

# Social networks as a tool of political technologists of Islamic radicalism in working with the protest behavior of Russian youth

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**Abstract**—The technological advantage of the Internet over traditional sources of information is crucial for the global distribution of information content and the ability to view it from various mobile devices. As a result, active Internet users and subjects of virtual network relations become objects of ideological manipulations, are exposed to the information influence of the radical elements of society. This article presents a theoretical, methodological and empirical study of the problem identified, an analysis of the effectiveness of the use of social networks by Islamic radicals as a globally closed system of propaganda of their own views, the research question “What can resist traditional Islam in the network of penetration of a society of politicized dogmas?”. The methodological base of the research is represented by scientific works of foreign and domestic researchers in the field of political science, philosophy, sociology and journalism. The paper uses the methods of cluster network and content analysis, information and communication approach, which reveals the development of the structural-functional method in the field of interpersonal and intergroup interaction of information, taking into account the characteristics of network contacts as elements of the overall structure of communications.

**Keywords**—*traditional Islam, Islamic radicals, social networks, communication, virtual relations, content, system, social network prevention, globalization, digital threats*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The modern synergistic approach to the study of ethno-confessional extremism as a form of deviation

processes also includes an analysis of changes in social behavior and psychology in deviation, which enriches the understanding of the underlying causes of deviation as a phenomenon of social life. The philosophy of deviantology is based on the relativity of the concepts of “Good” and “Evil” in real life, “where vice is intertwined with virtue, and where evil is born from good, and good from evil” [1]. Information sources have undergone significant changes in the conditions of globalization, this is due to the mass distribution and introduction of the Internet into the life cycle of mankind. It is not by chance that the 21st century is called the information age, since it is associated with the emergence of new virtual communications, which in a short time of their technological existence have been able to supplant traditional media, with the support of a significant part of the audience. One of the know-how of our time has become social networks. Extremism on ethno-religious soil is one of the elements in the structure of extremism. Social extremity is a forced or spontaneous social activity, a form of intensive activity - being on the verge of depleting the resources of the life of society and man. Extremism, as a carrier of a new cultural and value content and a form of intensive activity, is in demand under conditions of uncertainty and social instability. The boom of social networks is shaking its informational force. Social networks occupy an increasing place in the life of modern society, the number of both networks themselves and their registered users is growing. For many people, the difficult process of changing communication standards

is perceived as the immersion of society in the space of a mosaic, randomly oriented culture, and therefore the question of the value orientations of the individual in the network is becoming more acute [2].

Social networks, as well as the Internet as a whole, provided an opportunity for a person to get away from everyday problems and dive into the virtual world with all its mobile-technological capabilities: chat communication, multiplayer entertainment, games, leisure, news, etc. For statistics, we note that Russians spend a total of 2.5 hours a day on social networks and instant messengers [3].

In the sphere of intercultural interaction of the population, deviations are fully manifested in the form of ethno-religious extremism [4]. In this case, it is propaganda and incitement of racial and religious hatred, public justification of terrorism or its implementation, violation of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of a person depending on his national, religious or language affiliation, etc. (Federal Law "On Countering Extremist Activities" 114, 2002). Constructive extreme manifestations in intercultural interaction have their own internal logic, are caused by necessity and obey the laws. They are aimed at a qualitative, progressive transformation of the existing social system [5-8]. Such extreme manifestations include the struggle of ethnic groups for survival in periods of discrimination, genocide, globalization and migration [9, 10]. Their highest manifestation is the social revolution [11, 12]. Destructive extremity is always marked by egocentrism and self-will. She is always accompanied by aggression and aggression, while aggression is a person's action aimed at harming another, and aggressiveness is more likely readiness for such actions [13-15]. The varieties of destructive extremism are fundamentalism, fanaticism and extremism.

