, the following socio-demographic characteristics were assessed: gender (2 characteristics), age (4 characteristics), and educational level (2 characteristics) (Table 2). The weighting programme was aimed at minimizing the sum of squares of deviations of official statistics and weighted data for each controlled attribute through a series of successive iterations.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by specified quotas (% x 100)

Unweighted data	4534	5465	831	3067	2561	3541	2860	7139
Weighted data	4512	5487	839	2975	2513	3672	2930	7069
Statistics (adjustment plan)	4512	5487	840	2974	2512	3672	2930	7069
	male	**female**	**age<25**	**age<40**	**age<55**	**age>54**	**higher education**	**not higher education**

Source: own design based on omnibus survey conducted by Levada Center

The weights of the respondents are distributed as follows: Min = 0.326 and Max = 2.474.

Table 3: Distribution of the number of questionnaires by ranges of values of weight coefficients

Value	0	0-0.1	0.1-0.2	0.2-0.5	0.5-1	1-2	2-5	5-10	>10
Number of original questionnaires	0	0	0	24	837	739	1	0	0

Source: own design based on omnibus survey conducted by Levada Center

The statistical equivalent index – inverse to the coefficient of variation of the weight coefficients increased by 1 square – is equal to 0.96.

Central Asia Barometer omnibus survey methodology

During the 2020 omnibus survey in Kazakhstan, Central Asia Barometer used simple random sampling of mobile phone numbers to obtain a national representative sample. All telephone surveys were completed by 26 interviewers via desktop CATI applications from either in-office or in-home stations between 8 October 2020 and 23 November 2020.

The omnibus survey included questions about the respondents' media usage, the political and economic situation in Kazakhstan, news consumption, public health, and attitudes towards the government in addition to questions capturing demographic information such as age, gender, marital and employment statuses, and education level. The average telephone survey length was 24 minutes, ranging from 12 minutes to 81 minutes. Employing simple random sampling with p=0.5 at the 95% CI level and the resulting sample sizes of 2,000 in Kazakhstan, the margin of error was calculated to be 2.19%. Incorporating the mean design effects into these estimates yields the margin of error at 2.63%.

Sampling

The target population was the mobile phone-owning population of Kazakhstan, and the sample size was 2,000. The sample was designed to be representative both geographically, including both urban and rural areas of all 17 territorial units, and on the basis of large and small wireless carriers (Table 4). The mobile sample was generated using simple random sampling of area codes outlined in the 2019 ITU national numbering plan.[2] All possible area codes and subscriber codes, remaining digits following the area code, were generated in the Reactive User Interface Database (DRUID). This is an R database interface developed for generating, managing and sampling RDD telephone databases. DRUID then houses the complete sampling frame. The summary of the mobile frame in Kazakhstan is shown in Table 4. Complete random telephone numbers were sampled from this database. For this survey wave, numbers were sampled without replacement.

Table 4: Summary of mobile frame in Kazakhstan

Provider	**Area code**	**Total Numbers**
Activ/Kcell	701, 702, 775, 778	40,000,000
Altel	700, 708	20,000,000
Beeline	705, 771, 776, 777	40,000,000
Tele2	707	10,000,000
Tele3	747	10,000,000
Total		**120,000,000**

Source: own design based on omnibus survey conducted by Central Asia Barometer

Mobile devices were assumed to be personal, and therefore the person who answered was the selected respondent if he or she fulfilled the initial screening criteria (aged 18+, residing in survey

2 https://www.itu.int/oth/T020200006F/en

country). If a minor answered the phone, the interviewer would determine the owner of the phone before determining eligibility for participation.

