

## Dynamics of Reading Habits of Modern Russian Students: A Sociological Analysis



**Ekaterina V.  
KARGAPOLOVA**  
Plekhanov Russian University of Economics  
Moscow, Russian Federation  
e-mail: K474671@list.ru  
ORCID: 0000-0002-2892-3953; ResearcherID: O-6734-2017



**Yuliya A.  
DAVYDOVA**  
Plekhanov Russian University of Economics  
Moscow, Russian Federation  
e-mail: ylkadav@mail.ru  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5660-328X



**Vera V.  
D'YAKOVA**  
Astrakhan State Technical University  
Astrakhan, Russian Federation  
e-mail: vvdyakova@yandex.ru  
ORCID: 0000-0002-3715-1393; ResearcherID: AAO-5921-2021



**Marina A.  
SIMONENKO**  
Plekhanov Russian University of Economics  
Moscow, Russian Federation  
e-mail: masimonenko@yandex.ru  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4594-1595

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**Abstract.** The features of reading habits and their transformation are the subject of interdisciplinary scientific analysis, as well as of a broad public discussion about the effective response of the Russian state to the challenges of a technogenic society. The areas of sociological reflection on this phenomenon are quite broad, such as the reading crisis, interest in books, the impact of globalization, e-books and other electronic formats for reading. Sociological analysis allows finding answers to questions about the state and features of reading habits as a component of social capital, the social quality of specific geographical, social and demographic groups. Bookishness (love and respect for books) is an important feature of the Russian mentality, an indicator of socio-cultural continuity, which is why the study of reading habits of modern Russian students' culture acquires particular relevance. This article presents the results of a sociological research conducted in Astrakhan and Volgograd (2016, 2019), as well as in Moscow (2019). These empirical studies provide insights into the main trends in the dynamics of the reading habits of modern Russian students, and help to conduct a comparative analysis of these habits of Russian cities' students, among other things in terms of socio-cultural space levels (the "core – periphery" coordinate system). We identified the dominance of the axiological component of reading habits; determined that classical literature is the basis of the content structure of reading; noted that the frequency of reading habits falls with decreasing population of the settlement – people read more in Moscow, less in the province. We think it would be promising to use the results and conclusions in monitoring studies and sociological projects on similar topics in other regions, and to continue studying the obtained results in the framework of interdisciplinary analysis.

**Key words:** reading habits, book culture, youth, students, digitalization of society.

### Introduction

The research interest in the analysis of reading habits of students is associated with the awareness of large-scale transformation processes, which cover various spheres of book and reading existence: the status of books, the value status of reading as a result of changes in the role relationship between author and reader in the era of the formation of technogenic civilization are being revised; reading strategies are being transformed due to the appearance of new book formats (e-books, audio books) and the increasing popularity of electronic communication forms (Ageeva, 2019). Reading habits in this situation are to be understood as "culturally accepted (traditional/new) ways and skills of dealing with books and other printed and electronic artifacts" (Kolosova, 2014, p. 69).

Reading habits as an actual social phenomenon are investigated by means of sociology. Sociology

treats reading as a social practice, studies its role in shaping the spiritual world of an individual, analyzes the nature and essence of reading interests and needs (Vorontsov, 2009; Wood et al. 2006). Reading, on the one hand, is interpreted as a cognitive-communicative activity that changes the consciousness of a social subject (Smith, 1995). For example, a direct relationship between reading comprehension and emotional intelligence has been confirmed (del Pilar Jiménez et al., 2019), as well as between reading pleasure and reading comprehension (Rogiers et al., 2020). On the other hand, reading can be seen as work on active, purposeful transformation and subordination of text content to the needs of a social subject (Mironova, 2003).

Researchers use the concepts of "reading culture", "reader's culture" (Plotnikov, 1999),

“book culture” (Paichadze, 2000). In this context, reading habits can be interpreted as components of human culture, an important mechanism for preserving the Man of Culture. Sociological research shows a decrease in the intensity of reading habits and interest in reading, the presence of a “reading crisis”, which has a negative impact on the state of society (Vorontsov, 2009; Kalegina, Kormishina, 2018; Maksimova, Garas, 2017, Seliverstova, 2012; Stefanovskaya, 2007; Chernova, 2013). This situation is probably due to the fact that the nation’s classic literary heritage has been universally “set upon by Western consumerism, a system embodied in the instant gratification of momentary pleasures, from the McDonalds to the TV series” (Hutchings, 2004).

We should recall that bookishness, respect for books is a feature of the Russian mentality, so the preservation of book culture is one of the fundamental responses of Russian society to the challenges of unifying globalism of a technotronic civilization. This issue is becoming a significant, national problem, requiring both the attention of the authorities and the adoption of volitional managerial decisions. In 2011 Russian President V.V. Putin, speaking at the congress of the Russian Book Union noted: “For a long time we have been one of the most reading countries in the world. I have to say bluntly: there is a danger that we can squander that status. According to sociologists, the number of people who do not read books – neither paper nor electronic – is growing. In the interests of the country, its future, we will revive people’s need for books...”<sup>1</sup> In 2017 he endorsed the idea of promoting children’s literature and recalled that in the 1990s, which were the childhood of those who are now becoming parents, little attention was paid to reading. “Today, the competition for the person, for the soul, for the attention of the young especially, is very big, I think, insane. The Internet

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.interfax.ru/culture/209820>.

makes it possible to get anywhere with one click”, remarked the president<sup>2</sup>. And in 2020, V.V. Putin called for the promotion of book reading<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, the study of reading habits becomes fundamental in the context of analyzing the preservation of the national socio-cultural code. A number of researchers note that in the modern world there is the existence of a trend of rapid revival of interest in books and reading. According to S. Kurschus, “book culture, books as media and their benefits have never been reflected or discussed as intensely as today – paradoxically, it is the digital media revolution that has generated an increased interest in the printed book and its future. The faster such cultural changes occur and the more people feel threatened by the loss of their cultural and individual identity, the more they will cling to traditional values and symbols of those values. The printed book is one of these symbols”. (Kurschus, 2015).

