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The Effect of Negative Sanctions on Political Communication on Social Media

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

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Relevance of research topic

The impact of negative sanctions on various aspects of political life is a key topic for a number of subject areas of political science. The observed effects have significant implications for the scenarios for the implementation of the state's coercive potential and their results for both governments and those who may be the object of sanctions. One of the most obvious roles the impact of sanctions plays is when considering the relationship between the implementation of various negative sanctions against political activists and the further course of contentious politics.

Negative sanctions applied by law enforcement officials during protest actions are not something extraordinary for all political regimes. The measures that protesters resort to in the course of articulating and defending the desired political changes often turn out to be associated with restricting the rights of other citizens, which forces law enforcement officers to intervene in protest episodes even in acknowledged liberal democracies. This intervention itself is often associated with an increased risk of subsequent delayed negative sanctions, as the reaction of protesters to the involvement of law enforcement officers can lead to violations of the law.

The implications of negative sanctions for the subsequent dynamics of contentious politics have been the subject of intensive research. The rise in activity in the study of this topic has been especially noticeable over the past 15 years. The increase in interest is associated with the emergence of large protest waves in the Middle East, Latin America and Western countries, the spread of interdisciplinary research, which to the fullest extent allow us to take into account the complexity of the subject under discussion, the emergence of available empirical data on recent protest episodes, and, finally, the need to study new previously unobserved aspects of this relationship.

The nature of this relationship is not obvious, since the effect of negative sanctions can be multidirectional. On the one hand, a negative impact can make participation in an action more dangerous, and therefore more “expensive” for a

potential protester¹. On the other hand, the use of sanctions against protesters can increase the aggressiveness of the protesters and those who support them². Empirical studies performed on the materials of the Arab Spring, trade union movements in European countries, Latin American countries also do not give an unambiguous answer about the impact of sanctions on the scale of further actions³: the researchers found both protest attenuation⁴, and its escalation⁵, and the nonlinearity of this relationship⁶.

At the individual level, the effect of the sanctions impact on the protesters depends on the presence of the fact of the implementation of sanctions in the mental representation of political events⁷. The consequences at the level of the whole society depend on the degree of dissemination of information about sanctions and their nature: sanctions applied to protesters have a direct impact only on a narrow circle of those who are subject to them. When analyzing the reaction to sanctions, it turns out to be useful to separate the “subjective” (“perceived”, existing in each individual consciousness) and “objective” (“structural”) levels of negative impact⁸. The increased availability of the internet and social media around the world⁹ has given protesters and sympathizers the opportunity to spread their vision cheaper and

¹ Opp K. D., Gern C. Dissident groups, personal networks, and spontaneous cooperation: The East German revolution of 1989 // *American sociological review*. – 1993. – P. 659-680.

² Ayanian A. H., Tausch N. How risk perception shapes collective action intentions in repressive contexts: A study of Egyptian activists during the 2013 post-coup uprising // *British Journal of Social Psychology*. – 2016. – Vol. 55. – №. 4. – P. 700-721.

³ Honari A. From ‘the effect of repression’ toward ‘the response to repression’ // *Current Sociology*. – 2018. – Vol. 66. – №. 6. – P. 950-973.

⁴ Ellefsen R. Judicial opportunities and the death of SHAC: Legal repression along a cycle of contention // *Social movement studies*. – 2016. – Vol. 15. – №. 5. – P. 441-456; Jämte J., Ellefsen R. The consequences of soft repression // *Mobilization*. – 2020. – Vol. 25. – №. 3. – P. 383-404.

⁵ Almeida P. D. Waves of protest: popular struggle in El Salvador, 1925-2005. – University of Minnesota Press, 2008. – Vol. 29.

⁶ Brockett C. D., Tarrow S. Political movements and violence in Central America. – Cambridge University Press, 2005; Ellefsen R. The unintended consequences of escalated repression // *Mobilization*. – 2021. – Vol. 26. – №. 1. – P. 87-108.

⁷ Opp K. D. Theories of political protest and social movements: A multidisciplinary introduction, critique, and synthesis. – Routledge, 2009. – 424 P.

⁸ Honari A. From ‘the effect of repression’ toward ‘the response to repression’ // *Current Sociology*. – 2018. – Vol. 66. – №. 6. – P. 950-973; Kurzman C. Structural opportunity and perceived opportunity in social-movement theory: The Iranian revolution of 1979 // *American Sociological Review*. – 1996. – P. 153-170.

⁹ Individuals using the Internet (% of population) // World Bank. – [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS> (Проверено: 06.04.2023);

faster. Studies show that protesters do use the described opportunities to mobilize their supporters during protests¹⁰. At the same time, the dissemination of information about the protest in social networks can be one of the important drivers for the protest mobilization¹¹. Thus, the reaction of social media to the sanctions affects the further development of the protest movement and is one of the "transmission mechanisms" responsible for the formation of a feedback between sanctions and protest. Despite the importance of the described mechanism, the impact of negative sanctions on communication around the protest movement in social networks remains poorly understood, which creates a significant gap in the existing theoretical description of contentious politics in the 21st century. This constitutes the **problem** of this study.

Literature review

The impact of negative sanctions on online communication dedicated to the protests was studied mainly in terms of the effects of instant negative sanctions by law enforcement officers, while studies on the impact of delayed forms of negative impact on online political communication were not conducted.

Most of the early studies on the relationship between online communication and contentious politics have been reduced to studying the role of new media in the development of protest activity. Such studies have attempted to determine the effect of the dissemination of information about the actions of the regime on the magnitude

¹⁰ Howard P. N., Hussain M. M. The role of digital media //Journal of democracy. – 2011. – Vol 22. – №. 3. – P. 35-48; Соколов А. В., Палагичева А. В. Мобилизация и демобилизация в сетевом политическом протесте //Политическая наука. – 2020. – №. 3. – С. 266-297; Мамонов М. В. Протестная активность россиян в 2011-2012 гг.: основные тренды и некоторые закономерности //Мониторинг общественного мнения: экономические и социальные перемены. – 2012. – №. 1 (107). – С. 5-22.

