

# Information technologies as a production resource of youth protest virtualization

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**Abstract** — Socio-political instability and the complication of political reality stimulate protest moods and actions, especially among young people. The rapid development of the information and communication sphere, the availability of information technologies and digital communications led to the emergence of innovative forms of protest activity among young people. Information technologies are becoming a production resource through which policy is virtualized and the youth community is included in the media space. Thanks to the active work in social networks, the youth blocs manage to ensure a broad connection with their like-minded people, who often mobilize its resource potential for criticizing the government and oppositional demarches for narrow selfish interest. In other words, social media can be a real tool for the radicalization of modern youth and for activating their social energy on the path of destructive social and political transformations. As a rule, young users of Internet resources as active subjects of politics are attracted by anonymity, freedom of action. As a result, flash mobs, happenings, performances as innovative forms of radical protest against the government are gaining popularity among young people. In the end, policy virtualization complicates the process of neutralizing the radical moods of young people, which can lead to new challenges in the system of ensuring the information security of society and the state.

**Keywords** — information technologies, virtualization, protest, protest activity, youth.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the most general sense, protest is a decisive objection to something, opposition to the existing order of things, an active form of protecting interests from outside attacks [1]. In general, a protest can be interpreted broadly and include a different range of phenomena. So, G.I. Weinstein defines the social protest as “challenging, denying the whole social reality, the principles of the socio-political system, outraging the existing orders and institutions of power in general, and speaking only against certain tendencies in their policies” [2]. In the context of socio-political relations, a protest can be considered through political behavior. Political behavior is one of the forms of participation of the individual, the social community of people in the exercise of political power, to protect their political interests.

Social media in the 21st century contributed to a surge in protest activity when the younger generation is a direct participant. The media and information media, in particular, the Internet and cellular communications, become a

production resource through which virtualization of protest attitudes takes place. Thanks to active work in social networks, blogs, and other Internet resources, opposition members manage to ensure communication with their supporters and call for going to rallies, pickets, processions. Thus, modern youth, as the most active user of social resources, may become the object of violence in the Internet space. The youth of the most active users of social Internet resources, anonymity, isolation from real communication, except for a close circle of people, contribute to the formation of a maximalist world view, which they spread among their own kind, destabilizing the constitutional order in the country.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS (MODEL)

The principles of the communicative approach were used as the methodological base of the research. The theoretical basis of the study was the works of A. Bell [3], K. Prell [4], L. Manovich [5], M. Castells [6] on network communications and communications in the Internet space. Such important concepts as concepts of social action (M. Weber [7]) and relative deprivation (S. Stauffer [8]) make it possible to characterize the activity of young people as an institutional subject. K. Mannheim [9], S. Firs [10], S.N. Eisenstadt were engaged in conceptualizing the concept of “youth”, as well as defining its characteristic features [11].

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Protest and protest activity

In science, there are a number of methodological approaches explaining the causes of protest behavior. Indicators of social well-being and the dynamics of public expectations have an important role to play. According to the concept of relative deprivation of S. Stauffer, the protest is explained by the fact that “some individuals are dissatisfied as a result of dissatisfaction with the state of discrepancies between his personal aspirations, hopes, demands, and the actual situation. Increasing differences lead to increased discontent. At some stage, the significance of the differences becomes so large that it leads to total disappointment” [8]. A different understanding of the reasons for the protest is traced in the works of Kirk and Paynard, who developed the concept of political conflict. The protest is viewed as “a form of political conflict, which subject is specific actions and policies of the authorities. In

most cases, the protest is short-lived and is expressed in the form of demonstrations, strikes [12].

It is interesting to consider protest through the key category of social action in M. Weber's sociology, where the concept of action and the concept of meaning are inseparably linked. Only those acts of human behavior with which "the acting individual or individuals associate the subjective meaning" [7] can be called an action. Protest behavior, as a social action, should be viewed as the actions of individuals, oriented at each other, and directed, for example, against elements of the political system, perceived at the subjective level as an obstacle to the normal existence of the group.

R. Merton also considered protest through the concept of social action. In his opinion, "the functional unity of social action is possible in theory, but contrary to reality" [13]. Analysis of reality should include not only the study of the functions of social structures but also the study of their dysfunctions. According to R. Merton, functions are "those observable consequences that contribute to the adaptation of this system". Dysfunctions are "those observable effects that reduce the ability to adapt the system" [13]. The consequences of those social actions that support the system - are functional, while the consequences of social actions that upset the balance of the system, lead to tensions and conflicts - are dysfunctional. In this case, protest activity is related to dysfunctional social actions.

According to Karl Marx, any human activity in its nature is expedient and conscious, so he criticizes M. Weber for underestimating the category of interests. Interest is "uniting people into classes, if you have an awareness of your classes and class interests, class contradictions arise, which can only be solved by violence" [14]. Consequently, the class struggle will always be a natural mechanism for development. The accumulation of class contradictions leads to a revolutionary transformation of society and the state. Thus, Karl Marx considers the protest of the oppressed class a guarantee of social progress.