As T.A. Kalugina noted in 2014, Russians have been reading more books in recent years (Kalugina, 2014). In 2017, according to the results of an online survey conducted by the international market research institute GfK, Russia was in the top three most reading countries in the world in terms of the amount of time spent on reading. But it is still too early to talk about a way out of the reading crisis, because the intensity of reading practices in terms of the number of books read is significantly inferior to the level recorded a few decades ago (Zubova, 2018, p. 32). In addition, the emergence of new ways of reading urges researchers to look into such characteristics of the reading crisis as functional illiteracy, problems of understanding, perception, memorization, and reproduction of the text. Therefore, when studying reading habits, it is very important to study the reader’s strategies for

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://rg.ru/2017/09/01/reg-cfo/putin-prizval-chitat-knigi-i-slushat-klassiku.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.sostav.ru/publication/vladimir-putin-prizval-reklamirovat-chtenie-45832.html>.

choosing paper or electronic or digital media, and the reasons and consequences of these choices.

The need for sociological analysis of the reading habits dynamics under the influence of technogenic challenges, leading to the transformation of not only traditional, but also new reading formats, is actualized. G.M. Ageeva notes: "The paper book is indeed being superseded by the electronic book. One often hears that it is the future. But this does not mean that the book in its new electronic form will retain its former "status". (Ageeva, 2019, p. 182).

New reading formats will continue to evolve as long as paper books remain the most important, trustworthy technical means of storing and transmitting information, and book culture as a traditional form of culture remains one of the mechanisms for the formation of social identities. At the same time, the new form of culture – electronic one – is still in its formative stage and has the features of protoculture (Solov'ev, 2010). It does not offer a holistic picture of objective reality (Bollie, 1994), which makes it possible to actualize traditional forms of culture and reading habits.

The turbulence of cultural forms leads to heterogeneity of reading habits due to belonging to a particular socio-demographic group, financial situation, level and quality of education, access to traditional / new media, characteristics of the socio-cultural space, gaps in the socio-cultural space of the country. This actualizes the study of different levels of socio-cultural space, for example, in the core – periphery coordinate system. Sociological analysis also allows determining the characteristics of reading habits at different levels of socio-cultural space, which creates the basis for more effective management of book culture development processes in individual regions. As part of this analysis, it is possible to study the characteristics of the book culture of specific regions as a system of values and associations, reflecting the features of native speakers' consciousness, their ethno-confessional

and territorial affiliation (Gil'yaminova, 2016; Chernienko, Kurnikova, 2015).

There is considerable heterogeneity in reading habits, including those among students (Dulina et al., 2017). Although the topic of bookishness, reading books as a fashionable hobby is actively discussed in blogs and social networks, which indicates that it is in demand among the younger generation. VCIOM data show that young people read more than other age groups, although the number of books read is significantly lower than a few decades ago. We can talk about "a tendency toward extended reproduction of reading habits: the prevalence of young people reading compared to their parents and family members has been revealed" (Kalinchuk, 2019). A. Kendall notes, that there is a stereotype that young people are often seen as passive, uncritical consumers of low-quality texts, who rarely read for pleasure and prefer magazines and television to books. In fact, the reality of young people's reading habits is more nuanced, complex, and dynamic (Kendall, 2008). The study of this reality is of particular interest for further modeling and predicting the dynamics of various spheres of society, including inculcating of spiritual and moral values and guidelines. After all, students are the vanguard of society, on which the future of the country depends.

*The purpose of the study* is to conduct a sociological analysis of the dynamics of the reading habits of modern Russian students.

In order to implement the purpose of the study it is necessary to solve the following *tasks*:

- 1) based on the results of a specific sociological research to study the dynamics of value-reflexive attitude to books and reading as a traditional component of the mentality, social capital of the individual, specific social groups in Russian society;
- 2) to reveal the dynamics of reading strategies (amount of reading, structure of reading preferences, choice of traditional/new reading formats) in the context of turbulent cultural forms;

3) to conduct a comparative analysis of reading habits dynamics among students in Russian cities representing different levels of socio-cultural space in the core – periphery coordinate system. The core is seen as more involved in global information flows, which can help it adapt to the challenges of the big society. The periphery's exclusion from the “nodes” of global information flows can lead to the archaization of its socio-cultural space. But the core, as a carrier of innovation, faces threats of destruction of the traditional socio-cultural code to a greater extent than the periphery.

### Research methods

In order to analyze the dynamics of students' reading habits, the results of the author's sociological study “Circle of reading fiction by Russian students” were used. We consider reading fiction to be the core of reading habits, since it is fiction that represents one of the main means of forming an idea of national culture and reflects the features of national, cultural and linguistic development (Poelueva, Indrikova, 2020; Borodaeva, 2012). Classical texts of fiction continue to fulfill the most important cultural and civilizational mission in the media socialization of modern youth to this day (Poelueva, Indrikova, 2020).