¹¹ Howard P. N., Hussain M. M. The role of digital media //Journal of democracy. – 2011. – Vol 22. – №. 3. – P. 35-48; Valenzuela S., Correa T., Gil de Zúñiga H. Ties, likes, and tweets: Using strong and weak ties to explain differences in protest participation across Facebook and Twitter use //Political Communication. – 2018. – Vol. 35. – №. 1. – P. 117-134; Lee F. L. F., Chen H. T., Chan M. Social media use and university students' participation in a large-scale protest campaign: The case of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement //Telematics and Informatics. – 2017. – Vol. 34. – №. 2. – P. 457-469; Boyle M. P., Schmierbach M. Media use and protest: The role of mainstream and alternative media use in predicting traditional and protest participation //Communication Quarterly. – 2009. – Vol. 57. – №. 1. – P. 1-17.

of a particular protest episode¹². One of the main findings of this research is the discovery of two trends. First, the protesters do react to messages about the use of various coercive measures spread by other protesters. Second, the protesters are deliberately using social media communication to raise general awareness of the regime's brutal actions and to shape a new protester identity in the long term, and to coordinate and mobilize their supporters in the short term¹³.

The mobilization potential of evidence of police coercion on civilians is generally recognized by the actors. The cases are described when presumable episodic police brutality is a topic for fabricating fake publications intended to foster political mobilization¹⁴. Digital activists can organize actions in the online space specifically against police brutality¹⁵. At the same time, the perceived or actual actions of the police can be a reason for the manifestation of discontent, which only enhances the political salience of the accumulated contradictions¹⁶.

Observing social movements in Hong Kong, Russia, Africa, and Western countries, researchers find that social networks play an even more important role in contentious politics than just disseminating information about protest events. In the new media, there is a construction of a public image of negative sanctions and structures that impose these sanctions¹⁷, and an understanding of past protest events

¹² Howard P. N., Hussain M. M. The role of digital media // *Journal of democracy*. – 2011. – Vol 22. – №. 3. – P. 35-48.; Lynch M. After Egypt: The limits and promise of online challenges to the authoritarian Arab state // *Perspectives on politics*. – 2011. – Vol. 9. – №. 2. – P. 301-310.

¹³ Breuer A., Landman T., Farquhar D. Social media and protest mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian revolution // *Democratization*. – 2015. – Vol. 22. – №. 4. – P. 764-792.

¹⁴ Kanozia R. et al. A study on fake news subject matter, presentation elements, tools of detection, and social media platforms in India // *Asian Journal for Public Opinion Research*. – 2021. – Vol. 9. – №. 1. – P. 48-82.

¹⁵ Iroulo L. A Weapon of the Weak: Fighting Police Brutality through Social Media // Hamburg: German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). – 2021. – [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/a-weapon-of-the-weak-fighting-police-brutality-through-social-media> (date assessed 23.02.2023).

¹⁶ Aniche E. T., Iwuoha V. C. Beyond police brutality: Interrogating the political, economic and social undercurrents of the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria // *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. – 2022.

¹⁷ Clark M. D., Bland D., Livingston J. A. Lessons from #McKinney: Social media and the interactive construction of police brutality // *The Journal of Social Media in Society*. – 2017. – Vol. 6. – №. 1. – P. 284-313; Lawrence R. G. *The politics of force: Media and the construction of police brutality*. – Oxford University Press, 2022.

in general. Social networks offer protesters ample opportunities for self-mediation¹⁸ and turn the Internet space into a separate area of activist work: if earlier the most noticeable activity of the participants in the protest movement was street events, now the main activity of the protest movement has moved to social networks. The hybrid nature of this "digitalization" is noted¹⁹. On the one hand, social media are becoming a separate platform for self-sufficient political participation and activism: the Internet space allows protesters to organize actions with a significant audience and the number of participants literally in itself²⁰. On the other hand, street events are still an important part of the protest repertoire, but their organization, mobilization of participants, coordination and information coverage take place with the active use of social networks²¹. Finally, a separate group of actions stands out, the organizers of which use the interpenetration of digital and physical spaces, giving rise to mixed forms of activism - both digital and offline²².

¹⁸ Cammaerts B. Technologies of self-mediation: Affordances and constraints of social media for protest movements //Civic engagement and social media: Political participation beyond protest. – 2015. – P. 87-110.

¹⁹ Wong S. C., Wright S. Hybrid mediation opportunity structure? A case study of Hong Kong's Anti-National Education Movement //New Media & Society. – 2020. – Vol. 22. – №. 10. – P. 1741-1762; Bailo F., Vromen A. Hybrid social and news media protest events: from# MarchinMarch to# BusttheBudget in Australia //Information, Communication & Society. – 2017. – Vol. 20. – №. 11. – P. 1660-1679.

²⁰ Candón-Mena J., Montero Sánchez D. From cyber-activism to technopolitics: A critical take on historical periods and orientations in the use of digital technology by social movements //International Journal of Communication. – Vol.15. – 2021. – P. 2921-2941; Lee F. L. F., Chan J. M. Media and protest logics in the digital era: The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. – Oxford University Press, 2018. – 288 P.; Lee A. Invisible networked publics and hidden contention: Youth activism and social media tactics under repression //New Media & Society. – 2018. – Vol. 20. – №. 11. – P. 4095-4115; Bailo F., Vromen A. Hybrid social and news media protest events: from# MarchinMarch to# BusttheBudget in Australia //Information, Communication & Society. – 2017. – Vol. 20. – №. 11. – P. 1660-1679; Iroulo L. A Weapon of the Weak: Fighting Police Brutality through Social Media // Hamburg: German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). – 2021. – [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/a-weapon-of-the-weak-fighting-police-brutality-through-social-media> (Проверено: 23.02.2023).

