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EVOLUTION OF SMART MOB: FROM FLASH MOB TO SMART CITY ELEMENT

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Abstract

Over recent years, new digital communication technologies have had a big impact on established social institutions. These technologies naturally exert some pressure on modern society. The article reveals such phenomenon as a smart mob, which appeared due to the development of information technologies and social networks and is widespread now. The research shows the evolution of the smart mob and the flash mob as its kind in the way of constructing new formats for mass communication and social group management. Analysing different types of smart mobs, the authors identify four stages of its development: "creative", "game", "business" and "smart". Four main stages of the smart mob evolution determine the principles of its organization and the main characteristics. The classic flash mob at its first stage has the principle of artistic creativity, which assigns the flash mob like a work of art. This creative act displays social processes beyond the habitual perception, drawing attention of an external observer to something, presenting this object in a new way by destroying established communication patterns used in everyday life. At the second stage, the smart mob loses its mystery, uniqueness and becomes a mass phenomenon attracting many thousands of participants. The third stage has practical characteristics, a goal-setting matrix for political, commercial and other purposes. At the last stage, the smart mob can evolve to the smart city element that helps to attract attention to a problem and to solve it.

1. Introduction

The transition from the industrial to the postindustrial (information) society promoted the growth of the value of information and the development of appropriate technologies aimed at improving the processes of redistribution and information flow. The great popularity of the Internet and the widespread use of mobile information and communication technologies has significantly changed the social environment and social communication. As a result, information interactions are possible on such scale and with such intensity that one has not met in the known history of humanity.

The wide introduction of social networks has contributed to the socialization of the Internet. The Internet is the technology that helps many people to communicate with many others at any time and globally. According to recent data, around 3.7 billion of people use the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2017). Thus, new synthesis of mobile communication and the Internet technologies obviously influences different aspects of our life (Evseeva, Obukhova & Tanova, 2017). A special reference must be made to social networking sites such as Facebook which attract millions of users and are very popular among young people (Costa , Matos , Rosário , Luz Vale-Dias & Zenha-Rela , 2016). Is it possible to agree with the opinion that virtual communities have become an objective reality and influenced the systemic properties of the society? If it is so, in what way does it happen? Positively responding to this question, firstly, one should consider such phenomenon as a smart mob, a form of self-structuring social organization effectively operating by means of digital information technologies.

2. Problem Statement

A smart mob as a specific technology of social activity has been developed from the beginning of the 21st century, primarily in America and Europe. Since 2010, it has been widespread in Asia (Chiou-Pirng, Devi, Cynthia, 2014). The smart mob appeared as a unique performance, and today have become well known and mass. It is obvious that the smart mob has a powerful force and can influence the social and political life of society.

The sociologist Howard Rheingold brought the term "smart mob" into scientific usage. In his book "Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution" published in October 2002, the author explains that modern means of communication enable people "to act together in new ways and in situations where collective action was not possible before" (Rheingold, 2002, p.8). Smart mobs consist of people "who are able to act in concert even if they do not know each other" (Rheingold, 2002, p.4). The book describes examples of the smart mob effectiveness. So in 2001, protests against the corruption of the president in the Philippines were organized via SMS, like "Go 2EDSA, Wear black", etc. The silent protest of the Manila residents as an organized smart mob was influential in "bringing down of the government without firing a single shot," (Rheingold, 2002, p.158). Today, smart mobs have not been adequately researched in the scientific literature. Tough there is a large number of descriptive publications. There is no precise generally accepted definition of this phenomenon. A smart mob is defined as a crowd, a social group, a social organization, a social technology. Can one raise the question that existing interpretations of this phenomenon cannot give a full designation of its content?

3. Research Questions

Within the framework of this research, the authors will define a 'smart mob' and consider a 'flash mob' as a kind of the smart mob. Analysis of more than 1000 flash mobs made it possible to identify the trend of its development and key characteristics, to determine the tendency of the smart mob development as a social phenomenon, to distinguish the stages and prospects of its spread in society.

4. Purpose of the Study

Research objectives are:
- to consider characteristics and particular qualities of the smart mob from the first emergence of flash mobs till the present;
- to analyze how the smart mob is changing during the last decade;
- to estimate the prospects of its development.

