

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILDREN'S INTERNET SEGMENT: AGE CHARACTERISTICS IN VARIOUS ELECTRONIC CONTENTS

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Abstract:

The Internet is an indisputable factor in the development of society, children and teenagers in particular. It becomes our daily companion, some are so immersed in the World Wide Web that they lose their sense of reality. Young people, especially teenagers, are the most impressionable audience, so it is important to know and evaluate the content they are viewing. The article examines surveys from which it is possible to analyze the behaviour of children and adolescents in the Ukrainian-speaking segment of the Internet during the last 20 years. Unfortunately, few such studies were conducted, though they did not provide any answers to the questions about the correspondence between the needs and interests of schoolchildren and the reality of the functioning of electronic children's content. However, by comparing the existing data, it is possible to form an idea about the activity of children and adolescents in the information space, to identify trends.

The authors analyzed the research conducted in Ukraine from 2002 to 2022. It was established that computer use and access to the Internet grew rapidly, and in 2014 already 62-73% of children and adolescents played Internet games and accessed social networks daily. The 2018 survey showed that all teenagers use or have used the Internet before finishing school. The age when children begin to use the Internet has also decreased.

Since the Internet plays a significant role in the lives of children and adolescents, we have identified and recorded the use of all social functions of the content: informational, communicative, recreational, cultural and educational. We can say that young people actively use all the opportunities

provided by the worldwide network and prefer electronic media content.

Keywords: Internet, content, information space, children, teenagers

Introduction. The Internet is an integral part of the modern child's life. Its role in children's and adolescent culture is undeniable. For children, the Internet has become an important part of everyday life, along with public transport, television and household appliances, it is no longer something distant. It goes without saying, Internet capabilities are of particular importance.

Formulation of the problem. Nowadays, schoolchildren use the Internet not only for recreation and communication, but also for learning, cognitive purposes, and self-development. Due to the fact that the Internet offers a wide range of opportunities for self-development, education and training, self-expression, communication, creativity and entertainment and contains certain risks, it is important to have clear criteria for assessing the degree of danger of the content of certain sites for children. The question of the existing content's quality on the Internet and its compliance with the needs of teenagers is also relevant.

Presenting main material. Educators, psychologists, workers in the field of culture and leisure and parents often lag behind children and teenagers in mastering new information technologies, they do not keep up with the rapidly changing trends of the Internet reality. Specialists defend their positions regarding the use of Internet opportunities. In the process of selecting sites for children and teenagers, they are guided, most often, by their ideas about useful, safe, positive or dangerous, harmful web resources, about the need to limit access to the Internet. Personal experience of using modern Internet technologies and everyday life experiences form their ideas about which Internet sites children can visit, and which access should be prohibited or restricted.

However, information technologies penetrate all spheres of human life, such as school, home, leisure, etc. The change in the content of children's leisure activities towards an increase in Internet's role in it makes it necessary to develop a qualitative method of evaluating content for children not only from the position of an adult expert but also from the position of the child as the main consumer of the final product.

Few large-scale studies of the behaviour of children and adolescents in the Ukrainian-speaking segment of the Internet have been conducted in the last 10 years, local surveys were conducted in a patchwork manner and did not provide answers to whether the needs and interests of schoolchildren correspond to the reality of the functioning of electronic children's content. However, by comparing the available data, it is possible to get an idea of the current situation

and identify a tendency to increase the involvement of children and adolescents in the information space.

According to the research of the Internet Association of Ukraine, the daily audience of the Internet in Ukraine is growing every year, which indicates the spread and growth of its role in the lives of Ukrainian adults. If in 2004 only 12% went online, then in 2019 already 71% of respondents used the Internet once a month or more often (Fig. 1) [3].

Figure 1

Динаміка проникнення Інтернету:
щорічний замір

12

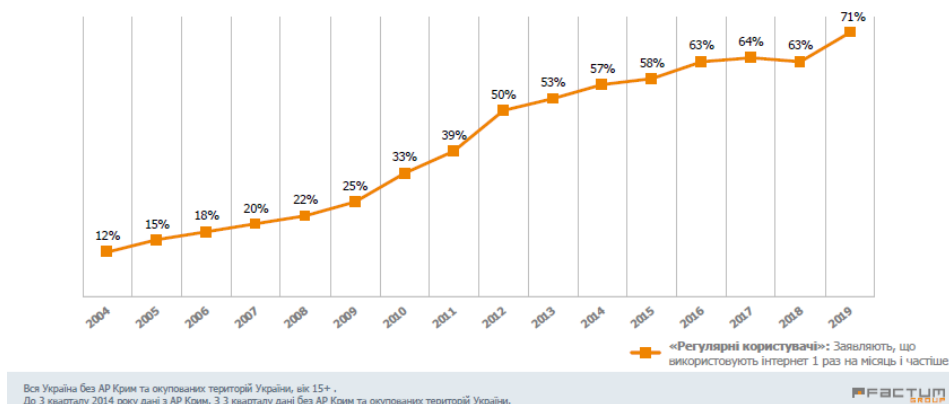


Fig. 1. Dynamics of Internet penetration: annual evaluation of the number of common users

In 2022, according to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, “approximately 82% of respondents use the Internet at least once a week, of which 78% daily or almost daily ... 4.5% use the Internet once or several times a week, ... never use 15.4% of surveyed Ukrainians” [5].

