

CDSSES 2020**IV International Scientific Conference "Competitiveness and the development of socio-economic systems" dedicated to the memory of Alexander Tatarkin****SOCIAL NETWORKS' ROLE IN THE RUSSIAN PUBLIC POLICY DIGITALIZATION**

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Abstract

Significant changes took place in the traditional political space due to the convergence of information and communication technologies: virtual forms of political activity began to form, and network communities emerged, which subsequently evolved into new civil society subjects. The article is devoted to studying the social network's role in the context of Russian public policy digitalization. Particular attention is paid to forming a networked public policy, society, and the political environment networkization. The study presents the conceptual foundation of social networks, describes social networks' integration into politics and reflects social networks' mobilization potential. The analysis of the most popular social media in Russia (VKontakte, Instagram, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) has been carried out, the specificity of network political activity in Russia has been revealed. The practice of organizing network discourse by political parties and state authorities is reflected. The results obtained in the study can be used by public policy actors in order to carry out effective activities that take into account current political trends and citizens' demands in the new digital reality.

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1. Introduction

The process of convergence of information and communication technologies at the beginning of the 21st century has transformed the traditional political space, filling it with new content. Having affected all spheres of public life: social, political, economic, cultural, intensive changes have acquired unprecedented proportions. The world from a systemic has turned into a networked one, where knowledge and information flows began to play a decisive role.

Communications' methods and quality have changed, and network interactions have acquired a new form, integrated with the public Internet space. The result was the formation of non-institutionalized, virtual forms of political activity. This trend has contributed to the emergence of new civil society subjects - network communities with enormous potential for self-organization and mobilization.

Controlling such communities' activity is extremely difficult given the intricate global information links and the decentralized nature of network power (Kurochkin, 2019).

Modern practices of socio-political interaction show multiple communication structures, transformable schemes of social and political relations, diametrical alignment of public (personal physical participation or use of dedicated mass media and communication media channels), and virtual methods of interaction. As a rule, routine practices represent a consistent and expected series of events for every participant of social interaction within the system of network communication (Golovatsky, 2017, p. 396).

Within the framework of the paradigm grounded by the Spanish researcher Castells (1999), it is networks that constitute the new social morphology of modern communities, and the spread of “network” logic significantly affects the course and results of processes associated with production, everyday life, culture and power.

Language dependence of electronic media has far-reaching implications for the characteristics, organization and goals of political processes, politicians and political institutions. Ultimately, the power held by media networks is second only to the power of flows, embodied in the structure and language of these networks (Castells, 1999, p. 503).

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Networks in public politics

In this way, the public policy in the network was born. It should be understood as a set of public policy tools created by users based on the use of technologies of the global Internet network - web 2.0 and web 3.0, which expand the unified information and communication space of the public sphere through the impact of the social environment on the creation, use, reproduction of the content of the network space that affects society. Thus, Internet technologies are able to change the level and quality of political participation, which contributes to the formation of constructive and effective competition within the network information space between various socio-political actors (Pavlyutenkova, 2015).

The effect of public administration networkization is described in detail in the studies of Miroshnichenko (2013). This phenomenon is associated with multi-component network changes in the multilayered public policy space, where the instruments of political power, influence, and control are distributed among various actors, both individual and collective. The author highlights such an essential characteristic of networked public administration as its designability, based on which various actors of public policy can participate in public administration practice. The role of initiator and moderator of project and expert networks is assigned to the state. Monitoring the state public policy institutionalizes public impulses of a networked civil society, thus creating the necessary conditions for involving citizens in publicity.

To date, the virtual platform for implementing a networked public policy is e-government, which is designed to improve the quality of public services, increase the level of electronic participation of citizens and ensure transparency and accountability of the activities of public authorities at the local level. E-participation refers to citizens' involvement in decision-making through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT).

Electronic participation includes electronic information (providing citizens with information), electronic consultation (conducting public discussions in real time) and electronic decision-making (involving citizens in the decision-making process), as well as open data and mobile applications, social media are the main technologies for electronic participation.

