Incivility Balanced? Civil vs. Uncivil Speech in Online Political Discussions as Dependent on Political Parallelism

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Abstract. This paper explores the balance between civility and incivility in Russian online political discussions in their relation to platform-based political parallelism. So far, the deliberative quality of communication on online forums and social networks has been seen as dependent on discussion structure, contextual factors, user traits and intentions, and textual features of the discussions, especially negative ones like incivility. However, of the latter, interdependence of (in)civility patterns and political parallelism of media where the discussions take place have not been explored well. Moreover, while incivility is studied extensively, its balancing practice, namely explicit civility and respect, usually escapes scholarly attention. In Russia, political discussions, media, and even platforms demonstrate strong political polarization, forming a peculiar picture of political parallelism. Polarization fuels political hostility that may have civil and uncivil patterns influencing the way of networked talk. To explore to what extent political positioning of the discussion milieus, e.g., media / media accounts where discussions take place, alters the volume and the nature of political (in)civility, we explore two cases, the first used as a baseline one and the second as the target one. For this, we use discourse analysis and descriptive statistics to show that incivility in the Russian-language online discussions is partly compensated by explicit civility, while remaining dominant in the fabric of political discussions. Moreover, we show the difference in the volume and nature of (in)civility within the comment sections of oppositional and pro-state media. Our results suggest hint to the 'free speech vs. hate speech' dilemma, as the comments in the oppositional media appear to be more hostile, while those on the pro-state accounts look less polluted by aggression.

Keywords: Online Deliberation · Networked Discussions · Political Conversation · Incivility · Russia · Platform Affordances · Political Parallelism

1 Introduction

The recent research on dissonant publics [1] and cumulative deliberation [2–4] allows for interpreting communication on social media and digital forums as a form of online

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deliberation dependent on features of networked discussion structure, cultural factors, and user traits and intentions. The normative theory of the political communication process claims that political discussions of deliberative nature are open, polite, and respectful, and are intended for mutual understanding [5–7]. In fact, there is a vast number of studies dedicated to such a central category in a political dialogue as civility [8–11]. However, when analyzing political Internet conversations in practice, a contradiction can be observed, since only a minority of political discussions characterized by considerable opinion polarity, are civil, polite, respectful of the audience. While online media allow citizens to freely discuss political issues and have the potential to facilitate political talk, not all online comments contribute to achieving this ideal [12–14]. An extensive body of research reveals that the prevalence of rude and intolerant communication (insults, stereotypes, or hatred) in Internet milieus can complicate the processes of deliberative discussions and reaching consensus in them [15–18].

Despite the growth in the number of studies on civility, there is not much knowledge on whether and how exactly (un)civil user behavior in comment sections is linked to the political stance of media. Most research in this area is done with a focus on for Western social mediated discussions, while such studies are still rare for countries with less stable democratic traditions.

In terms of uncivil speech online, the Russian-speaking Internet segment represents a special but telling case. First, offensive speech has centuries ago formed a sub-language called *mat* [19], which has passed through massive de-tabooing in the recent decades [20]. Second, online speech on Russian-speaking platforms has been demonstrating growth of radicalization and aggressivity since at least as early as the late 2000s [21], while Internet speech remained more free and much less regulated than that of offline media throughout the 2000s and 2010s [22]. Third, the rapid socio-economic and political changes of the 1990s has polarized the society not only politically but also in assessment of the Soviet and recent post-Soviet past, and politicized speech has brought to life multiple political pejoratives that serve for demarcation of individual and groups along the lines of historic memory [23]. Thus, the dilemma of 'hate speech vs. free speech' [24] for Russia has gained peculiar forms, highly relevant, though, for most other post-Soviet states and may, due to intensity of use of offensive speech, help discover and generalize the linkages between incivility in online discussions and their other structural or content parameters.

Thus, it is not surprising that, as previous research on Russian networked discussions shows, incivility plays a significant role in mass-scale online political discussions, becoming a key marker of strong opinion polarization [25] which fuels political hostility, and vice versa. At the same time, political hate speech may perform constructive functions within a heated political discussion, including spurring discussion dynamics, 'us – them' recognition, and contextualization of mutual pretentions [23]. What we have also shown earlier, though, is that uncivil speech tends to diminish when users discuss substantial issues, while growing in single non-dialogical comments or aggressive phatic communication, especially when users label each other as bots or trolls [25]. In this paper, we extend our exploration of uncivil political speech to possibilities of balancing it with explicit civility in discussions.

