The Map and The Territory:

Russian Social Media Networks and Society

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Abstract

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This dissertation uses Russian social media as a lens for exploring the historically, culturally, socially and politically situated relationship between individuals and online communication technologies. I propose a framework for comparative international analysis that leverages three interconnected elements – history, network structure and media ecology. On the basis of these three elements, this dissertation examines Russia’s social media ecology and its relationship to Russia’s broader socio-political environment, articulating the various factors that have influenced the specific network structure and nature of social media in Russia, its role within the broader online and traditional media ecologies, and its implications for Russian society and politics in general.

In the first part, I outline the features of Russia’s distinct social media ecology, and examine the various historic and social factors that have shaped its evolution, highlighting the implications of the intertwined development of the Internet and social media in Russia. In the second section, I present the findings of my case study of the network structure of Russian social media, examining the culture of Russia’s online social networks and providing a detailed analysis of the network structure and patterns of attention in Russian social media between 2009-2010. In the final section, I consider these findings within the broader context of Russia’s media ecology, highlighting the distinction between “Internet Russia” and “TV Russia” and evaluating
the role of Russian social media networks in offline action, particularly the tumultuous events of 2012.

Russian social media networks are not a microcosm, reflection or “map” of Russian society. They are created and pursued by an as yet elite, but growing, segment of the population - active and engaged social media users for whom the relatively uncensored Internet serves not only as an independent source of information, but, more significantly, as an avenue for interpersonal connection and communication. Civil participation in Russia, I conclude, has its roots in these interpersonal social networks.

My historically, socially and culturally rooted exploration of Russian social media ecology recognizes it as an interpersonal space as well as a public sphere, highlighting the communication and coordination aspect of social media, as much as the informational one. This approach explains the immediate success, “like a fish to water,” of LiveJournal’s social network based blogging platform in Russia, and provides a foundation for understanding the unique structure and nature of Russian social media networks. Finally, it offers context and insight for a more nuanced understanding of the offline social and political ramifications of social media in Russia, as well as a matrix for cross cultural comparison.
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Dedicated to my parents,

СПАСИБО ЗА ВСЁ
INTRODUCTION:
MEANING IN CONTEXT

In the early 1990’s, I travelled to Russia to research an article on the state of Russian theater for a Stanford University student publication. I assumed that I would be speaking to theater directors and playwrights who were rejoicing in their newfound freedoms of expression. I found just the opposite. The directors and playwrights I interviewed all had the same message – Russian theater was in crisis. Producers and audiences were accustomed to tackling political issues obliquely, with indirectness, with messages hidden “in between the lines,” with humor and satire. Perestroika had changed all that – it allowed directors and playwrights the freedom to openly say whatever they wanted to say. And in this context, they suddenly found themselves tongue-tied. The limitless possibilities offered by freedom of expression, they discovered, were both overwhelming and paralyzing. During seventy years of authoritarian Soviet rule, Russian theater had developed a specific language for communicating social and political messages. When the context changed, the language no longer applied, and both producers and audiences were at a loss as to how to proceed. This new environment had effectively transformed the medium, and both producers and audiences needed to learn anew how to formulate and express ideas with radically altered tools.

This anecdote serves to illustrate the underlying thesis of my dissertation – that the implications of a medium, whether it be theater, or, in my case, the Internet and online social media, depend on the history, culture and socio-political context in which it is applied. I argue that the ramifications of technological change are determined not merely by what these technologies enable, but by how, and by whom, they are used. This involves a consideration of both the information and communication aspects of ICTs, of the influence of Internet
technologies not only on systems of information production and exchange, but on networks of interpersonal communication as well.

This dissertation uses Russian social media as a lens for exploring the complex relationship between individuals and online communication technologies. The dissertation is divided into three parts, examining Russian social media using the interconnected reference points of history, network structure and media ecology. In the first part, I outline the features of Russia’s distinct social media ecology, and examine the various historic and social factors that have shaped its evolution, highlighting the implications of the intertwined development of the Internet and social media in Russia. This analysis is supported by the second section, which presents the findings of my case study of the network structure of Russian social media, examining the culture of Russia’s online social networks and providing a detailed analysis of the network structure and patterns of attention in Russian social media between 2009-2010. Finally, I consider these findings within the broader context of Russia’s media ecology, highlighting the distinction between “Internet Russia” and “TV Russia” and evaluating the role of Russian social media networks in the tumultuous events of 2012. This approach addresses the specific nature and socio-political implications of social media in Russia, and also provides a comparative framework for other international studies. The development of a comparative framework speaks to the broader goal of my dissertation – to contribute to the internationalization of Communication and Media Studies, and, more specifically, the internationalization of our understanding of the evolving role of online social media not only in theory, but in practice. I argue that today, individuals leverage online media for private and public discourse in a way that is specific to each nation, as a consequence of that nation’s particular social, cultural and political history.
My approach is similar to the one advocated by Curran and Park, who, in their work *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, explore the relationship between media, power and society using case studies from Asia, Africa, North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and Russia. Curran and Park assert that, “media systems are shaped not merely by national regulatory regimes and national audience preferences, but by a complex ensemble of social relations that have taken shape in national contexts….It is precisely the historically grounded density of these relationships that tends to be excluded from simplified global accounts, in which theorists survey the universe while never straying far from the international airport.”¹ Similarly, in *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics*, editors Russel and Echchaibi dispute the tendency of new media scholars, “especially American ones,” to repeat “the mistake we made with old media…assessing social media around the world according to US based assumptions regarding form and function.”² Their work provides diverse examples of how “Internet users around the world are producing material for local and national audiences in ways that are distinct from the U.S. model.”³

In this dissertation, media ecology refers to the entire media environment of a particular nation or country – it includes traditional media such as print, radio and television, as well as online media. Online media refers to the online presence of any and all media, including the websites of traditional or mainstream media, web-native media outlets (those media sources

³ Specifically, their essays describe how:
• Political blogs in Australia, rather than mixing with mainstream media, remain almost entirely apart from more conventional forms of political coverage.
• In Israel, mainstream journalists in Israel largely ignore political blogging, prompting bloggers to make direct contact with politicians.
• In Morocco, political blogging has been effective because it leveraged an already established social movement
• In Singapore, political blogs have constructed new forms of civic participation, “disrupting and displacing the dominant discourses of the nation through personal narratives.”
• In Iraq, popular blogs are strengthening traditional forms of communication, such as oral storytelling
which originated online, and exist primarily online) and social media. Social media, including blogs as well as social networking sites, are defined by a focus on interactive online dialogue between individuals, organizations (including mass media) and communities, and, in particular, by the public availability of their user-generated content. The structure and nature of this online dialogue, and the various social media platforms on which it is maintained, constitute a social media ecology.

* * * * *

Over the last 100 years, theories of media and communication have explored the influence of information and communications technology on individuals and society. Scholars have primarily addressed two broad, overlapping themes – the influence of the typology of the medium (oral, print, electronic, digital) on psychology, culture and society, and, more specifically, the role of communications media in conveying information and shaping public opinion, behavior and politics.

The discussion of the influence of communication technology on culture and society includes a diverse group of theorists such as Ong, Innis, McLuhan, Meyerowitz, Postman, Carey, Castells and Benkler, who argue, from various perspectives, that the characteristics of a medium (oral, print, electronic and, most recently, digital) have a fundamental impact on individual psychology, and the shape of society and culture. This line of scholarship usually takes a “big picture” and “long view” historic perspective, exploring the full range of communication models available throughout history – including interpersonal (ie face to face), the one-to-many mass 

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media model, and the many-to-many “mass self communication” of social media.\textsuperscript{5} This approach incorporates not just a focus on the production and exchange of information, what Carey has dubbed the “transmission” aspect of communications technology, but also its “ritual” aspect, “the maintenance of society in time” through connection, coordination and “the representation of shared beliefs.”\textsuperscript{6}

The analysis surrounding the role of media in political communication is more narrow, concerned primarily with the information aspect of communications technology, and its fundamental relationship to public opinion, public discourse and the public sphere. This analysis has traditionally been tied to theories of democratic discourse, with communications technology seen as means for either aiding or impeding discussion and deliberation in electoral democracies, or potentially fostering this discourse (and promoting democracy) in more authoritarian regimes.

Scholarship on the influence of communications technology on public opinion has fluctuated between “Powerful Effects” and “Limited Effects” – between those who believe that media effects are, to good or ill, “powerful,” shaping mind sets and opinions, and those that believe these effects are “limited” by the power of audience and society to filter and otherwise influence media reception. For the majority of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, this analysis have been predicated on the traditional model of mass media, with three fundamental characteristics: (1) its is a “one to many” structure that polarizes broadcaster/producers and audience/receivers (2) it empowers the mass media with significant influence over framing public issues and setting the


agenda for public discourse and (3) access to this platform is restricted to elite gatekeepers with sufficient financial resources and/or state authority. In the Powerful Effects model, the holder of power has traditionally been the broadcaster/gatekeeper (either corporate or government), those elites with the resources of capital or authority to control the message sent to a relatively passive receiver/audience (either domestic or foreign), or at the very least, the ability to frame the issues and set the agenda – telling the audience what to think about, if not what to think.\footnote{Maxwell, McCombs. E. “A Look at Agenda Setting: Past, Present, and Future.” \textit{Journalism Studies} 6, no. 4 (2005): 543–557. Maxwell, McCombs. E, and Donald L. Shaw. “The Agenda Setting Function of Mass Media.” \textit{Public Opinion Quarterly} 36, no. 2 (1972). Maxwell, McCombs. E. “The Evolution of Agenda Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Market Place of Ideas.” \textit{Journal of Communication} 43, no. 2 (1993): 58–67.}


Powerful effects were first invoked by proponents of the early “Hypodermic Needle” theory, alarmed by the sway of propaganda over mass audiences. Post WWII, belief in the “powerful effects” of mass media on public opinion and culture underscored the Modernization Theory popular in the 1950’s and 1960’s, in which communications media were assumed to originate from the Capitalist West and were seen as an essential force in promoting democracy worldwide\footnote{Lerner, Daniel. The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East. Macmillan Pub Co, 1958. Schramm, Wilbur. \textit{Mass Media and National Development}. Stanford University Press, 1964. Schiller, Herbert I. \textit{Mass Communications and American Empire}. Beacon Press, 1971.}, and, conversely, in concerns of a Cultural Imperialism, similarly spread by a mass media rooted in capitalist ideology and Western power.\footnote{Echchaibi, Russel. \textit{International Blogging}. 2009} Echoes of Modernization Theory, also known as the “Theory of Exposure” which espouses the “"inherently democratizing/liberating potential of communication media”\footnote{Echchaibi, Russel. \textit{International Blogging}. 2009} can be seen in contemporary American foreign policy, in
what Clay Shirky refers to as the “Instrumental Approach,” which focuses on access to information and concerns with censorship. This focus on the information aspect of communication technology is one which Internet scholars have problematized, and which I also address in my dissertation.

In contrast to the “Powerful Effects” model, the uninhibited power of mass media to directly influence public opinion has been questioned since Katz and Lazarsfeld’s seminal 1955 work on the mitigating effect of social ties and personal influence. More recently, scholars have responded to the concept of “powerful effects” by reaffirming the role of the audience in the production of meaning – in theories highlighting audience reception, selective exposure and user gratification. Similarly, the globalization theorists of the 1990’s countered the “powerful effects” Cultural Imperialism model, and the concurrent fears of cultural homogenization, with numerous examples of cultural hybridity, countercurrents, and the resurfacing of localism. So, for example, Arjun Appadurai writes of the “growing evidence that consumption of mass media throughout the world often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity and, and, in general, agency,” and Jan Pieterse agrees, stating that “local meanings are…often made within and against the

17 Appadurai,1996.
symbolic resources provided by global media networks.”

Marwan Kraidy argues entirely against a polarization between global and local, which “assumes that they are separate realm connected by the mass media. This alleged distinction glosses over years of osmosis between different national and cultural entities.” The boundaries between the local and the global have been further blurred with the development of online communications networks that span the globe, and discussion of audience agency, and, in particular, selective exposure, have gained prominence due to the enhanced power of online audiences to manage and personalize information.

Since the 1990’s, scholars have addressed the problem of integrating the new medium of the Internet into theories of Media and Communications. Most agree that the Internet has disrupted an established system of information production and exchange, fracturing the traditional mass media dichotomy of broadcasters vs. receivers, producers vs. audience, and enabling new modes of coordination and organization for social movements. Contemporary individuals initiate, participate in and coordinate conversations on a variety of online media, including blogs as well as social networking sites, blurring the traditional boundary between the producer and consumer of information. The conversation is no longer one directional, top down, from mainstream media to the masses. The user generated content and interactive features of online communications are generally understood to have empowered the “audience” to participate in content creation and dissemination, reducing the power of information gatekeepers, and building networks of communication and coordination that span the globe. However, in an echo of earlier tensions between proponents of Powerful vs Limited Effects,

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contemporary scholars continue to disagree on the degree, extent and implications of these changes, on the specific manner and nature of the influence of online communication technologies on public opinion and behavior, culture, society and politics.

Taking a “big picture” view, Manuel Castells and Yochai Benkler argue that Internet based technologies undergird a profound social transformation, an evolution from an industrial model to one based on online communications networks, which Castells calls “Network Society” and Benkler refers to as the “Networked Information Economy.”22 While Castell’s approach is truly multinational, with examples of how the “network society” manifests in various local contexts around the world, Benkler’s discussion, and, in particular, his analysis of the “networked public sphere” is primarily applicable to liberal democracies. In terms of their influence on political communication, both of these theories underlie Clay Shirky’s “environmental view” of Internet freedom, which highlights the long-term effects of communication technology on public opinion, civil society and the public sphere, both domestically and internationally.23 On the other side of the debate, scholars such as Morozov, Gladwell and Hindman are cautious about the transformative potential of online communications technologies, arguing that the potential benefits of these technologies are not innate, and that online media may serve to only promote shallow connections and even reinforce established or elite power.24 The ongoing debate over the effects of new media on political communication is aptly summarized by Williams and Delli Carpini, who, in an article on new media and American politics, write: “optimistically we believe that the erosion of gatekeeping and the emergence of

23 Shirky, 2011
multiple axes of information provide new opportunities for citizens to challenge elite control of political issues. Pessimistically we are skeptical of the ability of ordinary citizens to make use of these opportunities and suspicious of the degree to which even multiple axes of power are still shaped by more fundamental structures of economic and political power.”

New Society – Not Industrial But Network

In various works, Manuel Castells argues that digital communication networks have engendered the “diffusion of networking in all realms of activity” – effecting not only media ecology, but also economics, work and employment, culture, politics and state institutions. The result is a “network society,” whose “technical and organizational infrastructure” is built on information and communication technology. The network society, Castells explains, has become “the dominant medium for social organization,” creating a “new technological paradigm” in which “social structure is determined by networks powered by microelectronics and software based information and communication technologies.” Yochai Benkler agrees that, “we are going through a moment of social-economic transformation…rooted in a technological shock to our basic modes of information, knowledge, and cultural production,” as digital computer-communications networks are reconfiguring “the basic model of information

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production and exchange in modern complex societies." In "The Wealth of Networks, How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom," Benkler examines how "social production" or "commons based peer production," built on the backbone of the Internet and digital communication networks, has influenced economics, media, politics and culture. In particular, he describes the emergence of a "Networked Information Economy" based on user-generated content, which represents "a radically decentralized, distributed mode of interaction" that highlights the role of individuals as active producers rather than passive receivers. In terms of media ecology, Benkler argues that the Network Information Economy produces a "new media environment" that alters the shape of the public sphere, with implications for the criteria surrounding democratic discourse in general. Castells agrees that while the communication system of the industrial society was mass media, today we are witnessing the emergence of "a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive."  

Both Benkler and Castells argue that the "network society" or "Networked Information Economy" provide an all-encompassing social model that is fundamentally different from the preceding industrial model. "Just as industrial society is based on electricity and the electrical engine," writes Castells, "so network society is enabled by the emergence of specific technology of online networks." Similarly, Benkler asserts that "the rise of commons-based information production, of individuals and loose associations producing information in nonproprietary forms,

presents a genuine discontinuity from the industrial information economy of the twentieth century.”

Castells understands network society and the contemporary concept of “globalization” to be synonymous, as both are based on profound worldwide changes enabled by global networks, especially global communication networks that transcend boundaries. Castells recognizes “the commonality of this nucleus across cultures,” but also underscores “the cultural and institutional differences of the network society in various contexts.” Castells’ emphasis on context echoes my own, and my analysis of the evolution, structure and role of social media in Russia affirms his contention that, because it “diffuses at different pace in different societies, and…interacts in various forms with pre-existing social structures…the network society manifests itself in many different forms, according to the culture, institutions, and historical trajectory of each society.”

Mass Mediated vs Networked Public Sphere

Castells’ “new communication realm” and Benkler’s “Network Information Economy” and “Networked Public Sphere” are conceptually positioned against the dominant communications and information model of the 20th century - the pre-Internet mass media model, and its “market based, mass mediated public sphere.” Both Benkler and Castells contend that online communications networks have fundamentally changed the systems of information production and exchange, mitigating the influence and power of mass media, with profound consequences for public opinion, public discourse and the public sphere.

Benkler argues that the “Networked Information Economy” represents a “technical-

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organizational shift from an information environment dominated by commercial mass media... to an information environment that both technically and as a matter of social practice enables user-centric, group-based active cooperation platforms.” He explains that “the fundamental... difference between the networked information economy and the mass media is a change in the network architecture - a shift from one-to-many to many-to-many, and a shift in the cost of becoming a speaker - a reduction/elimination of barriers of access/gatekeepers.” In Wealth of Networks, Benkler describes in detail how this change in the information environment transforms the public sphere from a mass mediated one to a “networked public sphere.”

Similarly, Castells argues that new communication technologies, and their “extension...to all domains of social life,” have caused a “historical shift of the public sphere from the institutional realm to the new communication space.” This “new communication space,” explains Castells, is based on “the development of interactive, horizontal networks of communication, including the rise of a new form of communication, mass self-communication, over the Internet and wireless communication networks...It is mass communication,” Castells explains, “because it reaches potentially a global audience through the p2p networks and Internet connection. It is multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software...allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many.”

Benkler is explicit that his arguments on the benefits of the Network Information Economy, and the networked public sphere, are not based on a comparison with some idealized “everyone is a pamphleteer” version of public discourse, but on the broadcast media reality.

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38 Castells, 2007
“There never has been a complex, large modern democracy in which everyone could speak and be heard by everyone else. The correct baseline is the one-way structure of the commercial mass media...We need to consider the attractiveness of the networked public sphere...from the perspective of how it compares to the actual media that have dominated the public sphere in all modern democracies.” Towards that end, Benkler’s analysis focuses primarily on the role of media in modern democracies, providing a detailed explanation of the way that online technologies constrain the power of mass media, and mass media elites, in shaping public opinion and public discourse. Benkler judges the benefits of the Network Information Economy and the networked public sphere on the basis of its treatment of public opinion in a democratic environment – the degree to which the public can be “heard” through access to a medium that offers wide intake of opinions, the filtering, accreditation and synthesis of these opinions, with key issues rising to the top, and the freedom of these processes from government and market control. On the basis of a varied and detailed analysis, he concludes that, “from the perspective of democratic discourse and a participatory republic, the networked information economy offers a genuine reorganization of the public sphere...The networked information economy ... has a capacity to take in, filter, and synthesize observations and opinions from a population that is orders of magnitude larger than the population that was capable of being captured by the mass media.” When compared to the market based mass mediated public sphere, Benkler argues, the networked public sphere is an improvement, providing “broader intake, participatory filtering, and relatively incorruptible platforms for creating public salience.”

In *Wealth of Networks*, Benkler explores how a network-based system provides “a platform for the public sphere that is structured in a fundamentally different way than the mass-

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media model.” In support of this argument, Benkler provides empirical examples from network typology literature and recent events that describe how networks in general, and online communication networks in the United States in particular, are able to filter, accredit and synthesize information, allowing the most salient and relevant ideas to rise to prominence. “An ordered system of intake, filtering, and synthesis, “ he argues, “can in theory emerge in networks generally, and empirically has been shown to have emerged on the Web.” Online communication, Benkler explains, goes far beyond information production, consumption and exchange. Online links and comments involve an unprecedented level of autonomy, enabling users to “be their own source of deciding whom to trust and whose words to question… exercising [their] own judgment about who shares one’s interests and whose judgment seems to be sound” as well as “observing the judgments of others as to what is interesting and valuable.” Through the selective process of linking, “online interest & affinity groups filter the observations and opinions of an enormous range of people, and transmit those that pass local peer review to broader groups and ultimately to the polity more broadly.” As a result, the “enormous capture basin” of online content is “filtered, synthesized, and made part of a polity-wide discourse;” in a manner that is entirely different from the mass media model. “It is precisely the varied modes of participation in small-, medium-, and large-scale conversations, with varied but sustained degrees of efficacy,” writes Benkler, “that make the public sphere of the networked environment different, and more attractive, than was the mass-media-based public sphere.”40

Benkler’s work demonstrates that patterns of linking, peer production, collaborative filtering and accreditation have a specific order, producing “a reasonably navigable and coherent information environment” that belies fears of fragmentation, information overload or chaos

created by online communications. Contrary to such fears and critiques, Benkler writes, “observed use of the network exhibits an order that… is not too concentrated and not too chaotic, but rather, if not “just right,” at least structures a networked public sphere more attractive than the mass-media-dominated public sphere.…The networked public sphere allows hundreds of millions of people to publish whatever and whenever they please without disintegrating into an unusable cacophony…and it filters and focuses attention without re-creating the highly concentrated model of the mass media.” Furthermore, Benkler argues that the technical infrastructure of “distributed network communications…with few identifiable and reliable points of control and manipulation,” ensures that “the networked public sphere is less susceptible to the exertion of control by regulators, owners or those who pay them…While money may be useful in achieving visibility, “ he explains, “the structure of the Web means that money is neither necessary nor sufficient to grab attention—because the networked information economy, unlike its industrial predecessor, does not offer simple points of dissemination and control for purchasing assured attention.” Hence, the networked public sphere provides an effective “non market alternative” that can “attenuate the influence over the public sphere that can be achieved through control over, or purchase of control over, the mass media.” In these ways, Benkler argues, the networked information economy is “solving the information overload and discourse fragmentation concerns without reintroducing the distortions of the mass-media model.”

The networked information economy, then, affects “the relative power of the media” by accessing a wider set of information and opinions, and providing an ordered, structured system for distilling this information and selecting voices and concepts for prominence. In short, Benker argues that the networked information economy “affects the structure of intake of observations

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41 Benkler, 2007.
and views. It affects the presentation of issues and observations for discourse. It affects the way issues are filtered, for whom and by whom. Finally, it affects the ways in which positions are crystallized and synthesized.” As a result, he concludes, the emerging networked public sphere “is more responsive to intensely held concerns of a much wider swath of the population than the mass media” creating a communications process that is “fundamentally different from the small number of commercial professional editors of the mass media” as well as “more resistant to corruption by money.” In other words, the networked public sphere is more responsive to public opinion and resistant to issues of money and power.

Benkler’s main thesis is that the democratizing potential of Internet lies in its ability to empower individuals, transforming them from passive readers, listeners or viewers to active participants in the public sphere. “The network allows citizens to change their relationship to the public sphere, “ he writes. “They no longer need be consumers and passive spectators. They can become creators, primary subjects [and participants in conversation].” Ultimately, “the Internet restructures public discourse in ways that give individuals a greater say in their governance than the mass media made possible. The Internet provides avenues of discourse around the bottlenecks of older media, whether these are held by authoritarian governments or by media owners.” Benkler’s underlying perspective is that the networked information economy provides “an opportunity to change the way we create and exchange information, knowledge, and culture.” He confirms his status as a cyber-utopian in his hope that these changes ”can make the twenty first century one that offers individuals greater autonomy, political communities greater democracy, and societies greater opportunities for cultural self-reflection and human connection. We can remove some of the transactional barriers to material opportunity, and improve the state

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of human development everywhere."^{43}

**Environmental vs Instrumental View**

In a series of articles in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, Clay Shirky also explores the impact of online media on public discourse, public opinion, the public sphere and civil society.\(^4^4\) Shirky argues that online communication media enhance the public sphere by altering the dynamics of participation, conversation and coordination, and cautions that this influence is long-range, rather than immediate. Shirky’s goal is to shift the discussion from a short-term focus on the influence of social media on social movements, where, he concedes, the “use of social media tools…does not have a single preordained outcome," to a more long-term perspective. Rather than focus on “dueling anecdotes” between successful and unsuccessful cases of Internet enabled social action, Shirky advocates a “long range” or “environmental” take on Internet freedom. Rather than attempting to predict short-term revolutionary effects, Shirky contends, “the more promising way to think about social media is as long term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere.” The public sphere is a “slowly developing” entity, Shirky warns, and changes wrought by these benefits may emerge over years and decades, rather than weeks or months.\(^4^5\)

For Shirky, communication media are not simply sites of information production and consumption, but also tools of coordination. Shirky observes that historically, all forms of communication technology – not just the Internet, but also the printing press, telegraph,

\(^{43}\) Benkler, 2007.


telephone and postal service – served to not only spread information, but also “foster participation,” by enabling individuals “to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views.” Echoing Benkler, Shirky posits three key ways in which online media support and enhance the public sphere, both domestically and internationally – “increased access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action.” In other words, online media have empowered individuals in terms of the production, receipt and exchange of information – as audience/receiver, as broadcaster/producer, and as interpersonal coordinator. “Digital networks have acted as a massive positive supply shock to the cost and spread of information, to the ease and range of public speech by citizens, and to the speed and scale of group coordination,” he writes.46

All three of these elements are important, but Shirky places particular emphasis on discourse, both public and private, arguing that public opinion, and hence the public sphere, are shaped by both media and conversation. This is particularly significant, Shirky notes, because “political speech and apolitical speech are not mutually exclusive,” and participants can interweave both types of discussions into online conversations. Shirky cites Katz & Lazarsfield’s infamous research into the “two step” flow of communication, and the influence of interpersonal communication and opinion leaders on public opinion. According to Shirky, the Internet, and, in particular, social media, play a key role in this second “interpersonal” step. Social media, Shirky asserts, foster the “dissemination and adoption of ideas and opinions in the public sphere.” Online discourse also promotes “the ability of each member of a group to not only understand the situation at hand but also understand that everyone else does,” a “shared awareness” that, according to Shirky, is necessary for network based collaboration. Social media

46 Gladwell and Shirky, 2011.
constrain elite power, Shirky contends, especially in authoritarian regimes, not only because they expand access to information, but also because they advance communication and coordination.47

Shirky positions his “Environmental” approach, which highlights the conversation and coordination aspect of communications media, against what he calls the “Instrumental view,” which concentrates on access to information and its converse, censorship. “The Instrumental view,” he writes, “is politically appealing, action-oriented, and almost certainly wrong. It overestimates the value of broadcast media while underestimating the value of media that allow citizens to communicate privately among themselves. It overestimates the value of access to information, particularly information hosted in the West, while underestimating the value of tools for local coordination. And it overestimates the importance of computers while underestimating the importance of simpler tools, such as cell phones.” In terms of international diplomacy and foreign policy, Shirky argues, a policy of “Internet freedom,” should “de-emphasize anti-censorship tools, particularly those aimed at specific regimes, and increase… support for local public speech and assembly more generally.” A “patient and global application of principles,” Shirky believes, will not only create less backlash, but will be more successful in the long term. “It makes more sense to invest in social media as general, rather than specifically political, tools to promote self-governance,” he writes.48

From my perspective, the “environmental” and “instrumental” approach need not be polarized. Coordination and interpersonal communication are certainly strengths of social media, but they are not necessarily separate from information. In the same way that personal and political conversations are intertwined, the benefits of social media involve both interpersonal connection and information exchange, and I feel that Shirky goes too far in asserting that,

47 Gladwell and Shirky, 2011.
48 Gladwell and Shirky, 2011
“access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation.”⁴⁹ The tendency to highlight the information aspect of communication media, at the expense of the coordination and participation aspect, is characteristic of a focus on the interaction of Internet technologies and democratic discourse. As my dissertation will demonstrate, this focus is based on a narrow conception of “the public sphere” that does not fully capture the changes wrought by online communication, especially from an international perspective.

**Cyber-Utopians vs Cyber-Realists**

Whereas Castells, Benkler and Shirky are “big picture” thinkers, embracing the positive potential of digital technologies for social structures and systems, Morozov, Hindman and Gladwell focus on specific contexts – foreign affairs, American politics, and social movements, respectively - and warn against assigning too much power for positive change and transformation to the Internet and online communications.⁵⁰

*In The Myth of Digital Democracy* political scientist Matthew Hindman focuses on American politics, questioning the extent to which online media truly expand and mobilize the public sphere. Rather than make sweeping generalizations, Hindman applies meticulous quantitative research methods, and, in terms of the influence of online communications on American electoral politics, his results are sobering. Hindman’s empirical analysis examines link structure and online search patterns to reveal who actually gets read and heard in online political discussions. He finds that, despite the reconfigured media environment, readership of political blogs is minute in comparison to mainstream media, and audience attention remains concentrated on a few top sources. He does not, however, explore how the content of

⁴⁹ Shirky, 2011
mainstream media is affected by topics raised and discussed online. Hindman concludes that the main influence of the Internet on political participation in the US is not in terms of a more – or even differently – informed public, but at the group level and “behind the scenes” – affecting the way that political groups organize, mobilize and raise funds. Despite these changes, he finds, online organizing and fundraising remain dominated by a few powerful interest groups.\(^{51}\)

Whereas Hindman’s analysis concentrates exclusively on the US, Evgeny Morozov examines the influence of online communications in a global context, on international affairs and diplomacy. In *Net Delusion*, Morozov argues effectively against the cyber-utopian idea that the Internet and social media contain inherently liberating characteristics. Morozov contends that the structure and features of the Internet and online communications networks do not contain innate benefits, but are rather value neutral tools, which can be leveraged for negative purposes as much as for positive ones. Like Hindman, Morozov does not believe the Internet and social media are reducing or affecting the power of vested interests and elites. Rather, he writes, “the dangerous fascination with solving previously intractable social problems with the help of technology, allows vested interests to disguise what essentially amounts to advertising for their commercial products in the language of freedom and liberation.” Morozov observes that the same aspects of the Internet that can promote freedom and democracy on the international stage can also be used to restrict, control and monitor. In authoritarian regimes, for instance, the Internet enables the “customization of censorship,” the ability to use keyword based filtering to identify, gather information on and even suppress specific websites or Internet users. Even in liberal democracies, he argues, the potential dangers of Internet technology are recognized, although they are ensconced in a hypocritical double standard, a “digital Orientalism” which

\(^{51}\) Hindman, 2008.
celebrates the Internet’s liberating power overseas, in repressive regimes, while domestically raising issues of infringement and harm. In support of his perspective on the value neutral, and even dangerous uses of the Internet, Morozov cites cases of Turkish villagers using the Internet to find multiple wives (despite restrictions on polygamy) or Mexican crime gangs using social networking sites to gather information about their victims or Russian neo-fascists employing the Internet to fix the positions of minorities in order to organize pogroms. Morozov echoes my affirmation of context and calls for a recognition of the “social, cultural and political subtleties and indeterminacies” of each specific situation, rather than, succumbing to “the pressure to forget the context and start with what the Internet allows.”\textsuperscript{52} In other words, Morozov, like I do, advocates for an approach to the implications of online communication technology which measures them based on more than affordances alone, isolated from specific context and circumstance.

A weaker argument is Morozov’s contention that the entertainment aspect of the Internet is utilized as much, if not more, than the political one, breeding civic lethargy and distracting from actual activism and engagement. “The Internet has provided so many cheap and easily available entertainment fixes to those living under authoritarianism that is has become considerably harder to get people to care about politics at all,” Morozov writes, in an echo of Niel Postman’s case against television.\textsuperscript{53} Shirky actively refutes this point, noting that the fact that various other media – including print, theater and especially television – are more likely to be used for entertainment than politics, does not dilute their political influence. “Far more people in the 1500s were reading erotic novels than Martin Luther's "Ninety-five Theses," Shirky writes,

\textsuperscript{52} Morozov, 2012.
“and far more people before the American Revolution were reading Poor Richard's Almanack than the work of the Committees of Correspondence. But those political works still had an enormous political effect.” Even more significant is Shirky’s observation that entertainment and politics are not mutually exclusive, and are often intertwined. As noted earlier, it is the “shared awareness” fostered by online conversations, be they overtly political or not, that is part of the power of social media.

**Online Media and Social Movements**

Malcom Gladwell focuses his analysis on the influence of social media on social movements and social action, arguing that claims touting the potential of social media in this regard are overblown. At the heart of Gladwell’s perspective is a distinction between two types of activism – high risk, potentially high change movements, and low risk and relatively superficial activism, between, as he puts it, “the weak-tie connections that give us access to information.[and]... the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger.” Gladwell contrast the Civil Rights movements of the 1960’s, which were built on an orderly, hierarchical structure and required high risk and “strong tie” involvement, with the “slacktivism” enabled by the broad, yet low risk and “weak tie” connections online. “The evangelists of social media don’t understand this distinction,” he argues, “they seem to believe that a Facebook friend is the same as a real friend and that signing up for a donor registry in Silicon Valley today is activism in the same sense as sitting at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro in 1960.”

Gladwell affirms the benefits of social media - the network characteristics that enable it

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54 Shirky, 2011.
to be “enormously resilient and adaptable in low-risk situations,” and promote “the diffusion of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, seamlessly matching up buyers and sellers, and the logistical functions of the dating world.” However, Gladwell contends that these benefits are built on “weak ties” that, while they may be effective in increasing participation, they do so by “lessening the level of motivation that participation requires.” Activism via social networks, Gladwell argues, “succeeds not by motivating people to make a real sacrifice but by motivating them to do the things that people do when they are not motivated enough to make a real sacrifice.”

Gladwell’s perspective is in direct opposition to Benkler’s, who argues that the contributions of online networks lie precisely in their ability to motivate and mobilize users, promoting them from audience to actors. “The power of the network”, writes Benkler, “has to do with mobilizing the judgments, links, and cooperation of large bodies of small-scale contributors.” The key distinction lies in what kind of action is deemed significant. Gladwell focuses on actions that require “real sacrifice,” arguing that participation via networks is superficial. Benkler, on the other hand, believes that participation in meaningful online discourse will stimulate offline action, arguing that social networks “engage users to the point that they become effective participants in a conversation and an effort; one that they have a genuine stake in and that is linked to a larger, society-wide debate.”

In a direct response to Gladwell’s critiques, Shirky contends that certain contemporary social movements would indeed not have been possible without social media, that online tools provide activists with critical new strategies that “change the rules” for social movements and social action. In particular, Shirky highlights the coordination features of online social media, which, he argues, empower groups to “synchronize…behavior… quickly, cheaply, and publicly.

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57 Gladwell, 2010.
in ways that were unavailable as recently as a decade ago. Shirky avoids Gladwell’s distinction between “high risk” socially transformational activism (which is a high standard to set for any social movement, not just those organized online) and “low risk” relatively superficial “slacktivism.” In my opinion, the flaw in Gladwell’s perspective is that it appears to consider social movements in isolation – as fragile organizations built on shallow “weak tie” connections, removed from any offline grounding. Shirky provides on a more helpful matrix - a group or movement’s level of “commitment.” Online social media, Shirky explains “do not allow otherwise uncommitted groups to take effective political action,” rather, “they…allow committed groups to play by new rules.”

