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Original article

RESPONSES TO DISASTERS IN RUSSIAN AND FRENCH SPEAKING TWITTER: NOTRE DAME DE PARIS AND ST.. PETER AND ST. PAUL OF NANTES CATHEDRALS FIRES CASES

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Abstract: The paper explores how disasters are discussed in politically and ideologically polarized social media space by the example of discussions on the Notre Dame de Paris Cathedral fire and Nantes Cathedral fire on the French and Russian Twitter. Datasets were collected and analyzed with facilitation of Netlytic program. The qualitative analysis of revealed posts (N=100 for each case) was performed based on the grounded theory approach.

Key words: online discussions, polarization, discursive strategies, responses to disasters

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Научная статья

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РЕАКЦИЯ НА КАТАСТРОФУ НА ПРИМЕРЕ ОБСУЖДЕНИЯ ПОЖАРОВ В СОБОРАХ НОТР-ДАМ-ДЕ-ПАРИ И ПЕТРА И ПАВЛА В НАНТЕ В РУССКОЯЗЫЧНОМ И ФРАНКОФОННОМ ТВИТТЕРЕ

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Аннотация. В статье исследуется, как стихийные бедствия обсуждаются в политически и идеологически поляризованном пространстве социальных сетей на примере дискуссий о пожарах в соборах Парижской Богоматери и Петра и Павла в Нанте. Наборы данных были собраны и проанализированы с помощью программы Netlytic во французском и российском Твиттере.

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Качественный анализ выявленных сообщений (N=100 для каждого случая) проведен на основе подхода обоснованной теории.

Ключевые слова: онлайн-дискуссии, поляризация, дискурсивные стратегии, реакции на катастрофы.

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Introduction

The role of social media in awareness and discussing disasters is crucial nowadays [14; 15]. Users in the networks exchange important information and coordinate the efforts of various actors to overcome the disaster [13; 16]. Besides, they emotionally support each other, exchange opinions, praise the heroes and look for the guilty.

Social media contributes to increasing community resilience after disasters [3; 9; 10; 20]. Burgess et al. [5] showed the ritualistic reactions of social networks to tragic events. Whitehouse et al. [21] demonstrated that sharing painful experiences produced “identity fusion” – a visceral sense of oneness. However, the disasters can be accompanied by communication crises [17], the discussion of dramatic events in social networks can exacerbate polarization.

The polarization between various social and political groups is growing [1; 6; 11]. These processes have national specifics and require separate studies in each country, as well as comparative studies. Few studies on the national features of polarization have been conducted in France and Russia [4; 7].

Working group of Institut Montaigne [21] revealed that one event can have different effects and kinds of polarization in different countries. The polarization in social networks is primarily studied on big data using network analysis [8]. Meanwhile, the topic deserves a closer look at small data with the help of qualitative research.

Major disasters are seriously changing the agenda, temporarily distracting users of professional and social media from polarizing topics. However, given the tendency to politicize and mediatize the agenda [12; 16], we assume that the agenda developed at the time of the disaster affects its discussion, including in social networks.

The current paper explores how disasters are discussed in politically and ideologically polarized social media space by the example of discussions on the Notre Dame de Paris (next Notre Dame) Cathedral fire and Nantes Cathedral fire on the French and Russian Twitter. In particular, it examines how the discussion of the fire was linked to other polarizing topics and events that dominated the agenda at that time.

The data was collected and analyzed using the Netlityc program [2] in the Russian-language and Francophone Twitter for the Notre Dame case during the period from April 15, 2019 to April 15, 2019, for the Nantes Cathedral case from 18.07.20 to 25.07.20. Datasets were collected using relevant hashtags identified by the snowball method. Then, datasets were identified, in which hashtags were adjacent, simultaneously associated with both fires and other relevant topics that dominated the agenda at that time, considering that hashtags link a tweet to other content [18]. These topics were elucidated by studying the most frequent news in Yandex services, News and Google News. The most popular topics and posts were identified using Netlytic. The qualitative analysis of revealed posts (N=100 for each case) was performed based on the grounded theory [17] approach.