5. Research Methods

In our research, the authors use the methods of social analysis (comparative, context, informative) which allow studying the forums and sites uniting the organizers and participants of flash mobs (All-Russian and in large cities). The authors have analyzed videotapes on YouTube hosting dedicated to Russian and foreign flash mobs, publications in the media about various flash mobs, social networks connecting with tags #flashmob, political actions carried out by the smart mob technology. Overall, more than 1000 various flash mobs have been analysed.

6. Findings

The first practical application of the Rheingold' theory was a flash mob. Flash mobs are ''an analogy to a flash flood, evoking the way that these crowds (which in the original version arrived all at once and were gone in 10 minutes or less) rushed in and out like water from a sudden storm'' (Wasik, 2011, para. 17). It should be noted that the term "flash mob" became popular very quickly and substituted "smart mob". Grainge defined 'flash mobs' as groups of "well-wired folks who gather suddenly, perform some specific but innocuous act, then promptly scatter" (Grainge, 2011, p. 165). Chiou-Pirng, Devi & Cynthia (2014, p. 31) define flash mobs "as a contemporary social movement whereby all participants are contacted through technology to come together as a group". So can one really comprehend a smart mob and a flash mob as a crowd or should one define it as a social group? Gustave Lebon introduced such concept as an organized crowd. It means an ordered crowd with a clear organizational structure. For example, even the army can be attributed to it. Lebon (2011) also used the term 'spiritualized crowd', emphasizing that the crowd has its own soul. Many researchers disagree with such expanded interpretation and believe that the crowd can only be called an unorganized mass of people. On the other hand, any crowd is a quasigroup, a social group that is characterized by unintentionality. In such group, there are no stable connections among the members, social structure, common values and norms, and the relationships are one-sided. Quasigroups exist for a short time. Then they either completely disintegrate,

or under the influence of circumstances turn into stable social groups. These characteristics are quite suitable for describing a flash mob in the era of its origin. However, the smart mob is more relevant to a social group, because it has such features as an internal organization, the general goal of activity, intensive group interactions, a sense of group affiliation or membership, role expectations of group members with regard to each other.

If one talks about the development of the smart mob in recent years, it has had significant changes. The number of people involved has increased; purposes and shapes have changed. The authors propose to distinguish four stages of the development of the smart mob, smoothly flowing one into the other, preserving the features of every previous stage.

6.1. First stage. Creative. "Classic" flash mob.

The first stage of the smart mob development is characterized by separate displays of the confidential groups' activity that represent unique performances. Self-sufficiency of the flash mob is declared. The basic principle is the absence of economic, political and religious goals.

It should be highlighted that the smart mob technology has spread throughout the world very quickly. Obviously, the idea of using modern means of telecommunications for organizing a joint action, devoid of rational meaning, proved to be in demand. The goal of the smart mob at this stage was unclear to an outside observer. Irrationality of the mass behavior attracted the participants of the action. The purpose of the action was the opportunity to "break" the clear and measured life of a big city. The mystery, encompassing the participants of the action, was a prerequisite. They tried to avoid mass media. Random passers who cannot understand the meaning of what is happening are shocked and surprised by the flash mob.

Let us consider in more detail the origin of the flash mob movement. R. Zazueta, a programmer from San Francisco, created the first site where people could agree on holding such actions. The first flash mobs took place in July 2003, in New York, after several unsuccessful attempts, frustrated due to information leakage and other reasons. The first flash mob took place in Manhattan (organized by Bill Wasik (senior editor of the Harper's Magazine)) on June 17, 2003. Participants came to a pre-determined place where they received instructions about a final place and time just before the start. Over 200 people (according to other sources 150) gathered around one expensive carpet in the furniture department of the Macy's department store and began to tell the sellers that they live together in a warehouse in the "suburban commune" on the outskirts of New York and came to buy "love rug".

