

**Post-virtualization:  
banality of the digital and new trends in society**

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# Digital transformation and virtualization of society

- Digital transformation is managerial discourse promoting new instruments for old social processes of virtualization
- **Virtualization means the replacement of real objects and actions by images and communications**
- Social life since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is immersed in virtual realities of branding, image making, and communications through digital media
- **Virtualization of society:** social relations take form of relations among images
- *It is not digitalization that makes society virtualized, rather virtualization of society makes digital technologies a requirement for human activities*
- Virtualization of society makes **networks** the prevalent social structures and the **ICT** main means of activities

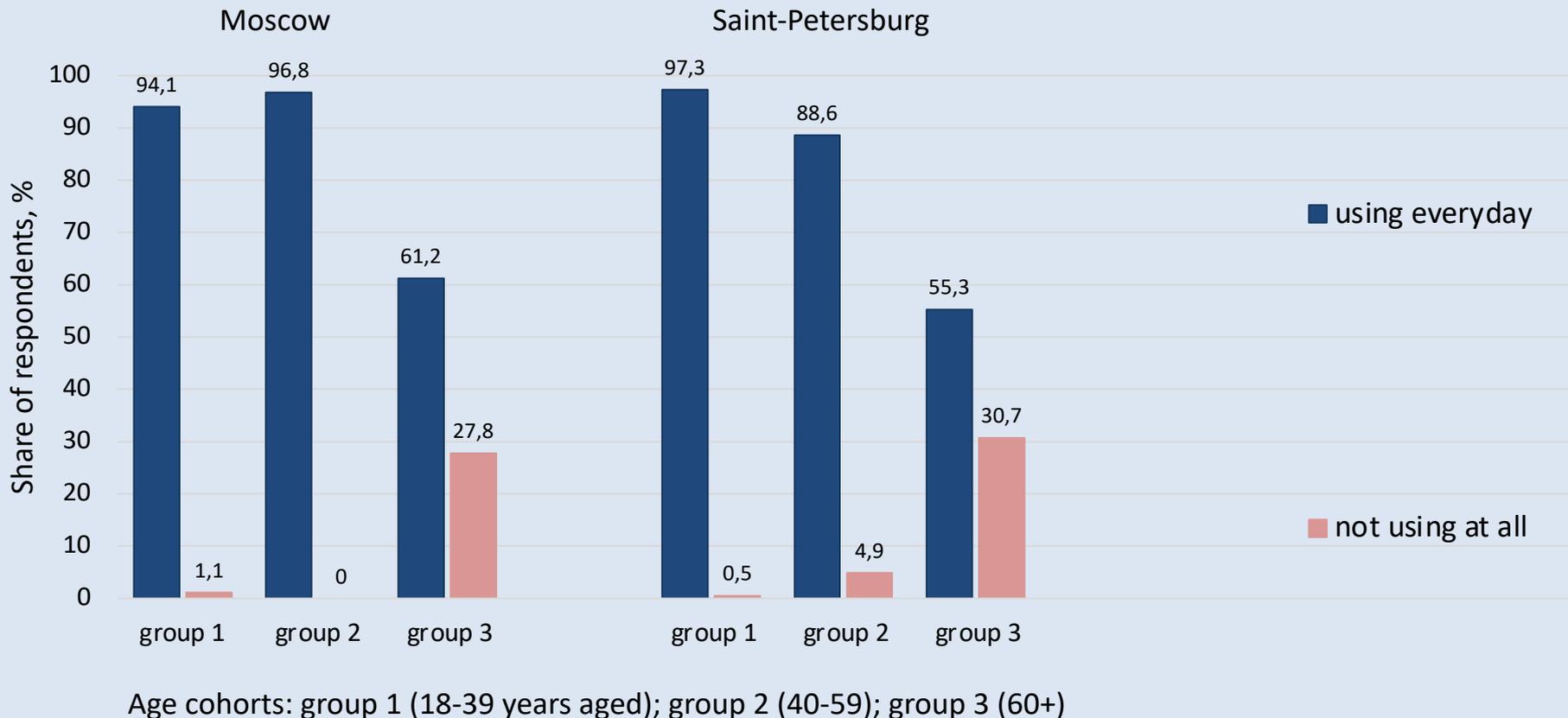


# From virtual exotics to digital routine

- Contrast between virtual reality accessed by minority and habitual social reality experienced by all people was sharp at the age of the century
- Now, close to the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century, virtual reality of images and communications and digital platforms for virtualization of social life are becoming everyday experience and social routine imposed on majority of people
- The majority is involved permanently in usage of digital technologies
- **The banality of the digital is obvious especially in large cities and megacities** (see surveys data below)

