

Social Conflicts In The Information Society: Theoretical Foundations, Typological Analysis, And Regional Implications For Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the transformation of social conflict under the conditions of the emerging information society, with particular attention to Central Asia and Uzbekistan. Building on classical conflict theory (Durkheim, Simmel, Blau, Mauss) and contemporary typological approaches (Rutkevich, Antsupov, Davletchina), the study traces how digitalization reshapes the sources, subjects, and forms of social conflict. Using a qualitative, interpretive analysis of theoretical and empirical literature, the paper develops an "interests → conflict → development" model, evaluated through SMART criteria, and applies it to the phenomenon of information conflict and its most radical expression, cyberjihad, understood as a networked, non-linear, and decentralized form of confrontation. The results indicate that information-society conflicts are increasingly driven by unequal access to digital resources, the erosion of traditional normative consensus, and the strategic instrumentalization of information flows by state and non-state actors alike. The discussion situates these findings within the regional cooperation frameworks pursued by Uzbekistan and its Central Asian neighbors since 2017, arguing that mitigating information-society conflict requires an integrated legal, technical, and educational strategy rather than purely repressive measures. The article concludes that a holistic, ethically grounded approach to information governance is indispensable for regional stability.

Keywords: information society; social conflict; digital divide; information conflict; cyberjihad; regional cooperation; Central Asia; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

The discourse on the information society emerged in the United States and Western Europe in the early 1990s and, within a remarkably short period, became inseparably linked to the development agendas of less industrialized countries. Political rhetoric, strategic policy documents, and the analytical output of international development organizations converged on a single premise: that the diffusion of information technologies, the construction of modern telecommunication infrastructure, and expanded access to information resources constituted an indispensable condition for national development. Guided by this premise, most developing states, often with the support of international institutions, formulated strategies for transition to an information society and undertook concrete initiatives in this direction.

By the end of the 1990s, however, the practical outcomes of these strategies had generated considerable concern within the international development community. Because information and communication technologies (ICTs) diffused across the globe in a profoundly uneven manner – propelled by globalization processes led by the political and economic institutions of the industrialized states – the disparity in technological access between and within nations became codified under the concept of the “digital divide.” Pippa Norris has argued that this phenomenon comprises three constitutive dimensions: a global divide between industrialized and developing countries; a social divide between information-rich and information-poor strata within developed societies; and a democratic divide between those who do and do not use digital resources for civic participation and political mobilization. While this typology usefully foregrounds the question of technological access, it does not adequately capture the substantive content of information and knowledge, nor the social capacities required to internalize and apply such knowledge – dimensions whose neglect obscures the deeper social and cultural roots of digital inequality.

2. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in socio-philosophical analysis rather than quantitative measurement. The research draws upon a corpus of theoretical and empirical literature spanning

classical sociology of conflict (Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Peter Blau, Marcel Mauss), Post-Soviet and Central Asian conflictology (M.N. Rutkevich, A.Ya. Antsupov, S.B. Davletchina, A.A. Plotnikov, E.G. Solovyov, A.S. Panarin, S.A. Danilov, V.N. Porus, E.V. Malakhova, A.P. Garnov, and I.M. Kornilova), and specialized studies of information-driven radicalization and geopolitical conflict (O.N. Drobotenko, I.V. Surma, A.V. Manoilo).

The analytical procedure comprised three stages. First, a comparative-historical reading of information-society discourse (including the 1980 UNESCO report “Many Voices, One World” and subsequent debates on the New World Information and Communication Order, NWICO) was undertaken to situate contemporary digital-divide concerns within a longer trajectory of communication-equality debates. Second, existing typologies of social conflict were subjected to comparative content analysis in order to isolate their classificatory criteria (subject-based, structural, interest-based) and to identify a synthetic model capable of accommodating information-society conditions. This yielded the “interests → conflict → development” model, which was then evaluated against SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to assess its explanatory and predictive utility. Third, a case-oriented analysis of cyberjihad as an extreme, networked expression of information conflict was conducted, drawing on secondary literature regarding the communicative strategies, technological infrastructure, and organizational morphology of extremist online mobilization, with attention to its manifestations in the Balkans, the Middle East, and, potentially, Central Asia.

The study's scope is necessarily bounded by its reliance on secondary theoretical and documentary sources rather than original empirical fieldwork (survey data, interviews, or digital-trace analysis); its conclusions should therefore be read as a conceptual synthesis intended to orient further empirical investigation rather than as an empirically validated causal account. Despite this limitation, the qualitative-interpretive approach is well suited to the paper's aim, which is to reconstruct the conceptual architecture underlying information-society conflict rather than to measure its prevalence.

