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ATTITUDES TOWARDS GOD IN THE TEXTS OF
INTERNET COMMUNICATION IN RUSSIA
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The paper presents the results of the study of attitudes towards God in the Russian mass consciousness, obtained using the method of analysing the texts of Internet communication. As a result of the study of spontaneous texts of mass self-expression, the author came to the conclusion that the ideas about God in the consciousness of Russians are formed mainly on the basis of their own experience, rather than on the basis of tradition, authority or historical experience. The texts testify that the relationship with God remains a subject of predominantly personal and group (family), but not public sphere.

Keywords: religion, faith, public opinion, Internet, Russia.

ОТНОШЕНИЕ К БОГУ В ТЕКСТАХ
ИНТЕРНЕТ-КОММУНИКАЦИИ В РОССИИ
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В статье представлены результаты изучения отношения к Богу в российском массовом сознании, полученные при помощи метода анализа текстов Интернет-коммуникации. В результате исследования спонтанных текстов самовыражения массы автор пришел к выводу, что представления о Боге в сознании россиян формируются главным образом на основе их собственного опыта, а не на основе традиции, авторитета или исторического опыта. Тексты свидетельствуют о том, что отношения с Богом остаются предметом преимущественно личной и групповой (семейной), но не общественной сферы.

Ключевые слова: религия, вера, общественное мнение, Интернет, Россия.

Introduction

Sociological studies of religious identity and the level of religiosity of Russian citizens have been conducted for more than 30 years and testify to the increasing number of followers of different religions in Russia [q.v.: 3; 4; 6; 11; 15], but depending on the methods and criteria used, researchers come to very different final figures [some methodological approaches described in 5; 6; 14]. On the other hand, scholars in their empirical research have noted formal and substantive signs of growing religiosity among Russians, who increasingly call themselves religious people and attend church services [q.v.: 2; 7; 9; 13]. Curious cases about faith aberrations are also described in a numerous publications [q.v.: 1; 8; 10; 12].

According to the FOM research centre, there are a number of other interesting paradoxes in the religiosity of Russians. In particular, 34% of those who call themselves Orthodox Christians never pray [13]. The majority of respondents assign to religion the role of regulator of everyday life by establishing moral norms [2].

The shortcomings of determining religiosity through self-identification of respondents were noted in his study by S. Usoltsev: "Just about 30% of those respondents who identified themselves as Orthodox Christians are oriented in the basics of Christian doctrine and are familiar with the Bible. Analysing the obtained data, we can assume that the available information about religiosity, obtained through self-identification of respondents, can be corrected with the use of markers of awareness in matters of faith. The result obtained would be three times lower" [12, p. 54].

At the same time, along with sociological surveys, another way of obtaining knowledge about the religiosity and the attitudes towards God is possible. Deeper and more qualitatively detailed knowledge could be obtained after the analysis of the *texts of spontaneous self-expression* extensively published on different Internet platforms.

Generally, the Internet has become one of the main information channels of mediatisation of religion and also of the self-expression on religious issues. In addition, primary religiosity online is transformed into a "second religious identity" – a person becomes a member of a virtual community where interpersonal ties are formed and religious issues are clarified. Moreover, it is customary to distinguish between "*religion online*" and "*online religion*" in the network. The first category refers to the self-representation practices of official religious organizations. The second category describes different manifestations of religiosities that originated on the web and are specific to it. A simple example of "*religion online*" is the preaching of a priest on his personal blog, while "*online religion*" refers to religious discussions and practices on the Web. Consequently, in this paper we are focused on the "*online religion*" phenomenon.

"I love God, I hate God..."

The paper is based on an empirical study conducted in 2018 at the Faculty of Journalism of Moscow State University. One of the popular resources of the Russian-language segment of the Internet – the site *lovehate.ru* (no longer available online, unfortunately, but it does not make the results less interesting). This site was chosen as an object for the study of the religious values of Web users and their attitudes towards God.