Weighting

The data were weighted to adjust for minor statistical imbalances. A full-weighting scheme was developed for this dataset with the following adjustments via weighting: (1) base weight was calculated as the inverse of the probability of a respondent being selected; (2) a multiplicity adjustment for the number of mobile numbers the respondents owned was also incorporated; (3) a post-stratification weighting adjustment was performed using national population estimates as targets for gender, age, region (urban/rural), and ethnicity; (4) weights were trimmed that were more than or less than 3 standard deviations from the mean iteratively until all weights fell within a magnitude of 2 and 5 or until 10 iterations were reached; and (5) weights were also delivered in a rescaled format.

Contact procedures

Three replicate workbooks, each containing between 5,000 and 10,000 phone numbers, were used in Kazakhstan during the fieldwork. Once a phone number was successfully contacted, the person who answered the phone was the designated respondent. If a child (under 18) answered the phone, the interviewer would ask if the child owned the phone. If the minor did not own the mobile phone, the interviewer would ask to be passed to the owner of the phone.

Respondent substitution was not permissible in this survey. If the selected respondent was unable to participate during the contact attempt in which one was selected as the designated respondent, the interviewer proceeded with recontact procedures. After three unsuccessful attempts, the number was recorded as non-contact, and a new number was substituted into the sample. Each interviewer kept records of calls and call outcomes. These are detailed in the 'Sample Disposition' below.

Sample disposition

A sample disposition is another diagnostic tool to understand the validity of the sample. Final disposition codes, call outcome rates, and response rates contribute to an understanding of the presence of potential survey error. According to the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR, 2011, p. 7), 'by knowing the disposition of every element drawn in a survey sample, researchers can assess whether their sample might contain a nonresponse error and the potential reasons for that error'. A detailed and comprehensive set of survey dispositions were recoded into the six major types of AAPOR survey case dispositions (Table 5).

Table 5: Final disposition codes

Vendor Code	Category Description	Frequency
Survey Management Section		
	Total numbers dialled	28,610
	Active sample remaining (numbers generated but not dialled)	19,346
	Pulsed Out	332,044
Interview (AAPOR Category 1)		
1	Completed interviews	2,000
Eligible, Non-Interview (AAPOR Category 2.1)		
2	During interview, selected respondent refused (general)	62
30	Refusal	11,925

Eligible, Non-Contact (AAPOR Category 2.2)		
20	Selected respondent not available	671
Eligible, Other (AAPOR Category 2.3)		
40	Selected respondent unable to complete interview in languages available	-
41	Other – Eligible	1,113
Unknown Eligibility, Non-Interview (AAPOR Category 3)		
10	Busy signal	688
11	No answer	4,820
12	No adult pick-up (child answers)	-
13	Other – Unknown eligibility	2,822
-	Number generated by not dialled	19,346
Not Eligible (AAPOR Category 4)		
50	Out of target population / No adults (18+)	574
52	Non-residence (business, school, church, etc.) / No one lives there	16
53	Non-working / Disconnected number	3,919
-	Number pulsed (not-working)	332,044

Source: own design based on omnibus survey conducted by Central Asia Barometer

In order to achieve the final sample size of n=2,000 in Kazakhstan, a total of 380,000 mobile phone numbers were sampled with the field team dialling a total of 28,610 mobile phone numbers. The formulas for calculating response rates, cooperation rates, and contact rates based on the final outcome rates were used for the evaluation of this survey according to the AAPOR standards for minimal disclosure requirements (Table 6).

Table 6: Formulas and rates

AAPOR Rate Formulas	**Rates in %**
Eligibility ratio (e)	0.04%
Response Rate 3 (RR): I/((I+P) + (R+NC+O) + (UH+UO))	11.76%
Cooperation Rate 1 (COOP): I/(I+P)+R+O)	13.25%
Refusal Rate 2 (REF): R/((I+P)+(R+NC+O) + e*(UH + UO))	70.47%
Contact Rate 2 (CON): (I+P)+R+O / (I+P)+R+O+NC + e*(UH+UO)	88.77%

Source: own design based on omnibus survey conducted by Central Asia Barometer

Field conditions

Covid-19 and related restrictions did not present any significant difficulties in data collection. No newsworthy events that would have affected data collection or respondent answers occurred during the fieldwork. Tensions, however, continued to rise in Kazakhstan as the Covid-19 situation had stabilized in certain regions, while restrictions had increased in others (Zhunusova, 2020).

