



Technologies of Digital Social Control of Public Authorities in Modern Russia: Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Social control is an important part of civil society. Due to social control, society may influence the activities of the authorities and the government, and create public opinion. Nowadays, the issue of using digital technologies in social control over the activities of power is being increasingly discussed. Digital solutions will increase the transparency and efficiency of government activities, increase the level of trust between the government and the population, and improve the quality of effective communications between government and society. The purpose of this article is to analyze the digital technologies of social control in Russia. The study analyzes the literature review, different theoretical approaches to the concept of social control, types, and forms of control, and analyzes modern forms of digital social control. The methodological basis of the study is a systematic approach. An empirical sociological study was conducted using the methods of a questionnaire survey and expert interviews. The data collection method was a questionnaire survey of Russian citizens aged 18-60 (n=2256 people) living in Russia, and expert interviews (n=25). From the studied survey results, indicators and indicators of social control over the activities of public authorities, and analyze the prospects for the emergence of digital social control in Russian society. The main problems of digital social control over the activities of the authorities are given and practical recommendations are offered for their solution.

Discipline: Sociology.

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1 Introduction

Social control is the activity of individuals and institutions of civil society in monitoring public authorities, as well as in public verification, analysis and public evaluation of laws and management decisions issued by them. The main forms of social control are public monitoring, public verification, public expertise, public discussions, public hearings and citizens' appeals [3, 5].

Currently, digitalization and digital transformation are current trends in various areas of life. Digitalization is “the improvement of existing processes through the introduction of IT technologies; Lean process optimization methods; process reengineering; data analysis for decision making” [8, 14]. Digitization and digital technologies are developing rapidly today. Nowadays, new forms of mass application are emerging [1, 9]. Citizens' access to information technologies is actively expanding. All these processes, of course, emphasize the need to "digitize" the modern system of public control [2, 11].

At present, there is no unified digital platform in Russia that allows the full exercise of the functions of control and monitoring of the government. But some digital social control services are already actively operating in Russia (Fig. 1). Let's consider them in more detail.

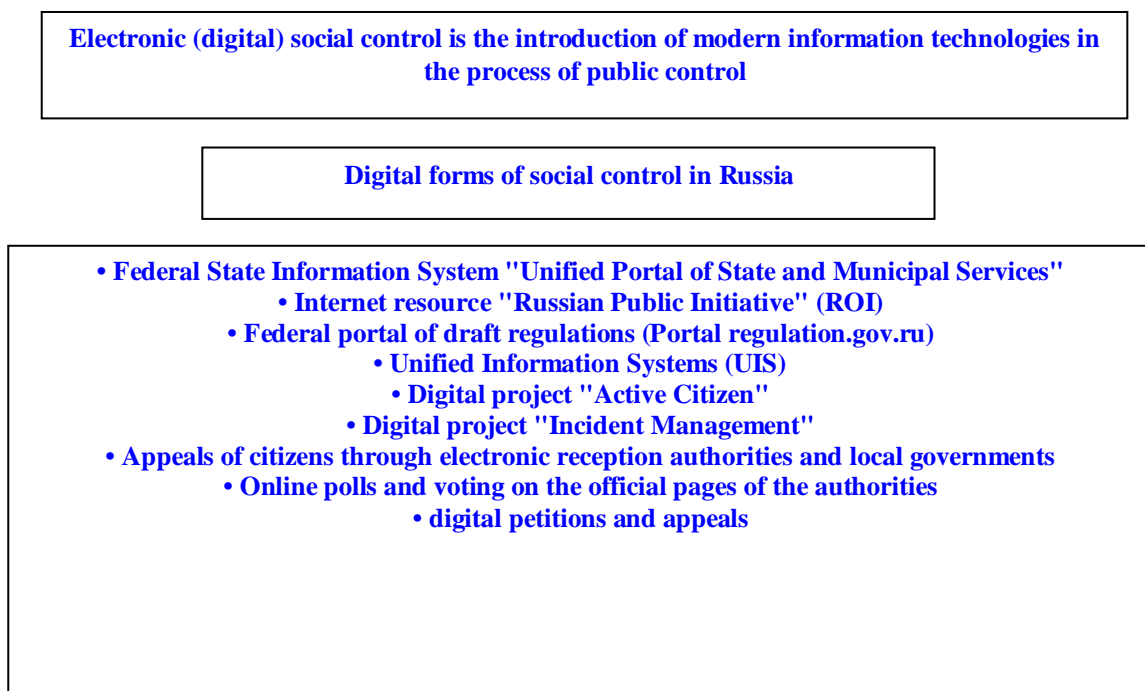


Figure 1: Digital forms of social control in Russia

One of the most popular and actively used super-services in the digital social control system of Russia is the public services digital portal [19]. The Federal State Information System "Unified Portal of State and Municipal Services" is a "reference and information Internet portal that provides access for individuals and legal entities to information about state and municipal services in the Russian Federation - Russia, state functions for control and supervision, about state services and municipal institutions" [10].