Moreover, we expect that the political stance of media affects the levels of incivility in user commenting. This is why we explore counter-balancing incivility by explicit

civility in user comments on media accounts of politically polar media, thus aiming at detecting political parallelism expressed via (un)civil speech. Political parallelism has been explored for effects in traditional media [26, 27], but it remains practically unexplored for platforms or media portals/accounts as communicative milieus, especially in terms of incivility studies.

To tackle these issues, we study the recent polarized discussions on two topics, namely the pension system reform and the court sentence to the non-systemic political activist Alexei Navalny, in terms of (in)civility of public dialogue. The cases have been selected by the principle of maximum dissimilarity. The pension reform case has been explored on VK.com, as this platform is known as less politicized, more populated by 'average citizens', and less a political filter bubble than the Russian-speaking segments of Facebook [28], Twitter [29], or YouTube [30]. Thus, this case works for us as a baseline one that allows to assess (in)civility on politically polar comment sections and see whether the online hostility has grown much from 2018 to 2021. The target case is that of Alexey Navalny's sentencing, as this case was one of the most polarizing, was accompanied by street protest, and directly marked the socio-political cleavages in the Russian society. Unlike many other events related to political opposition, this case was intensely covered by both oppositional and pro-state media and commented on their websites and in their accounts on social media, which makes this case suitable for studies of political parallelism in (in)civility.

We use discourse analysis and descriptive statistics in our study, as they help investigate the volume and nature of civil and uncivil patterns of online political talk. The approach to discourse analysis of uncivil speech is developed by Misnikov [31] based on the works on deliberative democracy by Jürgen Habermas. The scholar has summarized and offered a range of discursive aspects of online discussions, including activity, interactivity, civility, rationality, argumentation, dialogicity, and presence of basic validity claims, as formulated by Habermas. In Misnikov's method, these variables independently guide coding of user texts for assessment of their deliberative quality (see an example in [31] and [32]). We have applied his approach to 14 discussion threads that contained 6.347 comments published on VK.com and analyzed in terms of types of in(civility).

However, the method developed by Misnikov (who follows Habermas quite closely in assessing the discursive features and not assessing the discussion context) implies that the core of potential consensus lies only in the texts themselves; no external factors are assessed. Coming from media studies, though, we believe that external factors may also shape the emergent consensus – or, at least, move the scales of the emergent majority's opinion to this or that side in the process of cumulative deliberation [3]. In our earlier studies, we have divided contextual factors that may shape discussion content into the context of a discussion and the context beyond the discussion, according to the current critical discourse theory and studies of online semiotics [33]. The context beyond a discussion comprises factors that may shape the structure of consensus and the process of reaching it. In this paper, we check the relations between political bias of the media that post news and the civility of the comments that gather under their posts, thus checking whether political parallelism of legacy media present online is a meaningful factor in shaping the cumulative patterns of opinion formation.

Also, the novelty of our paper lies in the fact that both cases, the pension reform and the court verdict to Navalny, have got (somewhat understandably, given the circumstances) little attention from Russian scholars, while they have been one of the most actively discussed and certainly polarized the Russian public sphere.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a review of theoretical works on public deliberation vs. uncivil speech online. Section 3 formalizes the research questions and hypotheses. Section 4 describes the methods and sampling, while Sect. 5 provides the results according to the RQs. Section 6 concludes the paper by discussing the results and putting them in context.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Civility and Incivility as Concepts. The Approach to Analyzing Them in Online Speech

This research is based on the deliberative theory by Jürgen Habermas. This approach plays a huge role in deliberative studies. The deliberative model of democracy proposed by the German philosopher is based on continuous and maximally broad political discourse in society the results of which are determined by the power of arguments and conditioned by normativity of participation modes [34]. The concept implies that true problems of society, directions of their solution, and optimal ways to achieve goals are identified in the course of collective reflection.

