

# **ANALYSIS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN EXECUTIVE AUTHORITIES AND POPULATION BY MEANS OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION: CASE OF RUSSIA**

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## **Abstract**

Today, Russia is a state where a characteristic feature of society informatization in creating an «information society» is the length of the process because the implementation of the spread of IT technologies slows down due to the geographical factor of the country. Nevertheless, IT technologies can solve the problem of communication between remote territories through the creation of Internet communications. This article focuses on the development of Internet communication between the executive authorities of a Russian region and the population. It initially demonstrates the results of the secondary analysis of statistical data on the number of hits of the population to the relevant ministries of the region, submitted through the active function on the websites of the executive bodies. The method of questionnaire survey of the region population using quota sampling depending on the gender and age of respondents is used. This method made it possible determine the degree of awareness of the region's residents about the availability and the level of demand of Internet communication with authorities.

This study can be useful to researchers of communication between society and the power of any country because Internet communication is a global trend at all levels of development of modern society.

**Key words:** Internet communication, authorities and population, interaction, social policy, public administration

**JEL Code:** R28, R50

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## **Introduction**

The Russian Federation is the state where the process of society informatization is of a long-term development. Geographical factor affects spread of IT-technologies. The scale of the territory throughout the entire historical development of the country had a significant impact on the progressive development of society. However, it is information and telecommunication

technologies that can solve the problem of communication between remote territories. In the future, this will increase the efficiency of government and the degree of participation of citizens of all regions in the life of society and the state.

The issues of interaction between authorities and population through Internet communication are given attention in different countries. Raskhodchikov A.N. tests the technique of determination of potential of subjectivity of the virtual associations as the basis for the organization of address interaction with the population on the Internet in Russia (Raskhodchikov, 2017). Hofheinz A. views the Internet in the countries of the Arab world as a means of liberalizing relations between the state, society and the individual, which have been common for several generations (Hofheinz, 2005). Thijssen P. and Van Dooren W. analyze how the Internet influences the involvement of young people in the political processes of local government in Belgium (Thijssen, 2016).

It is possible to find similar studies about other countries and regions: Europe (Andreasson, 2014; Billon 2017; Venkat Reddy, 2017), Mongolia (Ariunna L., 2006), China (Wright J., 2014), Iran (Hendelman-Baavur, 2013), Russia (Raskhodchikov, 2017; Ivanova, 2019), Thailand (Meesuwan, 2016) etc.

## **1 Statistics of public appeals to regional authorities in Russia**

This article focuses on the development of Internet communication between the executive authorities of a Russian region and the population. The analysis was conducted on the example of the Sverdlovsk region.

For a comprehensive study of the demand for development of bilateral communication between government and society, the authors measured the frequency of requests from residents of the region to relevant regional ministries. (Tab.1).

Table 1 demonstrates that during 2017 a total of 28,525 appeals were received by mail, special delivery, personal reception, of which 4280 were sent using Internet communication: through the „Citizens’ Appeals“ on the website of the relevant ministry or using e-mail.

It is worth noting that despite the legislative requirements for openness of the activities of regional authorities, some ministries do not publish information on the number of appeals in the electronic format.

## **2 Demand for Internet interaction with the authorities: public opinion**

Considering the limitations in the analysis of official statistical information, in the framework of the research being conducted, the immediate importance is the designation of the demand for Internet communication with the authorities among the population of the region. For this purpose, a questionnaire survey was conducted of the population of the region using a quota sample with a gradation according to the main socio-demographic indicators (gender, age). Within this sociological survey 300 people were sampled. However, in order to improve the quality and representativeness of the data, the number of respondent questionnaires processed is reduced to 269.