Quality control

Additional data processing checks and hard checks were taken to ensure the quality of the report. The omnibus survey conducted by the Central Asia Barometer had a high level of quality control and oversight that contributes to the overall validity of the data collected. In this survey, while the field team was able to complete call-backs, the majority of the interviews were completed on the first visit. In Kazakhstan, 449 interviews were completed via call-back. A total of 2,000 interviews were completed by first attempt reaching 77.5%, by second attempt reaching 17.2%, and by third

attempt reaching the remaining 5.3% of total interviews. Of the final completed interviews in Kazakhstan, 100% were subject to back check. All cases (100%) had the audio file of the interview reviewed. Finally, once the data were received, additional checking and cleaning of the data, including checks for logic and patterning were made. These tests search for possible data entry errors and data anomalies including duplicate cases, patterning or matching responses, substantive response bias, systematic non-response and fieldwork productivity among interviewers.

Social background of respondents

Regarding young respondents, the target group was young people between 18 and 29 years old. This age range was chosen because, while youth age boundaries are 14–30 in Russia and 14–29 in Kazakhstan, people become politically active from the age of 18. Moreover, surveying people under 18 poses an extra layer of difficulty from ethical and procedural standpoints, such as by requiring parental consents for participation. Therefore, respondents aged between 14 and 17 were excluded in this study. To be consistent in a comparative analysis, the author also excluded 30-year-old citizens in the Russian sample. It should be noted that on 11 November 2020, in parallel with the fieldwork of this study, the State Duma approved a project to raise the youth age limit to 35 years in Russia (Zamakhina, 2020). This age range, 18–29, also covered all those young people who were born after the collapse of the Soviet Union by the time of the fieldtrip.

Information on the basic characteristics of respondents can provide an approximate indication of the representativeness of the omnibus surveys. Table 7 presents the per cent distribution of the social background of the respondents, including gender, marital status, educational level, and occupation.

Table 7: Social background of the respondents

Countries	**Russia**		**Kazakhstan**	
n	1601	322	2000	536
Indicators	% of total respondents	% of young people (18–29)	% of total respondents	% of young people (18–29)
Gender				
Female	54.9	51.4	51.6	49.9
Male	45.1	48.6	48.4	50.1
No answer/ refused	0	0	0	0
Marital status				
Married	61.7	44.4	65.5	46
Widowed or divorced	20.4	2.9	14.5	3.5
Single	17.7	52.7	19.5	50
No answer/ refused	0	0	0.5	0.5
Education				
Incomplete secondary	3.4	4.1	1.9	1.8
Full secondary	16.3	19.8	25.2	20.6
Vocational education	51	47.5	32.1	30
Incomplete higher	3	7	7.2	17.1
Complete higher	26.3	21.6	33.3	30.2
No education	0	0	0.1	0.2
No answer/ refused	0	0	0.2	0.1
Occupation				
Student	4	19.7	4	14.7
Unemployed and actively seeking employment	5.1	8.4	6.1	9.3

Unemployed and not actively seeking employment	1.7	2	1.9	2.7
Retired (including disability)	24.8	0.6	13.8	0.3
Housekeeping/ maternity/ childcare leave	5.5	10.3	14.4	14.5
Employed	58.9	59	59.3	58.4
No answer/ refused	0	0	0.4	0.1
Areas of residence				
Urban (cities and towns)	75.1	74.6	57.6	59.3
Rural (villages)	24.9	25.4	42.2	40.3
No answer/ refused	0	0	0.2	0.4

The gender distribution of omnibus surveys resembles the official demographic indicators: while 46% of men and 54% women constitute the Russian overall population (Rosstat, 2020), Kazakhstan has 51.51% women and 48.49% men in its total population (Kazstat, 2020). Every other respondent aged 18–29 was single during the omnibus surveys, while married people prevailed among the voting-age respondents.