The *lovehate.ru* web site was a kind of "centre of crystallization" of opinions, a forum, an "agora" where visitors come to express their opinions on various topics, and the opinions are polarized according to the "scale" set by the founders of the site: "*I love – I hate*". A detailed, reasoned description of one's point of view is encouraged (and such texts are the majority), which allows researchers to "capture" a large number of arguments *pro et contra* God for further qualitative analysis. The ideological concept of the site is the opposition of two polar opposite points of view on one issue (one topic), which is reflected in the graphical design of the site – all user texts are arranged in two columns, depending on the sign of the author's attitude to the subject of the statement.

As of August 21, 2018 before it was closed, the site had 257 953 registered users (with a "gender balance": 129 768 visitors identified themselves as male and 128 185 as female). Visitors expressed their views on 76 327 topics, with a total of almost one million posts – 941543. Registration was mandatory for everyone, so non-registered members were unable to post. Users who do not have any posts are deleted after a month.

The site might be described as a "galaxy of opinions", "self-photography" of the young generation of the beginning of the 21st century with a huge variety of arguments, details, "shades" of emotional attitude.

The approximate age of the audience can be indirectly estimated as young by the intensity of discussion of various topics and the hierarchy of preferences (the most intensively discussed topics are those related to attention to rock and pop music, communication, gender relations, drinks, joys of life, loneliness, meaning of life, etc.), as well as by the self-definitions reconstructed from the texts (*grandparents are alive, one has to go to school/university, relationships with a girl are not going well, one wants to go to rock music, etc.*).

While reading the texts on the lovehate.ru site, one is struck by the harshness and emotionality of the statements, generated, among other things, by the anonymity of the subject and the fundamentally uncensored and non-normative nature of the information environment on the Web.

As it comes to the representativeness, the population of site visitors is not representative of the general population – the entire Russian society, but in the case of qualitative research conducted by "soft" methods, this does not seem critical. It is important to note that the authors of the texts posted in the left and right columns on the site – the "teams" of lovers and haters – are in the process of communication, they engage in dialog among themselves and try to convince their opponents of the correctness of their attitude.

The topic "*I love/I hate God*" is one of the largest on the site lovehate.ru, at the time of its fixation for analysis it counted 1715 statements of Internet users *("I love"*

= 1039, "I hate" = 676), which in itself shows the attention of mass consciousness to the religious sphere and towards God in particular.

Methodological challenges

The first challenge concerns the "frame" of statements about God, which is set by the administration of the "lovehate" site for all topics *love/hate* and in the case of the relationship with God is extremely rigid. Which leads some users to a state of confusion: "I write in this column not because I hate God, but because there are no neutral columns"; "In my opinion, you cannot just say I love or not. I don't want to condemn this topic at all, it's just that you can't limit such serious topics in such a way"; "I think that this whole topic is not correct, because the phrase 'I hate God' or 'I love God' are not correct in themselves"; "Well, man, I should tear off the ears of the person who raised this topic".

The second challenge is related to the problem of the correspondence of the content of the statement to the real attitude of its author to God. The presence of some messages clearly shows that there can be significant "gaps" between the text and the author's attitude. On the one hand, we read and unambiguously interpret posts like "I sincerely hate your God and honestly write about it"; on the other hand, we find it difficult to interpret posts like: "While I am writing in the "hate" column, although I am more likely to be just fooling around than experiencing any real negative mental movements on this topic"; "It's just that the rating of the right column ["hate"] is quite small. In fact, I love God, he really helps me". On the contrary, the following messages are found in the positive column "I love": "I don't believe in God, I don't believe in the devil.... I am my own god and devil"; "I think so: believe-believe in God when you realize that it is absolutely unnecessary".

Since these texts are really present on the site, we cannot exclude them from the sample. In principle, if we take into account the problem of text verification in relation to what the author actually thinks about it, then in the case of the Internet (with anonymity and virtuality) any research would be difficult.

