



**Monitoring of Narratives Containing Hate
Speech, Violence, Radicalism and Xenophobic
and Racist Attitudes in Georgian Informational
and Online Space in the Context of Covid-19
Dissemination**



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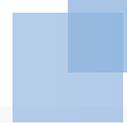
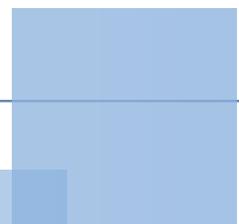
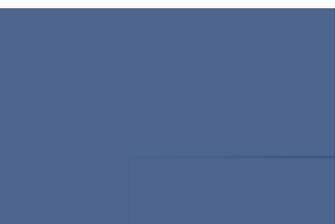
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Major Trends Displayed in this Data Report:

Media

- Media is associated with liberal ideology or with a group financed by foreign forces that have particular tasks to perform, in this case – disparage the role of the church;
- Lack of trust in journalists, who are blamed for the dissemination of fake news;
- Poor or inadequate Georgian language proficiency demonstrated by journalists; issues of fluency and accuracy in the Georgian language;
- Disappointment with and distrust in media that promotes ideology of liberalism;

Religion

- Pandemic as a trial and tribulation that Georgian Orthodox Christians are facing;
- Some churchgoers view the pandemic and virus as artificial, non-existing events that are manipulated and governed by masons or the Satan to test the faith of Orthodox Christians, particularly of Georgian ones;
- Some churchgoers perceived the pandemic as well as the discussions about temporary limitations on church services as a threat against their religion and a test of their belief;
- The pandemic does not exist and the temporary closing of churches is the price that Georgia has to pay for the assistance it receives from the United States;
- Various statements made by doctors, imposing restrictions and urges to respect and observe them caused negative attitude to infectious disease doctors (ID physicians);
- Temporary limitations imposed on church services and church goers were perceived as persecution of Christians;

The EU

- Strong outbreak of coronavirus in Italy and Spain, and the EU's response to this outbreak were used as strong arguments to support scepticism to Europe by Georgian supporters of extreme conservative attitudes;

Marneuli

- Comments about the Marneuli case concerned three aspects of the national identity: ethnic origin of the Marneuli population, religion and the problem of Georgian language proficiency/ the language issue;

China

- Demands to start investigation and punish China by boycotting their products dominated among the attitudes to the country due to the fact that the information about the pandemic was not disseminated in a timely manner;

World Health Organization

- Scepticism and distrust to the World Health Organization; viewing it as the disseminator of liberalism ideology (in the past), due to the decisions made by WHO – gender policy and removal of homosexuality from the list of illnesses;
- Explicit distrust to WHO due to its failure to declare a pandemic in a timely manner;
- Racist and xenophobic comments about the appearance and skin colour of the WHO leader;
- Coronavirus along with the related limitations and changes will increase the number of vaccine supporters. Some comment authors view the pandemic as a globally manipulated process to disseminate vaccines, microchips and 5G network technology.

Tourism

Negative attitude to the government was caused by the announcement on the planned opening of borders for tourists as well as Tourism Revival Anti-Crisis Plan introduced by the government as early as during the state of emergency and further strengthened and encouraged distrust to ID physicians and scepticism to the actual existence of virus.

Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the new Covid-19 virus a pandemic. The virus is new, and there is little information about it, which is being updated every day, in a continuous manner. These circumstances created additional advantageous conditions for the dissemination of inaccurate, false and targeted misinformation that aims to demonize particular groups or values.

Apart from being a pandemic, the new Covid-19 was also declared an infodemic. This is the reason why the information as well as the effects of its dissemination is gaining a greater importance. Each new case of virus transmission is declared by media along with the relevant geographical locations, which forms and has always formed a solid ground for fuelling xenophobic and racist attitudes, especially where the media does not have a strategy of experience of covering a pandemic and fighting against the related infodemic.

Infodemic

On 28 March 2020, António Guterres, the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations, made a statement on his official twitter account: "Our common enemy is #COVID19, but our enemy is also an "infodemic" of misinformation. To overcome the **#coronavirus**, we need to urgently promote

facts & science, hope & solidarity over despair & division.” “We’re not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic,” said the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) at a gathering of foreign policy and security experts in Munich, Germany, in mid- February, referring to fake news that “spreads faster and more easily than this virus.”

On 11 March 2020, WHO declared an infodemic along with the world pandemic. This relatively new term further complicated the situation for various social, national, or health institutions in an environment where the online platforms had been already packed with misinformation on a variety of topics, including health issues (vaccines).

The World Health Organization explains that the infodemic is the excess of information about a particular issue, which complicates the process of finding solutions. “They can spread misinformation, disinformation and rumours during a health emergency. Infodemic can hamper an effective public health response and create confusion and distrust among people.”

The Goal of the Research

The aim of the research is to identify the trends in the content and character of xenophobic and racist attitudes towards ethnic, religious or other minorities following the spread of the new coronavirus.

Strict Isolation and the Increased Level of Internet Usage

There is a connection between the declaration of strict isolation and the increased level of internet usage. Akamai Technologies, a cyber security company, provides web and internet security services. Akamai is one of the largest distribution platforms, which is responsible for 15% to 30% of the web traffic. In the words of Adam Karon,⁵ the company’s CEO, if the previous peak time of the internet usage ranged between 5 p.m. and 11 p.m., now it is from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. This seems to be true at the global level. “Pretty much the online downtime is when you’re sleeping,” he says.⁶ Akamai compares global internet usage to the level of internet usage in those countries, which first declared strict isolation (China, Italy, South Korea, and Japan). According to the company’s observations, China’s usage of internet was slightly lower in the period before the large-scale virus dissemination (maybe because of the Chinese New Year celebrations) when compared to other countries. However, as strict isolation rules were imposed, the above-mentioned countries demonstrated 30% increase. For example, in the first two weeks of February, the frequency of internet application downloads surged by 40% as compared to the same indicator from the same period last year (source: App Annie)⁷.

Based on 2019 data, 79.3% of households in Georgia are provided with internet.⁸ The indicator has shown 3.5% rise when compared to the previous year. “In terms of age groups, the indicator seems to be the highest among people from 15 to 29, amounting to 96.2%.”⁹ According to the GEOSTAT report (Page 3), main reasons for internet usage for citizens aged 15 and over include the following:

- Social network usage (96.0%),
- Internet (audio / video) connections (85.6%),

² António Guterres @antonioguterres · Mar 28 Our common enemy is #COVID19, but our enemy is also an “infodemic” of misinformation; 28/03/2020; <https://bit.ly/2YLF4m1>

³ UN tackles ‘infodemic’ of misinformation and cybercrime in COVID-19 crisis; <https://bit.ly/2BU7eC9>

⁴ UN tackles ‘infodemic’ of misinformation and cybercrime in COVID-19 crisis; <https://bit.ly/2BU7eC9>

⁵ Adam Karon is Executive Vice President & General Manager of the Media Divisions at Akamai. <https://bit.ly/2ZQ8M8z>

⁶ The Network Impact of the Global COVID-19 Pandemic; Mary Branscombe; 14/04/2020; <https://bit.ly/31uZa5G>

⁷ App and data analysis company - App Annie; <https://bit.ly/3e2bgWE>

- Reading online news / newspapers / magazines (55.4%),
- Send / receive email (53.8%),
- Find information on health issues (51.7%).

According to NDI's 2019 polls, television remains the primary source of information “about politics and current events” for 69% of the interviewed, while internet seems to be the second most popular source with 24% of votes.¹⁰ According to the same research, the most widespread form of internet usage is associated social network Facebook, amounting to 72%.

According to the given data, the level of internet usage in Georgia among young people (aged from 15 to 29) is 92.2%, 96% of which is associated with social network Facebook. Those of the interviewed who use internet for being informed on the news, say that social media (Facebook, Twitter, blogs) helps them better understand the news (37%), 14% note that the social networks confuse them about the current events, while 36% believe that social media does not influence them in any manner.¹¹ Accordingly, the data points to the importance of information shared on social networks and its role in informing citizens, especially youth.

