

of this informal practice is often considered by media scholars to be the result of the lack of judicial regulation of media activities. McNair considered that the problem in the 1990s was that ‘No effective regulation of the changing broadcast economy was put in place and transparency in financial matters was absent’ (McNair 2000: 75). At the beginning of the 2010s administrative measures to regulate *dzhinsa* were adopted by the Federal Directorate of the Anti-Monopoly Service of the Russian Federation, which has the power to punish media editors for the publication of PR texts not presented as advertisements. However, because of the informal practices sustaining *dzhinsa* and the difficulty of proving monetary exchange between a journalist and a client, the attempted clampdown on *dzhinsa* through federal regulation looks unlikely to succeed. Furthermore, in the context of growing political pressure on independent journalists, some fear that regulations may be abused and used as a repressive and arbitrary tool against them.

6.33 *Shpargalka* (Russia)

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Shpargalka (*shpora*) (English: crib sheet or pony, German: *Spickzettel*) are unauthorised materials used by students during tests and exams at school, university and other educational institutions. They may be divided into traditional and innovative.

A traditional *shpargalka* is a handwritten or typed sheet of paper that is small enough to be hidden in the palm of the hand, up a sleeve or in a pocket, and that can be used surreptitiously during exams. This is not easy to do, however: one needs ‘dexterity’ (*snorovka*) – a particular kind of social skill in itself. Students do not even need to produce their own *shpargalki*: paper *shpargalki* can be purchased in almost every bookshop and online. Many books or booklets can be cut up and used during exams.

The spread of mobile phones, smartphones and other devices has created new opportunities. Answers to likely exam questions, complex formulas and even entire essays can be uploaded onto a mobile device prior to the examination. Students only have to find a way of using their device without being detected. Alternatively, they can send a text message to an ‘assistant’, who will in turn dictate the correct answer via an earpiece hidden in the student’s hair. Some students may adapt their bodies for cheating: their nails, hands or legs might be inscribed with formulas, data and other important information. Female students may have an advantage here. This kind of body art is exotic, however. In spite of technical

progress, paper *shpargalki* remain the most popular form of cheating among Russian students.

As with other academic cheating techniques, the reaction of the professors is crucial. Do they notice it or not? Or do they pretend not to notice? As often as not, professors see all the traditional as well as the innovative and exotic cheating tools used during exams. Their reactions may differ, however: they may or may not act on what they have seen. If a professor picks up on a case of cheating, they might lower the student's mark and/or set additional questions. The reasons for ignoring cheating vary: if a student worked very hard during a semester and attended all the lectures, this small 'sin' may be forgiven. Some professors may even judge 'self-made' *shpargalki* positively, arguing that, by summarising the course materials, the student has critically reflected on the topic.

The Russian educational system is still oriented more towards providing knowledge than fostering competencies. This trend forces students to memorise a lot of information without critically reflecting on it. In addition, students often justify their use of *shpargalki* in classes that they consider 'unnecessary'. Science students, for example, are also required to study philosophy and sociology, while literature students must pass exams in mathematics and ecology. Knowledge of these disciplines is by no means essential to working in their chosen professions; as a result, students usually consider such courses superfluous. Using *shpargalki* during exams is also seen as less reprehensible by students who lack time to study, such as part-time students, *zaochniki*, who are usually adults with families and full-time jobs. They might not secure promotion without a higher education qualification, even though this is often viewed as a merely formal requirement. At the same time, many students believe that using *shpargalki* is immoral, and may not be proud of themselves for passing exams in such a way.

The use of *shpargalki* is widespread in Russia; many young Russians learn how to do so at school and perfect the skill during their time at university. *Shpargalki* are, however, violations of academic integrity linked to plagiarism, ghost-writing, manipulation of accreditation, degree mills and other forms of monetary and non-monetary corruption in academia. Sometimes students use *shpargalki* because they find it hard to study to such a high level. At the same time, they feel compelled to enter higher education because it is seen as the only way to secure a professional future. About 80 per cent of young Russians enrol in some form of higher education, and almost all of them complete their studies within the allotted time frame. One reason why students feel pressured to act in this way is the lack of social acceptance both of vocational education and of blue-collar employment.



Figure 6.33.1 Pony from Poland.

Source: Author Pöhlein, Erlangen. © Schulgeschichtliche Sammlung der Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.

Ponies have a long history and tradition not only in Russia, but also in other countries. In 2009, the School Museum in Nürnberg in Germany organised an exhibition of around a thousand ponies from the past 100 years. The exhibits came from all over the world and were displayed together with students' success stories about their use of ponies. One such story was by Germany's first post-war chancellor, Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967). In 2014, a similar exhibition opened in Russia's Ekaterinburg, showcasing more than 80 items dating back to the 1980s. One of the exhibits was a 100 ruble banknote with math formulas written on it. This was a pony no teacher would have dared to confiscate, given the potential risk of being accused of having extorted a bribe!

6.34 **Pyramid schemes** (general)

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Pyramid schemes are a type of financial fraud. Operators recruit unsuspecting investors with the promise of high returns. They claim to run successful business projects, but in fact early investors are paid with the money collected from later investors (a practice also known as 'robbing