

Psychology of Mass Public Events in Modern Russia

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Abstract. Last year was marked by an extraordinary rise of social activity in Russia - mass movements, marches and rallies. The subject of all these events was the crowd. Putting aside the question of the political content of these events, the author analyzes the social and psychological essence of mass action. What are the social and psychological characteristics of the modern crowd? Is it still impulsive, suggestible and irrational as it was described a hundred years ago by the classical author of social psychology, Gustave Le Bon? Has anything changed? What is the public opinion on the modern mass public events? The article contains the results of the socio-psychological study aimed at answering these questions. Based on the classic characteristics of the crowd, presented in Le Bon theory, the author developed a questionnaire, including 11 bipolar scales. The survey was conducted in a selection consisting of two groups of respondents. The first group consisted of participants of the meetings held in Moscow during the year 2012, i.e. 290 respondents. The second group of respondents included police officers, who were present at the events to ensure safety - 27 people. The study has shown that the psychological portrait of the modern mass phenomenon is very different from that of the 19th century, the chaotic, impulsive, irrational crowd, which image was created by G. Le Bon in his book and which has become a pattern and stereotype of public perception of mass phenomena. Apart from the comparison of the modern crowd with the «Le Bon crowd», performed in this paper, of particular interest are the results of the comparative analysis of mass phenomenon perception by its participants and guards.

Key words: Crowd • Public opinion • Social psychology • Politics • Mass mind

INTRODUCTION

"The crowd is always intellectually inferior to the isolated individual, but from the point of view of feelings and of the acts these feelings provoke, the crowd may, according to circumstances, be better or worse than the individual. " [1]. This is a quote from one of the most famous books on crowd psychology. Its author, the founder of social psychology, political scientist and sociologist Gustave Le Bon, over a century ago was one of the first to perform a detailed analysis of the psychology of crowds [2]. He tried to uncover the social and psychological mechanisms that act in the crowd, described its general properties and offered their classification. From the point of view of Le Bon, the crowd is characterized by depersonalization, a decrease in intelligence, responsibility, independence, criticality. In his "Mass psychology" Le Bon characterizes the crowd through the following qualities:

- Anonymity, diffusion of responsibility, impunity.
- Distribution of views via the mechanism of infection.
- Suggestibility, the crowd can be made even see what is not there in reality.
- Impulsiveness, the desire to immediately put their ideas into practice, the variability of behavior.
- Inability to think, no arguments and criticism.
- Irritability, exaggerated sensitivity.
- Absence of doubt; the crowd goes to extremes, when any suspicion may become an indisputable evidence.
- Reasoning of crowd is primitive and is based only on associations. The ideas are kept in the crowd only by means of categoricity and do not have any interrelation.
- The crowd is able to perceive only the images; and the brighter the image, the better perception. The miraculous and the legendary are perceived better than the logical and the rational.

- Formulas, expressed in words, eliminate the need of the crowd to think. Formulas remain unchanged, but the words of their expression should correspond to the time. "The most horrible things called by euphonious words, (the brotherhood, equality, democracy) are taken with respect".
- The crowd needs a leader. The leader is not necessarily wise, as the mind creates doubt. He is active, energetic and fanatical. Only the leader blindly believing in his idea can inspire faith in others. The main quality of a great leader is a stubborn, persistent will.

These are the common properties of the crowd of the late 19th - early 20th century, as presented by Gustave Le Bon [3]. Pretending to universality, his description, however, can not avoid bearing the features of the era, specific features of the mass consciousness of that time and the subjectivity of the author [4]. It is interesting to perform a comparative analysis of crowd described by Le Bon and the crowd today. Are modern mass phenomena characterized by the same qualities as a hundred years ago? Is a crowd still impulsive, suggestible and little capable of reasonableness? What is the public opinion on the psychology of modern crowd? What is the difference in the perception of mass phenomenon by its participants and the assessment by the outside observer? How a person, who is a member of the "crowd", evaluates himself in it?

The Research Program: To find answers to these questions we conducted a socio-psychological research. Based on the classic characteristics of the crowd, we have developed a questionnaire, including 11 bipolar scales. One pole of each scale is a characteristic of the crowd, suggested by Le Bon, another pole is the opposite characteristic:

- Conformity of ideas-Fragmentation,
- Anonymity-Personalization,
- Impunity - Personal responsibility,
- Suggestibility - Criticality,
- The presence of a leader - Lack of leadership,
- Gatoricity – Loyalty,
- Irritability - Calm,
- Emotionality - Rationality,
- Variability of behavior - Following the course,
- Impulsivity – Consistency,
- Energy - Passivity.

