

## **Types of Higher Education Services Consumption in Russia: Transformation Factors in Focus**

**Anna S. Frolova**  
**Altai State Institute of Culture**

**Elena V. Balashova**  
**Altai State Institute of Culture**

**Tatiana A. Kurnikova**  
**Altai State Institute of Culture**

**Marina S. Kuran**  
**Altai State Institute of Culture**

*The paper briefly describes the composition of socio-technological, socio-managerial, socio-economic, socio-psychological factors that have influenced the change in the motives of purchasing behavior of modern Russians in the market of educational services in the field of higher education. In particular, the major focus is on the introduction of advanced information and communication technologies in the organized educational process. The study also considers (1) the change of conceptual approaches to the organization of the higher education system in favor of practice-oriented learning; (2) the “obsolescence” of the content of educational programs of higher education; (3) the decline in the quality of services offered on the Russian adult education market, and (4) the mismatch of consumer motives in the minds of the family acting as a collective participant in the educational services market. The author’s also present their expert views on the vectors of further development of the market of services in the field of Russian higher education.*

*Keywords: higher education, Russia, quality, market for educational services, digitalization*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The radical liberal-market reform of the Russian education economy in the 1990s, the intensive introduction of advanced computer and telecommunication systems and technologies into the pedagogical process, coupled with the experimental import of European models of higher school organization, the democratization of access to remote educational resources, fluctuation in demand for educational organizations’ services against the background of revaluation of the basic (instrumental) the values of higher education and the aggravation of the problems of cognitive and economic accessibility of higher

education gave observers a reason to talk about the transformation of consumer behavior motives in the Russian market of educational services.

An educational service as a consumer item has many features. First of all, such a service has an ideal (immaterial) form. Therefore, its consumption is inseparable from the process of provision. Second, the service is a product of social interaction, and its provision is associated with the translation of social experience. Third, the subjectively recognized useful properties are characteristic of an educational service. It can satisfy the group and individual educational and professional information needs. Fourth, the cost of educational service is directly dependent on its current and prospective state and socio-economic significance.

The paper briefly examines some of the reasons and circumstances that led to the restructuring of the model of consumer behavior in the market of educational services in the field of higher education in modern Russia, which traditionally reacts sensitively to the declared demands of the audience, the current needs of the labor market, the dynamics of the purchasing power of the population, changes in the socio-demographic situation, the state of indicators of scientific, technical, technological, industrial and territorial development of regional and national farms, professional fashion, etc.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The specificity of the subject field of research dictated the need to involve methods aimed at identifying the qualitative characteristics of the system of phenomena and processes under study; descriptive inverse factor analysis was used as the basic research method, which allows inductively investigating the variety of cause-effect relationships in the complex system under consideration.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study includes the following:

- The concept of factors of social development (the theory of the functional connection of social phenomena) of the Russian historian, sociologist and jurist M. M. Kovalevsky (1851–1916), arguing for the pluralism of social causality (Kovalevsky, 2021);
- Ideas about the role of educational institutions in the context of the implementation of the processes of upward vertical social mobility, economic and professional stratification of the classic of sociology and cultural studies P. A. Sorokin (1889–1968) (1959);
- Ideas of the American pioneer of the sociology of higher education B. R. Clark (2007) about the stratification background of inequality in access to higher education;
- The theory of social characters of the American sociologist D. Riesman (1909–2002) (2001), revealing the motives of consumer activity, mechanisms of external participation in the processes of formation and control of consumer behavior of a pop culture person, entirely dependent on the opinion and expectations of the “other.”
- Views on the classification of types of consumption of services, the main motives of consumer choice, variables influencing consumer decision, set out in the works of specialists in the field of theoretical and applied marketing D. F. Engel, D. Kollat, R. D. Blackwell (1968), P. Kotler, G. Armstrong, W. Wong, J. Saunders (1999), etc.

