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DIGITALIZATION OF SOCIETY: DEMARCATION OF THE
BOUNDARIES OF PRIVACY AND PUBLICITY

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic that unfolded in early 2020 has updated a new wave of discussion about the potential of digital technologies used by the state in the public administration system. One of the most important goals of introducing digital technologies is proclaimed to increase the efficiency of the functioning of the entire state mechanism, which is achieved by including a technical component in the communication system of citizens and the state, which ensures the collection of information about citizens against their will and desires. As a result, the study of the role of digital technologies in the demarcation of the public and private spheres of society has been updated. The search for a harmonious balance between citizens and the state is a very complex and vital issue for the country. An adequate answer to it is possible based on the results of a sociological study of public opinion on the problems of digitalization of public administration, on the boundaries of the private and the public. The survey shows that the population knows sites, social networks, search engines collect data for web analytics. But the general population approves of digital technologies of social control and identification, as well as video surveillance in public places. However, the introduction of a single electronic document (passport) does not evoke an unambiguously positive attitude among the population. The very idea of special legislation on the distinction between public and private has a limited number of supporters.

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1. Introduction

The incorporation of digital technologies into the administrative subsystem of the state is becoming a daily practice in most modern states, although it is accompanied by certain problems, risks, and incidents (Vasilenko & Zotov, 2020). And the coronavirus pandemic that unfolded in early 2020 has updated a new wave of discussion of the potential of digital technologies used by the state in the public administration system. From July 1, 2020, an experimental legal regime was introduced in Moscow for 5 years (see Federal Law No. 123-FZ of April 24, 2020). Before that, in this area, legal regulation was not undertaken to such an extent. The stated goal is to accelerate the development and implementation of digital technologies, primarily technologies for processing and analyzing information flows for structuring and obtaining new conclusions (Big Data) and artificial intelligence technologies. This is also done to streamline the legal regulation of the processes of digitalization of society. The above-mentioned normative act allows for five years experimenting in the metropolitan metropolis with the legal regulation of digitalization processes, by adopting temporary laws. The experiment may well expand as the federal law “On Experimental Legal Regimes in the Field of Digital Innovation in the Russian Federation” is being developed. The bill mentions neurotechnologies, distributed ledgers, quantum technologies.

All these technologies combine to form digital networking platforms that provide analytics and predictive capabilities. They are based on the interaction between the Internet, people, and the real world, which is realized due not only to the direct input of the information by a person into a stationary or mobile device, but also information received from smart devices and sensors. Such information and the analytical platform is a system of algorithmic relationships between a significant number of independent actors and actants in a single network environment. This leads to the development of “platform research” as a new key area of social research (Apperley & Parikka, 2018; Leorke, 2012; Plantin et al., 2018; Zvereva, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

As part of the previously described social experiment, the Moscow authorities will be able to transfer anonymized personal data of citizens to private organizations that carry out “public functions”. For example, some of them can get access to the records of city video cameras installed in public places of the capital. This indicates the need to study the changing role of digital media platforms in public administration, in particular their impact on the public and private spheres of society. It is necessary to form a balance of private and public interests. In this context, the analysis of the boundaries of the public (what happens in interactions with other people) and the private (what is protected from being given out to others) in the public consciousness acquires a special meaning. Privacy implies not only the right to protect personal data about a person from outsiders but also the right to personal space and its protection. The preservation of privacy presupposes the taboo of actions that violate it, as well as the euphemization of possible conquests of personal space (Shkudunova, 2007).

3. Research Questions

In this context, the analysis of the spheres of the public and the private as the most important regulators of relations between citizens and the state, their development and distribution in a democratic society structure acquires a special meaning. The concepts of “publicity” and “privacy” are among the most important regulators of interaction between state structures and the population. With their help, the distance of citizens and authorities is determined (Shkudunova, 2007). Distancing and organizing personal space act as ways to ensure privacy, as specific mechanisms for achieving a balance of public and personal interests.

4. Purpose of the Study

Today, in the context of the digitalization of society and the obvious collapse of the previous foundations of organizing the space of human life, the world began to need a new understanding of both the past, the present, and the future, and the development of an ideological concept of the digital human environment. The search for a harmonious balance between citizens and the state is a very complex and vital issue for the country. The solution to the problems of normalizing the social order, the advancement of modern Russian society to the proper order depends on this. Determining the opinion of citizens about the boundaries of the private and public spheres is the purpose of this study.

5. Research Methods

The balance of public and private in the digital network space was considered as a social process, a set of interactions that change relationships between people or between the constituent elements of a community. The chosen methodology involves conducting a sociological study of public opinion on the problems of digitalization of public administration, one of the tasks of which was to determine the boundaries of the private and the public. Sociological research due to the epidemiological situation was carried out through a mass questionnaire survey in a combined way: 1) an online survey using the Google service; 2) field survey using personal interviews using a paper questionnaire. The general population of the study was made up of the country's population over 18 years old. The sample-set in the number of $n = 1000$ respondents was quota by gender and age.

