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# Downshifting in Social Networks

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**ABSTRACT**

The problem under investigation is urgent due primarily to the growing role of virtual communications in modern society, and to the growing influence of the information flow on a person's consciousness. The purpose of the article is to study downshifting in social networks and to identify behavior patterns using the example of the downshifters' community in Kirov. They consciously limit virtual communications in social networks on the Internet. The authors of the article used the methodology of qualitative sociology, since the subject of the research is new and atypical social phenomenon for modern society. The sample of the study included representatives of the youth of the city, the choice of respondents was based on the snowball technique. The leading method is a qualitative deep semistructured focused interview, which allows to identify causes of virtual downshifting and features of vital activity of participants in this social group. Empirical material was processed with the help of the method of analytical induction, that is to select several groups of phenomena with recurring signs from the set of phenomena, and then to construct a hypothesis about the properties of groups. The results of the article are: the identification of reasons for downshifting in social networks; the characteristic of the typical behavior of the downshifting community; and the identification of two subgroups within the studied community with slightly different models of behavior. The theoretical significance of the research is the development of scientific knowledge about the phenomenon of downshifting. The materials of the article can be useful for authorities, businessmen, teachers and educators working with the youth audience.

**Keywords:** downshifting, social networks, virtualization, Internet, slow movement, slow communication, youth, interview, analytical induction

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the XXI century the overwhelming majority of mankind was forced to live in the conditions of a huge increase in the information flow. If in the second half of the XX century information overload existed mainly due to television and radio, now the development of the public Internet, including social networks, plays the important role in this process. According to VCIOM (Press Release No. 3084, URL: https://wciom.ru/index.php?id=236&uid=115657), about 70% of Russian citizens use various social networks, whereas in 2006 this indicator was 5%. As a result, the "information landscape" has changed radically in the last few years. The overwhelming majority of modern society, and especially young people, live in a new virtual society. The "global village", about which M. McLuhan [1] wrote in 1962, is rapidly closing to the size of a very small screen - a computer, a phone, smart clocks, etc. We already live in this new "real virtuality" [2]: politics is gradually moving into the blogosphere, culture and art - in youtube, and crypto-currencies is gaining more and more weight in the economy. Both these circumstances (the growth of the information flow and the virtualization of society) largely predetermine the life activity of a modern man. On the one hand, he is forced to constantly consume huge layers

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of information, and on the other hand, to transfer his life to a virtual environment. Moreover, these two processes are closely related to each other.

At the same time, it is interesting that the modern society has communities of people who consciously refuse from the generally accepted "tempo-rhythm" of life. Such communities began to appear at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries under the general name of "slow movement" [3]: "slow food", "slow reading", "slow media" [4] and so on. The authors of this article analyze new emerging "slow motion" in the virtual sphere - downshifting on the Internet. By downshifting on the Internet, we mean a conscious partial or total rejection of social communications in a virtual Internet space in favor of social communications in the real world. Since the public system is built primarily on the basis of built-in communications within communities [5], and communications on the Internet are most widely distributed in social networks, the research on downshifting on the Internet was conducted in this segment of the virtual space.

So, the problem of the research is in the following contradiction: on the one hand, we live in a society of the 21st century, which depends very much on the coming updated information and on the Internet, and on the other hand, there are communities of people who refuse from it on purpose. To solve this problem, the authors found a community of downshifters among the youth of Kirov and took a series of interviews in order to discover reasons for the appearance and patterns of behavior of participants in this social group.

The aim of the article is to study downshifting in social networks using the example of the downshifters' community in Kirov. The objectives of the research are to find reasons for downshifting in social networks, to define downshifters' behavior model in social networks, to identify subgroups in the community of downshifters with different models of behavior.

Studies on this topic can be divided into two groups. The first group are articles related to the study of "slow motion" and downshifting (the terms are synonymous) in general, and the second group are studies of specific, particular manifestations of "slow movement".

