# Modern Digitalization as a Social Institution and as a Sphere of Society

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**ABSTRACT**

The article discusses the institutionalization processes of digital public relations, which have two forms of social embodiment - a digital social institution and a digital information sphere (subsystem) of public life. The basis of their emergence is the "human - knowledge - communication - computer technology" structure. Its elements folding into integrity make up digital formal and informal institutions in economics, politics, culture and social life. The digital information sphere arises as a unity of diverse digital institutions, it relies on its own type of activity and has as a subject a new type of personality - e-Homo Sapiens. The characteristics, mechanisms of occurrence, and the features of the purpose of the institution and the sphere are substantiated and revealed in the course of the analysis undertaken within the framework of the neo-institutional approach to the development of society. The sequence of the emergence of these phenomena presented in the form of stages constitutes the trend of modern post-industrial development.

*Keywords: Digital society, Digital information space, Digital social institution, Digital information sphere, E-Homo Sapiens.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information structures and the creation of ever new communication means and technologies are fundamentally changing the modern world. Its part, following the path of post-industrial development, acquires a new content of social dynamics - this is the formation of a digital society and the emergence of a new type of personality - e-Homo Sapiens. These processes are interconnected and broke into its sphere at the turn of the century when the digitalization of public relations acquired unprecedented intensity and scale.

*The digital society appears as a new level of development of the post-industrial society, differs in the way of building social relations, spheres of life and social institutions relying on digital methods of information processing and the specifics of its consumption.* That is, changes in the way of doing things inevitably affect the social structure, all its types and aspects.

The reliance on institutionalization as one of the processes of transformation of the social structure allows us to distinguish two stages of the formation of a digital society: 1) the stage of the emergence of digital social institutions and 2) the stage of the emergence of the digital information sphere of public life (DIS), which appears as the integrity of mature institutions.

Since social institutions have two main aspects of manifestation - the well-established norms of thinking and human behavior and their consolidation in society in the form of an organization and a method of activity - the interaction of the individual and the digital environment of the post-industrial world appears as the basis of reasoning. The views formed when considering these aspects constitute the conceptual basis of the approach to the problem. Purpose: substantiation and disclosure of the digitalization of public life within the framework of two forms of its institutionalization - as a social institution and as a sphere of society.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Discussions about the nature and methods of the emergence of digital institutions and the corresponding

sphere of public life are developed within the framework of the concepts of post-industrial development and the information society. The interpretation of the latter is within the framework of the paradigm developed by M. Castells.

The analysis of the formation of new sustainable digital structures is based on the principles of the neo-institutional approach to the evolution of society proposed, in particular, by D. North, J. Wallis, B. Weingast.

The systemic society development from the standpoint of synergy of off-line and online interactions is comprehended taking into account N. Luhmann's theory.

As the basis and mechanism for the emergence of new social institutions, the author considers the interaction of a person and the information space, which were analyzed based on the conceptual ideas of J. Habermas and P. Bourdieu.

## 3. TRANSFORMATION OF DIGITAL STRUCTURES IN THE PROCESS OF THEIR INSTITUTIONALIZATION

The starting point for the theoretical construction of both digital social institutions and the information sphere as a social phenomenon is the concept of the information space. This space has always existed, although its content is historical. The modern information space, which has acquired a global and generally accessible character, is inextricably linked with the development of electronic technologies, resources for working with data and is increasingly being interpreted as digital (cyberspace). Its structure, in addition to knowledge and people as their carriers and producers, includes the corresponding infrastructure - technical means and resources for transmission, processing, storage of information. Taken as a whole, these phenomena constitute a previously unprecedented structure: "human - knowledge - communication networks - computer technology", which, having acquired a stable character, turns out to be the basis for the emergence of digital social institutions. Their formation became explosive at the turn of the century. The digital economy and e-democracy have emerged. Information and processes in the cultural sphere, education are being digitized, transformations in medicine are of a cardinal nature, military affairs are being transformed in this way, etc. Digital technologies are becoming a part of the daily life of people who constantly maintain communication in social networks.

At the same time, the emerging digital social institutions act, first of all, as a continuation and a peculiar manifestation of economic, political, social and other processes localized in the  corresponding sphere of public life (economic, political and legal, social, spiritual one). But the new institutions realize their generic

assignment in a peculiar way. Within the framework of the institute, statuses and roles corresponding to the production of digital programs are fixed. The gadget is becoming a cultural symbol. Samples and codes of professional activity in this area, rules of behavior in the information space and networks are gradually being developed, and the emerging relations are standardized. At different levels of knowledge generalization, he theory and ideology of the digitalization of life are formed, which contributes to the formation of electronic social institutions (formal and informal ones), and then the information sphere (subsystem) of public life.