The adult audience of Internet users is growing consistently and smoothly. Unfortunately, studies of the child and adolescent audience on the World Wide Web were conducted irregularly. According to the State Institute of Family and Youth Policy [2], in recent decades, children and adolescents have been actively mastering the information space. If in 2007, among teenagers aged 14-17, 75% of respondents used a computer, and 41% of respondents used the Internet, then already in 2016, 91% and 95%, respectively. A survey of parents conducted by the Public Organization “Youth Institute” on behalf of the State Institute of Family

and Youth Policy [10] in 2018 showed that 93.3% of children use the Internet. They become regular users at the age of 7-9, and from the age of 10 all children are active participants in electronic content [10, p. 2].

The use of computers and the Internet by children and adolescents changed gradually. Thus, in 2002, according to the international project "Health and Behavioral Orientations of Student Youth" (HBSC) [14, p. 5], almost all teenagers spent their free time on the computer on weekdays and weekends equally – half an hour a day. In 2006, 65-90% of respondents, mostly boys, spent up to three hours in front of computer monitors [4, p. 62]. As of 2010, a number of teenagers spending up to three hours a day playing computer games or on game consoles [13, p. 89]. Meanwhile, there are some gender differences in the choice of leisure practices related to IT technologies: boys play computer games more than girls (54.7% and 39.6%, respectively), while girls more often use social networks, perform Internet surfing [13, p. 88].

The 2014 survey showed that depending on age 62-73% and 52-69% use Internet resources on weekdays and weekends, respectively, and 55.2-72.6% spend up to three hours on computer entertainment on weekdays and 49.9-72.7% of teenagers, depending on the age of the respondents [11].

"Most kids and teens spend as much time playing games on their computer, tablet, smartphone, or other electronic devices as they do homework, emailing, Twitter, Facebook, chatting, and using the Internet. From half an hour to two hours a day. On weekends, employment with such leisure activities increases to 3-4-5 and even more than 6 hours a day," says the international report "Health and Behavioral Orientations of School Youth of Ukraine" in 2018 [12, p. 78]. It is also noted that girls spend less time playing Internet games, unlike boys (2-3 hours per day), but visit social networks more, which can last up to 6-7 hours on weekends. This use of their free time is characteristic of most teenagers from the age of 13 when parental control is weakened.

Age differences in the use of the Internet by teenagers, according to a 2016 study, are significant. Thus, the number of children who use Internet services and are younger than 15 years old is 43.8%, and already at the age of 15-17 years – 85.7% [2]. In 2019, among people aged 15 and older, 97% of respondents are Internet users [7].

The majority of children prefer to access the Internet through a mobile phone/smartphone – 43.9%, a tablet – 42.8%, and through a laptop or personal computer – 33.8% and 18.5%, respectively [10].

The secondary analysis allowed us to clarify the portrait of a typical teenage

Internet user – a girl aged 12-14 who accesses the Internet mainly from home and spends 3 to 8 hours a day on weekdays and 5 to 12 hours on weekends.

During our analysis, children's use of all social functions of the content was identified and recorded. We will provide evidence for this thesis, based on the selection of arguments from the data of the largest studies of children's online behaviour over the last decade.

Firstly, there is convincing evidence that the Internet has taken its place in the structure of the living space, time budget, and educational and leisure spheres of modern children.

Over the past five years, there has been a tendency to decrease the age of entering the Internet, both in the world and in Ukraine. According to the European Commission, on average in Europe in 2008, only 34% of children aged 6-7 years used the Internet, while only four years later, in 2012, the number of preschoolers connected to the network, according to various data, was from 60 to 87% [1]. In Ukraine, according to surveys, in 2014, 62-73% of teenagers used the Internet independently [11, p. 86]. In 2018, 13.5% of children at the age of 2 accessed the Internet with the participation of adults, and 14.7% started using the Internet at the age of 5 [2].

Children 3-4 years old, as a rule, freely navigate in the computer game space, developing educational programs designed for this age. Every third preschooler uses a computer to play (35.4%). Meanwhile, research results show that every seventh child uses the Internet for school and extracurricular studies (13.5%), and only 5.8% of children watch cartoons and feature films on the computer [10].

By the end of school, there are no teenagers who do not use the Internet – up to 3 hours and more than 4 hours every day. 45% and 50% of teenagers use social networks, respectively, and only 6.7% do not use the network at all [12, p. 82].

The Internet plays a serious role in the lives of teenagers – every eighth teenager spends more than 5 hours on the World Wide Web on weekdays, and every fourth on weekends [12, p. 83]. It is social networks that are the main source of important information for children and teenagers – 76% of teenagers look for various information of interest to them there, which illustrates the informational function of the Internet.