1 FINDINGS

1.1 The French-language tweets' analysis of Notre-Dame's case

In the first hours of the fire, the reaction of the Francophone Twitter seemed to be consentaneous: disarray, stupefaction, stunning shock and support for firefighters. The images were looped on social networks, including photos with people praying on their knees, as well as videos of people singing Ave Maria. There were also many messages in which the users affirmed their commitment to their national, cultural, historical and religious values.

> "Quelle triste épreuve collective le lendemain du dimanche des Rameaux ! Pensées particulières pour la communauté catholique et au-delà de nos croyances personnelles pour tous nos concitoyens attachés à notre patrimoine culturel et historique. Soutien aux pompiers."
> What a sad collective hardship the day after Palm Sunday! Special thoughts for the Catholic community and, beyond our personal beliefs, for all our compatriots attached to our cultural and historical heritage. Support for firefighters.

The support and admiration for the firefighters were one of the unifying themes.

> "Magnifique et émouvant. Quand le cœur et l'histoire nous lient, nous unissent"
> Magnificent and moving. When the heart and history bind us, we become united.

Later, the focus shifted from emotional support to the responsibility of the authorities for the negligence and insufficient fire services funding.

> "Faut-il un incendie dans chaque cathédrale/édifice public pour qu'en France les #pompiers puissent être reconnus et pour qu'ils aient les moyens de leurs actions, dont la toute première: sauver des vies? Les budgets publics rétrécissent; ceux des SDIS aussi."
> Do we need fire in every cathedral / public building so that in France #firefighters can be recognized, and they have the means for doing their job, including the foremost - saving lives? Public budgets are shrinking; those of SDIS (fire department) too.

Most of the tweets containing criticism of authorities had hashtag #giletsjaunes (Gilets Jaunes, *Yellow Vests*). Besides, #ACTE23 (*23rd Act of "yellow vest" protests*) #antimacron #JACCUSE (J'accuse, *I accuse*) #corruption #gestapo etc. were used.

> "Pourrissement de la crise des #giletsjaunes Chaos #incendie #nddp Les policiers se suicident en masse Les #giletsjaunes prisonniers politiques Nos anciens et jeunes sacrifiés Les Français vous haïssent au + haut point"
> Degradation of the #giletsjaunes crisis. Chaos #fire #nddp. The Police commit mass suicide. The yellow vests political prisoners. Our old and young sacrificed. The French hate you to the highest degree.

In response to months of protest of the Yellow vests, president Macron was preparing to make an important speech. At the last moment, he had to change his plans and attend the scene of the fire. Later, he made a speech, declaring that the Cathedral would be rebuilt. Some Twitter users praised his speech.

> "Belle prise de parole de @EmmanuelMacron "Cette cathédrale, nous la rebâtirons ensemble". Ce moment restera dans l'Histoire. Après la sidération et la peine, tournons nous vers l'espoir et l'action."
> Nice speech from @EmmanuelMacron "This cathedral, we will rebuild it together". This moment will go down in history. After the stupefaction and pain, let's turn to hope and action.

However, the information that Macron's rating increased by three points during the events was questioned.

> "@EmmanuelMacron "gagnerait" 3 points de popularité à la suite de #NDDP comme à la suite des yeux crevés, mains coupée et autres blessures graves"
> @EmmanuelMacron "alleged" 3 points of popularity following #NDDP as a result of sore eyes, severed hands and other serious injuries.

Macron was also criticized for making hasty statements that were not based on expert knowledge.

Not only Macron was criticized, but also journalists and various parties, both rightists and leftists, for using the event for their own purposes.

> "Entre @EmmanuelMacron qui profite de l'incendie de la cathédrale de #NDDP pour faire de la récupération politique et ses amis adeptes de l'évasion fiscale qui font semblant d'avoir une éthique, ils réalisent un concours d'hypocrisie."
> There is a hypocrisy contest between @EmmanuelMacron, who takes advantage of the fire at the Cathedral of #NDDP to make his political recovery, and his friends - supporters of tax evasion, who pretend that they have some ethics.
> "FN Pas d excuses pas de pardon. à bannir! N'oubliez pas un truc. Les petits et les grands trauma nationaux quels qu'ils soient sont parfois pour les neoliberaux des périodes idéales pour profiter de la sidération passagère du peuple afin d'imposer de nouvelles régressions sociales."

