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**Cumulative deliberation: New normativity for the studies of online public spheres**

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Доклад посвящен концепции кумулятивной делиберации, которая призвана дополнить взгляды на традиционную публичную сферу. Социально-сетевые обсуждения оказывают значимое влияние на процессы принятия решений, но к участникам онлайн-обсуждений не следует применять требования, справедливые для институтов. Мы предлагаем новый взгляд на онлайн-делиберацию.

Ключевые слова: социальные медиа, делиберация, кумулятивная делиберация, новая нормативность, Юрген Хабермас.

Today, online discussions form the bulk of the public communication ecosystems. Their role in public deliberation is mostly perceived as negative, yet remaining significantly understudied. The growth of complexity of public discussion is conceptualized as dissonance, disconnectedness, and discontinuity of public spheres [4; 5]. The features of online discussions, i.a., include horizontal communication of users of different levels of institutionalization, as well as various types of uncivil behavior. The current theory of public deliberation poses the same demands of civil and consensus-oriented speech to all the participants of public discussions, which is unequivocally stretched to users of various institutional states in various speech situations, including ordinary users in everyday speech interactions. We see this as a conceptual problem, as it contributes to seeing online discussions as unpredictable and dissonant, users as uncivil, and online discussions as a digital threat to substantial deliberation.

The paper suggests a reconceptualization of deliberation for the current state of public communication and introduces the concept of cumulative deliberation. This concept highlights the role of cumulative patterns and effects in opinion formation, mostly in online discussions, as opposed to discursive instruments of dialogical and rational deliberation. Cumulation of opinions was studied in the works as distant in time and methodologies as those on the spiral of silence [3], online silent majorities [1], political polarization and echo chambering, or information cascades. What unites these works is that participants’ intentions and normative standings are seen as somewhat less important than the cumulative patterns and effects of how their opinions form on aggregate. This allows for seeing individual acts as those bearing opinions but not necessarily intended for rational public deliberation.

Such understanding of ‘tiny acts of [users’] participation’ [2] implies that the mechanisms of consensus formation alternative to those suggested by Habermas and his followers and critics demand a new normativity. The latter would see ordinary people with their personal traits and features of speech as legitimate, even if tiny, actors of public deliberation and re-assess the demands for quality of their contributions. Acknowledging the users’ right for non-rationality would allow for closer-to-life predictions in online opinion formation without putting an excessive normative burden to individual users. Instead of demanding orientation to consensus from all (or major) discussion participants on social media, the new concept helps add value to micro-acts of deliberation, including posts and comments, however emotional, aggressive, or trivial they might be, if, taken together, they are non-negligible within the process of public deliberation. Moreover, the new normativity will allow for healthier distinguishment between users’ expressions of legitimate discontent, indignation, or anger, on one hand, and hate speech, computational propaganda, and uncivil and abusive verbal behaviors, on the other hand.

We suggest six areas in cumulative deliberation research, namely: 1) normative demands to cumulative deliberation; 2) the very cumulative patterns of discussion on user, structural, or discursive levels; 3) the relations between opinion cumulation and endogenous discussion features, including aggressive speech and user traits; 4) the relations between opinion cumulation and exogenous discussion features, including platform affordances and discussion context; 5) the effects of opinion cumulation within discussions, including effects upon user participation, grouping, or interaction; and 6) the effects of cumulative opinions upon offline deliberation and political decision-making.

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