6. Findings

Earlier than others, commercial information and analytical platforms Yandex, Mail.ru, VKontakte, Facebook, Google, and Sberbank began to follow users. But people agreed with this and voluntarily installed their applications on their smartphones because they received much more benefits from using these applications. Our survey shows that 46% of respondents are well informed, and 37% are generally aware that Internet sites, social networks, search engines can collect data for web analytics.

Today, after the end of the pandemic lockdown, two events should be noted that have important consequences in the demarcation of the public and the private between the state and citizens. These events include the creation of applications such as STOP Coronavirus State Services for issuing digital passes in

the form of QR codes and Social Monitoring for monitoring infected people. It is worth noting that the installation of the last of these applications was in fact compulsory.

The situation with the observation and control of the actions of citizens through modern digital tools is also acute. It must be understood that the state application will monitor the citizen much more carefully than, for example, cellular operators or digital network platforms did. The state will control not only the location of the owner of the gadget, but also his correspondence, and much more.

It should be noted that the general population approves of digital technologies of social control and identification (Figure 01).

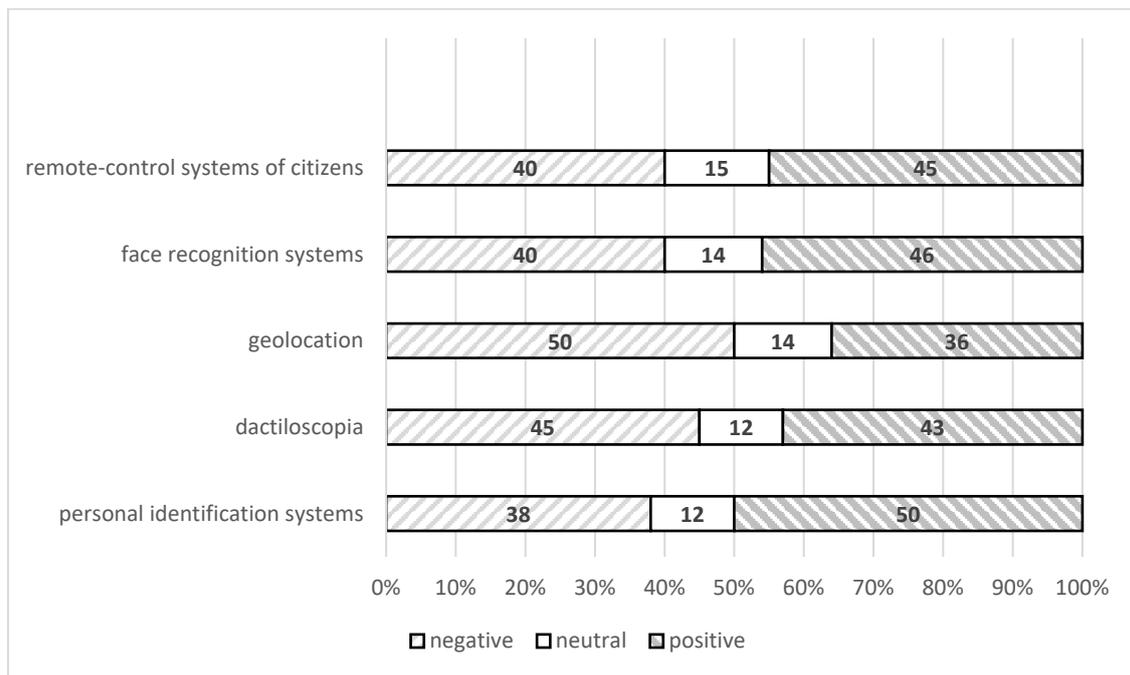


Figure 1. Distribution of answers to the question “How do you feel about the following digital tools for monitoring and controlling the actions and movements of citizens?” in %: negative, neutral, positive.

Most respondents expressed a positive attitude to personal identification systems (50 %), face recognition systems (46 % positive), and remote-control systems of citizens (45 % positive). The most controversial was the situation with fingerprinting. 43 % of respondents expressed their readiness to take fingerprints, while 45 % reacted negatively to this measure. A request for providing access to geolocation was received with a negative attitude of citizens: 50 % – for and 36 % – against.

Today, another area of “intrusion” of a citizen's private space is video surveillance, which is becoming widespread thanks to the implementation of the Safe City hardware and software complex, which serves as a necessary tool in the field of building a modern highly effective security system. CCTV systems are installed in many public places, and it can be assumed that CCTV creates discomfort and will cause rejection among the population. However, the survey shows a generally positive attitude towards video surveillance in public places (Figure 02).