The first group of articles is quite diverse. "Slow motion" and downshifting have been studied from many sides. First of all, here it is C. Honoré's [3] work "No-fuss: How to stop the rush and start living", which became the starting point in the popularization of "slow movement". Honoré here analyzes the history of the "slow movements", namely, the movement "slow food", which appeared from the principle of saving time: "Saving time, the worker eats fast food, and relaxes with the help of alcohol. It's not by chance that the most hasty people are the thickest. A third of Americans and one in five Britons have obesity. Even the Japanese are gaining weight" [3]. The place of downshifting in Western countries and in Russia in the first decade of the 21st century was studied by V. Merzlyakova [6], C. Breakspear & C. Hamilton [7], M.K. Batista, et al. [8], Y.V. Ovetchkina [9], E.H. Kennedy & N.T. Krogman [10]. Varieties of downshift depending on the location in a particular social group were analyzed by E.V. Lisova [11]. Psychological aspects of downshifting were investigated in the works of A.I. Prihodko [12], A. Paukova [13], N. Zaritska [14]. Historical background of the "slow movement" was considered by N.V. Butonova in the article "Downshifting. The new rule is the rejection of all rules" [15]. Downshifting as a reaction to the development of modern capitalist society is the focus of the study of G.A. Zapolskikh [16] and A.A. Yakovleva [17], A.T. Ragusa [18], M.R. Nelson, M.A. Rademacher & Hye-Jin Paek [19]. Specific rules and examples of slowing down of life are presented in the works of S.V. Makeeva [20] and D. Drake [21], J. Schreurs, P. Martens, & G. Kok [22]. An overview of the components of "slow motion" ("slow life", "slow cities", "slow food", "slow reading", "slow money") is given in articles of O.E. Yatsevich [23, 24].

Works of the second group refer to certain segments of "slow movement". Speaking of "slow media", it is necessary, first of all, to point out "The Slow Media Manifesto", which was written by journalists B. Köhler, S. David & J. Blumtritt [25]. In the manifesto, they declare: "Like "sloughfood", "slow media" does not imply the rapid consumption of the product (in this case, the information-author's comment), but the thoughtful selection of ingredients and careful preparation" [25]. An attempt to understand the new definition of "slow media" was undertaken in the article of the philologist A.I. Soloviev [26]. The place of "slow media" in the structure of modern sociocultural reality is considered by V.V. Vitvinchuk [27]. Features of the existence of "slow cities" are undelined in the articles of L.G. Ilivitskaya [28] and D.S. Elmanova [29], M. Erdogan [30], J. Carp [31], E. Park & S. Kim [32]. The features of the slow food movement are analyzed by N.B. Kusheva [33] and D.N. Karpova [34], M. Rombach, A. Nellen & V. Bitsch [35], S. Munjal, S. Sharma & P. Menon [36], L. Voinea, A. Atanase & I. Schileru [37]. The manifestations of the movement "slow cinema" in contemporary art were investigated by T. Luca [38]. The movement "slow reading" relies on the articles of J. Miedema [39], T. Newkirk [40] and others.

The phenomenon of downshifting on the Internet was identified for the first time in D. Freeman's manifesto "Not So Fast", in which he points out three principles: the speed matters (he compares the modern information field with a flashing stroboscope at rave parties that quickly appear and disappear) ; the real world is important (the author claims that modern cafes, post offices, parks, cinemas, city social centers, conference rooms are silent, only the sounds of work on various gadgets, similar to the crackling of insects can be heard); communication is important (people should be connected not only with a virtual web, but also with their relatives, friends, colleagues
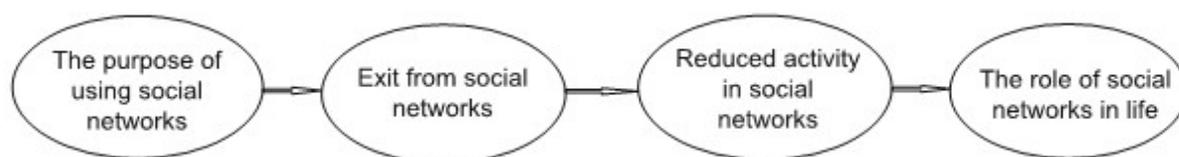
**Figure 1.** Structure of the interview

at work) [4]. P. Kolozaridi [41] talks about "slowing down" of virtual life. In her article, she calls this phenomenon "slow communication", that is, communication between people without the help of various gadgets, etc. [42, 43, 44] But we note that the Internet environment includes not only the process of communication, so the term "slow communication" seems not very successful.

