



## INFORMATION SPACE AS A FACTOR IN THE PERCEPTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

### O ESPAÇO DE INFORMAÇÕES COMO UM FATOR NA PERCEPÇÃO DO ENSINO SUPERIOR

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This article presents the results of a study aimed at determining the role of the information space in decision-making related to obtaining higher professional education and choosing a higher education institution.

**Methods and Materials:** A survey is conducted among first-year students of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (Russia) (N=142).

**Results:** Based on the sociological survey, it can be concluded that the choice of higher education is influenced not only by the prospects of the city and chosen profession but also by the media space created by higher education institutions around their activities.

**Conclusion:** The study finds that prospective students most often turn to official websites and social media communities of universities when seeking information about institutions and professions. An interesting finding is that more than 70% of respondents believe that in the future, short-term educational courses could replace traditional higher education, leading to a loss of the original value and role of universities in the lives of the younger generation. This perspective is largely based on information that begins to dominate the media space due to the active work of both educational platforms in the competitive struggle for consumers and opinion leaders. The conclusion is drawn that the communicative policy of higher education institutions needs to pay special attention to the operation of search service algorithms.

**Keywords:** Higher education institution; Higher education diploma; Media space; Modernization of education; Online education; Online courses.





## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** Este artigo apresenta os resultados de um estudo com o objetivo de determinar o papel do espaço de informações na tomada de decisões relacionadas à obtenção de educação profissional superior e à escolha de uma instituição de ensino superior.

**Métodos e materiais:** Foi realizada uma pesquisa entre os alunos do primeiro ano da Universidade Federal de Kazan (Região do Volga) (Rússia) (N=142).

**Resultados:** Com base na pesquisa sociológica, pode-se concluir que a escolha do ensino superior é influenciada não apenas pelas perspectivas da cidade e da profissão escolhida, mas também pelo espaço de mídia criado pelas instituições de ensino superior em torno de suas atividades.

**Conclusão:** O estudo conclui que os futuros alunos recorrem com mais frequência aos sites oficiais e às comunidades de mídia social das universidades ao buscar informações sobre instituições e profissões. Uma descoberta interessante é que mais de 70% dos entrevistados acreditam que, no futuro, os cursos educacionais de curto prazo poderão substituir o ensino superior tradicional, levando à perda do valor original e da função das universidades na vida da geração mais jovem. Essa perspectiva é amplamente baseada em informações que começam a dominar o espaço da mídia devido ao trabalho ativo de ambas as plataformas educacionais na luta competitiva por consumidores e formadores de opinião. A conclusão é que a política de comunicação das instituições de ensino superior precisa dar atenção especial à operação dos algoritmos de serviço de busca.

**Palavras-chave:** Instituição de ensino superior; Diploma de ensino superior; Espaço de mídia; Modernização da educação; Educação on-line; Cursos on-line.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Global trends and tendencies in the global economic system aim at the development of a knowledge economy, which is marked by a strong presence of information and knowledge in all spheres of society. This focus gave higher education a priority both in the formation and self-assertion of the individual and the development and prosperity of society as a whole (Karpova et al., 2021). Hannan (2018) writes that

University graduates are healthier, more likely to vote, and more likely to engage in sociable and charitable work. This is not to mention the higher personal incomes of those with higher education, and the strong correlation between national GDP and educational attainment levels in society.





However, in today's conditions, knowledge has turned into a market product to be sold or purchased. Due to the development of the global Internet, which has opened opportunities for the introduction of new forms of education, we are witnessing the active development of organizations offering short-term training courses to obtain professional skills. Their advertising policy works in the direction of downplaying the role of higher education in obtaining the knowledge needed for professional development.

In this context, the present study aims to define the role of the information space in applicants' decision-making about enrollment to continue their education in Russia. The pursued research objectives include identifying the factors, motives, and reasons guiding university applicants when applying to a university and choosing an educational institution.

## 2 METHODS

The study was conducted from November 1 to November 25 in the form of an online survey in Google Forms.

The object of the study was first-year full-time students of the Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (KFU) (Russia) in the fields of sociology and humanities, natural sciences, and technical and exact sciences. The age of the respondents was above 17 (N=142).