Gladwell also asserts that the egalitarian, horizontal network structure of social networks lack the “centralized leadership structure and clear lines of authority” necessary for successful movements to challenge entrenched systems. According to Gladwell, the characteristics of social media that enable adaptability and resilience also make it difficult to reach consensus and set goals, to the detriment of planning and strategic organization. “The drawbacks of networks scarcely matter if the network isn’t interested in systemic change—if it just wants to frighten or humiliate or make a splash—or if it doesn’t need to think strategically. But if you’re taking on a powerful and organized establishment you have to be a hierarchy….The things that King needed in Birmingham—discipline and strategy—were things that online social media cannot provide,” writes Gladwell. Building on his distinction between high risk, high reward movements and low risk “slacktivism,” Gladwell insists that, while the weak tie networks of social media are “well suited to making the existing social order more efficient,” they lack the strong tie hierarchies necessary to “confront socially entrenched norms and practices” and bring about real change.

59 Gladwell and Shirky, 2011
Social media activism, he claims, “shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity and toward those which promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact….We are a long way from the lunch counters of Greensboro,” he concludes. Contrary to Gladwell’s assertion that hierarchy is a prerequisite for successful social movements and social change, Shriky argues that the organizational and coordinating capacities of social media overcome the requirements of “formal organization and management,” enabling “loosely coordinated publics to demand change…Larger, looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns, that were previously reserved for formal organizations.” At the same time, Shirky agrees that social actions, whether enabled by online media or not, are most effective when they “are the end of a long process, rather than a replacement for it.”

The Russian Wildfires “Help Map” provides a helpful illustration of the implications of these distinctions. The Help Map was generated in a matter of days in the summer of 2010 by a disparate group of extremely committed Russian volunteers, based in Russia and in the US, to promote efforts combating a spate of dangerous wildfires outside of Moscow. The online “Help Map,” built on the open source Ushahidi platform, contained live updates of wildfire locations, and helped coordinate volunteer efforts and humanitarian aid. This is not “high risk” revolutionary action. Nevertheless, it is a significant instance of grassroots activity that would not have been remotely possible before the advent of Internet technologies, a case where citizens who previously could only complain about government ineptitude were able to quickly and effectively mobilize online to take instrumental action with powerful offline results. As I will

60 Gladwell, 2010.
61 Gladwell and Shirky, 2011.
argue further in my dissertation, this example affirms Shirky’s “environmental” approach, because the cumulative long-term effects of actions such as these are to bolster an incipient (and some would argue revolutionary or transformational) sense of civic potential among Russians.

**Conclusion**

The debate over the influence of Internet technologies on society, and, in particular on interpersonal and political communication, is, in essence, a debate over the extent to which these technologies empower individuals to participate and engage in social and political discourse and action. Scholars such as Castells and Benkler advocate for “powerful effects,” arguing that changes in the realm of media and communication have permeated every aspect of daily life, with profound implications for social structure and organization. Shirky and Benkler highlight transformations to the “public sphere,” especially in liberal democracies, promoting a long-range perspective, and an emphasis on conversation and coordination in addition to, or even above, information production and consumption. Other scholars, such as Morozov, Hindman and Gladwell, minimize the social and political influence of Internet technologies, arguing that these effects are at best superficial, and that elite and vested interests leverage the Internet to maintain and reinforce power.

My analysis of this debate highlights three primary, interconnected, insights. The first emphasizes the significance of social, cultural and political context to any investigation of Internet implications and effects. I argue that the form and function of online social networks - their structure, nature, uses and implications - are not universal, but are a consequence of a country’s individual social, cultural and political history. Unfortunately, this relatively obvious consideration is often overshadowed by a tendency to assume universal affordances of
technology, usually based on Western or US assumptions regarding form and function. This leads us to the second key point, the importance of considering human behavior, “the way that people use tools,” in addition to the attributes of the technology itself. In the case of online social networks, this highlights the third key point, recognizing the importance of interpersonal conversation and coordination, above and beyond the production and consumption of information.

More specifically, understanding the effects of Internet technology on democratic discourse and political engagement requires refiguring theories the “public sphere,” to accommodate the affordances and attributes of online communication networks. Both Benkler and Shirky, for instance, argue that networked communication technologies call for a reformulation of the requirements of democratic discourse from an emphasis on information and an informed citizenry, to a view that highlights engagement and participation. Benkler, in particular, contends that a focus on information, in terms of a well-educated public and informed citizenry, does not capture the distinguishing characteristics and key contributions of a networked public sphere. “In the networked public sphere,” Benkler contends, “receiving information or getting out a finished message are only parts, and not necessarily the most important parts, of democratic discourse.”

Assessing theories of the “public sphere,” however, involves examining not only the characteristics of online technology, but also considering how individuals use online tools. It includes, for instance, a consideration of how online communication has influenced the process and significance of deliberation in the Internet era - how the Internet affects political discussion,

63 Benkler, 2007
as well as about how political discussion can affect public opinion. It also involves considering how the Internet has affected the process and power of agenda setting, which influences what audiences “think about,” as well as how the Internet effects the concept of selective exposure, which involves how individuals’ attitudes shape their exposure to and reception of political information. A deeper consideration of all these elements avoids the pitfalls of deterministic and cyber-utopian tendencies by incorporating theories of individual and group behavior, in addition to the affordances of the tools themselves. This approach echoes Morozov’s admonition that Internet scholars should not succumb to the pressure to “forget the context and start with what the Internet allows.” As the authors of *New ICTs and the Study of Political Communication* explain, “in assessing the relationship between the capabilities afforded by new technologies and the political communication processes that utilize them - the role that these capabilities play and the conditions under which these transformations occur - scholars must strive to avoid making deterministic assumptions through remembering that consequences are defined by how technologies are used and by whom, not by what they enable.”

The authors of *Political Change in the Digital Age* also approach online communications as tools leveraged by individuals and social actors for a variety of purposes. This approach is similarly less concerned with information (in terms of access to and the spread of) and more focused on the broader context of the people using these tools, and their (both the individual’s and the tool’s) ability to facilitate online organization. “The Internet has an important role in increasing information sharing, access to alternative platforms, and allowing new voices to join political debates,” they write. “The Internet will continue to serve these functions, even with

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64 Garret, Bimber, de Zuniga, Heinderyckx, Kelly, and Smith, 2012
65 Morozov, 2012
66 Garret, Bimber, de Zuniga, Heinderyckx, Kelly, and Smith, 2012
state pushback, as activists devise ways around state online restrictions. Conditions that contribute to success are likely determined not by the given technological tool, but by human skill and facility in using the networks that are being mobilized... As scholars, we ought to focus our attention on the people involved and their competencies in using digitally-mediated tools to organize themselves and their fellow citizens...rather than the flow of information as such.”

At the same time, a focus on the connection between Internet technologies and democratic discourse has, as the authors of *New ICTs and the Study of Political Communication* note, “contributed to the criticism of the discipline as being too U.S.-focused, or at least relevant only to certain modes of democratic society.” This criticism is similar to the one leveled by the editors of *International Blogging: Identity, Politics and Networked Publics*, who contest the tendency of new media scholars to “assess social media around the world according to US based assumptions regarding form and function.” I agree that it is important to expand analysis of the implication of Internet technologies and of “how people use tools” beyond of the limitations of electoral politics and onto the global stage. I argue that research on the influence of Internet technologies on society on a global scale requires a broader understanding of the public sphere, one that takes into consideration, especially in authoritarian regimes, a sense of civic society, civic responsibility and civic empowerment. This is especially significant because, as Shirky points out, the political and the personal are not mutually exclusive, and online discourse often interweaves both simultaneously.

68 Garret, Bimber, de Zuniga, Heinderyckx, Kelly, and Smith, 2012
70 Shirky, 2011.
A key argument of this dissertation is that the structure, nature and implications of social media networks are a consequence of a country’s particular social, cultural and political history. In order to expand theories of new media beyond US centric models, to better understand the delineations between universal characteristics and specific context, and the culturally situated relationship between online media and the public, it is important to consider the complex set of factors that shape national and language-based social media ecologies. The challenge “in addressing the tension between common affordances and context sensitivity on a global scale,” as the authors of *New ICTs and the Study of Political Communication* point out, is how to determine, or at least analyze, “the extent to which the changes in practices and uses are universal, and why.”

By examining specific local contexts, scholars can begin to answer these questions, developing a more nuanced assessment of how individuals use online media to serve various communication needs, how these media exist in relation to one another, and how they interact with other forms of communication in the larger media ecology. Towards that end, this dissertation uses Russian social media as a lens for exploring the historically, culturally, socially and politically situated relationship between individuals and online communication technologies. I propose a framework for comparative international analysis that leverages three interconnected elements – history, culture and socio-political context. On the basis of these three elements, this dissertation examines Russia’s social media ecology and its relationship to Russia’s broader socio-political environment, articulating the various factors that have influenced the specific structure and nature of social media in Russia, its role within the broader online and traditional media ecologies, and its implications for Russian society and politics in general.

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71 Garret, Bimber, de Zuniga, Heinderyckx, Kelly, and Smith, 2012
The difference in metaphors for the Internet used by Russians and Americans illustrates the significance of cultural and historical context. When the Internet first emerged in the US in the 1990’s, it was conceptualized in exterior, spatial terms – as an “Information Superhighway” that one navigated, “the Wild West” or a “Frontier” that one explored, or an ocean of information that one “surfed”. By the time social media, and, in particular, blogs, emerged a decade later, they were construed as an addition to, or extension of, this already established external field. In Russia, on the other hand, the Internet did not gain purview until after 2000, simultaneously with the emergence of social media. In Russia, social media and the Internet evolved concurrently, built on a backbone of tight and trusted networks of computers and interpersonal connections. This is reflected in Russian metaphors for the Internet, which illustrate its role as an alternative channel outside the control of the state, a mixed public and private medium for interpersonal discussion and the sharing of information within a community of trust. In Russian, the Internet and social media share metaphors, and both are often compared to the kitchen table debates of Soviet times, places of lively and free conversation between trusted friends. The Internet and social media are also likened to Soviet era Samizdat – grassroots publications of underground information, also shared and distributed outside state channels, between trusted individuals.72

Dr. Eugene Gorny, one of the pioneers of the Internet in Russia, and a Russian social media scholar, argues that, “the opposition between the “official media” and the blogosphere seems to be very similar to the historical opposition between the dullness of Soviet propaganda and the

freedom of expression and communication in kitchen-table talks and samizdat….The re-
alienation of media in the 2000s led to the revival of Soviet kitchen-table talk culture, the only
difference being that now the kitchen has moved into cyberspace.”

My historically, socially and culturally rooted exploration of Russian social media
ecology recognizes it as an interpersonal space as well as a public sphere, highlighting the
communication and coordination aspect of social media, as much as the informational one. This
approach explains the immediate success, “like a fish to water,” of LiveJournal’s social network
based blogging platform in Russia, and provides a foundation for understanding the unique
structure and nature of Russian social media networks. Finally, it offers context and insight for a
more nuanced understanding of the offline social and political ramifications of social media in
Russia, as well as a matrix for cross cultural comparison.

Gorny, 2007
CHAPTER 1
THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN RUSSIA -
HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

A key argument of this dissertation is that the form and function of online social media networks - their structure, nature, uses and implications - are not universal, but are a consequence of a country’s individual social, cultural and political history. In particular, I argue that the “host environment” - defined by the level of nationwide Internet penetration and user demographics at the time when social media emerged - has a fundamental influence on the structure of social media networks and on their roles in public and private discourse. In this chapter, I examine the social media ecologies of Russia and the US, describing how the timing of the evolutions of the Internet and social media in each country has created disparate network structures, with differing uses, different relationships between traditional media and digital media, and distinct socio-political implications. In the US, social media emerged when the Internet was already an established commercial medium, emphasizing a distinction between open and closed networks that has led blogs and social networking sites along divergent paths, creating disparate channels with marked public and private roles. In Russia, on the other hand, a history of grassroots communications via unofficial networks (computer and interpersonal), coupled the simultaneous evolution of the Internet and social media, and, in particular, the formative influence of the social network and blogging hybrid LiveJournal, have created an entirely different social media ecology, one characterized by a mixture of public and private communications, interweaving political and personal discourse via interpersonal networks.
Prequel – The End of the Soviet Union and The Origins of the Runet

On August 19, 1991, a group of hard line Communist officials took over the Kremlin and declared a “State of Emergency” in an attempt to oust President Gorbachev from power. Although the coup collapsed within two days and Gorbachev returned to government, the event marked the beginning of the end for the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. The coup organizers took control of the media immediately, hoping to monopolize the flow of information between Moscow to the rest of the country, and between Russia and the rest of the world, and thereby reinforce their legitimacy. Security expert Rafal Rohozinski describes that morning as: “a throwback to a distant past: the radio played classical music—a sure sign of the gravity of the situation; Soviet television, the beacon of perestroika during the past five years, broadcast reruns of Swan Lake, interrupted only by the somber news bulletins of anonymous announcers dressed in military uniform; and those newspapers that were published dutifully carried the full declaration of the Extraordinary State of Emergency. “74 The leaders of the coup, however, neglected to shut down the telephone lines. As a result, operators of Russia’s fledgling computer networks were able to transmit updates and news about the coup, as well as Yeltsin’s defiance, throughout Russia and to the outside world. In the first hours of the Putsch, private computer networks provided the only independent information available, reinforcing opposition and resistance. 75

The programmers at Relcom/Demos, one of Russia’s initial private computer network providers, were among the first to see the coup in progress from their offices near the Kremlin. Eyewitness accounts of tanks in the Red Square were sent out by Vadim Anatov, a 26-year-old

75 Rohozinski, 1999
senior programmer at Relcom/Demos.\textsuperscript{76} Within a few hours, Anatov’s email message had been relayed to computers in 70 Soviet cities from Leningrad in the West to Vladivostok in the East. The message was also sent to a computer in Helsinki Finland, which was connected to the emerging Internet.\textsuperscript{77} In addition to providing independent updates of event, Relcom/Demos established a node at the White House and was soon e-mailing “Yeltsin’s defiant declaration, rejecting the legitimacy of the coup committee, to Russia’s regions and abroad.”\textsuperscript{78} Relcom/Demos, together with other emerging private networks, such as Glasnet and Sovam, acted as major information channels between Moscow and the regions, and between Russia and the outside world, linking the multitude of major and minor actors opposed to the coup. Twenty years before the Arab Spring, before the Internet was a household term, Russia’s grassroots computer based interpersonal networks highlighted the power of networked individuals against official control. “The cyber-community’s mobilization,” Rohozinski observes “…circumvented the very factors that the coup plotters had counted on for imposing the state of emergency, namely their control of the media, the hierarchical ordering of Soviet society, and the social isolation imposed by Russia’s immense geography.”\textsuperscript{79}

Rohozinski describes the emergence and development of these private, interpersonal, pre-Internet computer networks in the Soviet Union, and their success at the expense of better-funded official efforts. At its core, his explanation is a socio-cultural one. Rohozinski argues that it was the Soviet era reliance on interpersonal social ties and an ingrained “economy of


\textsuperscript{78} Rohozinski, 1999.

\textsuperscript{79} Rohozinski, 1999.
favors” (*blat*) that fostered the success of these private computer networks. In Soviet times, explains University College of London Sociologist Alena Ledeneva, underground *blat* networks allowed people to leverage “personal positional power” to obtain needed goods and services, and “facilitate the workings of the otherwise paralyzing Soviet bureaucracy”. “In social and economic terms, blat exchanges became vital to the population, and to the functioning of the Soviet system,” she writes. “The nature of the economic and political changes in contemporary Russia cannot be properly understood without attention to the powerful legacy of the blat economy.” Rohozinski agrees, drawing a direct parallel between Russia’s strong underground social networks and the success of its private computer networks. According to Rohozinski, it is precisely because of their interpersonal nature that private computer nodes thrived in Soviet Russia, “rout[ing] around the hierarchies and blockages of the existing institutional order, utilizing state-provided resources to construct private networks.” “State-run attempts to establish computer-mediated networks withered, despite the high priority they were accorded, because of ingrained bureaucratic and institutional resistance and complications,” he explains. “At the same time, private networks flourished, often with the tacit agreement of the same line managers and directors who resisted official networking efforts, because they were congruent with everyone’s needs for reliable information.” Writing in 1999, when Internet penetration in Russia was still nominal, Rohozinski concludes that the “informal social networks, or blat, which pervaded Russian society and facilitated day-to-day decisions in an ossified system, formed the basis for constructing Russian cyberspace.”

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80 Rohozinski, 1999.
82 Rohozinski, 1999.
networks, both computer and interpersonal, is one of the key factors influencing the shape and
dnature of Russia’s online social media.

**Timing – Social Media and Internet Penetration**

In the US and Russia, distinct “host environments” for social media have resulted in
different social media ecologies, with disparate socio-political interpretations and implications.
Social media (including blogs and social networking sites), by definition, exist only online,
created by a community of Internet users for other Internet users, generating publically available
content and enabling interactive dialogue between individuals, organizations (including mass
media) and communities. Consequently, I argue, the level of nationwide Internet penetration
and user demographics within a country at the time of the emergence of social media has a
fundamental influence on the structure of their networks and the nature of their use. As I will
demonstrate, this timing impacts the form and function of various constituent elements of online
social networks - blogs, online journals, social networking sites, friends, readers and
communities - shaping their network structure, uses and definitions.

When social media platforms became available around 2000, Russia and the US had
distinct “host environments” characterized by starkly different levels of Internet penetration and
use. Figure 1 below, compares the growth of nationwide Internet penetration between the US
and Russia from 1995 to 2011. Table 1 provides key dates for the launch of social media sites
in the US and Russia. Taken together, these disparate national growth patterns illustrate the
distinct online environments in which social media evolved, and the impact of timing on the
structure and nature of online media ecology.

83 Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010.
Figure 1: Comparison of Internet Growth in US and Russia, 1995-2011
*US Data from PEW* \(^{84}\), *Russia Data from FOM* \(^{85}\)

Table 1
Key Dates in US and Russian Social Media 1999-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Blogger – first popular blogging platform launches, English only. LiveJournal launches with multilingual capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>First Russian language LiveJournal blog</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Friendster social networking site launches, English only LiveInternet.ru launches in Russian—hybrid model like LJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>MySpace social networking site launches, English only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Facebook social networking site launches (Harvard students only) Merriam–Webster Dictionary declares “blog” the Word of the Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>YouTube launches – multilingual Mail.ru launches blog platform in Russia – hybrid LJ model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{84}\) “Internet Adoption | Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project.” Accessed January 31, 2013. [http://pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-(Adults)/Internet-Adoption.aspx](http://pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data-(Adults)/Internet-Adoption.aspx)

Table 1 Continued
Key Dates in US and Russian Social Media 1999-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Facebook opens to all English language users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian social networking sites Odnoklassniki and Vkontakte (copycat of Classmates and Facebook) launch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Yandex acquires Russian Moikrug.ru blogging/social networking platform, becomes Ya.ru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Facebook available in Russian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Twitter available in Russian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

When social media platforms emerged in 1999, the Internet was an established commercial and public medium in the US, hosting mainstream media outlets as well as commercial websites, accessed by almost 45% of the population. (Figure 1, Table 1) In this context, American language blogs and social networking sites evolved along discrete and divergent paths, distinguished by the nature of their networks and the purpose of their use. In the US, the open blogosphere has been primarily interpreted as a public medium, an extension of, or addition to, a thriving online public sphere, while the closed networks of social networking sites have traditionally been reserved for “backstage” interpersonal interaction. In contrast, Russia’s nationwide Internet penetration had not yet reached 5% in 2000, although a select group of technology savvy Russians had been building and reinforcing interpersonal connections via unofficial computer networks for years. (Figure 1) The simultaneous evolution of the

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88 The most comprehensive figures on Internet penetration and use within Russia are gathered by the Public Opinion Foundation of Russia (FOM) which has been publishing quarterly reports on Russian Internet penetration and use, based on nationwide surveys, since 2001. Their respondents are chosen by random selection, around 30,000 adults over the age of 18.
Internet and social media in Russia played a key role in the distinctly interconnected structure, nature and uses of its social media networks.

**Internet Penetration and American Social Media Ecology**

In the US, the two primary venues, or platforms, for social media are blogs and social networking sites. These are considered social media on the basis of three essential characteristics – the fact that they exist only online, the fact that they are created by the user her or himself (ie user generated content) and, finally, by the fact that they are interactive, and encourage interpersonal engagement through the sharing of information and the use of hyperlinks that point to relevant content and to other users. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, blogospheres and other social media networks worldwide are built (and analyzed) on the basis of these links between users. In American social media ecology, the structure of these networks constitutes a key distinction between blogs and social networking sites. American blogs represent independent elements within an open network system, in which bloggers link to each other regardless of the blogging platform or blog hosting site. Social networking sites, in contrast, are defined by closed networks, which promote (and sometime restrict) links to other members of the network. Users of social networking sites (previously only individuals, but today corporations as well) “construct a public or semi-public profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” These connections can be bi-directional or unidirectional, and have a range of labels – contacts, friends, fans, followers – specific to the social


90 Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010.

networking site. Regardless of the specific label used, it is this articulation of bounded social networks that is the defining feature of social networking sites. In the US, the open, “platform agnostic” blogosphere has been primarily interpreted as a public medium, like journalism, and American blogs were seen as an extension of, or addition to, a thriving online public sphere. In contrast, the closed, “platform specific” networks of social networking sites have traditionally been reserved for “backstage” interpersonal interaction in the US.

In the US, the growth of blogs was stimulated by the advent of online publishing tools around 1999, when nationwide Internet penetration approached 45%. These tools enabled the average Internet user to self-publish online without any specific technological skills. Today, blogs can be published on a variety of Internet hosting sites or by using specific blogging software tools, such as WordPress, Movable Type or Blogger. Despite this variety of publishing options, American blogs have developed a specific structure and set of features, which distinguishes them from other social media, and, in particular, from social networking sites. American blogs are characterized by a series of long form updates, or journal entries, known as “posts,” which are typically displayed in reverse chronological order, so that the most recent appears first. In addition to regular, date stamped entries appearing in reverse chronological order, the main features of a blog in the US include access to archived entries, the ability to syndicate content, and interactivity with other bloggers in the form of hyperlinks and the comments which users can add to each others blogs. Typically, this structure has remained consistent, regardless of the content, intended audience or hosting platform. Consequently, the choice of blogging platform has been irrelevant to the shape of online discourse in the US -

\[92\] boyd and Ellison, 2007.

American bloggers can choose from a number of sites to host their blogs, and they can and do link to other bloggers on the basis of content and shared interests, regardless of platform. Public discourse on the American blogosphere, representing a collective community of blogs connected by links and comments between bloggers, has evolved on the basis of various high profile blogs, hosted on a variety of open platforms. The open nature of the American blogosphere has contributed to its interpretation as a public medium in the US, and analysis of the American blogosphere has centered on its engagement with mainstream media and interaction with the public sphere. Social networking sites such as Friendster and MySpace emerged a few years after blogs, around 2002, when US Internet penetration was around 60%. (Figure 1, Table 2). The bounded nature of these sites, the limits imposed on the lengths of posts, and, in particular, their distinction from the open platform blogosphere, led to their initial interpretation as a “back stage” medium in the US, serving primarily as a venue for interpersonal communication and the maintenance of social ties.

In the US, this distinction between blogs and social networking sites, and, in particular, the interpretation of blogs as a public medium, has historically been so strong that analysis has primarily focused on the potential blurring of boundaries between blogs and mainstream media, rather than between blogs and social networking sites. Hence Technorati’s statement on the subject in the introduction to their 2008 “State of the Blogosphere” report: “As the Blogosphere grows in size and influence, the lines between what is a blog and what is a mainstream media site become less clear. Larger blogs are taking on more characteristics of mainstream sites and mainstream sites are incorporating styles and formats from the Blogosphere.”

In more recent years, as social networking and micro-blogging sites have grown in popularity, the uses of

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various types of social media in the US have begun to overlap. Blogs still maintain their leading position in US public discourse, but social networks have also entered the conversation. In 2010, Technorati claimed that while “blogs influence on mainstream narratives [is] firmly entrenched...bloggers’ use of and engagement with various social media tools is expanding, and the lines between blogs, micro-blogs, and social networks are disappearing. As the blogosphere converges with social media, sharing of blog posts is increasingly done through social networks—even while blogs remain significantly more influential on blog content than social networks are.”

Internet Penetration, Live Journal and Russian Social Media Ecology

Russia’s contemporary social media ecology is built on the legacy of Soviet era grassroots communications via unofficial networks (computer and interpersonal). Another formative factor is the simultaneous evolution of the Internet and social media platforms, both of which emerged in Russia around 2000. In particular, Russia’s Internet penetration grew hand-in-hand with Russia’s pioneering social media platform, LiveJournal, enshrining LiveJournal’s unique mix of long form public content and closed social networks within Russian social media. As a consequence, the various features of Russian social media – private, public, blogs, online journals, social networking sites, friends, readers and communities– overlap and converge in a distinctly different manner than in the US, with different socio-political implications.

During the 1990’s, despite the existence of private, unofficial computer networks in Russia, the growth of the Internet itself was constrained by a number of interrelated factors, such as political and economic upheavals after the 1991 coup, as well as technical and infrastructural

restrictions that limited most of Russia’s computer networking to simple tools such as email and Usenet groups. As a result, the early Internet was not nearly as popular as other computer networking systems, such as those provided by the private computer network Relcom/Demos or the free global bulletin board and email network FidoNet. Foreign investment helped sponsor some computer networking projects, both non-profit and commercial, across the country. For the most part, however, Russian computer networks remained private and intimate, spreading through interpersonal contacts between colleagues with shared interests, and accessed primarily by a tight knit group of “Internet pioneers” – mostly educated and creative young men, mostly in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Russia’s original private computer network, Relcom/Demos, began in government funded science and technology research institutes. At first, Relcom nodes relied on the state institutions in which they were based, which paid for the computers and telephone charges, while the nodes themselves serviced the private needs of their operators. As Soviet-era institutions began their decline, the Relcom networks spread through personal contacts among colleagues, encompassing an ever-expanding range of institutions, linked by personal or professional circles of interest. Relcom became more and more commercial, and its fees moved beyond the reach of many potential users, especially those not involved in business. As a consequence, those potential users whose interests remained more academic and social than entrepreneurial turned to a different network system: FidoNet. FidoNet is a once popular global computer bulletin board

96 Rohozinski, 1999.
and email network, used in the West primarily before the rise of the Internet. Because of its free and simple access, and because the services that it offered were roughly on par with those of early commercial Internet providers, FidoNet was more popular as a computer networking tool than the Internet in early 1990’s Russia. Like Relcom, FidoNet was built entirely upon contacts between acquaintances. But unlike Relcom and other commercial providers, FidoNet remained decidedly non-commercial. Unlike its commercial counterparts, FidoNet was cost free, and available, because of its simple technology, to anyone with a computer and a modem. FidoNet’s capacity to send mail, transfer files, support a wide range of news groups and even connect with the global Internet offered, for free, essentially the same limited services as most commercial Internet service providers. Rohozinski argues that FidoNet’s popularity was also a function of the FidoNet users themselves. Fidoshniki (FidoNet enthusiasts) formed an active and cohesive Russian language community dedicated to FidoNet’s maintenance and expansion. Even among individuals with other means of accessing the Internet, FidoNet’s ethos of sharing and community attracted a wide-spread and loyal following.98

The release of Windows 95, in 1995, which supported Cyrillic encoding, was a turning point for the Russian Internet. Although the .ru domain was registered in 1994, it wasn’t until Windows 95 that Russians could create Russian language web pages, without having to use transliteration (writing Russian with Latin characters). Windows 95 dramatically enlarged the potential Internet audience, immediately generating a number of Russian language websites, first indexed by Relcom/Demos on www.ru in 1995.99 The denizens of the early RuNet have been

98 Rohozinski, 1999.
described as "a handful of tech enthusiasts, natural scientists, émigrés and inquisitive creative artists – incidentally, mostly men." Similarly, Rohozinski describes the community of Fidoshniki, as "expanding from its initial core of professional computer aficionados to a wide range of users, including artists, musicians and scientists." The groups overlapped, and were concentrated primarily on the Moscow and St. Petersburg axis. In an article on the evolution of the Internet in Russia, Schmidt, Teubener and Butwilowski describe the tight knit Moscow and diaspora based social groups that pioneered some of the initial creative resources on the RuNet: “for the pioneers of the Web,” they write “the discovery of so-called cyberspace was closely linked to an experience of open-mindedness, personal freedom and creative self-realization.” Accordingly, Russia’s first popular online projects were of a literary and cultural character – including the online library, Lib.ru., which launched in 1994 and the first online cultural magazine, Zhurnal.ru, which launched in 1996. The producers of these sites were more artists than professionals, amateurs who developed the fledgling Russian Internet as an “aesthetic space with no apparent practical use, borne by a feeling of euphoria about everything new.” Similarly, the “emergent blogosphere,” according to Eugene Gorny, co-founder of Zhurnal.ru, “was interpreted in terms of ‘one’s own circle,’ as personal self-expression or interpersonal play rather than in terms of “an antidote to state dominance,” “political liberation” or “opposition.” In other words, the fledgling RuNet was a place of free expression and creativity, not overtly

101 Rohozinski, 1999
102 Butwilowski, Schmidt and Teubener, 2005.
103 Butwilowski, Schmidt and Teubener, 2005.
political, and rooted in tight interpersonal networks. Its main characteristics were, and continue to be, that of an alternative channel of information, based on trusted networks, blurring the line between public and private, producing public content with an informal, “between friends” style, and generally emphasizing the social and interpersonal over the political.

In 1999 an American college student Brad Fitzpatrick started a unique social media platform called LiveJournal as a way to stay in touch with his friends, endowing it with multilingual capabilities, and structuring it to enable long form blog posts within closed social networks. LiveJournal refers to itself as simply a “social media platform” and has been labeled as either a blog or a social networking site in various scholarly and commercial articles. The format of LiveJournal is long form journal entries, listed, like blogs, in reverse chronological order, with archived entries, hyperlinks between posts and comments. However, like social networking sites, LiveJournal is a bounded system, in that it encourages interaction with other members of the site. While LiveJournal users are able to link to content outside the site, discourse occurs primarily between members. Connections on LiveJournal are labeled “friends,” and, depending on the user, and the type of journal or blog that they maintain, these “friends” can represent actual friends, as well as followers, readers or subscribers. In short, LiveJournal is a social media hybrid that combines narrative features typical of open weblog platforms (e.g. Blogspot, Wordpress) within the structure of closed social networking services (e.g. Facebook, MySpace). LiveJournal’s hybrid structure found only a niche market in the US, where LiveJournal has been eclipsed as both a blogging platform and social networking site by more

popular social media. In the US, LiveJournal’s 4.5 million users\(^{106}\) represent a small portion of America’s bloggers\(^{107}\) and as a social networking site, LiveJournal has been overshadowed by more popular platforms such as Facebook, with over 150 million users in the US.\(^{108}\) However, in Russia, LiveJournal’s unique combination of long form blogging and trusted social networks have had a particular resonance. Russian speaking users, within Russia and outside of it, have consistently formed a significant percentage of the site’s members, the second largest group after Americans.\(^{109}\)

The first Russian language LiveJournal was started two years after the site’s launch, in 2001. At the time, Russia’s nationwide Internet penetration was below 5%. (Figure 1 and Table 1) However, as discussed in the “prequel” above, it can be argued that Russian society was particularly primed for social media, based on a culture of reliance on informal social networks, and experience building and reinforcing interpersonal connections via private, unofficial computer networks. Over the course of the next decade, LiveJournal’s “first mover” advantage translated into market dominance, as the popularity of LiveJournal among Russian speaking users grew in tandem with the burgeoning Internet. In Russia, the LiveJournal social media platform developed simultaneously with Internet penetration, creating an environment that combines in depth discourse with strong interpersonal connections.

\(^{106}\) http://www.livejournal.com/stats.bml accessed 6/7/12
\(^{107}\) http://www.pewinternet.org/iPoll%20results.aspx - 9% of Americans blog
\(^{108}\) http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/
\(^{109}\) According to LJs Stats page, in the Fall of 2011, users from the Russian Federation (and not including Russian speakers outside of Russia) made up the second largest group on LJ, numbering almost 2.5 million - compared to US users, who number around 5.5 million. The remaining countries are far behind - UK, Canada and Ukraine around .5 million each. The data from LiveJournal’s public statistics page, however, is somewhat odd and ineffectual. There is, for instance, an enormous distinction between the number of accounts in general (33 million) and “active” accounts (2 million). The country statistics appear to include all open accounts, and, are based on what a LJ Product Manager has called, in personal correspondence with the author, “a pretty crude rollup” of the public information on a users profile. As a result, this public information is not very informative. According to this Product Manager, LJ has much more complex methods of gathering statistics for its internal use.
A variety of factors have contributed to LiveJournal’s success, and its formative role within Russia’s social media ecology. Significantly, LiveJournal was the first major social media platform with multilingual capabilities, accessible to non-English speaking users – specifically, Russians. In addition, LiveJournal’s ease of use and cost free access made it readily available to anyone with an Internet connection, regardless of technical skill or economic status. In other words, LiveJournal was the first social media platform on which average Russian Internet users could expound, converse and connect in their native language. In addition, many of LiveJournal’s original Russian users claim that part of the site’s appeal was the fact that LiveJournal was “American,” with the comforting implication that user data stored outside of Russia was more secure from outside or government interference and censorship.

It can be argued that, despite comparatively low levels of Internet penetration, Russia’s online ecology in 2000 was ripe for a social media platform with LiveJournal’s hybrid characteristics. As noted above, at the time of LiveJournal’s launch, Russia’s online ecology already featured online journals, columns and essays, and as well as online communities on various Russian language forums. LiveJournal, however, was the first Russian language platform that combined long form journal entries with interpersonal social networking capabilities. In addition to timing and language capabilities, part of LiveJournal’s success is that it’s hybrid structure featured elements that were already familiar to Russian Internet users - online columns (such as those maintained by a various leading journalists and public figures) and online forums.

Membership in early LiveJournal was even more restricted than it is today, available on an “invitation only” basis. Some scholars have argued that the site’s closed social structure

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112 Personal communication with Eugene Gorny, 2010
resonated with an already established tradition of trusted interpersonal networks, which flourished in Soviet Russia even before the advent of the Internet. Writing in 1999, before the emergence of social media, Rhozinski contended that “Russian cyberspace” is rooted in Soviet-era informal social networks.113 A decade later, Russian Internet scholar Eugene Gorny extended the argument to social media, claiming that “the blogosphere…in Russia provide[s] a specific example of a more general principle - a case of informal personal networks compensating for and replacing ineffective formal and impersonal institutions.” Gorny similarly suggests that the social networking characteristics of LiveJournal resonated with an established Russian cultural “tendency towards collectivist behavior”.114 This culturally situated perspective, which interprets characteristics of social media such as interconnectivity, interactivity and social networking as reflecting Slavophile values of collectivism, de-hierarchization, and egalitarianism, provides an interesting contrast with American rhetoric, which focuses on terms such as “collaboration,” “user participation,” and “ego-networks” highlighting the many individuals who drive the process, rather than the collective.115 Gorny also has a cultural explanation for one of the most striking features of Russia’s social media ecology – its unusual combination of public content with informal discourse. Gorny observes that while most Russian blogs are publicly accessible, few follow the norms of public discourse, communicating in a more informal, interpersonal manner. Structurally, this combination is a result of the hybrid nature of LiveJournal, which blends the public features of blogs with the private aspects of closed social networks. However, taking a culturally situated perspective, Gorny claims that this stylistic tendency is a result of the fact that “the emergent blogosphere

113 Rozhinski, 1999.
114 Gorny, 2009
was interpreted in terms of ‘one’s own circle,’ as personal self-expression or interpersonal play rather than in terms of a political statement, ‘an antidote to state dominance,’ ‘political liberation’ or ‘opposition.’ ”

In his *Creative History of the Russian Internet*, Gorny explains how LiveJournal’s initial role in Russia was as “a playground for intellectuals”—explored by a tightly knit, technologically elite group, who were discovering the Internet and LiveJournal’s features and opportunities simultaneously. As LJ’s user base grew, more journalists, writers, political commentators, artists, musicians, and other “trendsetters” joined its ranks. Many of these journals were more public than private, serving as online publications and articles on cultural and professional topics, with thousands of “friends,” who, like Twitter “followers” today, were not personally known by the authors. By 2002, only a year after the first Russian LJ blog was started, Russian media dubbed the site “the most fashionable address on the web.” “Since the beginning, [Russian LJ] has attracted a disproportionately high number of the ‘Who’s Who’ in the informational and cultural space—journalists, writers, publishers, politicians etc.” wrote online journalist Kirill Pankratov in 2005, adding “… once you spend time with the LJ, reading the same old Moscow Times … is the fastest way to put oneself to sleep.”