Finally, *the third* challenge has to do with the attribution of the attitude mark to the text. The coding did not take into account the localization of the text at all, in

which of the columns ("love" or "hate") it is located, and the attitude label was recovered from the content of a particular text. Therefore, for example, a neutral attitude towards God was recorded in the following texts: "I don't believe in him, but if I did, I would love him! He gave life to everyone... And then mom and dad... But in general, I do not believe in him"; "People!!!! There is no God! And there is nothing to hate him for"; "I don't know how you can hate what you don't believe in, but I wrote in this column!!!", "I don't hate God. How can you hate something that doesn't exist"'; "I don't know how you can love and hate something you don't believe in. I'm a hundred percent atheist and I don't believe in God, so I can't say whether I love him or not".

There are texts that can capture both negative and positive attitudes toward a subject, such as: "God gave us freedom of choice. It says so in the Bible, in his own image and likeness. If you believe, go to heaven, if not, go to hell. And he knew we wouldn't believe in him. The world itself forces us to make the wrong choices from his perspective. And in giving that freedom of choice, He knew that half of us would fall to the bottom and then into the hyena of fire. He couldn't help but know, because He is omnipotent and omniscient. So what's the conclusion? God is a scoundrel. That's why I love that bastard. He looks like me..."

In some texts the attitude to God is substituted by the attitude to another subject. For example, the attitude to religion, as in the following text: "I love, I love. Not God, but the idea of religion, which makes people go like a herd of sheep toward some goal of their own. Which makes Mormons live in Greenland, Jehovah's Witnesses [in April 2017 the Supreme Court of Russia labelled Jehovah's Witnesses an extremist organization, banned its activities in Russia], refuse any surgical and chemical interference in their bodies, Orthodox and Catholics beat their foreheads on the dirty floor, Baptists wait for the coming of the seven-headed beast Antichrist. Maybe there is no God, maybe there is. What the hell difference does it make? But the very power of religion throws me into ecstatic awe".

Another difficult situation arises when the subject of the relation "disintegrates" into several subjects with different signs of relation to them: "Our

Most High can neither be loved nor hated, because it is the totality of white and black gods. So when you pray to the Almighty, you pray to the devil too. It's better to pray to each god separately, it's more reasonable and effective. For example, pray to *Belbog* to do well, and pray to *Perun* to win in a street fight. There is no God at all, there is energy, matter, reason, certain rules. And I think it is difficult to call all this a god...”

The problems described above make it difficult to analyse the texts of mass self-expression and make their interpretation ambiguous. Some messages demonstrate quite vividly the state of religiosity of Russians, for example: “I like him, that's all. I don't know what kind of creature he is, where he is and why he is there, but I like him. But I don't like religion. Religion, in the sense of Church, in the sense of priests, their painted boards and similar things are only necessary for people with a lazy mind”; “I am grateful to the Almighty for the creation of mankind. But it was a mistake”.

Generally speaking, at the next stage of analysing the texts of this sample of 1715 texts it would be possible to consider in more detail the “subject of belief” of the subjects of the statement and, after a qualitative analysis, to reconstruct the “symbol of belief” of the visitors of the *lovehate.ru* website, since in most texts their authors explain quite specifically and unambiguously in whom or what they believe, and in whom or what they do not believe, which is also important for understanding the current state of religiosity in society and the directions of religious communication.

The specific features of the attitudes towards God in Russian public opinion

After the semantic analysis of the sample, we found several specific features of the attitude to God.

1. *Relationship with God is a subject of predominantly personal and group (family), but not public sphere.*

The level of consideration of relations with God is characterized by an important peculiarity: a pronounced shift towards the personal space, which also

includes the closest relatives (family) and friends. Cumulatively, the personal and group levels make up more than two thirds of the respondents' statements.

This state of affairs seems quite logical if we take into account the specific weight of interpersonal communication in the religious sphere. Meanwhile, a rather high percentage of the universal level (23.4%) can be explained by the respondents' belonging to world religions, as well as the consideration of God as the creator of the world.

Many web posts emphasize the personal aspect of the relationship with God, and for some authors religious dogmas remain secondary to the inner feeling: "I love God and treat him not as religion attributes to me, but as it is convenient for me"; "Religion is what a person feels inside himself"; "God is you yourself, you make your own destiny"; "God should not be imposed, God is personal for each person"; "I have different ideas about God than other people"; "Everyone has his own God"; "Why do I love? For living. And whether I am bad or good is none of his business. I live and have fun, not being guided by the commandments of various religions and ideas about God".