The link to the survey was forwarded to the respondents through the university's institutes. The survey questions were formulated specifically for this study and touched upon the topics of the influence of the information space on the choice of profession and university in particular and the choice to pursue higher education in general. The latter topic came into focus because today the market for short-term online educational courses has also become extensive. In competition, online education companies are actively involved in the media space, partly downplaying the role of traditional higher education. The main questions of the survey included the following: "Why did you choose the KFU?", "Would you say that your choice to pursue higher education was influenced by the media environment you were in as a high school student?", "Did you have thoughts of taking courses at online education organizations, such as Skillbox, Netology, Wayup, and others,





rather than going to university?", "Did any of your classmates/acquaintances/relatives decide not to pursue higher professional education? What was the reason for their choice?", "In your opinion, can short-term educational courses replace traditional higher education in the future?".

### 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Searching the Internet for any information about higher education, one often comes across publications with headlines like "Is it worth getting a higher education in the 21st century?" (Pogodin, 2022), "Is a higher education diploma necessary for a successful career today?" (Khovanskaya, 2022), "If you can take courses in any profession and then get a job without a diploma, why waste time in college/university?" (Kharlov, 2018), "Is higher education necessary? 10 Pros and Cons" (Academica.ru, 2022), and so on. Information presented in these articles tilts the reader toward the possibility of acquiring professional skills and building a career without studying in institutions of higher education. These article titles and texts and comments on forums and social media are partly affected by public results of sociological surveys. For instance, statistics on the number of people working in the profession of their university training, published by Rabota.ru following the results of a survey from August 2021, indicate that only 34% worked in the profession that they had been trained in, 23% had worked in their profession but no longer did, and 43% had never worked in their profession (Rabota.ru, 2021).

Another aggravating factor in the choice of whether or not to go for a higher education degree is the demands of the market, which is ready to accept some specialists without a completed higher education. This is evidenced by the analytics of the Zarplata.ru research center. Almost a third of Russian employers, mainly in IT, digital, advertising, and several other areas do not ask potential employees for a university degree, because experience and skills are more important to them (RIA Novosti, 2021).

These examples suggest that higher education is losing its initial value of obtaining knowledge. Today's youth, consuming the information within their reach and perception, develop their idea of higher education as a complicated method of acquiring the





knowledge required for the profession. A much easier way is to take a 1-3 month online course or to read a couple of articles on the Internet on "What skills should an expert in ... have". As evidence of that, in 2021, venture investments in Russian edTech companies increased by 42% compared to 2020. The main audience of online courses is young people from 18 to 24 years old (46%), who actively choose such areas of study as foreign languages (28%), marketing/PR/sales (14%), IT (12%), design (11%), and management (6%) (RBK, 2022).

Search engines are designed to give answers to any questions the user may have. If a user only asks for information about the disadvantages of getting a higher education, they will get precisely that. Furthermore, they will receive various targeted and context advertisements for vocational courses and for articles and surveys about the redundancy of higher education in the 21st century and students' dissatisfaction with the quality of higher education. This eventually creates an information bubble, in which Internet users develop a very narrow understanding of the topic.

In this study, we assert the need to analyze another side of the problem and to identify factors that motivate the younger generation to pursue a higher education degree and the influence of the media field in this process.

For this purpose, we conducted a study among first-year students of the KFU, which included 142 respondents. The majority of survey participants studied social sciences and humanities (58.5%), natural sciences (29.6%), and technical sciences (8.5%).

The conducted study delivers the following results:

1) The choice of the KFU is influenced by the factors of the university being one of the largest in Russia (61%), Kazan being a promising city (41.5%), the good reputation of the university (37.3%), and active information coverage of the university in the mass media and social media (12%) (Figure 1).