From early 2020, news programs and information spread by media was packed with virus-related issues / info. Frequently updating statistics of deaths and reported cases, information about the risks of virus dissemination, unknown nature of the infection and the unpredictable future, physical distancing, and economic risks, has heavily impacted people's mental health. Such conditions may influence people's behaviours and decisions. Life under the constant threat and fear of the disease, isolation, uncertain future, and economic crisis encourage people to adopt more conservative attitudes. There are cases of the spread of infectious diseases in the history of mankind with greater death tolls than wars.¹² Such historical experience along with “fears of contagion” developed “due to some deeply evolved responses to disease, lead us to become more conformist and tribalistic.”¹³

An environment that is characteristic of a pandemic, where people have to follow and observe more norms and regulations, increases loyalty and adherence to the conventional rules, as well as demands for their fulfilment. Such environment strengthens social control. It is evident that people still breach rules, and a breach of any rule, which may not be directly related to the pandemic, results in surging indignation and moral judgement among others, largely conditioned by the fear that such offenders may also violate the obligatory rules of the pandemic and, in this way, increase the threat of spreading the virus. Fear of illness grows along with the demands to observe rules, as the level of trust to strangers decreases. Representatives of foreign cultures are viewed in an especially negative manner. For example, the behaviour accepted in and characteristic of other cultures that is today included in the measures for virus prevention (washing hands, wearing face masks, observing physical distance) was little heeded in the period before the virus.

• ⁸ Usage of Information and Communication Technology in Households (2019); The data was collected in July 2019; National Statistics Office of Georgia; <https://bit.ly/3dMDjco>

• ⁹ Usage of Information and Communication Technology in Households; National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2019; Page 3; <https://bit.ly/2B0raGI>

• ¹⁰ National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted a nationwide (excluding the occupied territories) research from 19 November 2019 to 13 December, which included 2 180 (response rate – 35) face-to-face interviews based on representative selection. Average margin of error: 1.9 percent; <https://bit.ly/2zdaQ1e>

• ¹¹ Usage of television as the primary source of information has decreased as well as trust to R2 and Imedi – NDI research on media; 16/01//2020 <https://bit.ly/3cIksil>

• ¹² The Influenza Pandemic of 1918; <https://stanford.io/2B0uyBF>

Demonstration of regionalism on the state level, when representatives from one's [native] region are given advantage over others.

• ¹³ A Transitory Period to Democracy and Active Citizenship: Training Materials. Begiashvili, Bostoghanashvili, Lezhava et al., Tbilisi 2007 <https://bit.ly/3gxMJue>

Nowadays, however, they are at the centre of attention out of fear that the infection will be transmitted unintentionally (or intentionally) by a stranger (Schaller, 2016). Such attitudes today may become the source of xenophobia. Logic that accompanies such behaviour lies in the following: “Better safe than sorry.” (Lene Aarøe).¹⁴

People’s behavioural immune system differs. Some people express their intolerance of strangers / foreigners more explicitly than others. For those, who have lower level of stranger acceptance, pandemic and fear of infection transmission intensifies already existing attitudes and approaches. (Aarøe).

Context

In Georgia, several well-known coronavirus cases are associated with Marneuli and Bolnisi Municipalities. On 22 March, a 62-year-old woman from Marneuli was diagnosed as having coronavirus¹⁵. On 23 March 2020, Bolnisi and Marneuli municipalities had to face a lockdown. The official reason stated was the failure to identify the source of Covid-19 that might have infected the woman from Marneuli. People were banned from entering and exiting the municipality. 12 outposts were placed along all the roads to Marneuli. This event marked the country’s official shift to the stage of local transmission.¹⁶ On 22 March, the state of emergency was imposed in Georgia, while nationwide quarantine was declared on 31 March.¹⁷ According to the official data, 137,314 people live in Marneuli, and the municipality stands out with its diversity, including Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Armenians, muslims, christians or followers of Armenian Apostolic Church. According to the official website of Marneuli. “In terms of religion and belief, largest part of the population in Marneuli municipality is Mohammedan, next come orthodox Christians, while the rest of the population adheres to the Armenian Church.¹⁸” In addition to ethnic and religious diversity, Marneuli population is distinguishable in terms of language issues. The population of the municipality is mostly fluent in the Azerbaijanian language, with poor proficiency of Georgian. This was the exact reason why the state began to provide information in three languages since the this first case was reported in Marneuli. With the spread of pandemic and infodemic, the dissemination of information is one of the key methods for virus prevention. Marneuli Municipality was not reopened until 18 May.

Following this event, materials with xenophobic content were spread all over the Georgian internet space through online information agencies or by individual users. Spread of virus-related information went beyond the field of medicine or political administration. Necessity to stay at home combined with the increasing usage of internet, and, especially social media (Facebook), created an advantageous environment for studying such attitudes.

Methodology

The current research uses qualitative research methods, which is based on data analysis through the synthesis of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the data. The study of attitudes is based on the user data collected from the comment fields of online media platforms that had been selected for the study in advance. During the research process, coronavirus-related posts were identified on Facebook online platforms of the media, comments about the selected posts were collected and grouped in thematic categories and; at the final stage, collected and categorized data was described and analysed.

¹⁴ “Better safe than sorry’ logic”; Lene Aarøe at Aarhus University, Denmark

¹⁵ A 62-year-old woman was diagnosed with Covid-19 in Marneuli; 22/03/2020; <https://bit.ly/38zmgTD>

¹⁶ Marneuli and Bolnisi face shutdown – Quarantine; 23/03/2020; <https://bit.ly/2ZqXx7U>

¹⁷ General quarantine and curfew have been introduced in Georgia; 31/03/2020; <https://bit.ly/308CN3R>

¹⁸ Marneuli Municipality; <https://bit.ly/3gUUjin>

Coronavirus-related Facebook posts from 22 March 2020 to 22 May 2020 that used textual information were selected for the research. Thus, photo and video material used by the media were not included in the study.

Research Limitations

Data was being selected every week throughout the research process; however, the fact that the Facebook platform does not have a search function based on dates posed an obstacle that was independent of the research. This means that the current report may not include all relevant posts and comments from the selected media platforms.

During the data collection process, two databases were created in Excel. The first one includes raw information, particularly, Facebook posts from 22 March to 22 May grouped according to various media, while the second database has texts from the comment fields of posts integrated within thematic categories. Thematic categories were identified by the researcher based on the content of the comments. In order to determine the content, the researcher also used the content of the relevant post, the comment field of which included that comment. For example, if First Channel posted information about WHO, all comments concerning the WHO would be included in the WHO category.

From 22 March to 22 May, 700 comments of more than 450 posts were collected. Collected data is related to the period from the imposing of quarantine measures to the end of the state of emergency. Virus-related data and information are rapidly changing, and attitudes may as well change.

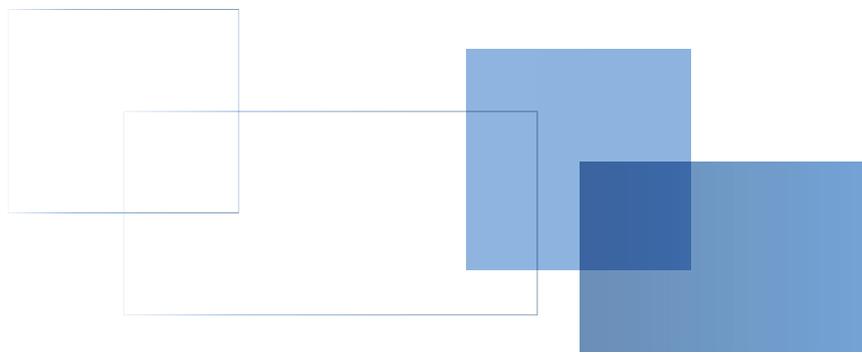
At the final analytical stage of the research, grouped comments were described and compared in order to identify differences and similarities between various media comments.