The ROI website is a Russian public initiative. ROI is "an Internet resource where Russian citizens, authorized through the state-supported system of identification of citizens of the ESIA, can put forward various civic initiatives or vote for them" [20]. "The Internet resource allows you to submit your initiative, get acquainted with the posted initiatives, vote "for" or "against" the posted initiatives, get information about the progress and results of the implementation of the public initiative" [15]. As of July 28, 2022, 20340 initiatives in the field of transport and roads, housing and communal services, migration, education and science, etc. were registered on the site [16].

The Federal Portal of Draft Regulatory Legal Acts (Portal regulation.gov.ru) is "a digital resource in the digital social control system designed to post information about the preparation of draft regulatory legal acts by federal executive authorities and the results of their public discussion" [4]. A citizen can find out about any legislative initiative on this portal and leave their feedback there, and at the end of the discussions, see a summary of the feedback and the answers to them [21]. In turn, the authorities can track the public reaction and further adjust the rule-making initiatives, taking into account the opinion of the public [17].

Among the digital platforms in the field of social control over the activities of the authorities, there are Unified Information Systems (UIS) in various sectors of socio-economic and political life (for example, the Unified Information System in the field of procurement, housing and road construction, etc.) [12]. On the site, any citizen can track the progress of the implementation of a particular management decision, and leave comments.

The filing of citizens' appeals through electronic reception authorities and local governments can also be attributed to the system of digital social control over the activities of the authorities [7]. "The digital service provides an opportunity to send an appeal in the form of an electronic document and receive information on the progress of consideration of previously submitted appeals" [13].

Online polls and voting on the official pages of government bodies, digital petitions and appeals can also be attributed to forms of digital social control. These forms have recently become very popular among the Russian population.

At the local level, digital projects in the field of social control and monitoring are also being actively implemented. Among the most popular is the Active Citizen project, which was created as a "platform for conducting electronic voting among various groups of Muscovites on urban development issues" [18]. Within the framework of this project, city residents can propose initiatives for improvement, organization of city events, and improvements in the urban environment. The project has already accepted more than 194 million opinions of citizens.

Among the latest innovations in the field of digital social control is the Incident Management project, a project that allows you to route people's complaints between performers at the government level. The joint project of the autonomous non-profit association Dialog and the Russian Ministry of Digital Development has formed an operational feedback mechanism between

government agencies and users. This system “collects information about the problems and requests of citizens in social networks and monitors the reaction of regional authorities” [6].

Thus, the analysis of digital technologies of digital social control of power allows us to draw the following conclusions.

Currently, there is a growing need for the widespread introduction of modern information technologies in the system of public authorities. Also important is the implementation of modern digital technologies in the activities of institutions of social control over the practices of government bodies. Public control is a special type of control over the activities of state bodies by citizens and social institutions; it is a modern, democratic and effective method of social management. Public control plays an important role in ensuring the rule of law. The effective implementation of public control ensures the legitimacy of the activities of state authorities.

Further, in Russia, there is no unique digital platform that allows society to fully exercise the functions of control and monitoring of the activities of the authorities on the part of society. But there are and are already actively functioning separate digital services for the implementation of certain functions of social control. However, the question is still open, how effective are these services? Is the population really aware of their existence and are they active users of the system? Will these digital services replace traditional institutions of social control? The answers to these research questions will be addressed in the next section.

2 Method

The methodological basis of the study is a systematic approach. The systematic approach allowed us to develop an empirical model of digital social control over the detail of government bodies. To study the implementation problems and the prospects for introducing a system of digital social control over the activities of government bodies in modern Russia in 2021-2022, an empirical sociological study was conducted using the methods of a questionnaire survey and expert interviews. The data collection method was a questionnaire survey of Russian citizens aged 18-60 (n=2256 people) living in Russia. The results of empirical data were processed in SPSS Statistics 17.0. Heads of state and executive authorities, heads of commercial organizations, and representatives of the academic community (n=25) were invited as experts. We studied expert assessments of digitalization and digital transformation of social control in the system of state and municipal government. We also studied indicators of social control of public authorities and analyzed future trends in digital social control in Russian society.