By 2006, LJ had been covered in a variety of newspaper articles and television shows, and LJ blogs were often sited as sources by information agencies. In a 2006 essay on the social functions of blogs in contemporary Russia, Ekaterina Alabyeva suggested that LJ’s low barriers

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117 In those early years, a listing of all Russian language LiveJournal users worldwide was able to fit into one page. (Gorny, 2009) This aggregate page eventually became too unwieldy, but echoes of it remain, particularly in the Yandex blogging portal (http://www.blogs.yandex.ru), a more sophisticated blog aggregator than Technorati, BlogPulse or anything else currently available in the US.
118 Gorny, 2009
to entry and mass communication potential had made it an ideal Habermasian public sphere, which, in a country with few such venues, served the important purpose of at least reminding Russian citizens that such an ideal was possible. That same year Gorny wrote about “a communicative core in Russian LJ, consisting of several thousands of journals that are tightly interwoven with each other….a common communication environment in which the news spreads quickly and discussion about different political, literary or social issues can involve dozens of journals and hundreds of interested users.” Similarly, in a 2007 article on Russian blogging for The Nation, Arutunyan describes LJ founder Brad Fitzpatrick as “struck” by the “social magnitude of ZheZhe and the serious content of its journal entries…What for Americans is an electronic diary accessible to a few chosen acquaintances became for Russians a platform for forging thousands of interconnected virtual friends,” she writes.

Fitzpatrick sold LJ to the American blogging company Six Apart in 2005. In 2006, Six Apart licensed the burgeoning “Russian segment” of LJ to the Russian media giant SUP, causing a controversy among Russian speaking LJ users over volatile issues of identity, privacy and censorship. Some Russia based users were anxious about the privacy of their content if data storage was moved to Russia. Some diaspora Russians were upset at what they saw as a “virtual deportation” back to Russia. Other Eastern European and formerly CIS country LJ bloggers were upset at being wrongfully labeled “Russian.” After a year of passionate online discussion, the controversy became moot in December, 2007, when SUP purchased all of LiveJournal in its entirety. While today there are many cases of Russian moguls investing in

123 Alexanyan, Koltsova. 2009.
Silicon Valley, the buyout of LiveJournal is unique in that it represents the first example of a foreign media company entirely taking over an American social media platform. SUP manages the popular platform to this day, serving users from around the world, with offices in both San Francisco and Moscow.

With its meteoric rise in popularity, LiveJournal had a virtual monopoly on social media in Russia for the first, key years. From 2000 to 2006, Internet penetration in Russia grew from less than 5% to almost 20%. (Figure 1) During that time, LiveJournal cemented its status as the leading online platform for public discourse in Russia, and its hybrid structure became the primary model for Russian blogging. Despite its bounded structure, LiveJournal has been interpreted as a blogging platform in Russia from the outset, and LiveJournal members have been, and continue to be, understood as bloggers. Since 2004, Russia’s leading Internet portal, Yandex, has been publishing annual reports on Russia’s “blogosphere” in which LiveJournal blogs and even LiveJournal communities, play a key role. By 2009, 70% of Russia’s “blogs” were hosted on four top social media platforms – LJ, LiveInternet, Blogs.Mail.ru and Ya.ru – all of which follow the hybrid LJ model.124 LiveJournal’s hybrid features have shaped the structure and nature of Russia’s social media ecology, and the site’s initials (Zhe Zhe) are synonymous with blogging to this day.

From 2006 to 2011, Internet penetration in Russia grew an additional 30 percentage points.125 (Figure 1) By 2012, Russia’s Internet penetration was estimated at 52% of the total

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125 This rapid growth is similar to what the US was experiencing before the advent of social media, between 1995 and 2000, when US Internet penetration grew from 14% to 46%.125 (see Figure 1)
population – roughly where the US was in 2001, when social media platforms first emerged.\footnote{Internet in Russia, Fall 2012. FOM Public Opinion Foundation, Fall 2012. \url{http://runet.fom.ru/Proniknovenie-interneta/10738}}

(Figure 1) On a global scale, this places contemporary Russia between Brazil (39%) and Italy (59%), but still significantly behind the US, which is currently approaching 80%.\footnote{Internet in Russia, Fall 2012. FOM Public Opinion Foundation.} The period between 2006 and 2011 also saw the emergence of home grown “pure” social networking platforms such as Odnoklassniki and Vkontakte in Russia, which are essentially copies of the American sites Classmates and Facebook. Facebook itself did not enter the Russian market until 2010, and Twitter did not become available in Russian until 2011. (Table 2) These “pure” social networking platforms differ from LiveJournal and Russia’s other hybrid blogging platforms in that they do not cater to extended blog posts, and concentrate instead on enabling users to locate, reconnect with, and maintain friends, participate in groups and communities, and share images, video and audio. In other words, these “pure” social networking sites focus on interpersonal connection, rather than the long form content afforded by Russia’s hybrid blogging platforms.

Designed by an American college student to be primarily a private, interpersonal medium, in Russia, LiveJournal evolved into a relatively public platform, where “online journals” were produced by various leading literary and artistic figures, intended for a wide readership of “friends”. LiveJournal’s initially limited and elite set of bloggers or “power users,” with their wide and overlapping networks of “friend/readers,” eventually built a highly interconnected online public discourse network. Despite a continually evolving landscape, LiveJournal’s influence on Russia’s social media ecology persists - as I will demonstrate in my study of the network structure of Russian social media in the next chapter - in the form of a
centralized and interconnected public discourse network, noted for its combination of long form content and interpersonal connections.

**Russian Social Media Use**

The simultaneous evolution of social media and Internet use in Russia has resulted in a particularly active, social and interpersonal online ecology. While the Internet remains a relatively elite medium with an as yet modest nationwide reach, those Russians who do go online, do so frequently, regularly engaging in social media. Figure 2, below, compares the US and Russia in terms of Internet penetration and percentage of all Internet users who are considered “active” or daily users from 2000 to 2010. It illustrates the extent to which the percentage of Russia’s Internet users who are “active” or daily users has always been comparatively high, and continues to increase rapidly. In 2000, US Internet penetration was approaching 50%, and 50% of American Internet users could be considered “active” or “daily” users. That year, the Internet was barely emerging in Russia. By 2005, however, “active” users made up over 40% of Russia’s Internet users, despite a national penetration of only 15%. In 2005, US Internet penetration was at 65%, and around 70% of users were “active”. Russia, on the other hand, reached 70% active users in 2010, with a nationwide penetration of only 43%. Today, while Internet penetration in Russia remains significantly lower than in the US (51% compared to 80%), the percentage of Internet users who are “active” is almost as high (77% compared to almost 80%).

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128 “Internet Adoption | Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project.” *Internet in Russia, Fall 2012*. FOM Public Opinion Foundation.
Russia’s highly “active” Internet users are also noted for their frequent and engaged social media use. Recent studies of global social media use find that the percentage of active Internet users that use social media is particularly high in Russia, and that Russian social media users are “engaged” to an above average degree. In particular, three surveys of social media habits worldwide, conducted by the global media agency Universal McCann between 2008 and 2010, have concluded that the percentage of Internet users who are also active social media users is consistently higher in Russia than it is in the US, or even globally.  

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129 “Internet Adoption | Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project.”
130 FOM Public Opinion Foundation, Internet In Russia Report, Issue 32, Winter 2010-2011
The Universal McCann surveys focus on the “active Internet universe” – a self selected group of users who go online at least every other day. UMC reports, which all include Russia, began with 15 countries and 7,500 respondents in 2006 and have grown to 53 countries and 37,600 respondents by 2010. The reports compile a range of data more applicable to marketers than academics, but they include a few important demographic variables. In particular, they measure what percentage of their respondents have read a blog or created a social networking profile in the last six months. In both cases, the statistics for Russia are consistently higher than the US, at or above the global average. UMC reports not indicate other relevant activities – such as updating the social networking site, or creating a blog.132

Universal McCann data on blog readers attests to the breadth of the Russian audience. Over the past three years, from 2008 to 2010, the percentage of Russian active users who have “read a blog in the past six months” have been consistently higher than in the US, and roughly equivalent to the global average. (Table 2) Furthermore, when it comes to creating a social networking profile, Russians continue to be far ahead of their peers in the US and globally. Over the past three years, a significant majority of Russia’s active Internet users (65%-79%) have created a social networking profile. In comparison, the global averages for social networkers are distinctly smaller (45% in 2008 to 61% in 2010) and the US is far behind even that – at a mere 33% in 2008, growing to 58% in 2010. (Table 2)133

Table 2
Blogging and Social Networking Habits – Russia vs Global vs USA, 2008-2010
Source: Universal McCann Social Media Reports, Wave 3 2008, Wave 4 2009 and Wave 5 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read a blog in past 6 months?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIA</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOBAL</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created Social Networking Profile in Last 6 months?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIA</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOBAL</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The UMC findings on the popularity of various types of social media in Russia are consistent with recent reports by Comscore, a global digital media measurement and analytics agency. According to Comscore, Russia had the “World’s Most Engaged Social Networking Audience” in 2009 and was second in social networking activity worldwide in 2011. (Tables 3 and 4) According to Comscore’s 2009 report, Russians spent more time on social networking sites than anyone else in the world, scrolled through pages faster, and ultimately racked up more page views than any other nation. In 2009, Russians’ monthly average of 6.6 hours spent on social networking sites, viewing 1,300 pages at a rate of 3.3 pages per minute, far exceeded the global average of 3.7 hours and 525 page views at a rate of 2.3 pages per minute. The average American, in contrast, is quite slow, spending, in 2009, only 4.2 hours on social

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135 Israel was first
networking sites, and viewing a comparatively small 477 pages at a rate of less than two pages per minute.\textsuperscript{137} (Table 3)

Table 3  
\textbf{Social Networking Site Engagement by Country, 2009}  
Ranked by Average Hours per Visitor  
Total Worldwide, Age 15+, Home & Work Locations  
\textit{Source: comScore World Metrix}\textsuperscript{138}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average Hrs per Visitor</th>
<th>Average Pages per Visitor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\textit{World-Wide}</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Russia</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Brazil</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Canada</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Puerto Rico</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Spain</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Finland</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 United Kingdom</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Germany</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 United States</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Colombia</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By April, 2011, Comscore’s ranks had changed dramatically, with countries moving up, down, onto and even off the list. Nevertheless, Russia remained at the top, rated second in terms of average hours spent per visitor per month on social networking sites. At 10.3 hours per head, Russians were only behind Israelis, who average 10.7 hours per month. Americans were 13\textsuperscript{th}, averaging only 5.2 hours per month on social networking sites.\textsuperscript{139} (Table 4) Over the course of three years, Russian social networking site use had increased by 4 hours per month, while

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Russia Has World’s Most Engaged Social Networking Audience.} Comscore.com, July 2, 2009.  
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Russia Has World’s Most Engaged Social Networking Audience.} Comscore.com, July 2, 2009.  
\textsuperscript{139} “Average Time Spent on Social Networking Sites Across Geographies.” \textit{comScore Data Mine}, 2011 2011.  
\textsuperscript{139} “Average Time Spent on Social Networking Sites Across Geographies.” \textit{comScore Data Mine}, 2011 2011.
Americans had only increased an hour. By 2011, Russian’s spent twice as much time on social networking sites as Americans.

**Table 4**

*Average Hours Spent per Visitor on Social Networking Sites Across Geographies, 2011*

*Source: Comscore Media Matrix, April 2011*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>HOURS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Israel</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Russia</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Argentina</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Philippines</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Turkey</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Venezuela</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Columbia</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Chile</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Canada</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Spain</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 United Kingdom</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Mexico</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13 United States</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Malaysia</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Germany</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Comscore reports do not indicate what percentage of a country’s Internet audience is using social media, and so they do not indicate that there are proportionately more Russian’s using social networking sites. Rather, the Comscore reports demonstrate that Russians are a particularly engaged audience – that those Russians who use social networking sites are quite infatuated with them, and spend a great deal of time zipping through a large numbers of pages.

In sum, UMC finds that among Russia’s active Internet users, a large majority (79% in 2010) are managing profiles on social networking sites and reading blogs (63% in 2010).

Comcast data builds upon UMC to assert that those Russians that are social networkers, are extremely engaged, spending a great deal of time on the sites, and moving quickly through large

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140 “Average Time Spent on Social Networking Sites Across Geographies.” *ComScore Data Mine*, 2011 2011.

141 Universal McCann, Proprietary Studies, Social Media Studies, Wave 4 and Wave 5.
numbers of pages. In comparison with Americans, Russian’s are particularly active Internet users, engaging in social media frequently and intensively.

**Conclusion**

Rooted in an intimate circle of private computer networks, and developing simultaneously with social media, the history of the Russian Internet is primarily the history of a social medium, founded on interpersonal connections. For Russians, the Web has always been 2.0 – social, interpersonal and user driven. The specific timing of Russia’s Internet development has had a fundamental effect on Russia’s social media ecology, as well as on the nature of Internet use in Russia. Unlike more technologically advanced nations, social media and the Internet have evolved simultaneously in Russia, creating an online environment that is particularly social and engaged. In addition, Russia’s distinct social media ecology has been shaped by its pioneering social media platform, LiveJournal, which provides long form blog content within trusted social networks. The simultaneous evolution of individual blogs and the Internet, without the social networks fostered by LiveJournal, would not have provided the community necessary to support Russia’s vibrant online discourse. In fact, it can be argued that the open network structure of blogs is not interpersonal or community oriented enough to have been successful in Russia, especially given Russia’s history of informal, grassroots networks. However, “pure” social networking sites do not provide the long form content that is essential for in depth online discussions. Consequently, Russia distinct social media ecology can be understood as the result of the specific combination of three interrelated factors – its history of grassroots interpersonal and computer networks, coupled with the simultaneous evolution of
social media and the Internet, and the profound structural influence of the hybrid blogging and social media platform LiveJournal.
CHAPTER 2
CASE STUDY PART I
THE STRUCTURE OF RUSSIAN SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS 2009-2010

In the previous chapter I describe Russia’s social media ecology as a mixture of public and private communications, interweaving political and personal discourse via interpersonal networks. These qualities, I argue, are a result of three key factors - Russia’s specific history of grassroots communications via unofficial networks (computer and interpersonal) coupled the simultaneous evolution of the Internet and social media, and, in particular, the formative influence of the social network and blogging hybrid LiveJournal. The structure, nature and uses of Russian social media networks outlined in Chapter 1, and the particular significance of LiveJournal, are supported by my case study of the patterns of linking and clusters of attention in Russian social media. My study of Russian language social media networks applies social network analysis methods developed by John Kelly of Morningside Analytics, and leverages data collected as part of a large-scale study sponsored by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, investigating the impact of the Internet on Russian politics, media and society.142 The results of my research depict the Russian language social media ecology as a hybrid network, exhibiting the characteristics of both public blogs and closed social networking sites, and containing a core of highly intertwined political and cultural discussion. These research findings reflect the fact that the Russian language social media ecology has, since its inception, been structurally and socio-culturally a mixed interpersonal and public space,

142 “Impact of the Internet on Russian Politics, Media, and Society | Berkman Center.” http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/russia
combining public and private discourse networks, and featuring discussions which interweave politics with culture.

**Social Network Analysis – Theory and Literature Review**

My analysis of Russia’s social media is rooted in techniques of social network analysis (SNA), developed to investigate the perennial social science question of “who talks to whom, about what”. Social network analysis applies network theory to social relationships, investigating how involvement in social networks helps explain the behavior and attitudes of network members. In an article on the study of online social networks, Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman explain that, “just as a computer network is a set of machines connected by a set of cables, a social network is a set of people (or organizations or other social entities) connected by a set of social relationships, such as friendship, co-working or information exchange…When a computer network connects people or organizations,“ they continue, “it is a social network.“ Rather than focus on the specific attributes of individuals, social network analysis highlights the relationships among network members. Social network analysis “seeks to describe these networks of relations as fully as possible, tease out the prominent patterns in such networks, trace the flow of information (and other resources) through them, and discover what effects these relations and networks have on people and organizations.”

In this approach, the main unit of analysis is the relation – the tie, the link – among network members or “nodes,” be they individuals, organizations, blogs, online journals etc. Social network analysis explores the patterns of relations among members of the network that are

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embodied in these links, examining how information flows through both direct and indirect network ties. “If we term network members *egos* and *alters,*” explain Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman, “then each *tie* not only gives egos direct access to their alters but also indirect access to all those network members to whom their alters are connected.” In other words, indirect ties involve “compound relations” (i.e., friend of a friend), so that “when social network analysts study two-person ties, they interpret their functioning in the light of the two persons' relations with other network members.” Social network analysis looks not only on the relationship between A and B, but also at “how A, who is in touch with B and C, is affected by the relation between B and C.”

According to network theory, these patterns of links and relations among members of the network “create multiple complex and connected structures.”

Garton, Haythornthwaite and Wellman explain that “in social network analysis, a group is an empirically discovered structure,” so that group membership and boundaries are generated based on observed patterns of interconnection. These patterns of direct and indirect links create interconnected sets of members known as clusters. Clusters are measured by density, based on the number of ties, and level of connectivity, based on the relevant ties within the defined network. Multiple clusters form the core and periphery of a network.

A cluster description, or profile, can be created based on the demographics of cluster members, the types and nature of the links that define the cluster, and, if relevant and possible, the contents of the messages exchanged.

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In online social media, direct and indirect ties are embodied in friendship networks and in hyperlinks, forming clusters “of various density and levels of connectivity” and, ultimately, the macro structure of the network. \(^{147}\) Social media such as blogs and social networking sites provide rich sources of naturalistic behavioral data, gathered through both manual and automated collection techniques. \(^{148}\) Leveraging the tools of new media, contemporary scholars are able to access the volumes of data now publically available, “collect[ing] and analyz[ing] data on a scale and scope that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.” \(^{149}\) The various elements of an online social network – nodes, links, clusters, core and periphery - can not only be measured and analyzed; they can also be graphically displayed and analyzed visually. \(^{150}\)

In the US, as discussed in Chapter 1, the open nature of the blogosphere versus the bounded nature of social networking sites has had a significant influence on the structure of their networks, and hence on research approaches, and methods of analysis and visualization. Because of the open, platform agnostic structure of the American blogosphere, it has been said that the “the medium of blogging came into existence when these authors recognized themselves as a community.” \(^{151}\) In the blogosphere, social order, which is “constituted by the attribution of friendship, trust, and admiration between members” is “observable through the hypertext links that authors make to each other’s sites,” which “act as markers for the topics that [members] are


\(^{148}\) boyd & Ellison, 2007


discussing, as well as for their interests in general.”

Blogosphere research has shown that individuals tend to practice the same kind of information selectivity online that they do offline, so that hyperlinks reflect the interests, preferences and attitudes of their makers. Blogger linking behavior - in terms of which other members to link to, as well as which resources across the Internet to link to – is an indication of their personal interests, as well as their judgments of each other. The preferences that lead members to link to one another “with disproportionate frequency” also leads these same members “to link preferentially to other online content”, such as particular media sources or NGOs.

Blogger linking choices generate clusters of attention and interest, so that, in a blogosphere, “structures emerge out of collections of conversations,” “reflecting the choices individuals make about who they speak to and how often.” As John Kelly explains in his PhD dissertation, in the US and elsewhere around the world, “microcosms of bloggers come together around a large and unpredictable set of topics and interests, but they do not come together around just anything...Bloggers link to things in which they are interested, many of these interests endure, and over time this leads to structural regularities.”

So, Kelly continues, whether or not a blogger links to a major node such as YouTube, or Wikipedia “reveals very little about his or her interests. At some point, the majority of the top bloggers link to these types of sites. But other, less dominant sites are preferred by particular clusters of bloggers, receiving a far greater proportion of links from them than random chance would allow. Studying the proportion of links from particular sets of bloggers shows the patterns of

preference.”

In other words, blogger’s hypertext links create “a network of readership and social relations,” which, as has been explained in Chapter 1, is insensitive to blogging platform. While blogs create communities and networks based on interest and attention, regardless of the blogging platform used, social networking sites represent closed networks, primarily organized around people. These are “structured as personal (or "egocentric") networks, with the individual at the center of their own community.” In the blogosphere, researchers explore the clusters of interest and attention created by linking choices. In social networking sites, linking data can be combined with profile information to explore demographics and patterns of relations, such as friendship networks, within a bounded structure.

For instance, in an article examining the political blogosphere in the US during the 2004 presidential election, Adamic and Glance analyzed and visualized the linking patterns and discussion topics of political bloggers in order to “measure the degree of interaction between liberal and conservative blogs and...uncover any differences in the structure of the two communities.” Their study included an analysis of hyperlinks from a data set of over 1,000 political blogs over the course of one single day, as well as a more detailed examination of the contents of the posts of 40 “A-list” blogs over the period of two months preceding the election. Their analysis found “that liberal and conservative blogs did indeed have different lists of favorite news sources, people, and topics to discuss, although they occasionally overlapped in their discussion of news articles and events. The division between liberals and conservatives was

158 boyd & Ellison, 2007
159 boyd & Ellison, 2007
further reflected in the linking pattern between the blogs, with a great majority of the links remaining internal to either liberal or conservative communities.”  

Figure 3, below, demonstrates the potency with which network visualization techniques convey this information. This figure portrays the “community structure” of the 1000 political blogs in the data set. The size of the blog is based on the number of other blogs that link to it. “Colors reflect political orientation” - conservative blogs and the links between them are red, while liberal blogs and the links between them are blue. Links from liberal blogs to conservative ones are marked in orange, and links from conservative blogs to liberal ones are purple. In this figure “the unmistakable division between the liberal and conservative political (blogo)spheres” is immediately visible – a graphic illustration of the fact that “91% of the links originating within either the conservative or liberal communities stay within that community.”

Figure 3: Community Structure of Political Blogs, Adamic and Glance, 2005

In another example, a 2007 study chose LiveJournal’s bounded network as a site for investigating the network characteristics of non-English language conversations online. The study examined language use in over 6,000 LiveJournals (5,025 automatically “crawled” and 1,000 randomly-selected) “in order to determine the overall language demographics, the robustness of four [primary] non-English language networks (Russian, Portuguese, Finnish, and Japanese), and the characteristics of individuals who bridge between different languages on LiveJournal.com.” The study used network visualization techniques to represent patterns revealed by “crawling the 'friends' links of monolingual source journals from each language, and coding the languages used in the resultant sample.” By basing their network on friends lists, rather than hyperlinks, the researchers in this study were essentially measuring and visualizing the language content and density of friendship networks on LiveJournal, with no indication of attention or interest. While I have some disagreement with the findings (described in further detail below), they generally resonate with common sense assumptions, revealing “that English dominates globally but not locally, network robustness is determined mostly by population size, and journals that bridge between languages are written by multicultural, multilingual individuals, or else they have broadly accessible content.”

Descriptions of LiveJournal in this study affirm the platform’s hybrid nature. While the authors refers to LJ as a “blog hosting site,” they also qualify their findings by explaining that, like a social networking site, LiveJournal is “a relatively self-contained 'community’” with “its own culture and practices that do not necessarily represent those of other blog hosting services or

the blogosphere as a whole.”\textsuperscript{163} Hence, the “audience” in this study is not the community of bloggers worldwide, but rather other LiveJournal members, specifically, those “designated as 'friends' (also known as 'friending') by individual journalers.” LJ was selected as a study site not only for the convenience of crawling a contained network, but also because of its linguistic accessibility, because, as the study authors explain, “LJ is a hosting environment that is welcoming to non-English bloggers, in that it offers blog templates in 32 language varieties and supports Unicode. The constraints on use of non-ASCII fonts identified in previous discussions of multilingualism on the Internet do not seem to apply to LiveJournal; every language we were able to identify displayed in its native font in our browsers, except when bloggers chose to represent it in another font.”\textsuperscript{164} As mentioned in Chapter 1, this accessibility is also one of the key reasons for LJ’s popularity in Russia.

The researchers in this study began by manually coding 1,000 randomly selected journal/blogs to attribute language, and identify the four top non-English languages to be used. Of the random sample of 1,000 journals, English was the predominant language (84%) followed by Russian (11%), with Portuguese, Finnish, Spanish and Dutch tying for a distant third place with 0.4%, followed by Japanese with 0.3%.\textsuperscript{165} On the basis of popularity and linguistic diversity, Russian, Portuguese, Finnish, and Japanese language blog/journals were chosen for further investigation. The researchers next used a variety of methods to select six monolingual journals for each language (for a total of 24) to use as sources, or “seeds” from which to crawl the network. They then constructed a “snowball” sample by crawling two degrees out along the

network, based on “friends lists” in the profiles of the 24 seed journals. The snowball sample produced 5,025 journals, which were also hand coded for language attribution.\footnote{Herring, et al. “Language networks on LiveJournal.” 2007.}

The study authors acknowledge that the number of friends in the journals of the seed samples had a profound impact on the size of the networks produced by crawling out from seed links. However, they appear to overlook the impact of the significance of these variations in their final conclusions. The study authors note, for example, that Russians had by far the highest amount of friends per journal – a mean of 231, as opposed to 170 for Portuguese, 60 for Finnish and only 20 for Japanese. The report did not indicate the mean friendship networks for English. As a result of the high number of friends for each Russian user, Russian LJ blogs ended up dominating the network. “While the four languages are represented equally (25% each) at Degree 0, by Degree 1, Russian constituted 65% of the sample, growing to 70% at Degree 2, while the proportions of journals in languages with fewer friends decreased accordingly.” In short, the analysis found Russian language LJ blogs to be most “robust” in terms of highest number of friends per journal, creating the most self contained network, with fewest non-Russian journals.\footnote{Herring, et al. “Language networks on LiveJournal.” 2007.}

The study authors use network visualization techniques similar to the ones I use in this dissertation to display the “differing degrees of network density and linguistic homogeneity” that they found between languages. Their visualization techniques involve a method similar to the one I use in my research,\footnote{Fruchterman, Thomas M. J., and Edward M. Reingold. “Graph Drawing by Force-directed Placement.” \textit{Software: Practice and Experience} 21, no. 11 (1991): 1129–1164. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/spe.4380211102/abstract} which “pulls together well-connected nodes, and pushes to the edges nodes that are less well-connected, enabling a clear visual comparison of density and centrality
The study finds that, due to the combination of number of journals and high number of friends per journal, “Russian and Portuguese LJs have attained a critical mass sufficient for a (relatively) persistent, dense, centralized network to emerge for each language, while Finnish and Japanese have fewer LJ users and less persistent, sparse, decentralized networks.”

The figures below display the results for the largest and smallest of the four networks in the study – Figure 4 shows Russian and Figure 5 shows Japanese. In both figures, languages are indicated by color - English (blue), Russian (red), Portuguese (yellow), Finnish (green), Japanese (violet), and other (orange). The figures illustrate that the Russian language network was not only the largest of the non-English networks, it was also the most self-contained, with “a large number of well-connected nodes that are almost entirely Russian…A few English and other language journals (e.g., Ukrainian and Romanian) are found in the dense central core, while the occasional concentrated clump of English is pushed to the edges.” In contrast, the Japanese network is the most sparse and multilingual. “With the exception of a small tight clump of Japanese that appears towards the upper right, the source journals neither have dense clusters of links nor do they connect closely to one another.” A majority of the Japanese journals are bordered by English language journals. Some presence of Russian, and a bit of Portuguese, is also apparent. Based on this data, the study authors conclude that for Russian users of LJ, “most of one’s LJ experience would be in Russian,” and that “monolingual Russians would find an abundance of journals to read and interact with on LJ,” although, if desired, “it would not be too difficult to connect through friends to English journals.” On the other hand, results for Japanese

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language LiveJournals indicate that “it would be difficult to have extensive conversations in Japanese on LJ; Japanese users would also have to know English.” ¹⁷¹

Figure 4: The Russian Language Live Journal Network, 2007

Figure 5: The Japanese Language LiveJournal Network, 2007

As an explanation for the “robustness” of the Russian network, the researchers site Gorny’s claim that LJ is popular among Russians because of their “national character, which includes a need for intense affiliation, which is supported by the 'friending' and 'community journal' features of LJ.”\(^{172}\) However, despite this acknowledgement, the authors of the study neglect to fully explore the implications of this variation in linguistic friendship networks on their results. It is evident that according to the methods used in this study, the size of the friendship network for each language has a significant exponential effect on the “robustness” of network studied. However, the authors do not investigate possible socio-cultural reasons for the size of friendship networks, and simply assume that the number of friends per journal is primarily based on the size of the potential audience, that “the greater the presence of a language on LJ, the larger the universe of potential friends its speakers have to choose from, and the more friends they are likely to have.”\(^{173}\) This leads the authors to conclude that population size, rather than the size of friendship networks, is the determining factor in network “robustness”. “Regarding the robustness of non-English language networks, “they write, “our main finding is that population size matters. The number of LJs in the languages in our study corresponds roughly to degree of network persistence, density, and centrality.”\(^{174}\) This conclusion is understandable, given the parameters of the study, and the fact that the size of the population does seem to influence the size of friendship networks in each language. Nevertheless, I believe that this emphasis on size of linguistic population, rather than on the size of friendship networks, is misplaced. In other words, this conclusion overlooks the impact of friendship network size on

the very friendship networks the authors are investigating. As I argue in Chapter 1, the size of friendship networks is not simply correlated to sample size, but is a product of a confluence of social, cultural and historic elements specific to each country.

Like the studies above, the methodology used in my social network analysis is rooted in network theory, and the understanding that the macro structure of online social networks arises from the linking behavior of individual members. In particular, my approach explores how networks of hyperlinks within an online social media network provide an indication of the patterns of attention and interest within the network. Identifying the nature and structure of these patterns in Russia’s online social networks is the goal of this section of my dissertation, and is key to understanding Russia’s social media ecology. It represents a step towards Kelly’s suggestion that “the ability to correlate the topology of social media networks with specified social characteristics of populations, and map the behavior of attentive clusters with respect to sets of known political and media actors/institutions, presents a powerful direction for global comparative research.”

Case Study - The Structure of Russian Language Social Media Networks 2009-2010

My analysis of the form and function of Russian social media leverages quantitative and qualitative data on Russian social media networks, collected as part of a large-scale study, sponsored by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, investigating the impact of the Internet on Russian politics, media and society. I was a member of the Research Team for this project, and co-authored the initial results papers, Public Discourse in the

176 “Impact of the Internet on Russian Politics, Media, and Society | Berkman Center.” http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/research/russia
My research for this dissertation is based on two interrelated sets of data – quantitative data on social media network structure, derived from hyperlinks, and qualitative data on social media content and user characteristics. The quantitative aspect draws on social network analysis, advanced statistics and data modeling, to measure, analyze and graphically visualize online networks. The initial data set for quantitative analysis and network visualization consisted of 1 million active blogs, collected between May 2009 and September 2010. This set was narrowed down to a highly interconnected “RuNet Discussion Core” of approximately 12,000 blogs and 4,000 hyperlinks, active between May 2009 and February 2010, containing the majority of the online public discourse, and centered around the LiveJournal platform. Further network analysis segmented the “Discussion Core” into 35 distinct clusters of interest and attention known as “Attentive Clusters.” A subset of the “Discussion Core,” consisting of 1,200 blogs and 680 links, was further analyzed for semantic content in order to identify and label these “Attentive Clusters,” indicating “who is talking to whom about what.”

The qualitative and quantitative data were combined with visualization techniques to generate a “network map” that displayed the clustering patterns produced by relatively dense ties among sets of nodes. “Attentive Clusters” were analyzed visually and statistically, creating detailed profiles of key clusters and enabling quantitative and qualitative comparisons across the subsets. These profiles provide a description

of the bloggers within each cluster, the content of their discussions, the nature of their interests, and the quality of their discourse within and across clusters.

**Methods - Network Analysis**

My investigation of Russia’s social media ecology initially approached Russian language social media networks with methods developed on the basis of the open structure of America’s blogosphere. These methods, we discovered, needed to be modified in order to more accurately reflect the specific characteristics of Russia’s hybrid social media ecology.

As described above, my research methods are predicated on the understanding that an aggregation of the links within a social media network generates a specific network structure, and that, in a blogosphere, patterns of hyperlinks provide an indication of the clusters of attention and interest within the network. The methods used in my analysis involve four overlapping types of hyperlinks. The distinction between these types of links is important, as each represents different measures of attention, with disparate effects on network structure and meaning. In the analysis of social media networks, hyperlinks between bloggers and other blogs are called **Inlinks**. Inlinks represent patterns of attention between individual nodes, or bloggers. In aggregate, they indicate the size and nature of a blog’s audience. In this dissertation, network structure is graphically represented on network visualization maps by the size, position and color of the blog dots, and the “Network Neighborhoods” and “Attentive Clusters” that they form. Blogs are drawn into proximity based on Inlinks, providing a visual indication of which bloggers are in communication with each other. In contrast, **Outlinks** are the links that bloggers make to all potential online resources – not only other bloggers, but also the websites of media, entertainment, commercial, educational, governmental and non-governmental organizations.
Outlinks reflect which web resources an individual blogger is paying attention to. Bloggers with similar Outlinks or interests will form groups or “Attentive Clusters,” indicated by color in my network maps.

Inlinks and Outlinks can be further divided into two structural types - dynamic (changeable) and static (constant). As John Kelly explains, “analysis of static vs dynamic link types assumes an information architecture common to the blog genre, involving the use of blogrolls and posts.”¹⁷⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1, this is the predominant model in the US, in which the changeable, dynamic links appear within blog posts, while constant or static links traditionally appear on the side, or “blogroll”, of a particular blog. Static links are traditionally located outside of blog posts, and remain consistent over time, “regardless of how often blog content is changed.”¹⁸⁰ Static links usually reference the broader online resources that the blogger finds meaningful, pointing to the homepages of various websites, media resources and blogs.¹⁸¹ Static links typically represent “a sign of readership, support, interest, or marker of a social relationship.” Dynamic links, on the other hand, “tend to occur inline with the text of a weblog, and as the weblog is updated, they fall off of the front page.”¹⁸² These links usually reference a specific conversation or topic, pointing to specific content – news articles or other blog posts, indicating who, or what, the blogger is paying attention to at any given moment. “Typically studies present static links as a form of readership, with dynamic links implying discourse or interaction around a particular topic. Together these references form a readership network that spans the content produced by community.”¹⁸³ Kelly clarifies that, unlike blogs,

¹⁸² Marlow, 2006.
“social networking services…use a different architecture, structured by friend lists and group affiliations…Analyses of these alternative online genre forms would require methodological adjustments.” My study of Russian social media revealed the necessity for precisely this type of methodological adjustment, when the first mapping of Russian social media networks, using standard methodology developed on the basis of the American blogosphere, revealed the dominant influence of the more bounded, “social network site” structure of LiveJournal.