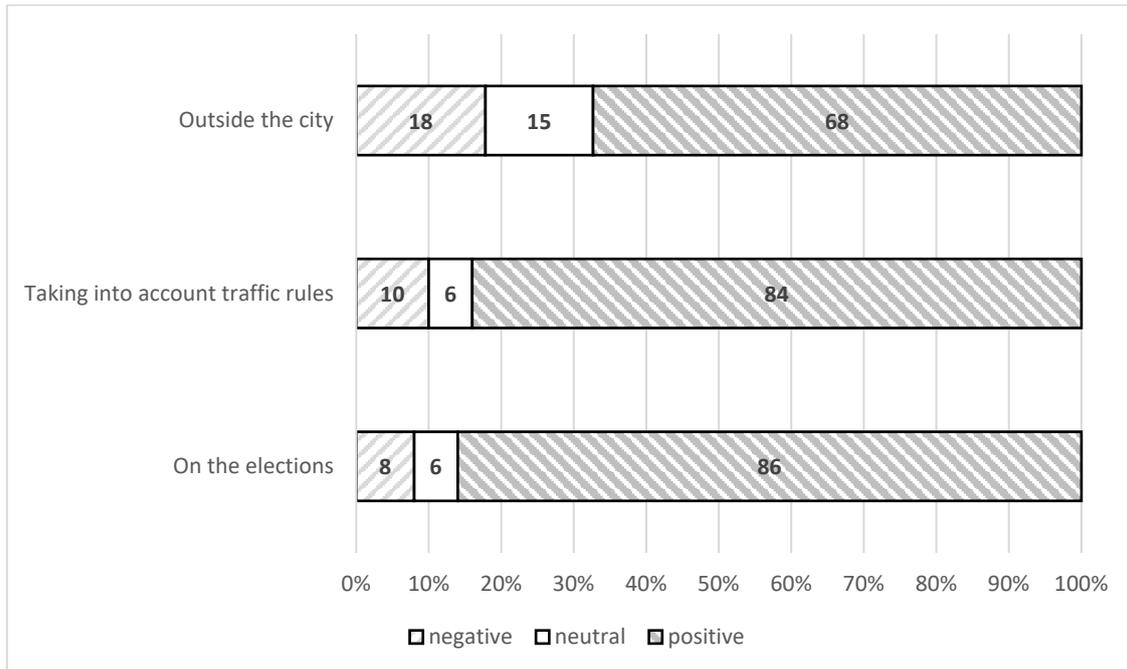


Figure 2. Distribution of answers to the question “How do you feel about video surveillance in the following public places?” in %: negative, neutral, positive.

One of the main trends in the implementation of the digitalization process is a gradual transition to a complete electronic document flow, including the creation of a single digital document of a citizen. The relevant ministry hopes to launch Mobile Identifier by the end of the year. This is an application that generates a QR code with a set of personal data of a citizen, which allows you to use a phone instead of a passport. A phone with a QR code can be presented to the police, used when buying plane and train tickets (within the country), and if there is an electronic signature, the Mobile Identifier will replace a passport in situations such as concluding an employment contract, buying a car, issuing an individual entrepreneur. So far, it is proposed to issue a digital passport voluntarily, but in a few years, it may become mandatory. Polls show that 20 % of respondents expressed an unambiguous positive attitude towards such an electronic ID, rather positively – 24 %. A negative attitude was stated by 34 % of survey participants, rather negative than positive – 15 %. And 6 % of the respondents chose the position “I don't care”. As the survey shows, this is due to the fear of data available for third parties (69 % of respondents), possible fraud due to the unreliability of information protection (58 %), and possible technical failures in the system (50 %).

It can be assumed that the digitalization of society does not exacerbate the problem of demarcating the private and the public. This is generally confirmed by the answers to the question about the need at present to develop special legislation that will distinguish between the private and the public on the Internet and will open opportunities for searching for new schemes and tools for organizing interaction between the authorities and the population in the digital space. Most survey participants (58 %) said that the development of such legislation is necessary, while only 19 % adhere to the opposite point of view, 23 % found it difficult to answer.

7. Conclusion

The digitalization of public administration implies the introduction of significant systemic changes in many areas of interaction between power structures and citizens. Today, humanity is faced with a historical choice of a wide range of options – from strengthening the totalitarian tendencies of the state, whose supervisory functions can fit not only into the family but also into the human body, to the use of digital technologies in solving a wide range of socially significant problems. Now we need to look for opportunities for the future social structure of a digital society. At the same time, the public and the private should not break the social process into “fragments”, but on the contrary, their development should be oriented towards achieving the integrity and coherence of social development. This will contribute to the generally positive attitude of the population towards digital technologies of social control and identification, as well as video surveillance in public places.

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