## **RESULTS**

Based on the theoretical basis of the study described above, we will consider a range of factors that change the usual appearance of consumer activity of modern Russians in the field of adult education.

### **Digitalization of Adult Education**

Information and telecommunication technologies have become the driver of the development of the educational environment of a modern domestic university, enriched the classical lecture and seminar system of education with alternative forms of organizing the pedagogical process (among which, for example, a video lecture, an online test, a virtual discussion platform (forum, chat), a webinar, an online exam, etc.).

Due to the borrowing of proven foreign technological solutions, a full-fledged market segment of Russian-language distance education for adults with a consumer audience of many thousands has developed in the country in a relatively short time, demonstrating (especially during the pandemic that catalyzed consumer activity) high (up to 30% annually since 2019) growth rates (Kolesnikova, 2021). There is a tendency to reduce the cost of educational services provided using telecommunications technologies, a key role in the formation and consolidation of which was played by the widespread use of open distance learning programs, specialized educational and developmental environments, multi-user platforms for mass online education (e.g., Netology, Open Education, Yandex.Practicum, “Coursera,” “Geekbrains,” “Loftblog,” “Skillbox,” “Stepic,” “Udemy,” etc.). The intensification of the processes of informatization of education will significantly increase the coverage of youth with accredited higher education programs in most subjects of the Russian Federation.

### **The Institutionalization of the Paradigm Shift of Higher Education**

The answer to the urgent need for conceptual modernization of philosophical approaches to the organization of the educational process in the post-Soviet Russian higher school was the choice in favor of a practice-oriented learning model aimed at forming a range of specific professional competencies critically important in the context of performing certain practical tasks, which has no alternative in the current socio-economic conditions. This fact required, on the one hand, a harmonious synthesis of fundamental education with elements of professional and applied training and, on the other hand, bringing the technical and technological components of the educational process in line with the current stage of the qualitative evolution of the country’s information and telecommunications infrastructure. The undesirable variability of the content of the knowledge, skills and abilities mastered by students, fraught with a mismatch between the public interests formulated in the social order for educational services and the observance of these interests, is leveled by unifying the forms of educational activity and the requirements for the list of competencies formed by the future specialist. The Russian federal state educational standards focused on ensuring the unity of the educational space and the continuity of multi-level educational programs (National Association for the Development of Education and Science, n.d.), determined the similarity of the structure and content of curricula – the main documents regulating the implementation of the educational process – in various educational institutions of higher education. Considering this fact will force a mass applicant from provincial Russia to reconsider the motives of his interregional mobility in the future.

### **“Obsolescence” of the Content of Educational Programs of Higher Education**

In modern Russia, there is a situation in which professional knowledge, skills and abilities once acquired at a higher educational institution quickly cease to meet the high-quality demand for competencies in the labor market. Continuous educational activity in the formats of additional professional education, retraining and advanced training courses becomes a prerequisite for professional self-realization and demand in the realities of the digital economy, where the personal level of education is one of the main criteria of social stratification.

### **The Decline in the Quality of Educational Services for Adults**

From the point of view of the modern average applicant or student, higher education no longer has an obvious correlation with public recognition, career growth, or personal financial well-being; the change in mass perceptions of the social status of the holder of higher education has negatively affected the strength of students’ motivation to study, which directly determines the quality of educational activities. The unfairly low salary level of teachers of state educational institutions of higher education has caused several waves of professional migration of highly qualified teaching staff to more “bread” industries; the departure of specialists from the profession has had a sharply negative impact on the quality of the educational process and learning outcomes. In addition, modern higher education in the traditional (classroom) format is forced to compete with distance education with varying success. Moreover, explosive growth in the share of short-term highly specialized courses offered by initiative groups of specialists of organizations for which educational activity is not the main one in the market of distance education services can be considered a

sign of the times. Subjective assessment of the quality of such services at the stage of consumer decision-making meets serious difficulties due to the lack of an independent expert opinion on their compliance with high standards. Therefore, consumer choice made largely for “random” reasons often becomes erroneous, setting the consumer against distance education in general. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the providers of such services are not responsible for the quality of educational training of students, for the compliance of the content of the disciplines taught with the current requirements of the professional environment and the labor market.

