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Digital Transformation of Government Control and Trust in Government: To the Problem Statement

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ABSTRACT
The article provides an analysis of the so-called performance theory, directly connecting trust in government authorities and the quality of government electronic services according to the scheme: "improving the quality of government services through the use of information technology - increase of citizen satisfaction with the quality of services - increase of trust in government authorities." It was demonstrated that this theory does not have empirical confirmation, both due to difficulties with the operationalization of the "trust in government" concept and because of the so-called "attribution errors". The difference of the methods used to assess the quality of e-services and determining the level of trust in government authorities, further compounds matters. The empirical results look unclear and controversial: trust is both the cause and the consequence of satisfaction with the control quality. However, performance theory is supported by a coalition of technocrat experts interested in promoting it as a tool to the rationale for the very costly processes of the digital transformation of government control.
Keywords: *e-government, e-services, performance theory, trust, policy, politics*

1. INTRODUCTION

The decline of trust in government authorities and pronounced anti-establishment sentiments are a worldwide trend that is actively discussed in the scientific literature. This tendency is explained, including, by the massive introduction of new information and communication technologies, and social media above all. They are considered as disruptive innovation [1], which led to the destruction of the existing system of interaction between citizens, the media and government authorities and generating a variety of hybrid phenomena. Despite existing doubts about the predictive power of the disruptive innovation model [2], it sufficiently describes the processes that are currently taking place in the sphere of interaction between government and citizens.

The initial expectations related to the digital transformation of the government control system were extremely positive and almost assumed a transition to direct e-democracy (in Russian literature, a typical example of such techno-optimism is [3]). A model of e-government was formed; e-government free from shortcomings inherent in the "Weber" bureaucratic machine and quickly responding to the needs, requests and proposals of citizens. As a result, the transition from "government for you" to "government with you" should have taken place, when the authorities do not just foresee the needs of people and

satisfy them, but represent a platform on which citizens and authorities jointly seek solutions to social problems. A similar model was called "digital government" (see more: [4]).

Increasingly, however, the concern that information technology is not so much a development mechanism as a mechanism for the destruction of traditional power mechanisms began to express. F. Bannister and R. Connolly even expressed the opinion that public bureaucracy, recently seemed troglodytic, with its silos, problems with interagency interaction and plurality of actors is a more reliable tool for protecting democratic values than a digital government with its cult of efficiency and benefits [5].

Experts talked about the phenomenon of "technological populism" [6], a special feature of which is that people make not complex ideological choices, but "acquire specific decisions and changes", which leads to the breakdown of traditional political structures and the emergence of many flexible, constantly forming around specific issues and disintegrating interest groups [7]. Actually, this refers to the destruction of traditional mechanisms of depoliticization, providing a separation of the neutral managerial sphere in which, as C. Schmitt showed, it is possible to come to some "minimum of unanimity, which makes security, evidence, mutual understanding and peace to be possible" [8].

Therefore, the reverse side of "technological populism" is the intensive development of technological government supervision ("digital traceability"), which results in a whole range of ethical conflicts (see, for example, [9]) and revives the nightmare ghost of Orwell's "Big Brother". If in 2015 M. Bauer stated that with regard to information

technology we are in a situation with "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time": it is necessary to understand why "the dog did nothing", that is, why the public resistance to mass digitalization in the last decades was minimal ([10: 114]; I mean an episode from the story of A. Conan-Doyle "Silver Blaze"), then five years later we can talk about the emergence of new social movements, such as the movement for "algorithmic accountability" [11], which are based on a deep suspicion in the ability of existing authorities to cope with the information technology development .

In light of this, the model, popular in the coalition of "digital government" supporters, of increasing trust in the state, when authorities more effectively use information technology for interaction with citizens is starting to raise increasing doubts.

The goal of our research is to analyze this model, and to demonstrate its fundamental limitations related to the fact that it is based on blurring the boundaries between politics and politics.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is based on an analysis of the literature on the trust in government authorities issue. We use both academic publications and so-called "gray literature", that is, analytical materials prepared by various expert centers, primarily international (for example, the UN and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development).

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Analysis of the "gray literature" on the trust issue shows that it is based on a fairly simple scheme of "improving the quality of government services through the use of information technology - increase of citizen satisfaction with the services quality - increase of trust in government authorities". It can vary: for example, the basis of the international Open Government Partnership activity is the scheme of "improving the openness of government authorities by publishing "open data" - increase of electronic participation - increase of trust in government authorities".

Thus, international experts summarizing the experience of government control digitalization suggest that the transition to digital government and the provision of government services in electronic form should automatically, without additional efforts, lead to increase of trust in government authorities. This scheme is constantly replicated in expert literature. It is taken for granted and practical recommendations are given on its basis (see, for example, [12]). It should be highlighted that national specificity in these recommendations is fundamentally ignored. This periodically generates advices to use information technology for fighting corruption simultaneously in such different countries as Jordan, Ethiopia and Fiji (of course, applying a marketing approach to expand the target audience) [13].

Thus, the problem of trust is mixed exclusively in the sphere of policy and is taken out of the politic, that is, it is de-politicized and neutralized.

4. DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

In the academic literature, the scheme we described was called "performance theory" [14]. In its extremes, it leads to a reduction in the problem of trust in authorities enforcement, in the problem of improving the usability of official websites and portals of government bodies.

The paradox is that there is no convincing empirical evidence of the "performance theory" because trust itself while remaining a policy phenomenon, is understood extremely summarized in gray literature. Meanwhile, even the most preliminary operationalization of the "trust" concept shows its extreme complexity.