The method of collecting primary information was a questionnaire survey. The first wave of the study took place in February 2016 and covered students of universities in Astrakhan (N = 400) and Volgograd (N = 400), among whom 78.2% were students of technical specialization, 11% – socio-economic, 2.6% – humanities, 1.3% – natural sciences, and 6.9% did not indicate their specialization (results of the first wave, see, for example, Dulina et al., 2017). The second wave was implemented in June 2019 in Moscow (N = 2100), Volgograd (N = 460) and Astrakhan (N = 400). The participants included students of different professional training profiles: technical sciences – 32.8% of respondents, natural sciences –

5.9%, social-humanities – 23.7%, management sciences – 8.1%, economic sciences – 19.2%, legal sciences – 5.4%, military sciences – 0.4%.

The main thematic blocks of the set of tools that meet the objectives of the study: 1) value-reflexive attitude to books and reading (self-assessment as a Reader of fiction, self-assessment of the volume of reading fiction, the purpose of reading fiction; attitude to books and reading as a value of modern civilization, the transformation of its functions in terms of informatization); 2) reading strategies (channels for obtaining fiction, sources of information about new fiction, technical channels for reading fiction); 3) readers' preferences (genre preferences, works of fiction read over the past year, identification of a favorite work of fiction, a favorite fictional protagonist, choice of a protagonist for a personal meeting with an explanation of the reasons for the choice).

The choice of regions for analysis corresponds to the objectives of the study: Moscow is positioned as the core, included in the global information space; other regions are defined in terms of periphery, but it is assumed that the level of their periphery will be different. The Volgograd Oblast, where the administrative center is the city with population exceeding one million, Volgograd, tends more toward the core; the Astrakhan Oblast, where the administrative center, Astrakhan, has just over 500,000 inhabitants (534,241 as of January 1, 2019), demonstrates a much greater degree of peripherality. We analyzed the dynamics of the reading habits of students in Astrakhan and Volgograd, and compared the results of the study in the cities, representing different levels of socio-cultural space in the core – periphery coordinate system.

The study was of a probing nature, the task of representing the sample was not set, so the immediate results we obtained can be applied only to a targeted sample of surveyed students, or be used as a reference data. However, the total number of students interviewed allows making reasonable

assumptions, formulate working hypotheses, and draw general conclusions. They will undoubtedly be in demand by specialists in the field of education in similar future studies. The array of obtained data was processed using Vortex (2016) and SPSS (2019) software packages.

### Research findings

Structural elements of readers' habits, in our opinion, are value-reflexive attitude to books, self-assessment as a Reader, motives for reading fiction. It is these elements that determine the value meaning of reading activity and the degree of involvement in those layers of spiritual culture, which have a direct influence on the formation of the individual's worldview and behavior, find expression in the moral consciousness and social practice of people (Borodaeva, 2012).

In this sense, an important indicator is the distribution of answers to the question "What category of people do you consider yourself to be?" (Tab. 1). As we can see, in the assessment of the parameters of reader activity in 2019 the leading position is "I like to read and I read fiction with pleasure", while in 2016 this position was comparable in the proportion of choices with the positions "I read fiction when I have no other way to spend my leisure time" and "I read fiction

only when necessary". In Moscow the greatest proportion of those who like to read (53.5%) was recorded, but the proportion of book lovers has also increased in the cities of the Lower Volga Region. The proportion of those who read out of necessity, on the contrary, decreased, to a greater extent in Astrakhan.

The leading position "I don't read much, but I'd like to read more" remained unchanged when answering the question "How would you rate your own reading of fiction?" (Tab. 2). In our view, it indicates that in all of the cities represented in the study reading is perceived by students as a value orientation – not only can they appreciate their involvement in reading as a practice, but in most they express a desire to develop their reading skills. It is noteworthy that most of these self-critical respondents were in Moscow. In 2019, Moscow led in the number of respondents who read a lot. Astrakhan, on the contrary, topped the anti-rating; it has the largest number of respondents who do not read much, but enough for themselves (and their proportion has grown since 2016).

In addition, this result may reflect bookishness as a traditional feature of Russian mentality, which is evident in half of the respondents. But there may be other explanations, namely saturation of student

Table 1. Answers of respondents to the question "What category of people do you consider yourself to be?", % of respondents

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
I love to read and I read fiction with pleasure	30.3	32.0	30.3	39.3	36.8	53.5	49.0
I read fiction when I have no other way to spend my leisure time	30.8	32.5	32.0	32.0	28.4	22.6	24.8
I read fiction only when necessary	27.6	26.3	27.4	22.3	24.3	16.0	18.2
I don't read fiction at all	8.2	7.6	7.9	5.1	7.5	4.7	5.2
Hesitate to respond	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.8	2.9	2.6
Refusal to respond	1.7	0.5	1.2	0	0.2	0.3	0.3
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: own compilation.

Table 2. Answers of respondents to the question “How would you rate your reading of fiction?”, % of respondents

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
I read a lot	7.5	7.0	7.1	10.7	7.7	16.0	14.0
I don't read much, but enough for myself	23.6	26.6	25.0	28.4	22.6	20.0	21.5
I don't read much, but I'd like to read more	45.2	46.1	45.8	44.9	49.0	50.7	49.7
I don't read much	18.8	15.7	17.3	15.5	18.1	10.7	12.5
When I finish studying, I'll quit reading	1.9	0.5	1.2	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.0
Hesitate to respond	2.2	1.1	1.6	0.0	0.6	1.3	1.0
Refusal to respond	0.8	3.0	2.0	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: own compilation.

life areas. Therefore, reading does not take priority in the daily routine, which is also typical of students from other countries due to the intensity of classes, busy social life, and other factors (Erdem, 2015).