The scale consists of seven divisions: from the maximum expression of a single-pole through a neutral division to maximum severity of the opposite one. According to the hypothesis and the object of study, two groups of respondents were chosen. The first group of respondents, which included the participants of mass events held in Moscow in 2012, was asked to rate the condition of the crowd of protesters and their own state at the time of the rally according to these scales.

A second group of respondents, police officers providing security during the same events, was in turn asked to assess the mood prevailing in the crowd according to the same scales.

Purpose, Object and Subject of Study: The objective of the study is to identify the current social-psychological characteristics of the crowd and an individual in it. The study was conducted in three phases. During the study, we interviewed the participants of two of mass opposition meetings "For Fair Elections" held in Bolotnaya Square on February 4 and May 7, 2012 and "March of Millions" held on September 15, 2012 in Moscow [5].

The object of this social-psychological research is the crowd. The subject of the study is a comparative analysis of the crowd image in the classical Le Bon's theory of crowd and in the perception of participants of modern mass actions.

Sample: The selection is represented by two groups of respondents. The first group consisted of the members of three rallies held in Moscow during the year 2012. Within each of the three public meetings the study attracted for participation about one hundred respondents. A random selection included men and women (72 percent and 28 percent, respectively) in the age from 17 to 75 years, involved in different activities: from university education to public service. The structure of the sample is presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Structure of selection (the first group of respondents)

	Number of respondents	%
<i>Sex</i>		
Men	208	71.7
Women	82	28.3
<i>Age</i>		
17-28 years	194	66.9
29-60	86	29.7
Over 60	10	3.4
<i>Education</i>		
Academic degree	14	4.8
Higher	212	73.1
Incomplete higher education	48	16.6
Secondary	16	5.5

Table 2: Evaluation of the crowd qualities by the participants of the meetings

Crowd qualities described by G. Le Bon		Difficulties in evaluation on this scale	Crowd qualities opposite to the ones described by Le Bon	
<i>Conformity of ideas</i>	73.8	8.2	18.0	<i>Fragmentation</i>
<i>Anonymity</i>	13	16.2	70.8	<i>Personalization</i>
<i>Impunity</i>	15.4	15.4	69.2	<i>Personal responsibility</i>
<i>Suggestibility</i>	28.8	32.2	39.0	<i>Criticality</i>
<i>Presence of a leader</i>	16.8	19.2	64.0	<i>Lack of leadership</i>
<i>Categoricity</i>	56.5	17.7	25.8	<i>Loyalty</i>
<i>Irritability</i>	20.7	24.1	55.2	<i>Calm</i>
<i>Emotionality</i>	61.0	15.3	23.7	<i>Rationality</i>
<i>Variability of behavior</i>	18.0	11.2	70.8	<i>Following the course</i>
<i>Impulsivity</i>	19.2	14.6	66.2	<i>Consistency</i>
<i>Energy</i>	73.3	11.7	15.0	<i>Passivity</i>

Table 3: Evaluation of the crowd of protesters by police officers

Crowd qualities that agree with the ones described by Le Bon		Difficulties in evaluation on this scale	Crowd qualities opposite to the ones described by Le Bon	
<i>Conformity of ideas</i>	18.5	14.8	66.7	<i>Fragmentation</i>
<i>Anonymity</i>	74.1	7.4	18.5	<i>Personalization</i>
<i>Impunity</i>	59.3	18.5	22.2	<i>Personal responsibility</i>
<i>Suggestibility</i>	59.3	14.8	25.9	<i>Criticality</i>
<i>Presence of a leader</i>	18.5	18.5	63.0	<i>Lack of leadership</i>
<i>Categoricity</i>	85.2	7.4	7.4	<i>Loyalty</i>
<i>Irritability</i>	22.2	33.3	44.4	<i>Calm</i>
<i>Emotionality</i>	88.9	3.7	7.4	<i>Rationality</i>
<i>Variability of behavior</i>	74.1	14.8	11.1	<i>Following the course</i>
<i>Impulsivity</i>	66.7	18.5	14.8	<i>Consistency</i>
<i>Energy</i>	77.8	11.1	11.1	<i>Passivity</i>

Without incorrectly filled-in questionnaires, the total number of the first group of selection was 290 people. During further analysis, we will pay special attention to the comparison of the results of the three phases of the study, conducted at various rallies. Mathematical analysis showed that even though these differences exist, they are not statistically significant.