A few days later, a wave of actions swept across America, Europe, Australia and Asia. In the streets of Tokyo and Osaka, hundreds of people walked in the costumes of Agent Smith from the Matrix, and they tried to portray the fighting scenes from the film. July 24 in Rome, about 200 people entered the bookstore and began to ask non-existent books for several minutes, and then they applauded the patient store employees and disbanded. July 30 in Berlin, 70 people were doing exercises on the street (jumping, spinning, clapping their hands) and dispersed. August 3, the first flash mob took place in Sydney. According to the scenario, participants had to gather on the beach, take off their left shoe and lower their left foot into the water. At the same time, it was necessary to laugh and applaud.

On August 16, 2003, the first flash mob was held in St. Petersburg and Moscow (participants met the passengers at the train station with the nameplate "Tatyana Lavrukhina. Society of Anonymous Alcoholics" in St. Petersburg and "NzR178qWe" in Moscow). On the same day, the first actions took place in Dnepropetrovsk and Kiev. In Kiev, about 70 participants bought a sucking candy on a stick, and went to look at shop windows from 17.58 to 18.02. Then they all gathered around the candy stall, licking their sweets, and began to ask the sellers: "Tell me, please, how much one needs to eat such candies to gain weight by 7 kilograms?" In Dnepropetrovsk at 17.17, thirty people in paper hats came into the shopping mall "Grand Plaza". They silently went through the second floor of the center and went to drink beer.

The first organizers of the flash mobs established the principle: "flash mob beyond religion, politics, and economy". It means that the flash mob was not used for mercenary aims purposely. In addition, the organizers of the actions tried not to repeat the used scenarios. The flash mob was akin to performance and had a philosophical basis. During the next few years, thousands of possible scenarios were used.

6.2. The second stage of smart mob development. Game

The flash mob has a mass popularity. Its various analogues have appeared. The authors observe new variants of smart mob, violating the rules that limit flash mobs at the first stage, both in terms of event's goals and features.

In parallel with the development of the "classic flash mob" the forms violating its basic rules have appeared. First of all, the principle "flash mob beyond religion, politics, economy or any other similar goal" was broken. In 2004, the first versions of social and political flash mobs appeared, where the element of "strangeness" of the mass behaviour remained. However, they had a clear goal - to express their attitude towards a particular social or political situation. In Zurich, Greenpeace organized an anti-nuclear flash mob. During this action, the activists of the organization mingled with ordinary residents, and after that, they fell dead to the ground, portraying the death from a nuclear disaster. In 2006, in the centre of Minsk, several participants opened the newspaper Soviet Belarus and began tearing it into small pieces. The other 30 residents defiantly blindfolded and turned away from the screen set on the square, over which the speech of the Belarussian prosecutor was broadcasting.

The smart mob at this stage loses the aura of mystery. On the forums, there is an influx of privies who are not always ready to comply with the rules, in particular to maintain equanimity, not to contact with others, etc. Accidental passers may become aware of the meaning of flash mob, therefore they are less shocked.

The possible number of participants grows to thousands of people. Especially it is typical for dance and "figured" smart mobs.

The sense of the dance actions is that the previously agreed participants start suddenly dancing all together in crowded public places (a public park, a mall, the train station, a library, a student union, airport, an airport terminal, a park etc.). Sometimes casual bystanders join them. A huge dance flash mob was held in Mexico City in August 2009 with the song "Thriller" in memory of Michael Jackson (more than 13 thousand people dressed in zombies took part in it). The largest flash mob gathered about 20

thousand people at the Black Eyed Peas concert in Chicago in 2009. In the last five years, many dance smart mobs with a huge number of participants have been held in Russia: in Moscow (one of the most spectacular was held on the Vorobyovy Hills with the song "Putting on the Ritz" in February 2012) in Novosibirsk, Kazan, St. Petersburg. Sometimes dances have some additional social meaning. In 2008, pregnant women in London, Berlin, Canada and Paris danced breakdance on the street. The aim was to protect the rights of pregnant women in poor countries who do not receive proper medical care. Nevertheless, researchers note that the artistic language and agency of realized flash mobs at this stage so far appear largely repetitive, unimaginative and underdeveloped (Brejzek, 2010).

The second variant for numerous flash mobs is a huge figure created from the people gathered together (or for example from cars).