The concept of democratic deliberation implies a purposeful, respectful, civil discussion where both ordinary citizens and representatives of institutions reach consensus in a deliberative way and make decisions. As it is the normative conditions of argumentation that critically define the quality of deliberation, civility of the communicative process within societal deliberative efforts inevitably becomes one of the key concepts in the normative tradition of political deliberation studies [35–38]. However, the concept of civility still lacks conceptual clarity across disciplines, as it is investigated by scholars from political science, communication, sociology, and other fields. Hence, there is no clear definition of civility. Some scholars understand civility as politeness, etiquette, or manners [39–41], some compare it to forgiveness [35], others to respect for persons [42, 43]. One area where the literature agrees is that politeness or mutual respect is a necessary and, for some, sufficient part of any definition of civility [17, 44–46]. Nevertheless, various meanings of mutual respect and politeness across cultures [47] make it more complicated to define civility. There are also concerns that overemphasis on politeness might inhibit the free flow of ideas in political conversation, resulting in a very polite, restrained, and barely human discourse [11]. Thus, civility is described as a central component of deliberation that presupposes respect for and affirmation of all people and their opinions, even if there is a contention [48].

The same problem may be when it comes to conceptualizing incivility. Interestingly, incivility is not defined as 'lack of civility' but as a separate, self-sustaining, and active form of communication, with a plethora of considerable options in various works. Verbal incivility can be determined as a set of verbal behaviors (both oral and written) that threaten not only interpersonal relations between interrogators but also the democratic

quality of public discourse [11, 49, 50]. Verbal incivility frequently includes threatening and aggression, intimidation, disrespectful speech, hostility and hate speech. Some works, though, still insist that incivility in its milder forms is the lack of respect for others and their ideas.

Coe et al. indicate one more aspect of defining incivility [18] which can be observed in comments involving rude naming, lying, vulgarity, aspersion, or usage of pejoratives. Thus, studies of incivility often conflate inherently harmful behaviors (such as expressions of racism, sexism, or hate speech) with expressions that, while disrespectful, vulgar, harsh, are not necessarily offensive [16–18, 51, 52].

Furthermore, scholars have examined the implications of civil and uncivil political discourse online. For example, previous research has shown that exposure to online incivility fosters political polarization [53, 54], promotes further use of incivility [55, 56], and decreases willingness to read others' comments online [54]. Uncivil comments that unnecessarily disrespect, label, and attack others derail the focus of a discussion and undermine citizen engagement [5, 57, 58], while reason-based opinion exchanges online can facilitate deliberation and active political engagement [56]. However, differences are inherent in political sphere and are not necessarily harmful to the democratic process. Our previous research suggests that political offense in polarized speech has positive functions, including fueling the discussions, mutual recognition of users with similar views, opinion cumulation, and contextualization of opinion via the use of historic metaphors and memories [23]. Moreover, aggressive speech demarcates non-substantial and aggressive phatic communication from substantial discussion [25]. The theory of cumulative deliberation implies that users have a right for expressing emotions, including negative and even aggressive emotions if such emotions do not surpass legal limits or strong conventional borders of civil speech. This means that incivility must be studied very attentively, to distinguish negative but legitimate emotions from conventionally illegitimate, unlawful, or propagandistic practices.

In this paper, though, we will use the broadest possible definition of civility and incivility, as there are still no conventionally shared academic approaches or instruments to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uncivil speech in online discussions. For this, we have selected the approach developed by Yu. Misnikov [31]. Civility is used to characterize the qualitative nature of a public online discussion and understood as demonstrating a tolerant attitude towards a discussion participant, his/her position, and/or the object of discussion. Consequently, incivility means an intolerant attitude towards a participant, his/her position, and/or the object of discussion.

2.2 (In)civility vs. Political Parallelism: Studies of Content Divergence in Political Commenting Online

The recent research shows that (in)civility in online discussions has connections to both the factors that influence its use and the factors that are themselves influenced by (in)civility. The former, in their turn, may be divided into exogenous and endogenous factors.

Exogenous factors include those that influence discussions from outside. These may include platform affordances, user traits, or discussion context.