Selection

In order to demonstrate the diversity and the bigger picture of the research data, Facebook pages of different media were selected: TV Imedi, Mtavari Channel, First Channel and Alt-Info, as a conservative online media platform.

Judging from the limited research time, only 4 online information pages (Facebook page) were selected. Main criterium for the selection of information pages was the page's representativeness and popularity, which means that they represent already known media, which have a certain number of users (likes) on Facebook. Accordingly, this category mostly included Facebook pages of TV channels. For diversity, the research additionally included Facebook page of conservative media platform Alt-Info.

- Georgian public Broadcaster;
- TV Imedi;
- Mtavari Channel;
- Alt-Info.



Facebook Media Pages	Criteria		
	Followers	Number of Likes	Motto
1.First Channel - 1TV (First Channel)	411,126	335,638	<i>That, which unites us</i>
2.TV Imedi	729,737	661,076	<i>Fast, trustworthy and diverse</i>
3.Alt-Info	39,028	31,871	<i>Conservative media platform</i>
4.Mtavari Channel	630,544	423,064	<i>Gain your freedom together we us! You are the most important!</i>

Data 29.06.2020

Data Analysis

Throughout the research process, 700 comments of more than 450 posts on 4 Facebook pages were collected. Collected data is related to the period from imposing of quarantine measures and the state of emergency to the end of the state of emergency – from 22 March to 22 May.

According to the collected data, the following thematic categories were formed: religion, Marneuli, WHO, China, EU, media, tourism, 5G network technology. The listed categories are discussed in the context of the new coronavirus pandemic, and these categories were common for comments on all four media Facebook platforms subject to research.

The current research does not consider the information that involves the identification of personality of comment authors or page users, bots and trolls. The research data (comments) is perceived as fragments of the wide discourse.

— Alt-Info

Alt-Info was included into the study as a conservative media platform, which gained popularity over the course of last year, and increased the number of its programs and live broadcasts. The site is characterized by the coverage of conservative trends in the international politics and the preparation of explanatory video broadcasts in the local context.

As this report is being written, the page has 31,871 likes and 39,028 followers. The page description reads that it is an informational media platform. The page has a website as well, <https://alt-info.com/>, which has four major categories: Georgia, World, Videos and Contact. Alt-info also has a Facebook group with about 2400 members, and about 6 posts written every day.

Comments on news shared by Alt-Info were divided into the following major thematic categories: religion, Marneuli, media, EU, WHO, China. The most burning issue that causes the greatest number of responses and feedbacks from Facebook users is the information about religion, then come the EU and WHO news.

— Religion

Comments that are included in the religion category are associated with temporary restrictions imposed or permissions granted on the Easter services both for churches and the general public. The coverage of religion-related issues in the context of the pandemic is perceived by the users of the conservative media as a trial and tribulation that they, Orthodox Christians, must face - a test, which is to be taken as part of their great historical responsibility. The comments of the page users demonstrate that people or organizations that support temporary shutdown of churches and imposing of restrictions during the pandemic are deemed enemies. Such division is discussed as part of the opposition between liberal and conservative ideologies, in which journalists, liberal media, local non-governmental or international organizations are viewed as adversaries. Such perception is further supported by the belief and idea that, for some churchgoers, the pandemic and the virus are artificial, non-existing events manipulated or governed by Masons or Satan in order to test Georgian Orthodox Christians. Local partisan political context and pre-election environment further contribute to such perception, in which oppositional political parties are presented as pioneers and heads of anti-religious and liberal ideology.

"God accepts repentance from people of all confessions, but God's grace is only in orthodoxy, and conservators of the catholic and protestant countries have to realize it at last in their fight against liberalism, otherwise they will not save their nations from doom." #1¹⁹

"Coronavirus, which Trump called the Chinese virus, also swine and bird flu, SARS, Mars, and thousands of shit like this, came from atheist China, where Christian faith was officially banned, the state implemented mass repressions against Christians and issued an order to bring the Bible in conformity with socialist values. Judging from this, imposing state restrictions on religious service will leave the population unprotected from the nearing evil, which Shevardnadze's disciples - Nationalist- revanchists will celebrate. #2

"It is a general rehearsal yet, while the real persecution of Christians is still ahead." #3

News shared by Alt-Info about the statements of Giga Bokeria, a former member of the United National Movement, and representatives of non-governmental organizations about the temporary shutdown of churches, were met with negative comments by page users, which include slang, swearing, scornful references of liberal ideology, Masons, Satan, and blaming them all for the fight against religion.

¹⁹Translator's comment: all quotes of user comments are translated with the maximum precision of style, punctuation, and attitude demonstrated by comment authors.

Information spread by Alt-Info quotes Giga Bokeria's comment, which also concerns restrictions for churches during the Easter holidays: "If the government imposes restrictions on public gatherings, then church services have to be restricted as well."²⁰

"Bokeria, you Natsi slut!²¹ Why don't you say anything about the virus having spread during Bayram celebrations? Was not that financed by Soros?" #4

Page users compare the gathering of churchgoers in churches to supermarket queues, or to journalists standing in groups while on duty, where physical (social) distancing rules are not observed. Accordingly, they express dissatisfaction.

"NGO-s, you'd better think how to control situation at supermarkets and pharmacies, as people are almost sitting onto one another (pardon for the word)". #5

"The topic was already answered, as these journalists rush and siege a man like beasts and begin to ask questions, does not the law concern them if it is the same for everyone how do we know that you will not spread the virus if one of you are virus carriers? #6

"When all of this is over, a trial for journalists has to be held not in court rooms, but in people's minds and journalists who wish evil to people have to be reassessed and we have to flush them down and boycott them and not watch their programs". #7

"There will be a time for your punishment and you will not defend yourselves television journalists who sold your souls for a few dollars." #8

Page users seem to have an unanimous attitude to journalists and non-governmental organizations. In the category of religion, the major attitude includes the content of having the feeling of injustice or being persecuted for being religious.

Some churchgoers perceived the pandemic and discussions about the temporary restrictions on churches as a trial and a faith test against their religion:

"Doors of churches will be open here as well and we will once again show the world out exemplary orthodox faith..."#9

"Mass testing will begin after Easter to link virus dissemination with people going to church." #10

These attitudes conform with the information shared by Alt-Info, namely, statements made by Bulgarian Prime Minister and President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko: "A difficult decision but I am ready to bear the reproaches, I just cannot issue an order to close churches" – by the decision of Bulgaria's Prime Minister, orthodox churches will be open during Palm Sunday and Easter holiday church services." #11

"Lukashenko: I am always attending church services on Christmas and Easter. We will not prevent anyone from going to churches, I strictly demand it." #12



²⁰"If the government imposes restrictions on public gatherings, then church service has to be restricted as well."

21.03.2020; <https://bit.ly/206rVhj>

²¹Translator's comment: offensive reference to Bokeria's membership of the National movement, often called "Natsebi" in Georgia

As demonstrated in the comments of page users, such information is met with their strong approval and admiration, and they praise the decision makers for their bold measures.