> FN (*National Front*) No excuses no forgiveness. ban them! Remember one thing. Small and large national traumas, whatever they are, are sometimes ideal for neo-liberals to take advantage of the peoples' fleeting shock in order to impose new social regressions.
> "Quand on constate comment l'extrême-gauche, jalouse, haineuse et violente a déjà récupéré le drame de #NDDP pour ses vieux combats anti-riches, grâce aux journaleux complices , on comprend mieux comment elle a pu infiltrer et dynamiter le mouvement #GiletJaunes de l'intérieur..."
> When we see how the extreme left, jealous, hateful and violent, have already diverted the drama of #NDDP to their old anti-rich fights, thanks to the journalist accomplices, we understand better how they were able to infiltrate and undermine the #GiletJaunes movement from the inside...

Not all French people experienced dysphoric emotions. Some tweets were marked as including "potentially sensitive content" as their authors rejoiced in the event.

> "Merci, je dormirais un peu mieux ce soir #notredrame"
> Thanks, I will sleep a little better tonight.
> "ALLAH AKBAR nique la France... KARMA, maintenant on détruit et on fait une mosquée INCHALAH"
> ALLAH AKBAR fuck France ... KARMA, now we destroy and we build a mosque INCHALLAH.

Some of these statements were accompanied by hashtags #SoutienHugo (support Hugo) #jesuisHugo (I am Hugo) that refer to the case of a Twitter user, known as "Hugo". The teenager's joke about Mecca triggered a backlash from the Muslim internet community two days before the Cathedral fire, and he was targeted with online death threats. These hashtags were used by many people, including the Secretary of State for Equality, Marlène Schiappa. By putting these hashtags to messages, users not only tried highjacking them, but emphasized the link between the joke, the fact that the French were defending Hugo and the fire as a result of the wrath of Allah.

> "Tu t'attaque à la Mecque et tu te plein que notre dame prend feu Allah u akbr y'a une justice j'aime cette vie"
> You attack Mecca and you complain that notre dame catches fire Allah u akbr there is justice I love this life.
> "Vous avez vu à quel point allah es puissant avec notre dame de Paris????"
> Did you see how powerful Allah is with notre dame de Paris ????

This eventually led to condemnation of the joyful reaction and discussions on who can be called "French".

> "Pendant que les Français sont meurtris par l'incendie de Notre-Dame de Paris, d'autres "Français" s'en réjouissent. Par milliers."
> While the French are crushed by the fire of Notre-Dame de Paris, other "French" rejoice. Thousands and thousands.
> "S'il vous fallait encore une preuve que le vivre-ensemble est un échec, la voici."
> If you still need proof that living together has failed, here it is.

Some messages on this topic were accompanied by islamophobic hashtag #padamalgam which alludes to medicine for political correctness (pas d'amalgame means "*no conflation*") and implies mockery and criticism of the French mainstream media and authorities.

"#media padamalgam subventionné
Attentat de NZ, Christchurch, 10 minutes, pour savoir que le terroriste est blanc, de droite imaginaire, puis communiste, qui déteste @Trump Jamais, nous connaîtrons la marque d'allumette qui a foutu le feu à Notre-Dame de Paris"
media padamalgam subsidized
Attack in NZ, Christchurch, 10 minutes to find out that the terrorist is white, alleged right, then a communist who hates @Trump.
Never will we know the brand of matches that were used to set Notre-Dame de Paris on fire.

Huge donations to Notre-Dame restoration led to debates. Concurrently with joy and gratitude, multinational corporations were criticized for "donating to stones", not to the unfortunate people such as the homeless, jobless, and refugees.