²¹ Breuer A., Landman T., Farquhar D. Social media and protest mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian revolution //Democratization. – 2015. – Vol. 22. – №. 4. – P. 764-792; Manacorda M., Tesei A. Liberation technology: Mobile phones and political mobilization in Africa //Econometrica. – 2020. – Vol. 88. – №. 2. – P. 533-567; Hill T., Canniford R., Millward P. Against modern football: Mobilising protest movements in social media //Sociology. – 2018. – Vol. 52. – №. 4. – P. 688-708; Jost J. T. et al. How social media facilitates political protest: Information, motivation, and social networks //Political psychology. – 2018. – Vol. 39. – P. 85-118; Lee F. L. F., Chan J. M. Media and protest logics in the digital era: The Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. – Oxford University Press, 2018. – 288 P.; Пырма Р. В. Протестные настроения российской молодежи в цифровой сети //Гуманитарные науки. Вестник Финансового университета. – 2019. – Т. 9. – №. 6. – С. 100-110.

²² Wong S. C., Wright S. Hybrid mediation opportunity structure? A case study of Hong Kong's Anti-National Education Movement //New Media & Society. – 2020. – Vol. 22. – №. 10. – P. 1741-1762; Архипова А. С., Радченко Д. А., Титков А. С., Козлова И. В., Югай Е. Ф., Белянин С. В.,

Quantitative studies of the relationship between online communication and social movements are mainly aimed at studying the influence of online activity on offline events and processes. Based on the materials of the Arab Spring, it was shown that decentralized processes in social networks themselves are able to influence the scale of subsequent protests, regardless of traditional media and elites attitude²³. The positive impact of the penetration of social networks on protest activity was confirmed on the materials of African countries²⁴, Russia²⁵ and Latin American countries²⁶.

Thus, there is now evidence that negative sanctions can have an impact on social media communication, and social media communication has complex relationships with contentious politics and social movements. The study of the communicative consequences of the implementation of negative sanctions is necessary both for further clarification of the relationship between the dynamics of contentious politics and negative sanctions, and for a correct description of the activities of social movements in the context of mediatization.

Conceptualization and operationalization

The key concept in this study is political communication. Political communication will be further understood as public statements devoted to the discussion of political phenomena and aimed to change the political context (at least by altering the position of the recipient of the message)²⁷. We will examine in detail the discussions of protest episodes and negative sanctions against protesters that took place on social networks. Therefore, when discussing the growth in the number of

Гаврилова М. В. "Пересборка митинга": Интернет в протесте и протест в интернете //Мониторинг общественного мнения: Экономические и социальные перемены. – 2018. – №. 1 (143). – С. 12-35; Ним Е. Г. «Игрушко митингу»: в поисках теории медиатизации гражданского протеста //Журнал исследований социальной политики. – 2016. – Т. 14. – №. 1. – С. 55-70.

²³ Steinert-Threlkeld Z. C. et al. Online social networks and offline protest //EPJ Data Science. – 2015. – Vol. 4. – №. 1. – P. 1-9.

²⁴ Manacorda M., Tesei A. Liberation technology: Mobile phones and political mobilization in Africa //Econometrica. – 2020. – Vol. 88. – №. 2. – P. 533-567.

²⁵ Enikolopov R., Makarin A., Petrova M. Social media and protest participation: Evidence from Russia //Econometrica. – 2020. – Vol. 88. – №. 4. – P. 1479-1514.

²⁶ Salzman R. Exploring social media use and protest participation in Latin America //Journal of Latin American communication research. – 2015. – Vol. 5. – №. 2. – P. 72-85.

²⁷ McNair B. An introduction to political communication. – Taylor & Francis, 2017.

mentions of protest actions in social networks, this paper talks about the activation of political communication in social media as such. At the same time, the use of the narrower term “protest communication” would be incorrect, since not all mentions of protests are stating their support. Observable communication consists mainly of messages, those who make them and those who perceive them. In addition, an important element of communication is the environment in which it occurs. The specific empirical metrics analyzed in this study thus include the number of statements mentioning protests (number of such social media posts), the number of views (because the number of unique readers is not available due to technical reasons), the number of authors of these messages, and the number of pages on which they are posted. Only publicly available messages are considered: publications in chats and closed publics are not available for researchers (and in many respects follow a different logic, since they are not addressed to a potentially unlimited circle of readers²⁸).

Social media in this study refers to publicly available digital platforms that operate on the Internet and provide users with an interface for communication with a potentially unlimited number of other users of this platform²⁹. The most significant example of social media are social network sites. This study will use data collected from the Vkontakte social network, which is one of the key platforms for communication (including political) in Russia and some CIS countries.

The protest movement is understood as a set of actors and organizations struggling for a change in government policy within the course of contentious politics³⁰, and their actions. Protest episodes, often in the form of rallies, are one of the key observable manifestations of contentious politics. In the empirical part of this study, data on the number of rallies and their temporal characteristics will be used.

²⁸ Costa E. Affordances-in-practice: An ethnographic critique of social media logic and context collapse // *New media & society*. – 2018. – Vol. 20. – №. 10. – P. 3641-3656.

²⁹ Van Dijck J., Poell T., De Waal M. *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. – Oxford University Press, 2018.

³⁰ McAdam D., Tarrow S., Tilly C. *Dynamics of contention* // *Social Movement Studies*. – 2003. – Vol. 2. – №. 1. – P. 99-102.