Earlier research suggests that the political stance of the media on which content users comment is also a factor that influences user discussions in various ways. These include, i.a., patterns of content spreading and sharing [59], cumulation of similar views [60], and even formation of counter-publics [61]. However, so far, the direct linkage between political parallelism of media and user incivility has not been explored. We explore whether the political stance of media affects manifestations of civility and incivility in user commenting in the Russian context.

3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

Thus, we have posed the following hypotheses:

H1. In line with previous research, the levels of incivility in both discussions will be high (over 10% of posts). The platform difference will be insignificant (less than 2%). The difference between oppositional and pro-state media will also be insignificant.
H2. The discussions have a similar configuration of incivility types, with insignificant differences between platforms and political alignments of media.
H3. Incivility is not balanced by explicit civility, which means that the volume of uncivil comments exceeds that of the civility-oriented comments at least two times on all the platforms, independent of the media's political stance.

4 Methodology and Sampling

4.1 Empirical Data

In this paper, two cases of political nature were analyzed.

The first case is the Russian pension system reform (2018). The discussions on the increase in retirement age and consequences of the Russian pension's reform were conducted most intensely during the time period from January 20, 2008 to January 24, 2019, on VK.com. Accounts in 10 Russian cities were chosen (see Table 1). According to the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation, cities are divided into the largest, large, big, medium, and small ones [63]. Thus, we selected 10 cities that would fall into these categories, represent the vast Russian territory, and have popular newsgroup accounts with live discussions. As a result, two cities with different sizes from each group were taken in order to figure out a comprehensive picture of civility and incivility in chosen social media conversations. However, the differences between cities of various sizes in terms of (in)civility were not included in analysis, as we were interested in a result that would work as a baseline. Thus, St. Petersburg and Volgograd (the largest), Kaliningrad (large), Bratsk and Nalchik (big), Belorechensk and Snezhinsk (medium), Uryupinsk and Borovichi (small) were analyzed; special attention was paid to Moscow in this study, due to the capital status of the city, but the number of comments was smaller in Moscow's discussion than in most cities' talks. A total of 5282 comments left by 431 participants were collected via parsing. We realize that such sampling is not clearly representative for any of the city groups; however, as we needed aggregated data

Table 1. The composition of the dataset on the Russian pension system reform.

City	Number of comments	Number of participants
Moscow	126	85
St. Petersburg	1793	42
Volgograd	284	67
Kaliningrad	561	38
Bratsk	120	35
Nalchik	683	27
Belorechensk	178	19
Snezhinsk	801	45
Uryupinsk	424	29
Borovichi	312	44

Table 2. Online discussions on Navalny's court verdict on the VK pages of four media outlets

Sources	Independent		Pro-state	
	Rain	Meduza	Channel One	KP.RU
Article title and contents	The suspended sentence was replaced with a real one for Navalny. Taking into account the time spent under house arrest, Navalny will spend two years and eight months in the colony.	Will Navalny's sentence be replaced with a real one? We follow what is happening in the court - and around it.	The Moscow City Court sentenced Alexei Navalny to 3.5 years in prison and a fine of 500 thousand rubles.	The court sentenced Alexei Navalny to 3.5 years in prison in a general regime colony.
Post time	02.02.2021 (20:46)	02.02.2021 (18:34)	04.02.2021 (14:03)	02.02.2021 (21:24)
N likes	499	154	116	177
N reposts	152	71	33	41
N comments	602	155	160	148

for a baseline case, the balance between feasibility and representativity allowed us to use only 10 cities of varying size for this analysis.

The target case (that of A. Navalny's court verdict in February 2021) caused a large-scale wave of opinion polarization in the Russian society. Online discussions on the pages of the VK.com social network of the politically polar Russian-language outlets

were selected. These mass media outlets were chosen based on their political affiliation: openly oppositional (Rain, Meduza, by September 2022 both recognized as foreign agent entities by the Russian authorities) vs., explicitly enough, pro-state ones (Channel One, Komsomolskaya Pravda (KP.RU)). The posts with news about the court decision and user comments were all posted on February 2 to 4, 2021. In total, 1065 comments were analyzed. Table 2 presents the posts on the selected four media accounts in terms of their source and political affiliation, as well as the news piece metadata: a short textual profile of the post, its date and time, and number of likes, reposts, and comments. All the data were collected on March 10 to 15, 2021. Only the comments left strictly during February 2 to 4, 2021, were included into the dataset.