L. Milbright singles out one form of protest — protest behavior in elections, in which he divides: electoral absenteeism, more precisely, absenteeism associated with a certain protest motivation for non-participation in elections; voting for radical or not popular political leaders or voting against all. Such a vote may be an expression of distrust (protest) not only to the political course pursued but also to the entire political regime as a whole and its individual institutions (for example, political parties) [15].

Modern researchers have identified three types of protest activity: the traditional, gaming and virtual types. The traditional type of protest is implemented in rallies and pickets. Here "the protest is manifested in the classical form, as a result of demonstrations, rallies, most of them unauthorized." A game or inactive type of protest is characterized by the fact that protests do not aim at any specific goal but are organized for the sake of "themselves." This is explained by the fact that according to Lipovetsky J., Narcissus is a symbol of the postmodern society: "a new stage of individualism is coming: narcissism means the emergence of a new type of person, with increased attention to himself and his body, as well as to other people at the moment when authoritarian capitalism gives way to

hedonistic and liberal capitalism." The virtual type of protest activity occurs in the measurement of cyberspace. This has become possible since the virtual actions became social in their consequences. "When society gives up many of its processes to the virtual world, then this world will already be mastered by those people who at one time rejected this society. The protest will lose its main feature - publicity, but this will make it even more dangerous and stronger" [16].

#### *B. Young people as a subject of protest*

The spread of protest sentiments among young people can be explained from various scientific positions. For example, there is a theory of generations of American sociologists N. Hove and W. Strauss. In the early 90s of the 20th century scientists, considering the values of the majority and typical behavior patterns, came to the conclusion that the most important factors determining the thinking, actions of generations are not age but the environment in which people grow up to 10-12 years old (all that is happening around, people in this age rating do not see in the categories "good or bad", "right or wrong", but in the category "usually") and the standards of education in the family that the child perceives as appropriate. "So, a person forms basic values. They unconsciously manifest themselves for lifelong, both of an individual and a whole generation, affect our behavior" [17].

The features of protest activity of young people follow from the essence of young people as a social group and are determined by the transitive nature of the formation of their social subjectivity [18]. It is at a young age that the imperfection of the surrounding social world is most relevant. Accordingly, it is either a desire to isolate oneself from this reality and create one's own world ("leaving" option), or to change it ("revolt" option), regardless of the world's readiness for transformation. "Young people are becoming the subject of social reproduction so that their social situation is characterized by incomplete social status, marginality, the uncertainty of social identifications. The latter makes it difficult to identify the intragroup and outer group, generates a contradiction in consciousness between "we" and "they", which in turn leads to extreme forms of consciousness and behavior" [19]. At the same time, adults can directly relate to protest activities and young people often seek to imitate their illegal behavior. The actions of young protesters are more radical and crueler, because of their age, they are not afraid of death, prison, physical injuries, they are poorly aware of the consequences of their actions.

One of the first researchers who paid attention to the specific features of young people as a social group is German sociologist K. Mannheim. In his understanding, youth is a reserve that comes to the forefront of society at times when it is necessary to adapt to changing and qualitatively new circumstances and conditions [9]. Societies are dynamic and at some point they will need to step up and organize them, that is, resources that are often suppressed in traditional societies instead of mobilizing and integrating them. In the theory of K. Mannheim, the youth performs the function of "reviving the social life mediator". To implement this function, the incomplete inclusion of young people in society in various aspects is necessary. In

determining the age of maturity of individuals, the decisive condition is the moment when young people enter society and the first encounter with the “chaos of antagonistic assessments”. According to K. Mannheim, “the youth is neither progressive nor conservative, it is a potency, ready for any undertaking [9]. From the point of view of the English scientist S. Fries, it is necessary to focus on the social context of the state of young people, that is, on the process of transition of the individual from the youth cohort to the adult one. This process implies a number of changes, among which there is a transition from dependence - to independence and from irresponsibility - to responsibility [10]. In other words, “youth” means a social construct and a certain generalized image, according to which individuals are distinguished from a certain age range (11-30 years). Distinctive features of young people are restrictions on access to the significant economic, social, political and cultural resources of society.

In the second half of the twentieth century, youth, as a social group, became known as a special subculture. Thus, within the framework of the functionalism paradigm, youth was defined as a carrier of culture, designed to overcome the problems that arose as a consequence of the industrialization of society. The works of the Israeli sociologist S. Eisenstadt analyze the special youth culture in the context of the process of transferring values from one generation to another, translating values and their subsequent functioning into actual ones. Youth culture is defined as an institution the main goal and function of which is the regulation of the process of separating a child from a family and preparing young people to adopt a new status position in society [11]. The process of marginalization of youth and formal institutions that perform the functions of training and control, according to S. Eisenstadt, are two aspects in the process of transition of young people to new status positions.