Negative sanctions are understood as various types of physical, administrative and criminal measures of influence on protesters by the state³¹. At the limit, the sanctions can be almost anything, from the dismissal of identified protesters from work to the use of lethal violence. As part of this dissertation research, we will consider the impact of instant negative sanctions (physical impact on protesters by law enforcement officers) and delayed negative sanctions (criminal prosecution). Thus, the considered negative sanctions are one of the possible types of political control³², constituting that part of it that is associated with physical coercion, and only such that is implemented as part of the state's monopoly on the use of legitimate violence.

The **research question** of this dissertation is how the implementation of various negative sanctions against protesters affects political communication in social media.

To answer the research question, the following **research objectives** need to be addressed.

- 1) To study the existing theories of the transformation of political communication in the context of mediatization.
- 2) To study relevant theoretical approaches on the use of social media in the evolution of protest movements.
- 3) To examine the available theoretical and empirical evidence on the impact of negative sanctions on protest activity.
- 4) Formulate a theoretical model of the impact of negative sanctions on political communication in social networks, and on its basis derive hypotheses about the

³¹ Беленков В. Е. Влияют ли проникновение интернета и онлайн-цензура на успешность репрессий в противодействии уличной протестной активности в долгосрочной перспективе? // Мониторинг общественного мнения: экономические и социальные перемены. – 2021. – № 6. – С. 119-144. (In Eng.)

³² Hassan M., Mattingly D., Nugent E. R. Political control // Annual Review of Political Science. – 2022. – Vol. 25. – P. 155-174.

observed consequences of applying various types of negative sanctions for political communication in social media.

5) Determine the appropriate empirical material to test the predictions of the theoretical model on the data, collect the database.

6) Test the hypotheses formulated on the ground of the theoretical model using the collected data.

The need to fulfill these objectives imposes certain requirements on the **empirical basis** of the study. Empirical material should provide data on political communication in social media during the discussion of several comparable political events, during which there was variation in the use of negative sanctions, and other factors were either fixed or subject to the control of the researcher. Thus, the optimal case for research is communication that occurs during the discussion of a series of protest actions that

- was characterized by different strategies of law enforcement forces within different episodes spaced apart in time,
- passed relatively compactly in time (to exclude the influence of changes both in the characteristics of the media environment and various aspects of the political system) and in space (in order to exclude variation caused by geographical and demographic differences in the dynamics of protest mobilization),
- had one set of organizational structures (to exclude the influence of differences in the media capabilities and media strategies of different social movements),
- took place in the condition of the widespread use of social networks.

These requirements, as well as the requirements for the availability of data for Russian researchers, are met by a series of protest actions that took place in Moscow in July-August 2019, and communication on the Vkontakte social network around it. This period includes four protests in Moscow (20 and 27 July, 3 and 10 August 2019). The agenda of the protest movement was local, the street events themselves

took place in a short period of time, and the organizers of the actions were the same. The level of penetration of social networks in 2019 in Russia was high, and, unlike, for example, in 2012, among different age categories³³. At the same time, four protest episodes took place with varying intensity of the implementation of negative sanctions: the first episode ended without detentions and the use of measures of physical coercion, the second and third episodes were characterized by the active involvement of law enforcement officers, and the fourth - by limited activity of law enforcement forces. In addition, some events of the protest episodes were qualified by the authorities as a violation of the law, as a result of which measures of delayed negative sanctions were applied to some protesters. Due to just such a combination of factors, using the materials of this protest series, it is possible, under conditions close to a natural experiment, to consider the impact on Internet communication of both instant (physical) negative sanctions and delayed forms of sanctions.

The social network "Vkontakte" was used to collect data. The choice of the social network is dictated by its popularity in Russia, the large number of users not usually involved in political communication (which means that variation in the number of engaged users can be expected in this social network), and the lack of a strong association with any social movement. Vkontakte is a platform for internal political communication, where all the texts included in political communication are addressed specifically to fellow citizens. Another popular platform for political communication, Telegram, was less widely used in 2019 and does not provide the ability to analyze all publicly available messages³⁴.

The list of keywords used to filter communications for the period under review includes the main mentions of rallies as such and mentions of sanctions measures ("the Moscow case", the names of the accused). All selected messages were

³³ The estimation of number of users of "Vkontakte" social network in 2019 can be found in Ахмаева Л. Г. Влияние возрастной и гендерной специфики пользователей социальных сетей в России на методы маркетинга и рекламы // Цифровая социология. – 2020. – Т. 3. – №. 3. – С. 21-28.

³⁴ The data for 2018 is presented in Телеграм, прощай! // ВЦИОМ. – [Электронный ресурс]. – URL: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/telegram-proshhaj> (Проверено: 06.04.2023);

additionally filtered according to an list of marker words (mentioned non-Moscow toponyms and so-called “deceived equity holders” were excluded) in order to exclude mention of other protest actions. In total, about 425 thousand messages were collected in this way. The time period for which data was collected is limited to July 20 - August 12, 2019 for the rally references and July 27, 2019 - March 1, 2020 for the delayed negative sanctions references.

The **methods** used in this dissertation include comparative analysis, statistical analysis and machine learning methods for analyzing natural language using vector representations of words³⁵. Comparative and statistical analysis is performed under conditions close to the conditions of a natural quasi-experiment: the selection of empirical material is carried out in such a way that the influence of exogenous factors on differences in dependent variables is controlled or excluded. Thus, the methods used allow achieving high external and internal validity of the study.