Data Collection, Network Selection and Network Visualization

The unusually platform sensitive nature of the Russian language social media networks became evident during the first phase of my research, in which a network map was generated based solely on Inlinks (links between blogs). The methodology used to generate this initial network map, aggregating both “static” and “dynamic” links between blogs, was developed based on the platform agnostic structure of America’s blogosphere, where bloggers communicate with other bloggers regardless of platform, and hence platform choice does not influence network structure. My study began with initial set of approximately five million Russian language blogs gathered from the blog index provided by Yandex, Russia’s leading search engine. As described in Chapter 1, Yandex considers LiveJournal, and all the other platforms that emerged in its image, as “blogs,” listing them as such in its blog index, as well as in its annual reports on the “Trends in the Blogosphere” in Russia. As explained in Chapter 1, this is a result of the long form content of LiveJournal posts, the platform’s formative influence on the development of Russia’s social media networks, and the socio-political relevance of their

online discourse in Russian society. However, as noted earlier, LiveJournal and other similar platforms are not “pure” blogs as they are understood within the American context, and, in our initial analysis, their bounded social network structure created unexpected results. The initial set of approximately five million Russian language “blogs” gathered from the blog Index provided by Yandex was further narrowed down to a network of one million active blogs (those that had been updated within the last 3 months) gathered between May 2009 and September, 2010. The fact that the vast majority of the blogs in our initial corpus were found to be inactive, or only very slightly active, corresponds with other data on the Russian language blogosphere, such as the “Trends in the Blogosphere” reports published by Yandex Research, which claim that a large percentage of Russian language blogs are started and then abandoned. Based on an analysis of both “static” and “dynamic” Inlinks between these 1 million active blogs, the initial map of the macro structure of Russian social media networks depicted a network unusually divided into a small amount of distinctly separate groups. (Figure 6) On the map in Figure 6, below, as in all the maps presented in this dissertation, each dot represents a blog. The size and position of each blog dot are determined by the Inlinks, representing the quantity and quality of communication between bloggers.

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Figure 6 – Russian Blogosphere Map, based on Static and Dynamic Inlinks

Further analysis found that each separate group in the map above represents a separate social media platform. This highly segmented initial map illustrates an essential aspect of Russian language social media networks - their platform specific nature, indicating that, in Russia, blogger communication is limited primarily to others within the same blogging platform. In contrast, a map of the US blogosphere, shown below, generated using similar methods, also based on a combination of static and dynamic Inlinks, is far more integrated. (Figure 7)

Figure 7 – US Blogosphere Map, based on Static and Dynamic Inlinks
As discussed in Chapter I, platform specific network structure is a characteristic, most notably, of social networking sites, where members will communicate primarily with others within the same platform. It is also a characteristic of Russia’s pioneering blogging platform, LiveJournal. Today, nearly 70% of Russia’s blogs are hosted on four main “blogging platforms” - LiveJournal, LiveInternet, Ya.ru, and Blog.Mail.ru - which all emulate the hybrid LiveJournal model. While not strictly “walled gardens,” these hybrid platforms strongly promote links within platforms rather than across, creating the platform sensitive network structure depicted in the network map of Russian social media Inlinks, above. The results of our initial mapping, using methods developed based on the platform agnostic structure of America’s blogosphere, revealed the unique “platform specific” structure of Russian social media networks, the extent to which blogger communication in Russia is segmented by platform, and the significant influence of LiveJournal.

**Identifying the RuNet Discussion Core**

Given the structural distinctions of the Russian language social media networks, our research team determined that the standard approach needed to be modified in order to more accurately reflect the Russian context. In particular, we felt that this initial network visualization, with its high level of platform segmentation, did not accurately reveal the patterns of attention and interest necessary for a full understanding of the discussion networks in Russian social media. In order to identify the most interconnected “Core” of public discourse among Russian language blogs, we needed to overcome this platform segmentation. Our solution was to modify the Network Selection methods to exclude static links and focus only on the changing

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187 Yandex blog report, 2009
“dynamic” hyperlinks or citations that usually appear within blog posts. This approach is not without precedent. In previous research into other linguistic blogospheres, Kelly found it necessary to take similar measures, such as disqualifying certain static platform specific links, in order to mitigate the impact of this type of link bias. However, Russian social media networks presented the most extreme case, and the Russian language social network map is so far the only one based exclusively on dynamic, in post links.\textsuperscript{188}

Based on an analysis of only the dynamic Inlinks within posts, we narrowed our original dataset to focus on the blogs that all other bloggers linked to most frequently between May 1, 2009 and February 17, 2010. This focus on the ‘active link economy’ reduced our data set to 17,000 blogs that transcended platform atomization, including relevant blogs from across Russia’s social media networks, while excluding peripheral, platform-specific clusters. In order to partition this network into clusters of interest or attention, we analyzed Outlinks - links that bloggers make not just to other bloggers, but to all possible online resources – media, commercial, educational, governmental, NGO etc. Our first step was to identify the top links to all online resources generated by the 17,000 most interconnected blogs. We selected the 4,000 most popular Internet resources cited by these 17,000 bloggers. These top 4,000 Outlinks served as a threshold which was applied back to the set of 17,000 blogs, creating a smaller group that included only those blogs that linked to at least 10 of the 4,000 most widely cited URLs. The final network contained 11,792 blogs and 4,000 Outlinks. This network transcends platform segmentation to provide a visualization of the structural and conversational nucleus, the “Discussion Core,” of the most interconnected blogs on the Russian language blogosphere. This

\textsuperscript{188} Personal communication with John Kelly, dated 2011
Discussion Core, I was not surprised to find, is overwhelmingly (98%) comprised of blogs on the LiveJournal platform.

My two primary findings regarding the structure of Russia’s social media networks - their sensitivity to platform, and the existence of a Discussion Core dominated by LiveJournal bloggers - are a result of formative role of LiveJournal in Russian social media. This insight illustrates the extent to which the socio-political history of the Russian language Internet discussed in Chapter 1, including the simultaneous evolution of the Internet and social media, and the emergence of LiveJournal as a dominant force, are essential to understanding the structure and nature of Russia’s contemporary social media networks, and the implications of my research.

**Isolating Clusters of Attention in the RuNet Discussion Core**

The RuNet Discussion Core contains clusters of interest or attention, generated on the basis of the Outlink choices of the bloggers in the network. Identifying the number of Attentive Clusters in a network is a partially subjective process, requiring an iterative approach that compares several possible “cluster solutions,” based on, as John Kelly explains “cut points that divide parent clusters into relatively large child clusters with relatively high cophenetic distances (indicating more distinct clusters).”\(^{189}\) The best option is one that balances cluster distinction with quantity, identifying the lowest possible number of discrete clusters. Towards that end, we examined various cluster solutions using both a visual analysis of the results projected upon the map, and a semantic analysis of cluster content. Our analysis ultimately partitioned the “RuNet Discussion Core” of 11,792 blogs into 35 distinct clusters. In the social media network

visualizations used in this dissertation, and, in particular, in the RuNet Discussion Core map below (Figure 8) these “Attentive Clusters” are indicated by color.

**Figure 8 – The RuNet Discussion Core**

![RuNet Core](image)

**KEY:**

**Dot** - Blog  
**Size** - Prominence & Popularity - based on volume of links  
**Position** - Inlinks (between bloggers), based on who is paying attention to the blog/dot  
**Proximity** - “Network Neighborhood,” based on similarity of Inlinks, blogs are drawn together when the same bloggers are linking and thus paying attention to them.  
**Color** - Outlinks, based on which internet resources the blog is paying attention to  
**Shared Color** – “Attentive Cluster,” based on similarity of outlinks – blogs share a color when they are paying attention to similar resources

The RuNet Discussion Core network map above (Figure 8) is the result of my iterative process of network selection, analysis and partitioning, based on the understanding that patterns of attention and networks of links within a social media network will influence its structure.
This structure is represented by the size, position, clustering and color of the dots on the map, providing a visual representation of the relationships and patterns of attention and interest among the 11,792 most frequently linked to blogs in Russian social media – the RuNet Discussion Core. The map groups these blogs into 35 clusters, based on an analysis of linking patterns involving the 4,000 most popular Internet resources in our dataset. After a map is generated, qualitative analysis of the content and nature of the blogs themselves is necessary in order to create labels and profiles for each “Attentive Cluster” and fully interpret the implications of the data.

On this map, each dot represents a blog. Blog/dot size and position are generated based on Inlinks from other blogs, which serve as a measure of the collective judgment of bloggers vis-a-vis other bloggers. Inlinks are a factor of a blog’s audience – an indication of which bloggers are paying attention to it, and to what degree. The size of a dot represents individual blog prominence and popularity - the bigger the dot, the more links it received from other bloggers. Similarly, the position of each dot is also based on the collective choices of fellow bloggers. Like a gravitational pull, blogs are pulled closer and closer together when they share Inlinks – the same bloggers who are paying attention to one, are also linking to the others nearby. Consequently, blogs are in close proximity, ie, in the same “Network Neighborhood,” when they share an audience. A blog’s size, position and “Network Neighborhood” are generated based on the linking behavior of fellow bloggers, ie the blog’s audience. In contrast, “Attentive Clusters,” depicted in color on the map, are generated based on Outlinks, which represent the linking behavior of the individual blogger, rather than the collective. Outlinks from a blog to all possible resources on the web, are indicative of individual blogger interest. They reflect the diversity of the web itself, and include not just other blogs, but resources such as media and commercial websites. “Attentive Clusters” are formed by bloggers who share interests and
have statistically similar Outlinks. In other words, the type of Internet content – blogs, media, news, entertainment, social networking, business etc – the blogger is linking and paying attention to within her or his posts, will determine which “Attentive Clusters” they belong to. Blogs in the same “Attentive Cluster” will share a color, indicating that they are paying attention to the same sites across the Internet. “Network Neighborhoods” (location/proximity) and “Attentive Clusters” (color) are highly correlated and generally overlap a great deal in network maps. However, it is important to recognize that they have different implications. Network position (size and proximity) are based on Inlinks, and are an indication of the collective preferences of bloggers vis a vis other bloggers. “Attentive Cluster” assignment (color), on the other hand, is based on Outlinks – indicating the linking choices of the individual blogger, what online resources that blogger is paying attention to. Hence, while Network Neighborhoods are determined by the collective judgment of fellow bloggers, Attentive Clusters reveal the choices and interests of member bloggers. In sum, choices of fellow bloggers will influence a blog dot’s size and position, while the choices of the individual blogger will determine the blog’s color and “Attentive Cluster.”

It is important to recognize a certain limitation to this approach. Bloggers often have rich and varied interests, and write about a wide range of topics. This is particularly true of Russian bloggers. However, the current method assigns blogs to one mutually exclusive “Attentive Cluster” only. The current process does not yet allow for cluster overlap, and the map does not indicate a blogger’s secondary interests or minor linking sources. In other words, a blog’s membership in a certain Attentive Cluster indicates which Internet resources the blog links to the most, but does not represent the blogger’s sole and entire identity. As is explained in Public Discourse in the Russian Blogosphere, “this clustering approach is one which makes large,
statistically derived generalizations in order to identify large-scale tendencies and regularities within extremely complex online discourse networks…. But assignment to a cluster labeled ‘Nationalist,’ for instance, does not necessarily mean that a blogger is a Nationalist, but that their pattern of linking, over time, resembles those of bloggers who tend to link to Nationalistic online content and sources.” 190

Blogs that share a color (Attentive Cluster) and are in close proximity with one another (Network Neighborhood) represent bloggers who are interested in the same things and have similar bloggers linking to with them. This usually implies that these bloggers are also communicating with each other. These double ties are the strongest and most potent to analyze. Blogs that are close by (Network Neighborhood) but have different colors (Attentive Clusters) imply that similar bloggers are paying attention to them, but they themselves do not share many interests. For instance, a set of active political bloggers may link to various political clusters, such as “Patriot/Nationalist” and “Democratic Opposition” or “Conservative” and “Liberal”. Each different attentive cluster will have its own color, denoting their interests – the sources the clusters themselves are paying attention to. However, these clusters will be pulled together and will appear in proximity with each other because of the shared attention (Inlinks) from various active political bloggers – forming a region on the map where political discussion is strong. Bloggers who share a color (Attentive Cluster) but are scattered across the map denote individuals who are paying attention to a similar set of concerns, but may not be aware of each other. These include, for example, regional and diaspora clusters, such as Russian speaking

Armenians who may all be paying attention to the same Armenian media, but not necessarily communicating with each other.

In order to fully interpret the map above, the content of these “Attentive Clusters” and their linking choices needed to be analyzed, described and labeled. This process is described in the next chapter.

**Conclusions – A Hybrid Network**

The two key structural findings of my research - the fact that Russian social media networks are structured according to the style of social networking platforms, and the fact that the RuNet Discussion Core is localized around LiveJournal – indicate the extent to which Russia’s social media ecology has been shaped and influenced by its pioneer blogging platform, LiveJournal, which combines features of social networks and blogs, and has, historically, contained the core of online public affairs and cultural discussion. The distinctions between American and Russian social media networks were affirmed not only by these results, but also by the fact that standard methods of social network analysis, developed based the structure of the American blogosphere, needed to be modified to adjust to the platform sensitive nature of Russia’s social media networks, and generate a network map that more meaningfully reflects Russia’s online discourse. These modifications were required because of the platform specific nature of the Russia’s social media networks, based on a network structure that is more characteristic of social networking sites than blogs. The simultaneous evolution of the Internet and social media in Russia, and the foundational influence of LiveJournal, has created the hybrid network structure described in this chapter. My findings regarding the structure of Russia’s online social networks are supported by my analysis of the clusters of attention and interest,
outlined in the next chapter, and the particularly social and interpersonal nature of Russia’s online media ecology, as described in Chapter 1. Russia’s social media networks, as my analysis of Attentive Clusters will demonstrate, constitute a hybrid interpersonal and public space, comprised of blogs that combine public and private discourse, and featuring discussions which interweave politics with culture.
The previous chapter addresses the uniquely hybrid structure of Russian social media networks. The networks of links and attention identified by the first phase of my research, including the process of data collection, network selection, network visualization and network partitioning, as well as the required methodological modifications, revealed a Discussion Core of highly interconnected blogs, centered on the LiveJournal platform. Within the RuNet Discussion Core, the first phase of my research identified 35 Attentive Clusters, varying in size from as small as 26 blogs to as large as 1591 blogs, but with an average size of around 335 blogs.\(^{191}\) The map of the RuNet Discussion Core, Figure 9, below, illustrates which “Attentive Clusters” exist and where. In order to fully interpret this map, these “Attentive Clusters” needed to be analyzed, described and labeled.

**Figure 9 - The RuNet Discussion Core**

\(^{191}\) See Table 14, for a list of all 35 Clusters, by size and Zone
In order to understand the make up of these Attentive Clusters and their relationship to the RuNet Discussion Core as a whole, I needed to examine the content of the blogs themselves. For this purpose, a subset of the larger network of blogs and Outlinks was selected for detailed content analysis. This subset, consisting of 1,200 blogs and 680 Outlinks, was coded by a team of language experts using specially designed surveys. (See Appendix) In order to identify the characteristics and primary interests of the bloggers within each Attentive Cluster, I reviewed the volumes of quantitative (raw, automated) and qualitative (coded) data generated by my research, juxtaposing that information with the visual representation of the map itself. This approach enabled me to create detailed profiles for the key Attentive Clusters of the RuNet Discussion Core, and then analyze their relationship to each other and to the RuNet Discussion Core in general. My detailed semantic and demographic analysis of the 35 clusters of interest and attention within the RuNet Discussion Core revealed a highly intertwined network of political and cultural discussion, in which a distinct political blogosphere was difficult to isolate. In the conclusion of this section, I compare these observations with the findings of similar research into other national and linguistic social media networks (such as Arabic and US), and discuss the social and political implications of these findings.

**Methods – Content Analysis**

In order to describe and label each “Attentive Cluster,” I analyzed the position and relationship of clusters as visualized on the RuNet Discussion Core Map, as well as the reams of quantitative and qualitative data produced by my research. The quantitative data set includes the automated “raw data,” based on blogger hyperlinks (Inlinks and Outlinks) used to generate the RuNet Discussion Core map. Analysis of this data enabled me to determine the top (i.e. most
often linked to) blogs and top Internet resources for each individual Attentive Cluster, as well as the most popular blogs and Internet resources for the RuNet Discussion Core overall. This automated data, however, provided only the web address (URLs) for these blogs and websites. In order to understand who the bloggers were, and what online sources they were citing, I needed to analyze the content of the blogs and websites themselves. For this purpose, a subset of approximately 10% of the blogs and Outlinks in our network was selected for semantic and content analysis. I recruited nine native Russian speakers to serve as the primary “language specialists” or coders for this aspect of the project. Their role was to provide qualitative descriptions of our network – blogs, bloggers and the Internet resources that these bloggers pay most attention to. Their assignment was to review a select set of blogs and Outlink URLs, and complete a specially designed online survey for each. These surveys were modeled after surveys used in previous Berkman Center led studies of the Arabic blogosphere, with specific modifications for Russia. The surveys of blogs provide specific demographic data on the bloggers, as well as detailed descriptions of the blogs themselves. The Outlink surveys describe the selected websites and categorize them by type – blog, media, commercial, governmental etc. (See Appendix – Coder instructions, Sample Blog and Outlink Surveys). The final qualitative data set collects results from the blog and Outlink surveys, and provides descriptions and demographics for the key bloggers and websites identified above.

Each of the nine selected coders passed through a vetting process, which involved coding a set of 10-15 blogs to ensure a high level of linguistic ability and cultural competence. The coders are all individuals involved in the Russian Internet – as bloggers, students of communications, sociology and psychology or as professionals in the New Media field. They represent the diversity of Russian Internet - three are based in Moscow, one in Russia’s
Ulyanovsk Region, two are in the Ukraine, one in Europe and two in the United States. My team of language specialists completed a total of 1,880 surveys related to the RuNet Discussion Core. These include surveys on 1,200 blog URLs, addressing approximately 10% of the core network of almost 12,000 blogs, as well as surveys on 680 Outlink URL’s, representing around 17% of the 4,000 total Outlinks in our network. In order to select the 1,200 blogs for survey and analysis, I began with an initial sample of 1,000 blogs selected at random from the larger set of almost 12,000. From this random set of 1,000, a smaller set of 154 blogs was randomly selected for double coding to ensure intercoder reliability according to the principles of Krippendorff’s Alpha, generally considered the highest standard for determining reliability.\textsuperscript{192} Once a satisfactory reliability of over .74 was established, the remaining 846 blogs were coded. Towards the end of the process, an additional 200 blogs were added to ensure that a representative sample of approximately 10% of each cluster was coded. The Outlink URLs were selected using a similar process. Coders reviewed a random set of 680 Outlinks, representing approximately 17% of the total of 4,000 Outlinks used to generate the final map. 120 of these were double coded to ensure intercoder reliability.

The qualitative and quantitative data used in my analysis was aggregated into five key data sets described below:

**Blog Data:**

1) **Master Blog List**

The Master Blog List is an automatically generated index of all the 11,792 blogs in the RuNet Discussion Core. This list consists only automated data, and does not contain any qualitative information about blog content. The index provides the blog URL, the Attentive Cluster that the

\textsuperscript{192} K. Krippendorff, *Computing Krippendorff’s Alpha Reliability*, 2011 [http://repository.upenn.edu/asc_papers/43/]
blog belongs to, as well as the INDEG ranking, which measures the significance of a blog based on quantity of Inlinks - the links to that blog from all the other blogs on the list. Sorting the Master Blog List by INDEG ranking indicates which blogs are the most prominent across the entire RuNet Discussion Core. Table 5, below, provides a list of the top ten blogs in the RuNet Discussion Core, as well as the cluster that they belong to.

Table 5 - Top Ten Blogs in the RuNet Discussion Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL</th>
<th>CLUSTER</th>
<th>INDEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1307</td>
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<tr>
<td>ibigdan.livejournal.com</td>
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<td>946</td>
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<td>776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Avmalgin.livejournal.com</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sorting this list by Cluster, as well as INDEG Rank enabled me to identify the most popular (most frequently linked to) blogs for a specific Attentive Cluster. Table 6, below provides an example of the top ten results for Cluster 1, which I would eventually label as “Internationally Linking Public Discourse.” I repeated this process for each cluster that I analyzed.
Table 6 - Top Ten Blogs in Cluster 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL</th>
<th>CLUSTER</th>
<th>INDEG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navalny.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivand.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>becky-sharpe.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amoro1959.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eu-shestakov.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mrparker.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tarlith-history.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shusharin.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivanov-petrov.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plucer.livejournal.com</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Coded Blog List

The Coded Blog List aggregates data from the 1,200 qualitative blog surveys, representing approximately 10% of the blogs in each cluster. The list indicates which cluster the blog belongs to, and includes whatever demographic information coders were able to glean for each blog, such as blogger location (country & city), gender, primary language used and anonymity. Most importantly, it includes detailed qualitative descriptions for each blog. These descriptions are the heart of my Cluster Profiles, providing a nuanced sense of the variety and diversity of Russian social media networks, as well as a strong feel for the unique flavor of each cluster. As part of the process of creating Attentive Cluster labels and profiles, I analyzed the demographic data provided by the coders for each cluster, as well as the descriptions of the blogs in that cluster. The two tables below provide an example of the demographic and descriptive data from five of the coded blogs in Cluster 1 - which I eventually labeled “Internationally Linking Public Discourse.” (Table 7, Table 8)
### Table 7 - Sample Coded Data From Blogs in Cluster 1 – Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>OTHER COUNTRY/CITY</th>
<th>USES</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>CL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://mijas.livejournal.com">http://mijas.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>Don't Know/Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Canada, Ottawa</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://grezev.livejournal.com">http://grezev.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Ekaterinburg</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://fandaal.livejournal.com">http://fandaal.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>Don't Know/Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Estonia/Tartu</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://mbla.livejournal.com">http://mbla.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>Don't Know/Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>France/Paris</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://sanin.livejournal.com">http://sanin.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>Don't Know/Other</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Greenland/Avanersuak</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8 - Sample Coded Data from Blogs in Cluster 1 – Tags and Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL</th>
<th>CL</th>
<th>TAGS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://mijas.livejournal.com">http://mijas.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>travel, photos, opinions, society, world, analysis, life politics</td>
<td>Russian language LiveJournal of a Canadian man who travels a lot and posts many photos from his travels. There are notes on life in countries the user visits, and as well there are overall notes on life in different countries of the world provided with analytical data. There are also notes on history and culture of the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://grezev.livejournal.com">http://grezev.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>politics, international election</td>
<td>This blog is called: it is only about politics and elections and it is true. All posts are about elections all over the world- from Peru to Australia. The blogger not only posts information about it but also comments on them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://fandaal.livejournal.com">http://fandaal.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>photos, everyday issues, politics, nationalism, videos, images</td>
<td>The blogger himself tells that he rarely publishes open posts, most of posts are friends only. He reposts some links, for example how Russians are discriminated in Estonia, picture of his cat. He posts many videos with music as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://mbla.livejournal.com">http://mbla.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Paris, France, photography, everyday issues, hobby</td>
<td>Most of the posts are description of everyday life, the places where the blogger has been, the friends she has met. Just pictures of Paris and friends. But they are written in a very high style. The language is beautiful, and every post is a small writing masterpiece. The blogger's hobby is photography, so except of stories about her cameras, she posts photos. She and her friends go for a walk often and travels all over France, so she writes about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The blogger probably has a background in political studies, that's why his commentaries on the world political events are very detailed. He reposts poems he likes. Though he writes in his user info, that he lives in Greenland, according to his posts he comes to Moscow often. He travels a lot, and writes about his traveling, but it is very hard to understand what his job is...

Outlink Data

3) **Master Outlink List**

The Master Outlink List contains all of the 4,000 web resources cited by the bloggers in our network. The list provides the Count (frequency) of citations for each Outlink URL, indicating how many blogs among the 11,783 in the Discussion Core link to this particular online resource. Count is an indicator of the popularity of a particular Outlink URL across the RuNet Discussion Core. The Master Outlink list also indicates the Cluster Focus Index (CFI) for each Outlink URL, which measures how often members of a particular cluster link to the site. The CFI score indicates the significance of each Outlink to a particular cluster - the more frequently blogs in a cluster link to a source, the higher its CFI score. For each website URL, the list provides 35 CFI scores - one for each Attentive Cluster. As with the Master Blog List, this index contains only automated data, without any qualitative descriptions of these Outlink URLs.

I sorted the 4,000 Outlinks by Count to generate a list of the most popular online resources within the RuNet Discussion Core overall – which websites, across the Internet, Russian bloggers were paying attention to with the highest frequency. Table 9, below, shows the results for the top 10 Outlinks – the 10 most frequently linked to Internet resources - in the RuNet Discussion Core. A list and description of the top 30 URLs in the RuNet Core is available in the Appendix.
Table 9 - Top 10 Outlinks in the RuNet Discussion Core

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>URL</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4874</td>
<td><a href="http://youtube.com">http://youtube.com</a></td>
<td>Other – Video Sharing Portal</td>
<td>YouTube, one of the most popular video-sharing portals. Has content in many (if not all) languages, including Russian. There's also a localized Russian-language section: ru.youtube.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4861</td>
<td><a href="http://ru.wikipedia.org">http://ru.wikipedia.org</a></td>
<td>Other - Russian Wikipedia</td>
<td>This is the homepage of the Russian-language version of Wikipedia, which currently has 484,849 articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3127</td>
<td><a href="http://lenta.ru">http://lenta.ru</a></td>
<td>News/info/media – Web native</td>
<td>Lenta.ru, one of the most popular Russian news sites, founded by Anton Nossik in 1999.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2748</td>
<td><a href="http://rian.ru">http://rian.ru</a></td>
<td>News/info/media – Print</td>
<td>RIA Novosti, a state-owned news agency. Breaking news, politics, economy, world, culture, sports, etc. In Russian as well as other languages. Audio news, video, photo. Embedded content from other venues (e.g., InoSmiru.ru). Links to authors' LJ blogs (+excerpts from latest posts); links to authors' TV shows etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2520</td>
<td><a href="http://gazeta.ru">http://gazeta.ru</a></td>
<td>News/info/media – Web native</td>
<td>Gazeta.ru is one of the leading online news and analytical sites in Russia. Breaking news, commentary, online press conferences. Short items and in-depth pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2459</td>
<td><a href="http://aeterna.ru">http://aeterna.ru</a></td>
<td>Other – user-generated tests, surveys, games</td>
<td>Tests, surveys, games - over 100,000 users who have posted 35,353 tests. Current tests on the homepage include &quot;How cynical are you?&quot; - as well as something about love, elves, ghosts, dreams and Harry Potter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2289</td>
<td><a href="http://kommersant.ru">http://kommersant.ru</a></td>
<td>News/info/media – Print</td>
<td>One of the leading Russian newspapers; Kommersant publishing house also does a number of magazines, as well as a daily in Ukraine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2150</td>
<td><a href="http://vkontakte.ru">http://vkontakte.ru</a></td>
<td>Other – Social Network</td>
<td>VKontakte is Russia's leading social network. A Facebook clone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td><a href="http://newsru.com">http://newsru.com</a></td>
<td>News/info/media – Web native</td>
<td>Newsru.com; Popular liberal news Web site that belongs to Gusinsky (affiliated with RTVi TV channel)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also sorted the Master Outlinks List by CFI Score per Cluster to identify which Outlinks (ie internet sources) bloggers in a particular cluster are paying attention to the most. Table 10 below shows a sample result of this procedure, indicating the top 10 URLs for Cluster number 1 (Internationally Linking Public Discourse). This process was repeated for each of the 35
Attentive Clusters in the RuNet Discussion Core. Due to space constraints, I have only provided the CFI scores for Clusters 1-7 below, although the spreadsheet itself lists the scores for all 35 clusters. In the case of Cluster 1, the top URLs are primarily to international news media sites.

Table 10 - Top URLs for Cluster 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>URL</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>463</td>
<td><a href="http://nytimes.com">http://nytimes.com</a></td>
<td>21.70</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>-1.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>224</td>
<td><a href="http://online.wsj.com">http://online.wsj.com</a></td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>-2.18</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>-1.49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151</td>
<td><a href="http://washingtonpost.com">http://washingtonpost.com</a></td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>-1.94</td>
<td>-2.72</td>
<td>-1.60</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
<td>-0.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>399</td>
<td><a href="http://guardian.co.uk">http://guardian.co.uk</a></td>
<td>16.87</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>-2.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>536</td>
<td><a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk">http://news.bbc.co.uk</a></td>
<td>16.13</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184</td>
<td><a href="http://news.yahoo.com">http://news.yahoo.com</a></td>
<td>15.85</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
<td><a href="http://timesonline.co.uk">http://timesonline.co.uk</a></td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>865</td>
<td><a href="http://openspace.ru">http://openspace.ru</a></td>
<td>15.29</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>-4.01</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>454</td>
<td><a href="http://telegraph.co.uk">http://telegraph.co.uk</a></td>
<td>14.94</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>-0.92</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td><a href="http://avva.livejournal.com">http://avva.livejournal.com</a></td>
<td>14.57</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>-1.72</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>-1.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) Coded Outlink List

The Coded Outlink List contains the survey data provided by coders for 680 Outlinks, including detailed qualitative descriptions, country and language data (where available) and tags. Coders also labeled the Outlinks by type of Internet resource – including “blog/journal,” government/political, broadcast media, print media, web native media, NGO/organization and other. This coder data was cross-referenced with the automated CFI scores, enabling me to see
the significance of each coded Outlink to each cluster. By sorting this spreadsheet of coded Outlinks by CFI score for each Attentive Cluster at a time, I was able to identify the attention patterns and preferences of the bloggers within that cluster. For instance, if the top Outlinks are primarily to other blogs, or to file sharing resources, that indicates that the cluster is mostly focused on sociability. If the Outlinks are mostly to news media, the members of the cluster appear more interested in current events or public discourse type issues. The types of media – foreign vs domestic, liberal vs conservative, high tech, financial etc – are also informative. In the case of regional clusters, the geographic source of a majority of the Outlinks provides a key insight. Tables 11 and 12, below, provide an example of the results of this process for the top five coded Outlinks in Cluster 1. Sorted by “Cluster 1, descending” the spreadsheet lists the coded Outlinks by those which have the highest CFI scores in Cluster 1. The actual spreadsheet shows CFI scores for all 35 clusters, indicating the level of relevance of that particular online resource to each cluster. However, for reasons of space, I have only listed five clusters in the sample below. For my research, only the CFI scores for the cluster in question were necessary for analysis. As we can see, the top coded Outlinks in Cluster 1 are all to international news media sources – affirming this clusters label as “Internationally Linking Public Discourse.”

Table 11 - Sample Outlinks for Cluster 1 – CFI Score, Country, Language & Typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL</th>
<th>CTRY</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Russn Lang?</th>
<th>Other Lang</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nytimes.com</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>21.70</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>No/ Don't Know</td>
<td>Eng</td>
<td>News/info/media – Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online.wsj.com</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>-2.18</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>No/ Don't Know</td>
<td>Eng</td>
<td>News/Info/Media – Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>TAGS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nytimes.com</td>
<td>This is a web-edition of one of the biggest US papers – The New York Times. It covers politics and society in the USA and the world and wide variety of other topics. It has domestic and global edition. It reviews books, movies and travel options, also has an employment, vehicle, real estate and classifieds section.</td>
<td>News USA, news world, analytics, art, fashion, science and technology, books, movies, travel, employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>online.wsj.com</td>
<td>This is a web-edition of influential US newspaper Wall Street Journal. It is focused on business, economy and finance; publish news, opinion editorials, interviews, and financial data; has special editions for the USA, Europe, Asia and Americas.</td>
<td>WSJ web-edition, global news, economy, finance, business news, financial news, markets, industries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washingtonpost.com</td>
<td>This is a web-site of one of the biggest US newspaper Washington Post. Publish latest news from US and abroad, opinion editorials, has special section for local news of many US regions, a section on art and culture news. Assess to some of the sections of the site requires a subscription.</td>
<td>US news, world news, business news, technology, sport news, opinion editorials, pictures, gallery, local news, jobs, real estate,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guardian.co.uk</td>
<td>This is a web-site of on of the biggest UK newspaper Guardian; contains news from UK, USA and the world, opinion editorials, sections on sports, entertainment, employment, finance, travel, health, lifestyle ; contains blogs section and a section with multimedia files. Home page starts with breaking news line updated in real time.</td>
<td>UK news, USA news, world news, business, finance, culture, blogs, entertainment, society, science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is a news portal of the British Broadcasting Corporation, focused on international news. The site posts the most recent developments from all over the world. Allows users to sort the news based on the region and topic; contains multimedia files, provides overview of national media for many countries. It has a mirror in 6 other languages including Russian.

5) **Aggregate Cluster Demographics**

The Cluster Demographics spreadsheet aggregates all the blogger demographic data provided by the coders into one document, listing the results by percentage, enabling me to review and compare aggregate demographics across clusters. It is important to note that the RuNet Core demographics gathered for this study is only a general representation of the demographics of the bloggers within the RuNet Core. The demographics are not automatically generated, but rather, they represent the subjective opinions of the coders. In addition, the percentages collected in the data are based on the 1,200 coded blogs, rather than the total 11,782 blogs in the network. Nevertheless, this data provides a helpful illustration of the make up of the RuNet Discussion Core, and serve as a general measure that can be compared with documented averages for the broader Russian language Internet. Blogger location, for instance, is instrumental in identifying regional clusters. Gender and age percentages,\(^{193}\) as well as whether or not bloggers revealed their names, all served to shape my understanding of each cluster. Those cases where cluster demographics diverged from the Discussion Core average were particularly informative - for instance, those clusters that were overwhelmingly female, or youthful, or had a particularly low

\(^{193}\) While most of the blogger demographics are based on coder data, age was gleaned in an automated fashion from all the blogs in the total network. Out of 11,793 blogs, only 4897 (approximately 30%) reported a date of birth. Once this list of 4897 was cleaned of improbable ages – over 75 and under 10— we had ages for 4764 bloggers, separated by Cluster, and ranging from 18-75
level of anonymity. The Table below lists the aggregate blogger demographics for Cluster 1 – Internationally Linking Public Discourse. I have highlighted in bold some of the key demographic features of this cluster – a slightly below average Russian location for the blogger, a higher than average rate of using their full name, and a higher than average male membership.

The Full Cluster Demographics Spreadsheet is in the Appendix.

Table 13 - Sample Aggregate Blogger Demographics for Cluster 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INTERNATIONALLY LINKING PUBLIC DISCOURSE</th>
<th>ALL CLUSTERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CLUSTER # 1</td>
<td>ALL 35 CLUSTERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Size</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>10684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded Size - approx 10%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BLOGGER’S COUNTRY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Don't Know</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BLOGGERS CITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiev</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minsk</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USES NAME</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td><strong>38.2%</strong></td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENDER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td><strong>81.6%</strong></td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know/Mixed Group Blog</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Profiling Clusters of Interest and Attention

As mentioned above, my research identified 35 Attentive Clusters within the RuNet Discussion Core, varying in size from as small as 26 blogs to as large as 1591 blogs, but with an average size of approximately 335 blogs. I examined the key indicators from the above-mentioned data in order to identify and label each Attentive Cluster.