The network landscape of Russian public policy is characterized by a set of various social networks, both closed and open, based on certain social connections (strong or weak), social resources (social capital) and determining the nature and methods of political institutionalization of social networks.

The individual network extension and mobilization is directly linked with accessibility, but an individual can have an ample accessible network and not have mobilization capability of certain actions. The effective use of those networks depends on variables that reinforce the accessibility and the kind of resources involved, that is, networks are goal specific (Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos, 2017, p. 3).

In this sense, Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos (2017) distinguish two dimensions: expressive and instrumental. Instrumental-expert mobilization, from the perspective of researchers, is more sensitive to status and contextual variables and is directly linked with instrumental uses of individual social capital. While expressive mobilization is related more with the strength of strong bonds, family size, marital status and others.

In this vein, the conceptual foundation of social networks lies in two theoretical concepts:

- The reciprocal concept of social networks by Granovetter

Professor at Stanford University and author of *The Strength of Weak Ties*, Granovetter (1973), understood social networks as a stable set of trust-based informal relationships and non-hierarchical relationships between participants in the exchange of various resources (financial, material, informational, symbolic, emotional, etc.) and representing a certain type of mutual (reciprocal) solidarity.

Based on the frequency and duration of social contacts, Granovetter divided all social ties into two main categories - strong and weak ties. The strong ties on which closed social networks are based are the sum of time, emotional strength, intimacy (mutual trust), and reciprocal services.

Weak ties of open social networks, characterized by the presence of fewer common contacts for the subject of communication, allow individual actors to connect a large number of network nodes (individual, collective or institutionalized actors) and provide access to the necessary resources to achieve certain goals. Thus, it is weak ties that are a necessary condition for the integration of individuals into communities.

- Bourdieu's concept of social capital

The French sociologist Bourdieu (2005) considered social capital as the main resource for mobilizing civic participation and creating various structures of collective action. In general, Bourdieu associates social capital with trust, solidarity, mutual cooperation, moral norms and values. According to the concept he describes, social capital is formed by obligations, that is, connections and relationships. Bourdieu defines capital as “the set of real or potential resources associated with the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - in other words, with membership in a group”.

2.2. 2.2. Networkization of civil society

The networkization of civil society causes a crisis in the traditional system of political representation, which does not reflect the interests of those social groups and communities that have arisen within the framework of network transformations in the social and economic spheres of society. As a result, there has been a change in the patterns of political representation and civic participation in contemporary public politics (Miroshnichenko & Morozova, 2017).

Networks offer new forms of interaction between political subjects: slactivism (participation in Internet actions, reposts, likes, etc.); new forms of political participation in the online environment: interactions with government authorities (e-government); blogosphere; discussion of information using Internet resources (sites, blogs, accounts, forums); trolling. Moreover, most of these forms implement the principle of freedom of opinion of network users (Shchenina, 2020).

In the scientific literature, there are different ideas about the stages of the process of the social networks integration into politics and political institutionalization. We are close to the approach of Miroshnichenko (2013), which involves three stages:

- Latent stage (mutual assistance in solving issues, provided in the process of interpersonal interaction);
- Subcultural positioning of online communities (social identification);
- Stage of political institutionalization of network communities (the formation of civil and political participation of network communities).

From our point of view, these stages are essential components of the social networks integration into politics. The desire to jointly solve common problems is the key to the citizens' political socialization. Today, in matters of political participation using social media, communication is much

faster, more extensive and safer than in real time. However, such connections, especially those of a protest nature, are practically beyond the state's control.

Through network communication, society quickly organizes itself to express its attitude towards the current government. At the same time, restrictions and prohibitions initiated by the authorities are ignored if they contradict pressing social needs (Voronkova, 2020).

3. Research Questions

The main research questions are:

- What is the role of social networks in Russian public policy?
- What is the specificity of network political activity in Russia?