Theoretical framework

The fundamental motivation of this study is provided by the theory of mediatization, which implies the transformation of political and social processes under the pressure of institutionalized technologies of mass communication³⁶. Within the framework of this approach, mediatization is understood as “an historical process whereby communication media become in some respect more ‘important’ in expanding areas of life and society [and...] institutionalized technologies of communication expand in extension and power”³⁷. At the same time, it is noted that the nature of the relationship between the media and "a wider range of aspects of private and public life" is two-way. The change in existing relationships leads to the

³⁵ Стукал Д. К., Беленков В. Е., Филиппов И. Б. Методы наук о данных в политических исследованиях: анализ протестной активности в социальных сетях // Политическая наука. – 2021. – №. 1. – С. 46-75.

³⁶ Couldry N., Hepp A. The mediated construction of reality. – John Wiley & Sons, 2018; Livingstone S. Audiences in an age of datafication: critical questions for media research // Television & New Media. – 2019. – Vol. 20. – №. 2. – P. 170-183; Fornäs J. Culturalizing mediatization // Mediatized worlds. – Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014. – P. 38-53.

³⁷ Livingstone S. Audiences in an age of datafication: critical questions for media research // Television & New Media. – 2019. – Vol. 20. – №. 2. – P. 170-183; Fornäs J. Culturalizing mediatization // Mediatized worlds. – Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014. – P. 38-53.

fact that a significant part of social and political life is connected with digital intermediary platforms and either expands beyond online spaces or is completely transferred to it. Traditional forms of political participation are complemented and reinforced by new forms of digital activism. In general, the processes described by the theory of mediatization lead to a general increase in reflexivity - the number and strength of feedbacks, and the emergence of subject fields, both completely new and related to the already studied problems of political science.

Mediatization as a transformation of social processes should be distinguished from mediation as a set of practices through which specific individuals, organizations and movements are included in the flows of media circulation and media production, gaining access to the public sphere through various mediators³⁸.

The theoretical model presented in this study consists of two main components: the first describes political communication in social networks as such, the second describes incentives to participate in digital forms of political activism. The first component is largely based on the theory of a hybrid media system (hybrid media system)³⁹, which describes the transformation of the communication system in the context of mediatization. This approach argues that in the current conditions there is a mixture of traditional and digital forms of communication, the grounding of traditional institutionalized media on new digital communication platforms, and a mixed character of political and media spheres of society. This paradigm makes it possible to analyze the communicative space in which digital editions of large media and niche “micromedia” and discussion and entertainment communities supported by enthusiasts coexist. Not surprisingly, the language of description proposed by this theory is successfully used to describe political communication around large protest movements⁴⁰.

³⁸ Mattoni A., Treré E. Media practices, mediation processes, and mediatization in the study of social movements // *Communication theory*. – 2014. – Vol. 24. – №. 3. – P. 252-271.

³⁹ Chadwick A. *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. – Oxford University Press, 2017. – 256 P.

⁴⁰ Ханг., Wong S. C., Wright S. Hybrid mediation opportunity structure? A case study of Hong Kong's Anti-National Education Movement // *New Media & Society*. – 2020. – Vol. 22. – №. 10. – P. 1741-1762.

The second component is based on socio-psychological research and the integrative model SIMCA (Social Identity Model of Collective Action) ⁴¹, which describes the structure of motivation for participation in collective action (including contentious politics). The three main components of this motivation are identity, injustice, and perceived effectiveness of participation. If the theoretical models of political participation, based mainly on the rational considerations of individuals and the structure of opportunities, often struggle to transfer to describe digital forms of political participation (since the dynamics and the ratio of risks and opportunities turn out to be fundamentally different), then the affective and identity components of motivation can be "digitized" without such problems.

The research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1.

When discussing political events that took place with the implementation of negative sanctions, there will be a general intensification of publication activity within the framework of political communication: an increase in the number of publications made both on behalf of ordinary users and on behalf of communities, an increase in the number of unique authors and an increase in the average activity of each author.

Hypothesis 2.

Discussions of political events that took place under the implementation of instant negative sanctions will see a decrease in the share of the number of publications and user views that fall on stably politicized communities (communities that participated in each discussion considered).

Hypothesis 3.

⁴¹ Van Zomeren M., Postmes T., Spears R. Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: a quantitative research synthesis of three socio-psychological perspectives //Psychological bulletin. – 2008. – Vol. 134. – №. 4. – P. 504.

When discussing political events that took place with the implementation of negative sanctions, there will be an increase in the number of comments on original publications.

Hypothesis 4.

When discussing political events that took place with the use of instant negative sanctions, there will be an increase in the number of reply publications.

Hypothesis 5.

When discussing political events that took place with the implementation of instant negative sanctions, the number of publications-answers in communities that are not included in political communication by their administrators will increase (their share will increase).

Hypothesis 6

The impact of delayed forms of negative sanctions on the number and share of reply publications will be lower than the impact of instant sanctions.

Hypothesis 7

The dynamics of the number of publications devoted to the implementation of delayed forms of negative sanctions depends primarily on the number and quality of informational occasions associated with the implementation of delayed forms of negative sanctions.

Statements to be defended

1. Negative sanctions affect the activity and characteristics of political communication in social networks. At the same time, different types of negative sanctions have a different impact on communication, the features and circumstances of their implementation are also important.
2. Instant negative sanctions lead to a situational activation of political communication, and this activation occurs both due to the expansion of the number

of pages included in the communication, and due to the activation of already included users.

3. The implementation of instant negative sanctions during a protest episode facilitates the use of the comment mechanism to involve communities in political communication whose administrators did not post publications on protest topics.

4. Negative sanctions are one of the factors contributing to the activation of political communication, but even in a discussion about the events of protest events, they are neither the only nor the key factor in their discussion of protest actions: the number of past events is no less important.