The communicative function is realized through the communication of teenagers on the Internet – in social networks, blogs, chats, on forums: in 2018, 41% of teenagers communicated on the Internet, 40% looked for friends on social networks, another 14% communicated with players in virtual and online-games [12, p. 83].

It is especially worth highlighting such an Internet service as social networks. A social network as a website has many users. It allows participants to create their profiles, find friends, correspond in real-time, create interest groups and communities, share media materials and information, upload their photos, play online games and occupies an important place in the lives of teenagers since these sites are concentrated in numerous different types of Internet activities that teenagers prefer.

The use of this service by children is constantly growing: in 2016, 60% of schoolchildren used social networks and by 2018, 97% of teenagers used social networks [12, p. 82]. In 2021, the most popular among young people (13-15 years old) social network was Instagram – 82%, Facebook network took second place – 61%, but the TikTok platform was popular only among 32% of respondents [8].

In 2016, almost a third of teenagers had more than one open profile on various social networks, 60-80% of them registered in the networks under their name and indicated the exact age and number of the school in which they study; every fifth teenager had more than 100 friends in networks (30 people on average). In 2018, already 40% of registered schoolchildren had more than 100 friends on social networks, and the majority of users knew all or almost all of their online friends. A third of all students are “friends” on social networks with their parents, and more than half of the surveyed teenagers (52%) are friends with their teachers [12, p. 84].

Thus, with the help of social networks, in addition to the communicative one, the educational function of the Internet is realized. With the help of social networks, integrative and regulatory functions are also implemented: research shows that teenagers prefer to communicate not in social networks designed exclusively for their age audience, but on those resources where adults are present (63% of Instagram users are aged 18- 34 years, Facebook – 37%, respectively) [6]. The interaction between generations and different social groups on these sites is ensured, as well as the transmission and broadcasting of norms and rules of behaviour in society. An important function of the Internet is recreational because the network contains various recreation opportunities: online games, blogs, forums and sites that contain information about various hobbies, hobbies, and various types of creativity. This function is in demand by children and teenagers. In 2016, 18% of respondents named online and mobile games as activities on the Internet. Another type of leisure time of teenagers on the World Wide Web was communication – 13% [2].

Sites with information about world history, the history of art and architecture, the cultures of the peoples of the world, contributing to raising the level of culture

and education, intellectual and spiritual development, and reading e-books can perform a cultural and educational function.

According to the results of the international study of the quality of education PISA-2018, 59% of teenagers use the Internet to obtain a variety of information that is interesting to them, including information of a cultural and educational nature. 37% of respondents use social networks to read news online and another 25% take participation in group discussions or forums [9, p. 99]. Respondents were also asked whether they read on the Internet and in what form it is better to read e-books. Teenagers were also asked how much time they spend reading for their pleasure. 27.2% of respondents read books on paper and electronic media equally often, 27% prefer books on digital media, and 24.2% read books on paper media [9, p. 99].

As for the time that schoolchildren spend reading for their pleasure, girls predominate here, 27% of surveyed girls read up to one hour a day, while 22.7% of boys read. 26.7% and 16.3% read from 1 to 2 hours a day, respectively. If we talk about reading for personal pleasure for more than 2 hours a day, there is already a big gap here: 16.3% of girls and 6.7% of boys [9, p. 108].

No less important and promising social function of the Internet is education. In 2016, according to research data, 38% of Ukrainian teenagers used the Internet to search for various thematic information, information for learning [2], and in 2018, almost two-thirds of teenagers (59%) turned to electronic resources for information on educational topics [9, with. 99].

The attitude of the population of Ukraine to the use of the Internet by young users is ambiguous: adults tend to be wary of the deep and widespread immersion of children in the virtual space, meanwhile, parents themselves often provoke these processes due to the earlier provision of access to the World Wide Web, instilling the skills of using the Internet for entertainment and learning. Among the risks that children may face, from the point of view of adults, in 2018, the greatest concern was that a child may give other people personal information about themselves (62.7%). When using the Internet, children encounter obscene words (38.4%), saw images or videos of a sexual nature (29.1%) and 10.1% were exposed to the dangers of cyberbullying. Many parents try to protect their children on the Internet, so they monitor the sites visited by the child, 67.3% of respondents and 51.7% set time limits for being on the World Wide Web [10].

This trend allows us to talk about the relevance of knowledge about the Internet, risks and ways to protect against the dangers that a child may encounter online. 46.8% of parents use software to protect their child from Internet risks, 36.7% use network filters and 21% include parental control functions on devices

connected to the Internet. Meanwhile, 94% of the interviewed parents of minor children are convinced that adults should monitor what websites their children visit, but only 19% stated that they share the Internet with their children [10].

Conclusions. Summing up, we can say that children and adolescents actively use the opportunities provided by the Internet, the child and the adolescent audience have their requirements and advantages of electronic content and use a variety of social functions of media content. Meanwhile, the World Wide Web contains a large number of dangers that the younger generation can face.

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