The analysis of the goals of reading fiction shows that among the students of Astrakhan since 2016 the proportion of the answers “preparing for classes”, “information”, “learning about the world around us”, “pleasure” has increased (Tab. 3). Overall, according to those surveyed, in 2016 students were most likely to read works of fiction for information and to prepare for classes, while in 2019 the priority goals were to get information and read for pleasure. Moreover, among students of Moscow

universities in the hierarchy of reading goals, the option “preparing for classes” takes only the fifth place, whereas in Volgograd and Astrakhan – the first and second, respectively. In Moscow, the option “reading for self-education” is a higher priority, although in the cities of the Lower Volga Region the proportion of choices has increased. We should note that the demand for the educational (“self-education”) function of reading activity is an indicator of the educational process efficiency in terms of the adequacy of the created conditions for individual and personal development. In a daily or weekly routine, Moscow university students also find more time to read for pleasure or leisure.

Table 3. Distribution of students' answers to the question “For what purposes and how often do you read fiction?”, % of respondents who chose the answer option “once a day and more often” / ranks

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
Information	25.5/2	26.6/1	25.9/2	35.5/1	25.2/2	31.4/1	31.0/1
Pleasure	18.0/5	22.5/4	20.2/4	25.6/3	24.5/3	31.1/2	29.3/2
Preparing for classes	27.6/1	24.9/2–3	26.5/1	32.7/2	25.8/1	27.0/5	27.6/3
Self-education	18.5/3–4	14.6/6	16.8/5	24.1/4	21.5/4	28.1/3	26.6/4
Leisure time and entertainment	18.5/3–4	24.9/2–3	21.6/3	21.6/5	20.4/5	27.8/4	25.8/5
Self-development and self-understanding	13.5/6–7	16.0/5	14.6/6	15.2/7	15.5/6	24.3/6	21.7/6
Learning about the world around us	13.5/6–7	13.0/7	13.3/7	18.0/6	14.0/7	18.9/7	18.0/7
<b>Average</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>21.0</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>25.2</b>

Source: own compilation.

The least demanded is the cognitive function. Less and less books are read for learning about the world around us, for self-development and self-understanding. Although in the not too distant by historical standards, the Soviet past, the notion of the prevailing social function of reading was ingrained: “Reading is not entertainment, but education and enlightenment” (Kalegina, Kormishina, 2018, p. 128). In the modern world, the main sources of information are most often social networks, various Internet resources, saturated with simulacra and in many ways alienating from the knowledge of the real, physical world of nature, the self, and sociality.

The intensity of comprehension of all purposes of reading fiction is the highest among students of Moscow universities. This result increased by 5.4% among Astrakhan students, while among Volgograd students it remains within the statistical discrepancy.

As for the dynamics of the value-reflexive attitude toward books, the proportion of respondents who consider books a source of spiritual development and those who believe that the art of reading should be taught has increased (*Tab. 4*). At the same time, the proportion of students who fully agree with the statement “A book is a means to improve the educational level” decreased. The influence of electronic culture was manifested in

the growing number of respondents who believe that e-books will replace paper books, and that the home library is no longer a necessity. In 2019, the proportion of those who strongly agree that the home library is no longer a necessity was 17.8%, 23.7% chose the answer option “rather agree”, 18.9% – “rather disagree”, 17.4% – “strongly disagree”, and 20.9% hesitated to answer. That is, more than a third believe that a home library is necessary, every fifth hesitates to respond, and more than 40% believe that it is not necessary. We should note that according to VCIOM data for 2018, “87% of Russians have a home library, but of varying sizes. Small libraries with less than 100 books prevail (44%), they are more common among young people from 18 to 24 years old (57%). The largest libraries with books more than 1,000 pcs have the older generation from 60 years old (8%)” (Zubova, 2018, p. 33).

We also analyze the dynamics of students’ reading strategies in terms of their choice of technical channels, sources of obtaining fiction, and sources of information about new fiction.

It is worth noting that the proportion of references to all the sources of access to texts of fiction presented in the questionnaire: the Internet, bookstores, home and public libraries, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, who make up the

Table 4. Students’ value-reflexive attitude toward books, % of respondents who chose the answer option “Strongly agree” when answering the question “Do you agree with the following statements?”

Respond option	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
A book is a means to improve the educational level	73.3	65.3	69.3	65.7	59.8	61.6	61.8
A book is a source of spiritual development	58.4	52.0	55.2	60.9	59.1	59.1	59.4
The art of reading should be taught	19.0	13.0	16.0	36.8	34.0	32.4	33.2
A book is a source of aesthetic pleasure	32.9	29.0	30.9	36.8	30.1	29.1	30.3
E-books replace paper books	13.7	12.7	13.2	19.3	20.2	17.3	18.0
Home library is no longer a necessity	10.8	14.4	12.6	18.3	18.3	17.6	17.8
Source: own compilation.							