**Tab. 1: Statistics of citizens' appeals to regional ministries (2017)**

Ministry name	Total number of registered appeals	Total number of registered appeals via Internet (email, website)
Ministry of State Property Management	1400	575
Ministry of Industry and Science	171	25
Ministry of Finance	150	64
Ministry of General and Vocational Education	2383	No data available
Ministry of Social Policy	4721	2388
Ministry of Agriculture and Food	624	180
Ministry of Economy and Territorial Development	209	19
Ministry of International and Foreign Economic Relations	65	33
Ministry of Health care	11908	No data available
Ministry of Culture	405	174
Ministry of Natural Resources and Ecology	1060	221
Ministry of Transport and Road Management	1061	445
Ministry of Construction and Infrastructure Development	2304	No data available
Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports	No data available	No data available
Ministry of Investment and Development	181	60
Ministry of Public Security	173	96
Ministry of Energy and Housing	1710	No data available

Source: official websites of ministries

Given the context of the analysis, it was important to determine the devices used to search for information and the frequency of application of these tools. In the future, this will help to identify the existing need for interaction of the population with the regional authorities through Internet services (Tab. 2).

The percentage distribution of answers in Table 2 is arranged in rows and shows that among users who often use the Internet to search for information indicated in the “Several times a day” and “Once a day” answers mobile phones and smartphones are the most popular device. This analysis allows us to conclude that in order to increase the efficiency of Internet interaction between the authorities and the public, it is required to implement the function of the mobile

version of websites to increase the degree of information retrieval on the basis of the already created web resources of the executive bodies. At the moment, this function is missing.

**Tab. 2: Ratio of distribution of answers to questions about the frequency of using the Internet to search for information and the most convenient device for accessing the Internet, %**

		How often do you use the Internet to search for information?						
		Several times a day	Once a day	Few times a week	Once a week	Several times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month
What device do you most often use to access the Internet?	Personal computer (laptop or stationary computer)	20,7%	42,9%	46,9%	50,0%	53,8%	66,7%	71,4%
	Mobile phone, smartphone	<b>64,0%</b>	<b>52,4%</b>	37,5%	50,0%	38,5%	33,3%	28,6%
	Tablet	4,0%	4,8%	12,5%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
	I use all of the above devices equally often	11,3%	0,0%	3,1%	0,0%	7,7%	0,0%	0,0%
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chi-square test is 0,005

The most distinctly problematic implementation of bilateral Internet communication is traced when respondents answer the question about the relevance of the development of this interaction, as well as about attempts to independently use the active feedback function "Citizens' Appeal" on the websites of the ministries (Tab. 3).

The distribution of the respondents' answers in Table 3 indicates the acute relevance of the development of Internet communication between the population and the executive authorities of the region. 78.1% of survey participants confirmed the importance of this communication. However, every second (53.5%) never used the opportunity of electronic appeal to the executive authorities of the region. In the Table the distribution of responses is arranged in rows. The data suggests that regardless of whether there is a recognition of the relevance of the Internet interaction between society and government, every second (49.5%)

never used the active feedback function “Citizens' Appeal” on the websites of ministries. This is also possible to designate as indicator recommended for improvement to increase interaction efficiency. First of all, the problem of popularizing this mechanism of contacting the executive bodies may be related to public awareness of the availability of such a possibility.

**Tab. 3: Ratio of the distribution of answers to questions about the relevance of the problem of Internet communication development between the executive authorities and the population and the frequency of using the „Citizens' Appeal“ function on the websites of regional ministries,%**

		Have you used at least once the function of the electronic appeal of citizens?			
		Yes, I used	No, did not use	Difficult to answer	
Is the problem of the development of Internet communication between the population and the regional authorities relevant for solving various issues?	Yes, the problem is relevant	43,3%	49,5%	7,1%	100%
	No, the problem is not relevant	25,4%	67,8%	6,8%	100%

Chi-square test is 0,036

Considering also the age categorization of the population, it is important to identify the most optimal way for citizens to interact with the authorities in the opinion of respondents (Tab. 4).

The ratio of variables in Table 4 and the distribution of answers are presented in columns. Based on the above information, a tendency is characteristic that the higher the respondent's age, the lower the support for electronic communication methods and the higher the preferences for the traditional interaction format. The current situation demonstrates the need to develop a differentiated approach to the popularization of Internet communication tools, using conceptually different approaches for the categories of youth, middle age, pre-retirement and retirement, which in the long run will also increase the loyalty of the population to the government and the development of a positive image of government in general.