"Avec les 400millions de dons récoltés en 12h pour retapper #NDDP : on aurait pu complétement héberger, nourir et accompagner les gens (sdf, réfugiés, toxicos…) qui dorment à la rue pendant plus d'une demie-décennie, facile"
400 million of donations were collected in 12 hours to restore #NDDP: we could have easily completely housed, fed and supported people (the homeless, refugees, drug addicts ...) who have been sleeping on the street for more than half a decade.
"S'il y a des #dons pour #NotreDame, il y doit bien avoir quelques solutions pour les #SDF, #Pauvres et #GILETSJAUNES, non?"
If there are donations for #NotreDame, there must be some solutions for #homeless, #Poor and #GILETSJAUNES (*yellow vests*), right?

1.2 The French-language tweets' analysis of Nantes Cathedral's case

Despite its lesser destructiveness, the Nantes fire forced users to remember the fire in Notre Dame de Paris.

"Plus d'un an après le feux de Nôtre Dame de Paris, la Cathédrale de Nantes se trouve elle aussi attaquée par une incendie. Priez pour la Cathédrale de Nantes. @notredameparis #cathédraledeNantes"
More than a year after the burning Nôtre Dame de Paris, the Nantes Cathedral was also attacked by a fire. Pray for the Cathedral of Nantes. @notredameparis #cathédraledeNantes

Along with regrets, calls to pray for the Cathedral, and support for the firefighters, the idea was emphasized that this should not happen again.

"Colère 1 an après #notredamedeparis, c est #CathedraledeNantes qui est en proie aux flammes.La leçon n a pas ete retenue
Il est urgent de revoir leur sécurité incendie #sauvonsnotrepatrimoine"
Anger 1 year after #notredamedeparis, it is #CathedraledeNantes which is in the grip of flames.
The lesson has not been learned
It is urgent to review their fire safety #sauvonsnotrepatrimoine (*save our heritage*).

The main version was that the fire had been started deliberately. Thus, very quickly some users blamed Muslims, refugees or Christianophobia and decivilizing, and next to the hashtags like #incendie #cathedraleDeNantes there were, #christianophobie, #Croisade (*crusade*); anti-Islamic hashtags like #padamalgme, #cepacalislam (*it's not only in Islam*) #grandremplacement (*great replacement*), #islamisme, #terrorisme, #remigration and #racaille, #LaRacailleTue, #StopAuxRacailles (*scum, scum kills, stop scum) and* #RacismeAntiBlancs (*anti White racism)*. The police detained the asylum seeker from Rwanda, volunteer of the Cathedral, then released him (#prejugés #présomptioninnocence, #Ilestinnocent) and eventually he had confessed to starting the fire. His lawyer asked to be merciful to him, and as a response there were calls to expel "the whole scum" first,

and then to think of mercy. The authorities were similarly criticized for the ostrich policy, inaction and permissiveness:

> "Alors que 3 actes antichrétiens ont lieu chaque jour, cessons la politique de l'autruche, agissons ! Je demande au Gouvernement de protéger nos monuments avec la vidéoprotection et de sanctionner ces barbares : les interpeller, les condamner et les expulser s'ils sont étrangers !"
> As three anti-Christian acts occur every day, let's stop the ostrich policy, let's act! I ask the Government to protect our monuments with video protection and to sanction these barbarians: detain them, condemn them and expel them if they are foreigners!
> "L'#islamisme a encore frappé par mégot de cigarette "oublié" interposé... ça arrive moins fréquemment dans les mosquées... #Nantes #cathedraleDeNantes #incendie #grandremplacement
> The #islamism struck again by interposed "forgotten" cigarette butt... it happens less frequently in the mosques... #Nantes #cathedraleDeNantes #fire #grandremplacement
> "Les premiers éléments évoquent un acte criminel concernant l'incendie de la #CathedraledeNantes
> Mais n'y voyez aucun acte anti chrétien, puisque comme le #RacismeAntiBlancs et la haine anti #France cela n'existe pas, par construction et par principe…"
> The first elements evoke a criminal act concerning the burning of the #Cathedral of Nantes. But don't think of it as an anti-Christian act, since #AntiWhiteRacism and anti #France hate doesn't exist, by construction and by principle…

Other users mocked such hasty conclusions.