Table 5. Answers of respondents to the question “Where do you get books to read?”, % of respondents

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
I get them from the Internet	55.0	66.7	60.1	73.0	77.6	65.3	72.2
I buy them	21.2	20.1	20.5	39.6	40.6	61.6	47.3
I have a large library at home	22.6	24.9	24.2	33.1	28.8	40.9	34.3
I take them from friends, relatives, etc.	15.6	13.0	14.2	23.2	24.9	29.6	25.9
I go to the library	20.0	17.9	19.6	25.3	25.2	18.9	23.1
<b>Average</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>28.5</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>43.3</b>	<b>40.6</b>

Note: the sum of the responses exceeds 100%, as it was possible to give more than one response.  
Source: own compilation.

interpersonal circle of communication has significantly increased (*Tab. 5*). On average, the intensity of the practice of receiving or acquiring works of fiction is highest among university students in Moscow. They are more likely than students in the Lower Volga Region to buy books, turn to their home library, relatives, and acquaintances, but less often to the Internet and the public library. Most likely, the influence of material status on reading strategies manifests itself here. And book culture under these conditions of social stratification can acquire features of elitism.

According to the results of our study, the main sources of information about new works of fiction

are the Internet, relatives and friends, which correlates with the results of other studies of students' reading habits (see, for example, Akulich et al., 2018, p. 45; Pimenova, Khakimova, 2018, pp. 182–184). But the study of this issue in dynamics shows a significant increase in the intensity of reference to such sources of information about new works as the Internet, friends, teachers, relatives (*Tab. 6*). It is also noteworthy that students in Moscow more often turn to friends and relatives than students in Astrakhan and Volgograd; Volgograd students somewhat less often turn to friends and relatives and much less often to university professors.

Table 6. Answers of respondents to the question “From what sources do you mostly get information about new works of fiction?”, % of respondents

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
Internet	68.8	75.9	71.7	85.1	85.2	84.1	84.8
Friends	36.5	35.2	35.8	53.5	49.9	65.1	56.2
Lecturers	20.9	22.2	21.7	36.4	23.7	33.4	32.4
Relatives	14.2	15.2	14.7	21.2	18.9	28.9	23.0
TV	9.1	9.2	9.6	9.1	9.9	7.8	8.9
Newspapers, journals	5.3	5.1	5.4	5.3	6.5	8.0	6.6
Librarian	2.4	1.9	2.2	4.8	4.3	3.3	4.1
Radio	1.9	2.7	2.5	3.3	1.5	3.1	2.6

Note: the sum exceeds 100%, as it was possible to give more than one response.  
Source: own compilation.

When answering this question, respondents could give their own answer. Among the responses received in this way were the following: “I only read fanfiction”, “From book stores”, “I go shopping and if a book interests me by its cover, title and abstract, I take it”, “Books on universes are of interest to me”, “I don’t get information on new works”, “I don’t read and I am not interested in new fiction”, “I don’t read new works. I like classics: Tolkien, Defoe, Twain”, “I don’t read books published less than 30 years ago, with some exceptions”, “I just go to bookstores. Also, sometimes on the back of a book there is some information about cool books from other series”, “My boyfriend has a good social circle, they can always advice me a good piece of work. For example, I recently read Dale Carnegie, and now I am reading George Peterson’s just-translated *12 Rules for Life*”<sup>4</sup>.

When analyzing reading practices, it is important to examine strategies for choosing paper or electronic media. Thus, a comparative analysis conducted by other authors shows that reading speed does not depend on the format, while understanding cause-and-effect relationships and memorization is

more effective using paper books (Singer, Alexander, 2017; Clinton, 2019). At the same time, young people are well aware of increased fatigue, decreased concentration when reading from a screen, and that text on paper is remembered faster and better than on electronic media (Lebedeva et al., 2020; Li et al., 2011; Baron, 2013). Research results also show that when reading a complex and long academic text (which is important when interpreting our results), preference is given to a paper-based media, while for short and entertaining one – digital media (Kurbanoglu, Špiranec, Grassian, Mizrachi, Catts, 2014).

The results of our study to examine the picture of reading strategies in relation to the choice of format for acquaintance with the work of fiction remains unchanged: about half of student youths acquainted with the full text of a fiction work on paper, every three-fourth – on electronic media (Tab. 7). This correlates with the results of other empirical studies of students’ reading habits, according to which approximately one in three people prefers an e-book (Anisina, 2016; Drozhina, 2011, 113). One in five does not read the full text,

Table 7. Answers of respondents to the question “What sources do you use for reading works of fiction?”, % of respondents

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
The full text of a work of fiction on paper	52.2	46.3	49.6	47.5	45.2	55.9	53.1
The full text of a work of fiction on electronic media	26.2	33.6	29.7	33.2	34.4	25.1	27.6
Excerpts from the text in a chrestomathy	1.0	1.9	1.3	2.5	1.1	2.3	2.2
Summary of a work of fiction	11.3	9.2	10.2	9.1	10.8	8.1	8.6
Adaptation of a work of fiction in the cinema or on the TV	7.2	6.5	6.7	7.4	7.1	6.5	6.7
Staging a work of fiction in the theater	2.1	2.5	2.5	0.3	1.5	2.2	1.8
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Source: own compilation.							

<sup>4</sup> In the respondents’ editorial.

but only reads fragments from the textbook and a summary of the work, and prefers screen adaptations and theatrical productions. In general, there is a preference for paper books, which correlates with the results of other empirical studies (Asfandiyarova, 2019; Drozhina, 2011; Maslenkova, 2015; Woody et al., 2010).