The construction of a certain symbol, figure or inscription from a large number of people can have a certain social meaning. Often clothes of certain colours are used, so that the resulting image become painted. For example, in 2008 in Chelyabinsk, 9 thousand people in canary cloaks and hats lined on the Republic Square in a huge 75-meter smiley.

The new mass types of smart mob are much simpler in content, do not cause shock or surprise to casual bystanders. "Classic" flash mob quite often have a social or political meaning and strive for media coverage. For example, in 2014 in Crimea, a large group of youth dressed in blue, white and red T-shirts lined up in rows, forming a colour scheme of the Russian flag in front of the improvised scene.

In addition, flash mobs that do not meet the "flash" criteria have appeared. People began to call the actions 'flash mob' when people perform the same actions not synchronized in time. These are flash mobs on the Internet, the so-called "I-mobs". However, network smart mobs are also called 'flash mobs'. Al-khateeb & Agarwal (2015) consider that flash mob takes place in the cyberspace, but could possibly extend to the physical space.

Social networks not only serve to organize smart mobs, uniting interested people, but they can also act as a "place" for conducting it. Virtual flash mobs most often imply that certain photos with a hashtag corresponding to a flash mob are laid out in social networks. Sometimes it is required to write a certain text or a status. Synchronicity of actions is not necessary. On the contrary, information about a smart mob can be transmitted to each other. For example, in the end of 2016 in social networks in Russia, the flash mob #thecallreceived meant that users put online photos of their children. However, the one who pressed the "like" button under this photo received a message that he should also post his photo.

Other virtual smart mobs mean answers to certain questions, and "transferring" them further. Another option suggests doing a certain action, make video and put it online. American comedian Jimmy Kimmel suggested that parents give their children on Christmas unnecessary things (for example, electric bulbs or dolls for boys) and capture their disappointment on the video.

Breaking the rule of the "Classic" flash mob, the most successful ideas become regular. For example, the traditional winter flash mob called No Pants Subway Ride is that hundreds of New Yorkers, Atlanta and Los Angeles residents simultaneously get down in the subway, where they temporarily get rid of pants and travel in their underwear. Among the traditional international smart mobs, one can mention "Free hugs", "Lot of Socks" (people who take part in this flash mob all day wear different colours of socks, which is a symbol of otherness), Worldwide Pillow Fight.

The authors also consider that long-mobs do not meet 'the flash criteria'. They are held at any time while the action is in progress, and the interest is the overall result. For example, "City in snowballs" - a long-mob lasting about a month in winter 2004. Participants were asked to sculpt snowballs and leave them in crowded places.

By 2005, Wasik declared the flash mob "dead," possibly as a reaction to commercial interests latching onto the phenomenon and attempting to create it for mass audiences (Downey, 2016).

6.3. The third stage of smart mob development. Business

Smart mob loses self-sufficiency and turns into technology used for political, commercial, social and other purposes with great efficiency. The "Classic" "meaningless" flash mob becomes a rare phenomenon.

After 10 years, "classic flash mob" disappeared around the world. Special forums dedicated to flash mobs were abandoned or completely disappeared from the Internet. However, it does not mean that flash mobs have disappeared from people's lives. On the contrary, smart mobs have moved from exclusionary creative manifestations to everyday practice, which thousands of people can understand and accept. Moreover, the main information channel now is social networks.

Smart mobs became numerous, bringing together creators of visual or verbal content for creativity on a particular topic. Receiving a certain topic, they spread their creativity in the network with a certain hashtag. Thus, despite the individual creativity, each author is in a virtual team, sees other people's work, exchanges "likes" and comments.

The new trend of smart mob development provides its effectiveness in commercial advertising and political struggle. The game with a view of reality has disappeared.

Smart mobs have become quite popular in large cities to attract attention to certain brands. Often they are conformed to a movie or certain product output. Again, one observes the rule violation of the "classic" flash mob fixing the absence of payment for participation in the flash mob. In this way, commercial flash mobs can simply be an imitation of smart mobs, but they can be organized as an ordinary theatrical performance.