Digital institutions emerging in various spheres of society are not isolated structures - on the contrary, their active development is due, among other things, to interaction with parallel similar formations. For example, today's popular Agile software development methodologies in Russia are quickly becoming the reason for improving legislation in the field of national projects. However, a problem-free development is not under discussion. The digitalization of public relations is not only a matter of social self-organization, but also of public administration. Blocking possible and real threats to society and state systems in this area, many countries, in addition to supporting the spread of digital technologies, consider, in particular, the necessary restrictions on the Internet to be part of state policy, political regime and ideology [1, p.271].

The gradually emerging systemic integrity of digital institutions marks a new stage of institutionalization - the emergence of the digital information sphere. Its isolation from other spheres of public life is based on the following considerations.

1. The emergence of a corresponding subject and object of new relations and activities is a condition and at the same time a factor in the emergence of systemic education at the society level. The subject in our case is "e-Homo Sapiens".

Relations that include a person in society are formed as a unity of subsystems: "human - nature", "human - society", "human - human", "human - his Ego". As applied to e-Homo Sapiens, they should be enriched with the "person - digital information space" relationships. Relations arising in this subsystem are the vital aspect and social mechanism that transmits the forming flows of information to the spiritual world of the individual and, conversely, transmits outside the energy, meanings, and attitudes of a person, which was "processed" into individual positions. Moreover, individual activity is generated by new formations in the personality structure of representatives of the digital generation - by need (the approach of psychologists) and the changed characteristics of habitus (the approach of sociologists).

A new need is the need for human presence and activity in cyberspace. It is complex in nature.  If we turn

to the classics of the problem - the hiararchy of needs of A. Maslow [2, p.47-51], then the emerging phenomenon ties together the needs and values located at almost all levels of this hierarchy. So, the network, if the user wishes, keeps him anonymous, which means that it provides security to a certain extent. Here you can really earn credibility and receive recognition from the network-developed community. There is a possibility of self-affirmation, realization of talents, fulfillment of desires, etc.

Habitus, on the one hand, allows a person (*P. Bourdieu's* agent) to make changes in existing structures by realizing his own initial "information" attitudes. On the other hand, it "is a product of characterological structures of a certain class of conditions of existence" [3, p.50]. That is, a kind of "vicious circle" arises, or rather, it looks like that. In fact, the indicated interdependence contributes to understanding the complexity of interaction and explaining the stages in the development of a digital society as it moves from institution to sphere.

2. The basis of each sphere of society is its characteristic type of activity, which is coupled with the system of corresponding social relations. For the digital information sphere, "its" activity *is the production of knowledge and communications in electronic networks relying on digital methods and algorithms for information processing.*

Moreover, the nature, quality, content, types of produced knowledges are the subject of a separate study. Here we note that the approach of D. Bell who at one time determined the central place of theoretical knowledge in the post-industrial society [4, p.189], today it is possible to supplement, expanding the scope and characteristics of emerging knowledge, information, information related, in addition to theory, to the world of everyday life.

3. Each of the spheres of social life, interacting in a certain way with other spheres, takes a corresponding place in relation to them. If we consider the digital society as a knowledge society, then it is the *digital information sphere as a system of activities, relations, communications arising between the relevant subjects regarding the production of knowledge using digital means and methods*, is its central sphere, which embodies the main characteristic of society.

The way the DIS dominates is determined by its network structure. "All societies of the information age," writes M. Castells, "are really permeated — with varying intensity — by the ubiquitous logic of a network society, whose dynamic expansion gradually absorbs and subjugates pre-existing social forms" [5, p.505]. In addition, in the digital world, this area acts as a focus providing "operational isolation" of society, the provision of which is being developed by N. Luhmann. The scientist represents society as a system of communications (virtual and real ones) when the end of one is a condition for the emergence of another [6, p.52].

4. The digital information sphere is emerging as a unity of formal and informal institutions. Digital institutions purposefully created in economics, politics, etc. are formal in nature. In parallel with them, through the efforts of individuals, various communities, amateur associations and organizations, the information space is being formed as an informal institution. Its inseparable component is social networks, which appear as an element of everyday life. Later, when reaching maturity, this phenomenon is not limited to everyday communications, but turns into a way of being an individual one, allowing you to solve the problems of not only communication, but also the search for diverse information, stay in the news stream, independent learning, receiving services, shopping, treatment, etc.