5. The implementation of delayed negative sanctions does not lead to an intensification of communication, which is noticeable against the background of the general discussion of the rallies, but the discussion, like the informational occasion itself, is of a more long-term nature. At the same time, the activation of political participation in social networks is not observed.

6. The specifics of a particular episode of the implementation of delayed negative sanctions affect the reaction of social networks: the fewer informational occasions are created in the course of their implementation, and the more passive the defense side is (including in the media plan), the less noticeable the media coverage will be.

Novelty

1. The author's theoretical model of the impact of negative sanctions on political communications is proposed. The proposed model was used to formulate hypotheses that were confirmed by empirical data.

2. The author's methodology was developed for comparative analysis of political communication flows dedicated to various events.

3. The impact of varying intensity of implementation of instant negative sanctions on subsequent political communication was investigated while controlling external factors.

4. The impact of delayed forms of negative sanctions on political communication was investigated.
5. A comparison was made of the communicative consequences of applying different types of sanctions.
6. The impact of negative sanctions on political communication on various types of platforms available to users was investigated.

Research Approbation

Articles:

1. Akhremenko A.S., Philippov I.B. Impact of the Violent Suppression of Protest on its Discussion in Social Networks // Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes. 2019. № 5. P. 200-225.
2. Philippov I.B. Symmetrical Answer: Police Suppression of Protests as a Driver of Political Communication in Social Media // The Journal of Political Philosophy and Sociology of Politics "Politeia. Analysis. Chronicle. Forecast". 2020. Vol. 105. № 2. P. 24-48.
3. Philippov I.B. The "Moscow Case" as a Factor of Protest Communication Activity in the Social Network "VK" // RUDN Journal of Political Science. 2022. Vol. 24. № 3. P. 530-544.
4. Philippov I.B. Quantitative Indicators of Text Style as a Factor of the Post Promotion in a Social Media Protest Communication // Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law. 2020. № 2. P. 249-268.
5. Stukal D.K., Belenkov B.E., Philippov I.B. Data science methods in political science research: analyzing protest activity in social media // Political Science (RU). 2021. № 1. P. 46-75.

Conferences:

1. XXII April International Academic Conference on Economic and Social Development, report: The Implementation Of Negative Sanctions Against

Protesters As A Factor Of Intensity Of Political Communication In Social Network Sites, 22 April 2021.

2. ICA Regional Conference 2022 Computational Communication Research in Central and Eastern Europe, report: Symmetrical Answer: Police Suppression of Protest Episodes as a Driver of Political Communication in Social Media, 27 June 2022.

Research seminar:

1. Research Seminar of Doctoral School of Political Science, report: The Impact of the Police Violence against Protesters on Communication around Protest Movement in the Social Network Vkontakte in 2019.

The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 20-311-90078 «The Impact of Negative Sanctions against Protesters on the Communication around Protest Movement on Social Media».

Summary

The chapter 1 of the dissertation is devoted to the theoretical aspects of studying the connection between social movements and political communication in social networks. The paragraph 1.1 describes the key implications of the spread of social media for political communication and argues the need to take into account the ongoing transformations in the communication field in order to fully describe contentious politics. The proliferation of social media is leading to three major shifts in political communication that lead to changes in contentious politics. Firstly, there is a decrease in transactional costs to maintain communication, both internal and directed outside a particular social movement. Second, there is an increase in political polarization. Finally, the effect of preference falsification is reduced. These shifts lead to such changes in contentious politics, which are noted by researchers at the macro level based on empirical material on protest events in the Middle East, various countries of Africa and regions of Russia. The same changes are recorded

by qualitative methods, when analyzing the description of the protest events by the protesters.

In paragraph 1.2, it is proposed to use the theory of mediatization and the more specialized theory of the hybrid media system that emerged within its framework as a theoretical basis for analyzing changes in contentious politics caused by the transformations of the communicative environment. The theory of a hybrid media system considers the political and media spheres of society as interconnected both at the level of processes and at the level of mechanics, gives clear predictions of the hierarchy and interaction of various types of actors in Internet communication, and points to the role of intermediary mechanisms that mediate the interaction between these actors. In the course of the paragraph, it is shown that the developments of the described theories were already necessary to explain and describe the transformations in contentious politics in Hong Kong.

The paragraph 1.3 describes political participation in social networks. A description of social networks as a space for political communication and political participation is proposed, during which the mechanics of interaction between actors in social networks are described in detail. It is shown that the algorithms of social networks mediate the actions of actors and set the framework in which they occur. At the end of the paragraph, the main part of the theoretical research model is formulated, which describes the mutual influence of political communication and political participation in social networks.

The paragraph 1.4 presents an overview of the empirically observed features that are inherent in political communication in social media and brought there precisely due to the mediation of user interactions by specific algorithms. The two main features highlighted include homophilia and the existence of significant disparities in communicative effectiveness between different users (and different types of users).

The chapter 2 of the dissertation is devoted to the theoretical aspects of the mediatization of negative sanctions. The paragraph 2.1 discusses various types of negative sanctions, describes their features and the main known consequences for the dynamics of contentious politics. It is indicated that in the future, instant and delayed negative sanctions aimed at the participants in the contentious politics themselves will be considered.

The paragraph 2.2 briefly describes the predictions of the main theories of contentious politics about the consequences of negative sanctions for the further dynamics of contentious politics, it is concluded that these theories do not provide a single consistent prediction. The theoretical uncertainty of the prediction is enhanced by the data of empirical studies, which also capture various scenarios following the implementation of negative sanctions.

