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**Cumulative narratives of discontent: methodological approaches**

Online discussions on social networks have become an important part of the modern public sphere. In our previous research, we have shown that online discussions are home for narratives and narrative communities of public discontent addressed to authorities.

Keywords: cumulative deliberation, cumulative narratives.

Online discussions on social networks have become an important part of the modern public sphere. In our previous research, we have shown that online discussions are home for narratives and narrative communities of public discontent addressed to authorities [2]. The conceptual framework of cumulative deliberation [1] implies that such communities and narratives form cumulatively in time, and their formation is shaped by a number of endogenous (discursive) and exogenous (user-trait, platform-affordance, and contextual) factors. Moreover, temporal dynamics is crucial for hybrid deliberation: Thus, ‘complaining communities’ discovered in our research may be inefficient if they are short-term, but have impact upon regional and local decision-making in the longer-term perspective. Or, vice versa, short-term heated discussion attracts attention by media and local authorities, while long-standing but rather flaccid online discussions may remain a feature of the local political landscape that do not affect decision-making in a given region.

Previous research also suggests that involvement of various types of media and political actors in the discussions may be a marker of whether these institutional players shape them. However, most studies of pre-COVID-19 times underline the institutional vacuum as characteristic for complaint-based discussions in Russia, unlike in other European countries. Recently, though, the socially mediated discussion space in Russian regions has changed. Today, it is divided between ordinary users and influencers, businesses of various sizes, representatives of social movements and professional associations, as well as government agencies and individual politicians. The active presence of the state on Russian social networks since 2022 has significantly altered the information and narrative landscapes. In recent years, stable narratives have developed on local agenda and politics, citizens’ dissatisfaction with the quality of life, expectations from business and its services, and sensitive topics like vaccination or traditional values.

In the current research, we focus on two exogenous features of complaints-based discussions and try to identify the platform difference in how institutional actors shape the dynamics of dominant complaints narratives. For that purpose, we upload messages with comments for one month from different platforms. This allows for differentiating the platforms by assessing the ‘discussion organizer’ role of the aforementioned accounts. Then, we locate the positions of media and political actors as discussion participants in the comment threads that discuss complaints.

For that, we, first, track the formation of complaint narratives in each account by, first, teaching the machine to delineate complaints from non-complaints (using BERT architecture), and, second, tracking the complaint-containing comments within our data. We qualitatively assess the changes in the narrative and outline the ‘semantic chain’ of the narrative where we can, based on complaint comments. Then we add the comment threads to which these complaint comments belong to our dataset and search for institutional representatives in these threads, thus detecting whether they are present in the discussion and which roles they play in how the narrative develops (interrupting, shaping, supporting etc.).

We pose several questions on the quality of complaints-related public discussions within the conceptual framework of cumulative deliberation, taking Russian regions as a case. We hypothesize that there are more cumulative patterns in online discussions than there are deliberative ones, due to users’ asynchrony and insubordination. We also assume that professional media have less and less influence on the formation of discussions around news, and the role of the state in monitoring and shaping public sentiment is increasing.

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