The secondary nature of the community factor also significantly influenced the statements of the site visitors: "God gives us a choice, and it is up to us to choose. And what road we take – righteous or not, unfortunately, depends on us"; "He can give you the meaning of life if you want it"; "I'm not interested in who says what. I believe in God"; "Everyone chooses his own way and faith"; "Everyone reaches everything by himself".

Privacy is also noted by the authors: "One should believe in God in oneself, in one's soul, and not to shout about it to everyone". Sometimes the *group aspect* of attitude to God is manifested, and the group is, as a rule, the nearest environment: "He is always with me, with my nearest and dearest!"

In principle, it can be assumed that the proportions of private/public and individual/global found in the texts on the site under study quite reflect the proportions in the mass consciousness of Russians, but this statement needs further

verification on other samples of texts or with the help of other tools (e.g., sociological surveys).

The societal level of consideration of the topic was mentioned by the authors of the posts least often. Several times the Western public was cited as an example ("People in the West attend churches, which are found on every step not for the sake of fashion, but out of the dictates of their hearts"), and their compatriots were censured ("There are only one suckers on the European continent. It is Russians. Probably that is why they always go from extreme to extreme. They spit on God in friendship, and then they bow down to God in the same way"). In one case there is a quote-diagnosis from a letter of Ayatollah Khomeini to Mikhail Gorbachev: "[Your] difficulties lie in the absence of true faith in God, and this leads and will lead the West into the mire of vulgarity, into a dead end. Your main difficulty lies in the vain long struggle against God, the basic source of being and all things".

The universal level of consideration of the theme was met almost twice as often as the societal one, and in two aspects: 1) *unification* ("God is one, in all faiths, all faiths have the same roots, and all Holy books write about one"; "I realized that he is in the soul of any person and it does not matter what religion you have, God is one for everyone"; "He created everything. From planets to the laws by which these planets live" and 2) *eschatology*, connected with death, human choice and global struggle of good with evil ("There are no atheists in the falling airplane.... It's just that these people have not yet been touched by a disaster that would show a person who is the Master in the world"; "God gave people freedom of choice, but they don't know what to do with it. I don't know either"; "Our world is already bent by the devil's power").

2. *In spontaneous texts describing attitudes toward God, Internet users refer mainly to their own experience and to the experience of others rather than to faith, authority, or tradition.*

Reference to their own experience (59.5%) significantly exceeds the mention of faith, which, it would seem, should lead the conversation about God. However, this conversation is taking place in a society where religiosity has been suppressed for

decades and only in the last 20 years has it been revived, under difficult conditions and mostly in "institutional" forms. Therefore, it is not surprising that the experience of other people (16.4%) was the second in terms of specific weight, and references to faith, authority, tradition and historical experience are much inferior to the experience of one's own and immediate environment.

In order to understand the nuances of justification of the position, it seems reasonable to dive into the texts in more detail, starting from the "leaders", one's own experience and the experience of the "other". Here we can conditionally distinguish two levels of comprehension of experience: *generalized-theoretical and concrete-practical*. Examples are given below.

Generalized-theoretical comprehension of personal experience: "It is simply impossible to live without faith, I cannot believe in anything"; "I have long ago sent all religions to known letters and communicate with God without intermediaries"; "I owe everything good in myself to God and everything bad – to myself, or rather my ego"; "I have many gods, I am a pagan. I worship my gods and believe in their power"; "I believe in God only in my own way, without incense and candles. We are just good friends"; "And I was just born with faith in God. I felt Him from the moment I was born"; "He helps me a lot. You can call him whatever you want, God, good energy, Buddha, Muhammad or whatever, in any case he is one and he is with us".