I analyzed the automated, quantitative data to identify the top blogs and Outlinks in each cluster, and then reviewed the survey data, including blogger demographics, Outlink typology and detailed blog and Outlink descriptions. I compared data on each particular Attentive Cluster with the aggregate data generated for the RuNet Discussion Core overall. I also analyzed the map itself, and the position of each cluster on the map, especially relative to other clusters in the Network Neighborhood. The quantitative data allowed me to isolate the most popular and significant blogs and Internet resources across the RuNet, as well as in each of the 35 Attentive Clusters identified in the network mapping process. The qualitative data, gathered from the online surveys completed by the language specialists, provided detailed descriptions of relevant blogs and Outlinks, as well as blogger demographics by cluster. I layered and combined this information in order to understand the make up of each cluster, what kinds of issues its members discuss, and which Internet resources they pay attention to the most.

Based on the data outlined above, I segmented the majority (25) of these clusters into four main thematic and geographic “Zones” – Politics and Public Affairs, Culture, Instrumental and Regional. The remaining small peripheral clusters, all of which contained less than 150 blogs, I grouped into a fifth “Under 150” Zone. Table 14 below provides a list of the 35 Attentive Cluster labels generated by my analysis, including the size (number of blogs in the cluster) and the thematic Zone to which each cluster belongs.
Results - Overview of The RuNet Discussion Core

Table 14 - 35 Attentive Clusters and 5 Thematic Zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZONE</th>
<th>LABEL</th>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politics and Public Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Internationally Linking Public Discourse</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian Media Focused Public Discourse</td>
<td>1591</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patriot-Nationalists</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic Opposition</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business, Economics and Finance</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social and Environmental Activism</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian Orthodox</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian Personal, Culture, Hobbies</td>
<td>1233</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian Women/Sociability</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian Literature</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movies/Pop Culture</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International – Diaspora</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International - Visual Art/Diaspora</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central Upper/Blogs</strong></td>
<td>International – Music /Diaspora -</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female/Hobbies</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SEO/Spam</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional</strong></td>
<td>Link Exchange</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental A</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental - Pro Governmental Youth</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central/Culture/Female/Tests</strong></td>
<td>Central/Culture/Female/Tests</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture/Authors/Blogs</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Center-Right/ Recreation/Blogs</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central/Mixed/Circle of Friends</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental B</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central/Culture/Female/Tests</strong></td>
<td>Radical Photo Sharing Site Users</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental C</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upper Right/Blogs</strong></td>
<td>Upper Right/Blogs</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central/Culture/Female/Tests</strong></td>
<td>Upper Right/Blogs</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower Left/blogs</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central/Culture/Female/Tests</strong></td>
<td>Central Upper/Blogs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes: news-focused discussion, business and finance, social activists, and political movements

*Includes: literature, cinema, high culture, and popular culture

*Includes: bloggers united by interest in regional content

*Includes: peripheral clusters, with no standout features and small size

Upper Left Quadrant

Central Upper/Blogs

Spread out across the map
It is important to note, again, that one of the key limitations of this process is that it places a blog into only one Cluster, despite the often varied and multifaceted interests of the RuNet Discussion Core bloggers. Consequently, the Attentive Cluster Labels are not definitions of “who these bloggers are”. Attentive Cluster Labels do not indicate the sole or even the overriding viewpoint of each blog in that cluster. Rather, these clusters represent statistically significant citation patterns. So, for instance, bloggers in the “Nationalist” cluster are not necessarily Nationalists, but rather, individuals who link to Nationalist content in a statistically significant manner. In other words, cluster membership indicates the cluster that the blog links to the most, but does not represent the bloggers sole and entire identity.

The next chapter provides detailed profiles and descriptions for the 25 clusters that make up the 4 main Zones in the RuNet Discussion Core. In addition to containing highlights from the data outlined above, the profiles are given added flavor and nuance with excerpts and quotes from descriptions of various blogs provided by coders.

**Figure 10— Attentive Cluster Zones**
Figure 10, above, shows the location for the three Zones – Politics and Public Affairs, Culture, and Instrumental, which have localized “Network Neighborhoods” on the map. The other two groups – Regional and “Under 150” are spread across the map.

Two main Zones - “Politics and Public Affairs” and “Culture”, dominate the RuNet Discussion Core. They include 15 of the 35 Attentive Clusters in the network, and represent 80% of the blogs in the RuNet Core. The remaining three Zones – Regional, Instrumental and “Under 150” – contain 20 smaller clusters and represent only 20% of the total network, including some small, but significant clusters.

The Culture Zone is centrally located, and contains eight clusters and over 5,000 blogs – almost half of the entire RuNet Discussion Core network. This is a diverse group, united by an emphasis on culture over politics. Blogger interests center on movies and pop culture, visual arts, photography, literature, hobbies, and sociability. One key difference among the eight clusters in this group is demographic. There are three clusters with a large international or Diaspora contingent: Cosmopolitan; Visual Arts/Diaspora and Music/File Sharing/Diaspora. According to coder data, over 45% of the members of these clusters are located outside of Russia. In contrast, there are three clusters that have a definite Russian/domestic orientation - Russian Literature; Russian Personal, Culture, Hobbies and Russian Women/Sociability. According to coder data, 70% to 90% of the bloggers in these clusters are based in Russia. Membership for the remaining two clusters, Movies/Pop Culture and Female/Hobbies, is 62% Russian, close to the RuNet Core average. In addition, two of the clusters – Female/Hobbies and Russian Women/Sociability are characterized by the predominance of women bloggers.
The Politics and Public Affairs Zone contains around 4,000 blogs and makes up approximately 35% of the RuNet Core. This Zone contains seven clusters that are localized in the upper left quadrant of the map, representing bloggers that most frequently discuss Russian politics and current events, or demonstrate evidence of political and social mobilization in Russia. As is typical in other blogospheres, these news-attentive clusters include the vast majority of politically-oriented blogs, as well as blogs that are concerned with business and finance, social and environmental activism, and charity. This Zone also includes those blogs and clusters that are affiliated with offline political groups and social movements in Russia. Perhaps it is because of their charity work that the religion based Russian Orthodox cluster is also located in this region. This Zone is the closest to a “Political arena” in the RuNet Discussion Core, and contains a wide spectrum of political attitudes and opinions. While certain clusters (such as “Democratic Opposition,” “Patriot/Nationalist” and “Social Activism) overlap with political and social movements, no cluster entirely correlated to a specific offline political party. The “Democratic Opposition” cluster, for instance, while relatively well defined, is also small and diffuse. Similarly, the “Patriot/Nationalist” cluster contains a diverse group ranging from historians, to Stalinists, to virulent ethno-nationalists. Their support for government policy and actions depend on the issue. Significantly, I found no evidence of an overtly “pro government” cluster.

The remaining three Zones – Regional, Instrumental and “Under 150” - represent only 20% of the total network, but they also contain some significant clusters. The Regional Zone, for instance, includes four clusters of bloggers from the CIS and other countries with substantial Russian-speaking populations, primarily Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, and Israel. The bloggers in these four clusters are united in a regional emphasis, and a majority of their Outlinks are focused
They are blogging primarily in Russian, but many of are located outside of Russia, and link to content outside of Russia as well. These clusters are mostly small, and together they make up only 5% of the RuNet Core. It is worth noting that our coders were only able to identify 1.4% of the coded blogs (20 out of 1200) as being written by Russian language bloggers located in the US. Their presence can be observed primarily in certain “International” or “Diaspora” clusters, as their location did not serve as enough of a unifying feature for them to form a cluster of their own. The Instrumental Zone of the map consists of groups of bloggers who, instead of blogging purely about their own interests, appear to blog primarily on behalf of marketers or online advertisers, or with some external benefit as their motivating interest. There are at least four clusters in this section, appearing close together in the Upper Right section of the Discussion Core, and making up about 7% of the total. This Zone contains blogs designed to optimize Search Engines, collect as many “friends” as possible, exchange links and otherwise maximize blog ratings. Some bloggers in this zone have a clearly commercial goal, and are attempting to monetize their blogs either through direct or indirect advertising. The quality of their content ranges from partially automated and obviously pirated or reposted to a more sophisticated “content advertising” approach, where advertisements are designed to appear as sincere journal entries. For other bloggers, the purpose of the search engine optimization is less obvious. Interestingly, one small cluster, with only 39 members, contains a number of blogs with content related to Nashi, a Russian pro government youth group. The location of this Pro Government Youth Group cluster in the Instrumental Zone implies that it has little interconnection with other clusters, such as those in the Politics and Public Discourse Zone. It also implies that Nashi activists are using paid bloggers to distribute their content. Finally, the

194 Appendix – Cluster Demographics
remaining 12 clusters are all particularly small in size (under 150 blogs each) and have no particularly outstanding features. Together, they make up the remaining 8% of the RuNet Core.

**Top Web Resources**

The top web resources or Outlinks in the RuNet Core demonstrate the extent to which it is a peer-produced space, drawing most often on Web 2.0 resources. For instance, the two leading Outlinks (out of the full set of 4,000) are both interpersonal, Web 2.0 information and entertainment references – YouTube and Russian Wikipedia. A descriptive index of the Top 30 Outlinks in the RuNet Discussion Core is provided in the Appendix. Of these, 50% are to various news and information media – from Webnative news sources such as Lenta.ru and Gazeta.ru, to websites of key print publications like Kommersant, to websites of important broadcasters like Echo Moskvy. Another quarter of the Top 30 Outlinks are to Web 2.0 social networking type resources such as photo, video and music sharing sites and major blogging and social networking platforms. The remaining top links include an online bookstore and library, as well as a site for user-generated tests, surveys and games. Only one blog received enough links to make it to our list of top 30 Outlinks – that of “drugoi” – a photo journalist who’s images and commentary are consistently one of the top blogs on RuNet.

**Demographics of the RuNet Discussion Core – Gender, Age, Location & Anonymity**

Our analysis looked at four key demographic factors – gender, location (country and city), age and anonymity. The data on blogger gender, location and anonymity gathered for this study is not based on automatically generated data for the total 12,000 blogs in the RuNet

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195 See Appendix - Top 30 Outlinks on RuNet Discussion Core
196 See Appendix – Cluster Demographics
Core, but rather reflects the subjective opinions of the coders, based on the 1,200 blogs that they reviewed - approximately 10% of the total. The Age data, on the other hand, was gleaned in an automated fashion from all the blogs in the network. While this data does not provide a strictly representative sample, these percentages do offer a helpful general measure of the make up of the RuNet Discussion Core, enabling comparison between clusters, as well as with externally documented averages for bloggers and Internet users.

According to our coders, the overall gender breakdown of the RuNet Discussion Core is 65% male, 30% female, and 5% unknown. This is a slightly more male distribution than the Russian Internet in general, as the gender breakdown of Russia’s Internet users is more even - approximately 51% male and 49% female.\(^{197}\) In some clusters, the gender breakdown varied significantly from the Discussion Core distribution, providing key insight into the cluster’s profile. For instance, clusters such as Russian Women/Sociability and Culture/Female/Tests were predominantly (over 70%) Female. The Social Activism cluster also has a disproportionately high percentage (59%) of women. Other clusters – such as the Patriot/Nationalists (90%) and Business, Economics and Finance (87%) - were dominated by men.

The data set for this study was based on Yandex’s index of Russian language blogs, in which the location/country of the blogger was not limited. As a result, out of the 1,200 coded blogs, our coders were only able to confirm about 67% as written by bloggers physically located within Russia. Close to 11% were from the Ukraine. The other countries with enough Russian language bloggers to register on our scale were Israel (2.5%), Belarus (2.1%), the U.S. (1.4%), Latvia (0.7%) and Armenia (0.3%). The remaining 15.5% were coded as “Other” or “Don’t

\(^{197}\) Internet in Russia, Spring 2009. FOM Public Opinion Foundation, Spring 2009.
Among the bloggers located in Russia, the geographic distribution of the Discussion Core is even more skewed towards Moscow than is the Russian Internet in general. According to FOM, in 2009, Moscow had 8% of the country’s adults and 20% of its daily Internet users.\footnote{Internet in Russia, Spring 2009. FOM Public Opinion Foundation, Spring 2009.} According our data, 34% of RuNet Core bloggers are from Moscow. St. Petersburg (10%), Kiev (5.2%) and Minsk (1.6%) are also represented. 26% of our bloggers were from some other city, either within Russia or elsewhere around the world. The location of the remaining 24% was unclear to our coders.

While most of the blogger demographics are based on data gleaned by the coders, age was gathered in an automated fashion from those blogs in the total network – about 30% - that reported a date of birth. Once this list was cleaned of improbable ages – over 75 and under 10—our data reflected the ages for 4764 bloggers, separated by Cluster. The average age per cluster ranged from 24 to 42, which reflects the fact that 51% of Russia’s Internet users are between the ages of 25 and 44.\footnote{Internet in Russia, Spring 2009. FOM Public Opinion Foundation, Spring 2009.} The average age of specific clusters served to reaffirm our profile descriptions. For instance, bloggers in the Public Discourse Zone had the oldest members – the average for each cluster was at least 35. The other two particularly older clusters were Russian Literature (40) and Israel (42). The youngest clusters, with an average age of under 30, were primarily in the Instrumental region.

In addition to age, gender and location, our coders also evaluated anonymity in order to identify the percentage of bloggers that were fully transparent about their identities. We asked coders to only indicate those bloggers who used their full names, first and last, in their entirety. Incomplete versions of the full name, or bloggers who used a pseudonym (even if their real...

\footnote{Exact age breakdown - 29% of Internet users are under 24, while 31% are 25-34, 20% are 35-44 and another 20% are over 45.}
identity was well known) were not included. Given our tight restrictions, only 28% of the bloggers we coded provided this level of personal identification. Clusters with a significant diaspora population were more likely to reveal their full names. So, for instance, bloggers in such clusters as Public Discourse – International (38%) and Culture – International (40%), Israel (55%) and Armenia (67%) were more likely to openly list their identities. Other standouts were, interestingly enough, Democratic Opposition (40%) and Religion (47%) and, unsurprisingly, Russian Literature, where a full 79% of the bloggers – mostly authors – reveal their names.

**Analysis**

My research into the structure and nature of Russian language social media networks reveals a highly interconnected RuNet Discussion Core, dominated by blogs on the LiveJournal platform. Within the RuNet Discussion Core, long-term patterns of hyperlinks within posts generated clusters of interest and attention formed by Russian social media discussion networks. These attentive clusters were projected upon a network visualization map, producing a visual representation of who is speaking to whom about what. My analysis of these Attentive Clusters, and other key RuNet Discussion Core data depicts Russian language social media as a structurally hybrid network, combining aspects of public blogging with interpersonal social networking, and containing a core of highly intertwined political and cultural discussion, in which a distinct political arena was difficult to isolate.

My results are based on three key findings. The first, discussed in Chapter 2, is that the Russian language blogosphere is unusually segmented by platform, a characteristic commonly associated with social networking sites. This network structure reflects the significant structural

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200 See Appendix – Coder Instructions
influence of Russia’s pioneering blogging platform, LiveJournal, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, is in fact a social networking and blogging hybrid. Significant methodological modifications were required in order to overcome this platform segmentation and narrow the network of analysis from the initial set of one million active blogs to a core of social, cultural and public affairs discourse, containing 11,782 blogs and 4,000 Outlinks. The second key finding of my research, also discussed in Chapter 2, is that this “RuNet Discussion Core,” representing the most interconnected bloggers in the Russian language blogosphere, is dominated by LiveJournal bloggers, who have historically represented the leaders of online political and cultural discussion in Russia. The third key finding, outlined below, is that the specific patterns of linking and attention in the RuNet Discussion Core formed Attentive Clusters that are highly interconnected, in terms of both structure and content. More specifically, my content analysis of the RuNet Discussion Core revealed a nucleus of highly intertwined political and cultural discussion, in which a distinct political arena was difficult to isolate. My analysis of the Zones and Attentive Clusters within the RuNet Discussion Core found them to be highly integrated. Political, social and cultural issues were actively discussed in all of the clusters and zones, from a wide variety of perspectives. Not only do the bloggers in the Discussion Core tend to interweave politics, culture and society in their discussions, they also actively engage in cross-cluster discourse.

Figure 11, below, juxtaposes Russian and US social media network maps. While the two maps were generated with slightly different methods, they can nevertheless be compared. The distinctions between the two maps are immediately apparent. While the US blogosphere easily splits into left and right “hemispheres” that parallel the two party system, Russia’s

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201 The US map presents a social network diagram generated with static and dynamic links. (Morningside Analytics, 2008). The Russia map is based on dynamic links only, in order to overcome platform segmentation.
blogosphere is much more of an intertwined cloud of political and cultural discussion, underlining the difficulty of isolating a distinct “political blogosphere” in the RuNet Core.

**Figure 11 – Political Polarization – US vs Russia**

Research has found that, in the US, most politically engaged bloggers are willing if not proud to declare party affiliation, firmly aligning themselves with a recognized collective political identity. Researchers into the US blogosphere can easily identify a “political blogosphere,” with clearly defined clusters of bloggers, each with a specifically articulated political perspective. The boundaries between these clusters are relatively firm, and their members tend to preference their own co-ideological news sources, linking to bloggers and media of the same political persuasion far more frequently than they link across the “virtual

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aisle” – even in the case of direct debate. In Russia the situation appears quite different. Unlike politically-oriented bloggers in the US, who nearly always fall clearly on one side or the other of an ideological divide, the majority of Russian bloggers appear to write from a more independent, non-aligned perspective. Bloggers in the RuNet Discussion Core preferred an independent intellectual posture, one that eschews group affiliations, discussing politics with less commitment to any defined collective position. In particular, my research found no evidence of a unified political opposition in the network.

In the RuNet Discussion Core, the “Politics and Public Affairs Zone,” which contains the seven clusters that most frequently discuss Russian politics and current events, or demonstrate evidence of political and social mobilization in Russia, is distinguished by a prevalence of social and cultural topics, as well as high level of cross cluster discourse. The politically oriented clusters in this Zone are less “structurally distinct” than those in the US, covering a broad spectrum of attitudes and agendas, and making a distinct “political blogosphere” difficult to identify. Only two of the clusters in this Zone – “Democratic Opposition” and “Patriot/Nationalists” – can be said to represent distinct threads of political thought in Russia, or can be tied relatively directly to offline political movements. While the “Democratic Opposition” is the most clearly defined, it is not particularly unified, nor is it particularly prominent in terms of size. The “Patriot/Nationalists” are a relatively large cluster, but they represent a range of political viewpoints – from military and history buffs, to Stalinists and more virulent ethno-nationalist perspectives. Neither the “Patriot/Nationalists,” nor any other cluster for that matter, could be accurately labeled as “Pro Government”. While I did find some pro-government elements such as pro-Kremlin youth groups and bloggers who represent the

government’s point of view, these were not large in numbers, nor were they particularly significant or influential in terms of the network structure and cluster divisions. The remaining five clusters of “The Politics and Public Discourse” group express a range of political viewpoints, and, while they are active in public life, cannot be directly linked to any offline political position. The two largest and most central – Internationally Linking Public Discourse and Russian Media Focused Public Discourse – discuss politics as part of a larger conversation on society. In addition, while their content may often be critical of the government and those in power, they are not directly tied to any particular political party or affiliation. The bloggers in this cluster do not overtly self identify with any specific group, and their attitudes tend to fluctuate depending on the issue, and cannot be easily labeled. The final three clusters – Business, Economics and Finance, Social and Environmental Activism and Russian Orthodox Religion - also do not have any overt political affiliation, although the bloggers in all three demonstrate an active involvement in the interconnection of politics and public life.

The comparatively high level of interaction between clusters in the RuNet Discussion Core can be interpreted as a positive indicator for Russia, representing an absence of the political echo chambers that can develop elsewhere, such as in the US, and implying that Russian social media networks exhibit an active cross cutting political debate and form a less polarized political space. On the other hand, this high level of interaction may also indicate the absence of a strong multi-polar political structure and a lack of political alternatives.²⁰⁴ Hence, for the Russia experts who have reviewed the results of my research, as published in “Public Discourse in the Russian Blogosphere,” my findings reflect, as Russian media scholar Olessia Koltsova puts it, the “the underdevelopment of political parties and a well structured and competitive political

arena” in Russia. In her comments on my research, Koltsova contrasts the historically structured and stable political systems of the US and Europe with the relatively unformed and suppressed political landscape in Russia. In the US, in particular, the two party system has been entrenched for generations, and the number of “swing” voters has been comparatively low. In Russia, on the other hand, Koltsova explains, “parties have come to decline before actually having been born. Before the parties could gain resources and form properly, before voters could learn about them and develop voting habits consistent with their values and social status, the whole process was suppressed. Existing parties are purely decorative, they do not formulate any clear programs, so it makes no sense to group around them. Also, since people understand the decorative (“hypocritical”) character of parties, trust in them is low. Therefore people can not find any anchors in the political field to get attached to and they wonder through the blogosphere bumping into their allies and opponents relatively randomly.” Similarly, Floriana Fossato, author of an oft cited Reuters study on Russian online mobilization, sees the absence of a strong unified opposition in the RuNet Discussion Core as a confirmation of one of the key findings of her study — that that the Russian blogosphere reproduces the political and cultural features of Russian society. Fossato argues that “limited polarization in the political clusters…is the result of the substantial lack of politics on the Russian scene…This, in my opinion, should help explaining your finding that the majority of Russian bloggers discuss politics with less commitment to any defined collective position. In the absence of clearly articulated positions collectively recognized by society - there is nothing to support,” writes Fossato. In the final

205 Personal Correspondence with Koltsova Nov, 2010
207 Personal Correspondence with Fossato Nov, 2010
chapters of this dissertation, I will revisit this analysis in light of the recent civil unrest and growing political engagement in Russia.

**Conclusion**

My historically and culturally situated analysis of Russian social media, as presented in the initial chapters of this dissertation, recognizes it as an interpersonal space as well as public sphere. Unlike American society, in which the Internet took hold years before social media emerged, for most Russians, the Web has always been 2.0 – social, interpersonal and user driven.

This insight explains the immediate success, “like a fish to water,” of LiveJournal’s social network based blogging platform in Russia, and provides a foundation for understanding the particularly interconnected structure and nature of Russian social media networks, as documented in my research. The story begins with the dominance of the pioneering LiveJournal model and the resultant hybrid structure of Russian social media networks. This hybrid structure explains the outstanding compositional features of the “Discussion Core” - the apparent blurring between public and private, the mixture of political and cultural discussion online, the tendency of Russian bloggers to eschew consistent political affiliation, the high level of interaction and lack of “structural distinction” between Attentive Clusters, and the subsequent difficulty of isolating purely “political” clusters, especially clusters that parallel existing offline political structures. Taken together, the three key findings of my research reveal a structurally hybrid network that combines characteristics of public blogging with interpersonal social networking, and contains a Discussion Core of highly intertwined discourse, mixing politics and public affairs with cultural, social and personal topics. The interpersonal aspect of the Russian
social media networks is essential to understanding their nature, and helps explain the key findings of my research.

In the next chapter, I provide detailed profiles of the 25 key clusters in the four main thematic Zones - Politics and Public Affairs, Culture, Instrumental and Regional. The final section of this dissertation places Russian social media networks within the larger context of Russia’s overall media ecology, addressing issues of media freedom and the distinction between online audiences and the general Russian public. In the conclusion, I revisit my research findings in light of this bigger picture, and discuss their social and political implications. I describe the recent civil unrest in Russia, and argue that the conversation about the relationship between information and action must be expanded to include the interpersonal communication and coordination fostered by social networks. Civil participation in Russia, I contend, has its roots in these interpersonal social networks.
CHAPTER 4

PROFILES OF RUNET DISCUSSION CORE ATTENTIVE CLUSTERS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my analysis of the RuNet Discussion Core identified 35 Attentive Clusters, varying in size from as small as 26 blogs to as large as 1591 blogs, but with the average size of approximately 335 blogs. Further analysis fit the majority (25) of these clusters into four main thematic Zones – Politics and Public Affairs, Culture, Instrumental and Regional. The remaining small peripheral clusters, all of which contained less than 150 blogs, I grouped into a fifth “Under 150” Zone. Table 14, lists all the 35 Attentive Clusters, and Figure 10 shows the location for the three Zones – Politics and Public Affairs, Culture and Instrumental, which have localized “Network Neighborhoods” on the map. The other two groups – Regional and “Under 150” are spread across the map. Based on a layering and analysis of such factors as demographic data, key blogs and Outlinks, qualitative coder descriptions and cluster position on the network visualization map, I generated a detailed profile, provided below, for each of the 25 clusters that make up the four Zones. It is important to note that the percentages used in these Attentive Cluster descriptions are based on the 1,200 blogs coded, representing approximately 10% each cluster. So, for instance, when we write that 62.3% of the bloggers in Cluster 1 are based in Russia, that means that 62.3% of the bloggers in the 77 blogs coded for Cluster 1 (out of a total of 737 blogs in the that cluster) are based in Russia.
I. POLITICS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS ZONE – UPPER LEFT QUADRANT

Table 15- Politics and Public Affairs Zone – 7 Clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LABEL</th>
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<th>Cluster ID</th>
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<td>Internationally Linking Public Discourse</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriot-Nationalists</td>
<td>742</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Democratic Opposition</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business, Economics and Finance</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Environmental Activism</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Orthodox</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL – 7 CLUSTERS</strong></td>
<td><strong>4122 Blogs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RUSSIAN MEDIA FOCUSED PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Figure 12 – Russian Media Focused Public Discourse

This is one of the largest clusters on the map, containing a wide range of discourse on politics, current events, technology, culture, and personal life. These bloggers are overwhelmingly based within Russia (81.3%) and link primarily to domestic news sources (Newsru.com, Lenta.ru, Ekho Moskvy and Gazeta.ru). This is in contrast to the Internationally-linking Public Discourse
Cluster, which pays a high level of attention to English-language news sources. Major ‘A-list’ RuNet bloggers (such as drugoi, Tema and Radulova) are ranked highly in this cluster. This cluster is defined by the breadth of conversation - politics and current events mix in the discussion with philosophy, culture, religion, technology and personal life – as well as by the lack of one specific political position. While a majority of these bloggers are interested in politics, their views fall across the spectrum and vary depending on the topic. While there appears to be more of a liberal/oppositional tendency, it is in no way overwhelming, and a variety of political perspectives are represented. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• The blog belongs to...a historical expert. The blog provides intellectual analysis of Russian history and tradition. Many posts are dedicated to the Russian church and Russian traditional art. The blogger writes about a fire in an art restoration center and posts pictures that he took there a year ago. In another post, he writes about his visit to a Russian cadet academy, where he gave a lecture about history and took cadets to Borodino.

• The blog of a political activist who posts information about opposition activity and police tyranny. The blogger reviews trials of the leaders and regular members of oppositional groups who were arrested during meetings. There are posts about government errors – e.g. Putin approved the pollution of the world's largest lake, Baikal, etc.)

• The title of the blog means ‘Housewife’. This is a Saint Petersburg woman who writes opinions on general social issues along with notes and observations about personal life. There are also some memories from the past including notes about the Siege of Leningrad, which the user seems to be related to in some way.
This is a large cluster of politically oriented bloggers. They blog in Russian but, unlike the “Russia Media Focused” Cluster, these bloggers link frequently to English language news websites such as those for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, the *Guardian* and the BBC. While the bloggers in this cluster are based primarily in Russia (62.3%), they have more diaspora (mostly US and Israeli) bloggers than average (about 8% total). Bloggers in this group are also slightly older than those in other clusters, with a median age of 37. These bloggers are mostly well-educated professionals, including professors, academics, translators/linguists, scientists and journalists. Many frequently travel internationally, posting pictures or discuss their trips. While politics and news are major issues of discussion for this cluster, they also write about history, culture, and literature, along with more everyday, diary type reflections. Several appear to have a more liberal/oppositional bent to their political opinions, but it is certainly not exclusively liberal or especially activist oriented. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:
• The blog belongs to a woman who works in the philosophy and religious studies department at Saint Petersburg University. The blog is a mix of private information and content related to work. She writes posts about world history and cultural studies, posts information about university life (e.g. university union opposition to new university code) and expresses her opinion regarding religious news in Russia. She holds liberal political opinions and posts about the dialogue between Shevchuk and Putin as well as opposition protests.

• Russian-language LiveJournal blog of a D.Sc. in physical chemistry, originally from Lithuania and living in Haifa. The blog is mainly dedicated to science, the blogger extracts different popular science reports from the Internet, posts and discusses them. Also posts notes on other topics, such as general news and cooking.

• The blog belongs to a journalist and columnist who writes for various Russian magazines and online media about cultural studies, philosophy, literature, and social studies. The articles cover a wide range of issues including western philosophers’ biographies, Russian poets, western writers and reviews for books about cultural studies of Russia.

• This blog belongs to an Israeli political scientist. The major topic is political analysis of Israeli politics as well as discussion around other more general topics, including nationalism, the information society, and Soviet, Israeli, and Jewish history. The blog also provides many links to various political discussions. The blogger is very critical and sarcastic and it looks like he is close to positions of the Israeli right wing.

**Patriot – Nationalists**

*Figure 14 – Patriot/Nationalists*

This cluster includes a range of “Pro-Russia” bloggers, ranging from moderate patriots that focus on Russian and Soviet history, the Russian Orthodox Church, and football, to
xenophobic nationalists advocating violence against immigrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia. The spectrum includes Russian “Ethno-nationalists” concerned with ethnic and racial purity, as well as “Imperialists” nostalgic for a powerful Russia of the past, especially a Soviet or Imperial past. Bloggers in this cluster often criticize the West and hail Stalin, but they also criticize the current Russian government. This cluster has the highest concentration of male bloggers on the map - 90%. It consists primarily of bloggers in Russia (74.6%) and Ukraine (11%). Along with the Democratic Opposition (in this Zone) and Government Youth Group (in the Instrumental Zone) clusters, this cluster is one of the few that offers online representation of offline political and social groups. Bloggers in this cluster provide clear evidence of political mobilization around nationalist causes, including protests, nationalist marches, calls to support extremists who have been jailed, nationalist concerts and other offline action and organization. In particular, the nationalist Movement Against Illegal Immigration (DPNI) is the primary socio-political movement linked to by this cluster. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **Extremely aggressive blog of a writer who considers that people in Russia have become slaves of Jews and gays. He summons people to kill those who are not Russians and who have conquered his country**

- **The blog belongs to a PhD in history, who is a supporter of Russian nationalism. Many of his posts are dedicated to political philosophy and justification for nationalism. He writes about his concerns in regard to the number of Non-Russians in Moscow and shares his concerns about Islam. In other posts he discusses the positive role of Orthodox Church, the negative impact of West and some conspiracy theories about the West.**

- **The blog belongs to a Russian nationalist and a writer. He is also a founder of the political movement ‘Motherland: Common Sense.’ He describes in his blog the dangerous future found in Europe's decline and new separatists wars that will destroy the modern world. He is very critical toward the current Russian government and in particular the development of the Russian innovation zone Skolkovo. He says that Medvedev is a neoliberal and no one in the West will really help Russia contrary to what Medvedev has argued. According to the blogger, Russia has to focus on uniting and protecting the Russian people all over the world**
• The blog is primarily devoted to religious topics, and there are many posts with Eastern Orthodox icons, and links to materials related to these themes. The blogger discusses Slavic national and historical questions, and provides related illustrations.

• The blogger supports the current political course of Russia and is very critical, almost hostile, towards many things that originate from the West, particularly Europe and America.

• The blog is primarily dedicated to nostalgia for Soviet times and the glorification of the Soviet people. Some of the blog is dedicated to memories of World War II. As an example of the spirit of Soviet innovators the blogger tells the story of a person who asked Stalin for assistance to establish a new kolhoz (Soviet collective farm) before the end of the war, who later became the director of the most successful kolhoz in the USSR.

• Most of posts are news about people whom the blogger calls ‘prisoners of consciousness,’ but they seem to be extremists who were put in prison for extremist actions. The blogger writes a lot about how non-Russians destroy the country. He speaks about people who were beaten by migrants and publishes information about how to help them and posts pictures of prisoners who need help.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLOG**

Figure 15– Democratic Opposition

This cluster consists of leading bloggers who are part of offline Democratic opposition groups, including the Solidarnost’ movement, an effort to bring several oppositional democratic parties together under the same umbrella. Key outlinks for this cluster include a website for Gary Kasparov, the former world chess champion who is now a leader of the Russian opposition
movement Other Russia, the leading oppositional news site Grani.ru, the Solidarnost’ political movement, and Radio Free Europe. In addition to discussions of the democratic and oppositional political platform, there is clear evidence of political mobilization within this cluster. A top outlink for this cluster is the LiveJournal blog of the ‘Strategy 31’ movement, a group created in defense of Article 31 of the Russian Constitution, which states that, “Citizens of the Russian Federation have the right to gather peacefully, without weapons, and to hold meetings, protests and demonstrations, marches and pickets.” This quote is featured prominently at the top of the blog, and this group organizes protests on the 31st of each month. Key bloggers in this group include Ilya Yashin, a young political activist in the Solidarnost’ movement, and Marina Litvinovich, a blogger and democratic activist. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- This blog belongs to a political liberal activist and a member of the Democratic Union party. It is primarily an oppositional blog with a lot of political content. She posts videos with Shevchuk’s appeal to Putin, a video appeal to the president by a mother who lost her child in a car accident that was caused by a government prosecutor, and an embarrassing video of the speaker of the Russian Duma. The blogger promotes various oppositional political actions and shares links for interviews with Russian democratic leaders. The blog also provides special instructions on “how to behave with the Russian police.”

- This blog belongs to a political activist of the Russian liberal movement - a former member of Civic Front who left the group following the process against Marina Litvinovich. Most of the content is political and oppositional in nature. The blogger posts photos from opposition demonstrations and also a lot of pictures with political jokes (e.g. promotion of an anti-government campaign by Russian Newsweek). Some of the posts are focused on internal conflicts in the Russian opposition and primarily Marina Litvinovich’s case.

- The blog is devoted to critics of the Russian political system: authoritarian tandem Medvedev/Putin, lack of democracy and freedom of speech, falsification of history, conflict with Georgia, xenophobia and nationalism, and weakness of the opposition. The author’s main idea is stated in the first post as a copy from United States Declaration of Independence: ‘All men are created equal,’ and ‘whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.’
• This is a well-known blog that belongs to Alexander Lebedev, one of the owners of the liberal Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta. This blog has a few major topics. First it is used as a platform for providing comments in regard to Lebedev's own business and reposting his interviews/press conferences for mass media. Second, Lebedev posts links from Russian media, primarily Novaya Gazeta, Kommersant, and Vedomosti; and shares his point of view on cases of corruption, persecution of journalist/bloggers and violation of human rights. The blog also raises some charity issues. To conclude, it's a liberal blog of a Russian news-maker that focuses on business and political issues, but is also careful in regard to some sensitive political topics that might involve the current Russian leadership.

BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

Figure 16–Business, Economics and Finance

This is a relatively well-defined cluster with a clear business and finance focus. The members of this cluster link heavily to business, economics, commerce and finance oriented media, such as the Web sites for Vedomosti (a joint project with the Financial Times), Kommersant, ForbesRussia, and Smart Money. These bloggers often cite statistics, data, and research, and repost or read other bloggers who write about economics, finance, and IT-related news. The members of this cluster are overwhelmingly (87%) male. The top bloggers write about society, current events, politics, and economics. The political attitudes of the majority of these blogs are
consciously neutral and objective. However, where political views are apparent, they are more often oppositional. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **A blog of a professional economist, who posts mostly news about economics, or political news connected with economics. He posts links to some useful information connected with tax legislation.**

- **The author mostly tries to inform his readers about world economics in a way that is understandable for the average reader. He also writes his thoughts about political events, but with no specific political position.**

- **Blog of a well known social and business figure, an entrepreneur (currently runs a bank) and media personality. Writes on various themes, posts video and promotes his new books and projects.**

- **The blog is a mix of on one hand discussion about stock exchange and trade and on the other hand funny pictures, movies and entertaining content. It looks like the blogger spends a lot of time earning money through systems e.g. Forex. The user tends also to use a lot informal language and slang.**

- **Most blog posts are author commentaries on political and social issues. The blogger is a political journalist, his posts are very clear, witty and don't have strong political commitment. It is hard to say that he criticizes the present authorities, sometimes he just outlines facts, but everything is clear. He said that political journalists believed in Putin in the end of 90s, but now they are all disappointed in his politics.**

- **This is the personal blog of a financial market trader. Many posts are notes on various prices and the situation of the markets. The blogger is very much focused on his profession and on money and views many global news events foremost as economic factors (e.g. he remarks that his only concern after the Gaza flotilla incident and the ensuing instability is how it is going to play out on the market). Nevertheless, he does show some concern about the inequalities, corruption and abuse of power in Russia. The blogger makes clear that he isn't a big supporter of the current government.**
This cluster is oriented around social and environmental causes in Russia, and also includes a number of anti-fascist or anti-extremist bloggers. This cluster presents one of the highest proportion of women (67%) on the map, an inverse of the average distribution of 67% men and 33% women. Charities and historic preservation are leading issues for the bloggers in this cluster. For instance, this cluster features bloggers from St. Petersburg who oppose construction of the Gasprom tower, a proposed skyscraper that would be one of the tallest in Europe. Bloggers in the group, Bashne Nyet (or “No Tower”) argue that the Gasprom tower would destroy the city’s architectural integrity and could cause the city to lose its status as UNESCO world heritage site. They also write more generally about issues related to the preservation of architecture, gardens and public spaces. Bloggers in this cluster link primarily to other bloggers who discuss social and environmental issues, such Dr. Liza, a well known doctor who establishes hospices in the region and was active in mobilizing volunteers during the summer 2010 wildfires (doctor-liza.livejournal.com), the blog of the environmental organization Tsentr EKOM (ecoist.livejournal.com), and vveshka.livejournal.com, a blogger who writes often about St.
Petersburg architecture and the bashne.net group. Top non-blog links include links to the Bashne.net site, the site charity.ru, and the site for ‘Autonomous Action: The Organization of Liberal Communists’ (avtonom.org) which focuses on protests and activism, such as recent action against one of Russia’s leading environmental causes – the razing of the Khimki Forest outside Moscow to make way for a new highway. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• A LiveJournal community of Saint Petersburg citizens who care about what is going on in their city. They publish information about different violations by authorities, private companies and famous people who destroy trees and architectural masterpieces for their own benefit. The blogger also uses the blog as a space for planning actions and protests.

• The blogger works for an online charity Web portal supported by the Russian Orthodox Church. In her blog she shares many stories about the elderly, children, and families that need help and donations due to illness or socio-economic situations. However, the blog also has many very private and personal posts about the blogger's children (she has 2 sons), traveling, personal photos, exhibitions that she had visited and her new haircut. She also writes about cultural topics - art, movies, books, etc. To conclude, it's a semi-personal, semi-charity blog.

• This is a group blog written by activists from an environmental organization. It mostly contains information about the destruction of parks and gardens in Saint Petersburg because of decisions by municipal authorities. The bloggers also try to find volunteers to help clean gardens and plant trees.

• The blog of a politically active woman, who writes about different protest actions she participates in. She also re-posts information about people who are sick and who needs money for operations. She also fights homophobia and nationalism and posts information about different protest events.
RUSSIAN ORTHODOX

Figure 18– Russian Orthodox

This is another well-defined cluster, in which virtually all the blogs and outlinks are focused on Russian Orthodox Christianity. Top outlinks include Russian Orthodox portals such as http://pravmir.ru and http://bogoslov.ru, with hundreds of thousands of visitors per month and diverse links to interactive conversations with priests, Orthodox cuisine, and articles on theology, history of the church, other religions, relevant books and publications, church and religious news. The official webpage of the Moscow Patriarchate of Russian Orthodox Church, http://patriarchia.ru, is also one of the top links. The gender breakdown of the blogs in this cluster is the average 65% male and 30% female. Many of the bloggers are priests, as well as individuals for whom religion is a key aspect of their lives. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• *This blogger seems to be orthodox believer and is interesting mostly in religious issues: relations between Orthodox Church and State (e.g. meeting of Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill with President Medvedev), ethical questions (e.g. sexual minorities and Church), social issues (children in Church). One of the most frequent resources for commenting is a site pravmir.ru, news portal on orthodoxy and society.*
• The blog belongs to a priest of the Russian traditional church in Omsk. The blogger covers the life of the local religious community, asks for help with restoration of the church icon, post request for charity and also comments on various events in the life of the city of Tomsk. He also posts videos and clips about local life and his church. One of the local topics that widely covered by the blog is the rescue operation following flood in Tomsk.

• A blog of orthodox priest, who writes about his services and everyday issues. He posts some rock music and trailers for Hollywood movies. He speaks a lot about faith and Christianity and says that the most important thing to have faith in Christ, all other things a person can learn. He listens to rap music and comments on the arrest of the famous rapper who was arrested for 10 days because his lyrics were considered offensive to police.

• A romantic 31 year old woman who publishes poems by her friends and much information about art and music. She is Orthodox Christian, so some of her posts are on religious topics, as well as some images and video files. She is moderately religious (she also posts jokes on religious topics), she is artistic and loves nature (a lot of posts with photos of flowers).

II. Culture Zone – Central

Table 16 – Culture Zone – 8 Clusters

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<td>Russian Women/Sociability</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female/Hobbies</td>
<td>344</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL – 8 CLUSTERS</td>
<td>5124 Blogs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RUSSIAN – PERSONAL, CULTURE & HOBBIES

**Figure 19– Russian- Personal, Culture, Hobbies**

This is the largest of the three “Russian” clusters, with members based primarily (70%) in Russia. This is also the second largest cluster on RuNet (second only to Russia Focused Politics and Public Discourse), and is essentially the center of the personal, social, cultural conversation. The cluster has a relatively average gender split – 57% Male and 40% Female, and the outlinks are mostly to other LiveJournal blogs, and the key websites are sociability ones -- fotki, Yandex, zhurnal.lib.ru and lurkmore.ru. According to our coders, the main topics of discussion are personal, revolving around “everyday issues” and personal development, experiences, growth, stories and thoughts. Other primary topics include tourism and travel, culture and the arts (photography, literature and books, music, poetry and movies) humor, history, family and children, professional development and jobs. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **The author is a professional gestalt-psychologist, using his blog as a personal dairy, place for his reflection and discussion with his friends of issues of psychology, meaning of human life and literature, as well as posts on his personal experience, music video, photography, humor, etc.**
• LiveJournal of a St. Petersburg woman working as copywriter. Blog contains notes on personal life and opinions on author's observations as well as reports from having time with friends along with some pictures the author likes, including hand-drawn portraits of herself made by her friends. The woman, as she states, is fond of copywriting and may sometimes post fantasy-like and other texts she may compose. At times she declares bi-sexuality and often refers to herself using masculine gender.

• The owner of the blog is a housewife, an active social networker, moderator of several LiveJournal societies. All her activity is concentrated around women’s issues: love, beauty, family, children, relationships, diet, shopping, marriage, books, pets, charity. It seems that, busy bringing up her children, she finds an outlet in social networking.

• The blog of a young man, professional medic, chatting on his personal life: his vacation in Egypt, photos of his native city St Petersburg, best 200 books and 50 films, gadgets, music, humor, etc. The author seems to be typical representative of Russian middle-class (living in a city, with higher education, having a car, vacations abroad, certain cultural leisure).

• The range of topics the blog covers is very wide as the author is interested in both climate change and psychology, political news and unusual and funny events. Most entries are quotes from different sources and a short summary from the author or his vision of the problem. There are quite a lot of poems which he writes himself about quite everything and publishes them in this blog.

• Kharkov-based blogger, mostly posts random cute things found on the internet, writes about her life, posts photos. The only “serious” recent post is about a new tax that they are allegedly planning to introduce in Ukraine - if they pass this law, those who gather and distribute information will be considered unregistered information agencies and taxed accordingly - and theoretically it concerns bloggers - and this law might be passed just in case, so that it's legal to send tax inspectors to shut up people who bother the authorities too much.

• A blog of a young man, who lives with his boyfriend and writes a lot about problems of homophobia in Russia, though he underlines that he doesn't like any ideology: nor religious nor gender. He posts funny pictures from the pride in Russia. He reads a lot and shares his opinion on the books. He argues with the people who say that HIV is just a horror story that is created by pharmacological companies.

• A little bit of everything: online poetry and humor, Siberia travel notes and photos, a note on a night spent watching striptease (didn't like it), a note on a new Russian movie about the gangs of the 1990s (liked it), a note on a new operating system developed by some Siberian school kid (Bolgenos, later turned out to be a fake or something) and other technological innovations, a post on the best ways to listen to music online “What's the internet for? For entertainment, of course!”, a nostalgic note on some old Soviet band that the blogger used to listen to when he was still in high school - and what they look and sound like now.
• A lot of posts of this blog are about violence of Soviet soldiers during World War II. The blogger tries to express his opinion through poems. He writes a lot about unknown factors of Russian history that are hidden by both Soviet and modern Russian government.

**RUSSIAN WOMEN & SOCIABILITY**

*Figure 20– Russian- Women and Sociability*

This is the second of the three predominantly Russian clusters in this Zone. This cluster is primarily made up of Russian women – according to our coding data, it is 70% Female and 75% based in Russia. The Outlinks for this cluster are primarily tests, surveys and other website entertainment tools. The topics of discussion are general every day life, family and hobbies – fantasy related themes also appear popular. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• *The blogger is a student. She devotes a lot of time to her hobbies. The posts are rather personal, she expresses her feeling and anxieties, but she also uploads photos of her handmade accessories. In general the blog seems to be simply satisfying her need to write and express herself.*

• *The blog belongs to woman from Moscow who likes to write poetry and short stories. She publishes her writing on her blog. She is also a fan of fantasy genre, J.R.R. Tolkin and role play, and she write about some of the games on her blog. In addition to the publication of writing, the blog is a personal diary, where blogger share short stories about her leisure, trips and other common daily experiences.*
• The blog belongs to a woman from Moscow who considers herself a witch and expert in paganism. She uses her blog to promote seminars about paganism and pagan rituals in Moscow, as well as to share some of her thoughts on these topics. At the same time the blog used for discussing a wide range of other common topics - relationships, going out in Moscow, story about car accident that the blogger saw from her window, memories about studying in school, shopping, web design etc.

• The blog of a housewife, posting on her personal life only: bringing up her children, housekeeping, her divorce, heat in Moscow, etc. She looks like a typical middle-aged city housewife with everyday concerns.

• The author is a provincial man, chatting about his personal and social life: favorite books, photos, travelling, an archaeological trip, study, family. The blogger seems to be romantic, thoughtful and sometimes boring.

• A lesbian writes about homophobia in Russia and in her everyday life. She tells about her girlfriend and thoughts about gender issues. She participates in prohibited pride parades and tells how they are closed down and problems with police.

• A girl who is fond of dancing, particularly pole dancing and moderates several communities about dancing, so she writes about her hobby a lot. She also writes a lot about women's issues how to be in shape, how to lose weight, how to eat right.

RUSSIAN LITERATURE

Figure 21 – Russian Literature
This relatively small cluster is the third predominantly Russian cluster in this Zone. A large majority (89.5%) of the bloggers in this cluster were based in Russia, and almost 50% of those (47.4%) were Moscow based. This cluster is united by an interest in writing and literature. The main outlinks are to literary portals, databases and collections of writers, magazines, journals and museums. The bloggers in this cluster are mostly authors and poets. This cluster also stands out because a significant majority (79%) of the bloggers in this cluster reveal their name, far above the 28% average. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• A blog of a poet and a writer who works for several journals and web sites as a journalist and analytic. He posts a lot of poems (his own and some other poets) he writes about new journals, his articles and scandals that are common in the Moscow literary world. He also translates a lot of world poetry and writes about peculiarities of that, comparing some originals with the translations.

• Russian-language LiveJournal of a poet and literary activist from Ufa. Writes mostly notes on cultural and political topics around his home Bashkortostan and sometimes other parts of Russia. There are posts about modern Bashkir songs and literature, about travels around Baskortostan and Tatarstan, meeting with people.

• It's a modern culture-art blog by a modern poet Alexander Delphinov. Most of the posts include poetry and cartoons that were created by blogger, as well as video clips from various fringe theater, poetry and musical festivals. Some of the poems include sarcastic political messages. The blogger also protests against prosecution of “Forbidden art” exhibition in Moscow.

• The author is a very popular lesbian net writer and poetess, posting in her blog her creative works. The blog seems to be a place for the virtual community of net readers, where they can read her works, write their opinions and discuss her works, find news and announcement in the field of net literature.

• LiveJournal blog of writer Alexander Karasev who publishes books with mostly contemporary war stories, mainly Chechnya-related. Born in Krasnodar, now living in St. Petersburg, served in Russian Army in Chechnya. Also posts information on the literary community which he appears to be a part of. The blog consists mostly of large or small quotations, and excerpts of his texts and announcements regarding his work.
The bloggers in this cluster are a diverse and relatively tech savvy group, connected by an interest in movies, photography and popular culture, among other things. Their blogs are a personal/public hybrid, combining descriptions of daily lives with movie and video game reviews. Vimeo, flickr, Picasaweb and Twitter are the top Outlinks for this cluster. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- Most of the latest 50 posts on this blog are about the Venice Film Festival and about the blogger's travel to Venice. Notes on the actors (e.g., she was overwhelmed by a handshake with Tarantino) and films watched during the Festival. Photos and notes from walks around Venice; notes on guidebooks and air travel. The blogger also writes reviews for a Russian movie site, her trip to Venice was most likely work-related.

- 32 years old movie editor who posts mostly music he likes, music videos and movie clips he has edited. He quit smoking less than a year and he is proud of it, so some of his posts are against tobacco and easy drugs. He is lonely and not very pleased with his life, so from time to time he declares that he needs to change something.

- The blog of a young woman from Kaliningrad (western part of Russia), professional photographer, who posts photos and pictures and gives brief comments, e.g. travel to USA, pedestrians in Paris, Kaunas city views, colleague portraits, humorous pictures, etc. The blog seems to be place where creative author presents her works to friends (there is a link to her flickr blog on main page).
• Russian-language LiveJournal of a woman from Latvia. There are notes on everyday life and family, which may be illustrated, and reviews of movies, books, music and news she got acquainted with. Also there are notes on Latvian society and politics, travel destinations, restaurants and so on.

INTERNATIONAL – DIASPORA

Figure 23– International - Diaspora

This is the first in a set of three “diaspora” clusters in this Zone, with a high percentage of bloggers based outside of Russia. This large cluster represents one of the lowest proportions (56%) of Russia blogs, and one of the highest proportion (4%) of US based bloggers. The bloggers in this cluster are predominantly male (74%) tech savvy professionals, journalists, photographers and public figures, often affiliated with the IT industry. They link frequently to Web 2.0 sites, such as Wikipedia (English and Russian), YouTube, Google, Flickr and Twitter. Other top links are the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) and habrahabr.ru - a web-portal focused on the IT industry, on-line marketing and on-line journalism, as well as other technology and culture related sites such as microsoft.com, code.google.com, torrents.ru and ozon.ru (Russian version of Amazon.com). Discussion topics in this cluster are diverse, favoring the arts and
social life, especially photography, travel and film, over politics. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **The blogger is a Russian permanently living in Thailand and traveling around neighboring countries.** There are no hints of what he does to earn his living though he seems rather well-off. The purpose of the blog appears to describe the culture and customs of the countries the blogger visits to his Russian friends and readers.

- **It's a blog of a Moscow based photographer.** He uses the blog to share a lot of his photography works. He also discusses some photography technology and review new photo editing software, as well as promote his seminars about photo editing. He also discusses more general topics about computer software and programming.

- **LiveJournal blog of a woman who used to work as a high society journalist for several prominent “glossy” mass media.** Blog contains notes on her personal life mixed with issues related to her profession, e. g. perfumery, travel, arts, exhibits, books, TV. Posts are usually relatively short.

- **LiveJournal of a relatively popular radio and magazine musical / mass culture journalist.** The blog contains content quite similar to what the blogger does professionally - reviews to movies and music albums, articles on various cultural topics. Also there are some notes on personal life presented somehow likely in a manner of magazine content. The blog (along with author's website) have an overall cheerful and ironic mood.

- **A lawyer from Michigan, describes in her blog her life in America.** Most of her blog is about everyday life and traveling. She post a log of photos from natural reserves with wild animals and also shares some casual stories about her family and husband. The blog includes also posts about favorite books and movies.

- **A blog of Russian-speaking software developer who lives in Tallinn, Estonia.** Appears to specialize in Java and Ruby. Writes notes and opinions on programming and technology, as well as personal reports such as a story of him leaving the job at which he worked for 6 years. Provides English tags to posts. Sometimes may post fun or interesting videos of various origin and also fun pictures. May also be discussing a book, mainly on programming.

- **This is a personal blog of a successful Russian software developer and IT professional, who lives in California with his wife and two kids.** He is enthusiastic about his life and work in Silicon Valley, posting mostly positive or humorous stories on both his everyday life and activities related to software development and technology. He believes in open source and dynamic environments for startup companies enabled by exchange of ideas and workforce and financed by venture capital as the main drivers of IT innovation. This leads him to be skeptical of Russia's current efforts to establish modern technology centers, as these centers are to be much more controlled both regarding financing and management.
• The author is a young cheerful and romantic woman from Almaty, Kazakhstan, immigrated to Europe; journalist, blogger, editor for several journalistic and New Media projects. This blog is her personal diary devoted to her thoughts and emotions, her articles, travelling, photos, communication with her friends abroad. She seems to be proud of her successful career and very happy with her European life.

• The blog belongs to a Russian woman living in Barcelona. It’s a culinary blog that is focused on Spanish food and food from Catalonia. The blog includes many receipts and colorful pictures of Spanish food. But it's also a personal blog. Some of the posts cover daily life in Spain and share thoughts about Spanish movies, Spanish education, family and other daily life issues.

• A young man (28 years old) from Uzbekistan studies in Japan and writes about his life. He used to study in Great Britain. He loves soccer and often comments on some players and games, including world championship. Most of his posts are about his everyday life and experience in Japan.

VISUAL ARTS and DIASPORA

Figure 24—Visual Arts and Diaspora

The second of three “diaspora” clusters, this cluster is visually focused, with primary Outlinks pointing to YouTube and images on the media hosting website imageshack.us. This cluster has a large international/diaspora contingent – only 47% of the blogs we coded were based in Russia.
The rest were primarily blogging from the Ukraine, Belarus, Israel, the US, although other countries were also represented. The bloggers are usually creative professionals – photographers, writers, professors, philosophers and animators. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- Since the author of the blog is an animation artist, who makes cartoons, he mostly writes about his job and cartoons. He is an experienced artist, who was working with the recognized and world famous cartoon artist Andrei Petrov. It is clear that animation is the most important thing for the blogger, so he uses any chance to share his experience off line and online.

- Most posts are photos of New York, Brooklyn and other places where the blogger goes. He calls it “The place” in photos and poems. He visited South America recently and posts a lot of pictures.

- The blog covers primarily three topics: mobile communication, music and traveling. The blogger write posts about gadgets, information technologies, Internet and mobile phone security. He also posts a lot of video clips with Russian music. But probably the major topic of the blog is travel around Russia with small stories and pictures from various places in Russia. To conclude, it’s a private work with a visual and textual content about leisure, traveling, music and hobbies (it’s not clear if IT or IT journalism is the blogger’s profession).

**MUSIC/FILE SHARING and DIASPORA**
This is the third of the “diaspora” clusters in this zone, with only 54% Russia based bloggers. The bloggers in this cluster link disproportionately to music, image and video sharing and social networking sites such as myspace.com, vkontakte.ru, ifolder.ru, lastfm.ru discogs.com, torrents.ru, vimeo.com, rapidshare.com etc. Not surprisingly, music, photography and sociability are key topics of discussion. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• The blog primarily dedicated to Russian music news, sharing new songs of popular rock singers and information about concerts. It also has some information about other cultural events and private life/thoughts. To conclude it's a personal blog that focuses on sharing and discussing Russian music.

• The blog belongs to Russian opera singer who lives in France. It's a semi cultural, semi political, semi personal blog. She expresses her support of Israel and pro-Israeli demonstrations in Europe, talks about anti-semitism in Sweden, shares a list of killed journalists in Putin's Russia and discuss European politics. She also shares her favorite Russian poetry, songs, classical music, singers and performers. The last pillar of the blog is personal thoughts about relationship, friends, life, God etc.

• This is a personal blog of a man from Moscow, who is currently living in Boston, US and attending Berklee college of Music. His primary musical interest is vocals, especially in the styles of rhythm and blues and rock. In the last posts, the blogger mostly writes in detail about his studies that consume the better part of his time and references musical resources. As a hobby, the blogger enjoys photography and often posts pictures from his everyday life. Apart from his studies, which he finds difficult, but rewarding, the blogger does not voice judgement on much and avoids writing on broader topics.

• LiveJournal of a poet, writer and musician, who participates in Russian “post punk” rock group “Region 77” and is interested in Balkan conflicts. Publishes notes, sometimes illustrated, about his areas of interest: such as his artworks, music he likes, war history, politics, culture (literature, photography, cinema).

• A blog of Moscow rapper, who posts his texts and posters about his shows as well as reviews of his concerts. He also writes a lot about his musician friends, how he plays with them.
This is one of the few clusters where women outnumber men – 48% Female to 42% Male (and 8% Don’t Know). This cluster also has a significant overlap with the LiveInternet blogging platform, so that LiveInternet is one of the chief outlinks, along with the file sharing site radical.ru. The bloggers discuss a wide range of interests, from hobbies to esoteric science to family issues. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- A mother of two kids writes about her sons, and their growth. She is very religious and thinks a lot what it means to be a real Christian. She posts many pictures of children's clothes and photos of her children. She also posts a lot of music from Soviet old cartoons.

- A diary like a blog of a woman who released a book based on her blog. She writes about her family, kids and everyday issues. She loves to cook and shares new spices she tries.

- LiveJournal of a Moscow man who posts some illustrated notes on his everyday life and travels, having time with friends. Also there are many “general entertainment” videos and other pop culture content. The author is also interested in things like technology and photography.

- An esoteric and mystic blog that covers topics as Buddhism, transformation of Earth in 2012, contacts with aliens, psychology and self-development etc. It's primarily includes interviews with teacher, You tube movies with mystic claims, articles about training and history of
Buddhism etc. One of the articles on the blog says that Obama will soon have to tell truth about aliens.

- The blog belongs to a young woman from Saint Petersburg. She is a figure skater of big fan of this sport. Her blog includes a very detailed report and a lot of pictures from international competitions. She also a big fan of dance and the blog has a lot of dance video clips. The blogger also posts a lot of photos and short stories about nature, as well as a lot of songs. It is a personal hobby-professional blog with entertaining content, photography and also some private information.

III. REGIONAL ZONE

Table 17 – Regional Zone, 4 Clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LABEL</th>
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<th>Cluster ID</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UKRAINE

Figure 27– Ukraine
84% of the coded blogs in this cluster are by bloggers who write in Russian but live in the Ukraine. A large majority of the sources are Ukrainian information and entertainment sources such as: www.pravda.com.ua, unian.net, korrespondent.net, telekritika.ua and obkom.net.ua.

Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **This is a diary like blog of a system administrator who lives in Ukraine and writes about everyday life. He complains a lot on the condition of roads and crazy drivers. He describes how he renovates his apartment and how he argues with his wife a lot.**

- **The blog probably belongs to anti fascist activist from Ukraine. Half of the blog is dedicated to political action and protests (primarily in Ukraine). The second half is mostly artistic pictures, probably by the blogger himself. Most of the blog is in Ukrainian. Consequently it a semi political semi photography personal blog.**

- **A blog of intelligent female, who writes a lot about her everyday life. Since she lives in Kiev, she speaks about many aspects of life in Ukraine.**

- **The blog belongs to a Ukrainian politician and a member of Ukrainian parliament who supports the Russian wing of Ukrainian politics and the current president Yanukovich. The blog discusses the political situation in Ukraine, provides analysis of election's results, gossips about sexual life of Yushenko and criticizes Ukrainian nationalists. The blogger also discusses politics in the Ukrainian blogosphere and provides a list – http://vchych.livejournal.com/41606.html - of all Ukrainian bloggers who are involved in politics: To conclude it's a political blog of active politician.**
A majority of the bloggers in this small cluster (72%) are based in Belarus. This cluster is predominantly male, and appears to have an oppositional bent. The top two sources, to a large degree, are independent, oppositional media – the website for an independent, oppositional Belarussian weekly “Nasha Niva” (nn.by) and the Belorussian site for Radio Liberty (svaboda.org). Charter97.org, an oppositional Belarusian news portal, is also among the top sources. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **Russian-language LiveJournal blog of 53-year old Belorussian political analyst and journalist. Mostly writes on his professional activities which are related to making and studying different publications on social issues, politics, philosophy, psychology, education. There is some analysis on contemporary Belorussian life, and also some notes on personal experience. Also portrays interest in Christianity. Probably not very loyal to Belorussian authorities.**

- **Some posts are in Belorussian language. A lot of post are thoughts about life in Belorussia and Belorussian politics- he discusses about how the life in Belorussia would be if the situation was different. He watches a lot of movies and writes his own reviews. There are some posts about World Soccer Cup as well.**

- **The blog belongs to a young activist of Belorussian opposition, who currently lives in Vilna, Lithuania. According to his profile, he was prosecuted by Belorussian authorities since his a**
member of political oppositional organization “Youth front” and currently he continues his activity from Lithuania. The majority of his blog is in Belorussian, with a focus on critical coverage of Belorussian politics. The blog is also used for discussing interesting news (e.g. scientific news), World Cup and also posting funny videos and writing about movies/music.

**ARMENIA**

**Figure 29 – Armenia**

This cluster represents the tight knit community of Russian speaking Armenians with a strong presence on LiveJournal. Bloggers are mostly linking to each other, and to Armenian news sources such as news.am. While 60% of the bloggers in this cluster are based in Russia, a significant amount - around 25% - are located in Armenia. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- *Armenia-related blog of Karen Vrtanesyan, who says he is related to “ArmenianHouse.org Electronic Library” and maintains this blog to discuss topics related to this project. The blogger posts in Armenian, Russian and English. He posts news and opinions on various cultural and social topics, including cooking, Internet usage, journalism, religion etc.*

- *Armenia-related Russian language blog of a journalist Samvel Martirosyan. Discusses some Armenian and Caucasus related topics and news along with general notes on Russian and worldwide social and cultural news and events. There are rare occasional posts in Armenian.*
• The blogger defines himself as web designer and political expert. The blog covers various aspect of life in Armenia including politics, culture, architecture and history. It also raise an issue of Nagorny Karabakh. On the other hand, the blogger discusses his professional work as web designer and his internet projects.

ISRAEL

Figure 30– Israel

This cluster is mostly (90%) comprised by Russian speakers living in Israel. The top sources are bilingual Russian/Hebrew as well, such as a site for online petitions on various topics (http://atzuma.co.il), the site for a leading Isreali Russian language TV channel (Channel 9 – http://zman.com) and a site for Israel related news in Russian (http://cursorinfo.co.il) Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

• Russian language LiveJournal of a man living in Jerusalem who seems to be interested in singing with guitar. Blog contains notes on cultural Israeli and Russian events author seems to be connected with, and general notes on political and social topics, Israel and CIS-related. Sometimes there are different poems posted, diary notes with photos.

• Russian language LiveJournal of an Israeli woman who seems to be interested in writing stories, the blog is mainly dedicated to cultural topics: literature, poems, theatre, and to various social topics. There are also personal diary reports that may be illustrated and provided with opinions.
The blog belongs to Andrey Grafov, a Russian-Hebrew translator that lives in Israel. His blog covers Israeli news and politics, personal thoughts, issues that related to his profession as translator and short stories/anecdotes. Grafov tell stories from his family past and his own memories, share some short anecdotes and philosophical stories and support Israeli side in flotilla incident by posting videos that present violence against Israeli soldiers.

IV. INSTRUMENTAL ZONE – UPPER RIGHT

Table 18 – Instrumental Zone – 4 Clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LABEL</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Link Exchange</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental A</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental/ Pro-Governmental Youth</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SEO and SPAM

Figure 31 – SEO and Spam

The bloggers in this medium sized cluster are united by the drive to increase traffic to their blog – most likely for advertising purposes. They link primarily not to other blogs, but to internet providers and sites that focus on search engine optimization, file downloading, web design and
advertising. A significant percentage - 25% - of the blogs coded in this cluster were from the Ukraine. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **Most of the posts in this blog have an instrumental nature.** Even if when the blogger discusses the responsibility and morality of Nabokov, it looks like a promo for an online portal that published an article on this topic. Despite the fact that some of the posts have a personal narrative, it is an instrumental blog.

- **A blog of a young woman, who studies in the University.** Her open posts are full of hidden advertising and links to other web sites, so most probably she earns money with her blog. Small part of personal information that she publishes is about her emotions, relations with parents and friends, and her study.

- **This is a personal blog of a man in his twenties.** Most of his posts are small loosely thematic collections of erotic photos found from elsewhere on the Internet, typically from Russian photographers. Some photos have attributions present, others don’t seem to have. Sometimes he also posts short amusing stories, which may be both fiction or from his own life. Under some posts, he writes sentences - advertisements containing links to products and services. It is clear, that the blogger chooses at least a part of the material for his blog to increase its popularity and thereby earn money.

**LINK EXCHANGE**

**Figure 32– Link Exchange**

The descriptions of the blogs in this medium sized cluster, and the fact that the Outlinks are predominantly between blogs, and finally the location of this cluster in the Instrumental section
of the map – all indicate that the primary purpose of the blogs in this cluster is the exchange of links. The purpose of “link exchange” is to increase traffic to your blog and hence increase the blog’s search engine rankings. Link exchange bloggers often openly advertise their status – posting at the top of their blog that they welcome new “friends” and similar cross links. The bloggers in this cluster are primarily (54%) male and located in Russia (77%). Sample coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- Most posts are reposting of some political news. Some posts are about LiveJournal users who add friends and who can be added by friends - since the blogger uses his blog for content advertising and publishes some advertising links

- The only personal thing the blogger is writing about is poker. All other posts are for content advertising. He writes some story and links to the web site. The topics of the posts are numerous and are not structured.

- It's an instrumental blog. The blogger posts funny pictures that are followed by information with advertising and promotion for various types of goods and services.

**INSTRUMENTAL A**

![Figure 33 – Instrumental A](cluster_32)

Similar to the Link Exchange Cluster, the links in this small cluster are primarily between blogs. This Cluster is about one third Russian bloggers, one third Ukrainian bloggers, and one third
“other/don’t know”. The gender split is about 50/50. Illustrative coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster:

- **Most of the posts are dedicated to the promotion of different kind of goods, with links to services. The themes of posts are connected with the promoted goods and gadgets. In some personal posts, the blogger writes about himself or some questions about society. However, there are very few comments in the blog, so it is highly possible that this is an entirely commercial tool.**

- **Russian language LiveJournal blog from Ukraine, which seems to be dedicated to SEO and link exchange, but appears to be maintained and watched. Blog is dedicated to general entertainment, and also to Ukrainian news. Content is mainly reposted from different sources. There are few comments, and the user answers them so this isn’t a completely automated aggregator.**

**CLUSTER 25 – Pro Government Youth**

This small cluster, with only 39 members, stood out because it appeared to have a significant amount of Nashi (Russian pro government youth group) related content, but was, at the same time, in the Instrumental group. The demographics of the group are either Russian (67%) or “Don’t Know” (33%) and more male (67%) than female (33%). Further analysis of this cluster found that the Nashi related content was interspersed with content that was not original, and
appeared copied or reposted from various sources. My hypothesis is that the reason these blogs appear in the Instrumental region of the map, and have little integration with the more political and public discourse clusters, is not that Nashi activists are paid bloggers, but rather, that they use paid bloggers to distribute their content. Coder descriptions of blogs in this cluster include:

- **Young activist who lives in a region close to Chechnya and Dagestan. He writes about his trips and projects, he organizes a summer camp for young political leaders from Caucuses and writes about publicity concerning this project. He shares some information about the city he lives in, and comments on political events that concern Caucuses region.**

- **LiveJournal blog of a young woman who is apparently related to youth political activities, particularly to “Young Russia” pro-government movement. There are posts related to these activities, and author's opinion on them. The woman is likely related to PR crews within such movements, there's a recent illustrated report of a trip to Seliger pro-gov forum. In posts, there is some support for pro-gov movements along with expression of some instability in relationships with her colleagues.**
CHAPTER 5

MEDIA ECOLOGY - A TALE OF TWO RUSSIAS

Since its development hand in hand with the Internet, Russian social media has evolved into a uniquely hybrid sphere, combining aspects of public blogging with private social networking, and featuring discourse networks that interweave politics and public affairs with cultural, social and personal topics. This chapter places Russian social media networks within the larger context of Russia’s overall media ecology, addressing issues of media freedom and the distinctions between online audiences and the general Russian public. As part of a rapidly growing, relatively uncensored Internet, social media falls on the more open end of a spectrum of media freedom and independence in Russia. The information diet of the majority of the Russian populace, however, remains narrow and monolithic – dominated, at the expense of all other media, by universally available government controlled television. Despite their diversity and vibrancy, independent and liberal media are sidelined by television in Russia, and, for a majority of the public, no other media – not print, radio nor Internet – come close to television in terms of audience preference, choice and trust. The result is a particularly stark distinction between a television watching majority exposed to a restricted diet of government regulated and approved news content, and a minority of active Internet users, who access and trust a more independent array of news and information.
A Spectrum of Media Freedom and Independence

Most domestic and international observers have taken a dour view of the state of media, press and Internet freedoms under Russia’s current government, citing the various obstacles to freedom of expression and information faced by Russian media outlets and journalists. These include dangers to investigative journalists, an ineffective judiciary, financial and economic pressures, bureaucratic and politicized news media regulations and a murky relationship between commercial and state interests. Taken together, these obstacles have led the majority of international observers and media monitoring organizations to consider Russia’s media system, broadly speaking, as “Not Free” or, at best, “Mixed”. So, for example, a panel of Russian media experts at IREX have deemed Russia’s media system from 2009-2011 as “Mixed Unsustainable,”\(^\text{235}\) while Freedom House analysts, noting a decline in the independence of Russian media,\(^\text{236}\) labeled Russia’s press as generally “Not Free” in 2010\(^\text{237}\) and its Internet as only “Partly Free” in 2011.\(^\text{238}\) Similarly, the Committee to Protect Journalists lists Russia among the worst countries in the world for dangers to journalists and accountability for crimes against them. Adding nuance to this perspective, I argue that Russian media ecology is not undifferentiated, but rather, represents a spectrum of media freedom and independence across the various Russian news media outlets, traditional to web native. Universally available, top down, government controlled federal television lies on the most restricted end of the spectrum, a


vulnerable and disappearing printed press teeters in the middle, and a liberal, growing, but still marginal Internet media lies on the most independent end. As described in Public Discourse in the Russian Blogosphere, this scenario is one in which “the Kremlin actively controls the far-reaching national television news, while allowing television entertainment to flourish, and permitting a marginalized independent media.”239

The level of government involvement in media – especially television – is one of the primary obstacles to freedom of expression and editorial independence in Russia. This manifests directly, in terms of government ownership of media outlets, as well as indirectly, in terms of the “behind the scenes” relationship between various industry giants and the state. The Russian government controls, directly or indirectly, seven of the eight major television channels with nationwide reach. These include the five federal channels (Rossiya, Kultura, Bibigon, Vesti and Sport), as well as Channel 1, in which the state has a controlling interest, and NTV, which is managed by the state owned energy giant Gazprom. Only one nationwide channel, St. Petersburg based Channel 5, managed by the National Media Group, one of the largest private media holdings in Russia, is considered relatively independent. In addition to nationwide Channel 5, the National Media Group also manages REN TV, which has almost nationwide reach with 27 television stations, broadcast over 253 cable networks throughout the country.240

Maria Lipman, media analyst for the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, argues that control over television news is part of an active agenda by the Russian government to manage public opinion.