Some page users believe that the pandemic does not exist and that the temporary shutdown of churches is Georgia's price to pay for the assistance that the country receives from the USA:

"Here is who cares for his people here everyone is sold and bought and television is and they are spreading misinformation America wants it to gain control over people and Georgia has no other way out but to follow their orders because we owe them money that they transferred all the money they have transferred they did for this and it is time for Georgia to repay the debt." #13

Coincidence of the pandemic, the state of emergency, and nationwide lockdown with the Easter holidays, combined with the related restrictions, was perceived by some churchgoers as a call for the refusal of God and religion, and each new restriction caused annoyance, indignation, and aggressive comments:

"This pagan government banned cars to prevent us from going to church, it will not stop us and the Lord will make you pay for it all!" #14

During the pandemic, in response to imposing general and Easter holiday-related restrictions, internet comments of some churchgoers grew into religious or moral threats and curses, including towards doctors and epidemiologists:

"You poor souls remember this day and you will be missing Corona for adopting those immoral laws of yours pray that this sin did not affect your children God save everyone but we all have to pay and answer for all nasty things to which we contribute." #15

"All this is happening to ruin Easter holidays for Christians. Look at the history: no government has ever remained unpunished for such actions. Gamkrelidze and Imnadze have entirely changed and altered over the last few days and they are barking now. They are tasked to bark and they are doing it because they promised 3 billion to government. They will spend it and we will pay! With broadcasts every hour from the infectious disease hospital they are sowing psychosis, hypnotizing people! I think that with such measures they will make people hungry and cause anxiety and unrest with the motto "I am hungry". I did not really expect that they would adopt the anti-Christian and anti-people position so explicitly." #16

"Non-governmental sector and their "natsmedia" (nationalist media) does not represent anyone in Georgia. They are not elected and cannot be elected and they only supporters include only those who receive direct grants and are, thus, interested in relevant gains." #17

"These godless people made a trend of church demonization. Nobody remembers the so-called bank cluster and neither the illness imported by foreigners (non-Georgians)." #18

"Communists were doing the same. Representatives of ideological and educational department attended lessons and lectures at schools and universities and warned pupils and students and if they found a cross or caught them praying at a church, they would be expelled from school and their parents fired from work. They would add then, everything was controlled by them, so." #19

Some churchgoers attended the Easter services with certain limitations, which included two-meter physical distance and holy service in church yards. Following the expiration of the incubation period after the Easter, no special rise or change in the number of reported cases were observed.

Tengiz Tsertsvadze, head of the National Disease Control Center (NDCC), stated that: “The number of infected people has not increased in relation to religious holidays.”²² This was perceived by users of Alt-Info’s page as a test successfully taken and passed in belief and religion:

“This was the great trial in the history of mankind which the Georgian orthodox churchgoers successfully passed and made us see those who “denied our Lord before the rooster crowed,” Christianity saved us Georgians and we have to realize it at last why can’t we”. #20

In the beginning of the pandemic, activity of Georgian doctors was viewed unanimously positively, however, because of diverse statements made during the religious holidays, imposed restrictions and urges to observe and respect them, caused the general attitude to ID physicians to change to negative.

“Good if it’s so. And why did you lock up almost half of the country, made them commit a sin, you will be the first to answer for it time to admit your crimes and sins doctor.” #21

“Performed their tasks and these Judas Bolsheviks of new generation were sold for 3 billion.” #22

— Media

In the category of media, Alt-Info users expressed their disappointment with media and television channels, associating them with liberal ideology. Statement by the US president Donald Trump could be used to voice this attitude (disappointment) to media. On 21 March, CNN reported²³ that to the question by NBC’s Peter Alexander, what the president would tell Americans scared because of the spread of the new coronavirus, Trump responded that he is “a terrible reporter.” The information was also published on 22 March by the Georgian conservative platform. In the Facebook comment field of the post Georgian users wrote that Trump was saying the truth and the same is true for Georgian media as well:

*“That’s the man, who gives no **** what journalists say about him, does not try to flatter them and tells them truth to their face! The truth is harsh though and journalists’ mouths are not the only ones to speak it! #23*

“Hey, Trump!!! Only CNN is spreading false news about you, while the entire “liberast”²⁴ mass media here are working on it!!!” #24

Page users identify their personal political ideology and attitudes with the statement of the US President and consider that local, Georgian liberal media disseminates far more fake news than CNN. Thus, they view the liberal media as the common adversary.

Page users, most probably, share Alt-Info’s conservative views, which includes negative attitude to media and journalists, demonstrated especially explicitly when it comes to the coverage of church and religion-related issues.

▪ ²²Tengiz Tsertsvadze: “The number of infected people has not increased in relation to religious holidays.”; 04/05/2020; <https://bit.ly/3ea5eU3>

▪ ²³Here's Donald Trump's angry response when asked what he would tell scared Americans; March 21, 2020; <https://cnn.it/38BfZNP>

▪ ²⁴Translator’s comment: offensive term used in Georgia to refer to people who support liberal values. The term also includes a reference to another offensive word “pederast” that is used for male homosexual people. The term reflects the tendency of conservatively minded Georgians to think of homosexuality and liberalism as interrelated sins and evils.

*"70% of these rotten journalists are trying to abuse the church all the time what the **** wrong with you you **** if you are not afraid of God do not force others stay away from Him **** you all!!!!!! Level of journalists in Georgia is 0%." #25*

"These Satanist journalists have to be killed at once I would be gladly slapping the bald head of that offspring of a Soros rat." #26

In the context of the pandemic, according to the comments of Alt-Info's page users, the attitude to Georgian media is negative. Media is associated with liberal ideology or with a group financed by foreign forces, which has a particular task - disparagement of the role of the church in this particular case. In the context of the pandemic and infodemic, increased internet and media usage may be an additional factor for internet users to be negatively positioned towards media, considering the fact that the information about pandemic involves fear and negative information.

— The EU

Sceptical attitude towards the EU can be traced in the comments of Alt-Info users. Strong outbreak of coronavirus in Italy and Spain, and the EU's response to this outbreak proved to be a strong reason for Euroscepticism among Georgian conservative attitudes – neglect and indifference of members of one family to one another – this was the view that the page users expressed in their commentaries. Such attitude is linked by page users to Georgia's quest to become a member of the EU, which causes their disappointment.

"The crisis has shown well the "liberating" impact of liberal ideology on the population over the last 60 years here is your ideal Council of Europe! I wonder what they have been discussing over the course of these years and financing themselves with enormous salaries and wages this good-for-nothing gang of sluts? My heart broke to watch this! Is that the Europe we have been looking to and striving for they do not want their elderly people and their families abandon them. Three generations lived together in my house and under the same roof and I miss the time when my grandpa and grandma were with us." #27

"This is how they are bringing up their future generations in Europe, strip them of the feeling of love, patriotism, national identity, a gathering of polite robots they are in Europe, I believe, many locals understand what the state did to them... and why would we expect their assistance?" #28

BBC published a news²⁵ that elderly people were found abandoned and dead in Spain. It was followed by wide generalisation on how Europe and the EU does not care for elderly people. In contrast to this, Alt-Info published a statement by Victor Orban in which he discusses the EU, and assistance received from China and Turkey. "Help we got from the Chinese, and I turned to the members of the Turkic Council, where Hungary is also a member, that they give help, and we got it also from there," Orbán said, while adding that "we remain members of the European Union, we belong to this western alliance."²⁶

Local interpretation of relationships between the EU members triggers Eurosceptic attitudes among Alt-Info's users, including towards European civilization, while also associating Euroscepticism with 2008 August war.

²⁵Coronavirus: Spanish army finds care home residents 'dead and abandoned'; 24/03/2020; <https://bbc.in/2Z7nSaR>

²⁶Hungarian Prime Minister: The coronavirus crisis has exposed the EU's "weaknesses" and failure to help in times of need, Viktor Orbán said today. 30/03/2020; <https://bit.ly/2Dcg7aW>

"By the way, culture was introduced to Europe from Asia. Before that they lived like beasts... There, your European culture. They think culture is culture just as the "elite" among us thinks that holding a knife and a fork correctly is culture. I prefer Lobio, Mchadi and leek to their "expresso";²⁷ etc. Savages I cannot imagine the same happening in Georgia." #29

"Did our mock governments hope they would help??? Swindlers and robbers. Billions are accumulating in the pockets of some individuals. It is about to break down and it will this European Union invented by swindlers poor souls who believe in you... They know well how to speak in an alarmed manner and now they are not even alarmed... Europe is doomed and somebody will find it good..." #30

"Maybe we will stop at last believing in and looking to America and Europe and look after ourselves." #31

"Standard fake: anxiety, indignation, alarms. False apologies and I am waiting for results! Italy will be the second country perhaps to leave the EU - like Britain. What you want, I wonder they help as they know and can do it. They are alarmed. We have to remember as well that they are always ready when we are in need and they will be always alarmed and we should not remember that they even expressed indignation in 2008." #32

This way, the EU category is also inspired with fear and disappointment, and the dominant themes include the EU's response to strong virus outbreaks in Italy and Spain in the context of the pandemic, which strengthens the fear that if Georgia becomes the EU's member, Georgia will be abandoned in times of trouble.