Specific testimonies of site visitors about God's intervention in their personal experience: "I am not religious, and I am not from such a family. I just noticed a strange phenomenon; I feel bad and need help. And then I go to an old icon and pray. And unearthly forces will intervene! It helps already on the 6th day of my difficult period of exams!"; "He gave me a child when I sincerely repented of the terrible sin of infanticide, which I committed twice many years ago"; "I came to faith by myself (my parents do not go to church), and no matter how much I got carried away, He always guided me on the path"; "Thanks to God my life has changed a lot"; "He has always helped me"; "He helps me, he is like a magician"; "Subhan Allah! I am very grateful to him; he has given me so many good things. It is difficult to even list them.

Wife, children, wealth, intelligence, talent. I wish he had given me eternal life!"; "I love him because he fulfilled my wishes. Now he doesn't do it, it's true, but I don't deserve it".

As for the experience of the "other" found in the study, there is much less evidence and it is mostly of a general nature: "It is probably not for nothing that many intelligent people come to God with age"; "I believe those people who met him on the threshold of death"; "I recently communicated with a deeply religious person, so he told me that he is not afraid of anything"; "I have a friend who observes fasts, goes to all-night services, but at the same time writes good literary sketches, is interesting in communication, knows two languages"; "I have a cousin who is baptized and says he doesn't fucking exist".

Then, in descending order of presence in the texts, there is a reference to historical experience. In their self-expression about the attitude to God, the site visitors cite both general statements ("History teaches us that people easily create gods to explain what is unknown to them, incomprehensible and just as easily forget them when the gods become unnecessary"; "Many historians of that time mentioned Christ, the whole problem is that no one mentioned the resurrection"), and specific historical facts and events ("In the Bible he killed 2 038 344 people"; "God has nothing to do with the Inquisition or the Crusades, it was all done by people hiding behind the name of God"; "Before, the god was the party, even earlier Lenin, now he does not exist").

A more extensive historical argument is related to the uniqueness of Christianity as a religion that conquered the world: "The main miracle of Christianity is not that Christ rose from the dead (which, incidentally, is unprovable, since it is unknown whether he died), but that the doctrine, so clearly contrary to the entire millennial (by that time) experience of mankind, did not disappear with the death of the founder, but took root, won a mass of supporters and became the dominant ideology, religion and philosophy for many centuries".

As a working hypothesis, we assumed that *faith as a way of justifying* a relationship to God would be mentioned much more often and would gain much more

than 10.6% of mentions from the total number of messages. Perhaps this is not only evidence of the specific state of religiosity in Russia, but also an indicator of the prevalence in the mass consciousness of trust in direct personal experience and a general "under-confidence" in mediated channels of knowledge.

In their texts, site visitors reflect this in the following way: "I love because I believe!" (this position is found in different variations, which we will omit); "Is there God? For those who believe, there is"; "Faith cannot be understood by reason, it cannot be understood at all, that's why it is Faith, not Knowledge, you can only come to it through Love"; "I am not fixated on Christianity. I just believe". At the same time, some records absolutize faith itself without reference to God, for example: "One should believe in oneself and in one's own strength, not in an imaginary power".

Next after faith in the order of decreasing "specific weight" in the total array is intuition, which as a way of justifying a position is used in 6.8% of texts.

As for the authorities (6.1% of texts), among them scientists (both in support of belief in God and in refutation of it) lead with a serious advantage. Here are some typical examples: "The majority of famous scientists agreed with the existence of God: Max Planck, Faraday, Newton, Kelvin, Enstein, Bekhterev, and many more"; "Scientists have proved that believing people live longer once! They "recover" faster after illnesses – two!"; "Sir Karl Popper put forward the principle of "falsifiability", i.e. any judgment, to be considered scientific, must be at least in principle refutable". Theologian Clive S. Lewis, priest and scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, philosophers Francis Bacon and Friedrich Nietzsche are also cited as authorities.

Tradition, as the results of the study show, can both promote and hinder belief in God: "I'm Armenian and for me Christianity is everything!"; "I was brought up in a very religious family. From childhood I was told about God, I went to church, I read prayers. Religion is very deep in me, there is no escape from it"; "Belief in God does not arise in a person nowadays, but is almost forcibly imposed from early childhood"; "Arguments about God, based on the interpretation of the basic scriptures of religions, are tiresome".