According to the results of our study, as in other empirical studies (Schijns, Smit, 2010), girls are more likely than young men to choose the full text of a fiction work on paper. Whereas young men are more likely to prefer the full text on electronic media, digests, and film version. Among university students in Astrakhan, the proportion of those who read the full text of a fiction work on paper has decreased. In 2019, the proportion who chose this answer option in Moscow is much higher than in

Astrakhan and Volgograd. While among Astrakhan residents there are more of those who prefer the full text of a work of fiction on electronic media.

In the structure of reading habits, we can identify a content component – reading preferences in the choice of books of fiction by genre, specific authors. When analyzing the dynamics of this component, we can note some changes in the structure of reading preferences of fiction genres (*Tab. 8*). Works of classical literature are most read in Moscow, while in Astrakhan and Volgograd people are still interested in fantasy. Among all respondents, interest in crime fiction has increased, and most of all among Astrakhan residents. Approximately every third of all respondents continue to read adventure novels. Interest in psychological novels has increased significantly in all cities, with the greatest preference

Table 8. Answers of respondents to the question “What works of fiction do you prefer to read? (more than one answer is possible)”, % of respondents / ranks

Respond options	2016			2019			
	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Total	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Total
Works of classical literature	37.7/2	36.9/3	37.2/2	35.1/3	37.4/2	51.3/1	41.3/1
Fantasy	40.9/1	41.7/1	41.0/1	40.2/1	41.3/1	29.3/6	36.9/2
Crime fiction	25.5/5	34.1/5	29.9/5	34.8/4	36.8/3	37.2/2-3	36.3/3
Adventure novels	36.8/3	34.7/4	35.5/3	38.4/2	30.1/6	33.9/4	34.1/4
Psychological novels	21.9/8	22.0/7	21.5/8	28.0/6	26.9/7	37.2/2-3	30.7/5
Science fiction	25.0/6	40.9/2	32.0/4	32.6/5	34.0/4	24.7/8	30.4/6
Romantic novel	31.3/4	16.5/9	23.8/7	25.8/7	30.8/5	32.6/5	29.7/7
Drama	22.8/7	25.5/6	23.9/6	19.2/8	21.7/8	25.1/7	22.0/8
Comedy	20.7/9	19.5/8	20.1/9	16.7/9	20.9/9	18.3/9	18.6/9
Thriller	9.9/14	13.0/11	11.4/14	15.7/10	16.1/10	13.6/13	15.1/10
Poetry	13.7/13	11.9/13	12.5/12	12.1/11	15.7/11	16.8/11	14.9/11
Historical fiction	17.8/10	12.2/12	14.7/10	10.1/16	12.9/12	18.1/10	13.7/12
Humorous literature	14.4/12	14.4/10	14.2/11	10.6/14-15	12.7/13	14.8/12	12.7/13
Epic novel	8.9/15	8.9/15	8.8/16	10.9/13	11.0/15	12.1/14	11.3/14
Folklore, fairy tales, mythology	16.1/11	7.3/16	11.9/13	10.6/14-15	11.4/14	11.6/15	11.2/15
Action	7.0/16	11.1/14	9.0/15	11.4/12	9.2/16	4.9/18	8.5/16
Plays	5.0/17	5.4/17	5.2/18	6.8/17	6.9/17	8.1/17	7.3/17
Memoirs	4.3/18	6.8/17	5.4/17	3.5/18	5.6/18	8.7/16	5.9/18
I don't like to read	2.6	1.6	2.1	3.8	3.4	2.6	3.3

Source: own compilation.

for this genre in Moscow. Astrakhan residents interest in science fiction has increased, while in Volgograd the situation is opposite. The audience for romance novels in Astrakhan decreased, while in Volgograd it doubled. Among Astrakhan residents there was a slight increase in interest toward thrillers, but a decrease in interest toward folklore. Results of our analysis of the structure of reading preferences correlates with the results of N.V. Kalinchuk's empirical research, according to which foreign and Russian classics rank first in popularity among students, about half read fiction, every third reads crime fiction, every fourth reads romance novels and fantasy (Kalinchuk, 2019, p. 26).

Students also answered open-ended questions: "What is the author and title of three works of fiction that you have read this year?" and "What is your favorite work of fiction? (Write the author and title)". It is worth noting that when we asked 2,960 students about works read over the past year, 1,750 students named three works, 1,880 students named two works, and 2,070 students – one work, which is 59%, 63%, and 70% of the total number of respondents, respectively. This question thus received 5,500 responses. The favorite work of fiction was named 2,140 times, which is 72% of the number of responses. Thus, the proportion of active readers and big fans of fiction is almost identical. During the analysis the answers to open-ended questions were grouped by genre (Tab. 9).

The most read authors are Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky (5.6% and 5.1% of the answers, respectively). The works of Mikhail Bulgakov, Aleksandr Pushkin, and Nikolay Gogol over the past year gained 3.9%, 3.1%, and 1.6% of respondents' answers, respectively, and these Russian writers are also among the most famous and most read. In general, when answering the question about the works read during the last year, the national literary classics were recorded in every third of the presented answers. The most read works were *The Master and Margarita*, *War and Peace*, *Crime and Punishment* (3.9%, 2.5% and 1.3% of answers respectively).