In addition to the meeting participants, the police officers present at the events to ensure safety were involved in the study. The second group of respondents included 27 persons: officers of riot and other security agencies.

Description and Analysis of the Results: The data obtained from the survey are summarized and systematized as shown in Tables 2 and 3. The lines in the tables correspond to the bipolar scales; the numbers in the cells represent the percentage of respondents describing the state of the surrounding crowd according to each scale closer to one pole (the first column of data), to the other pole (the third column of data) or as neutral (middle column of data). First, we consider the perception of past mass actions by the participants (Table 2) and then analyze the view from the outside, that is, an assessment of the event by police officers (Table 3). Then, move on to the comparative analysis of these two

images. Following the initial course of study, we continue to accept the categories proposed by G. Le Bon as baseline, a foundation and a starting point in the analysis. That is, first, to examine their relevance a hundred years later and secondly, because of the need to analyze a single coordinate plane.

A Crowd from the Protesters' Point of View: The analysis of the results showed that public opinion of people present at the meeting is in sympathy with G. Le Bon roughly on one third of the crowd characteristics.

Echoing the classical theory of the crowd, the vast majority of respondents (about 74%) indicate that the characteristic of the crowd is conformity of ideas rather than fragmentation and assess the participants' solidarity as above average. The rally participants generally agree that among the crowd the emotionality dominates over rationality (61% of respondents) and categoricity wins loyalty (57% of respondents). Estimating the crowd of protesters on the scale of energy-passivity, 73% of those interviewed chose the pole energy, evaluating its evidence mainly as 2-3 points out of three.

Now look at the parameters differentiating the contemporary large groups from the classic description of the crowd by G. Le Bon. First, it is personalization and

individual responsibility (it is mentioned by more than two-thirds of respondents). Second, the lack of a unified and powerful integration center - the leader (64% of respondents). Third, calm (half of the respondents, describing the crowd prefer this pole to irritability and vice versa - only 20%, the rest quarter of the respondents, chose a neutral position on this characteristic). Fourth, 71% and 66%, respectively, preferred following the course and consistency to the opposite poles of the scales. About suggestibility scale the respondents are not that unanimous as on the previous one. About 40% believe that the Moscow rallies crowd is characterized by criticality rather than by suggestibility. A third of respondents did not give a priority to any of the poles of the scale and 29% of respondents rated the crowd as susceptible to suggestion.

Thus on these scales, the modern public opinion not simply disagrees with Gustave Le Bon; it gives just the opposite assessment of the crowd than the classic of social psychology, namely, much more encouraging, approving and optimistic. Of course, the assessment can not avoid influence of the evaluator's position of included, from "inside" of the respondents and the external expert position of G. Le Bon. From "inside" of the mass phenomenon it is difficult to objectively assess it in any way [6]. The estimate is added with various errors of social perception, social identification and in-group favoritism [7]. However, the evaluation of mass phenomena by an external observer is not without the fundamental error of causal attribution and other errors of perception by outside observers [8].

We can not influence the objective perception of Gustave Le Bon any more, but it turned out to be possible to reduce the subjectivity of respondents involved in the meetings. To do this, we have included a second block of issues in the questionnaire. In addition to the assessment of the protesters group in general, the respondents were asked to assess their own self-awareness at the time of a meeting according to the same scales. Such problem statement allows respondents to take a position of the outside observer, somewhat distance from the demonstrators and to assess the audience and themselves individually. In addition, to reduce the factor of social desirability (the desire to estimate the crowd, to which you belong, as a highly developed and progressive), before the survey the interviewer created an appropriate tuning; the respondents were warned that the objective of research lies outside of the political problems, is purely scientific and aims to study mass phenomena of our time,

rather than to investigate different political forces [9]. The respondents were offered the role of "experts", whose opinion should have been to the utmost objective and impartial.