Education levels vary significantly in both countries. There were more respondents with higher education in Kazakhstan, while the share of research participants with vocational education was greater in the Russian sample. We can also see that young people aged 18–29 are more educated than the overall voting-age population of Kazakhstan, which is the opposite in the Russian sample. Interestingly, occupational status in both countries shows very similar indicators among students, unemployed and employed respondents. However, there were 11% more retired and disabled respondents in Russia, whereas there were almost three times more respondents on housekeeping, maternity and childcare leave in the Kazakhstani sample.

With regards to the residential areas of respondents, almost three out of every four young Russian voting-age respondents were urban residents, while 57.6% of voting-age and 59.3% of young Kazakhstani participants were city and town residents.

Omnibus survey findings

One of the four main questions in the surveys focused on the internet usage of all omnibus survey respondents. The purpose of this question was to understand the frequency of internet usage among all voting-age populations in both countries. Its results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: How often do you use the Internet?

Countries	**Russia**				**Kazakhstan**			
n	1601	322	879	722	2000	536	1032	968
Frequencies	**% of**							
	total respondents	young people (18-29)	female respondents	male respondents	total respondents	young people (18-29)	female respondents	male respondents
Daily	66.3	95.6	66.5	66.2	76.4	85.1	76.7	75.8
Several times a week	7.9	2.5	7.4	8.5	8.5	8	7.2	10

Several times a month	3.4	0.4	3.7	3.1	3.5	2.3	3.3	3.8
Rarely	2.1	0.9	2	2.2	5.4	3.9	5.8	4.9
Never	20.3	0.6	20.4	20.1	5.7	0.3	6.5	4.8
Don't know/ refused	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.7

Source: own design based on omnibus surveys

As can be seen from the table above, young people aged 18–29 reported significantly more internet usage than the overall voting-age populations. The answers of the respondents were similar within gender categories in both countries. What stands out in the table is the big difference in those who never use the internet between Russian (20.3%) and Kazakhstani (5.7%) samples. This difference is similar to the internet access of both countries: while in April 2020 more than 99% of the total Kazakhstani population was projected to be covered with internet access by the end of 2020 (Pokidaev, 2020), 81% of the total Russian population was recorded to have access in 2020 (Sergeyeva, 2020). However, the difference is not significant among young people. The vast majority of young people in Russia (95.6%) and Kazakhstan (85.1%) use the internet every day. The next question asked the survey participants about the frequency of their social media use (Table 9). It was asked only of those respondents who use the internet.

Table 9: How often do you use social media such as VK, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram? [Question was asked only to those who use the internet]

Countries	**n**	**%**	**Frequencies**					
			Daily	Once-twice a week	About once a month or more	Less than once a month	Never	Don't know/ refused
Russia	1277	total respondents	72.8	13.8	1.8	1.8	9.8	0
	320	young people (18–29)	92.4	6.2	0.3	0.7	0.4	0
% of respondents by education levels	469	higher	75	13.3	3	1.4	7.4	0
	816	vocational	72.2	13.6	1.4	2	10.9	0
	316	incomplete and full secondary	70.3	15.6	0.9	1.8	11.4	0
	0	no education	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0	no answer/ refused	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kazakhstan	1875	total respondents	74	15.1	2.6	4.3	3.2	0.8
	533	young people (18–29)	81.6	12.4	2.7	2.7	0.5	0.1
% of respondents by education levels	776	higher	82	10.7	1.7	3.6	1.4	0.6
	594	vocational	70.7	17.1	3.5	4	4	0.7
	498	incomplete and full secondary	66	19.2	3.2	5.7	4.9	1
	1	no education	100	0	0	0	0	0
	6	no answer/ refused	16.7	50	0	0	0	33.3

Source: own design based on omnibus surveys

Looking at Table 9, it is apparent that there are three times as Russians who never use social media (i.e. VK, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram) than those in Kazakhstan. The table also suggests that people with higher education in both countries use social media more than people with any other level of education. In a similar vein to the internet, the overwhelming majority of young people in both countries use the abovementioned social media on a daily basis.