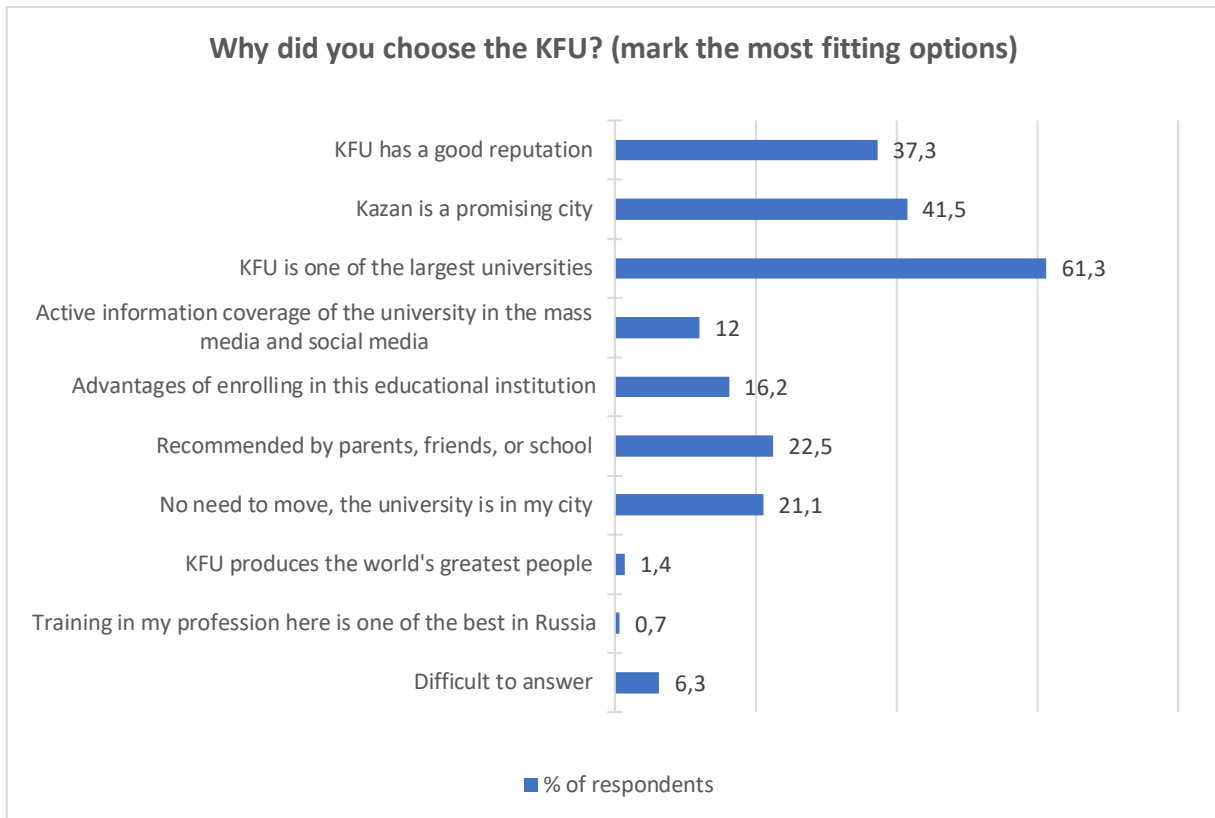
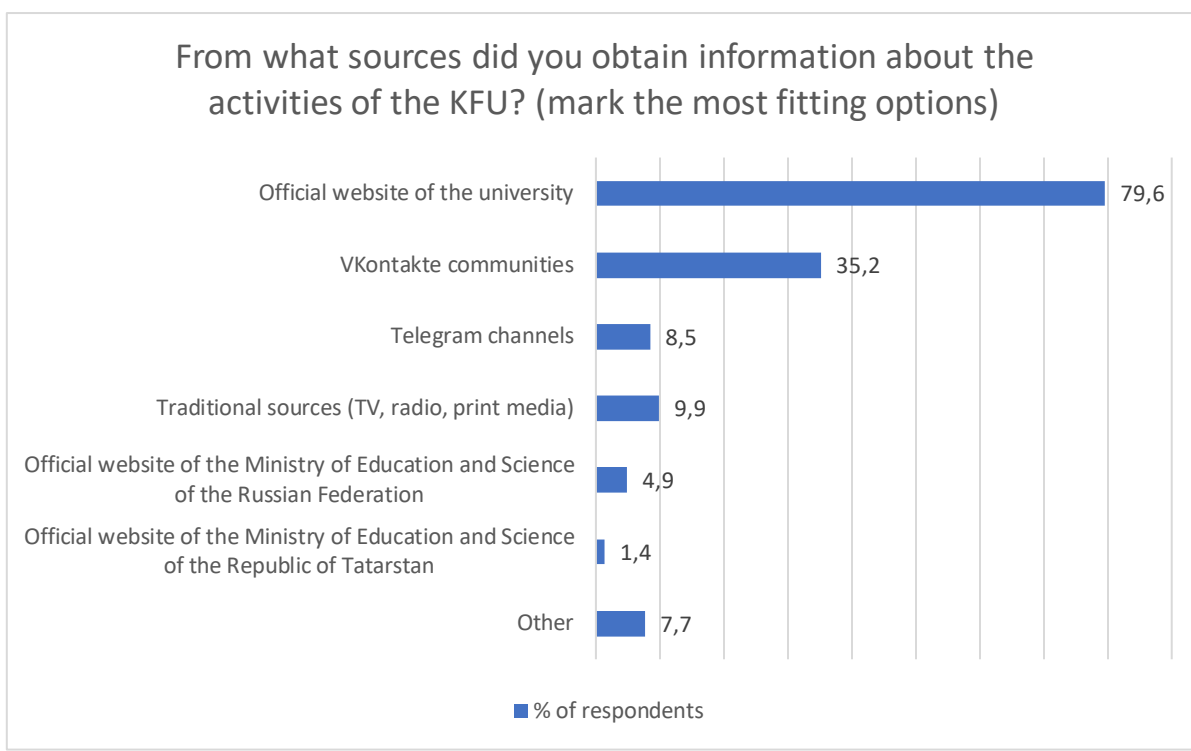