Academic literature does not contain a single definition of what trust is, although the connection of this concept with expectations, risk and uncertainty is constantly emphasized. This is indicated in the popular definitions of trust given by N. Luhmann ("trusting means behaving as if the future were certain" - see [15]) and P. Sztompka ("trust is a bet about the future contingent actions of others" [16]). It is constantly emphasized that trust is never absolute, it is always conditional and contextual.

Therefore, the attempts of academic researchers to verify the "performance theory" empirically lead to the fact that in the process of operationalization, the concept of "trust in government" falls into many categories and subcategories. So, trust is divided into procedural trust (based on the results of interaction with the government authorities), institutional trust (the government authorities as a whole) and trust in incumbents. Inversely, procedural trust falls into trust in various executive bodies, differing in competencies and powers, institutional trust and trust in incumbents fall into trust in different levels of government authorities (national, regional and municipal) - see, for example, [17].

An additional distortion is introduced by the "attribution error" problem [18], which is caused by the low administrative competence of citizens and their stereotypes regarding government authorities. Researchers have repeatedly recorded a situation where institutional trust in government as a whole can be combined with a lack of trust in specific authorities, and vice versa.

And finally, the trust in government and the level of satisfaction with government services are measured by different methods and different structures and bodies. The final results look unclear and controversial: trust is both the cause and the consequence of satisfaction with the control quality.

The transition to digital government and interaction with citizens in the electronic form further complicates the performance. The fact that trust in government is the most important causative factor affecting the demand for

electronic services is generally recognized. L. Carter and F. Belanger developed a popular model for e-services adaptation, in which trust in government along with trust in the Internet is one of the factors that ensure such adaptation [19]. This model has been repeatedly supplemented and expanded. (see, for example, [20]). However, the "inverse model", demonstrating how the service quality affects trust in government, has not yet been formed, as indicated by leading experts on this issue [21, 22].

Thus, the relationship between institutional and procedural trust, as well as between the generalized trust in government and satisfaction with the quality of government services, is not obvious, the cause and effect in the few models describing such a relationship are constantly changing places.

The complexity of the problem is also evidenced by the fact that the demand for electronic government services in all countries of the world is lower than expected. In the same way, the demand for "open data" and the level of electronic participation are lower than expected. Moreover, it develops that efforts aimed at promoting the benefits of e-services and electronic participation increase trust in government only for those citizens who already trust it, keeping everyone else indifferent [23].

Generally, the academic literature has accumulated considerable empirical material: researches on satisfaction with the e-services quality and trust in government are performed in almost all countries of the world, although not always with the required scientific rigor. As another curiosity, we can refer to a research conducted in Saudi Arabia, in which it is proved that women are inclined to interact electronically with authorities more than men, and accordingly, they trust more in such structures [24]. However, the authors ignore the very specific distribution of gender roles distinctive for this country. However, identifying the relationship between the quality of government control, e-services and the level of trust in government remains a very non-trivial task.

Currently, in most developed countries, including the Russian Federation, there is a transition to the proactive provision of comprehensive services to citizens to solve a specific life situation of a citizen, provided in a proactive mode based on the principle of end-to-end identification (the so-called "super services"). Techno-optimists suggest that this will "dissolve" government functions in a single information space because citizens stop to ("do not want to") distinguish between the government and other organizations in solving their situations [25:59]. Techno-pessimists talk about "digital totalitarianism", citing the Chinese social credit system as an example, thanks to which the government will begin (and almost have already begun) to control all aspects of citizens' life in a proactive mode [see more: 26].

This only critically raises the question of how the new forms of interaction between the government and citizens will affect generalized trust, which is formed on the assessment of the administrative activities of authorities and is the main rational legitimization of these activities, that is, it transfers from the sphere of policy to the sphere of politics.

We advanced a hypothesis that in conditions of "invisible electronic presence" of government, citizens are guided, on the one hand, by already developed tactics of interaction with various institutions and organizations (including commercial ones) in electronic form, and on the other hand, continue to rely on traditional "tactics of the weak", designed to interact specifically with representatives of the authorities (in this sense, we can't talk about any dissolution of the government in a single information space). There may be contradictions between these tactics, which ultimately form the electronic image of the executive branch, as well as generalized trust in it. This hypothesis was partially confirmed in a series of qualitative sociological researches that we had conducted in 2010-2016 [27]. However, it needs further development and substantiation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Methodologically, the task is to combine the analysis of government as a political and institutional phenomenon with the analysis of the processes of information technologies social adaptation. Currently, these approaches are developing autonomously. In our opinion, such a combination is possible on the basis of the "technological ideality" theory and the thesis of "co-production" of social and technical systems, and the political order based on general ideas about how society works and what it should be [28]. Using methods of qualitative sociology, it is necessary to identify the generalized image of government that citizens have, as well as their ideas about specific authorities with which they have to interact, and how this image and these ideas affect the willingness to interact with authorities in electronic form and satisfaction with the interaction results.

However, it should be borne in mind that performance theory, despite its apparent primitiveness, is supported by a coalition of technocrat experts interested in promoting it as a tool to the rationale for the very costly processes of the digital transformation of government control. Therefore, even the most evidence-based empirical research of the relationship between various forms of trust and the electronic interaction of citizens and the government is not able to influence the already existing set of techno-optimistic expectations. Only the oncoming wave of techno-pessimism, which A. Woolridge from "The Economist" effectively defined as "tech-lash", can really resist it [29].

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