These findings suggest that one can exclusively study young people who use the internet and social media in Russia and Kazakhstan as representative samples because only 0.3 and 0.6 per cent of young people in these countries respectively are never online. Yet, internet and social media users do not represent the whole voting-age populations in these two countries. The reasons for this outcome can vary, ranging from generational issues and internet penetration to digital skills and psychological preferences.

The third and fourth questions were asked only to those respondents who use social media. Through the third question, the author wanted to determine whether Russians and Kazakhstanis use social media for information about national and international news (Table 10). This question also included the option, 'I do not read or watch news at all', in order to catch those who never consume news but might use social media; those who consume news through other media had to choose the 'no' option in this question.

Table 10: Do you use the above-mentioned-social media (VK, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram) for information about national and international news? [Question was asked only to those who use social media]

Countries	n	%	Answer Options			
			Yes	No	I do not read or watch news at all	Don't know/ refused
Russia	1151	total respondents	67.7	25.3	6.5	0.5
	318	young people (18–29)	76.3	15.6	7.1	1
% of respondents by occupation	45	student	78.1	9.6	11.7	0.7
	78	unemployed	65.4	26	7.4	1.2
	287	retired (including disability)	65.1	28.5	5.6	0.8
	62	housekeeping/ maternity/ childcare leave	72.9	18.4	7.4	1.4
	679	employed	67	26.7	6.2	0.1
Kazakhstan	1800	total respondents	58.5	37.5	3.2	0.8
	530	young people (18–29)	71.1	25.8	2.7	0.4
% of respondents by occupation	75	student	72	28	0	0
	143	unemployed	55.8	44.2	0	0
	252	retired (including disability)	45	53.2	0	1.8
	259	housekeeping/ maternity/ childcare leave	60.7	37.7	0	1.6
	1071	employed	64	35.7	0.1	0.2

Source: own design based on omnibus surveys

It can be seen from the data in Table 10 that Russian social media users utilise social media for information about national and international news more than Kazakhstanis. However, those who do not read or watch news at all are more distributed among voting-age and young Russians than in their Kazakhstani counterparts. According to Table 10, just over three out of four young respondents in Russia and 71.1% of young participants in Kazakhstan use social media for information about national and international news. Furthermore, while the usage of social media for information about national and international news was most popular among students in both Russia (78.1%) and Kazakhstan (72%), such usage was least popular among retired, disabled, and unemployed people. These indicators might also suggest that young people are more inclined to consume news online than via old media such as TV, radio, or newspapers. The last question aimed to identify the frequency of social media use for information about politics (e.g. reading political news, 'commenting', 'liking', and 'sharing' political posts) (Table 11).

Table 11: How often do you use social media (VK, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram) for information about politics (e.g. reading political news, 'commenting', 'liking', and 'sharing' political posts)? [Question was asked only to those who use social media]

Countries	n	%	Frequencies					
			Daily	Once-twice a week	About once a month or more	Less than once a month	Never	Don't know/ refused
Russia	1151	total respondents	37.8	20.1	5.4	5.5	30.5	0.7
	318	young people (18–29)	35.1	23	8.4	8.3	23.4	1.8
% of respondents by areas of residence	864	urban (cities and towns)	39	20	5.2	4.9	30.1	0.8
	287	rural (villages)	34	20.4	6.1	7.3	31.8	0.4
	0	don't know/ refused	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kazakhstan	1800	total respondents	36.9	23.8	6.7	15.3	16	1.3
	530	young people (18–29)	31.9	23.5	7.4	21.5	15.4	0.3
% of respondents by areas of residence	1109	urban (cities and towns)	35.8	25.3	6.5	16.3	15.2	0.9
	688	rural (villages)	38.7	21	7.1	13.8	17.5	1.9
	3	don't know/ refused	0	100	0	0	0	0