— Marneuli

After the citizen from Marneuli was confirmed positive to coronavirus, comments associated with the ethnic identity of Marneuli population began to show up in response to the respective news on Alt-Info's page. On 22 April, protests were held in Marneuli as locals were unable to sell their agricultural products due to the restrictions imposed because of coronavirus.²⁸ In the comment field of the same news shared by Alt-Info, comments of page users concerned the ethnic identity of Marneuli population, their Azerbaijanian origin, as opposed to the Georgian identity. Comment authors argued that if the ethnic Georgians had done the same, they would have faced the strict punishment, which was not the case for Marneuli population. Page users demanded and supported the use of the police and military forces against the locals, called for their punishment and arrest, suggested that they were sent to Azerbaijan or isolated.

*"To prison with them or to Azerbaijan, **** them all!!! Everyone's rights are protected in Georgia except those of Georgians !! During the state of emergency even a simple disobedience is a crime and has to be punished. send armed soldiers there and tighten the emergency rules!" #33*

"...Georgians would not be forgiven for such a behaviour and why can others always get away with it?!" #34

"Pour the holy water on these pagans and they will scatter immediately. Why does no one say anything about it when they were making so much noise about churches?" #35

²⁷Translator's comment: Lobio (a Georgian dish with beans), Mchadi (baked corn bread); also, a common misspelling of espresso.

²⁸"We cannot sell our products" - Marneuli population is holding protests 22/04/2020; <https://bit.ly/3f9Qx4G>

"Beat them. Batons. As. Misha. did and. if. they do not like. these laws let them go to Azerbaijan Tatars brought coronavirus from Iran and want to bring them to Tbilisi." #36

"Nice beating and bruises would do them good. They have to be gathered and dragged away from Georgia to their Azerbaijan where is the police who pretend to be good guys issuing tickets every now and then. Why did they not penalize with 3000 GEL do they not breach the law where are you liberals or they are exception to everything and here and now all measures have to be taken according to the law and these gang of brainwashed idiots has to be punished... Who organizes all this... Enough with their impertinence and insolence." #37

"Siege them and lock them they want it they do not want to be treated and throw food to them like to dogs and do not let them out this is what they deserve." #38

"Circle them with barbed wires and let them die if they want, we are growing mad here, who are observing all rules. Narrow-minded idiots, let them send special forces and arrest them, until the entire village

is infected! So punish those mother f...s! The crowd of Neanderthals..." #39

"... Such people need Misha. Do not let them have their way. To prison with all rebels. Government's passiveness is understood by these criminals and offenders as encouragement. They will do it elsewhere as well." #40

"... in short, how long shall we stay locked up because of these degenerate and brainless people, penalize everyone who behaves like this, what have we done to be sitting like this because of idiots like those..." #41

The second characteristic pointed to the religious difference of the Marneuli population:

"Trade has nothing to do with it, people, even if their entire crops go bad, they will not worry, they will sell 2-3 grams of heroin and that is their entire income, now their Ramadan is coming on 25 or 26 and now let some of you go there and tell them not to enter the mosque, let these mock journalists go there and rush into mosques with their microphones as unbiased and brave as they are, and do not be surprised if Adjarian Muslims join these as well!" #42

While the third characteristic was the language issue:

"Man these people still dare to make demands... They have lived here for years and they speak no Georgian and do not try to learn, they must be exiled from there entirely..." #43

All three characteristics are important components for defining the national identity.

China

In news spread by Alt-Info, China category emerges in relation to the origins of coronavirus. A desire to begin an investigation into China's actions as well as to punish the country by boycotting its products dominated among attitudes demonstrated by comment authors.

"China has to be punished. The world must isolate China!" #44

"Say no to Chinese products---We could at least do that." #45

"It has to be severely punished, the world must boycott China." #46

²⁹Translator's comment: no actual reference to the Tatar people, here - an offensive way of referring to people of Azerbaijanian origin.

World Health Organization

Comment authors show distrust and negative attitude to the WHO. This attitude of internet users is demonstrated by statements made after the USA ceased the financing of the organization. The comments associate the organization's policy with Liberalism, which conforms with the organization's beliefs and decisions received in relation to LGBT issues and gender policy.

"That fraudulent organization must be entirely abolished, and the moustached black man has to be impaled." #47

"There is a nest of liberals as well it seems and Europe is protecting and hiding them under its ass" #48

The comments also include racist statements in relation to WHO's leader and his appearance and skin colour.

"President of the world health organization that nigger..." #49

*"World should not allow any childless person without a family to be appointed to governing or leading positions, neither childless man nor woman, as such people don't give a **** for the families or children of others, they only care to have themselves protected, and they have no one except themselves and do not care for others and they are making people subjects to all stupid experiments that pop in their minds." #50*

"Are you serious... You poor souls. WHO should better say based on what criteria it declared a pandemic. Who gave them the right for it. It is known that a pandemic is announced when the infection is transmitted to 5% of population. The rest is simple arithmetic 5% of 7.8 billion is 390 million. Were so many people infected? As they say themselves, at the peak of the infection, the number slightly surpassed 3 million. Or why are they announcing that there will be another outbreak from October to January? Logically, in those conditions when you expect it and you are ready for it even half of population must not be infected. Is it not so? Or perhaps Bill Gates's algorithms make different calculations? Secondly, I don't care for others and the Georgian government is fulfilling even the most stupid of orders that come from foreign forces, do they not have heads of their own..." #51

According to Alt-Info user comments, WHO promotes liberal ideology and conducts gender policy, while dictating the rules of domestic political activity to Georgia.

— TV Imedi

Facebook page of TV Imedi has 661,076 likes and 729,737 followers. The channel also has a website - <https://imedi.ge/>. Data collected from Imedi Facebook page also coincides with the categories of Marneuli and religion cases. The page is diverse and the comments of users often carry non-verbal character. (stickers, emojis, etc.)

— Religion

Among the users of TV Imedi's Facebook page, a greater part of comments concerned processes related to coronavirus and the pandemic. In the unified narrative of religion and faith, political ideology and international politics, page users considered the current situation as an attack against their faith and belief, which has underlying motives of forming the global government. This belief and view in some churchgoers and users are further supported by the fact that up to this time, Georgia has been coping with the virus with minimum losses.

Page users compare Georgia with countries like Italy, Spain or the USA that are fighting with heavy consequences of the virus. The above-mentioned is also associated with the WHO's image as the organization that conducts liberal ideology, including its past decisions about gender policy and the removal of homosexuality from the list of illnesses. In their turn, coronavirus and other current global processes are associated with the dissemination of vaccines and "microchips" – according to this belief, coronavirus and all the related restrictions and changes will assist the increase in the numbers of vaccine supporters. Pandemic is seen by the internet users as a globally manipulated process to disseminate and spread vaccines, microchips and 5G network technology. Although the entire narrative is a single, unified story, it is possible to separate, distinguish and explain user discussions in the comment field.

Major direction in the category of religion was the trial of orthodox Christians – temporary restrictions for the church and churchgoers was perceived as persecution of Christians by the followers of liberal ideology and atheists. In the opinion of believers, it was religion that saved Georgia throughout its history, and now is the same time.

"Now was the time to expose those who pretended to be more or less religious and churchgoers... I was not surprised anyway with actions of atheists and so-called liberals. And it is still this church and its members since the ancient days who have been praying for your souls as well... persecution it is indeed... Orthodox spirit and devotion saved this small country! Otherwise it would have perished from the map as even great empires did! God save us all!" #52

Fragmentary judgement of internet users fail to consider the fact that the restrictions are temporary, however, Some churchgoers believe that Easter is the most important Christian holiday, and, on this day, failure to go to church is a heavy tribulation for their belief.