3 Results and Discussion

At the first stage of the study, both experts and respondents were asked to answer the question “Does modern Russia need social control over power, and how does modern society control the current government (and does it)?” The statements of the expert community and the respondents clearly agreed on the need and importance of social control over modern government: (Table 1):

Table 1: In your opinion, does modern Russia need public control over the activities of the government?

| Answers | % |
|---------------------|-------|
| Yes | 89.3 |
| No | 5.4 |
| Difficult to answer | 5.3 |
| Total | 100.0 |

Results of the expert interview as well say that modern Russian society needs social control:

- Social control is needed. This is an indicator of the effective work of public authorities. It is necessary to involve citizens in the public discussion of regulatory and other documents adopted in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, to organize public voting for certain socially significant decisions. Involve citizens in the study of reports on the activities of public authorities with the subsequent possibility of sending comments and suggestions (Expert 1);

- Social control is a key mechanism for the effective functioning of a modern state. The most important "zones" of social control are the implementation of the budget and the implementation of the established indicators fixed in the documents of strategic development (Expert 5);

- Undoubtedly, social control is necessary for the effective functioning of public authorities, since social control allows for the examination of decisions made and the evaluation of their enforcement, which is even more important from the point of view of the implementation of decisions already made (Expert 7);

- It is certainly needed, without it, the state confesses some of its goals, and is conserved in the name of preserving its own benefits. Any intervention of citizens increases the efficiency of the authorities, because. They begin to understand - there is someone who will ask me. Forms of social control - participation in elections, support for political associations and players, lack of passivity in public mass events, more participation in public organizations and volunteer movements (Expert 8);

- today in Russia there are subjects of social (public) control - a vertical of public chambers (from federal to regional and municipal) has been created, public councils operate under government bodies, such structures as the ONF, trade unions, associations function, volunteer and volunteer activities are actively developing. In this regard, the question of the "necessity" or "uselessness" of social control disappears by itself - there are mechanisms for such control, and they function, including in the legislative field (ROI, various kinds of petitions, open letters, etc.). (Expert 9);

- A system of social control is necessary for any state that plans to develop along a democratic path. Moreover, this control should be real, and not turn into the creation of various social simulacra that imitate it. A real opportunity for society to exercise social control over the actions of the authorities will increase the effectiveness of management, due to the feeling of constant "public pressure" by the authorities. Indeed, in this way, each individual representative of the authorities will make decisions more thoughtfully, avoiding corruption and other violations of the law. It is extremely necessary to fine-tune the institution of elections - the main form of social

control in society. It is also necessary to create public councils/chambers that work in the interests of society and not representatives of the authorities (Expert 11).

Control is necessary, but does modern Russian society control the current government and in what forms (formal or real) is this control exercised? According to the majority of respondents (66%), control is not carried out (Table 2).

Table 2: In your opinion, does modern Russian society control the current government? (%)

| <i>Answers</i> | <i>%</i> |
|---------------------|----------|
| Yes | 13.3 |
| No | 66.0 |
| Difficult to answer | 20.6 |
| Total | 100.0 |

According to the expert community, there is control, but it is not enough, and it is more of a formal nature:

- Control is rather formal: the authorities often independently decide to what extent to disclose reporting information on the implementation of, for example, strategic documents (Expert 6);

- In my opinion, control is completely absent, there is only a rudimentary level of control over their residential buildings and reactive behavior during a social explosion (Shies protection of the square from development, and the like). There is no systemic civic position (Expert 8);

- Obviously, this control is largely formal in nature and rather provides opportunities than what provides it. The necessary legislative and other conditions have been created for the functioning of such mechanisms, but there are variously administrative and bureaucratic tools that significantly complicate their work (Expert 9);

- A formal vision of control is created, rather than a real one. There is no request: how the authorities are not interested in controlling society, since they do not consider the population competent in matters of governance; likewise, society is not interested, considering politics a dirty business (Expert 10);

- In my opinion, society tried to control. But ... Quite unequal rules of the game came into force. Any attempt to express dissent, to say something, or criticize the authorities or politicians leads to sad consequences ... Therefore, the control is more formal than real (Expert 17);

- I think, on the one hand, control is formal because the decisions of public councils and other public bodies are advisory in nature. On the other hand, if a citizen can realize his claims, and choose, this control is implemented in real mode. Here it is necessary to approach from the other side: from the side of the electoral system. We see that there are mechanisms that allow one or another government to gain control. Control is formal (Expert 20).