In the conditions of socio-demographic transformation of the structure of modern Russian society in the situation of new aggravation of relations between Russia, the European Union and the USA, instability of market relations, the problem of deviation processes in the world is becoming increasingly theoretical and practical significance [6]. The infringed ethno-religious identification is intensified, causing a surge in religious self-consciousness, ethnonational orientations, interests, national-cultural isolation, numerous ethno-religious clashes. At the same time, a social network allows not only to abstract from the surrounding world, but also to build your virtual world with its own principles, values and life orientations, which has a direct impact on the human worldview and behavior [16].

In this regard, we agree with the opinion of other researchers that the communicative behavior itself in modern conditions of the mutual influence of reality not mediated by technical means and virtual reality is differentiated into the communicative behavior of the reality of the Internet not mediated by means of the Internet environment and the communicative behavior of virtual reality (social networks) [17-19].

The problem of studying radical content in the information space is further mediated by the fact that social networks have become a global communication center and are able not only to fill the information vacuum in society, but also to determine models of everyday behavior.

Due to technological simplicity of use, mass distribution, imperfect legal regulation of relations in the virtual sphere, social networks have gained high importance in the activities of Islamic radicals and other destructive elements of society.

In this context, the study of social networks as channels for the dissemination of the ideas of radical Islam seems to us not only topical, but also timely, because the digital threat is capable of acquiring the most extreme forms of manifestation.

The results of recent sociological surveys of the population clearly demonstrate the presence of such indicators in society as ambiguity of life orientations, increasing significance of material values as opposed to spiritual values, mistrust of power, etc. In turn, anomie declares itself an increase in the number of various social deviations, which in modern Russia acquire the scale of major social problems (alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, corruption, etc.).

Modern sociology distinguishes several main directions in the study of deviations, among which there are both traditional theories of the emergence of deviations and synergistic approaches that analyze the deviation processes in the context of related sociology of science [20]. Deviantology as a science is in the stage of formation, therefore its theoretical and conceptual apparatus is not fully developed. At the same time, deviantology is open to both evolutionary and "revolutionary" paradigm changes, since today there is obviously no established terminology, stable structure, or generally accepted characteristics of its subject in deviantology.

We define the deviation processes as a course, the development of deviations with its successive change of states. By the term "deviance" we mean the very state of the subject involved in the deviation process, and the term "deviant behavior" is the alloprening of the subject in a particular type of deviation process.

The main factors contributing to the growth of deviation processes are leveling the foundations of traditional culture, rising unemployment, poverty and poverty, increasing corruption, worsening socio-economic situation in the country due to the global crisis and opposition to the West in the context of the new cold war, migration, strengthening of nationalist and extremist terrorist sentiment in the world.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

At present, many definitions of the concept "social network" have been formulated in the research environment. If you refer to the Oxford Dictionary, then under it the social network is not a specific phenomenon, but a kind of mass media using digital

technologies and Internet communications for communication [21].

The vagueness of this definition is explained by the fact that “the mediative does not have an ontology, it shies away from chronological determination, but it is possible to partially reconstruct its “movement” that was given to us at the time of the “change” [22].

Thus, the subject boundaries of this study will be limited to the content of Islamic radicals, as the ideological paradigm of the information space hosted on social networks [23]. To investigate the above problem, the authors of the article focus on the subject category “content of Islamic radicals in social networks”. This allows us to rethink the reaction and peculiarities of the society’s perception of information of a radical sense, since “communications are the basis of any society” [24].

Modern radical trends, when compared with previous ones, are building a new strategy for manipulating and influencing the masses through social networks and other instant messengers [25, 26].

Social networks, like other products of globalization, are subject to changes in the platform, acquiring new qualities and properties. Initially, they were used for the convergence of multimedia information (photography, video materials, etc.) on the Internet. Over time, their functional range underwent major changes, when it was no longer technologies, but people themselves, evolving from the “information consumer” type to the “information producer” type, began to fill out information content, bringing it to the highest global level [27].