— Marneuli

After the confirmation of the first case of virus in Marneuli, part of comments on the Imedi page demonstrate negative content in relation to Marneuli population. Slang and aggressive calls for violence used by the users concerned the poor proficiency of the Georgian language and failure to observe the rules of the lockdown:

""Most of those Azeri are illiterate. You can't talk of civil awareness. They are in the dark simply (not all of them, of course)." #53

"Even million Gakharias would not help with so many immoral people, they need prison not treatment." #54

"And if they survive, impose such a fine on them that will leave them hungry for the rest of their lives, these ignorant idiots..." #55

Despite the fact that cases found in Marneuli caused those comments that called for the lockdown of the town, sieging and arresting the population for the breach of quarantine rules, there were also some page users who believed that the virus and the pandemic did not exist:

"Let me take a second's glance at a single infected patient enough with this farce time to end it." #56

"These rounded numbers are especially doubtful :D Why 30 and not 29 :DD and the same in the previous case 10 or 5 :DDD" 57

*"Why does no one talk about the fact that 1 in 2 people in Georgia was down with virus this winter. Schools and kindergartens announced holidays. Hospitals were crowded and people were given therapy in corridors. Was it not corona? And what would you say that antibodies were found in some people? Go and **** off and stop threatening people. Journalists are the main provocateurs. Let people live corona does not kill. People overcame that virus in November and how the **** is it going to hurt anyone now." #58*

WHO

In WHO-related comments by Imedi's users, explicit distrust may be traced conditioned by the failure to announce a pandemic in time.

"Only WHO is guilty for not having declared a pandemic in time." #59

"China, in the first place, deserves the most severe punishment. Had it not been for their dirty food now the world would not be suffering like this. Let them die all at once." #60

Mtavari Channel

Facebook page of Mtavari Channel has 423,064 likes and 630,544 followers. The channel has its own website <http://Mtavari.TV/>. Mtavari Channel is represented in the current report with the least amount of data, as most of its news consisted of videos (live broadcast videos), which posed a problem of linking the comments of page users to the shared information. Apart from that, during live videos or live broadcasts, users provided live responses to presenters or respondents, which posed an obstacle for linking the comments to particular news and their content.

Despite this, data collected on the page of Mtavari Channel also conforms with the main categories created in this report.

— Marneuli

In case of Mtavari Channel, the reason of negative attitude of page users in relation to Marneuli-related situation was poor proficiency in the Georgian language among the Marneuli population, or belief in the non-existence of the virus.

"Why are they translating to this people I wonder, they have got used to it, to put it in a simple manner, they live in Georgia and do not know the state language Georgian it is a shame, how could they not learn it finally, not they could not, they did not because they can have a translation as if they lived in another country." #62

"In short, there is no panic in Russia here and no one wears masks and there is nothing and nothing is felt and people live normally I think Tv disseminates false news in Europe and Georgia and sow panic among people and how can you speak one and the same thing all the time." #63

"You are cheating doctors. Nothing is to be believed already." #64

"I don't believe it either this virus is not among us!!!!" #65

Despite the fact that little data was collected from Mtavari Channel's Facebook page, there was a scandalous case related to a program on their channel – on 5 April 2020, Post Factum was broadcast by

Mtavari Channel, which included a story titled “Genes against Corona.”³⁹ The host and the authors of the story discussed the importance of genes in the process of fight against coronavirus. The story was based on scientific assumptions about the advantages of Georgian genes and not confirmed facts. As the story came to an end, the host made a sarcastic comment about Armenian scientists: “I am much interested to find out which genetic group our neighbours belong to. I am certain it will be revealed that their DNA is stronger than that of Georgians and directly kills coronavirus, without even vaccines or medications.”

As the program was being broadcast, the audience had a chance to make comments on the story that they had been watching during Facebook live. Genes Against Corona received two relevant comments, which share the pathos of the story about the advantage of Georgian and, therefore, Orthodox genes:

“Genes of Virgin Mary’s Domain”. #66

“We Georgians have to grow in numbers and become millions!!” #67

Main informational space of Mtavari Channel on Facebook, especially during the state of emergency, was mostly crowded with live broadcasts. Comments of users of this webpage concern ongoing live events – users provide feedback in a dialogue mode on whatever is happening in a live broadcast. Active page users are arguing, responding and using non-verbal language with each other (visual expression images / means characteristic of social network: stickers, gifs) during live broadcasts. It is also common when authors of comments ask a question, address or “talk to” the person who is being on the live. Such comments of internet users (behaviour) is fragmentary and it does not represent relevant text material for the research – these often represent cynical or ironic responses or questions the full understanding of which requires the reconstruction of the entire dialogue. Due to this, a large part of Mtavari Channel page comments were left beyond the current research.

First Channel

Facebook Page of First Channel has 335,638 likes and 411,126 followers. The channel has website: <http://1tv.ge/>.

Data collected from First Channel’s Facebook page were also distributed in the categories of Marneuli, religion, WHO, the EU, and tourism.

— Marneuli

Comments of First Channel users concerned the poor proficiency of the locals in the Georgian language and their ethnic identity in relation to the confirmed case of coronavirus in Marneuli.

“If Azerbaijanian is your native language, go and live in your home country... Otherwise, bother yourselves to learn Georgian...”#68

“They must bother themselves to learn the Georgian language if they want to live in Georgia, do the Azerbaijanian or Armenian or Turkish schools allow Georgians to study in Georgian, or are there any Georgian schools at all? #69

“They do not speak Georgian and do not watch Georgian channels and they are demanding assistance from Georgian people and government, and yes, people of all beliefs and ethnicity who is the citizen of Georgia, was born and brought up in this country, must try as hard as they can and learn Georgian!”#70

³⁹ Genes Against Corona – a story included in Mtavari Channel’s program Post Factum (07:45–21:40); 05/04/2020; <https://bit.ly/38F7Nw3>

"Those who do not speak Georgian must be stripped of citizenship and then watch whether they learn it or not"
#71

"They had to introduce it and I stand by them lifelong imprisonment has to be allowed for the inhabitant of Marneuli who put us in this great trouble that immoral cow, I wish she survived that we could burn her ourselves the dirty Azeris generally don't like cleanliness and the entire Marneuli stinks like hell I have been there once." #72

"Let all of them be arrested because of them we have been in quarantine for such a long time and have been observing all rules and what have we done that because of them everything was locked down as they staged an entire battle." #73

Comment authors associate the spread of coronavirus with the spread of vaccines.

"PR is underway for vaccine promotion. Do not be vaccinated and let us try to make out immune systems better because all viruses strengthen when the immune system weakens." #74

World Health Organization

The comments demonstrate two kinds of attitude to the World Health Organisation. The first one is distrust in the organisation itself:

"WHO is entirely financed by Bill Gates. America and Trump in particular very rightfully ceased 500 million funding to the world health organization because their actions were unacceptable. In fact, Bill Gates is giving out orders and directives. So we may draw correct conclusions." #74

The second attitude includes racist and xenophobic comments about the appearance of the WHO leader and his skin colour:

"This man looks like an executioner his face speaks it let them keep their vaccines for Americans and these idiot abhorrible journalists who report all these news so pleasantly" #75

"This man looks like a doctor from horror movies who is conducting human experiments." #76

*"He looks like Satan. Did you talk to him? **** you, really, you journalists are hosting your programs shamelessly and those who are feel really sorry like myself will never sit in that place frozen-hearted wretches."* #77

"Who would trust a man with a face like this??..? Leave us simple people alone we do not need vaccines. Keep vaccines and microchips for yourselves." #78

"This man does not look like a doctor but like a monster from horror movies who is in alliance with Bill Gates, let them and our government and doctors vaccinate themselves, I will not be chipped and they are coronas themselves and promise of freedom killed people and you are killing people locked up in their houses with hunger, Italy lifted restrictions and what are you waiting for." #79

"One look is enough to be afraid and then when he begins to speak my arterial pressure increases and I became neurotic because of him let him perish and all in his likeness who sow panic and make people more ill than ever and kill them with heart attacks rather than with corona." #80