Based on the foregoing, we see that downshifting issues on the Internet (and, in particular, in social networks), as a kind of "slow movement", have been little investigated. In this article for the first time, we turn to this topic, using the method of analytical induction in the analysis of a series of interviews, through which it is possible to identify typical patterns of behavior of representatives of this community.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was carried out with the help of the method of qualitative deep semistructured focused interview in which the details of specific life situation were clarified, namely, the manifestation of virtual downshifting in the process of interpersonal and group communications in social networks. The analysis of a number of interviews was carried out by the method of analytical induction that is "in the beginning, phenomena with recurring signs are selected from a number of phenomena of a certain kind. Based on these recurring features, a hypothesis about the properties of this series of phenomena is constructed" [45].

The research was carried out by specialists of the Department of Cultural Studies and Sociology of Vyatka State University from April to June 2017 in the downshifters' youth community in Kirov. Under the youth the authors mean the community of people from 14 up to 35. The sample group was 10 people. This number is due to the fact that at some point the saturation point occurred and the further continuation of the survey of respondents did not give new information on the content. Respondents were selected by the "snowball" method.

A series of interviews with a group of downshifters was built according to the following logic. Firstly, there was the question about the purposes of their being in social networks and reasons for a partial or complete withdrawal from them. Secondly, the respondents talked about their experience of getting out of social networks. Thirdly, the topic of reducing activity in social networks was touched upon. Finally, downshifters talked about the place of social networks in their educational, work, daily and leisure activities (see **Figure 1**). In the final analysis, in our opinion, all possible, aspects of downshifting on the Internet in the life of modern youth were covered. This is confirmed by the results of an exploratory study that we conducted earlier in the study of the student community of Vyatka State University [46].

## RESULTS

As a result of the research, the authors have revealed some common features in the life of the studied community and two subgroups that build models of behavior differently within downshifting on the Internet.

First, we will describe a typical behavioral pattern characteristic of a social group as a whole.