A special aspect explaining the popularity of social networks in public communications is their penetration to mobile devices (smartphones, tablets). So, for example, according to the US analytical agency Statista, more than 2.1 billion mobile devices are used in the world, users of which regularly go to social networks [28].

This fact indicates a change in the very nature of the dissemination of information in the conditions of the information age, allowing a person to be aware of the main news stories without resorting to traditional sources of information [29].

Separately, you can highlight the benefits of social networking services over traditional sources of information that are actively used to promote content [30]:

1. Identification of a user account network.
2. Legal and technological equality of network users.
3. Independent publication and display of multimedia materials by network users.

If at least one of these items is not provided, then the system is not a social network service.

A group in social networks is a special context of communication, which contains not only the uniting of

people according to their interests, but also the information products produced: texts, pictures, video materials, audio recordings.

Groups in which the ideas of radical Islam are being promoted can be plunged by various typologies on social networks.

In our work the following classification is proposed:

- youth oriented groups (teenagers, students);
- groups focused on age from 25 years.

In the first case, technologies of mental simplification of information content, visualization of the material, the use of slogans for ease of perception are applied [31]. For a more adult audience, more voluminous materials are used that form stereotypical thinking.

According to the established practice, we initially conduct content - analysis of the materials themselves, placed in such groups, and comments to them.

At the second stage, cluster-network analysis is performed according to N.I. Terenin's – M.G. Bresler method, which is a scan of communication ways of information interaction in this community, followed by visualization of graphs of the open access program “Gephi”. At the same time, we determine the clustering factor, the share of stratum groups, the modulation level, the stage of formation of the network community, and a number of other indicators, including members of the network community with the highest node load.

### III. DISCUSSION

We proceed from the theory of G. Simmel that social harmony does not mean a total absence of conflicts, otherwise society would lose movement and structure, but rather their competent resolution [32-34].

This thesis is reflected in the field of intercultural interaction of the population, in which a complete overcoming of differences in principle is impossible. This is explained by the phenomenon of xenophobia, which, according to many sociologists and anthropologists, is of a biological nature, since it is the instinct underlying it that determined the principles of the organization of tribal formations. First of all, this is the rejection of everything alien, unfamiliar, unfamiliar. Moreover, in society there is a tendency to judge foreign cultures from the position of superiority of one’s own. This phenomenon is called ethnocentrism (Russell 2013). American psychologists M. Brewer and D. Campbell identified its main indicators: a) the perception of elements of their culture (norms, roles and values) as natural and correct, and elements of other cultures as unnatural and irregular; b) consideration of their customs as universal; c) the idea that it is natural for a person to cooperate with members of his group, to help them, to prefer his group, to be proud of it and not to trust and even to quarrel with others [35]. Thus, the greatest number of negatively evaluative stereotypes appeared where

ethnic groups for a long time were in a state of competition, conflict, and hostility. A large number of negatively estimated ethnic stereotypes in colloquial English are explained precisely by historical reasons: active international contacts of Great Britain, the struggle for territory, colonization, slavery in the United States and immigration in the United States.

At the present stage, there is a high interest in the problem of ethno-confessional extremism in the scientific community, but despite this, there is still no unified systematized theory in sociological science that can serve as a basis for overcoming practical problems in the intercultural interaction of the population.

Along with this, in the legal and scientific literature there is also no generally accepted definition of the concept "ethnoreligious and / or ethno-confessional extremism". Most often in the sociological and philosophical works the terms "religious extremism" are exposed (A.V. Zhuravsky, V.A. Burkovskaya, Z.S. Arukhov, A.A. Nurullaev, A.M. Verkhovsky, M.Ya. Yakhyaev et al.) and "ethnic extremism" (M.P. Kleimenov, V.P. Babintsev, L.V. Baeva, A.A. Burkov, A. M. Verkhovsky, etc.). The works of such authors as O.A. Rusanova are devoted to the problem of ethno-religious extremism. The contents of these concepts are often extremely blurred, affect the private sides of the phenomenon, and do not integrate all its properties. According to the team of authors, it seems reasonable to use the concept of "ethnic and religious extremism" because of the deep interrelationship of ethnic and religious factors, which can be traced from the beginning of human history and the period of the formation of ethnic communities.