"Look at his face this man is capable of anything to earn billions for himself." #81

"One look at this man will not cause a virus but a heart attack." #82

“World scarecrow WHO! Tedros Ghebreyesus – over the last 24 hours record number of the new Covid-19 cases were observed all over the world.” #83

“This WHO first removed pederasty from the list of illnesses and now they are going to include homophobia in that list. I will not even speak of gender changes for children. This is driving me mad! It is time to end the trend of baptizing every deviation as a norm!” #84

Media

Two main attitudes can be traced among comments related to journalists. The first one is distrust to them and holding them guilty for fake news dissemination:

“Journalists the time has come for you to say that you can no longer cheat the Georgian people think how much you can do and you are not doing anything except for disseminating fake news and shame on you for making people feel miserable and depressed.” #85

The second explicit attitude is related to the Georgian language and fluent speech issue:

“That is fine but journalists of 1TV have to speak Georgian. Cluster, cohabitation, news, fake, lethal [klasteri, kohabitatsia, niusi, feiki, letaluri] etc. #86

Tourism

As early as of 7 May, before the expiration of the state of emergency, “Tourism Revival Anti-Crisis Plan was presented at the Georgian Government Administration, at a meeting of the economic group that operates within the framework of the Inter-Agency Coordination Council headed by the Prime Minister.³¹” Information disseminated by First Channel concerned the topic of tourism and the opening of borders for foreign tourists, which was motivated by a desire to revive local economy and provide it with support. These statements caused aggression and negative attitude of page users to the government and further intensified and encouraged distrust to ID Physicians and the existence of virus in general.

“You were preparing coffins for us after Easter go away. Shut your mouths. Tourism has to stop entirely for 1-2 years!!!” #87

“Stop talking this shit, come back to your senses and let the future generations study and have a normal life... you have already locked up people and now children are prevented from going to schools you are opening tourism and we are unable to properly move inside the town you are doing everything for your own benefit and Mister Paata when you were shouting out those statements on TV and frightening people do not think that it will go unpunished and there will be time for you to pay you mock patriots with souls sold. This is all a lie and you are making people nervous for nothing. You are acting on someone’s orders. Do not let the tourists inside this year and there will be no threats.” #88

“First look after those people who are dying of hunger and then think about tourism you beasts. You are staging genocide for your own people.” #89

³¹Natia Turnava introduced Tourism Revival Anti-Crisis Plan for the 07/05/2020;
<http://www.economy.ge/index.php?page=news&nw=1479>

"It would be better to receive emigrants who are Georgian citizens first who are trying to leave to get back to

"The state of emergency has not been lifted yet and he is inviting tourists to change everything for the worse for elections and this swindler in the likeness of his knave master plans all these things for that very time, they will make their families richer with tourism, to make the rich wealthier of course who cares for the middle class, these Georgia and then guests." #90

"What difference does it make whether Corona kills you or so much inactivity, misery, suffering, hunger, debts, depression or simply monotonous life? You have already bored us to death with your corona pandemic." #92
parasites did not even leave a coin or two for us." #91

— Religion

Discussion about the inclusion of churches in the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic was viewed by 1TV users as a fight against their faith and related it to a historical experience.

"So much trouble and misery has come upon the world and you are still joking and making fun of church and religion. Don't you understand that it is because of our sins?" #93

"To make Georgia happy at last and for centuries we have been suffering and drowning in rivers of blood, wars came after wars, traitors all around, disintegration of the nation, integration and then disintegration again, we are still losing territories today. Gamsakhurdia we had and you did not let him live.. Whose prize is it now that we live in a 30-year long hell?" #94

"Georgia is has always been and will be a country of Orthodox Christians - this truth will never be changed regardless of how many centuries may pass!" #95

— The EU

The comments of the 1TV demonstrated two main attitudes. The first expressed scepticism to the EU:

*"Once corona is over many countries will leave the EU and NATO, why the **** do you want to be part of the union where no one gives you a hand in trouble!!! " #96*

"The world is now looking to Georgia. Up to this day everyone wanted to join NATO and now everyone wants to be in Georgia." #97

*"You wake up and ask yourselves what you are doing for that money you do not give a **** for your homeland and people and what you are doing to us locking us up at our homes and proceeding with your wicked plans let us die naturally why shall Masons kill us treating you are people." #98*

"I would recommend that first you understood and learned what it means to be a man and a Georgian a true Georgian and then think about law because without humanism law and its sovereignty means that you are obsessed with ways to enslave people.. You should not be responsible for governing law, you petrified robot, who could not be trusted for a second.. I wonder if your own mother trusts you at all or what have you been doing except cheating, lying and manipulating people To protect this country? Laws do not make people happy, laws, when deviating from democracy, are subject to enslavement... The one who put you in charge of the law, must answer for it in the first place and then you, alas, you hollow head of a beggar slave..." #99

While the second one concerned the social assistance provided by the EU, in which the authors of comments express their doubt on the reasonable and purposeful distribution of the funds:

"I wonder when the world finally understands that nothing is done for people and they are making the government richer; no one should transfer a single penny, they have stolen enough already." #100

"It does not make any sense. A single penny is not spent on simple people. And how much money the government should receive using people... the UN allocates a million USD to support Georgia in responding to coronavirus pandemic." #101

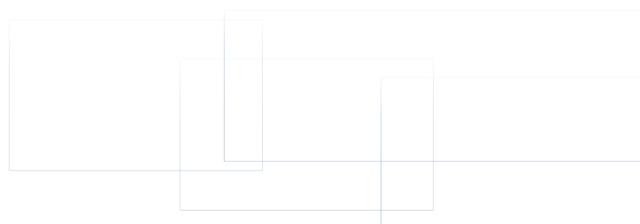
Data Summary

Data presented in this report is created by internet users. Content of the comments may be conditioned by ideological bias of particular media platforms, public views or other types of political affiliation. However, the number of these comments and homogeneous nature of the collected data from various media platforms form an impression that these comments are part of a wider and more general discourse, rather than being a characteristic of a particular media platform.

In social sciences, there is a view that disgust encourages conservative attitudes among people in order to avoid negative results, however, there is also a more contemporary view that disgust tends to be a characteristic of more protective political programs, whether liberal or conservative (Aarøe; Petersen; Arceneaux; 2017).

Data used in this report suggests that the conditions during the coronavirus pandemic, fear of virus spread or fear of being infected, economic crisis, physical distancing, constantly changing and negative information, and uncertain, unpredictable future directs people's beliefs and views or their social behaviour towards more conservative and protective patterns. In case of this report, such demonstrations include strong moral criticism of those citizens of Georgia, who are not properly fluent in Georgian or do not know the language, whether journalists or ethnic groups; or of the Prime Minister's statement on encouraging local production - "The government and I personally will support every businessperson who is capable of creating local production."³²

In this particular case, leading emotions include fear and unacceptance, which are governed by national and religious identities. Such reality is also conditioned by the dominance of tourism (income and employment) in the state economy. 2019 report of the Georgian Ministry of Finances reads that "over the last few years, tourism established itself as one of the most important sectors of the economy. In March 2019, overall number of visitors amounted to 600 000 which is 3.8 percent higher compared to the March data of the previous year."³³ For people living in the state of emergency, isolation or lockdown, information about the reopening of borders for foreign tourists may become one of the key reasons for xenophobic attitudes regardless of the fact that such measures are taken to avoid economic crisis.