> "Ce ne serait donc pas de dangereux islamo-gauchistes qui auraient mis le feu à la #CathedraledeNantes: quelle déception pour tous les complotistes d'extreme-droite et autres partisans du "grand remplacement"! Cc. @JeanMessiha #incendieNantes #incendiecathedralenantes"
> So they would not be dangerous islamo-leftists who would have set fire to the #CathedraledeNantes: what a disappointment for all the ultra-right conspirators and other supporters of the "great replacement"!

The confirmation of the fact that the fire was started because of arson led to a renewed suspicion that the fire at Notre Dame was not an accident.

> "Peut etre que maintenant on va pouvoir emettre l'hypothèse que l'incendie de #notredamedeparis n'etait pas un accident sans forcement passer pour un complotiste antisemite raciste et homophobe...?"
> Maybe now we will be able to hypothesize that the fire of #notredamedeparis was not an accident without necessarily looking like an antisemitic, racist and homophobic conspiracy theorist...?

Two ministers arrived at the scene of the fire from Paris. Their arrival was considered with hostility because of its uselessness, and leading only to the pollution of the environment and waste of budgetary money. Another reason for hostility was the identity of Interior Minister Darmanin, who was suspected of rape. Thus, he was met by feminists, and users quoted their rhyming chants and accompanied them with the hashtags #feminisme, , , #CathedraledeNantes:

> „Cathédrale en feu ! #Darmanin au milieu !"
> Cathedral on fire! #Darmanin in the middle!
> "Flics, violeurs, Darmanin !"
> Cops, rapists, Darmanin!
> "Darmanin rentre chez toi, les violeurs on en veut pas".
> Darmanin go home, rapists, we don't want them.

Some tweets expressed joy about France burning and denunciation of such reactions and communitarianism. Apart from the Muslim users, some representatives of the black community (like @ LDNAOFFICIEL - Ligue de défense Noire Africaine) were satisfied with the fire. They justified their reaction by the fact that the cathedral might have been built using the money of the slave trade that was supported by the clergy.

"Gloire à nos ancêtres ! CAR la cathédrale des négriers nantais payée par la traite-esclavage brûle ! Et la France ... pleure !?"
Glory to our ancestors! BECAUSE the cathedral of the Nantes slavers paid by the slave trade is burning! And France ... cries!?

Besides, references to Nantes Cathedral intertwined with mentions of a case of Adama Traoré resonating with the BLM movement. The activities of the Comité Vérité et Justice pour Adama (*Truth and Justice for Adama Committee*) resurged in June 2020, new "marches for Adama" and against police brutality took place despite the COVID restrictions. Thus, next to the hashtags like #CathedraledeNantes, #nantescathedral appeared supporting hashtags #AssaTraore, #PasDeJusticePasDePaix (*No justice no peace*) #ViolencesPolicières (*Police violence*) on the one hand, and opponents hashtags #GangTraore #adamalevioleur (*Adama the rapist*) on the other hand, as well as the names of the people who tragically perished that week.

"Vous n'avez pas soutenu #MelanieLemee #PhilippeMonguillot #AxelleDorier #CathedraledeNantes Mais on vous voit soutenir #GangTraore #adamalevioleur"
You didn't support #MelanieLemee #PhilippeMonguillot #AxelleDorier #CathedraledeNantes But we see you supporting #GangTraore #adamalevioleur (Adama the rapist)

1.3 The Russian-language tweets' analysis of Notre-Dame's case

During the first hours of the fire, the dominant response seemed to be the expression of ritual grief during which the role of eyewitnesses of the catastrophe was played by people, who before the fire had seen the Cathedral. Russian users regretted that they would not see the Cathedral again, or they missed this opportunity. Quite often, the users posted photos of the Cathedral taken during a trip to France. Many users emphasized their personal connection to the Cathedral and that they considered the loss as a personal one.