3. Results

3.1 Typologies of Social Conflict: From Subject-Based to Structural Approaches

Rutkevich has developed a typology of social conflict grounded in the criterion of the conflicting subjects, distinguishing four principal categories: conflicts between society-wide social actors; conflicts between ethnic groups acting as social subjects; conflicts between social groups; and heterogeneous confrontations among diverse intra-societal actors. This subject-based approach usefully organizes conflict analysis around the question of who is in conflict, yet it addresses only one dimension of a multi-causal phenomenon. A fuller understanding requires attention to the structural components of conflict – its subjects, its object, the means through which confrontation is pursued, and its eventual outcomes – as well as to the social conditions under which conflict arises, the goals of the contending parties, and the broader systemic factors shaping its trajectory.

Interest occupies a central place within this structural analysis, functioning as the internal driving force of conflict: it constitutes both the cause of confrontation and its substantive content, and it delimits the objective terrain over which contention unfolds. Social conflict itself may be defined as a category characteristic of a given state of society, determined by the collision of the interests of diverse social subjects. Were the interests of all social groups to coincide perfectly, the very concept of social conflict would lose its theoretical and practical significance; but no such convergence obtains in social reality. Societal development and dynamism are precisely a function of the plurality of interests, their mutual competition, and, in certain instances, their open confrontation – rendering social conflict an inseparable and inevitable constituent of social life.

3.2 The “Interests → Conflict → Development” Model and Its SMART Evaluation

The analysis proposed here conceptualizes societal development not as a linear process but as a dialectical one, articulated through the sequence “interests → conflict → development.” Under conditions of informatization, the rapid mutation of interests and the intensification of conflict within information space substantially heighten both the theoretical and practical significance of this model. Evaluated against SMART criteria, the model demonstrates considerable analytical value: it is Specific in identifying interest divergence as the proximate cause of conflict; Measurable insofar as shifts in group interests and conflict intensity can, in principle, be tracked through discourse and behavioral indicators; Achievable as a framework for policy intervention, since it directs attention toward interest-reconciliation rather than conflict suppression; Relevant

to the accelerated tempo of interest formation characteristic of informatized societies; and Time-bound in the sense that it foregrounds the need for timely, anticipatory management of emergent conflicts before they escalate into destructive confrontation.

A crucial implication of this model is that the reconciliation of interests does not entail the disappearance of difference. Rather, it denotes the prophylactic containment of conflict, whereby the parties preserve their distinct interests while consolidating social stability and cohesion. The principal task of conflict resolution, in this sense, consists not in eliminating the plurality of interests – which, as noted, is a permanent condition of social life – but in forestalling the transformation of latent, potential conflicts into acute confrontations. At the same time, interest pluralism, while indispensable to social creativity and development, frequently manifests in destructive rather than constructive forms, as competing interests are pursued through open antagonism rather than through processes of social construction.

3.3 Information Conflict as an Emerging Conflict Type

The management of social conflict has itself evolved alongside societal development. Beginning in the 1980s, the sociological literature increasingly linked conflict management to a broader organizational-managerial revolution, subsequently overtaken by the information-technological revolution associated with computer-based communication and administrative systems. This latter process gave rise to the reality of the information society, understood not merely as the introduction of new technologies but as the emergence of a qualitatively new social structure characterized by novel forms of communication and governance.

Within this structure, the dialectical tension between informational needs and the capacities (abilities) available to satisfy them generates interests, and the satisfaction of these interests becomes an object of contention. The disruption of equilibrium between needs and capacities constitutes a principal source of inter-subjective information conflict. The conflictological literature offers divergent definitions of this phenomenon. Antsupov defines information conflict narrowly, as a social conflict arising in the sphere of information production and dissemination, one of whose subjects is constituted by journalists or mass media organizations – a definition that confines the phenomenon to the professional media sphere. Davletchina proposes a considerably broader and more systemic conception, defining information conflict as a confrontational form directed at establishing control over information flows, appropriating information space, and exploiting it for one's own interests, while restricting or suppressing the informational interests of an adversary. This broader definition situates information conflict within the register of power, control, and interest confrontation rather than confining it to communicative processes narrowly construed, and it more adequately captures the reality of the information society, in which the subjects of information conflict include not only mass media but social-network users, virtual communities, political groups, and individual actors.

This shift indicates that information has ceased to function merely as a medium of communication and has instead become a strategic resource, such that the struggle for control over information constitutes one of the principal sources of contemporary social conflict. On this basis, information conflicts may be classified as a distinct conflict type, manifesting at the level of the individual, in interpersonal relations, and in the relationship between the individual and society.