Let's start with the statement that an absolutely typical behavior for the representatives of this community is the act of getting out of a large number of social networks. From the large number of accounts in social networks (Vkontakte, Facebook, Instagram, Classmates, Twitter) after downshifting there remains a minimal amount, often one, sometimes several. The study showed that in the conditions of the city of Kirov, the social network Vkontakte is the most popular among downshifters. This is due to the fact that working or educational activities are very closely connected with this social network. One of the respondents says: "I am always in Vkontakte, because I'm the head of the group. All information (for classmates - author's note) is transmitted through Vkontakte. That's why I can't get out of it. I'm sitting there, but I do not communicate." (Informant No. 8). Specific actions to reduce the activity in a limited space of social networks are: refusal to view the news feed, reducing the number of posts and reposts on the page, leaving a large number of groups in social networks and subscriptions and deleting friends and subscribers (a kind of "cleaning out" the account), exit from multi-user chats, reducing information about the identity in the account description, creating anonymous pages. One statement looks pretty revealing: "I clean my account constantly, every few months, it takes a very long time. I do not need all this, this is superfluous information. Why keep it all this?" (Informant # 1).
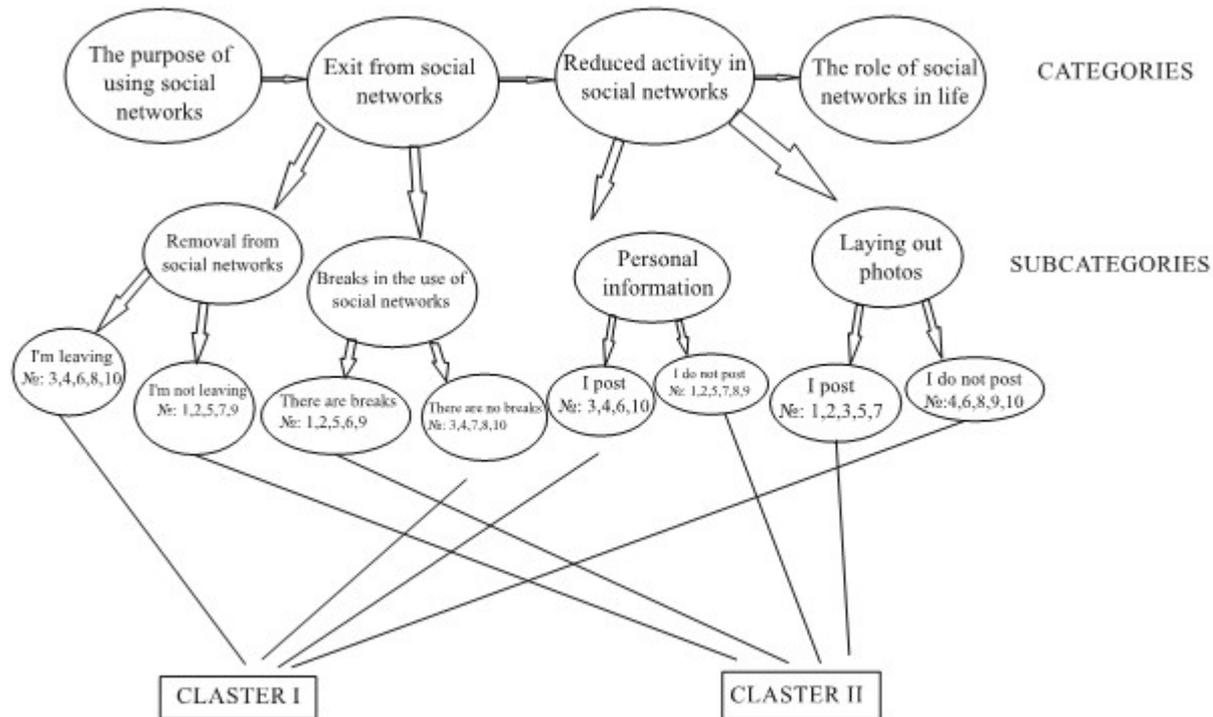
**Figure 2.** Cluster I and Cluster II

Hence comes another important feature of the downshifters' behavior on the Internet. If earlier respondents had priorities in communication with friends, network acquaintance, spending time in different groups and subscriptions, etc., after downshifting, their pastime in social networks is limited to getting the necessary information, often associated with work or educational activity, or with their immediate interests. In this sense, the answer of one respondent is interesting: "Previously, I checked all the accents I had every day and not once. Now I use Vkontakte regularly, almost daily, but for a short period of time, I cannot help reading messages, they often deal with work." (Informant №4).

We point out an important characteristic. Of all the activities (work / study, non-work / extracurricular, leisure) that were discussed during the interview, for downshifters the most important is work or study (or both). Respondents agree that it is impossible to completely exit virtual communications in the modern world, otherwise you can find yourself in an informative "vacuum". On the other hand, non-working and extra-curricular activities, as well as leisure activities, have a compensatory function: a person relaxes from information overload. "When I meet friends, I do not go to the Internet. I do not like it, I do not like when people are distracted and when a person is talking and looking at his gadget at the same time. I feel a little uncomfortable. Sometimes, I rebuke." (Informant No. 9), - says one of the downshifters.

The community of downshifters gives a unanimous response to one of the fundamental questions of the study, namely the question of the cause of the virtual downshifting act - an excess of information. The socio-cultural environment of universal virtualization and informatization that has developed in the 21st century forces them to behave in it in the way described above. "Using the Internet, I get a lot of information. And I'm interested in reworking it. But there is some kind of overload, or something. And I have a desire to relax." (Informant number 3), - a respondent describes his experience.

