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Challenges of '"Coercive Digitalisation": Communication Strategies of Digital Vigilantes in the Pandemic

Abstract

The Coronavirus pandemic has led to significant changes in numerous spheres of the world society everyday life. With principles such as diversity, polemics, conflict at its core digitalization process produces the whole range of new meanings and forms of connection. It does not fit into the traditional framework of the concept of public policy as a relationship based on consensus and appears to be a challenge for political systems. At the beginning of the pandemic the European leaders addressed their citizens with a request for trust in the national government, asking to show solidarity and cohesion in the face of difficulties. In the following months the development of so-called "coercive digitalization" reflected sustainable stereotyped practices of interaction. In Europe the virus was perceived as a challenge both for the public administration system and for civil society. As a result, various networks of mutual assistance were formed, marking the actualization of personal responsibility. In Russia the development of two significant tendencies was noticed: while paternalistic relations prevailed on one hand, "vigilant citizens"-networks carrying out a police function also became considerably active. The concept of "vigilance" in terms of civil activity attracted the attention of researchers in the 1990s and it was evaluated positively as a form of support to the state. With the development of communication technologies, there appears a growing concern about the growth of civic vigilantism. In general terms, vigilantism is a social movement involving the use of force (or threats of use) of force and occurs when the established order is violated, or there is a threat of violation of established norms. Digital vigilance, which takes place in social networks and social media, is now considered in the context of negative consequences and effects. This study is based on the methodology of D.Trottier, who interprets digital vigilance as a form of mediated and coordinated action, which starting point is moral outrage (or a general sense of insult), in relation to an event that was recorded and transmitted via mobile devices and social platforms [D. Trottier, R. Gabdulhakov, Q.Huang Introducing Vigilant Audience, 2020]. This is a strategy of a collective identity formation, which can be based on national, religious, or ethnic forms of solidarity which allows to analyze civil interventions as overlapping and even challenging institutional forms of justice that often reproduce established cultural values. This research paper aims to analyze communication strategies and mobilization practices in order to achieve justice in the pandemic. The actual question of do citizens always mobilize themselves or act with an implicit degree of the state digitalization or other interested parties. We consider "digital vigilance" as a latent tool of public policy. The danger of this tool is that harmless, at first glance, posts and videos can lead to social destabilization: as in cases with politics of isolation. Digital vigilance is a spreading and mobilizing force that cannot be ignored in current conditions. Digital vigilance is an interdisciplinary issue that requires both conceptualization and serious empirical research. Digital vigilance occurs when the demand for justice is more social than legal. For vigilantes, emotions are essential, emotions and reactions dominate facts, and this makes digital vigilance related to such a phenomenon as post-truth. Causal factors leading to digital vigilance remain speculative.