4. Purpose of the Study

According to the formulated research questions, the main purpose of the study is to identify the role of social networks in Russian public policy. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to analyze the most popular social networks in Russia (VKontakte, Instagram, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube) in the context of the political participation.

5. Research Methods

The study is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the social networks content. To achieve this goal, we used the method of statistical research, consisting of the following main stages: statistical observation, summary, data analysis.

We chose a type of discontinuous observation to obtain the information needed to date and carried out statistical observation using external secondary data.

So, within a month we reviewed the political content of six social networks, studied its characteristic features, the number of posts and comments, the specifics of political activity. In addition, we analyzed the political representation of government officials and political parties in social networks. In conclusion, we assessed the mobilization potential of social networks in Russia.

Using MS Excel, we have made a simple summary of the results.

6. Findings

When choosing social networks, we focused on the research of Brand Analytics, a monitoring and analyzing social media system, which provides the most complete analysis of the active audience of social networks in Russia, as well as current trends in Russian-language social media. Brand Analytics conducts annual research based on the analysis of the volume and activity of the audience of social networks, its socio-demographic and regional distribution. Particular attention is paid to the influence of social networks on the public opinion formation. According to the results of Brand Analytics research, the most popular social media in Russia are: VKontakte, Instagram, Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

We have found that the main feature of the Russian blogosphere in analyzed social networks is a pronounced socio-political orientation. It is noteworthy that active blogging is the easiest way of political participation, and users do not need special knowledge and skills in policy. We share the position of Neverov and Budko (2017) regarding the specifics of political content disseminated in users' pages in social networks:

1. Formal content (the official information published on government web resources);
2. Campaigning "for" (the support of a political leader, party, candidate (including the period of pre-election campaigning), information on activities);
3. Agitation "against" (materials aimed at discrediting "political opponents");
4. Self-positioning - posting personal photos with political figures from meetings, rallies, pickets.

With the growth of social networks, another type of Russian public policy emerged, based on new forms of mass public discourse organizing. To date political leaders (Medvedev, Mironov, Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy, Kadyrov, Navalny and others), parties (United Russia, Communist Party, LDPR, Yabloko, A Just Russia, Patriots of Russia, Civic Platform, Party of Growth, Party of Progress, Rodina, etc.), famous journalists (Soloviev, Semin, etc.), the media (RIA Novosti, Meduza, Komsomolskaya Pravda, TASS, etc.), various political movements, public organizations, interest groups and traditional political institutions create and implement their own political strategies online.

It should be noted that the state participation in the media sphere is one of the main legitimating resources for the modern Russian authorities, allowing them to have a high degree of independence. The role of social networks as powerful channels for organizing support and mobilization is equally important.

Thus, political parties of the Russian Federation actively use social networks to promote their ideas, campaign, inform and attract new supporters, as well as "communicate" with citizens. A number of parties are active in social networks; they have approved the style, design and "policy" of the content publication. The highest activity of parties among the platforms of the official media communities is in Vkontakte, the lowest indicator is in Instagram.

From our point of view, the social network Vkontakte provides the widest opportunities for content presentation, where, in addition to publishing materials in various formats, it is possible to organize discussions, forums, polls, as well as download text, video, audio and photo materials, links to other resources.

The United Russia party has the most orderly providing information system, the presence of a single design and content that appears simultaneously on all sites. The Communist Party is the leader in the number of published information posts per day.

It should be noted that the most popular types of content posted on party platforms are highly specialized and infotainment. In addition, parties do not sufficiently cover their activities, program, results of work, and their members.

We analyzed the Russian parliamentary parties' representation in social networks (table 1).