4.2 Research Methods

Despite our RQs and hypotheses being of comparative nature, this study used the case study method as it helps understand a pragmatic sense of research themes correlating with usage of (in)civility in real online discussions. Within case research, we employ the discourse analysis methodology developed by Misnikov [1] and descriptive statistics based on the results of the discourse analysis. To explore the nature of civility and incivility in the context of online conversations, we qualitatively assess patterns of their use in each case presented above. Using these methods will allow us to detect civility and incivility, which we explain in detail below.

To examine the conversations on the polarizing issues presented above, a methodological approach by Misnikov [31] was used in order to determine patterns of civil and uncivil speech in online discussions. The scientist reckons that if Internet forums can serve as public discourse structures for political expression and action, then participation in such discussions can lead to will formation and thus manifest a form of democratic citizenship for their participants. In a range of works, Misnikov suggests the standard to assess the deliberative quality of political discourse, as well as a set of empiric parameters that allow for revealing certain discursive features including civility and incivility [2–4]. His typology was used as a starting point in our analysis [1]. In this paper, the features of civil and uncivil communication were clearly distinguished and more fine-grained. As a result, the posts in both datasets were coded according to the following scheme:

1) posts mentioning a participant's name while being rude/offensive in relation to him/her, his/her nationality, religion, ideology etc. (including sarcasm);
2) posts mentioning a participant's name and rude/offensive in relation to the object of discussion;
3) posts without mentioning a participant's name but rude/offensive in relation to him/her, his/her nationality, religion, ideology, etc. (including gross sarcasm);
4) posts without mentioning a participant's name but rude/offensive in relation to the object of discussion;
5) explicitly polite and respectful posts that mention a participant's name (may contain irony, humor, or even positive sarcasm);
6) explicitly polite and respectful posts towards a person without mentioning his/her name (may contain irony, humor, or even positive sarcasm).

In order to define the level of civil and uncivil communication expressed in percentage, discussions and posts containing the features mentioned above (1–6) were analyzed and then their number of that posts was divided by the total number of posts in a discussion. To determine the general level of (in)civility in a few discussions, first, every single discussion was analyzed in terms of in(civility) described above. Second, the results with observed patterns of civil and uncivil speech in all discussions were summarized. Third, the general result was divided by the quantity of discussions.

5 Results

5.1 The Pension System Reform Case (2018)

The analysis of this case revealed a very high level of uncivil and intolerant discourse both towards the subject of discussions and their participants. The percentage of comments with uncivil speech (34.33%, towards both the participants and the subject discussed) was nearly 1.5 times higher than that of openly civil, polite, and respectful comments (23.44%) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Presence of civility and incivility in the public VK pages on the pensions reform

Types of speech		Comments, %
Civil speech	Explicitly polite and respectful posts towards participants addressed by name or personal expressions (they can include irony, humor, sarcasm of non-offensive character)	8.31
	Posts do not include an explicit mention of participants' name, they are explicitly polite and respectful (including intentional politeness, irony, humor or sarcasm of non-offensive character)	15.13
Uncivil speech	Obviously rude or offensive posts towards person, nationality, religion, ideology, place of living addressed by name or personal expressions (differ from irony/humor/sarcasm)	9.29
	Posts do not include an explicit mention of participants' name, they contain obviously rude or abusive expressions and vocabulary (irony, humor and sarcasm are excluded)	7.69
	Posts are dedicated directly or indirectly to the pension reform, they are on subject but rude towards a certain person	4.03
	Posts are dedicated directly or indirectly to pension reform, they are on subject but rude, impersonal	13.32

5.2 The Navalny's Court Sentence Case (2021)

Table 4 shows that openly tolerant and intentionally civil speech was virtually absent from user comments under both pro-state and oppositional/independent media, cross-validating our previous results on incivility as playing a bigger role in constituting the fabric of polar online discussions [23]. The impolite, rude attitude towards the participants, as well as towards the subject of discussion, strongly prevailed over polite ones as shown by the percentage of the posts with rude attitude towards other participants in all the discussions.