This institute is distinguished by the most important features. First, a person is "included" in its electronic environment directly, bypassing certain digital social institutions that mediate the participation of an individual in economic, political, legal, and spiritual activities. In other words, it is a kind of "entrance" for a specific person into the digital world.

Secondly, activity in the digital world of everyday life allows one to ultimately designate oneself as a significant subject of transformations at all social levels, including the global one. For example, the researcher of modern international relations J. Rosenau, along with organizations and states, singles out the individual as a subject of world politics. His/her role is justified by the opportunity to follow national and international processes, to form one's own opinion, to promote ideas, to unite supporters around him/her, creating public organizations and movements. Integration interactions arise initially at the regional level, then in various spheres of public life, and subsequently at the global level [7, pp. 655-686]. At the same time, the basis and tool of such social dynamics is the digital information space as an informal institution that arises in the process of social self-organization.

Thirdly, the interaction and interpenetration of informal and formal digital institutions denote the social vector of the formation of the digital information sphere, appears as a mechanism for its formation. This process can be represented in the terms of J. Habermas, perceiving an informal institution as an element of the life world (communicative rationality), formal - as an element of the systemic world (instrumental rationality) [8, p.180].

Thus, the digital information sphere emerges as a unity of diverse digital institutions, the number of which is rapidly increasing and in the near future will inevitably acquire integrity, therefore, a new quality indicating the emergence of a digital society.

## 4. SOME APPROACHES TO THE POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL INSTITUTIONS

The availability of scientific results obtained by other researchers prompts us to compare the data and assess the need to analyze in the article the problems of the development of digital institutions in the form of "artificial sociality" and the prospects for the subsequent transformation of society along the path of transhumanism.

Artificial sociality is understood as the fact that artificial intelligence agents participate in social interactions as their active mediators or participants [9, p.4]. In other words, not only human-to-human communications, but also human-artificial intelligence, are becoming a variant of the emergence of a digital institution. In the second case, during the formation of an institution, specific problems arise in subject-object relations, which, however, are outside the scope of our article.

The ideology of transhumanism generates the danger of transformation of "natural human" into "artificial one". According to theorists of this direction, digitalization creates the possibility of transferring human consciousness from a biological body to a computer. That is, we are talking about a separate being of consciousness, which exists through virtual reality, which "removes" the posthuman from real life but creates a different ontology of his being where any desires are realized ... [10, p.145]. Such a logic of the development of events, which turns a person from a goal into a means, which sometimes exists in the mainstream of anti-utopias and threatens with the extinction of humanity, is at the same time largely objective and prompts a deep study of these variants of theory and practice, but goes beyond the scope of this material.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Comprehension of the society development from the point of view of the transformation of its social and institutional structures is quite traditional for social theory. Its application to research within the framework of the neo-institutional approach involves the analysis of interaction and correspondence, on the one hand, of emerging social practices and structures and, on the other hand, of the emerging type of personality. This interaction acquires specificity due to a number of circumstances In the study of the post-industrial world at its highest stage today - digital society. First of all, it is the novelty of norms and methods that make up the focus of any social institution. The world community is just beginning to build practices in virtual space and gain relevant experience. "It is much more difficult to create and maintain an institute if new rules and templates have to be reinvented" [11, p.39].

Secondly, the novelty of digital institutions makes the mechanisms of interaction between the information space and the person extremely complex, which do not allow to define unequivocally the role of the subject and object of the emerging relationship, the creator and consumer of content.

Thirdly, the formation of a digital society is characterized by stages. The content of the first stage is related to the formation of digital institutions corresponding to economy, politics, culture, etc. They are the embodiment of needs in the development of a particular type of activity and they contribute to the growth of its effectiveness and are created by specialists through the targeted involvement of existing methods of data processing, technical means of information storage and transmission, etc.

The second stage is characterized by the maturity of the digital sphere of society, which is represented as an established system of formal and informal institutions, a harmonious set of well-established innovative practices, characteristic for the "information person". It is formed on the basis of a special type of activity viz. production of knowledge and communications in electronic networks being relied on digital methods and algorithms of information processing and will find its own laws of functioning and development.

The identification of the stages of the institutionalization of digital social relations is rather arbitrary. The processes characteristic of the emergence of the corresponding institution and sphere are intertwined in reality, and they often go hand in hand. Nevertheless, their presence in life constitutes a tendency in the social dynamics of modern post-industrial society.

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