We turn now to the most important results obtained in the analysis of the answers to the second question - about the respondents own state during the rally. General trends in respondents' assessments of the crowd and themselves in it in general match, but almost all the indicators are slightly shifted to self-sufficiency and independence. Thus, respondents are inclined to describe themselves a little more critical, rational, calm, loyal and consistent than the crowd as a whole. The vast majority of respondents assess their own level of personal responsibility as much higher than the average in the surrounding crowd. Almost every respondent (over 90%) admitted that for him personally there is no leader at this meeting.

Crowd from the Police Officers' Point of View: Analysis of the results suggests that the perception of the modern crowd by police officers is much closer to the classical Le Bon's description than the assessment of the situation from "inside" by the participants of the rally.

Police officers, following G. Le Bon, estimate crowd as emotional (such assessment was given by 88.9% of respondents), impulsive, not consistent (66.7%) and energetic (77.8%). In their view, the crowd is characterized by invariability of behavior in the absence of the course (74%). With regard to the degree of personalization of the meeting participants the police officers, probably even not realizing this, again agree with G. Le Bon. 74.1% percent of them believe that the meeting participants feel anonymity, dissolve their "selves" in the crowd and the phenomenon of responsibility diffusion creates a sense of impunity in them (59.3% of respondents noted this trend).

Their description is different from the classical one only in three scales. Observing the protesters during the actions, the guards recognized their peace, the lack of aggression and irritability. More than two thirds of respondents among the police note fragmentation of the crowd, lack of unanimity and a leader. Such characteristics contradict the classic image of the masses, certainly driven by a leader [10].

Commonalities and Differences in the Assessment of Social and Psychological Characteristics of the Crowd: Having examined separately, in what light the modern mass phenomenon is seen by its members and how the guards see it, we can go to the comparative analysis of

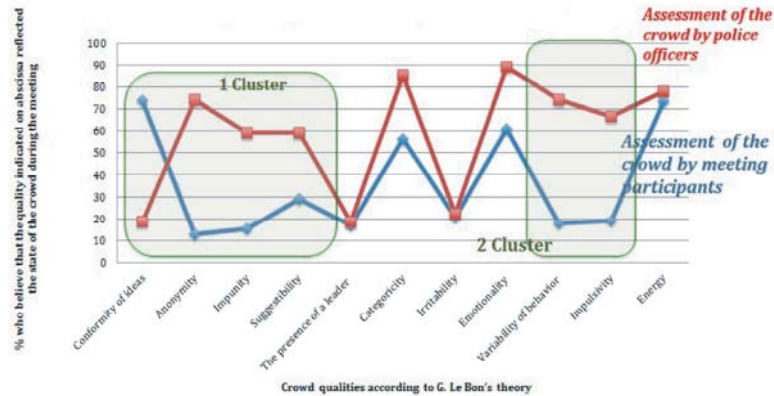


Fig. 1: Differences in perception of modern crowd by the meeting participants and the police officers

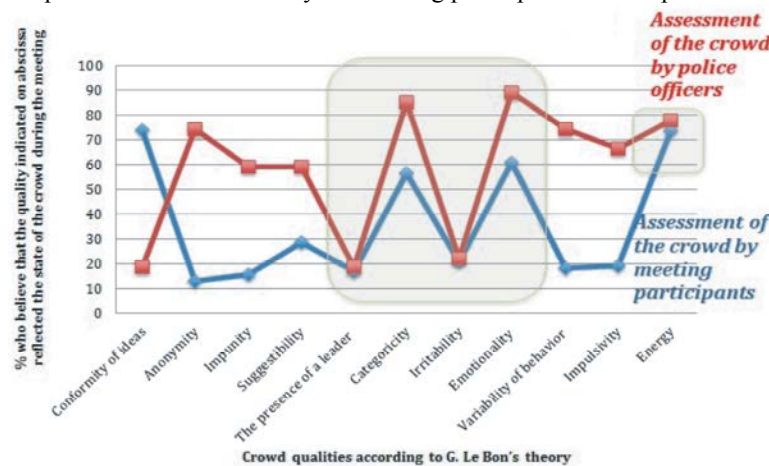


Fig. 2: Commonalities in perception of modern crowd by meeting participants and police officers

the two images. This analysis will help us to identify, which assessment is dictated by the position of the observer (external or included) and which characterize the modern mass phenomenon regardless of the point at which it is being watched. Let's start with the differences.