Table 4. Analysis of civility and incivility in the VK discussions on Navalny's court verdict

Types of speech		Independent		Pro-state		Mean
		Rain	Meduza	Channel One	KP.RU	
Civil speech	Posts with participant name's mention, discussion on topic in a polite in a tolerant way	0	0	0	0	0.7
	Posts without participant name's mention, discussion on topic in a tolerant way	0	0	0	0	0
Uncivil speech	Posts with participant name' mention, discussion on topic, but rude towards participants	**9.1**	4.5	2.5	2	4.53
	Posts with participant name's mention, discussion on topic but rude towards the subject of discussion	0.7	0.7	**3.1**	2	1.63
	Posts without a participant name's mention, discussion on topic but rude towards participants	0.3	**1.9**	1.3	0.7	1.1
	Posts without a participant name's mention, discussion on topic, but rude towards the subject of discussion	1.8	1.9	1.3	**4.7**	2.43
	Total % of incivility towards participants	**9.4**	6.4	3.8	2.7	5.58
	Total % of incivility towards the object of discussion	2.5	2.6	4.4	**6.7**	4.1
	Total % of civil and uncivil speech	11.9	9	8.2	9.4	9.6

However, the overall percentages of uncivil comments were also much lower than in the case of the pension reform. The total sum of uncivil comments in the discussions on non-mediatized VK.com is 2.8 to 4.2 times higher than under the posts of the legacy media. Thus, we see that media presence and their initiation of discussions play a crucial role in diminishing both the open civility and open incivility of online speech.

We have also shown that commenters of independent media are more correlated with counterpart discussants, while the users who commented on pro-state media preferred

to attack the object of discussion. This suggests us that the pattern of less controlled speech being more inclined to criticizing the discussion participants – this both raises the quality of discussions (via hinting on higher dialogicity) and lowers it, as attacks towards fellow participants do not lead to meaningful discussion. The higher number of comments that criticize the object of discussion (the problem itself) was higher on pro-state media, which reflects on simultaneously of lesser freedom of discussion in terms of addressing, even if aggressively, fellow commenters, and of higher discussion quality more oriented to issue-based discourse. This needs to be researched further, as this result partly reshapes our understanding of how uncivil speech works regard to media bias.

At the same time, the overall difference between the volume of uncivil speech in pro-state and independent media was too small to make conclusions about their stable difference. The highest percentage of uncivil comments was detected for the Rain TV's viewers and commenters (11.9%), while the lowest number of 8.2% was found for Channel One, the difference in the number of comments being only 3.7%. Thus, we can make an important conclusion that, on social networks, political parallelism does shape incivility of discussions; however, not in terms of the volume of uncivil commenting but in terms of the addressees of incivility, which definitely calls for future studies.

5.3 Responding to the Hypotheses

In terms of our hypotheses, we can state the following.

H1 (on the volume of uncivil speech) is strongly supported for the VK.com public pages but not for media where the results fluctuate around 10% (from 8.2% to 11.9%). With regard to platform difference (public pages or media accounts), H1 is strongly rejected, as the result for the former is 2.8 to 4.2 times higher than for the latter. For the difference between media of various bias, formally, H1 is supported, as the biggest difference has reached 3.7% (higher than the 2% threshold). However, we still consider this difference not that substantial, especially in comparison with the results for public pages on VK.com.

H2 on the patterns of distribution of types of uncivil speech is, in general, not supported, as the pattern for the pensions reform repeats for neither of the four media. This indicates that independent dynamics of incivility on 'open' VK.com and on media spaces within VK.com, and of absence of any generalizable patterns for all media represented on the platform.

H3, though, is supported, as incivility is not balanced via open civility. And if, on the public pages, incivility is not balanced *enough*, on the media pages, it is not balanced *at all*. This deserves expanding our research to look for the reasons of generally more neutral user speech on media pages present on VK.com.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have investigated the balance between civil and uncivil speech on Russian social media discussions (represented by VK.com) on the pension system reform

and on the court verdict for Alexey Navalny in relation to political parallelism of media outlets present on social networks.