Extremism on ethno-religious soil is one of the elements in the structure of extremism. Social extremity is a forced or spontaneous social activity, a form of intensive activity - being on the verge of depleting the resources of the life of society and man. Extremism, as a carrier of a new cultural and value content and a form of intensive activity, is in demand under conditions of uncertainty and social instability.

The social significance of the "social network on the Internet" phenomenon is debatable in the scientific and expert environment. Since the same predominant feature of a social network can serve as a prime cause of both creative and destructive processes. Consider this aspect in more detail in the context of the subject matter.

1. Social network as an element of amateur subjective activity and expression of will. From a positive point of view, this feature allows users to freely express their opinions, share experiences, and communicate to the public their subjective judgments (including professional, if they are characteristic of the user). A negative point is the objective lack of responsibility for the published material (except for cases prescribed by law) and misinformation, limited information gathering.

2. The social network is a mass activity and has a global reach of content distribution. Positive aspects:

more detailed and diverse coverage of informational events, a wide range of issues and interests covered. The negative manifestations include: exaggerated public attention to insignificant problems that do not have social significance and usefulness for society, the preparation of "junk materials".

3. In social networks, high speed publication and editing of informational materials. The positive aspect consists of the possibility of mobile and operational records in social messengers, a negative one - a noticeable decline in the quality of published materials.

4. Social connection provides the establishment of connections between users. Positive action - high speed information exchange. The negative action is the spread of misinformation at high speed.

5. Formation of the technological possibility of feedback in social networks. Positive aspects: a network discussion of the problems and the introduction of discussions, the ability to promptly and mobilely promote information products and interest network users in them. Negative aspects: radicalization of public opinion, conducting destructive discussions, spam activities.

Researcher-analyst V. Gladyshev-Lyadov notes: "The peculiarities of the dissemination of information in social networks determine their significance, which is difficult to overestimate. Information can be distributed as a newsletter from the community in which the user of the social network is, or directly from the user to the user, which determines the speed of its distribution. From a psychological point of view, the user perceives his page as a kind of personal space, which is due to the peculiarities of social networks, such as the user's own choice of social circle and content filtering through membership in interesting user communities. It is because of this personalization that the social network user's confidence in the information received is a priori higher than in information received from other sources, such as the federal media and even online media" [36].

It is worth noting that social networks today are difficult to control, even in comparison with Internet sites, in a technological and legal sense [37]. If, for example, an Internet site publishes extremist material, then a prompt response of law enforcement agencies follows. With social networks, many technological chains look more complicated, especially when it comes to the content of religious radicals and fanatics. "The Russian social network Vkontakte, according to statements by its press service, actively cooperates with internal affairs bodies in terms of removing extremist materials, searching for missing people and other areas, but despite this, the network is replete with groups that are openly propagandized religious extremism and fundamentalism, groups that post materials that can be considered political extremism, for example, advocating violation of the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. However, these groups remain unheeded, and if a group acting, for example, for the withdrawal of Siberia from the Russian Federation, can theoretically be closed by order of the prosecutor's

office, then with groups leading the propaganda of religious extremism, the situation is more complicated. Despite the rather broad definition of the concept of extremism in the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, the published materials are not recognized as extremist during the examinations, or they are not known to the internal organs in time" [36].

Foreign scholar M. Rudner notes that Islamic radicals have begun to use Internet capabilities to spread their ideas and recruit adherents since the early 2000s. The first to resort to online practice were representatives of Al-Qaida, but it acquired a more mass character only ten years later. By that time, social messengers were already entrenched in public life and became familiar to humans [38].