«Для меня горит не просто здание, а один из главных символов в моей жизни Его название я всегда ставила в каждую строку «любимого» Произведения искусства, книга, история, балет, мюзикл, мечта»
For me, it is not just a building that is burning, but one of the main symbols in my life. I always put its name in every line of my "favorite" Work of art, a book, a story, a ballet, a musical, a dream)

Other users expressed perplexity at the excessive nature of such reactions or made fun of them.

«Россияне несут к посольству Франции в Москве цветы. Напомню: при пожаре в Нотрдам-де-Пари НИКТО не погиб».
Russians are carrying flowers to the French Embassy in Moscow. Let me remind you that NO ONE was killed in the fire in Notre-Dame-de-Paris.

One of the popular arguments was that the Russians should not help and feel sorry for France because this country is unfriendly to Russia. This point of view is expressed in the post of the politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky on April 17 (414 Twitter reposts and 1527 likes).

«Сгорел Нотр-Дам. Конечно, неприятное событие. Но я не понимаю призывов помогать французам. Забыли, как они Москву сожгли в 1812-м? Как вторгались в Крым в 1854-м? Как сдались немцам в начале Второй мировой? Надо восстанавливать свои церкви и памятники, а не помогать иностранцам!»
Notre Dame burned down. Of course, it is an unpleasant event. But I don't understand the appeals to help the French. Have you forgotten how they burned Moscow in 1812? How they invaded Crimea in 1854? How they surrendered to the Germans at the beginning of World War II? We must restore our churches and monuments, not help foreigners!

Another argument from critics of excessive grief was that there were many problems in Russia to concern.

«в стране дороги как в 41м бомбили, восстанавливать собираетесь, или собор важнее??
The roads in the (our) country look like they were bombed in 1941, are you going to restore them, or is the Cathedral more important?»

Authors stressed that there are many more painful events and problems in Russia than Notre Dame fire, so it is amoral to say sorry for the Cathedral.

«…Вы - двуличные мрази, и вы не смеете зваться поэтами и писателями, если чужая исправляемая минутная боль для вас страшнее собственной агонии. .
Кто вы, если не предатели? #сибирьгорит #поэтызасибирь #нотрдамдепари»
You, two-faced scum, do not dare to call yourselves poets and writers if someone else's one-minute cured pain looks more terrible to you than your own agony. Who are you if not traitors? #siberiaisburning (*Siberia is burning*) #poetsforSiberia (*poets for Siberia*), #notredamedepari

In the example above, the hashtags emphasize the commonness of the forest fires in Siberia and fire at the Cathedral, confronting them at the same time.

Posts criticizing the European policy of tolerance were noticeable in Russian-language datasets.

«Пока папа Римский целует ноги диктаторам, сатана бесчинствует в Европе. Брак - одно из семи таинств Церкви; теперь попираемое дьяволом во Франции; однополые «браки», принят закон о родитель-1, родитель-2. Да, это знак, для когда-то стойкой в религии Франции».
While the Pope is kissing the feet of dictators, Satan is rampaging in Europe. Marriage - one of the seven sacraments of the Church; now trampled by the devil in France; same-sex "marriages", adopted the law on parent-1, parent-2. Yes, this is a sign for the once staunch French religion.

The high density of such markers as exclamation marks, question marks, and abusive words indicated the high expressiveness of messages. Obscene language was included in the top 10 and top 100 by frequency within collected datasets.

1.4 The Russian-language tweets' analysis of Nantes Cathedral's case

The responses to the fire in Nantes of users in Russian-language Twitter included posts expressing sympathy and lamentation about the disaster, the ritual nature of which was similar to the case of the fire in Notre Dame.

«Я подписана на Нотр-Дам, Сент-Шапель, Нантский собор... И я отлично помню прошлый год и ужас при обрушении шпиля, я рыдала, испугала мужа, он прибежал, а я ничего толком объяснить не могу, просто реву…»
I follow Notre Dame, Sainte-Chapelle, Nantes Cathedral... And I remember very well last year and the horror of the collapse of the spire. I sobbed, scared my husband, he came running, and I can›t really explain anything, I'm just wailing…

At the same time, Russian-language Twitter included posts that criticized the sympathetic reaction for being excessive.