In 2009, the mobile operator organized the dance "smart mob" at the train station in Liverpool. Since that moment, dance and "figured" smart mobs have firmly established themselves in the arsenal of the Public Relation specialist. Sometimes a commercial "smart mob" is a mass gathering of the product users (for example, the mass of girls reading the same magazine gradually filling the underground carriage). Smart mobs associated with the promotion of films look more original. For example, in 2014, "300 Spartans" moved in the London Underground in leather shorts with spears and shields in their hands.

Advertising executives are trying to come up with original actions related to the involvement of a group of people, and then use it to create a video. For example, the invitation of more than 1000 fans to a children's ice hockey tournament (St. Petersburg, 2015), a conversation in the language of gestures with all passers for the sake of a deaf neighbour (Istanbul, 2015). Similar actions are designed for the viral distribution of their videos in the Internet.

Political smart mobs are actively developing. Not limited by the creation of symbolic figures from people and symbolic actions, smart mobs are an effective way to organize political protests and rallies.

Social networks have simplified the process of mobilizing supporters and provided instant communication between activists. Therefore, everyone can act independently, coordinating with fellow citizens. The smart mobs' political power was perfectly illustrated by "Arab Spring in 2010", "EuroMaidan", England Riots in 2011 and others. During the "Arab Spring", the hashtag #LibiaFeb17 was used with an aim to track the planned actions easily. Unhappy people united through hashtags in the network were unexpectedly included in actions in the streets of many cities all over the world from New York to Moscow with a #occupy hashtag. Lim (2017) analyzes recent smart mobs on the Bersih rallies in Malaysia, which advocate free and fair elections, and the extension of these rallies abroad via the crisscrossing of multiple solidarities online.

In 2009–2010 violent flash mobs erupted in Philadelphia (Ducomb & Benmen, 2014). Hawthorne & Trask (2013) consider that while these youth mobs differ from the original conceptualization of a flash mob, they have often been labelled flash mobs by local media and public officials.

The smart mob endures logical and semantic deformations, acquiring new conditions for implementation and application and penetrates into new spheres of life.

For example, a new kind of the smart mob called "rolezinho" appeared in Brazil in 2013. Hundreds of young people from poor districts, coordinated through Facebook, gather in shopping malls, scaring the owners and security guards of stores. De Lima & Baumgartel (2016) consider "rolezinhos" expose the contradictions of the Brazilian society and distribute the shared space according to a political logic".

Since 2011, the notion "flash robs," (or flash mob robbery) has become known. These crimes are being organized by young teenagers through various social media outlets. Technology has not just made it easy to plan and organize. It has allowed the thieves to off-load their loot.

An interesting version of the social smart mob is implemented on the relay principle (Ice Bucket Challenge, 2016). The purpose of the action is to tell the world about the disease of the nervous system, called "amyotrophic lateral sclerosis". Those who wants to support the campaign should pour cold water out on themselves and then publish the record on the Web. After that, one will have to challenge one's friends. Everyone who receives a notification must perform the task within 24 hours. Otherwise, it is necessary to donate $ 100 in favor of the patients' fund.

6.4. The fourth stage of smart mob development. Smart

Today one can see some trends indicating that the smart mob will become an important social component of a smart city. The potential of the smart mob is great. Temporary association of strangers into a functioning social organism contribute to solution of big social problems.

This communication technology is opposed to modern consumer society, where advertising communication stimulates people to constant consumption of goods. The main problem of the advertisement "is that patterns advertised are connected with the consumption of good and services, the aim of which is greater comfort, relaxation, entertainment, an increase in social status by mean of purchasing good of more expensive make" (Sokolova, Pylkin & Safonova, 2017, p.264). Smart mob proposes the development of horizontal links that provide coordination of social action initiatives both online and offline.