According to the OSCE, to spread their ideas, Islamic radicals use the Internet and social networks as follows:

- create their own sites containing text and other multimedia materials;
- open groups in social networks ("Vkontakte", "Facebook"), microblogging ("Twitter"), video hosting ("YouTube");
- publish data of accounts and virtual wallets to raise funds for financing activities.

According to some scientists, radical-minded personality types are distinguished by aggressive and straightforward imposing their opinions on others, dividing people into groups of "their own" and "aliens." [39, 40] This promise is laid in communication [41].

According to some foreign experts, Islamic radicals and other adherents of an extremist orientation began to extract informational benefits from social networks by 2010. Prior to this, their attempts were generally ineffective for mass distribution [42].

Initially, the first groups in social networks containing the ideas of radical Islam were created on Facebook and Twitter. Later interest manifested itself in the social network VKontakte [43].

It is worth emphasizing that foreign social networks are outside the jurisdiction of Russian law, in connection with which they act as an open platform for distributing content that is prohibited in our country.

#### IV. RESULTS

Central to modern studies of the socio-cultural conditionality of state power and power relations is the reconstruction of sociocultural codes (archetypes, dominants) that determine the development of the political system and culture of society, as well as the levels of this conditionality. However, the levels, content and forms of the sociocultural conditionality of the political process are one of the debatable problems.

The complexity and ambiguity of such studies lies, on the one hand, in the excessive "psychologization" of this research project, which does not always correspond to the tasks of the analysis; on the other hand, in a certain "restraint", "caution" with which the

researcher belongs to the deep sociocultural structures of political and right culture, which is due to the lack of a sufficiently clear and authoritative position in the theory of studying the national basis of power, politics, law and other political and social and legal phenomena. Spreading the ideas of Islamic radicalism on social networks, besides the features mentioned above, has other specific features.

We have to take into account the fact that in a social network users often provide personal data, therefore political technologists have the opportunity to work with specific target (age) groups. Thus, the average age of network users included in groups with Islamic radical content is 18–20 years.

In this connection, of particular importance is the work with the student audience, which is most vulnerable to the propaganda of the ideas of Islamic radicalism [6, 44].

To do this, along with content analysis in the Internet space, we periodically conduct a cluster-network analysis of a number of network communities of the VKontakte social network, which are communities of ethno-directed and confessional-oriented users.

Most users of such communities do not share the ideas of extremism and radical religious trends, but a number of users stand out for the severity of their judgments. We assume that the functionaries of radical organizations themselves may be participants in these communities, but they do not actively promote their views in public space. Having identified potential candidates participating in the public discussion, they switch to personal communication in private resources, such as "Whatsapp", "Telegram", etc. According to expert opinion A.V. Manoilo, the political spin radicals, identify as a result of monitoring the content of network communities of moderate nationalistic or religious orientation of potential candidates to be attracted to radical organizations [45].

As an example of one of the studies, we will present the study of the network community "N" on the social network VKontakte. This is a relatively large community with a lot of active participants and developed communication links. The community is clearly oppositional to the regional authorities, publishing critical materials. At the same time, we can characterize the general nature of the materials as relatively moderate in relation to religious and ethnic issues, despite the fact that some of the subscribers express judgments that allow them to be judged about their radical outlook, but at the same time do not fall under the definition of extremist in terms of current Russian legislation [46].

On the cluster visualization (Fig. 1), we see emerging modules highlighted in conventional colors — blue, green, red, and others — representing subgroups of users with different value landmarks and multiple communication links. A more detailed analysis allows us to identify the leaders of the modules with the highest load indicators in this

community. Content analysis of their judgments shows the conservative nature of their worldview, with a common declarative adherence to religious and ethnocultural values.