During the analytical stage of the study, two clusters of respondents were identified using the method of analytical induction within the community of downshifters. The respondents were sharply divided according to the following indicators: the removal of their accounts in social networks, the breaks in the use of accounts in social networks, the laying out of photographs, the description of the respondent's personal information about his/her personality. (The selection of the different characteristics is shown in **Figure 2**).

Choosing from the answers to the questions indicated in the diagram, we identified two large clusters. Clusters were selected according to the principle of the greatest coincidence in one or another subcategory. It should be understood that the characteristics given above are also suitable for representatives of these two clusters.

The first cluster can be selected by the following set of respondents: 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, that is, by the first subcategory - removal from social networks (however, you can take another subcategory, the results will be the same in the end). In this cluster, there was a group of respondents with the following characteristics. They are removed from

**Table 1.** Comparison of respondents by age

| Cluster I | | Cluster II | |
|---|---|---|---|
| № interview | Respondent's age | № interview | Respondent's age |
| 3 | 33 | 1 | 25 |
| 4 | 33 | 2 | 24 |
| 6 | 35 | 5 | 30 |
| 8 | 25 | 7 | 16 |
| 10 | 34 | 9 | 26 |
| Average age – 32 | | | Average age – 24,2 |

**Table 2.** Comparison of respondents by the availability of education

| Cluster I | | Cluster II | |
|---|---|---|---|
| № interview | Respondent's education | № interview | Respondent's education |
| 3 | Higher | 1 | secondary |
| 4 | Higher | 2 | higher |
| 6 | secondary | 5 | higher |
| 8 | secondary | 7 | secondary |
| 10 | Higher | 9 | higher |

**Table 3.** Comparison of respondents by marital status

| Cluster I | | Cluster II | |
|---|---|---|---|
| № interview | Marital status of the respondent | № interview | Marital status of the respondent |
| 3 | Divorced | 1 | Single |
| 4 | Divorced | 2 | Single |
| 6 | Divorced | 5 | Married |
| 8 | Single | 7 | Single |
| 10 | Divorced | 9 | Single |

**Table 4.** Comparison of respondents by gender

| Cluster I | | Cluster II | |
|---|---|---|---|
| № interview | Sex | № interview | Sex |
| 3 | Male | 1 | Female |
| 4 | Female | 2 | Female |
| 6 | Male | 5 | Female |
| 8 | Female | 7 | Male |
| 10 | Female | 9 | Male |

social networks for a while, if they are bored with using them, while they do not take breaks in the use of social networks, give a minimal set of information about their personality and personal life on a page in a social network and do not upload photos.

The second cluster was selected according to the following set of respondents: 1, 2, 5, 7, 9. These are downshifters who do not delete their accounts from social networks for a while, and often they make big breaks in the use of social networks (that is, they just do not go to their social network account), sometimes they post photos, but they do not give any information about their personality and personal life.

Referring to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (within the framework of this study, age, education and marital status and sex were specified), we came to the following results. Compare the **Tables 1**, **2**, **3**, **4**.

Among four tables, the second and fourth tables are completely different. It can be seen that there is no connection between getting into this or that cluster and the level of education, as well as the gender. But in the other two tables, the difference between the two clusters is immediately evident. In the first cluster, there are older people (over 30 years), and in the second cluster - younger people (about 25 years old). From the third table, we can draw the following conclusion. It is clear why in the second cluster the majority of people is single / unmarried – it is

generally a young category of people, but the interest is that in the first cluster the overwhelming number of people is divorced.

A more detailed analysis of the interview showed that the primary reason for the behavior pattern of the first group of respondents is their family status. These are people who already have children of school age who are also registered in the same social networks as their parents. Parents, of course, try to build a certain distance with their children and often do not want to spread the moments of their personal lives on social networks before them. It explains why they do not upload photos at all and are inclined to delete their account for a certain time. Nevertheless, the status of a divorced person forces them sometimes to enter the virtual space to get to know other people of the opposite sex, because at present this is the most convenient space for this activity in the youth environment. This circumstance can explain that representatives of this cluster still have to report a certain, albeit minimal, information about their personality and personal life. It is also clear that new acquaintances still want to start a new life, so it's better not to have memories of a past life in the form of old photographs. One of the respondents comments on the deletion of their account and photos as follows: "I needed to delete some of my content from my life." (Informant # 3), talking about his ex-wife.