«Даже обидно как-то: как в России - так «пламя на складе в Мытищах» а как во Франции - так сразу «горит шедевр готики - Нантский собор Петра и Павла»
It's even offensive somehow: if it's in Russia - so it is "the flame in the warehouse in Mytishchi" and if it's in France- so it's immediately "burning a masterpiece of Gothic - Nantes Cathedral of Peter and Paul".
«Опять сбрасываться? Же суи санкта Питер и Пауль?»
To chip in again? Je suis sancta Peter and Paul?

Some users interpreted the fire as part of a plan to weaken Christianity, in particular "Map of churches in France that have been desecrated, attacked, or destroyed in the last four years" was published. Some messages contained rude racist remarks and sarcasm against the movement BLM.

«Собор в Нанте поджёг беженец из Руанды. Приехал и сразу почувствовал себя как дома. Считаю, у него прощения надо попросить. Ведь чёрные жизни важны. А соборы это камушки какие-то, фу».
The cathedral in Nantes was set on fire by a refugee from Rwanda. He arrived and immediately felt at home. I think we should ask him for forgiveness. After all, black lives matter. And the cathedrals are just stones, ugh.

The fire was the reason for the ironic comments that the West was used to blaming Russia for all the bad things that happened.

«Не удивлюсь, если в итоге счёт России выставят».
I would not be surprised if Russia is eventually billed.

«Так Путин же руководил поджогом. Он и был третьим».
So it was Putin who led the arson attack. He was the third.

Emotions as a discursive strategy were used in a large number of posts. Some of them consisted of obscene language. There were also quite a few messages where the mythopoetic strategy was used.

«Это им знак от высшей силы ибо нефиг»
This is a sign to them from a higher power to make them not show off

2 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

On the surface, the French and Russian social media response to fires in Notre Dame Cathedral and Nantes Cathedral seemed ritualistic collective mourning the loss, rallying virtual communities. However, in both countries this kind of reaction was not unanimous. For example, in the case of Notre Dame, francophone Twitter users, who expressed solidarity with the government services, were opposed by users for whom the fire became an occasion for criticism of the actions of the government (or political opponents). In Russia, some users spoke about the inappropriateness of such strong manifestations of grief about a fire in a foreign country against the background of Russian problems.

In both countries, the fires in Notre Dame and Nantes triggered intense discussions in Twitter on issues not directly related to them, but with the current agenda which overlapped with the catastrophes. At the time of the fire in Notre Dame de Paris, the main topic on the agenda in France was the yellow vest movement. At the time of the fire in Nantes the demonstrations of the yellow vests had ceased due to the anti-epidemic measures, but despite the ban on mass events, there were major protests of the Justice pour Adama (*justice for Adama*) movement. The polarization between supporters of the movement and its adversaries was accordingly traceable.

After conducting the grounded theory procedures, combining the codes, we reduced these discussions to central categories. In all cases, these categories became identity.

During the discussion of the fire in Notre Dame the identity of France as a Christian country was contrasting with its identity as a European tolerant country. At the same time, the axial discussions were intertwined in a variety of ways.

For example, the oppositions “right vs left” and “elite vs people’’ were observed, which did not always mean the same thing. Criticizing the elite, some users criticized the policy of tolerance. At the same time, the left-wing opposition condemned the French government and corporations for excessive donations for the restoration of Notre Dame amid the disasters of the poor and migrants.

In the Russian-language Twitter, when discussing the fire in Notre Dame, the issue of Russia’s identity as a European country (or not) became central one (through discussion of the issues of whether France is a friend or an enemy of Russia and whether Russians should feel solidarity with it). When discussing the fire in Nantes, self-identification with Christian France was observed in a fairly large number of posts, as opposed to self-identification with tolerant Europe.

Whitehouse [19] showed how tragic events bring the question of identity to the fore through intergroup cohesion. The studied cases have confirmed this, at the same time they have shown that tragic events can provoke a rethinking of the issue of national and religious identity through polarization.

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