	Russia	Moscow	Saint-Petersburg
respondents using the internet	WCIOM, Feb. / Oct. 2020 N = 1600	SPbSU, Feb. 2020 N = 356	SPbSU, Feb. 2020 N = 420
everyday	<b>68% → 73%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>84%</b>
not at all	<b>19% → 16%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>10%</b>

# Saturation of everyday life with virtuality for different generations in Russian super-urban areas



# Digital content consumption and creativity on social networking platforms

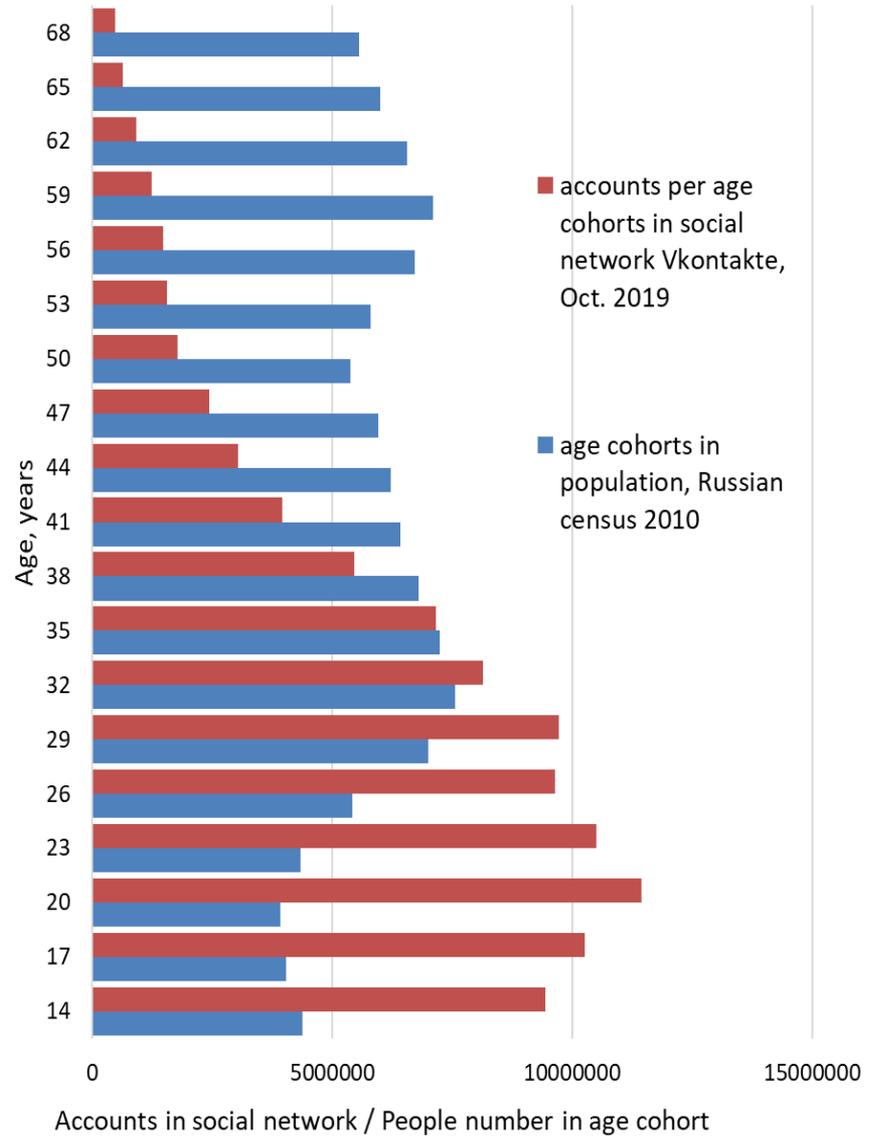
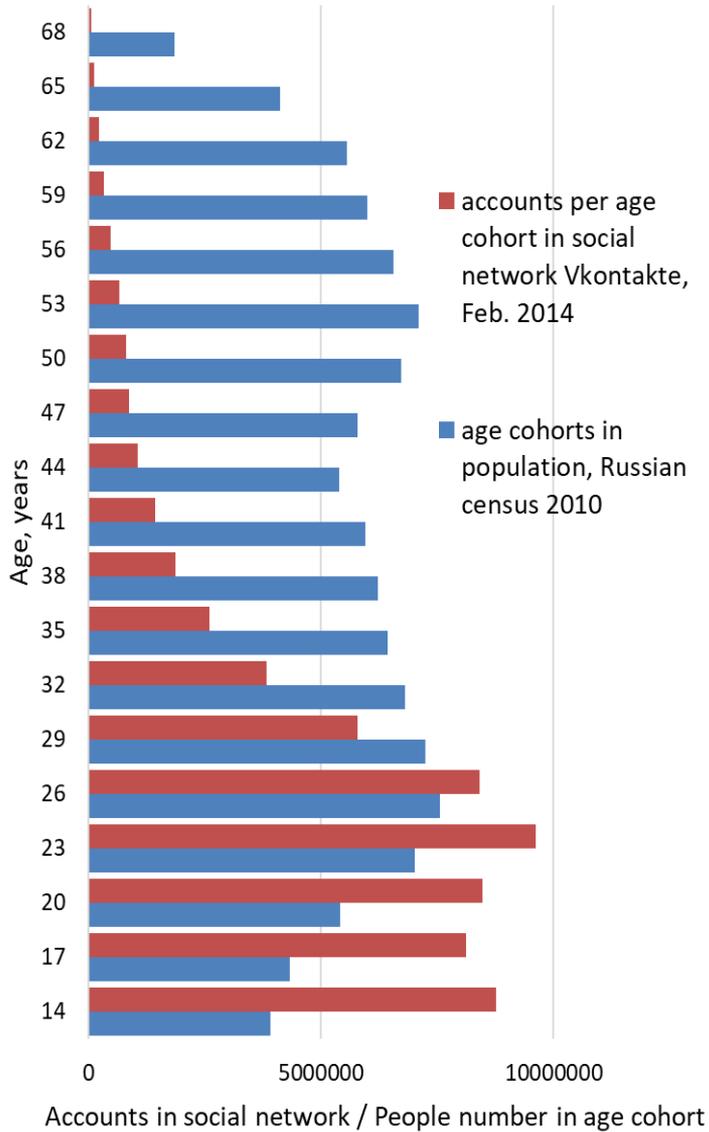
- **More than 80%** respondents in Moscow and St. Petersburg claim usage of social networking online platforms
- Levels of involvement in consumption of digital content look similar for different age cohorts while level of creativity in social networks is much higher among young users of Web 2.0