Our study had several limitations. First, more data is needed to perform descriptive statistics and measure the validity of our claims via statistical means; in this paper, we can only claim trends that we see in the data, not statistically proven dependencies. However, even such results deserve scholarly attention, as political parallelism of media has not previously been in the focus of the academe, to our best knowledge, while it shapes the structure of consensus online. Second, more analysis should be provided on interactivity of users, as there can be hyperactive and dominant participants who shape discussions and have an impact on them in terms of civil and uncivil patterns. This aspect should be taken into account in the future research in order to obtain more objective outcomes. Third, our method of manual coding needs to be complemented or substituted where possible by machine-learning techniques and automated detection of (in)civility. Fourth, the method by Misnikov may need to be expanded and/or corrected, in order to account for non-deliberative nature of user utterances.

We obtained some results according to our hypotheses that, on the one hand, are based on the previous research works, and, on other one, are aimed at developing new ideas and directions of research thought in the future studies. Thus, the analysis demonstrated high levels of incivility in political communication online as over 10% of posts on VK.com platforms contained intolerant, offensive and rude expressions both towards participants and subject of deliberating (**H1**). Referring to platform difference, the outcomes of target case's analysis showed insignificant distinction between them (**H1**). In addition, there was not much diversity in incivility between oppositional and pro-state media, but it was higher than 2% in most cases (**H1**). These conclusions are cross-validated by the outcomes of previous research conducted on Russian [23] and Belarusian YouTube [25] where an important role of incivility as a marker of strong opinion polarization in mass-scale online political discussions was formulated.

The discussions have dissimilar configurations of incivility types in absolute figures, but the low number of uncivil comments on legacy media accounts makes differences between platforms and political alignments of media insignificant (**H2**). This observation may contribute to the future studies dedicated to freedom of opinion expression in civil or uncivil manner and the hate speech dilemma which are partly developed in some previous works (see [12, 14, 23, 58, 59]).

Incivility is not balanced by explicit civility, which means that the volume of uncivil comments exceeds that of the civility-oriented comments at least two times on all the platforms, independent of the media's political stance (**H3**). For example, the analysis of (in)civility using the case of pension reform system case showed 34.33% of uncivil patterns vs. 23.44% of civil ones, the Navalny's court sentence case – a more unbalanced proportion – 9.69% vs. 0.18% respectively. Considering the media's political stance in the target case, we observed hint to the 'free speech vs. hate speech' dilemma, as the comments in the oppositional media appear to be more hostile but also more diverse in opinion expression, while those on the pro-state accounts look less polluted by aggression and offense but show signs of stronger filter bubbles (**H3**). However, the difference in the level of incivility between discussions on the VK pages of oppositional and pro-state media outlets was irrelevant (**H3**). This finding may merit future research on political

parallelism expressed via (un)civil speech and political parallelism's effects in traditional and social media.

To put our results in further context, we may say that we had done some research on American culture of communication in terms of (in)civility [14]. For example, we looked at the case of the second impeachment of Donald Trump and how citizens discussed it on Facebook groups of politically polar media. As a result, in general, there were more civil and polite expressions towards both the participants and the discussed topic. For the US dataset, we came to the conclusion that the political stance of media played a role in opinion formation, as well as in the arguments and manner opinions cumulate. There, we detected 'direct' parallelism when participants of discussions on Facebook pages of liberal media outlets spoke more negatively on the object of discussion (Donald Trump) than on the conservative media. Interestingly, for the USA, our conclusion on larger-scale presence of incivility in more pro-democratic and free media is also true, with the culture of communication being more intolerant on liberal media's accounts than those of the participants of conservative media. The discussions on platforms of liberal media outlets were more reasoned than on platforms of conservative ones, but less interactive and dialogical. This clearly sets a comparative perspective for the studies like ours, as we have seen a different nature of polarization between oppositional and pro-state media in Russia,

Thus, in further research, both the forms of incivility and their relation to the outer context (e.g., represented by the offline media system) should be investigated in more detail. Moreover, it is relevant to consider a correlation between uncivil traits of users' behavior and their disagreement patterns, since it may provide a better understanding whether incivility provokes disagreement and in what fashion it has an impact on it. One more research field is that different platforms for e-deliberation may demonstrate different levels and forms of uncivil patterns due to the specific affordances of digital environments, possibilities they open for communicating, and their biases.

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