
Special Theme of the Issue.
Socio-Psychological Consequences
of Accelerated Digitalization in the Context
of the COVID-19 Pandemic

EDITORIAL

Dear readers, we are pleased to present to your attention a special issue on the topic “Socio-psychological consequences of accelerated digitalization in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic”. The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have affected our lives and these changes still have to be fully comprehended and evaluated. One of these changes was the accelerated transition to digital technologies in many areas of life from education to political processes, in particular, voting in elections. As part of this special issue, we offer the reader a series of articles in which an attempt is made, based on empirical research, to understand and, in part, predict what socio-psychological consequences the accelerated digitalization will entail.

The first article, *“How can digitalization accompanying the COVID-19 pandemic affect attitudes towards political institutions? The relationship between Internet usage activity and institutional trust”* (A. Tatarko, E. Bushina, & A. Raevskaya) examines the relationship between Internet usage activity and institutional trust on the example of representative data from such European countries as Switzerland, Finland, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Croatia, Poland, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria. The authors found that in countries with low government efficiency Internet usage activity is negatively associated with institutional trust. On the contrary, in countries with high efficiency of the government, the activity of using the Internet is positively associated with institutional trust.

The article *“Intergenerational analysis of the relationship between involvement in the internet space and institutional trust among Russians”* (A. Mironova) examines a problem similar to the one addressed in the previous paper, using the example of representative Russian data and focusing on the intergenerational aspect. It was revealed that young people (18–30 years old) are the most active Internet users and they also demonstrate the highest levels of institutional trust in comparison to other generations. However, an increase in time spent on the Internet is associated with an increase in distrust in state institutions among young people. Representatives of the middle (31–44 years old) and older (45–80) generations are relatively less likely to use the Internet and have a lower level of trust in institutions. It is instructive to mention that engagement in the Internet space helps them strengthen their trust in state institutions.

The article *“Determinants of the online prosocial behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic”* (M. Bultseva) examines how fears associated with the pandemic affect the online prosocial behavior of an individual. The study revealed that the fear of coronavirus disease and anxiety stimulate online prosocial behavior and depression is an obstacle to it.

The article *“The relationship between values and prosocial behavior in different contexts before and during the COVID-19 pandemic”* (M. Efremova) is devoted to a similar problem. This paper examines the relationship between values and prosocial behavior in offline and online contexts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic breakout. It was found that during the pandemic, people were less prone to prosocial behavior in real life and rely less on Self-transcendence values. At the same time, in the group “before the pandemic”, the values of Self-transcendence contribute to prosocial behavior in both contexts, and the values of Self-enhancement contribute to prosocial behavior in the online context only. In the “during the pandemic” group, the values of Self-transcendence, Openness to change, and Conservation prevent prosocial behavior in both offline and online contexts.

Increased digitalization and self-isolation, which became a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, served as a fairly powerful impetus to the development of online education. Despite the fact that after the mass vaccination of the population and the reduction of morbidity, the need for remote learning disappeared, the online teaching format has been preserved for a number of educational programs. Online learning has become more popular and new educational products based on online learning technologies have emerged.

In this regard, one of the works of this special issue touches on topics related to online learning. The article *“Relationship between individual values and involvement in online learning: The role of social capital”* (G. Rodionov & E. Maklasova) presents the results of studying the relationship of values with involvement in online learning and the role of social capital for this relationship. The results of the study show that involvement in online learning correlates with social capital and values. The results of the moderation analysis showed that higher-order values are associated with involvement in online learning, and social capital is the moderator of this relationship. In particular, a higher degree of expression of bridging social capital changes the nature of this connection and is associated with a decrease in involvement in online learning.

The active use of information and communication technologies, which has significantly increased during the pandemic, does not bypass family relationships. One of the research papers in this special issue, *“The relationship between involvement in the use of information and communication technologies and family social capital”* (D. Dubrov), is devoted to the study of the relationship between involvement in the use of information and communication technologies and intra-family social capital. One hundred four families (parent and teenager, a total of 208 people) were interviewed in the study. The direct effect test showed that involvement in the use of information and communication technologies is a significant predictor of intra-family social capital. At the same time, there is a negative relationship expressed in the following association: the higher the level of involvement of family members in the use of information and communication technologies, the lower the

level of intra-family social capital and all its components, especially trust. This means that the more teenagers and their parents are involved in the use of information and communication technologies (Internet, tablets, phones, and other gadgets), the less they trust each other and pay attention to needs and mutual support, while the relationship becomes more distant and formal. The indirect effect test showed that involvement in the use of information and communication technologies is a significant mediator of the connection of intra-family social capital with subjective well-being. In this case, involvement in the use of information and communication technologies acts as a coping strategy if individuals are not satisfied with their relationships with their loved ones. The results obtained confirm the hypothesis of “social compensation”.

Russia is a multicultural state, and interethnic relations are influenced by many factors. We asked a reasonable question: how can digitalization, which has intensified as a result of COVID-19, be related to interethnic mutual perception and attitudes? The study “*Russians’ Involvement in information and communication technology usaging and intercultural attitudes: The role of on-line intra- and inter-ethnic friendships*” (V. Galyapina & I. Molodikova) is devoted to an attempt to answer this question. In this work, a search was made for links between the intensity of the use of information and communication technologies and friendly intercultural contacts, as well as people’s intercultural attitudes. The active use of ICT is associated with the building up of intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic friendly contacts in social networks. The Internet facilitates both the intercultural interaction itself and the maintenance of intercultural friendships, but it turned out that the direct influence of the Internet on intercultural attitudes is not very significant. The influence of the Internet on intercultural attitudes becomes significant if we consider friendly intercultural contacts as a mediator variable. In this case, a positive influence of the Internet and the active use of information and communication technologies on intercultural attitudes is observed. Perhaps online communication with friends from another culture helps accept different opinions, cultural values, and norms. It assists in more conscious filtering of information received from the Internet, social networks, blogs, etc. Therefore, it is important to develop virtual spaces and platforms for the development of intercultural friendship.

The special issue is completed by another study devoted to the association between the activity of using the Internet and social networks and issues of ethnic discrimination in networks. “*Online ethnic discrimination and self-esteem of ethnic majority: The mediating role of ethnic online orientation*” (Z. Lepshokova) reveals that the experience of ethnic discrimination can have negative consequences both in real virtual space. The results of this research showed that the experience of ethnic discrimination in the network is destructive not only for ethnic minorities, but also for the ethnic majority, negatively affecting their self-esteem.

In general, this special issue will allow the reader to learn of the phenomena and changes in our lives associated with the growth of digitalization that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.