	Moscow		Saint-Petersburg	
	Consuming contents	Creating contents	Consuming content	Creating content
Average	<b>94,6%</b>	<b>59,5%</b>	<b>95,5%</b>	<b>62,9%</b>
18-29 years aged	<b>98,8%</b>	<b>76,1%</b>	<b>99,0%</b>	<b>82,5%</b>
30-59 years aged	<b>92,7%</b>	<b>55,1%</b>	<b>96,2%</b>	<b>60,0%</b>
60+ years aged	<b>87,1%</b>	<b>46,4%</b>	<b>85,8%</b>	<b>35,9%</b>

# The digital divide evolution

- (1) Divide between those having and not having access to digital technologies. **The problem was economic but now in super-urban areas even poor people say they use the internet everyday (from 67% to 86% respondents in lower strata).**
- (2) Divide between those having and not having enough competencies to use digital technologies. **The problem was educational but now there is no significant difference between daily internet audiences among high school graduates and college graduates.**
- (3) Divide between those creating and just consuming digital contents / products. **The creativity in communication networks is characteristic of the minority** (young people enrolled in tertiary education and belonging to middle strata) **accumulating social and symbolic capital in its virtual form.**

# Oversaturated with the digital: virtual population of Russia



# Turn to Post-Virtualization

- virtual reality of images and communications is routinized and domesticated
- overproduction of images / constructed identities makes them less valuable and value-orientations are shifted to physical presence, real experience, something 'analogous' contrasted with all 'digital'
- in super-urban areas, alternative movements activists and businessmen create social spaces functioning as points of **access to reality**
- creative spaces, co-workings, anti-cafes etc. are places where different social realities are mutually penetrated and take form of **augmented reality** integrating physical and digital, material and symbolic, modern and 'postmodern' components of human life
- that is a general logic of **post-virtualization**: routinization of virtual reality and creation of **augmented reality**



# Augmented Modernity vs Exhausted Modernity

- social life in the mutually penetrated realities at the **access points** to networks and flows is an existence full of cyber-physical experience
- that is life in a regime of **Augmented Modernity**
- post-virtualization is leading simultaneously towards **Augmented Modernity** in super-urban enclaves of intensive sociality and **Exhausted Modernity** in the rest of communities



# Lack of reality in the time of COVID-crisis

- Compulsory virtualization of social life has led to recession, depression, networks congestion, and humans' exhaustion
- Crisis has pushed digitalization forward but not dramatically because of banality of the digital
- Virtualization / digitalization is not universal but particular solution for older people
- Life in the regime of augmented reality is the youth request
- Crisis has revealed the lack of real resources and physical spaces:
  - ✓ **hospital places and medical equipment,**
  - ✓ **human resources (health care and delivery),**
  - ✓ **safe places equipped for working and learning,**
  - ✓ **public spaces for consumption and entertainment.**



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