The paragraph 2.3 describes the socio-psychological consequences of the implementation of negative sanctions. Along with an increase in the perceived risks of participating in contentious politics, two main consequences of the implementation of negative sanctions are recorded: the emergence or increase of anger and the emergence of the perception of political participation as a moral obligation. Both of these antecedents positively influence the decision on political participation and reduce the role of rational factors, which is especially important in the context of political participation in a situation where negative sanctions have already occurred. At the end of the paragraph, the socio-psychological approach and the SIMCA model based on it are used to refine a fragment of the theoretical model that describes the impact of external events (negative sanctions) on political participation.

The paragraph 2.4 describes the theoretical and empirical evidence about the importance of social networks in mediating the effects of negative sanctions on the further dynamics of contentious politics, as well as empirical evidence of the transformation of political communication in social networks as a result of the implementation of negative sanctions during the events of a street protest. After that,

fragments of the theoretical model from the paragraphs 1.3 and 2.3 are combined into a single theoretical model, which is used to develop hypotheses about the impact of negative sanctions on political communication.

The chapter 3 is devoted to an empirical analysis of the impact of negative sanctions on political communication. Within the framework of this chapter, the hypotheses formulated on the basis of the results of the first two chapters of the dissertation were tested. The paragraph 3.1 is devoted to substantiating the discussion on the Vkontakte social network of a series of rallies that took place in Moscow from July 20, 2019 to August 10, 2019, as an empirical basis for the study. It was shown that the choice of this series is dictated by its properties, which make it possible to assess the impact of negative sanctions on communication most accurately and completely on the basis of the discussion materials of this protest series, and the choice of a social network for analysis is dictated by its unique position among other social networks used in Russia, and completeness of data provided to researchers.

The paragraph 3.2 includes a description of the strategy for testing the hypotheses using the collected data.

The paragraph 3.3 provides a general description of the collected data used to analyze the impact of instant sanctions, demonstrates their validity using the word vector representation method (one of the modern methods of machine text analysis) and substantiates further separate consideration of the corpus of answers and the corpus of comments.

The paragraph 3.4 is devoted to testing hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. For this purpose, a corpus of original publications made by ordinary users and communities was considered. It was shown that the implementation of instant negative sanctions with a comparable crowdedness of actions leads to an increase in the number of messages included in political communication published by both types of authors. Likewise, the number of involved authors is growing. At the same time, the average number

of publications is growing only for community authors (**Appendix 1**). Thus, hypothesis 1 was confirmed almost completely. In addition, it was shown that when discussing actions that took place with the implementation of negative sanctions, the collected publications received a greater number of comments both in absolute terms and in terms of one post (**Appendix 2**). Thus, hypothesis 3 was fully confirmed.

Testing Hypothesis 2 required a subsample of publications that were made by communities that discussed each of the considered actions (**Appendix 3**). These communities account for about half of all published messages and more than half of all recorded views. It was found that other things being equal, negative sanctions lead to a decrease in their role in communication: both the share of posts and the share of views decrease. Thus, hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

The paragraph 3.5 is devoted to considering a subsample of reply publications and, accordingly, testing hypotheses 4 and 5 (**Appendix 4**). At the beginning of the paragraph, it was shown that despite the relatively low share of reply publications in the overall structure of the content consumed, this type of publication offers users special opportunities to involve neutral communities in political communication. It was shown that when considering actions comparable in crowdedness, the number of publications-answers published when discussing actions that passed with the implementation of negative sanctions turned out to be significantly increased. In the entire subsample, the peak of the number of publications-replies fell on the discussion of one of the actions that took place with the application of negative sanctions, even though in general this is not the most discussed action among those considered. Hypothesis 4 was confirmed.

To test hypothesis 5, we considered a subsample of publications-replies posted as replies to posts on pages where protest actions were not mentioned before these publications were posted. Such posts were called engaging replies. It turned out that both the number and the share of involving replies among all reply publications were higher during the discussion of actions that took place with the implementation of negative sanctions. Moreover, it was shown that the proportion

of communities involved in political communication through the publication of replies was the highest when discussing such actions. Thus, hypothesis 5 was confirmed.

In the paragraph 3.6, the obtained results were checked for stability. The test was carried out on similar data collected for a different keyword (“protest”). It is shown that in this subsample the impact of negative sanctions can be traced even more clearly, but since this subsample is more noisy with non-political messages (due to the peculiarities of the use of the word “protest” in Russian), the more conservative conclusions of the main subsample are used as the main ones.

The paragraph 3.7 refers to the analysis of the second body of publications, which contains all references to the names of the defendants in criminal cases initiated as a result of the protest actions of the series, and the umbrella name of these criminal cases (“Moscow case”). This corpus will test hypotheses about the impact of deferred negative sanctions on political communication: hypotheses 6 and 7. It was shown that the application of deferred negative sanctions does not lead to a situational increase in the number of published messages and there is no widespread involvement of users in communication. Thus, hypothesis 6 was confirmed (**Appendix 5**). In addition, it was shown that the dynamics of references to deferred negative sanctions is strongly related to informational occasions that are created by investigative and judicial authorities and public defenders of the accused during the long process of implementing negative sanctions (**Appendix 6**). Thus, hypothesis 7 was confirmed.

In the conclusion of the research, empirical findings were briefly summarized during the consideration of two corpora of publications from the Vkontakte social network, it offers essential conclusions from quantitative observations and shows the role of dissertation research among various subject areas of social sciences. This dissertation makes a contribution to the study of the relationship between protest and negative sanctions, revealing in more detail one of the feedback links from negative sanctions to protest.

It is confirmed that social networks respond to the application of negative sanctions, and this generally changes the media coverage of protest events, which creates the potential for non-communicative and non-digital changes in the course of contentious politics.

In addition, the dissertation makes a contribution to the study of the digitalization of protest movements and the transformation of contentious politics in general in the context of mediatization. Within the framework of this dissertation, it was shown that the discussion of rallies in particular and political communication in general in social networks has a dual nature: it is both part of both communication and political participation.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the study of communication in social networks as such, through the presentation of the dynamics of the structure of political communication, the study of communication possibilities and the hierarchy of various types of actors.