Table 1. The Russian parliamentary parties' representation (in thousands) in social networks in March 2020

| Parties | Vkontakte | Instagram | Odnoklassniki | Facebook | Twitter | YouTube |
|--------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| United Russia | 111,074 | 78,4 | 66,798 | 71,443 | 155 | 3,87 |
| Liberal Democratic Party | 127,192 | 1,737 | 77,189 | 18,480 | - | 83,7 |
| Communist Party | 84,389 | 20,9 | 16,442 | 16,694 | 86 | 128 |
| A Just Russia | 28,108 | 9,843 | 12,392 | 30,647 | - | 3,87 |
| Rodina | 6,827 | 1,784 | - | 10,133 | 6,289 | 1,11 |
| Civic Platform | 23,222 | 12,4 | - | 31,419 | 2,842 | 0,152 |

The presented indicators allow us to identify several interesting trends: today the Liberal Democratic Party is ahead of the United Russia in the number of subscribers in VKontakte, Odnoklassniki and YouTube, what indicates the attractiveness of the party's content for a significant number of Russian users. At the same time, United Russia is the undisputed leader in the “liberal” foreign social media - Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. It surprised a large number of the Communist Party subscribers in YouTube, compared to other parties. It is likely that this indicator is associated with a large representation in the target audience of the Communist Party the “aged” population, who prefer the video format of the information presentation.

In 2017, the State Duma of the Russian Federation opened the personal parliamentary television Duma TV, in addition to official accounts in VKontakte, Instagram, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, Facebook, Telegram. The President of Russia (@KremlinRussia) and the Government (@Pravitelstvo_RF) also have accounts in social networks, what is yet another proof of the shift of public policy coordinates towards networkization.

Federal executive authorities give preference to social networks Facebook and Twitter. The leaders among public authorities in the social networks representation are the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, the Ministry of Emergencies of Russia, the Ministry of Defense of Russia, the Ministry of Agriculture of Russia, the Ministry of Construction of Russia, Roshydromet of Russia, Rosleskhoz, Rosavtodor.

The mobilizing potential of social networks is manifested both in the creation of communities in support of the current political power (for example, the VKontakte group “Informational support of Putin” (34393 subscribers), and communities in opposition to it (for example, the VKontakte group “Opposition”, the number of subscribers 35,426 people). The relative parity in the number of group

members allows us to conclude that the degree of involvement in constructive and protest-minded groups is approximately the same.

Our conclusion is confirmed by the results of Enikolopov et al. (2020) research, which notes that higher social media penetration leads to higher protest participation against the ruling regime if the content of social media is, on average, negative. However, even when the content online is positive, social media could increase protest participation if the gains in coordination are high enough.

History has many examples of the use of social networks in opposition movements around the world (“Arab Spring” in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, opposition groups in Russia in 2011-2012, 2017-2018 and 2019, Ukraine in 2013-2014, Belarus in 2020 and etc.). As practical experience has shown, oppositional feelings in social networks are permanent, while real protests are discrete.

There is a clear relationship between the organization of citizens’ network interaction and the development of political events. A relevant example of mobilizing citizens is the creation in the VKontakte group in the spring 2018 of more than 200 public social pages in different cities and regions of the Russian Federation (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, Novosibirsk, Krasnodar, Tula, Petrozavodsk, Irkutsk, Khabarovsk, etc.) under the general title “March 26 rally - against corruption”. In each community, there was an open dialogue of subscribers, campaigning for participation in the protest movement. According to law enforcement agencies, unauthorized actions against corruption, in which about 60 thousand people took part, were held in 82 cities of Russia. Social networks have become the main way of disseminating information, what indicates the successful application of mobilization technology (Kinyasheva, 2018).

Thus, social networks use may lead to increased participation in political protests because it exposes users to multiple sources and political information types. Besides, protest engagement creates incentives for participants to discuss protest events and polarizing political views on social media (Chang & Park, 2020).

7. Conclusion

The study allowed us to identify the essential role of social networks in the implementation of public policy in modern Russia in the context of digitalization. So, social networks are a powerful channel of information policy, an effective way of political power legitimating and political mobilization implementing, both constructively and protest-minded social groups.

Network political activity in Russia has its own specifics: despite the fact that the social and political nature of the published content is clearly found in the Russian blogosphere, only the online minority is demonstrating conscious civic activism with a clear political focus. Moreover, digitalization and internetization of society contribute to the diffusion of such a political culture when citizens perceive politics as entertainment.

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