Continuing the discussion about the quality and nature of social control, according to the majority of respondents (65.4%), civil society in modern Russia is rather poorly developed, which hypothetically indicates a low readiness to exercise social control over power (Fig. 2).

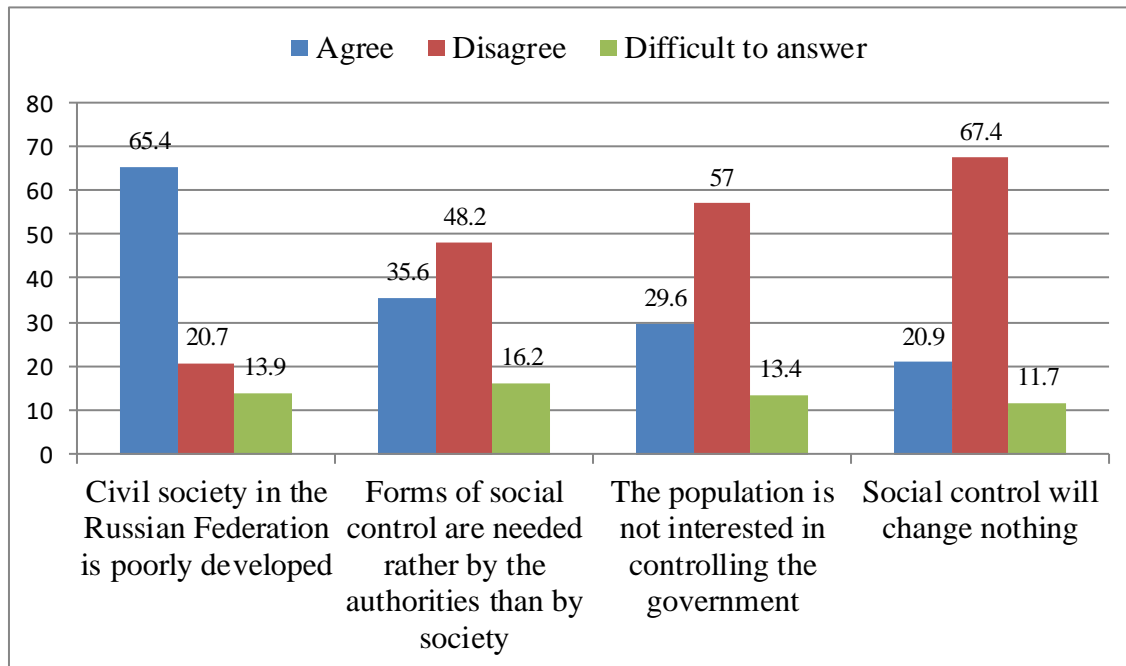


Figure 2: Assessment of social control over the authorities in the respondents' answers, %

How should social control be carried out and what hinders its effectiveness? According to experts, along with traditional methods and technologies (such as elections, public hearings, petitions, public examinations, etc.), it is possible to use modern digital platforms and services to exercise social control over the activities of public authorities:

- Several factors can be named as criteria for the effectiveness of control. Firstly, in order to implement effective public control, the subjects of its implementation must have the specialized knowledge necessary for a full understanding of management processes. The “everyday” dialogue of the authorities is not interesting. Secondly, in order to implement effective public control, the subjects of its implementation must be politically impartial. Their activities should not be connected with the activities of any forces or associations that set themselves political goals. Thirdly, in order to implement effective public control, the subjects of its implementation must be independent. They must not have any third-party affiliation or interests unrelated to public scrutiny purposes. It is quite acceptable to defend personal interests related to topical issues, including corporate ones, but these issues should be relevant personally. Fourth, in order to implement effective public control, the subjects of its implementation should not be aimed at seizing and retaining power. Control can be exercised only by those citizens who are not personally interested in filling the positions of persons responsible for making managerial decisions (Expert 4);

- Public control should be present already at the stage of development of management decisions. In this regard, such existing mechanisms as various public councils under state authorities can be an effective solution (if they work as intended). Today, the key task of all possible councils and chambers is to formally confirm the decisions of the authorities. Why don't these mechanisms work? There are many reasons for this - the composition of councils, the level of their powers, the low level of civic engagement, and political factors. It is possible to list for a long

time, but the following idea should be fixed - the low efficiency of the social control mechanisms is caused not only by the established restrictions and barriers on the part of the authorities but also by the general involvement of citizens in the control process (Expert 5);