“The three national channels work in a top-down manner, with one-way communication between the state and the citizens,” she writes. “As far as political and public affairs coverage is concerned, they are the government’s primary tool for shaping public opinion.”

Levada Center sociologist and researcher Dennis Volcov, in a March 2011 article for Novaya Gazeta, agrees that “almost complete government control of TV agenda leads to the fact that stories of corruption, abuse of authority by policymakers, the work of a repressive state apparatus, the actions of opposition movements, do not reach the ordinary citizen….If it does not appear on TV, it does not exist for the majority of Russians.”

IREX panelists concur, lamenting that, as a result of the dominance and popularity of television, most citizens “only hear the government’s views.”

Similarly, in a 2010 article in the Russian Analytical Digest, Russian media scholar Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasyuk claims that “TV news today, in both its format and content, does not support any form of public discussion: its broadcasts include no opposition figures or opinions; such people and ideas simply do not exist in the world portrayed by TV news.”

Freedom House, in particular, finds Russia’s “state owned media empire” to be a significant deterrent to media freedom. In its 2010 “Nations in Transit” Report, government control of television content is listed as one of the key reasons for Russia’s low “Independent Media” score – which has dropped to 6.25 (out of 7) in 2010. Similarly, the fact that “government-controlled television was


243. Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org, 2011

the primary source of news for most Russians” was a key factor in their labeling Russia’s Press as “Not Free” in 2010 – with an overall score of 81 (out of 100).245

Another significant obstacle to press freedom in Russia is the danger to outspoken journalists – both traditional and online. In 2009, the Committee to Project Journalists (CPJ) listed Russia as the third most dangerous country in the world for journalists, and the ninth worst for prosecuting crimes against journalists.246 According to CPJ, of the 17 journalists murdered since 2000, all were involved in investigative reporting that threatened powerful interests (in business, government, law enforcement and criminal groups). IREX identifies the forces behind the attacks to most likely be local authorities or extremist groups.247 The actual killers have been convicted in only a few cases (the most notable of which is the April, 2011 conviction of two radical nationalists for the murder of journalist Anastasia Baburova,248) but, according to CPJ, most of the masterminds behind the killings remain at large. As CPJ and IREX’s panel of media experts explain, the violence and intimidation against journalists is not only physical (beatings, and in extreme cases, contract killings) but also includes damage to equipment, and more subtle means of limiting access to newsmakers and news events, such as the refusal of sources and authorities to cooperate, the prohibition of interviews or recordings etc. Such obstacles to journalists were another key factor in Russia’s low scores in “Independent Media” (Freedom House) and Media Sustainability (IREX). Both Freedom House and IREX argue that

\[\text{References}\]

245 Freedom of the Press Report, Russia Chapter, Freedom House.org. 2010
247 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org. 2011
this multi faceted pressure inevitably leads to a high degree of self-censorship. Harassment and abuse are more likely in the provinces and regions, where they will attract less attention, than they are in Moscow. As journalist Vladimir Pavlovsky explained in the 2010 IREX panel, “If a crime against a journalist is committed in Moscow, people in Moscow and around the world immediately learn about it. The president, prime minister, and the authorities react, and pledge to oversee the investigation. If a similar crime happens outside the capital, the media community, civic society, or the president do not respond.” 249 Alexei Sidorenko, author of Freedom House’s 2011 “Freedom on the Net” report, agrees: “most of the harassment suffered by critical bloggers and other online activists in Russia occurs in the regions.” 250

The danger to journalists is augmented by impunity for perpetrators. The court system’s politicization and corruption were key factors in Russia’s low rating in two recent Freedom House Reports - a score of 5.5 out of 7 in “Judicial Framework and Independence” in the 2010 Nations in Transit report, and 24 out of 33 in “Legal Environment” in the 2010 Press Freedoms Report. Russia’s politicized judicial system can willfully disregard, dismiss or redirect undesirable court cases, Freedom House claims, leading to a “culture of impunity” where officials can leverage the system to “harass and prosecute” journalists. 251 In other words, as IREX explains, “even when people can obtain information about violations of public interests, nothing usually changes because the judicial system is not independent. Russian authorities can easily ignore inconvenient information.” 252

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249 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org. 2011
251 Freedom of the Press Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010
252 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org. 2011
Another significant check on the freedom and vibrancy of independent media is economic, since, as both Freedom House and IREX point out, independent, private media have to compete with state funded outlets. The government media empire supports its outlets with financial subsidies as well as government printing, distribution, and transmission facilities. Independent media outlets are more financially vulnerable, reliant on advertising funding from businesses with potential political ties, as well as more directly from politicians and, in some cases, even organized crime syndicates. The challenges to editorial independence are particularly strong for regional media, as noted in both a 2004 Report by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, and a more recent 2010 Freedom House “Nations in Transit” report. Both reports explain that the majority of regional and local newspapers, are established and run by state and municipal authorities, providing local government and business owners with a high level of influence on regional content. Private television and radio stations in the regions are also more likely to partner with federal media outlets, rebroadcasting the federal programs and producing only local news.

Based on the issues outlined above, Freedom House has consistently labeled Russia’s Press as “Not Free” in its annual “Freedom of the Press” reports. Freedom House’s analysis is rooted in three aspects of press freedom – legal, political and economic. Citing, in particular,

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253 Freedom of the Press Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010
Russia’s “politicized and corrupt court system” and “state-owned media empire,” Freedom House rates Russia quite low in each of these categories in 2010. (Table 19)

Table 19 - Freedom House, Freedom of the Press – Russia, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RUSSIA Status: Not Free</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal Environment: 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Environment: 33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Environment: 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score: 81 (60-100 NOT FREE)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the Freedom of the Press reports, Freedom House also issues broader “Nations in Transit” reports that include the state of Independent Media within a larger analysis of a country’s “Democracy Score.” In addition to “Independent Media”, Freedom House evaluates five more overlapping factors to determine a country’s Democracy Score - Democratic Governance, Electoral Process, Civil Society, Corruption and State of the Judiciary. Based on the issues described above, such as tight government control of television content, dangers to journalists, and potential negative trends such as closer government/Internet industry ties, Russia’s status for “Independent Media” has decreased a full point over the past 10 years - from 5.25 in 2001 to 6.25 in 2010.  

Table 20– Freedom House Nations in Transit, Russia 2001-2010

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256 Nations in Transit Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010
Leveraging the analysis and comments of a panel of media experts from across Russia, IREX produces a “Media Sustainability Index” that evaluates similar factors, examining a county’s media freedoms in five categories - Free Speech, Professional Journalism, Plurality of News Sources, Business Management and Supporting Institutions. In my opinion, these evaluations address the complexity of media freedoms in Russia with the most objectivity, presenting multifaceted input and varied perspectives. The scores from each category are averaged for a final assessment of the county’s media system, a range from (0-1) “Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press;” (1-2) “Unsustainable Mixed System;” (2-3) “Near Sustainability” to (3-4) “Sustainable”. Over the past three years, the IREX panelists have labeled Russia as having an “Unsustainable Mixed Media System,” one that only “minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system.” In fact, as Table 21, below, indicates, Russia’s overall score has gone down from 1.88
in 2009 to 1.5 in 2011. According to the 2010 IREX media panel, hardships such as dangers to journalists, financial pressures and lack of accountability or empowerment have led to the “death” of investigative reporting in Russia. Based on the various factors outlined above, IREX panelists concluded, “freedom of speech is only protected on paper in Russia.”

Table 21 – IREX Media Sustainability Index, Russia 2009-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Speech</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Journalism</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plurality of News Sources</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Institutions</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OVERALL SCORE</strong></td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internet Specific Issues

In Russia, the level of media freedom online is an especially contested and symbolically loaded issue. The Internet is seen as relatively free, yet particularly vulnerable. Internet content producers, reporters and online publications have unique vulnerabilities, above and beyond the concerns outlined above. In its 2011 “Freedom on the Net” Russia chapter, Freedom House lists a few examples, including overt pressure on ISP’s to remove materials, as well as more subtle, targeted and “largely non attributable” hacks and DDOS attacks, which sabotage website connectivity, as well as short term and localized “event specific” or “region specific” blocks. Both Freedom House and The U.S. Government’s Open Source Center also refer to curious cases.

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257 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter, IREX.org. 2011
258 Freedom on the Net Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010
of “information confrontation”\textsuperscript{259} and “proactive manipulation of discussion in the online sphere”\textsuperscript{260} – in other words, cases of “trolls for hire” (presumably by the government) who actively sabotage otherwise intelligent political debates. As is the case for the physical attacks on and harassment of journalists, the extent to which these types of Internet blocks and restrictions are a result of “top down” orders from Russia’s government is in question. Nevertheless, they do occur, and ultimately create an environment of fear and anxiety around freedom of expression, both online and off. In addition, some aspects of Russia’s news media regulations appear designed to inhibit press – and especially online media - freedoms. For instance, publications (print or online) are required to register as “mass media” in order to attend press conferences and have access to official sources. However, organizations registered as “mass media” are subject to loosely worded “defamation laws” and “extremism” statutes. This vaguely worded legislation (Article 282 of the Penal Code of the Russian Federation) is not transparent, and, it has been argued, can be manipulated to the benefit of various elites.\textsuperscript{261} So, for example, Freedom House reports 11 blogger arrests in 2009 and 2010, with criminal cases that include those that “posted clearly extremist content” as well as content that “appears to be more politically motivated”\textsuperscript{262} Others, such as Global Voices blogger and Russian activist Marina Litvinovich, claim that these persecutions are motivated more by a bureaucratic need to fill a


\textsuperscript{260} Freedom on the Net Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010


\textsuperscript{262} Freedom on the Net Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org, 2010
quota of “extremists” than by any overt authoritarian interest. Nevertheless, Litvinovich finds Article 282 and the “E-Centers” that enforce it, to be a serious obstacle to freedom of expression in Russia, and advocates for their abolition.

The specific obstacles outlined above are subsumed within the three broad categories that Freedom House uses to measure Internet freedom in its “Freedom on the Net Reports” - obstacles to access, limits on content, and violation of user rights. The Freedom House report, authored by Alexei Sidorenko, a Global Voices RuNet Editor, explores all types of barriers to access – not just infrastructural and economic, but also governmental, legal and regulatory. It also examines content limitations such as filtering and blocking of websites, various forms of censorship and self-censorship, outside manipulation of content, the diversity of online news media and the usage of digital media for social and political activism. Finally, it tallies violations of user rights such as legal protections and restrictions on online activity, surveillance, privacy, and physical and legal repercussions for online activity. Based on the measures outlined above, Freedom House labeled Russia “Partly Free” in 2011, with a slight deterioration in its overall score from 2009. Each of the three categories (Obstacles to Access, Limits on Content and Violations of User Rights) is rated on a scale up to 33, with a total ranging from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free). As the scores in Table 22, below, indicate, Russia’s “Obstacles to Access” are relatively moderate. The lower score for “Limits on Content” is based on various examples...


264 Government limitations on the Internet are not unique to Russia, of course—the U.S. Communications Decency Act of 1996 being a case in point. However, these restrictions are interpreted differently due to their different contexts. In the United States, for instance, civil rights advocates mostly raise concerns in a proactive and preventative manner, in order to ensure that freedoms protected in our constitution are not threatened. In Russia, on the other hand, restrictions on freedom of speech, expression or press are viewed with caution, imbued with the significance of a repressive past.
of “intentional content removal” and “manipulation of online expression.” The lowest score is in the category of “Violation of User Rights”, which includes “25 cases of harassment of bloggers in 2009 and 2010, including 11 arrests.” An analysis of these three categories together leads the author of the report to conclude that, “even as access to the Internet has improved, Internet freedom is eroding.”

Table 22 – Freedom House “Freedom on the Net” – Russia, 2009 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to Access</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits on Content</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violations of User Rights</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Freedom Status</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite these tensions, the Internet retains its high symbolic value as a bastion of media freedom, and most of the sources reviewed in this chapter do see in the Internet, and in particular, in the vibrant blogosphere, a tempered hope. For Freedom House analysts, the Internet’s “Partly Free” status offers some respite when compared to the “Not Free” score given to the Press in general. As the Freedom on the Net 2011 Report puts it: “Given the elimination of independent television channels and the tightening of press restrictions since 2000, the Internet has become Russia’s last relatively uncensored platform for public debate and the expression of political opinions.”

Similarly, IREX’s 2010 MSI report claims, that “anything that contradicts the official point of view has less chance of getting broad coverage in larger

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266 Freedom on the Net Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2011
media, especially on television—but journalists, bloggers, and citizens are tapping social networking services as an alternative way to sharing information.”

This perspective was raised as early as 2004, when Russian media scholar and Internet entrepreneur Ivan Zassoursky observed that, “at the same time as the media-political system is being consolidated in Russia, the Russian language Internet is showing more and more life and developing increasingly complex forms.”

For Zassoursky, the Internet is essential to the survival of media and information diversity, enabling, at the very least, any Russian user to access information from a variety of domestic and international sources. “Against the backdrop of the reconstruction of the image of Great Russia, an image that dominates the symbolic field,” continues Zassoursky, “it is...sufficient that the Net allows communities and reference groups to exist outside the boundaries of political discourse and to work out their own cultural codes.”

And, he continues, while this type of Internet access is perhaps “required more by a vocal minority than by a silent majority,” it is nevertheless important, since “it leaves a window of freedom in the communications system, and does not allow the majority to drive dissidents into a ‘spiral of silence.’”

Both IREX and Freedom House agree that the role of social media as sources of independent information has grown, especially since 2010. Although it does not provide specific examples, IREX’s MSI report claims that in 2010 there were “many cases when issues were first

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267 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org. 2011
269 Zassoursky, 2004
270 Zassoursky, 2004
raised in blogs and on Internet forums, and only then appeared in mass media". In an October, 2011 article, Radio Free Europe also claims that, "in the last two years, a huge amount of stories have first appeared on the blogosphere and only then made it onto federal television and into newspapers." The article sites the fatal car crash involving a Lukoil executive, the famous “YouTube Cop” videos, and Alexander Navalny’s exposure of embezzlement scams as premier examples. The article quotes Aleksandr Morozov, a prominent Russian blogger as claiming that, "if these stories hadn't first been seized upon by bloggers, the blogosphere, and social media, then it is more than possible they would never have come to light." Similarly, in its Freedom on the Net report, Freedom House refers to the blogosphere as “the sole credible source of information—especially during disasters or extraordinary events like the Moscow subway bombings, deadly fire in Perm, and the summer 2010 wildfires” as well as the “the main platform for social mobilization,” acknowledging that several blog campaigns were quite successful, “although bloggers’ actions came to nothing when attempting to address major cases involving senior officials.” Even the Open Source Center concedes, that “information may seep through any Kremlin efforts to censor the Internet as non-Russian portals such as Google, YouTube and Wikipedia are gaining popularity, and opposition users are very savvy in regard to circumventing censorship efforts.” An August, 2011 report on Russian Digital Media by the Open Society Foundation goes even further, claiming that the online sphere has grown in prominence to the point that the role of professional journalism is “evolving toward becoming an intermediary

271 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org 2011
273 Freedom on the Net Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010
between the blogosphere and the general public, or toward becoming a filter for stories that originate online, rather than as an agenda setter.”

**The Role of Business**

To a large degree, one’s interpretation of media freedom in Russia is colored by their perspective on the role of business and commercial interests, and the extent to which one believes that Russian media can remain independent of political and state influences. Evaluations of Internet freedom, in particular, are highly correlated with views on the quality of the relationship between commercial and political forces. Many groups see a symbiotic relationship between commercial and state interests in Russia, with the profit motive working hand in hand with political machinations. The Russian Internet is uniquely vulnerable in this regard, as it is almost entirely “home-grown.” While, for instance, nine out of the top ten websites in the UK are American (with the exception of the BBC), sixty percent of Russia’s Internet leaders are domestically owned. According to Radio Free Europe, nearly half of the top 20 Internet sites in Russia -- the Yandex search engine, Vkontakte, Mail.ru, and LiveJournal, among others -- are owned or controlled by entrepreneurs with close Kremlin ties, including metals magnate Alisher Usmanov and Vladimir Potanin, the co-owner of Norilsk Nickel.

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278 Sindelar, Daisy. “As Other Media Stagnate In Russia, Internet Changing Rules Of Engagement.”
Those that see political and commercial interests as working together in Russia are particularly sensitive to media ownership by individuals and private companies they view to be “loyal to the Kremlin.” Many of the above mentioned reports take this view, and their discussion of media ownership highlights purchases by not simply “media magnates”, but “oligarchs” that are inevitably “Kremlin friendly” or “Pro-Putin” – with the implication that any commercial interest intertwined with the Russian government is de facto in favor of curbing press and media freedom. So, for instance, the Freedom House Press Freedom report notes a decline in independent media outlets as “private companies loyal to the Kremlin and regional authorities purchase influential private newspapers.”

As mentioned above, the report also cites closer government and Internet industry ties among its reasons for Russia’s low Independent Media score. Similarly, in its evaluation of Russia’s press, the BBC notes that, “in recent years, several of the most influential papers have been bought by companies with close links to the Kremlin, state-owned energy giant Gazprom foremost among them.”

The Open Source Center and Freedom House are both apprehensive about an apparent trend towards increased online media consolidation. The organizations are not simply concerned with the negative implications of decreased media variety, but, more specifically, they are worried about the political alliances of these consolidating companies, whose owners they deem “Kremlin friendly.” The 2011 Freedom on the Net report, for instance, contends that “oligarchic control over an important block of online media, social-networking applications, and blogging


279 Freedom of the Press Report, Russia Chapter. Freedom House.org. 2010

platforms has raised concerns about the Russian Internet’s vulnerability to political manipulation.” The report continues by explaining that that “Kremlin allies have purchased several independent online newspapers or created their own pro government news websites, and they are reportedly cultivating a network of bloggers who are paid to produce pro-Kremlin propaganda.” 281 Similarly, the Open Source Center joins profit and politics in its report, stating that that “Pro Kremlin oligarchs have gradually acquired significant stakes in the most popular websites in Russia, apparently seeking profitable investments, while augmenting other government moves to establish control over the Russian Internet.” According to the Open Source Center, the acquisition of various web resources by “Kremlin allies” provides officials with “an additional level to control the content of the Runet if the Kremlin feels threatened,” although, they note, no example of this has yet to occur. The Open Source Center ultimately concludes that the role of business interests in limiting Internet freedom is not instrumental, arguing that “the Russian Government does not need to own the Runet in order to monitor or control it. It has numerous laws and policies in place that allow it to limit or threaten open discussion on the Internet.” 282

**Diverse, but Marginalized, Independent Media**

While producers of Russian media content face a range of obstacles to freedom of expression, Russian audiences are privy to a diverse and numerous array of media choices – television, cable, radio, newspaper and Internet. The number and variety of Russia’s media

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outlets is often cited by pro-government figures as an example of Russia’s press freedoms. “With so many media outlets, the argument goes, the government cannot possibly control all of them.” Hence, for instance, Putin’s assertion, in a June 2006 speech at the 59th World Newspaper Congress, that, given the growth and quantity of news media in Russia “there is no way the state could control everything, even if it wanted to.”

In addition to the eight major nationwide television channels (seven of which, as mentioned earlier, are managed by the government), Russians have access to hundreds of cable and satellite channels and dozens of regional broadcast television channels. While formal statistics on radio stations are difficult to come by, IREX, Broadband News Reports and the BBC estimate them to number in the hundreds. The European Journalism Center lists the most recent total, based on Russia’s National Association of Radio and TV Broadcasters, as close to 1000, including over 40 radio stations in Moscow alone. Of these, the two most popular stations are the state owned radio station Radio Rossii and the privately owned music station Russkoye Radio. In addition to the outlets above, Russia has approximately 400 news and information agencies that disseminate information to newspapers, television news organizations, and websites by subscription. Two of the three largest - ITAR-TASS and RIA Novosti – are state

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owned, while the third, Interfax, remains privately owned. 287 Russia also has numerous printed publications – close to 50,000 newspapers and magazines in 2009, according to IREX and the Federal Agency of Press and Mass Communications. 288 Among the approximately 25,000 newspapers, according to Freedom House, the Russian government owns two out of the 14 that have a nationwide reach, and 60% of the local newspapers and periodicals. 289 The circulation figures for these are conflicting. On one hand, according to the BBC, an aggregate of the circulation of the ten most popular nationwide papers still totals only around 10 million - far below the 52 million households that television reaches. 290 On the other hand, IREX lists Russia’s Federal Agency of Press and Mass Communications as claiming an astonishing 7.8 billion total circulation for newspapers in 2009, with magazines reaching a total circulation of 1.9 billion. 291

Even an outspoken Russian media critic as Maria Lipman, media scholar for the Carnegie Center for International Peace, concedes that amidst this large quantity of media outlets, Russia maintains a vibrant and relatively independent “liberal media,” which she defines as “sources, which adhere to professional and ethical standards of independence, as well as to Western democratic norms and principles.” 292 This “liberal media” is not limited to the relatively free online media, such as the webnative sources grani.ru, gazeta.ru and lenta.ru, as well as the websites of well-known newspapers such as NovayaGazeta.ru, and Ej.ru (the site of

287 Landscape: Russia. European Journalism Center. 2010
288 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org. 2011.
291 Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter. IREX.org. 2011.
Ezhednevnyi Zhurnal (Daily Journal).  It also includes, for instance, REN-TV, a Moscow-based commercial station with a strong regional network, majority-owned by National Media Group, one of the biggest private media holdings in Russia. REN-TV represents one of the few television broadcasters that is not part of the government’s media empire, and controls 27 TV stations through the country. Another leading example is Ekho Moskvy (Echo of Moscow), one of the most famous and popular information radio stations in Russia, with a daily listening audience of about 900,000 in Moscow, and 2.5 million nationwide. The station’s website is, according to the Mail.ru ratings site, the fifteenth most popular news and commentary site in Russia, with over 2 million visitors per month. The station offers a highly interactive political news and talk programs, broadcasting live and offering a broad diversity of opinions on the issues of the day. Although owned by Gazprom, the station is known for its editorial independence – despite occasional government pressure when coverage has been too critical of the Kremlin. In a 2008 evaluation of Russia’s press, the BBC argued that “the Russian newspaper market offers its consumers a more diverse range of views than those same consumers can sample on the country's leading television channels.” In Moscow in particular, there are a number of high-quality print publications, which maintain relative editorial

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independence. These include the mainstream business daily Kommersant, controlled by the steel tycoon Usmanov (who also runs a subsidiary of Gazprom, and is invested in the publisher of LiveJournal and other social networking sites), Vedomosti, a business daily published in conjunction with the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times, and Novaya Gazeta, which, the BBC describes as “often critical of the government” and “known for its investigative journalism.”

The paper is owned party by its staff, and partly by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and wealthy businessman Alexander Lebedev. Anna Politkovskaya, shot dead outside her Moscow home in 2006, was the paper’s most high-profile reporter.

Lipman concedes that all these various media outlets regularly publish articles and opinion pieces which expose corruption, mismanagement and abuse, and otherwise challenge or criticize the authority of the state. “In this media realm,” writes Lipman, “one can read reports of governmental corruption and mismanagement, with multiple examples of journalistic work directly challenging or defying the authority of the state. If they are careful not to encroach on powerful interests, reporters working for prominent Moscow publications can get away with challenging specific government policies or high-ranking officials.”

Russia’s independent, “liberal” media diverge significantly from government-controlled television in terms of news priorities and newsmakers, as well as in general tone. In a 2009 essay on “The Media and Political Developments” in Russia, Lipman and future US ambassador to Russia Michael MacFaul argue that “the picture one gets of the situation in Russia from

299 “Russia Country Profile.” BBC. 2012.
reading and listening to independent news sources is entirely different than that put forward by federal TV.\footnote{Wegren, Stephen K., and Dale R. Herspring, eds. \textit{After Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain}. Fourth Edition. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.} The distinction between television news and independent media is so apparent that it was even publicly acknowledged, in 2010, by then President of Russia, Dmitiri Medvedev, who admonished the heads of three federal TV channels that, “what should not happen, in my view, is a gap between the things that happen in real life and the newscast…The list of the news on TV, say, for one day, should not be strikingly different from what we read on the Internet or in other media. And that’s what I think the case is today.”\footnote{“Review of the Year with the President of Russia” Government. \textit{President of Russia}, December 24, 2010. http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/1520.}

The influence of Russia’s diverse and vibrant independent media is sidelined by the dominance of government controlled television news, which, according to a number of leading public opinion surveys, serves as the primary source of information for the majority the Russian electoral base. The 2010 Freedom House Freedom of the Press report describes the differences between Russia’s “top down” television system and the marginalized independent media, explaining that “government-controlled television was the primary source of news for most Russians, while lively but cautious political debate was increasingly limited to glossy weekly magazines and news websites that were accessible mostly to urban, educated, and affluent audiences.”\footnote{Freedom of the Press. Freedom House.org. 2010} In a March 2011 article in Novoya Gazeta specifically focused on the limited influence of the Internet, Levada Center sociologist and researcher Dennis Volcov, agrees, explaining that “the lack of freedom of speech on government television blocks the themes of the
free Internet. Its role as a source of information should not be over estimated.” (Translation mine). 305

The Dominance of Television

A review of five surveys on media preferences, conducted between 2007 and 2011 by Russia’s leading non-governmental public opinion research groups, the FOM Public Opinion Foundation and the Levada Center, confirms that television is the leading source of information for the majority of Russians. FOM and the Levada Center regularly ask their respondents about their preferred sources for news, current events and “interesting information” in general. The response options include not only major media sources such as television, press and radio, but also online news sources and social networking sites, as well as “relatives and friends”. In some cases, the responses are further subdivided into various categories, including not only socio-economic demographics such as gender, age, education, income and location, but also other interesting categories such as “Internet users” and “non users” as well as, in a 2007 FOM poll, categories determined by levels of trust in Putin. (See Table 23) The responses to these questions document changes in audience preferences over the past four years, as well as the distinction in media choices between the general public and active Internet users.

In 2007, FOM asked 1,500 respondents nationwide “Where do you usually find out about current events in our country?” and allowed them to select up to five types of media

outlets. The poll demonstrates the extent to which national television exceeds any other media as a source for news on current events for all Russians, across all demographics. National television was selected as a top media source by an average of 90% of respondents. This average includes all demographics – gender, age, education, income or location/size of city. In fact, the range was quite small - from 82% (for Moscow residents) to 92% (for 26-52 year olds). Markedly, all other media - such as national newspapers and radio, regional and local television, and local newspapers - trailed far behind, selected as one of the top five media choices by only 25% - 30% of the respondents. In 2007, only 9% of the respondents selected the Internet as one of their top five information media sources. (Table 23)

Table 23 - FOM Media Preferences Poll, 2007
Q. - Where do you usually find out about current events in our country – choose up to five mass media sources. (Translation Mine)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENT</th>
<th>TRUST PUTIN</th>
<th>IN GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>EDUCATION</th>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>INTERNET USERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of RESPONDENTS</td>
<td>ALL RUSSIA</td>
<td>FUL</td>
<td>PART</td>
<td>DIST TRUST</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>18-35</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATL TV</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>89</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATL NEWSPAPER</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>REG TV</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCAL NEWSPAPER</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>REG NEWSPAPER</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNET</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCL RADIO</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCAL CABLE TV</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATELLITE TV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARD TO ANSWER</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A 2009 Levada survey shows similar results, as illustrated in Table 24, below. When offered one single choice for “news of special interest” - as opposed to up to five choices in the 2007 FOM poll - a full 74% chose television. The margin between television and other media was enormous – each of the other six options (radio, newspapers, journals, Internet publications, “other internet sources,” “friends, relatives and neighbors,” and “difficult to answer” were
chosen by less than 6% of the respondents. However, in this Levada 2009 survey, the Internet had ascended to second place – admittedly a distant second, but nevertheless slightly ahead of both print and radio as a source of “insight into news of special interest.” Although selected by only 6% of the respondents, “Internet publications” appear one to two percentage points ahead of print and radio, as well as other “non television” options. It is also interesting to note that by 2009, “the Internet” was no longer a singular option, but split into two – online publications and “other internet” which presumably includes social media. If one takes the liberty of combining those two options, then the total score of 8% gives “the Internet” an even larger lead. 308

Table 24 – Levada Media Preferences Poll, 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Levada 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet publications (newspapers, journals, information_portals)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to answer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends, relatives, neighbors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other internet sources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three additional surveys on media preferences conducted by Levada and FOM between 2009 and 2011 demonstrate that over the last three years television has maintained its lead on

other media sources, while print and radio are in decline, and the Internet is growing steadily. The 2009 Levada survey asked “Where do you most often find news about the country and the world?”309 Similarly, 2010 and 2011 FOM surveys asked, “Which sources do you most use to find news?”310 All three surveys allowed respondents to list multiple sources, with virtually identical categories. The one difference was that the Levada option specified “conversations with relatives and friends,” implying face-to-face contact only, while FOM listed “relatives and friends” as a source, allowing for the possibility that of getting news from relatives and friends via the Internet. Table 25, below, combines responses from the three surveys. In all three surveys, television was selected as a source by 87% to 94% of respondents. While television’s leadership position in Russia has remained unwavering over the last three years, as a source of news, print and radio, in particular, have each gone down 15 percentage points. This finding is supported by the BBC, which, in a 2008 article on “Press in Russia,” maintains that “consumption of serious newspapers is…showing signs of decline…As a news medium, the press has been comfortably overtaken by television, which is more popular, has far wider reach and attracts heavier investment.”311 The Internet, on the other hand, is growing rapidly as a source. If one combines both online news publications with online social media, the broader “Internet” has almost doubled as a category, from 15% to 28% over the last three years. With a joint score of 28% in 2011, online sources become roughly equivalent to printed press (30%) and radio (27%).

Table 25– Media Preferences Poll, Levada 2009, FOM 2010 and 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media Preferences Poll, Levada 2009, FOM 2010 and 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009 Levada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print/Press (newspapers &amp; magazines, journals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Conversations with] relatives and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online news sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online forums, blogs, social networking sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monolithic Information Diet

The public opinion surveys documented above illustrate the decline of print and radio as sources of news in Russia, coupled with the consistent and rapid rise of the Internet as an information source – both in terms of news sites and social media sites. As a result, for many Russians, the Internet is becoming a second choice, either equivalent to, and in some cases ahead of, print and radio. Nevertheless, despite the rise of the Internet, the existence of a relatively independent “liberal media” segment, and a diverse array of other media choices, the information diet, for a majority of Russians, remains monolithic. According to the FOM and Levada surveys above, government controlled television is by far the primary and most trusted source of news and information for the majority of the public – including the young, educated, urban population. This lead is reinforced at the expense of other media outlets, augmented by the fact that the gap
between television and other media (including the Internet) as a source of news is larger in Russia than elsewhere.

What differentiates Russia from other countries, such as the US for example, is that, for a majority of the Russian populace, no other media – not print, radio nor Internet – come close to television in terms of audience preference, choice and trust. For instance, in the most recent survey, FOM 2011, television was selected as a news source by 94% of respondents. With a joint score of 28% in 2011, online sources were roughly equivalent to printed press (30%) and radio (27%). Hence, in 2011, when offered a range of choices, only 30% of respondents, at best, chose other media. In comparison, the information environment for the average American is much richer. According to the PEW Internet and American Life Project, the overwhelming majority of Americans (92%) use multiple platforms to get news on a typical day, including TV, the Internet, newspapers and radio. In the US, television is also the top news source, but to a slightly lower degree – for 73% to 78% of respondents. The Internet is the second most frequent option – selected by 61%, almost as frequently as television and far more often than in Russia. Local newspaper and radio are chosen by 50-54%, also more frequently than in Russia.312

Russia’s predominantly monolithic information environment is dominated by “top down” government controlled television and augmented by the large gap between television and other media as a source of news. At the same time, the fact that television and the Internet lie on

opposing ends of a “Media Freedom Spectrum”, and the rise of the Internet as a secondary choice for information and news, creates, in Russia, a particularly sharp distinction between a “television majority” exposed to a restricted diet of government regulated and approved news content, an active Internet using minority, who, as the following section will attest, access and trust a more independent array of news and information.

A Tale of Two Audiences -- The Television Majority vs the Active Internet Minority

While government controlled television is by far the most popular and trusted source of news and information for the majority of the public, for a select and relatively elite group of active users, the Internet competes with, and often supersedes, television as a source of information and trust. The elite nature of the Internet, and the distinctions in media choices between Internet users and non-users are supported by two recent FOM polls – a 2007 poll on media preferences (Table 23, above) and a smaller 2009 survey on sources of information and trust. 313

In the 2007 poll, Internet users (at least once per month) made up only 19% of respondents, and as a result, for the general populace, the Internet was rarely among the top five media sources – selected by only 9% of respondents. Among Internet users, however, the Internet was among the top five media sources for 44%, making the Internet the second choice after TV for this group, ahead of all other media. The percentage of those for whom the Internet was among the “top 5” was also higher for the young, urban, elite - Moscow residents (36%),

young adults under 35 (18%), those with the highest education (24%) and income (16%). High income and education were also an indicator for an increased use of other national media sources such as newspapers and radio.\textsuperscript{314} \textsuperscript{315} In the 2009 survey on sources of information and trust, FOM segmented respondents by “urban residents”, “Internet users” and “non Internet users,” enabling researchers to hone in on the differences in media use and trust between the general Russian public and the growing Internet audience. The 2009 FOM survey has a smaller and younger group of respondents than the other surveys referenced here – only 400 respondents, over the age of 12. FOM pollsters asked two questions: “Where do you most often find interesting information?” (choose up to three) and “Which one source do you trust the most?”. \textit{(Figures 35 and 36)} It is important to note that the question was not about news as such, but “interesting information” in general. Respondents were given six sources – television, Internet, books, print, radio and relatives/friends. The poll found that daily Internet users have a unique profile, differing dramatically from non-Internet users, and even from average urban residents, in their sources of information. In particular, the survey found that daily Internet users pay attention to and trust different sources of information than their less wired peers. For the average urban resident or non-Internet user, television remained the predominant source of interesting and trusted information. For these groups, television faces virtually no competition in the media

\textsuperscript{314} \textit{Media Preferences Report.} FOM. 2007
\textsuperscript{315} In 2007, while there was a correlation between opinions on Putin and television and Internet media choices, it was not overwhelming. Those that said they “fully trust Putin” cited TV as a source for current events a bit more than average (91%), and the Internet a bit less (8%). Those that “partially trust Putin” were at the national average, and those that “distrust Putin” had the lowest overall incidence of TV as a top choice for current events (86%) and a slightly higher than average percentage (12%) of Internet as a top source.
landscape. For daily users, however, the Internet offers an additional and alternative source of interesting and trusted information - one that rivals, and sometimes even exceeds, television. \textsuperscript{316}

Figure 35 – FOM Poll – Sources of “Interesting information” 2009

Source Question 1 – Where do you most often find interesting information? (choose up to 3)

Figure 36 – FOM Poll – Most Trusted Source 2009

Source Question 2 – Which Source Do You Trust the Most?