Source: own design based on omnibus surveys

Closer inspection of the table shows that the frequency of social media use for information about politics is greatly fragmented within the voting-age populations and young people as well as between the two countries. Yet, the frequency of such usage by urban and rural residents is quite similar in both countries. This similarity might indicate that new media provide citizens with borderless (e.g. cities versus villages) usage of social media for information about politics.

The most active users were participants who daily (almost every third Russian and Kazakhstani) and once or twice a week (every fifth respondent) use social media for information about politics. Over 30% of the Russian voting-age population never use social media for actions such as reading political news, 'commenting', 'liking', and 'sharing' political posts, which is almost two times higher than the Kazakhstani indicator. But this difference can be explained by the discrepancy in those who use social media for information about politics less than once a month – this indicator is almost three times higher in Kazakhstan than in Russia.

Based on the results of a sociological survey conducted in 2014 across Kazakhstan with 1,000 people aged 14 to 29 years, Umbetaliyeva et al. (2016, p. 168) found that 73.8% of urban and 43.7% of rural youth use the internet as the main source of information about political events. Similarly, based on interviews held in 2019 with 1,500 respondents aged 14 to 29 in Russia, Gudkov et al. (2020, p. 48) found that 84% of young Russians use the internet as the main source of news about public events or political activity. My findings corroborate these research findings: 74.8% of young Russians and 84.3% of young Kazakhstanis use social media, such as VK, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and Telegram, for information about politics, including for reading political news.

Conclusions

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that almost all (over 99%) of young Russians and Kazakhstani people use the internet and social media, and the vast majority of them are online on a daily basis. Given these findings, which are nearly equivalent to representative samples, it is possible for scholars to focus exclusively on young

people aged 18–29 who use the internet and/or social media to study Russia and Kazakhstan and make generalisable conclusions. The study is particularly important for scholars who study young people and their internet and social media use for information about (inter)national news and politics in Russia and Kazakhstan. It shows that 76.3% of young Russians and 71.1% of young Kazakhstanis use social media for information about national and international news, but the frequency of their social media use for information about politics is greatly fragmented.

In this paper, I have also identified the same abovementioned internet and social media usages for voting-age populations of both countries. These findings suggest that it is possible to conduct representative studies among the voting-age population of Kazakhstan, where over 93% of population uses the internet and social media; but the Russian voting-age population has not yet reached the same levels of internet and social media use. My findings also suggest that social media are mostly used by people with higher education, and mostly utilised for (inter)national news by students, regardless of gender and place of residence.

An arguable limitation is the different modes of surveying – face-to-face in Russia and phone-calls in Kazakhstan – which were caused by a) the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and uncertainties in Kazakhstan, and b) the financial ineffectiveness of conducting face-to-face research in Kazakhstan. Despite this difference, I contend that the Kazakhstani sample is as representative as the Russian sample, thanks to the expertise of Central Asia Barometer in conducting nation-wide representative phone surveys, which followed the survey dispositions of AAPOR. Further research should focus on determining sampling techniques among internet and social media users and considering ways to sample specific age groups.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. David Lane (Emeritus Fellow, Emmanuel College, Cambridge University) for his time and comments that helped to shape this paper and the four main questions of the omnibus surveys. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers of 'Studies of Transition States and Societies' journal for their time, insightful comments and challenging questions that helped to improve the research note. My special thanks go to Mr. Nathaniel Skylar Dolton-Thornton (Universities of Cambridge and Oxford) for proofreading the paper.

Funding

This work was supported by the 'Bolashak' programme under Grant № 15-1/25967.