Russian classics in the list of favorite works makes up 46.1%. The authors of the most favorite works are Mikhail Bulgakov (11%), Leo Tolstoy (6.9%), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (6.3%), Aleksandr Pushkin (4.5%), Mikhail Lermontov (2.4%), Nikolay Gogol (2.3%), Ivan Turgenev (0.9%), Aleksandr Griboyedov and Anton Chekhov (0.8% each). Among the most favorite works the first three places are *The Master and Margarita*, *War and Peace*, and *Crime and Punishment*.

It is notable that in the list of the most read works foreign classics are as popular Russian classics (36.2% and 33.6% of responses, respectively). The most popular authors were Erich Maria Remarque (5.2%), Ray Bradbury and Stephen King (2.6% each), Jack London (1.6%), Francis Scott

Table 9. Distribution of students' answers by genre preference (% of all answers)

Genres	"Name the author and the title of THREE works of fiction that you have read this year"	"What is your favorite work of fiction?"
Russian classics	33.6	46.1
Foreign classics	36.0	32.2
Books about war	8.5	5.6
Science fiction	6.0	2.4
Anti-utopia	5.8	4.9
Horror	3.0	1.8
Fantasy	3.9	5.5
Crime fiction	1.9	2.5
Source: own compilation.		

Fitzgerald and Jane Austin (1.1% each), father and son Dumas (1%). The most read books of foreign classics were the works of Erich Maria Remarque. One of them, *Three Comrades*, scored more than 1% of responses (1.7%).

Every third respondent listed as favorite works of foreign classics. Among the most favorite writers are Erich Maria Remarque (3.4%), Ray Bradbury (2.3%), the Bronte sisters and Oscar Wilde (1.9% each), Stephen King (1.7%), Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1.6%), Father and Son Dumas (1.4%), Jack London (1.2%), John Tolkien (0.8%). Most like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Three Comrades* and *Martin Eden*.

The questionnaire included the question “What fictional character would you like to meet in real life and why?” There were 869 detailed answers to this question. Among the most popular characters were characters from both Russian and foreign classics: Sherlock Holmes, Woland, Rodion Raskolnikov, Evgeny Bazarov, Grigory Pechorin, Behemoth, Alexander Chatsky, Evgeny Onegin, Natasha Rostova.

Choosing a communication partner from among the literary characters, the respondents simulate a virtual meeting scene and project their own expectations onto their imaginary interlocutor. Some readers look for a literary character as a friend and partner: “*Ilya Muromets, he’s kind*” (man, Moscow), “*Ilya Oblomov! Let’s talk! There are misunderstandings*” (woman, Moscow), “*Sometimes I really miss Sonia Marmeladova, to come and save me from all the horrible things in this world. Amen*” (woman, Moscow), “*Robinson Crusoe, to hang out together*” (woman, Moscow). Others see the literary hero as a teacher, a wise mentor: “*Alyosha Karamazov, because I want to learn to be an open and understanding person*” (woman, Moscow), “*Woland: to gain wisdom, to see justice*” (woman, Volgograd), “*Zarathustra, I would like to learn his philosophy from the horse’s mouth*” (man, Moscow). Finally, part

of the respondents perceived the literary character as a crony, someone they knew well from their childhood or youth: “*Hey, Pechorin, what’s up?*”, “*Mefody, show me your plait?*” (woman, Moscow). The desire to maximize the intimacy of the scene of an encounter with a literary character is observed in those cases where respondents use colloquialisms in their responses.

Some respondents expressed a desire to actively influence events described in the text and to change their trajectory: “*Sonechka from The Storm, to dissuade her from throwing herself into the river*” (woman, Moscow), “*The protagonist of The Catcher in the Rye, to talk the night away*” (woman, Moscow), “*Mephistopheles from Goethe’s Faust. I’d be glad to make a covenant*” (man, Volgograd), “*Matroskin the Cat, to have philosophical conversations sitting in the kitchen*” (woman, Moscow), “*Golden Fish, to fulfill my wishes*” (man, Moscow). Respondents often explain their choice of a literary character for a personal meeting by the similarity with him, without specifying the criteria for this similarity: “*Alexander Andreevich Chatsky, because there is a lot to learn from him and we are similar*” (woman, Moscow), “*Elizabeth Bennett, because she is a lot like me*” (woman, Moscow).

All answers to open-ended questions are marked with an emotional-evaluation aspect, and in a significant part of the statements the respondents’ personality assessment comes to the forefront and is emphasized especially strongly: “*Anna Karenina, in my opinion, is an example to follow*” (woman, Volgograd), “*Pushkin, he is cool*” (woman, Moscow), “*Chatsky, to shake his hand and admire his sharp wit and unsurpassed ability to debate*” (man, Astrakhan), “*Danko – because of admiration for his sacrifice*” (man, Moscow), “*Nasreddin Hodja, for he is the wisest man!*” (woman, Astrakhan), “*Pierre Bezukhov, because he is not corrupted by power, money, etc. and I am sure that keeping company with him is much more pleasant than with*

*the majority of the country's population today*" (man, Moscow), *"Andrei Bolkonsky, because he is a man of honor"* (woman, Moscow), *"Mr. Darcy, as a man who overcame his principles and prejudices; Tyrion Lanister, because he likes to drink"* (woman, Volgograd), *"Vasily Terkin (in any situation he never gets confused)"* (man, Volgograd), *"Andrei Sokolov. He is a man of will, with an inner core, who even after the war and the death of loved ones did not lose his humanity"* (man, Astrakhan), *"Dick from the novel The Fifteen-Year-Old Captain. He is brave and quick-minded"* (male, Moscow), *"Dorian Gray, he's really handsome"* (woman, Moscow), *"Dunno – mischievous, funny and always copes with difficulties"* (woman, Moscow). Personality assessment is expressed either by listing the main qualities of the character, real or imaginary, through the use of attributive vocabulary (smart, beautiful, kind), or by pointing out the character's achievements (copes with difficulties, never gets confused).