### *C. Social media as a technology resource protest*

The era of the 20th century is characterized by the rapid development of the media. The introduction of television, radio, as well as the mass distribution of periodicals, had a huge impact on people's perception and thinking, thereby changing the structure of society. The development of means of communication led to the creation of the Internet, which changed many communication practices in society. New platforms began to develop on the basis of Internet sites, which created a new communicative space, involving more and more participants.

Traditional media (television, newspapers, radio) establish relationships where, on the one hand, there are professional producers of informational messages, and on the other hand, there are a lot of non-professional consumers. At the beginning of the 21st century, the pervasive computerization and global spread of the Internet has led many citizens to access the same tools as professional news producers. At the same time, social media emerged, which became a platform where various people could produce and disseminate their messages [20]. Social media is a kind of online media, where each person can act both as an audience and as an author (even at the same time). Special software placed on the site allows any user producing, disseminating, commenting and editing

information, creating communities around common interests. Among the features of social media is the possibility of adjusting the published information, interactivity, the ability to track the popularity of the message, the availability of old materials, multimedia, links to other materials and incomplete control over the page content [21]. Social media includes blogs (including microblogging); social networks; data exchange services; social databases; social news sites.

The spreading of messages in social media is not chaotic, but on the contrary, strictly structured. Messages that are disseminated by users marked as “friends” form a messages flow called a “news feed”. “News feed” is the central element of any social network. It should also be noted that information in social media is presented, as well as in visual and textual form. The extensive functionality of social media allows you instantly uploading a photo or video file to a page, which immediately appears in the “news feed”.

American researcher B. Solis focuses on the technological nature of social media. In his opinion, “social media, in its most general form, is the way people discover, read, and comment on news, information, and content. This is a merger of the social component and high technologies that transform the monologue (from one to many) into a dialogue (many to many)” [22]. Thus, communication in social media is a new kind of communication. Social media users, by establishing relationships between each other and different communities, form a specific network. Inside this network, all communication takes place: users themselves produce and edit messages, spreading them throughout the network between “friends”. The number of recipients of these messages can be limited to one person or make up many people who are also message producers.

M. Castells calls this new form of communication mass self-communication. Social media communication has the potential to reach a global audience through mass mailing and networking. At the same time, the production of messages is carried out independently by each user in the same way as other actions, for example, searching for the message recipient [23]. Such communication networks are characterized by openness, decentralization, the predominance of horizontal links, self-development, and the autonomy of the nodes included in them. These properties allow you to work effectively with information on social media [24].

Communication networks contain nothing but links and nodes. Connections involve interaction between network users and the exchange of information, and nodes are the users themselves. The emergence of stable connections between nodes is a prerequisite for connecting individual users into a single network. The main feature of such a network is the ability to build simultaneous interaction of lots of similar nodes. Thus, social media have their own specific and special communication potential, therefore the use by social media subjects to achieve their goals becomes inevitable. One example of the use of social media is the formation of protest attitudes in social networks, blogs, especially among young people.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Due to age characteristics the younger generation is associated with youthful maximalism, a heightened sense of justice, the search for a reference group and their own identity, the meaning and value of life, and romanticism are characteristic. Young people are most perceptive to innovative ideas, values, and actions, and are characterized by specific qualities that underlie aggressively demonstrative behavior. Such behavior is often caused by an unsettled psyche, frustration, a sense of one's own uselessness, inferiority, conflicts in the family, with peers, lack of communication, lack of friends, and underdeveloped leisure time activities for young people. Intolerance in society, lack of consensus-based technologies for conflict resolution, lack of development of a culture of positive civic participation have a negative impact on the formation of socially demanded qualities of young people. The network can be formed almost spontaneously, which can be seen on the example of a flash mob made possible by the spread of the Internet [25]. For the latter type of social networks, which are based on communication on the world wide web, virtual connections are typical. A feature of such connections is the fact that in computer social networks agents are nameless, they do not always reveal their localization in geographic space and are not connected to each other by any other connections. For example, flash mobs, happenings, performances, gaining popularity in modern reality, can be considered as innovative forms of radical protest against the government. They are brightly provocative in nature, draw attention to the most pressing unsolved social problems, point to the need for transformation in this or that sphere. Such actions are difficult to control. This complicates the process of localization and neutralization of protest feelings, attitudes, which are the basis, including for radical actions. It follows from the above that the development of freedom in the area of information dissemination, carried out through scientific and technological progress, should be considered a key factor in the virtualization of the protest activity of young people. Thanks to the Internet, on the one hand, the choice of sources of information, the expression of their rights and freedoms, critics of the authorities who have become part of everyday life, make a significant contribution to the development of civil society, and, on the other, destabilize the established socio-political order.

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