As for faith, it is possible that just 10.6% of references to it in the texts of *lovehate.ru* visitors can be considered (tentatively, with great reservations) as a share of believers among young people.

3. *The argumentation in the texts is based mainly on appeals to emotions and feelings rather than on logical arguments.*

Visitors to *lovehate.ru* base their judgments on emotional statements and appeal accordingly to the emotions of their potential readers.

Value orientations and preferences are blurred and converted either emotionally or rationally to them. However, the coordinate systems of "logical/absurd" and "love/hate" do not fully cover the appeal to values, which remains a relatively independent segment of mass self-expression texts, so we have left it as an independent category of analysis.

The emotional background of the texts is quite diverse, it includes the whole palette of feelings from panic fear to rapturous love. Sometimes feelings are not specified, but simply described as feelings ("There is God. Because I feel his presence"), sometimes feelings are named, and it is not necessary to reconstruct them ("I do not love God, I am afraid of him"; "I do not know, I cannot know now, but LOVE! LOVE! I love with all the lump of my soul"; "I sincerely hate your God and honestly write about it"; "There is so much absurdity in the Bible, I want to cry, it's horrible!)". Besides, participants of the discussion of the topic "about God" quite actively express their emotions towards him, and towards other participants ("Don't impose your sick fantasies on others"; "I hate it when they wear crosses, I want to tear them off my neck"; "I hate religions. I want to kill religious fanatics").

Almost twice inferior to emotions and feelings in the number of appeals (34.1% vs. 61.6%), logic and reason are characterized by a much greater variety of objects of appeal (science, books, space, evolution, progress, etc.). Just as scientists lead among the authorities cited by site visitors, arguments of a scientific nature drawn from different fields of knowledge are much more common in judgments denying the existence of God than in those acknowledging it.

Some authors tend to identify God with reason ("This is the supreme cosmic mind of the universe without which there would be no life on Earth") or to see his presence in the whole surrounding world ("If he is everything, how can he be disliked and ignored"), as well as emphasize the rationality of God ("Don't you think that there is nothing more rational than the one who was able to create a well-oiled mechanism of the universe?", "The proof of God's existence can be built on an empirical basis", "Read the book "Proofs of the Resurrection of Christ". There is pure logic there. And everything is quite logically laid out"). The opposite side is more unambiguous and expresses itself in a less nuanced way ("Reason is the greatest enemy of faith", "Any religion limits the limits of reason and imagination").

In the mass consciousness there is both the "*logical necessity*" of God's existence ("If there were no God, it would be worth inventing one. The world is too multifaceted to claim that it originated by itself, without the Creator's participation!") and the "*logical impossibility*" of it ("From the scientific point of view, there is no God").

Some visitors of the site follow the "*apophatic*" model of proving the existence of God, giving arguments "to the contrary" in favour of his existence ("I have no proof that God does not exist"; "How can one KNOW that God does not exist in any sense?"; "Human ideas about God may be wrong, but his existence is fundamentally impossible to disprove"; "To deny the existence of God, in my opinion, is foolish"), or, from the other camp, to confirm that God does not exist ("All reasonable evidence says that God does not exist"; "Why reason about something that cannot be proved logically?").

We can distinguish two other large blocks of judgments in the sample related to a) appeal to the laws and achievements of natural sciences and b) orientation of personal experience to rationality.

Here is how site visitors appeal to the field of natural science: 'Let's have better faith in science! Science has proven itself, but God has not!"; "What about the laws of chemistry and physics?"; "If it were not for Christianity, which banned science for several centuries, we would now be pumped full of Nano controllers,

chromo-muscles and other things. Religion is a brake on progress"; "The creation of the Earth is only a regularity of various chemical and physical processes"; "The Earth was not created by God, but by chance and evolution"; "People, this is the 21st century, science has long ago explained the origin of the Earth and the Universe, and you believe in fairy tales like medieval fanatics".