The second cluster includes younger respondents, who usually do not have their own families. These are people who lead a fairly active lifestyle. They attend various events, spend their evenings with their friends, study and have no serious family and work commitments. Therefore, they are more inclined to simply abandon virtual interactions, leave things as they are, do not visit their account for a while, and then, if necessary, enter it. The same circumstance influences the fact that representatives of this subgroup are slightly more active in putting their photos on the net. A broader social environment in real reality allows them to refuse to post information on their personalities and personal lives in social networks. It is clear that most of their lives they spend outside the virtual environment. "Here a person creates a virtual image and yet you want to see him live. Is this image to be confirmed or not? Often it is not confirmed." (Informant No. 9), - one of the respondents describes his experience.

# DISCUSSION

During the research, the authors have proved that there is downshifting on the Internet in the youth environment of Kirov. The community of downshifters was discovered in the youth environment by the snowball method. A series of interviews was conducted with the participants of this community. The goal set at the beginning of the research was achieved by analyzing interviews using the method of analytical induction.

During the analysis, the authors have found out main reason for downshifting in social networks, a model of the behavior of downshifters in social networks, and two different groups of downshifters with different patterns of behavior. The study showed that downshifting on the Internet is a part of the so-called "slow movement" and it is similar to previously researched scientific discussers with its varieties: "slow media", "slow cities", "slow food", "slow reading", etc. It is interesting that the purpose of works devoted to these movements is to study essential and substantial aspects of the movement, causes of the appearance of movements, the history of their appearance, to consider these movements in the context of the development of various rhetorician, to explore business opportunities for the development of the movement. It was pointed out that very little attention is paid to the study of the social aspect, that is, to the study of the community itself, which produces ideas in its environment. This aspect we consider in our work.

Downshifting on the Internet and social networks is often mentioned in articles (for example, D. Freeman's manifesto "Not So Fast"), which means a great interest to this phenomenon and its relevance in public discourse. On the other hand, the community studied by the authors has not previously been the focus of social and humanitarian interest. This fact forced the authors to conduct this study.

# CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to study downshifting in social networks using the example of the downshifters' community in the city of Kirov.

Let's make the main.

The main cause of downshifting on the Internet is an overabundance of information, which is felt by absolutely all respondents. As a consequence, respondents somehow limit their activities in social.

The behavior pattern typical for the whole group of downshifters is the following: the refusal to use social networks and the decrease in activity during their use, namely: refusal to view the news, reduce the number of posts and reposts, leave groups and subscriptions, delete friends and subscribers, leave multi-user chat rooms, minimize information about the identity, create anonymous pages. The emphasis in the communication process within social networks among downstream users is to search for the necessary information in the work and

educational activities, extracurricular, non-academic and leisure activities remain extremely unrelated to social networks.

In the community of downshifters, two subgroups of respondents with slightly different models of behavior were identified. The first subgroup is the respondents who are more mature and divorced, the second subgroup is young single people. The first subgroup is characterized by the following behavior pattern: a removal from social networks for a while, they do not make big breaks in the use of social networks, on pages in social networks they report a minimal set of information about their personality and personal life, they do not spread photos in social networks. The second subgroup is characterized by the following behavior pattern: they do not delete their accounts from social networks, often make large breaks in the use of social networks, sometimes lay out photographs and at the same time do not give any information about their personality and personal life. The study showed that this difference is connected with the age and family situation of the respondents.

It should be noted that downshifting on the Internet and social networks is not mass for modern society, and therefore we turned to the methods of qualitative sociology, which deal with the study of atypical and new social phenomena. On the other hand, the appearance of these communities is not an extraordinary event. Over the past 30 years, we have seen a tendency to be fed up with modern "life velocities" that were suggested by modern society. Therefore, we can conclude that the phenomenon of "slowness" deserves attention, and its further development together with other general cultural changes can be the way of the future development of global and Russian culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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