At the end of the conclusion, a description of the limitations of the study and the boundaries of extrapolation of the results obtained are presented. The fundamental limitations of the study are the incompleteness of data on political communication (subsamples collected by one keyword were studied), the lack of explicit control over the activity of bots (besides that provided by the design of the empirical part) and the lack of analysis of the content of the collected messages.

The limits of extrapolation of the obtained results are set by the peculiarities of the considered series of the protest action. The results of this study cannot be extrapolated to societies with low penetration of modern communication technologies. In addition, when considering communication around larger (non-local) and longer protest series, strategic behavior of actors in social networks may arise, which is not traced in the results of this study. Finally, this study does not provide insight into the effects of lethal negative sanctions.

Appendix 1. Dynamics of Original Publications Posting

<i>Users` Publications</i>						
Rallies	Authors	Posts	Views	Likes	Reposts	Commentaries
Total	26 986	55 753	9 210 414	343 107	35 464	50 778
2019-07-20	3 746	5 558	1 512 983	61 099	5 606	7 005
2019-07-27	10 792	16 466	2 686 759	97 370	11 528	18 283
2019-08-03	8 905	13 387	1 859 908	67 326	6 992	10 285
2019-08-10	11 923	20 342	3 150 764	117 312	11 338	15 205
<i>Publics` Publications</i>						
Rallies	Authors	Posts	Views	Likes	Reposts	Commentaries
Total	11 609	45 284	176 898 481	3 346 890	154 480	581 270
2019-07-20	2 832	5 046	14 947 403	296 044	17 970	43 069
2019-07-27	5 315	12 958	45 624 927	812 958	43 894	183 660
2019-08-03	4 752	10 603	37 791 664	673 866	32 561	132 361
2019-08-10	6 135	16 677	78 534 487	1 564 022	60 055	222 180
Grand Total	38 595	101 037	186 108 895	3 689 997	189 944	632 048

Appendix 2. Dynamics of Original Publications` Communicative Success

<i>Users` Publications</i>					
Rallies	Authors per post	Views per post	Likes per post	Reposts per post	Commentaries per post
Total	2,07	165,20	6,15	0,64	0,91
2019-07-20	1,48	272,22	10,99	1,01	1,26
2019-07-27	1,53	163,17	5,91	0,70	1,11
2019-08-03	1,50	138,93	5,03	0,52	0,77
2019-08-10	1,71	154,89	5,77	0,56	0,75
<i>Publics` Publications</i>					
Rallies	Authors per post	Views per post	Likes per post	Reposts per post	Commentaries per post
Total	3,90	3906,42	73,91	3,41	12,84
2019-07-20	1,78	2962,23	58,67	3,56	8,54
2019-07-27	2,44	3520,99	62,74	3,39	14,17
2019-08-03	2,23	3564,24	63,55	3,07	12,48
2019-08-10	2,72	4709,15	93,78	3,60	13,32

Appendix 3. Variation in the scale of communication and the average number of reactions between flows of different rallies in a subsample of communities that discussed all protest episodes

<i>Absolute Values</i>						
Rallies	Authors	Posts	Views	Likes	Reposts	Commentaries
2019-07-20	1148	2 886	11 348 087	226858	11 975	34 010
2019-07-27	1148	6 076	28 281 980	519798	26 141	98 916
2019-08-03	1148	5 084	24 015 412	423360	19 612	73 387
2019-08-10	1148	7 654	51 172 364	1036777	34 653	116 925
Total	1148	21 700	114 817 843	2206793	92 381	323 238
<i>Average Activity</i>						
Rallies	Posts per author	Views per post	Likes per post	Reposts per post	Commentaries per post	
2019-07-20	2,51	3932,12	78,61	4,15	11,78	
2019-07-27	5,29	4654,70	85,55	4,30	16,28	
2019-08-03	4,43	4723,72	83,27	3,86	14,43	
2019-08-10	6,67	6685,70	135,46	4,53	15,28	

Appendix 4. Publication activity in promoting engaging replies against the background of reply posts in general.

<i>All replies</i>							
Rallies	Authors	Replies	Likes	Commentaries	Replies / Authors	Likes / Replies	Commentaries / Replies
2019-07-20	6 352	8 922	28 430	8 998	1,40	3,19	1,01
2019-07-27	31 180	53 589	233 717	76 539	1,72	4,36	1,43
2019-08-03	24 949	42 010	150 661	51 478	1,68	3,59	1,23
2019-08-10	31 802	51 654	196 552	70 974	1,62	3,81	1,37
<i>Only Engaging</i>							
Rallies	Authors	Replies	Likes	Commentaries	Replies / Authors	Likes / Replies	Commentaries/ Replies
2019-07-20	3 261	4 022	10 024	3 577	1,23	2,49	0,89
2019-07-27	12 742	18 840	74 813	25 980	1,48	3,97	1,38
2019-08-03	11 452	16 374	46 983	18 275	1,43	2,87	1,12
2019-08-10	12 077	16 895	49 765	21 181	1,40	2,95	1,25

Appendix 5. The distribution of «Moscow case» mentions by author and post type

	Authors	Posts	Views	Likes	Reposts	Commentaries
Replies	964	1 201		3 375	34	1 040
User	887	1 031		2 513	27	1 021
Public	77	170		862	7	19
Original posts	5 655	9 263	30 509 678	431 099	29 527	53 586
User	1 755	2 598	1 918 906	44 040	4 330	3 428
Public	3 900	6 665	28 590 772	387 059	25 197	50 158

Appendix 6. Daily dynamics of «Moscow case» mentions