Quite strongly in both camps the necessity of rational grounds of personal experience is expressed: "I believe that every person should know what he believes in"; "I believe in facts, experience, reality"; "There is a theory of "Big Bang" which is confirmed by many scientific facts and in which I have reasons to believe. And I have no reason to believe in God"; "I think it is silly to stupidly "believe" or "not believe" in His existence. I honestly don't know".

Moreover, one author emphasized the "*rational win-win*" of choosing in favour of God: "Bet on God. If you're right, you win eternal bliss. If you are wrong, you lose nothing".

At the same time, there are also judgments that emphasize the secondary importance of rational grounds for belief in God: "I don't need any proof that he doesn't exist or that he does. He is in my soul".

These are the values and ways to which the authors of texts that love God appeal in the studied array: "He is light, warmth, joy"; "God is Light. I love Him as the light of my life"; "Where there is healing, prosperity, fragrance, there is the Almighty"; "God is Love and He loves me; God is, in fact, truth"; "He is in us. And it is because of this that Faith, Hope, Love are alive"; "God for me is all the brightest and best in the universe"; "All bad things on earth are from people. All good things are from Allah".

The set of values and preferences of those who expressed a negative attitude to God is different. They mainly evaluate God on the scale of "benefit – harm": "He is cruel. The world he created is infinitely cruel and unfair"; "I'm not saying that there is no God. But if there is one, then this dude is obviously not good and fair"; "He is no more useful than a burned-out light bulb, but the harm is over the roof"; "I don't hate God, I think he is unnecessary".

The set of alternatives of the object of belief looks random and is represented in the array rather narrowly: "I believe in Canon, marriage/sex on account, human egoism and fainting after orgasm. In God – no"; "Paganism is our native faith. It is not barbarism or insanity. It is beauty and strength"; "Jesus was not a bad, kind and naive hearted guy, a la hippie"; "Love is a positive thing. Hate is destructive. Love God, music, Negroes, whatever. The main thing is to love sincerely. And everything will be fine".

The texts also reveal the political aspect of value orientations ("What the authorities believe in, I hate!!!"), as well as their psychological aspect ("Belief in God is for the insecure"; "The present God is just another myth created by and for those who cannot overcome their problems without foolish faith in higher powers").

Some authors question the value of faith and position inner truth above it: "Connection with God is connection with the inner truth within oneself. It is not so important whether you believe in God or not".

Conclusion

Internet users in matter of faith rely mainly on their own experience and on the experience of other people (relatives, friends, acquaintances), rather than on faith, authority, or tradition, as one might initially expect when expressing attitudes toward God. The most convincing explanation of this phenomenon is socio-historical: in Russia, faith and tradition have been consistently eradicated for quite a long period of time, and subjects who were known to be unbelievers were positioned as "authorities". Minimization of appeals to faith, tradition, and authority is a historical specificity of the Russian consciousness, which is also found in the modern consciousness of web users.

Another observed peculiarity is the exclusion of religion from the public sphere in the minds of Russians and its displacement into the private sphere (the inner circle – family, relatives of friends). If in Western societies this process is associated with general secularization, then in Russia after *Perestroika* it was likely to expect a more active influence of religions in the public space, up to its political manifestation - the

creation of Christian or Islamic parties. However, this is not happening. And, in addition to external reasons of social nature, during the research one of the internal reasons was discovered – visitors of the site very rarely think about the possibility of the public level of consideration of the attitude to God.

The global level manifests itself in the form of a stamp ("everyone must believe in God" / "it is clear to everyone that there is no God"), and it probably differs little from other societies in this respect.

It also seems natural that the argumentation in texts on the topic "I love / I hate God" is based mainly on appeal to emotions and feelings rather than on logical arguments. Here the initial working hypothesis was quite confirmed. However, due to the fact that the research is not quantitatively representative in the strict sociological sense of the word, it would be incorrect to extrapolate its results to the general population – the entire population of the country.

On the whole, the research can be continued both extensively – by searching for other similar topics and analysing them according to the developed methodology, and intensively – by further work with the same sample using qualitative methods.

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