A further step towards understanding the development aspects of the Internet interaction between regional authorities and the population was to find out among the participants of the questionnaire the need to develop official communities of the regional ministries in social media. This hypothetically allows to simplify the process of communication and raise public awareness about the activities of the regional authorities.

**Tab. 4: Ratio of the distribution of answers between the attitude of the respondents to the established age categories and the question about the opinion of the respondents about the most optimal format of interaction between the population and the executive authorities, %**

		Age category					
		18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	Over 65 years old
What statement reflects your opinion?	The traditional format of obtaining public services is the most convenient and reliable, since technical errors are excluded here.	0.0%	6.5%	14.0%	17.4%	15.2%	35.0%
	The traditional and electronic method of obtaining public services are equivalent in reliability. Everyone chooses what suits him best	52.0%	50.0%	46.0%	41.3%	39.1%	30.0%
	The electronic format of obtaining public services is more reliable, the human factor is excluded, can be used at a convenient time and in any place	44.0%	41.9%	36.0%	32.6%	26.1%	22.5%
	Difficult to answer	4.0%	1.6%	4.0%	8.7%	19.6%	12.5%
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chi-square test is 0,001

Based on the distribution of answers in Table 5, almost every second respondent (48%) considers it expedient to develop communities of regional authorities in social media. The data demonstrate the clearly expressed need for the development of this mechanism of Internet communication among the youth population of the region (18-34 years). Thus, taking into account the existing request for interaction, it is possible to implement a pilot project the purpose of which will be to increase the efficiency of interaction between ministries and young people in the region based on the creation of communities of relevant executive authorities in popular Russian social media.

However, the final aspect of the respondents' position regarding the development of Internet communication in the region is the designation of the initiator of the interaction.

**Tab. 5: Ratio of the distribution of answers between the attitude of the respondents to the established age categories and the question about the opinion of respondents about the need for the development of official communities of the executive authorities of the region in social media, %**

		Age category					
		18-24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45-54 years	55-64 years	Over 65 years old
Is it necessary today to develop official communities of regional authorities in social media?	Yes, it is required to develop, because it is the most convenient, fast and open way of interaction	60,0%	64,5%	60,0%	41,3%	26,1%	32,5%
	No, it is not required, because there is the possibility of interaction through citizens' electronic messages on official websites	32,0%	29,0%	22,0%	50,0%	39,1%	27,5%
	Difficult to answer	8,0%	6,5%	18,0%	8,7%	34,8%	40,0%
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chi-square test is 0,0

**Tab. 6: Designation of the initiator of the electronic interaction development in terms of the Sverdlovsk region population, %**

Representatives of the authorities	59,1 %
Citizens	11,9 %
Public organizations	10,0 %
Commercial organizations	1,1 %
Difficult to answer	17,8 %
	100 %

The distribution obtained in Table 6 demonstrates a clear idea of the population of the region that the authorities should act as initiators of the development of Internet communication. 59.1% of respondents adhere to this point of view. It is possible that the value of this indicator is associated with low civic activity in the territory of the Russian Federation and the paternalistic way of political culture, in which the state acts as the leader of all key processes in the development of society.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the issues, the authors identified the need of the population for the communication development with the executive authorities through various Internet channels: websites of relevant ministries, including mobile versions, official communities in popular social media. These tools increase the availability of this interaction and increase the degree of information and participation of citizens in the development of the region and the state.

At the present stage of development of society and the state in Russian Federation there is only one-way communication when the population is only informed by the authorities about any events and phenomena in public administration. Ignoring the potential of the Internet and popular social media in the long term leads to a lack of consideration of the opinions of citizens in the framework of socially important decisions by the executive authorities, and, consequently, to an increase in protest moods.

This study can be scaled to the study of Internet communication of the authorities and the population not only in other regions of Russia, but also in regions of other states, including the states of the European Union.

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