5. INTERNET AS A TOOL OF SOLIDARITY: THE LINGUISTIC ASPECT OF DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

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Annotation. The paper defines the concept of "internet solidarity". The Internet is viewed as a social space where the exchange of social capital occurs, and social interactions are concentrated.

Key words. Internet solidarity, online communities, social networks, digital communication, collective solidarity, empathy and support, hashtags, online petitions, crowdfunding and donations, group identity, media influence, virtual interactions, social awareness, network dynamics, online activism.

In the modern world, the Internet has become not just a means of communication but a powerful tool for forming and expressing collective solidarity. Social networks, forums, messengers, and online platforms enable people to unite around shared values, issues, and interests, regardless of geographical boundaries. The virtual space creates new forms of interaction, where support, empathy, and unity are expressed through digital formats such as hashtags, memes, flash mobs, petitions, and even internet slang. The Internet is viewed as a social environment where interactions between people are concentrated and various communities emerge. In this context, a community is understood as a group of individuals connected by shared interests and relationships, possessing internal cohesion and defining collective goals and objectives.

A person is not limited by space, typically by one group, and he has the ability to move from group to group according to their individual aspirations. In this regard, network communities are quite dynamic, mobile, and changing formations. Network communities exist in various formats: social networks, chats, forums, blogs, and others. The "agenda" for communication is diverse: cultural and political events, social issues, and others. Typically, the foundation of communities lies in values, ideas, and cultural products that are significant for group identity. As a result of the union of users based on shared interests, solidarity relationships arise, which, according to Russian researcher I.V. Ksenofontova, can be described by the term "internet solidarity" [1]. The internet space serves as a platform for providing support to people in clear and specific life situations. The urge to help a stranger often arises spontaneously, driven by genuine empathy and compassion, and manifests in a willingness to offer immediate assistance. Solidarity extends not only to social crises and emergencies but also to everyday situations that disrupt the usual course of life. Traditional forms of solidarity, which often rely on geographical proximity, online solidarity transcends physical boundaries, allowing people from diverse backgrounds to unite for common causes.

The driving force behind the development of communities is the empathetic experience (i.e., the affective component) of collective solidarity. Shared emotions facilitate the adoption of the other's perspective and ease interaction. As a rule, actions are driven by an internal urge to help others rather than by a desire to follow an abstract ethical norm or social rule. It is important to note that a reciprocal response (such as gratitude in the form of a return gift, a special sense of goodwill, or a feeling of respect) is neither guaranteed nor formally legitimised by anyone [2].

Some studies have been conducted on the role of the Internet in strengthening solidarity and how media influences solidarity, emphasizing the importance of group identity and its impact on the unity or division of people. The studies also analyse the phenomenon of online flash mobs and their role in shaping a new type of solidarity [3].