The respondents see themselves as participants in an imaginary meeting scene, ascribing to themselves a certain role, an active communicator or observer, from which we can conclude that the reader does not perceive the symbolic world of the fiction text in a detached way, but thinks of themselves as part of this world. Only in those few cases when respondents refuse to choose a character for an imaginary meeting, their desire to distinguish between the fictitious world of fictional characters and actual reality is manifested: *"I've never thought about it. I seriously don't know. THERE ARE TOO MANY OF THEM. And for what purpose would I pull them out of the canon world?"*, *"No one, let them stay in the pages of the books"* (man, Astrakhan)<sup>5</sup>.

Generally, the analysis of the answers to the open-ended questions allows concluding that the majority of the respondents in the three cities show similar tendencies: the majority tends to choose a character from the classics (both Russian and

foreign) as their desired meeting partner; in the modeled meeting scene the respondents assign themselves a certain role; the literary character is personified and given a certain status; all statements are marked with emotionally-evaluative vocabulary and specific syntax. In addition, each such answer to an open-ended question, while unique, is a kind of "snapshot", a reflection not only of the respondent's inner world, but also of the relationship of this world to the social world. These answers reflect what the respondent values highly. One cannot help but wonder what the respondent values in Anna Karenina as a role model? What values are significant for those respondents who are willing to make a deal with Mephistophile, with Woland as the measure of wisdom and justice?

### Conclusion

The relevance of reading habits as a social practice is not in doubt. Sociological science has accumulated experience in understanding various aspects of this social phenomenon: the role of reading in the formation of the spiritual world of personality and the features of reading practices in specific Russian regions are actively studied, the transformation of reading needs and interests in the context of such aspects as reading crisis, interest in reading, variability of reading practices under the influence of various factors (man-made challenges, new text reality) are analyzed in detail, some structural elements of reading practices (value-reflective, motivational) are analyzed, etc. The study of reading habits of modern Russian students is relevant because of the socio-demographic characteristics of this social group and its role in society. The results of empirical studies conducted among the students of Moscow, Volgograd and Astrakhan universities allow drawing conclusions about the dynamics of reading habits of culture, identifying similarities and differences in its actualization, including through the analysis of levels of sociocultural space in the core – periphery coordinate system.

<sup>5</sup> In the respondents' editorial.

The prevalence of the axiological component of reading habits is characteristic of the majority of respondents – they noted their love of reading and confirmed that they read fiction. The leading positions among young people’s reading goals are preparation for classes and obtaining information, with self-education and self-development following in this ranking. The proportion of those who like to read has increased significantly over the past four years. Students are quite critical about their own reading and admit that they “don’t read much”, but most say that they “would like to read more”. Respondents determine the frequency of their reading using the phrases “once a day and more often” and “once a week”. The features of reading preferences revealed in the study can be explained, first of all, by the main type of their activity – intensive studying at the university.

The content structure of the reading preferences of this group of young people can be defined as follows: classical literature is the most preferred, with a continuing interest in other genres. As an important conclusion, we should point out that the range of reading among Russian students is diverse. It is worth noting that a fairly large percentage of respondents did not list a single work as their favorite or read. This fact can be explained by the study load and, as a consequence, the lack of free time, as well as the availability of other types of

entertainment, mainly in the virtual environment of the Internet.

A comparative analysis of the data obtained in the surveys in Moscow, Volgograd, and Astrakhan also reveals differences in the reading habits of students in these cities. The main indicators for the students of Moscow universities are higher than for the students of Astrakhan and Volgograd. The values and activity components of reading are lower for respondents from Volgograd, the city with population exceeding one million, than for those from Astrakhan.

The results and conclusions presented in the publication allow expanding the possibilities of sociological analysis of the reading habits of students as a socio-demographic group that occupies a special place in the social system – as the vanguard of society, the future professional elite. Therefore, the results of the study can serve as a basis for public discussions and scientific research concerning the preservation of the Man of Culture, the specifics of cultural development of Russian society, the preservation of a common civilizational code with regional diversity, and the succession of generations. The findings from the two study waves can serve as a basis for studying trends in students’ reading habits (as well as in comparing other socio-demographic groups) at different levels of sociocultural space – cross-country, regional, etc.

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### Information about the Authors

Ekaterina V. Kargapolova – Doctor of Sciences (Sociology), Associate Professor, professor of department, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (36, Stremyanny Lane, Moscow, 117997, Russian Federation; e-mail: K474671@list.ru)

Yuliya A. Davydova – Candidate of Sciences (History), Associate Professor, associate professor of department, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (36, Stremyanny Lane, Moscow, 117997, Russian Federation; e-mail: ylkadav@mail.ru)

Vera V. D'yakova – Candidate of Sciences (Sociology), associate professor of department, Astrakhan State Technical University (16, Tatishchev Street, Astrakhan, 414056, Russian Federation; e-mail: vvdyakova@yandex.ru)

Marina A. Simonenko – Candidate of Sciences (Philology), Associate Professor, associate professor of department, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics (36, Stremyanny Lane, Moscow, 117997, Russian Federation; e-mail: masimonenko@yandex.ru)

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