Figure 1. Respondents' answers about the reason for choosing the KFU

2) The media environment also has an impact on the choice to pursue higher education (59.2%). For example, applicants received information through the official KFU website (79.9%), as well as through communities in the VKontakte social network (35.2%). A special role is played by information content not only on the VKontakte official page of the university but also on the pages of its institutes (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Respondents' answers about the sources of information about the work of the KFU

3) Answering the question "Did any of your classmates/acquaintances/relatives decide not to pursue higher professional education? What was the reason for their choice?", the respondents pointed to the following reasons: the opportunity to acquire professional skills at institutions providing educational courses in less time than in a higher education institution (36.6%), fear of taking the Unified State Exam (28.9%), and the influence of media opinion leaders who managed to succeed in their careers without higher education (15.5%) (Figure 3).

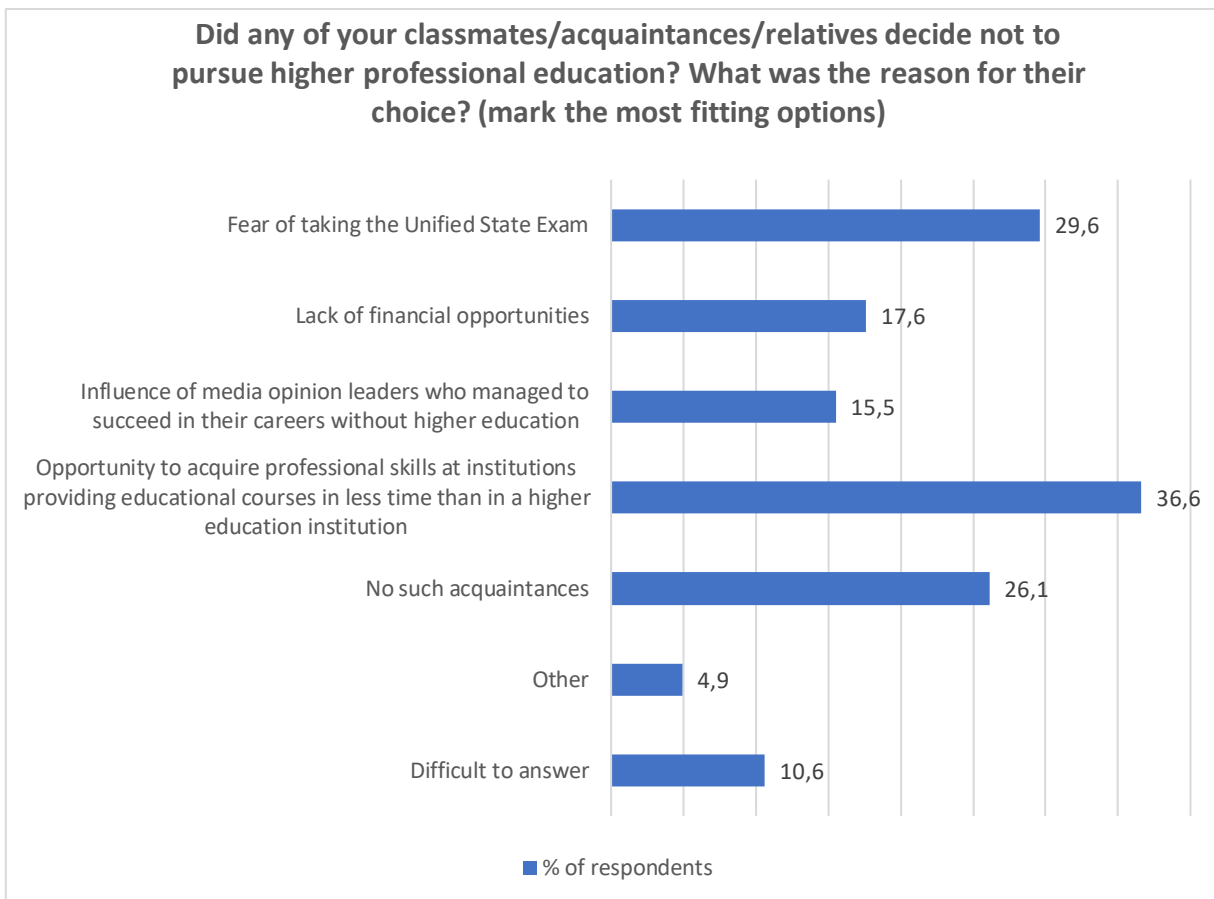
4) Over 70% of the respondents felt that in the future short-term educational courses may replace traditional higher education (Figure 4).