The chart (Figure 1) illustrates how people use the Internet to support each other. Social media awareness, accounting for 35%, is the most popular tool for solidarity, helping spread information about important events, issues, and movements while attracting a wide audience's attention [4]. Crowdfunding and donations, making up 25%, enable people to support those in need, finance charitable projects, and assist victims in crisis situations. Online petitions, representing 20%, serve as a means of expressing public opinion and pushing for change by drawing the attention of governments and organizations. Similarly, support groups and forums, also at 20%, provide virtual spaces where individuals can share experiences, seek support, and receive help from like-minded people during difficult times. Overall, the Internet plays a crucial role in bringing people together and strengthening solidarity through various digital tools. Additionally, these online solidarity tools complement each other, creating a multifaceted support system that is accessible to people worldwide. The ease of digital communication allows individuals to mobilize quickly, amplify marginalized voices, and drive social change on a global scale.
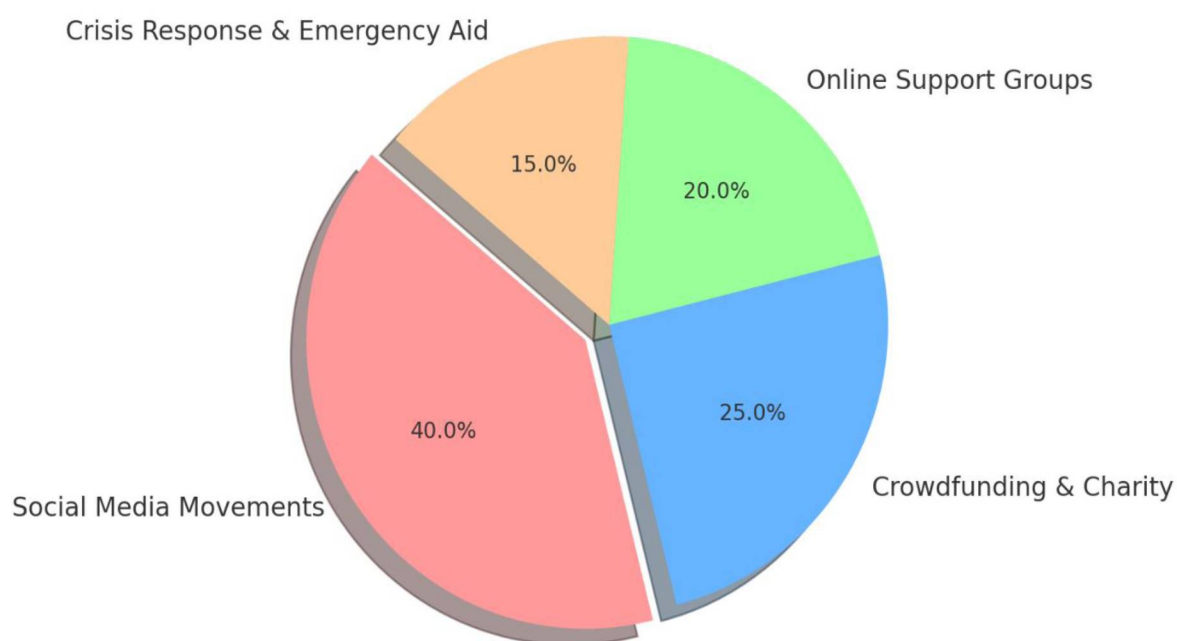

Figure 1 – Forms of Online Solidarity

The main forms of internet solidarity include social media movements, crowdfunding and charity platforms, online support groups, and crisis response efforts. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram help raise awareness of social issues and mobilize people for collective action. American platforms such as GoFundMe and Kickstarter enable financial support for those in need or for humanitarian projects. Online support groups offer emotional and psychological assistance to people facing health challenges, personal struggles, or social discrimination. Crisis response initiatives, particularly during natural disasters or conflicts, allow digital platforms to coordinate aid, spread critical information, and connect volunteers with affected communities. In Belarus, there are also charitable funds for assistance, such as the Belarusian Children's Fund, charity funds «UniHelp», «Spiros», etc.

Online support groups provide a vital space for expressing solidarity, offering emotional and psychological assistance to individuals facing health challenges, personal struggles, or social discrimination. These communities foster a sense of belonging, where users share experiences, offer encouragement, and provide practical advice, demonstrating how digital interactions can create strong, supportive networks despite physical distance.

In times of crisis, the Internet plays a crucial role in mobilising support and providing emergency aid. Online platforms enable people to quickly share critical information, organise fundraising campaigns, and coordinate volunteer efforts to help those in need. Social media amplifies calls for assistance, allowing individuals and organisations to respond swiftly to natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and other emergencies. Crowdfunding platforms provide financial aid to victims, while online communities offer emotional

and psychological support. This form of digital solidarity transcends geographical boundaries, demonstrating how collective action in the virtual space can lead to real-world impact.

Online solidarity in crisis response goes beyond just raising awareness – it actively shapes disaster relief efforts. Governments, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations), and volunteers use digital tools like real-time tracking apps, crisis mapping software, and AI-driven analytics to assess needs and allocate resources efficiently. Citisen-led initiatives often emerge, with individuals creating hashtags and online databases to connect victims with helpers. Blockchain technology is increasingly used to ensure transparency in donations, preventing fraud and ensuring that funds reach their intended recipients. Moreover, digital mental health platforms provide long-term psychological support for those affected, emphasising that online solidarity extends beyond immediate crisis relief to long-term recovery and resilience-building.