- Existing instruments of social control over the activities of government bodies can work effectively only if the subjects of such control are interested in establishing such control and, accordingly, are ready to overcome numerous administrative and bureaucratic difficulties. Therefore, the first step towards improving social control is the removal of administrative and bureaucratic barriers, increasing the transparency of procedures, and increasing the number of platforms for dialogue between the authorities and society within the framework of those forms of social control that are already functioning. Further, it is necessary to improve the skill level of subjects of social control, ensure transparency, objectivity and impartiality of their personnel selection, as well as form a system of feedback from authorities and civil society on the principles of social openness (Expert 9);

- Open hearings on particularly significant issues, the creation of public councils for specific tasks, and the involvement of independent and, not least, adequate people in the public chambers. The public is more intimidated by the state. It is necessary to stop persecuting for opinions and views, then it will be possible to talk about the productive work of the public (Expert 13).

Let us consider in more detail the prospects for introducing digital social control into the practice of civic engagement. Experts believe that at present there are many opportunities for the implementation of digital social control and the introduction of digital super services:

- Today, there are forms of citizens' appeal, where the date and time of the appeal are automatically fixed; this helps the authorities to respond on time. Reports are published on the websites of the authorities (Expert 8);

- For citizens of the Russian Federation, there are already services where you can watch and/or request information about the activities of government bodies. There are also resources where you can get acquainted with the current legislative activity, and draft by-laws (Expert 14).

Experts are generally positive about the idea of introducing a digital twin of the social control system as a new element of digital civil society:

- It is definitely necessary ... as I see it: there is a certain digital platform that is absolutely autonomous and independent; it is “managed” by artificial intelligence based on smart control. Ideally, this platform should not be the decision of the authorities, so that they would not see the next site of the state. services or the like. It is better for this platform to work on commercial platforms, such as Yandex. services (along with such products as Yandex. taxi, Yandex. lavka, etc.) (Expert 21);

- Of course, digital solutions are needed. It is also necessary to digitalize the system of social control (Expert 15);

- Digitization of social control is the way out. If this idea is implemented competently and beautifully, then we can achieve success, increase the efficiency and transparency of the activities of government bodies, and raise the standard of living (Expert 17);

- In principle, the idea is not bad, the more transparent control tools appear, the better and easier it becomes. The Internet and digitalization are good practices of self-organization. A community of people who are determined to do something like this can very easily cooperate with each other (Expert 16).

But at the same time, experts identify certain risks associated with the introduction of digital platforms into the system of social control over the activities of government bodies:

- In modern Russian realities, these technologies work in the opposite direction (Expert 4);

- Digitization of social control is a very good solution, but there are several points. Here you can already decide that it will be tied to the public services portal. And the second point is the security of access keys, that is, as far as it is possible to say that the citizen's data will not be compromised, to what extent HE will actually vote. Here you need to consider all kinds of coercion. It's trite, they force you to vote at work, to exercise social control ... here you can work through these moments (Expert 20).

Respondents during the questionnaire survey also supported the idea of introducing digital services in the context of social control. Already today, the population is an active user of analogue digital forms of social control, such as the “state services” portal, collective letters and online petitions, contacting electronic receptions, and comments on social networks (Fig. 3).