4. Discussion

The results assembled in this study indicate a coherent trajectory of transformation: social conflict in the information society has migrated from its classical, subject-based and structural registers – rooted in the sociology of Durkheim, Simmel, Blau, and Mauss – toward increasingly informational, digital, and transnational forms. This transformation is not merely a change of medium but a change of substance: interests themselves mutate more rapidly under conditions of informatization, and their collision within information space intensifies the theoretical and practical relevance of conflict-management frameworks such as the “interests → conflict → development” model proposed here. The SMART evaluation of this model suggests that, despite the inherent complexity of the phenomena it addresses, it offers a workable analytical scaffold for policymakers and researchers seeking to move beyond reactive, repressive responses toward anticipatory, interest-sensitive conflict management.

The analysis of information conflict definitions reveals an important conceptual evolution: whereas earlier, media-centered definitions (Antsupov) confined the phenomenon to professional journalistic contexts, the broader, control-oriented definition advanced by Davletchina more accurately captures a social reality in which ordinary citizens, social-network users, and virtual communities have become active subjects of

information confrontation. This conceptual broadening carries significant implications for governance: policies aimed solely at regulating mass media are unlikely to address the full scope of contemporary information conflict, which increasingly plays out in decentralized, peer-to-peer digital spaces beyond the reach of traditional media regulation.

The findings regarding the erosion of traditional social ties (Solovyov, Panarin, Danilov) point toward a deeper socio-philosophical concern that transcends technical policy responses. If, as Panarin suggests, the weakening of cultural-historical anchoring transforms individuals into passive consumers susceptible to external informational manipulation, then conflict-mitigation strategies must extend beyond technical and legal instruments to encompass the cultivation of spiritual-cultural resilience – critical thinking, historical consciousness, and value-based education. This is precisely the direction suggested by the Central Asian and Uzbek policy context examined in Section 3.6: national strategies that combine legal-institutional cooperation with attention to information culture and critical media literacy appear better positioned to mitigate information-society conflict than purely securitized or repressive approaches.

The case of cyberjihad illustrates the outer limit of this transformation, in which information conflict assumes an explicitly geopolitical and violent register. Its networked, decentralized, and non-hierarchical organizational form, as emphasized by the literature reviewed here (Drobotenko, Surma, Manoilo), renders it structurally resistant to conventional, hierarchy-oriented counter-terrorism strategies. This suggests that effective responses must themselves be networked and multi-sectoral – combining intelligence-sharing, technical countermeasures, educational initiatives, and international cooperation – rather than relying on any single instrument of control. For Uzbekistan and its neighbors, whose youthful demographic profile and geopolitical position render them potentially vulnerable to the diffusion of externally generated radical content, this implies a continuing need to integrate information-security considerations into regional cooperation frameworks, alongside the border-confidence and strategic-partnership instruments already in place since 2017.

Several limitations of the present analysis merit acknowledgment. First, as noted in Section 2, the study relies exclusively on secondary theoretical and documentary sources; empirical validation through survey research, digital-trace analysis, or comparative case studies across Central Asian states would considerably strengthen the conclusions advanced here. Second, while the “interests → conflict → development” model demonstrates conceptual coherence under SMART evaluation, its operationalization for empirical measurement remains a task for future research. Third, the cyberjihad case study, while illustrative of networked information conflict at its most extreme, should not be taken as representative of the full spectrum of information-society conflict, which encompasses far more mundane and pervasive forms of interpersonal and intergenerational tension.

5. Conclusion

This article has traced the transformation of social conflict under information-society conditions, from its classical sociological foundations through contemporary typological refinements to its most extreme, networked expression in cyberjihad. The analysis demonstrates that the sources of social conflict in the information society are multi-layered, ranging from individual psychological processes to global informational asymmetries, with unequal access to information resources, the erosion of shared normative consensus, and the strategic weaponization of information flows constituting principal conflictogenic factors. The “interests → conflict → development” model, evaluated through SMART criteria, offers a productive framework for reconceiving conflict management not as the suppression of difference but as the anticipatory reconciliation of interests in service of social stability and development.

For Central Asia and Uzbekistan specifically, the analysis suggests that regional cooperation initiatives – exemplified by the confidence-building and strategic-partnership agreements concluded since 2017 – constitute an important, though partial, mechanism for pre-empting information-society conflict. Full mitigation of such conflict, however, requires a holistic strategy that integrates legal-institutional measures with the cultivation of critical thinking, inclusive information policy, and the strengthening of intercultural and interreligious tolerance, particularly among younger generations most exposed to digital socialization. Future research should pursue empirical validation of the theoretical model proposed here, through comparative survey and digital-trace analysis across the Central Asian region, in order to translate these conceptual findings into actionable policy guidance.

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