Another means of expressing solidarity on the Internet is Internet slang and memes. Slang is a collection of informal words, abbreviations, memes, and expressions used in the digital environment for quick and convenient communication. It is constantly evolving, reflecting trends, subcultures, and the peculiarities of online communication. The main characteristics of Internet slang are speed of spread, flexibility, and community affiliation. New words appear and become popular very quickly, especially thanks to social networks (Twitter, TikTok, Instagram), memes in gaming and streaming communities (Twitch, Discord, YouTube), in messengers (Telegram, WhatsApp, VK), and through bloggers and influencers. Slang is easily adapted, modified, and combined with other linguistic elements.

Many words have come from the English language, for example, краш (from English *"crush"*, фейл (from English *«fail»*), рофл (from English *«ROFL»* – rolling on the floor laughing), флексить (from English *"flex"*). Borrowing also occurs from gaming slang: имба (from *"imbalanced"*), нуб (from *"noob"),* бустить (to artificially raise a player's level or rank).

Memes are a powerful tool of digital communication that use humour and irony to draw attention to important social and political issues. They are often used to support communities, express protest, and spread ideas that are difficult to convey through formal text. The most powerful memes are "Woman Yelling at a Cat", "Expanding Brain", "Mocking Sponge Bob", "Change My Mind".

Internet slang contributes to the formation of group identity. The use of specific slang signals membership in a particular group (e.g., gamers, K-pop fans, internet meme culture). People who know and use these expressions feel a sense of belonging, while newcomers strive to master this language to become part of the community. It also fosters the convergence of speech styles. In linguistics, the concept of convergence refers to when people start speaking like those around them to strengthen connections. On the internet, this is seen in the adaptation of slang, the use of popular memes, emojis, and abbreviations. Internet slang often replaces intonation and non-verbal cues (e.g., "лол", "кринж", "рофл"), helping to convey emotions and making communication less formal. Shared use of jokes, memes, and jargon creates a sense of emotional closeness. Slang expressions can serve as tools for solidarity and support (e.g., "краш" – a gentle term for infatuation, "ауф" – approval, "бро" – a friendly address). In difficult situations, people use a common language to express sympathy and support (e.g., "Hang in there, dude", "Don't worry, everything will be fine") [4].

In the context of the internet as a tool for solidarity, hypertextuality and multilayeredness play a critical role in shaping collective knowledge and reinforcing shared positions.

Hypertextuality refers to the interconnected nature of online content. Internet discourse involves navigating between various sources of information, such as articles, social media posts, videos, and forums. This interconnectedness allows users to access multiple viewpoints on a single issue and engage in broader conversations across platforms. For example, when a social movement emerges online, its discourse may combine news articles, personal stories, academic research, and viral content like memes. Hyperlinks enable users to seamlessly move between these sources, constructing a more comprehensive understanding of the issue [5].

Multilayeredness describes the multiple levels of communication in internet discourse. Online interactions involve text, images, videos, hashtags, emojis, memes, and slang. These layers offer different ways to express solidarity, whether by sharing an article, participating in an online petition, or using a meme to express a political stance. Each layer contributes to collective meaning and identity. For example, in a social media campaign, users can share factual content (news articles), emotional content (memes), symbolic content (hashtags), and interactive content (comments), all of which create a cohesive narrative that appeals to different forms of engagement.

Together, hypertextuality and multilayeredness strengthen solidarity by reinforcing messages across diverse mediums. The ability to respond in multiple formats allows individuals from different backgrounds to participate, broadening the scope of solidarity. These features foster a dynamic exchange of information, helping build a shared space where collective knowledge is continuously updated and strengthened, especially in online social movements.

In conclusion, the internet plays a crucial role in fostering solidarity through various tools and platforms. Social media movements, crowdfunding, online support groups, and crisis response initiatives allow individuals to unite for common causes, transcending geographical boundaries. Memes, a powerful form of digital

communication, use humor and irony to draw attention to critical issues, while internet slang helps form group identity and strengthens community bonds.

Hypertextuality and multilayeredness are essential in building collective knowledge and reinforcing shared positions. The interconnectedness of online content allows users to engage with diverse perspectives, deepening their understanding of social movements. Multiple layers of communication, from text to images and memes, facilitate emotional connections and create a cohesive narrative that amplifies solidarity. The dynamic and fluid nature of internet discourse strengthens collective action, making it easier for individuals from various backgrounds to participate and contribute to online communities. Through these mechanisms, the internet serves as an effective tool for building solidarity and advancing social change.

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