### **The Mismatch of Consumer Motives in the Consciousness of the Family as a Collective Subject of the Educational Services Market**

For customers of educational services (parents of applicants), it is a kind of sociogenic consumption motivated mainly by rational considerations (therefore, the educational strategy of Russian families can be considered utilitarian and pragmatic). However, for the majority of graduate students of modern domestic secondary schools, this consumption is motivated, on the one hand, by a personal impression, and on the other hand, can be regarded as an act of self-presentation, which, according to American sociologist David Riesman (2001), is motivated by the desire to gain public approval through symbolic consumption.

In our opinion, these factors caused the dominance of the rational-economic model of educational services consumption in the domestic industry market.

## **DISCUSSION**

We can make assumptions about the simplification of the following trends in the consumption of educational services by modern Russians in the field of higher education:

- To the emasculation of the educational principle from the educational process in higher education (dictated by the realities of the market, the trend contradicts the rich domestic pre-revolutionary and Soviet pedagogical tradition, considering education as a psychological and pedagogical phenomenon of a complex nature, necessarily including elements of education; in this context, it is difficult to imagine knowledge as a subject of buy and sale);
- To further personalize the offers on the educational services market, to expand the range of distance education services (in the form of short-term courses or training programs) aimed at an adult audience interested in promptly obtaining special professionally relevant knowledge necessary to solve narrow practical tasks; this trend is associated with a trend towards a gradual increase in the market share of unscrupulous providers of online educational services in the field of Russian higher education and, accordingly, a trend towards an increase in the number of consumers dissatisfied with the poor quality of services provided;
- To more active use of entertainment content and game communication tools to solve the problems of stimulating consumer demand when developing effective and ultra-effective marketing strategies for promoting educational services in the field of higher education in the Russian market among young people (the search for mechanisms of third-party influence on the consumer behavior of young market participants will be carried out considering knowledge about the key socio-psychological characteristics of the target audience – for example, about the emotional imperative and impulsiveness of consumer choice, about the stereotyped consumer consciousness of young people, about their desire for self-presentation and unmotivated opposition as initial consumer attitudes, about leisure motivation of network information search activity, etc.);
- To further integrate digital technologies into the organized educational process. The interest of potential consumers in providers of educational services in higher education will probably be more closely related to the general state of the information and telecommunications infrastructure of universities. The consumer decision to purchase educational services will be made considering the available data on (1) how high-tech it is, (2) what is the functionality of

the software of the service provider, (3) what is the ability of the hardware and software at its disposal to withstand global cyber threats, cyber risks, etc.).

## CONCLUSION

The quality, relevance and accessibility of higher education largely determine the strategic prospects of socio-economic development of the state, the level of its global competitiveness, one of the components of which is the current state and growth potential of knowledge-intensive high-tech sectors and sectors of the economy that require a developed personnel base (Agasisti, Egorov, Zinchenko & Leshukov, 2020; Krasnova & Polushkina, 2021; Sklyarova & Malyshev, 2021). The complex of circumstances and conditions that have a direct or indirect impact on the dynamics of the multi-vector development of adult education in modern Russia includes the factors discussed above (the widespread use of information and telecommunications technologies, the change in the conceptual foundations of the development of higher education, the obsolescence of the content of educational programs, the negative dynamics of the quality of educational services, the inconsistency of consumer motives), but, of course, is not limited to them. Changes in the higher education system (reform of higher education, the introduction of federal state educational standards, a noticeable increase in the total volume of computer-mediated communication in the “lecturer – student” pair, the appearance of a competitor in the form of distance learning in correspondence education, etc.) have had a disorienting effect on the average consumer; the regulators of consumer behavior of modern Russians in the market of educational services in the field of higher education are mainly rational and economic considerations.

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