■ ³² Giorgi Gakharia - "The government and I personally will support every businessperson who is capable of creating local production" - 28/03/2020; <https://bit.ly/2ZHUF1Q>

■ ³³ Current Economic Trends; Georgian Ministry of Finances 2019; <https://bit.ly/2Cgff4A>

Monitoring of Narratives Containing Hate Speech, Violence, Radicalism and Xenophobic and Racist Attitudes in Georgian Informational and Online Space in the Context of Covid-19 Dissemination

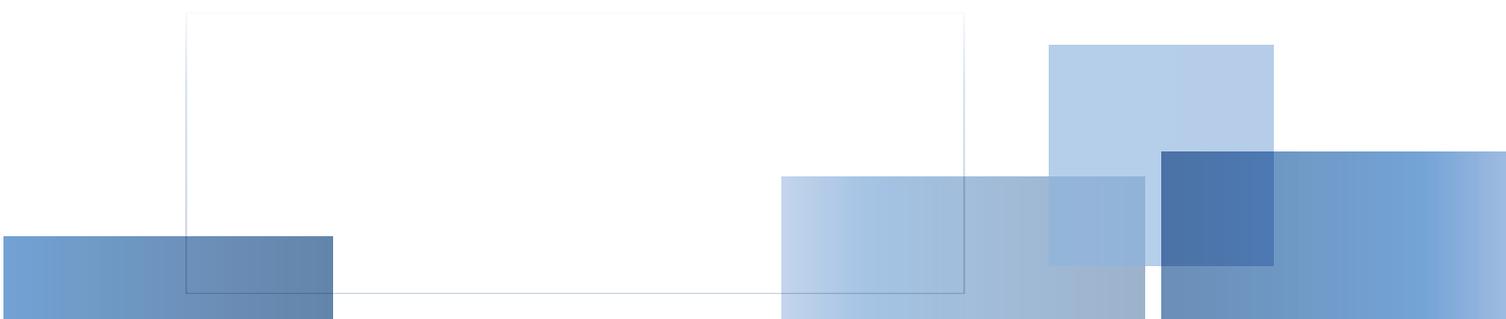
(Short Review of the Report)

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the new Covid-19 virus a pandemic. Apart from being a pandemic, the new Covid-19 was also declared an infodemic. This is the reason why the information as well as its influence gained a greater importance. Each new case of virus transmission is declared by media along with the relevant geographical locations, which forms a solid ground for fuelling xenophobic and racist attitudes, especially because the media does not have a strategy or experience of covering a pandemic and fighting against the related infodemic.

Life under the constant threat and fear of the disease, isolation, uncertain future, and economic crisis encourages people to adopt more conservative attitudes. Representatives of foreign cultures are viewed in an increasingly negative manner. For example, the behaviour accepted in and characteristic of other cultures that is today included in the measures for virus prevention (washing hands, wearing face masks, observing physical distance) was little heeded in the period before the virus. Nowadays, however, they are at the centre of attention out of fear that the infection will be transmitted unintentionally (or intentionally) by a stranger (Schaller).

The aim of this report was to identify the trends of various characteristics and contents of xenophobic and racist attitudes to ethnic, religious, or other minorities following the spread of the new coronavirus. Qualitative research method was employed to achieve this goal. In addition to this, data collected as part of the research was categorized based on qualitative and quantitative characteristics. Facebook pages of different media platforms were selected to demonstrate the diversity and give a bigger picture of the research data: TV Imedi, Mtavari Channel, First Channel and Alt-Info, as a conservative online media platform.

Throughout the research process, 700 comments of more than 450 posts on 4 Facebook pages were collected. According to the collected data, the following thematic categories were formed: religion, Marneuli, WHO, China, EU, media, tourism, 5G network technology. The listed categories are discussed in the context of the new coronavirus pandemic, and these categories were common for comments on all four media Facebook platforms subject to the research.



Media

- Media is associated with liberal ideology or with a group financed by foreign forces that have particular tasks to perform, in this case – disparage the role of the church;
- Lack of trust in journalists, who are blamed for the dissemination of fake news;
- Poor or inadequate Georgian language proficiency demonstrated by journalists; issues of fluency and accuracy in the Georgian language;
- Disappointment with and distrust in media that promotes ideology of liberalism;

Religion

- Pandemic as a trial and tribulation that Georgian Orthodox Christians are facing;
- Some churchgoers view the pandemic and virus as artificial, non-existing events that are manipulated and governed by masons or the Satan to test the faith of Orthodox Christians, particularly of Georgian ones;
- Some churchgoers perceived the pandemic as well as the discussions about temporary limitations on church services as a threat against their religion and a test of their belief;
- The pandemic does not exist and the temporary closing of churches is the price that Georgia has to pay for the assistance it receives from the United States;
- Various statements made by doctors, imposing restrictions and urges to respect and observe them caused negative attitude to infectious disease doctors (ID physicians);
- Temporary limitations imposed on church services and church goers were perceived as persecution of Christians;

The EU

- Strong outbreak of coronavirus in Italy and Spain, and the EU's response to this outbreak were used as strong arguments to support scepticism to Europe by Georgian supporters of extreme conservative attitudes;

Marneuli

- Comments about the Marneuli case concerned three aspects of the national identity: ethnic origin of the Marneuli population, religion and the problem of Georgian language proficiency/ the language issue;

China

- Demands to start investigation and punish China by boycotting their products dominated among the attitudes to the country due to the fact that the information about the pandemic was not disseminated in a timely manner;

World Health Organization

- Scepticism and distrust to the World Health Organization; viewing it as the disseminator of liberalism ideology (in the past), due to the decisions made by WHO – gender policy and removal of homosexuality from the list of illnesses;
- Explicit distrust to WHO due to its failure to declare a pandemic in a timely manner;
- Racist and xenophobic comments about the appearance and skin colour of the WHO leader;
- Coronavirus along with the related limitations and changes will increase the number of vaccine supporters. Some comment authors view the pandemic as a globally manipulated process to disseminate vaccines, microchips and 5G network technology.

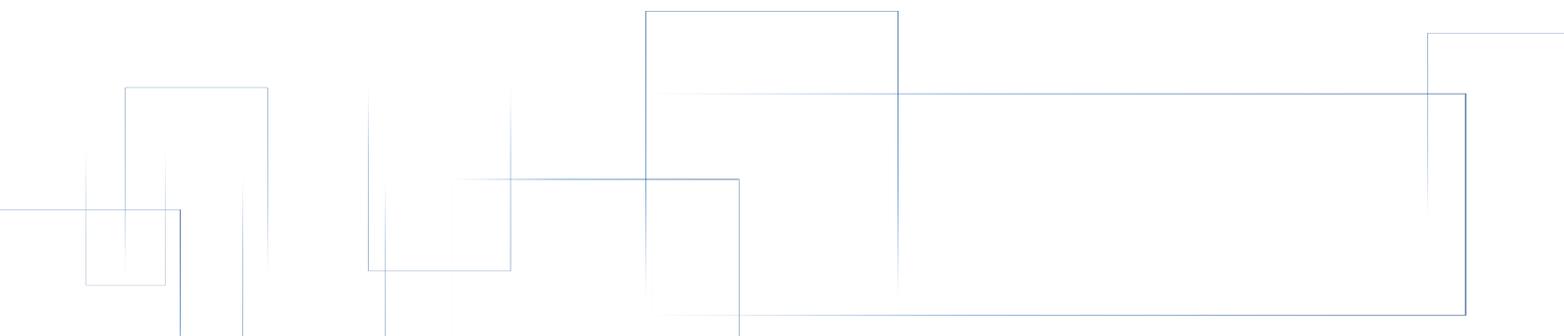
Tourism

Negative attitude to the government was caused by the announcement on the planned opening of borders for tourists as well as Tourism Revival Anti-Crisis Plan introduced by the government as early as during the state of emergency and further strengthened and encouraged distrust to ID physicians and scepticism to the actual existence of virus.

In social sciences, there is a view that disgust encourages conservative attitudes among people in order to avoid negative results, however, there is also a more contemporary view that disgust tends to be a characteristic of more protective political programs, whether liberal or conservative (Aarøe; Petersen; Arceneaux; 2017).

Data used in this report suggests that the conditions during the coronavirus pandemic, fear of virus dissemination or fear of being infected, economic crisis, physical distancing, constantly changing and negative information, and uncertain, unpredictable future directs people's beliefs and views or their social behaviour towards more conservative and protective patterns.

Virus-related information and data are rapidly changing and updating. Attitudes may as well change. The presented data and the relevant findings depict the period between 22 March 2020 to 22 May.



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