Hashtags, reposts and other communicative technologies existing in social networks, contribute to the rapid dissemination of information. People united with the hashtag can share their attitude, provide real help and carry out joint social activities. Sometimes the emergence of mass smart mobs can be a reaction to extraordinary events, shocking news and another incidents, affecting a lot of people. Purnomo, Heryadi & Gaol (2016) note that in modern large megacities, many events cannot be controlled by causing the slow response of the relevant institutions. However, information about events quickly appears in the Internet, promoting citizens unfamiliar with each other to react to situations on their own.
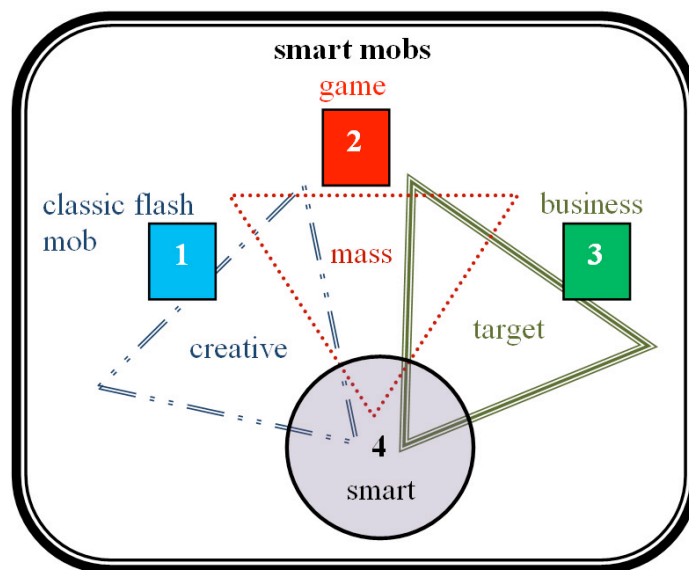

Figure 01. Four stages of smart mob

Purnomo, Heryadi & Gaol (2016) propose the use of specific analytical methods to gain insight from millions of posts in social media and news and the application of Big Data technology in supporting the fast and accurate implementation of Smart City. It helps the government to respond faster and better to problems related to crime, traffic, jams, waste problems, fires, floods, etc. However, the development of communication technologies should not overtake the awareness of human processes. It is important "not to overlook that technological projects and system implicitly include social ideas, cultural peculiarities, fears, expectation and hopes" (Nikiforova, Bylieva, & Lobatyuk, 2017, p.120). A truly effective smart city will take place if the participants of the Internet communication are not just passive observers of current events but active people who offer their own joint solutions to problems by using smart mob technology. Many authors note that technology can play the enormous role in putting the power "back in the hands of everyday people" (Akom, Shah, Nakai & Cruz, 2016, p.1288).

An example of a spontaneous smart mob, which started with a single person's offer, is the car assistance to people who could not get home because of the underground closure after the terrorist attack in Saint-Petersburg (April 3, 2017). Thousands of motorists offered their help in social networks (with a hashtag # home) and in car maps. A few hours later, lists of metro stations were created, where motorists marked their routes to get people home. Even later, commercial organizations were connected to the process (taxis offered free transportation, petrol stations offered free gasoline, cafes – free tea for those who could not leave). City administration provided free travel by public transport and free transit by a toll motorway.

Moreover, the experience of using smart mobs (for example, "World Wide Flash Mob" - a smart mob based on geocaching) proves the possibility of international association of people using this technology to solve global problems. Though "in cross-cultural communication the translation of sense is a big problem, it is possible to reduce all communication barriers" (Shipunova, Berezovskaya, Gashkova & Ivanova , 2017, p.372).

7. Conclusion

In recent decades, thanks to the development of information technologies, the world has changed irreversibly. New terms are used for designation of new phenomena in public life. The smart mob and the flash mob are related to them. So the authors may conclude that the general meaning of the 'smart mob' is a social group with undefined boundaries of membership, which acts are coordinated in time with specific goals, having previously agreed the actions with the help of the Information and Communication Technologies. The objectives of such event can be different: from the solution of urban problems to the overthrow of the current government. On the one hand, a smart mob is a natural social phenomenon, and on the other, a revolutionary one. Earlier only the government had the opportunity to coordinate the actions of large groups of people. But at present, ordinary people can unite in groups and coordinate their plans.

The smart mob as a new technology uniting people has had a complex development from single shocking creative acts to the mass communication technology, intensively exploited by organizations and political forces in their own interests. Today there has been a trend indicating that a smart mob can become a powerful force efficiently affecting society aside from media, administrations, organizations, etc.

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