The conducted sociological survey suggests a conclusion that aside from the prestige of the city and the chosen profession, the choice of higher education is influenced by the media space created by higher education institutions around their operation. As the study demonstrates, applicants most often resorted to official websites and social media pages of universities in their information search. An interesting finding is that over 70% believed that in the future, short-term educational courses could replace traditional higher education. This, as argued above, will cause universities to lose their original value and



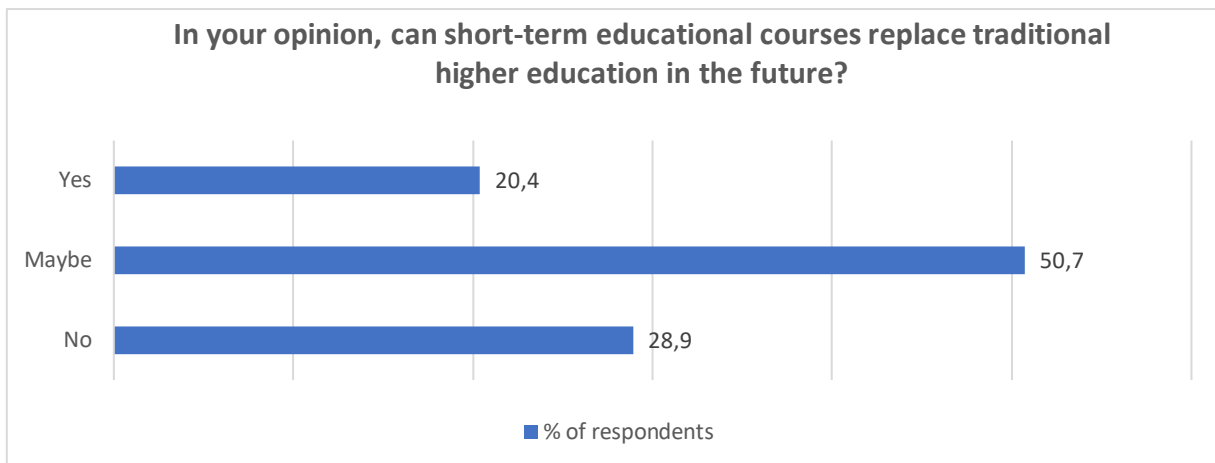


role in the lives of the younger generation. In part, this perspective is fueled by information that is beginning to dominate the media space because of the activity of both educational platforms competing for the consumer and opinion leaders. Nevertheless, particular attention in this communication practice needs to be paid to the work of search algorithms.



**Figure 3.** Respondents' answers about their acquaintances' reasons for not pursuing higher education





**Figure 4.** Respondents' answers about the prospects of short-term educational courses replacing traditional higher education

## 4 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we outline a problem that characterizes the erasure of the original purpose of higher education as a special form of obtaining knowledge. The reason behind this issue lies in the information that is distributed in the media field and surrounds the younger generation in the process of choosing the path of their professional development. Although now the average number of applicants to higher education institutions is not dropping significantly compared to previous years, the likelihood of an outflow of applicants in the future could be a problem for the state.

The state is currently pursuing a policy to modernize the field of higher education, which, in turn, requires a response to and revision of communication with potential audiences. These actions should be carried out, first, through information channels that are popular with young people, i.e. social networks, news platforms, and opinion leaders, and, secondly, by studying the educational and informational needs of both applicants and students.





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