Key indicators, on which the opinion of protesters and the guardians radically diverge, are grouped into two clusters: the degree of personal responsibility and the capacity for meaningful action. Protesters believe that the crowd is capable of both the first and the second. People assigned to ensure order and see what happens from the outside refuse such abilities in the crowd. In Fig. 1 one can see that the difference in the graphs on the scales included in these clusters approximately coincides with the Pareto Principle "20/80": about 20% of guardians agree with 80% of protesters and vice versa [11].

Let us provide more details about each cluster. The first one, designated as the personal responsibility, includes such features as personalization, lack of a sense of impunity and anonymity, low suggestibility and critical understanding of what is happening. Hence, the low level of unanimity may be inferred. People, who came out to the

squares for the year 2012 to express their civic position, believe that the participants of modern meetings possess these qualities. During the interview supplementing the questionnaire, many respondents emphasized that "the audience is not a single mass, but the amount of self-sustainable units with their attitudes and opinions". Police officers, watching the mass from a cordon, have not noticed these properties and in contrast mention the low level of personal responsibility and personalization.

In the second cluster, there were such qualities as availability of the course and rationality. While the protesters believe that the meeting participants have a developed single course and their behavior is dictated by rationality, the police officers see the behavior variability and impulsivity of the crowd.

What is the point, on which people who are on different sides of the cordon, agree with each other? These areas of "solidarity" are clearly visible in Figure 2. The overwhelming majority (about 80%) of both groups of respondents indicated high energy of the crowd, general calm and absence of irritability and lack of a leader. As for the latter one, the same estimates are characterized by different motivations. While the police

officers commented this as a proof of weakness of the opposition ("They even do not have a leader!"), the oppositionists themselves, noting "lack of leadership" in the questionnaire, assumed this to be an additional confirmation of the independence of each participant coming to the Square ("The participants here do not need the leader, all of them came here to express their position, it is an informed decision of every person"). As for the relatively high flatness and emotionality of the crowd, both groups are almost close to an agreement.

CONCLUSIONS

So, what are social and psychological characteristics of the modern crowd? The crowd of the 21st century, such as the one that appeared on the streets of Moscow in 2012 to express their citizenship. The crowd, three-quarters of which have a higher education or academic degree and another 15% are studying in higher educational institutions today. The crowd, which self-organization is performed not using the loud-speaker, but through Twitter and Face-book.

The study showed that the psychological portrait of the modern mass phenomenon is very different from that of the 19th century, the chaotic, impulsive, irrational crowd, created by G. Le Bon in his book and deeply soaked into the public consciousness, which has become a pattern and a stereotype in the public perception of mass phenomena.

The participants of the mass movements in 2012 claimed that they feel personalized in the crowd, that they don't feel diffusion of responsibility and loss of independence, don't sense dissolved in the mass, on which G. Le Bon so much insisted. Despite the emotionality and energy they were not irritated, behaved rationally and followed the planned course. The protesters were not led by a single leader and they were not in a pre-hypnotic state of high suggestibility.

But this image of modern mass movements is only one of the points of view, the position of a person who is part of the rally. Police officers, observing the behavior of the crowd of protesters from outside, were not that optimistic in their assessments and to a greater extent agree with G. Le Bon's theory of crowd. They, like a hundred years ago, talk of impulsivity, high suggestibility and solubility of participants in a crowd.

To find a consensus between these positions is impossible. The crowd is a complex social construction, which evaluation occurs in the process of social perception. And then, there are the peculiarities of perception and influence of the position of the perceiver. Description of the crowd by Gustave Le Bon is not devoid of subjectivity. Le Bon distrusts the ideas of democracy. As respectable bourgeois, he was critical of the crowd,

which in the 19th century in Paris has repeatedly overthrew the government and established a new order [12]. Such a position could not avoid reflection in his theory.

In the psychology of the crowd there were objective changes. The spread of the Internet communications seriously changed the mechanisms of interaction during mass movements and high intellectual level and social status of the participants can not affect the general level of culture and behavioral norms in the crowd. Use of a categorical grid, proposed by the classic of social psychology Gustave Le Bon, as a conceptual framework of the study, as well as consideration of opinion of both included and external observers allowed performing a comparative analysis that determined the characteristics of modern mass actions. Mass public events are rapidly becoming an important part of social and political life of Russia. Further study of their mechanisms is one of the most important tasks of modern social psychology and the objective of our further research.

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