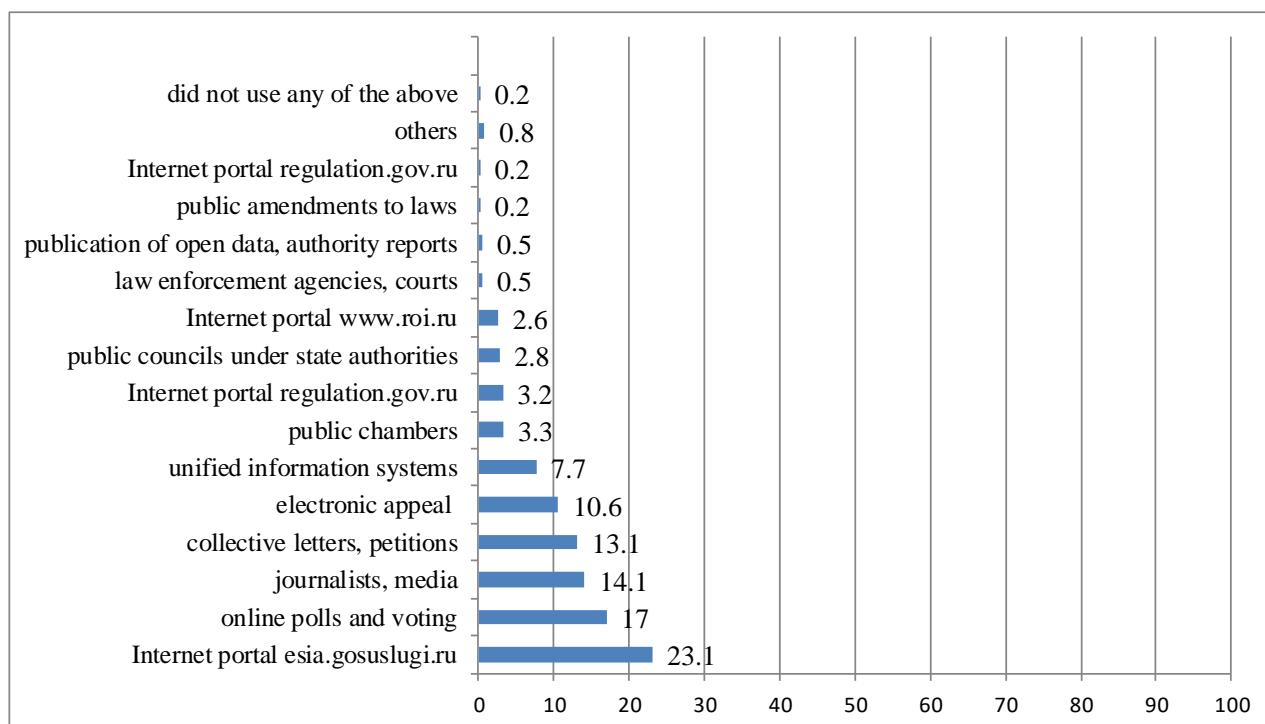


Figure 3: Active forms of digital social control in Russia in the answers of respondents, %

4 Conclusions

Thus, let's discuss the main problems of introducing digital technologies into the system of social control over the activities of the authorities. Among the main problems, experts name

difficulties in adapting to new digital technologies, difficulties in replacing traditional forms of social control with innovative ones, low digital culture of the population, as well as financial, technical, and administrative barriers:

There is no motivation and interest - both from the society and from the authorities;

- Insufficient amount of financial resources for the implementation of modern solutions in the subjects, shortage of personnel with the necessary competencies for the preparation of terms of reference and the subsequent introduction of electronic (digital) technologies;

- One of the main problems with the introduction of electronic (digital) technologies for social control over the activities of state and municipal authorities, as already noted, is the fundamental issue of the independence of existing technologies from the executive bodies of state power or public activists. The factors of objectivity and neutrality, in this case, are key in terms of the widespread introduction of digital technologies in public control.

Therefore, after analyzing the results of the empirical study, we formulate the main conclusions:

- The introduction of a system of digital social control is currently a necessary condition for the development of a modern democratic state. Digital solutions will increase the transparency and efficiency of government activities, increase the level of trust between the government and the population, and improve the quality of effective communications between government and society. Currently, there is a growing need for the widespread introduction and use of modern information technologies and digital platform solutions in the field of social control over the activities of public authorities;

- At the same time, digital forms of social control should not fully replace the already established traditional forms: they should become a harmonious addition;

- In modern Russia, there is no single digital platform that allows the full exercise of the functions of control, audit, and monitoring of the activities of the authorities on the part of society. But there are and are already actively functioning separate digital services for the implementation of certain functions of social control;

- The modern population of Russia with active civil attitudes is not fully informed about the existence of digital opportunities for the implementation of the functions of social control over the activities of public authorities;

- Among the main problems, experts name difficulties in adapting to new digital technologies, difficulties in replacing traditional forms of social control with innovative ones, low digital culture of the population, as well as financial, technical, and administrative barriers.

In order to effectively solve the above problems, we believe that it is necessary to further develop civil society institutions, increase the transparency of power, and apply digital solutions to increase the transparency and efficiency of government bodies. Digitalization and digital technologies are rapidly developing today, more and more new forms of mass application are

emerging, and citizens' access to information technologies is expanding. All these processes, of course, emphasize the need to "digitize" the modern system of public control.

5 Availability of Data and Material

All data are included in this article. Information can be made available by contacting the corresponding author.

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