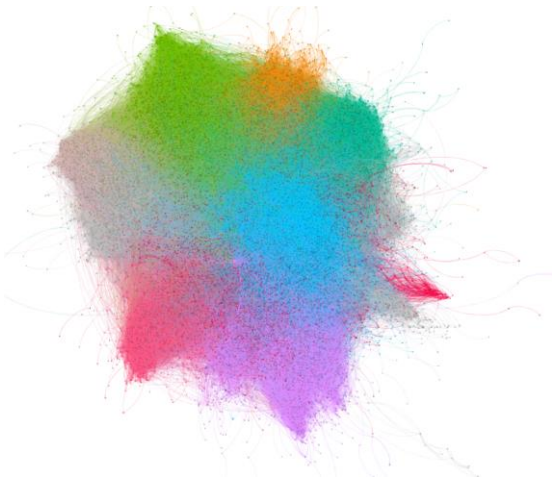


Fig. 1. Visualization of communication links of the VKontakte community.

We conducted a survey of teachers and students at the department of "International Relations, History and Oriental Studies" of the Ufa State Oil Technical University in January-February 2018 in the areas of training "41.03.01 - Foreign Regional Studies (bachelor)" and "04.04.01 - Foreign Regional Studies (magistracy)", concerning the prevention of religious radicalism and extremism in the Republic of Bashkortostan. The total number of respondents was 105 people.

The questionnaire data was processed using mathematical methods to identify the relationship between "social networks" and a tolerant attitude towards members of religious groups.

## V. CONCLUSION

The increasing complexity of the inner reality of modern man, who discovered the difficult nature of the language of image, action, inevitably turns into a search for stable foundations, the finding of which is carried out by building up an individual human history. Constructive extreme manifestations in intercultural interaction have their own internal logic, are caused by necessity and obey the laws.

In our opinion, the essence of the fundamentalist ideology is to return to the old social order or to preserve the existing social order, freezing, stopping the process of progressive changes. Fundamentalism arises in a crisis of any movement and, as a rule, opposes, including by violent means, the process of change, renewal. Fanaticism and fundamentalism are two ways in which subjects respond to extreme social situations. They can go one into another and merge with each other, act together. In their extreme forms, fanaticism and fundamentalism degenerate into extremism [47]. Fanaticism is aimed at a radical transformation of the existing society in accordance with its utopian ideological program. The following

generalized conclusions were obtained from the results of the study.

1. The majority of respondents believe that social networks can be used to promote the ideas of religious extremism. At the same time, special emphasis is placed on the manipulation of the youth consciousness, the imaginary solution to the vital problems of users and the lack of the necessary knowledge and competences in the field of social communications.

2. The social network "VKontakte" is the most popular, understandable platform for the Russian youth. More than half of the respondents are active users of this network; they not only get acquainted with the content, but also comment on it, add informational materials.

3. Most of the respondents perceive conflict situations in the social network as "playable", they do not take them seriously. At the same time they treat with caution and caution content containing destructive opinions and positions.

4. According to the majority of respondents, in the Republic of Bashkortostan a tolerant environment has been formed for the existence and development of all sorts of social groups, there are no real centers of religious radicalization of consciousness. This is a special pledge of economic prosperity of the inhabitants of the republic.

5. According to respondents, to combat the ideas of religious radicalism in social networks, it is necessary to form an effective toolkit to ensure continuous analysis (monitoring) and blocking destructive information products, as well as to increase the legal responsibility of those involved in their dissemination.

In conclusion, we note that for Russian Internet content a special body is needed that can effectively identify the risks and threats of spreading the ideas of Islamic and other types of radicalism in the network, and report it to law enforcement agencies [48]. Of course, this body must technically meet the latest requirements of the modern world, which will strengthen the system of countering extremism and radicalism in Russia, leaving no chance for those interested to conduct their agitation and propaganda.

Ethno-confessional extremism is a special type of social deviation, characterized by adherence to extreme views and measures in an effort to reorganize the existing structure of society in combination with fanatical and fundamentalist religious, nationalist and political views. The consequences of such a social phenomenon as ethnoreligious extremism are unequivocally negative, since they have a pronounced antisystemic character.

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