Based on the results of FOM’s 2009 survey, the portraits of the average urban resident and the “non Internet user” are quite similar. Both (potentially overlapping) groups find interesting information primarily on television – over 80% of them list TV among their top choices. As I have noted earlier, none of the other media offer any sort of information competition for these groups. As a secondary information source, print is chosen by less than half of the respondents, and at less than half the rate of television. Relatives and friends are turned to by around one quarter to one third of the respondents. Unsurprisingly, the main difference between the two groups is that, for urban residents, the Internet competes with relatives and friends as a third place source, while for “non Internet users,” it is, obviously, is not a source at all. Both of these groups also trust television more than any other source – TV is chosen by around 45% - 55% of respondents. Other media trail far behind in terms of trust as well. The second most trusted source for this group are relatives and friends – chosen by around 11 or 12% of the respondents. All other sources – including Print and Internet – are chosen less than 10% of the time. Even for the average urban resident, the Internet is selected as “the most trusted source” less frequently than “relatives and friends”, and by less than 10% of respondents.\footnote{Lebedev. Media Preferences: Internet Approaches Television. FOM Public Opinion Foundation. 2009.}

The profile of the active or daily Internet user is quite different. For this group, television is a far less dominant source of information, and the Internet is an active competitor, or secondary source. For active Internet users, the Internet exceeds television, if only by a small percentage, as a source of interesting information, and is virtually even with television as a source of trusted information. The Internet and television are both selected as a top choice of

\footnote{Lebedev. Media Preferences: Internet Approaches Television. FOM Public Opinion Foundation. 2009.}
interesting information by over 70% of the respondents in this group – with the Internet scoring a few percentage points more. In addition, when it comes to choosing one top media source for trusted information, the Internet and television are equally matched, chosen by around one third of the respondents, with television scoring only slightly higher. Other sources trailed behind, chosen by under 10% of the respondents in this group. In addition, the daily Internet user appears more literate than other groups, choosing books more often than the other groups as a source of interesting and trusted information.318

RuNet Discussion Core bloggers are part of this limited but growing group of active Internet users who access and trust a more diverse array of news and information. In fact, a comparison of the specifically news related sources among RuNet Discussion Core bloggers with the online news preferences of Russian Internet users, found that the bloggers in the RuNet Discussion Core demonstrate a slight preference for more independent news sources.319 (See Appendix – Top News Sources, Blog vs Internet.) For instance, the liberal, Moscow based business and politics daily Kommersant is 4th among RuNet Core bloggers, and 14th among Internet users in general. Similarly, the website for the liberal radio show Echo Moskvy is ranked 6th among RuNet Core bloggers and 20th among Internet users in general. Among RuNet Core bloggers, Novaya Gazeta is ranked 10th, Radio Free Europe (svobodanews.ru) is 17th, BBC News is 23rd and Grani.ru is 26th; none of these is ranked among the top 30 among Internet users in general. On the other hand, Regnum.ru, an online news agency that focuses on regional news, appeared at #5 for Internet users, and only #28 for RuNet Core bloggers. In general, RuNet

core bloggers show a preference for Web native Russian news sites (lenta.ru (#1), gazeta.ru (#2)), Web sites of government-supported and independent news agencies (RIA Novosti (#3) and Interfax (#14)), and major, Moscow based Russian newspapers (Kommersant (#4) and Vedomosti (#7)).  

In short, in Russia, the Internet competes with television as a source of information only for frequent (daily) users. For the majority of the population, television is the predominant source for information, trust and entertainment. For a select, relatively small, but growing group of active Internet users, however, the Internet serves a significant additional source of information and trust.

Conclusion – Two Russias

The information diet of the majority of the Russian populace remains narrow and monolithic – dominated by universally available, “top down” government controlled television, and augmented by the large gap between television and other media as a source of news. For a majority of Russians, no other media – not print, radio nor Internet – come close to television in terms of audience preference, choice and trust. The relatively uncensored, diverse and vibrant Internet is marginalized along with other independent media, turned to as source for information, news and trust by only a select group of active users. The result is a particularly sharp distinction, in Russia, between the “television majority” exposed to a restricted diet of government regulated and approved news content, and the growing minority of active Internet

users. This distinction has led a variety of social commentators to divide Russian in two – the “TV audience” and the “Internet audience”. In 2011 Radio Free Europe described these as “the "Internet Russia" of mostly young, increasingly globalized readers who can access any information they want; and the "television Russia" that listens to what the authorities want it to hear.”\(^{321}\) “There is an obvious difference in public agendas—one for those who use the Internet, and one for those who watch television,” observed one IREX panelist - journalist, academic Anna Kachkaeva.\(^{322}\)

In the following chapter, I discuss the relationship between the members of “Internet Russia” and the increase in offline action since 2009, with a particular focus on the protests and online innovations of 2012. I argue that the relationship between independent information and political activism is not unidirectional, that Russia’s relatively elite, young, urban and globalized minority have not become more politically engaged because they rely on the Internet. Rather, the minority which is involved in public affairs turn to the Internet not only for information, but also, and more significantly, leverage the Internet’s social networks for interaction and organization.

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322 *Media Sustainability Index, Russia Chapter*. IREX.org. 2011
The Relationship between Information and Action

The distinction between Russia’s “television majority,” exposed to a monolithic, restricted and regulated information diet and its “Internet minority,” who access and trust a more diverse and independent array of information, documented in the previous chapter, undergirds any conversation about the relationship between information and action. Making a direct link between information diet and politics, a December, 2010 Gazeta.ru editorial argues that there are two mass political parties in Russia, “the television party and the Internet party”.

American Enterprise Institute’s Leon Aron takes this argument one step further, making a causal connection between information diet and political activism in Russia. In a June, 2011 AEI report, Aron claims that “Russia can be divided into two nations, the “television nation” and the “Internet nation...Although most Russians still get their daily news from television,” he continues, “the minority who rely on the Internet are more politically engaged.”

Aron, like many Western observers, views the information gap between “TV Russia” and “Internet Russia” as a potential source for political activism. From this perspective, access to independent information can stimulate an informed citizenry into action, or, at the very least, activism is not

possible without access to independent information. I argue that in Internet savvy Russia, as in other “wired” semi-authoritarian states, analysis of the influence of Internet technology on democratic discourse and political engagement should be broadened to highlight communication and coordination, in addition to information. In a July, 2011 article in The Nation, Russian analyst and Foreign Affairs blogger Vadim Nikitin describes Russia’s “two nations” as “an offline mass of older, poorer, disaffected but largely inert and atomized consumers of state-controlled TV” and “an incestuous city-state of upwardly mobile, Internet-savvy young urbanites organizing and networking on LiveJournal.”

In Russia, I contend, the relatively elite, young, urban and globalized minority is not more politically engaged merely because of the independent information they receive online. Rather, this group leverages the Internet, and, in particular, online social networks, as tools for communication, coordination and action. The movements described below illustrate the Internet’s role as a medium of interpersonal communication and coordination, above and beyond its “liberating” power as an information medium. Civic participation in Russia, I argue, has its roots in the social networks of the RuNet.

**Grassroots Actions 2009-2011**

Since 2009, there has been growing evidence of the Internet’s role in coordinating, organizing and mobilizing offline socio-political action. 2009 was also the year that Internet penetration in Russia reached one third of its citizens nationwide. By 2012, that number rose

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to over 50%. The figures for Moscow and St. Petersberg are consistently higher, usually equivalent to those in Western Europe and the United States. By the winter of 2010-2011, Internet penetration in St. Petersburg and Moscow was over 65% – 20% higher than Russia’s 2011 nationwide average. As the Internet and social media diffuse throughout Russia, its users are going online, not only for information, but also for communication, coordination and community.

Uses of the Internet for offline social action before the dramatic events surrounding the 2011-2012 election cycle provide compelling examples of Russians leveraging the interpersonal aspect of social media networks to mobilize and address issues that have a concrete effect on their everyday lives. These actions can be grouped into three main categories – civil rights oriented social movements, such as those surrounding motorist rights, environmental/preservationist issues and the right of assembly; individually sponsored, targeted, grassroots civil action campaigns; and volunteer, aid and crisis intervention efforts. All three of these categories are united by their non-ideological nature, sharing an overall concern with corruption, abuse of power and privilege, and a lack of official accountability.

In Russia, issues affecting motorists have served as a powerful catalyst for unity and social action. These issues include taxes and gas price increases, as well as the brazen abuse of privilege by high-ranking officials and the accidents (often fatal) caused by the disregard of traffic rules by “VIPs.” These automotive concerns are not ideological, and bring together a


range of people regardless of political orientation. A 2010 Wall Street Journal article on the topic quotes Yuri Geyko, host of a daily radio program about automotive issues, explaining that "car owners come from the most educated and active part of the population, but most are not politically active…They feel stronger about their cars than their political rights." Russia’s Federation of Car Owners (FAR) is a movement organized primarily online, leveraging the Internet to mobilize in defense of victims of traffic accidents, and to coordinate protests against taxes, gas price increases, abuse of privilege and other issues affecting motorists across the country. Since 2010, the Society of Blue Buckets, whose participants overlap with those of FAR, have used social networks to organize campaigns against the abuse of emergency “blue bucket sirens” by high-ranking public officials. Protesters use toy blue buckets in flashmobs and other protests across Moscow. Video of Blue Bucket protests, traffic violations and police abuses are circulated via YouTube, blogs and other social networks. Their activities have raised awareness, and brought the group notoriety. In a few high profile cases of fatal accidents, Blue Bucket actions may have stimulated the persecution of high-ranking officials, but violations continue.

Russian Police “Used Drivers as Human Shield” BBC News, March 10, 2010
Environmental and preservationist movements provide another leading example of non-ideologically driven social activism. Since the late 1990’s, activists have been organizing online to block the construction of a superhighway through the old growth Khimki forest, near Moscow. The movement’s website (http://www.khimkiforest.org) claims that their “campaign has become Russia’s most inspiring and largest activist movement in a long time…Its about more than just a forest. We are fighting a legacy of corruption and bribery among government officials, law enforcement and industry that has allowed this project to move forward.”

Another example is the Bashne.net historical preservationist movement, which achieved its initial goal of halting the development of an enormous Gazprom tower in St. Petersburg in 2010. The group used the Internet to spread information, organize rallies and generate online petitions, and continues today as a preservationist watchdog.

A leading early example of a general, non-ideological civil rights movement is the ‘Strategy 31’ movement, (http://strategy-31.ru) created in 2009 in support of Article 31 of the Russian Constitution, which defends the right to peaceful assembly in Russia. Over the past few years, the group has used LiveJournal and other social networks to coordinate group protests on the 31st day of every month with 31 days, in around 20 cities around Russia. The gatherings are intended to both promote and defend the right to peaceful assembly.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8560618.stm

332 Save Khimki Forest! Website http://www.khimkiforest.org (accessed 1/10/12)


The strong popular resonance of motorist and environmental issues has also enabled successful, targeted grassroots actions instigated by individuals - highly connected bloggers who were able to leverage and mobilize their social networks for specific change. In 2010, 26 year old Ilya Varlamov (known as “zyalt”) founded the blogging campaign “A Country Without Idiocy” to address a specific instance of abuse of vehicular and official privilege - the brazen violation of handicapped parking spot use near the headquarters of Moscow’s traffic police. Mr. Varlamov led a letter writing campaign to the prosecutor’s office that successfully ended the practice, and his actions have, according to an October, 2010 Radio Free Europe article, earned him “the devotion of tens of thousands of microbloggers and turned him into a cult phenomenon on the Russian Internet”. Varlamov is quoted in the article as saying: "I wouldn't put it as glamorously as doing my 'civic duty…I just do what I like doing and what I think is right because I would really like to change things….I simply try to bring these little things to people's attention so that we can change the situation together." Similarly, in 2010, prominent travel blogger Sergey Dolya launched the “Country without Garbage” or “Bloggers against Garbage” campaign, leveraging his blog’s popularity to raise awareness about littering, and organize clean up operations in 100 locations nationwide, in one case removing 200 tons of trash from Russia’s streets in a single day. Finally, the most prominent example of an individually sponsored, targeted and successful grassroots effort is the anti-corruption site RosPil.net, launched in 2010

by well-known activist Alexei Navalny. The site allows people to anonymously report suspicious government tenders. An example of its success includes the exposure of a proposal by the Health and Social Development Ministry to develop a social network for medical sector workers and patients—a 55 million ruble ($1.8 million USD) contract that had to be completed within 16 days. The tender was ultimately cancelled and the official who set its terms resigned. The site claims to have prevented more than $10 million worth of similar misappropriations.337

In addition to undergirding popular movements, online social networks have been used to coordinate collective legal action, as well as crisis intervention and other volunteer and aid efforts. The most successful and well known of these is the Wildfires Help Map, (http://russian-fires.ru/), initiated as a result of the state’s inadequate response to widespread wildfires near Moscow during the summer of 2010. The Help Map was created, using the OpenSource Ushadi platform, by the RuNet Echo team at Global Voices, together with Russian blogger and activist Marina Litvinovich. The site allowed users throughout the area to coordinate volunteer and relief efforts, and went on to win a prestigious RuNet Award in 2011.338 In addition to the Help Map, there were many examples that summer of people from various regions organizing online to deliver humanitarian assistance to the affected areas. Other examples of collective action enabled by online social networks include the collective lawsuit organized against Moscow airports and airline officials in response to violations that occurred in December, 2010, when foul

weather caused 1,200 flights to be delayed or cancelled and 20,000 people stranded, as well as the response to the tragic July 2011 sinking of a Russian cruise ship, when volunteers used Vkontakte (Russia’s version of Facebook) to coordinate aid and support. A combined strategy of LiveJournal, Vkontakte, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube bulletins has also been used to organize searches and successfully locate missing persons.

In an article in the Eurasia Daily Monitor published in early 2011, Elena Chinyaeva cites many of the examples listed above, arguing that “the role of the Internet in social and political life [is the] one factor to be singled out which influenced Russia in 2010.” Chinyaeva concludes that 2010 was significant in that it was the year that virtual discourse actively influenced offline action - “shaping reality in modern Russia.”

The Map and the Territory - Offline Implications of the RuNet Discussion Core

The grassroots movements of 2009-2010 are united by their non-ideological nature, concerned more with specific cases of corruption, abuse of power and privilege, and lack of official accountability than with overt oppositional politics. As writer and online activist Oleg Kozyrev, states in The Nation, “people are unwilling to join organizations but are ready to solve

341 Sindelar, “As Other Media Stagnate in Russia, Internet is Changing the Rules of Engagement.” REFRL. October, 9 2011.
particular problems.”\textsuperscript{343} Similarly, a review of the top YouTube videos in the RuNet Discussion Core, published by the Berkman Center, also found that the leading politically oriented videos of 2009-2010 consistently addressed issues of corruption, accountability and abuse of privilege and power. “A significant amount of political videos are focused on corruption and transparency; pushing back against abuse of power by business and finance elites, the government, and the police; and include direct appeals for assistance to the Kremlin. There are some clips related to environmental issues, including stopping the destruction of the Khimki forest outside Moscow, and several related to nationalist issues,” the study reports.\textsuperscript{344}

Initiated and organized within Russia’s blogosphere and social networks, the nature of the grassroots movements of 2009-2010 actions resonate with the key politically oriented findings of my analysis of Russian social media networks, and the RuNet Discussion Core. My research identified three outstanding features of the RuNet Discussion Core – the integrated nature of the clusters themselves, featuring a mix of political and social conversation, a high level of cross-cluster interaction, and the absence of a distinct “political blogosphere.” Politics were certainly present in the RuNet Discussion Core, and political, social and cultural issues were actively discussed in all of the clusters and zones. Many of the bloggers demonstrated an active involvement in the interconnection of politics and public life, and some of the movements mentioned above, such as Khimki and Bashne.net environmental movements, and Strategy 31, were represented in the clusters of the Discussion Core (Social and Environmental Activism


Cluster and Democratic Opposition Cluster, respectively). The distinguishing characteristic of the RuNet Discussion Core, however, is the mixture of social and political perspectives in all the clusters, the active engagement in cross-cluster discourse, and the fact that none of the clusters could be easily mapped onto any existing Russian political party. These findings underscore my interpretation of Russian social media as an interpersonal sphere, in which political discourse is varied, diffuse and heavily intertwined with social and cultural issues. They reflect the mixture of political perspectives and lack of overt ideology behind Russia’s recent grassroots movements, as well as “the underdevelopment of political parties and a well structured and competitive political arena” in Russia, noted by Koltsova in her analysis of my research.\footnote{Koltsova, personal email, 2010} So, for instance, a December, 2010 Gazeta.ru editorial highlights the diffuse nature of the “Internet party,” explaining that, while a majority of Russia’s “Television party votes for Putin, Medvedev and any other United Russia member,” the political views of the “Internet party” are more complex -- while they are “by and large sharply critical of the government” they also take “differing positions that are at times diametrically opposed.”\footnote{“Internet vs the Idiot Box.” Gazeta.ru, December 10, 2010.} Similarly, a March 2011 Novayagazeta.ru editorial cites a survey of young Muscovites (15-29), conducted by the Levada Center in July 2010, that demonstrates that the group for whom the Internet is the preferred and most trusted source of information about current events, is dominated by people not affiliated with any particular political party.\footnote{“Televisor Blizhe Narody (Television Is Closer to the People).” Novaya Gazeta, March 4, 2011. http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/6865.html.}
By the summer of 2011, a few months before the dramatic protests surrounding the 2011-2012 election cycle, this surge in grassroots activity was being interpreted by Russia analysts as evidence of a nascent civil society, fostered by social networks, and notable for its non-ideological bent, more concerned with specific abuses of power and privilege, than with abstract “authoritarianism.” In his July, 2011 article in The Nation on the “rebirth of Russian civil society,” Nikitin articulates the same connection between the lack of a specific ideology, the absence of a formal movement to join, and the willingness to take specific action, that I observed in the RuNet Discussion Core. Nikitin argues that, “the country’s civil society… is repositioning itself as a more participatory, non-ideological and conspicuously patriotic one. As the state grows increasingly alienated from its people, civic leaders are carving out a small but growing space for online and grassroots protest.” Nikitin references Russian writer and activist Oleg Kozyrev, who described these new movements as different and important because “resistance to corruption and abuse of power is now coming from below, not from abroad and not from the old politicians—just ordinary people doing the right thing.” “The new civil society activists are democrats with a small “d” and an even smaller appetite for the ideological grandstanding and deal making of transactional politics,” argues Nikitin. “This pragmatic localism better reflects the worries of ordinary people, who place corruption, abuse of privilege and lack of accountability well above authoritarianism on the list of the country’s biggest problems,” he concludes.348

An October, 2011 Radio Free Europe article on the way that the “Internet is changing the rules of engagement” in Russia echoes the key issues – spectrum of media freedom and independence, monolithic information environment, two audiences - raised in the previous chapters of this dissertation. It also highlights the non-ideological nature of the Runet, uniting political perspectives by fostering civic movements that target specific everyday concerns:

In an otherwise bleak media landscape, the rapid rise of the Internet is shifting the Russian information industry from a top-down operation to a looser, more pluralistic affair where regular Russians are no longer expected to be passive consumers of traditional news… Television, which still reigns supreme as a source of news for 85 percent of Russians, may provide a glossy and orchestrated image of the world that suits the Kremlin's needs. The dwindling newspaper trade may deliver tailored bulletins to niche audiences. But the Russian Internet, or RuNet, is the first medium in the country to come without a built-in ideological bent…And along the way, it's fueling a new wave of civic activism -- one that may not bring sweeping political change or find common cause with the traditional opposition, but which is rapidly giving regular Russians power to bear on issues that affect them most, from car inspections to community safety to bureaucracy and corruption.349

Affirming my contention that civic participation in Russia has its roots in the social networks of RuNet, Nikitin argued that social networks have “handed Russians an unprecedented opportunity to free themselves from larger political debate and simply connect over real-life problems…those kinds of questions that touch on people's ordinary lives are the ones that have the biggest scope for bringing in participation.”350 In a Foreign Affairs blog post written a few months later, in October, 2011, Nikitin reminds readers of Russia’s digital divide, an issue I have addressed in earlier chapters, and affirms the connection between the social elite and the politically active. “Involvement in social networks, civic engagement and community

349 Sindelar. “As Other Media Stagnate In Russia, Internet Changing Rules Of Engagement.” REFRL. Oct. 9, 2011
participation,” he writes “also correlate with class, urbanization and education levels. And it is precisely the small group of wealthier and more educated people who live in the largest cities and have the strongest real-life social capital that also dominates the country’s virtual civil society: the most likely to get their news online, read and write blogs, and participate in social activism.” 351

In the summer of 2011, just a few months before Russia’s contentious 2011-2012 election cycle, Nikitin felt that “the movement remains too niche, elite and diffuse to challenge Russia’s status quo.“  Its main contribution, he argued, was to demonstrate that “there can be life outside the officially sanctioned spaces.”352  In his June, 2011 report, entitled “Nyetizdat – How the Internet is Building Civil Society in Russia,” Leon Aron similarly argued that the Internet is the “backbone of civil society in Russia – giving people both a voice and the tools to self organize." Where others emphasized the targeted and non-ideological nature of these grassroots movements, Leon interpreted the RuNet not only as the “main alternative public platform and the engine of grassroots self-organization,” but also as “a growing force against authoritarianism …at once a national ‘town hall’ and party headquarters, vital to the emergence and maintenance of thousands of social and political movements.”353  In 2011, I felt that Aron was somewhat overstating his case. By 2012, his observations seemed prescient.

2011-2012 – From Grassroots Activism to Mass Protest

The election period of 2011-2012 was a turning point for socio-political action in Russia. The relationships, energy, experience and civic confidence fostered by the non-ideological movements and grassroots campaigns of the preceding years came to a fore, triggered by a series of government moves that were interpreted as blatant political affronts. The result was a year of massive street protests, and an unprecedented wave of political engagement, driven by established and flexible interpersonal networks and supported by the creative application of Internet technologies.

“If there was a single catalyst to the recent events,” writes The New York Times in December, 2011, “it was probably Mr. Putin’s unilateral announcement in September that he would run again for the presidency, in effect swapping places with Mr. Medvedev. Some Russians now snidely refer to this as “rokirovka” — the Russian word for castling in chess.” The same article quotes political commentator Viktor A. Shenderovich as explaining, “these are people protesting because they were humiliated. They were not asked. They were just told, ‘Putin is coming back.’” 354 In a February, 2012 Foreign Affairs article Maria Lipman and Nikolay Petrov agree that the announcement of the Putin/Medvedev switch was one of the triggers for the “crisis”. “The Russian public saw the two leaders' trading of places as evidence that they held their citizens in full contempt, especially when Medvedev, lamely, added that their decision to switch offices had been made long ago.” 355

Carnegie Endowment entitled “The Russian Awakening,” Lipman and other authors explain that the decision left the “modernized” part of society “thoroughly disillusioned. In fact,” they continue, “Russian history suggests that political turmoil often comes after hopes for a liberal change are thwarted.”

This “affront” was followed by Parliamentary (Duma) elections that were riddled with perceived fraud, including an immense wave of DDOS attacks targeting independent and watchdog online media that were understood as a fragrant attempt to block election monitoring. The DDOS attacks were timed to overlap with the Duma elections of December 4, 2011, beginning as soon as polls opened and ending once the polls were closed. The attacks were a focused effort, unprecedented in scale, directed at the LiveJournal platform, the election monitoring group Golos (www.golos.org), and a number of other leading independent journalism sites, such as Echo of Moscow, Novaya Gazeta, NewTimes, Bolshoi Gorod, slon.ru, ikso.org, ridus.ru, zaks.ru and pryaniki.org. The timing and targets of the attack, and especially the fact that many of the targeted sites were publicizing submissions on election violations, led observers

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to interpret the attacks as a clear “attempt to inhibit publication of information about violations.”

The attacks were reminiscent of earlier DDOS attacks, taking place in April and August of 2011, which primarily targeted LiveJournal, effectively shutting down the platform for several days. At the time, the popular view was that the April and August attacks were politically motivated – a way of practicing the shutting of one “valve” or channel rather than the whole flow in advance of the upcoming election cycle, with the goal of crippling or otherwise inhibiting online dialogue and coordination, or at the very least, desensitizing audiences to such attacks, so that, as one observer suggested, “there will be little surprise if such difficulties are experienced also during the vital period surrounding December’s elections for the State Duma or the presidential elections in March 2012.” More subtly, leading Russian blogger and high tech entrepreneur Anton Nossik suggested that the attacks aimed to “break up the LiveJournal blogging community, leading bloggers to move to other forums and fragmenting the dense political discourse network that has developed on the LiveJournal platform.”

New Media scholar and publisher Ivan Zassoursky, agreed, stating that the aim of the attacks was not to destroy the network permanently, but to show that it was not reliable as an instrument. “There


are hardly any independent media in Russia,” he is quoted as saying. “LiveJournal is unique because it unites independent journalists – [this means] they can be shut off altogether.”

Whatever the reasons behind the April and August attacks, one result was that many leading LiveJournal bloggers took the precaution of setting up alternative or mirror accounts on other platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus and in stand alone blogs, despite the perceived drawbacks of these platforms, such as the limited space for extended blog posts offered by Facebook or Vkontakte and especially Twitter, and the Google Plus requirement for posting under real names. As a result, despite the unprecedented scale of the December 4, 2011 DDOS attacks, many media organizations were prepared, swiftly transitioning to alternative platforms such as Facebook, Vkontakte (Russian Facebook clone) Twitter, YouTube and GoogleDocs to continue distributing information. The large scale, targeted attack was unable to stifle the flow of information, and the RuNet was full of exit polls, reports and videos about voting violations. RussiaProfile analysts argue that, in fact, the DDOS attacks served as an additional mobilization call, triggering a massive reaction in the Russian blogging community. “One blogger after another, from such popular figures as anti-corruption crusader Alexei Navalny to rank-and-file civic journalists, offered their blogs as vehicles for publishing reports of violations,” they write. Social networks, especially Twitter, disseminated exit poll

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data from Moscow and the regions, as well as evidence on alleged vote rigging. The persistence of these reports attests to the power and significance of the interpersonal networks themselves, rather than the individual platforms or channels used. It demonstrates that attacking or shuttering a specific channel or online resource is not effective when the interpersonal network is strong and flexible enough to simply migrate elsewhere.

United Russia scored just under 50% in the Parliamentary Election, failing to gain a majority in the Duma. Opponents claimed that even this reduced performance was inflated by ballot-box rigging. Popular demonstrations, protests and rallies calling for “Fair Elections” began immediately after the controversial Duma elections, and continued regularly over the course of 2012. Many of the demonstrations were the largest that Russia had seen in twenty years. Although they were primarily concentrated in the largest urban areas – Moscow and St. Petersburg – demonstrations occurred throughout Russia. The movement, dubbed “For Fair Elections” staged two surprisingly massive demonstrations in Moscow in December, 2012. Protestors called for an annulment of Sunday's election results; the resignation of the head of the election commission, and an official investigation into vote fraud. Large scale protests were held monthly in February, March, April and May of 2012, on dates that coincided with Putin’s re-

As the rallies continued over the course of 2012, additional demands emerged, calling for freedom for political prisoners, more openness regarding opposition parties and elections, entirely new democratic and open elections, an end to widespread government corruption, and for Putin to leave office. A protester at a September, 2012 rally summed up the movement’s frustration, stating that he was protesting against "total lawlessness, total corruption, the lack of civil freedoms, the absence of independent courts and social injustice."

An outstanding feature of the 2012 protests is their diversity. Demonstrators “expressing mutual disdain” included liberals, nationalists and communists, spurred to the streets and united only by their opposition to Putin and their call for fairness and accountability. As noted above, I found evidence of this mixture of political perspectives, and their incompatibility with any existing political parties, in the character of the Attentive Clusters of the RuNet Core. The diversity of the nascent opposition movement eventually influenced the composition of the

Coordinating Council, formed online in October, 2012, and segmented into four internal divisions: General Civil, Leftist, Liberal, and Nationalist.\textsuperscript{373}

In response to the protest rallies, several “pro Putin” rallies were also organized over the course of 2011 and 2012. These, however, suffered from unenthusiastic and allegedly forced attendance.\textsuperscript{374} According to Carnegie Endowment, “administrators of various levels and government employers have used a combination of coercion and compensation to ensure broad participation. Many pro-Putin ralliers have been bused or even flown in to Moscow from faraway places. Though the not-quite-voluntary participants are reluctant to give their names, more than a few have anonymously posted online copies of instructions from authorities to deliver a certain number of their staffers to pro-Putin events.”\textsuperscript{375} The lack of sincere enthusiasm exhibited in the Pro-Putin rallies is underscored by the paucity of user-generated content from rally participants, in stark contrast to the flood of fervent self-documentation produced by the oppositional demonstrators. In fact, the majority of the content from the Pro-Putin rallies was posted by oppositional activists promoting transparency, featuring YouTube reports that exposed the forced nature of rally attendance.\textsuperscript{376}

In early June, 2012, the Duma passed legislation that imposed restrictions on protest


rallies and heavy penalties for violating the rules. Additional legislation passed over the course of the following months restricted criticisms of established political parties and “threats to the constitutional order.” Libel was reinstated as a criminal offense, and “offensive content” on websites became grounds for “blacklisting.” The June resolution was followed by a series of arrests on charges related to earlier protests, and raids on the homes of several opposition leaders. Seven opposition leaders were issued summons, ordering them to appear for questioning on June 12, conflicting with a demonstration scheduled for that day. One of the opposition leaders summoned, popular activist Alexei Navalny, Tweeted from the court, mocking his interrogators.

Despite these measures, large crowds turned out on “Russia Day” Tuesday, June 12, 2012. A New York Times article from that day observes that, “the large turnout, rivaling the big crowds that had gathered at the initial antigovernment rallies in December, 2011, suggested that the tough new posture adopted by the Kremlin against the protests was emboldening rather than deterring Mr. Putin’s critics….The protest rally defied an atmosphere of intimidation and repression fostered by the Putin administration.” Rallies continued into September and October of 2012, also drawing large numbers, and leading the New York Times to reiterate that the persistence of these demonstrations has “sen[t] the message that….ranks are undaunted by a battery of new government sanctions and the two-year prison sentences handed down…to the

punk-rockers of Pussy Riot.” The article concludes that, “nine months after the first large protests sent shock waves through Moscow, the movement appears to have reached a kind of cruising altitude. It is not euphoric, as it was in December. But it is also not going away.” The authors of a September, 2012 Reuters article agree, writing that the Fall 2012 demonstrations were large enough to “maintain the momentum of the nine-month-old movement but almost certainly too few to increase alarm in the Kremlin.”

In October, 2012, the opposition movement coalesced to create a virtual, oppositional body, an “Opposition Coordination Council“ (OCC), whose goal is to produce a more coherent platform, “unite the often fractious opposition” and “try to harness constructively the growing mood of dissent in Russia.” Online elections for the Council were held on October 20-22, 2012. A few offline polling stations were also established. 170,000 people registered on the election site, cvk2012.org, and ultimately more than 80,000 people cast their votes. Interestingly, the project’s offices are not in Moscow, but in an ”anonymous-looking office block“ in Yekaterinburg, a large city approximately 1,240 miles from Moscow. The BBC describes the team of 25 who run the site as a “young” and “enthusiastic,” looking “like something out of a Starbucks commercial - sitting cross-legged and drinking coffee as they worked on their

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laptops….programming the election computers, and checking the identities of people registering, to prevent multiple voting.”

Representing the diversity of the opposition movement, the Coordinating Council is segmented into four internal divisions: General Civil, Leftist, Liberal, and Nationalist. The “General Civil” wing is allotted thirty seats, and the “ideological courts” hold another five seats each. Voters chose the 45 members of the Coordinating Council from among 200 candidates. Leading candidates participated in televised debates aired on the oppositionist-friendly Dozhd online/cable TV channel, leading some to view the election as a “popularity contest to determine which of the fragmented opposition's most prominent politicians and activists were genuine leadership material.” Among the 30 people elected from the main list of “general candidates” are Mr Navalny, former world chess champion Garry Kasparov, TV presenter Ksenia Sobchak and activist Ilya Yashin. According to the BBC, the Council’s political purpose is “mainly to represent the views of a protest movement that is scattered across the political spectrum, united largely - and in some cases only - by their opposition to Mr Putin and his system.” Ultimately, the new Coordinating Council will be responsible for coming up with a common agenda, formulating policy positions and agreeing tactics, such as street protests and

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campaigning for regional and municipal elections. At the time of writing this dissertation, its effectiveness was yet to be seen.

**Online Innovations of 2012**

The actions of 2012 have in common a series of innovations enabled by the coordination, crowd-sourcing and information sharing afforded by social media and other online technologies. I describe a number of these innovations below, grouping them into four key categories: online accountability efforts such as election monitoring; the online coordination and performance of new types of protest; the online creation and dissemination of protest related content and symbols; and online media, including citizen journalism and other “self-communication.”

The most well known of the Internet enabled election monitoring and accountability tools that emerged from the election cycle of 2011-2012 was created by Golos, (www.golos.org) an independent Russian election monitoring organization, active since 2000. In advance of the parliamentary elections, Golos launched an online Map of Violations (www.KartaNarusheniy.ru), supplemented with a text messaging service (www.sms.golos.org), which served as an interactive, crowd-sourcing platform with real time data showing the location of perceived election violations throughout the country. As mentioned above, the Map of Violations was one of the victims of the December 4th DDOS attacks, although its data was also available on back up systems in Google.docs and elsewhere. After the contested Parliamentary

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elections of December 4th, a number of leading journalists and public figures united to create the “League of Voters,” http://ligaizbirateley.ru an online hub for various opposition activities. The League of Voters website aggregates information on various activist groups around Russia, enabling users to register and search for groups by topic or location. The League also sponsored and supported protest activity, as well as initiatives related to election monitoring and accountability, such as the website, Svodny Protocol (svodnyprotocol.ru), which verified election monitoring reports, and the website chernyspisok.info (The Black List), which crowd sourced information relating to election fraud. Another election monitoring application, developed especially for smartphones, “Web Observer” (webnablyudatel.org), enabled users to instantly share video, photos and reports of violations. Introduced one week prior to the presidential election, Grakon (www.grakon.org) is a social networking platform designed to coordinate and share election monitoring information, enabling members to register as voters, observers, members of voting commissions, lawyers, and official representatives. A number of additional platforms were developed to help citizens register as official observers on behalf of any party or candidate taking part in the election. These include the website Citizen-observer (nablyudatel.org) and Alexey Navalny’s initiative Rosvybory.org. Regional websites, such as Saint Petersburg Observers (spbelect.org) also emerged, launched by local activists with the goal of increasing the number of local observers. Ultimately, these efforts enabled 28,000 volunteers throughout Russia to serve as official observers for the 2012 presidential election—an

unprecedented upsurge in civic responsibility and grass-roots activism, which, Aron argues, was “all the more remarkable because the result was widely believed to be predetermined.”392

Additional efforts include the special election page created by the online service Kuda-Komu (“Where-To Whom”) which helps users generate letters of complaint. The page assisted users with letters that focused on particular types of electoral fraud and suggested where they should be sent. An online petition was also started, on churovu.net, calling for the resignation of the Head of the Russian Central Election Committee, Vladimir Churov, a figure who is seen by many as responsible for significant election fraud. Last, but not least, is the official initiative to install webcams in nearly all of Russia’s 95,000 polling stations, enabling visitors to the presidential election monitoring website webvybory2012.ru to observe the voting process. Prime Minister Putin announced this initiative in December of 2011, in response to agitation regarding voter fraud. The webcam installation, which cost an estimated 10-15 billion rubles ($320-$480 million) equipped every polling station with two cameras: one focused on the ballot box and the other providing a broad view of the polling station. Once voting was over, one of the cameras also broadcast the vote counting process. Around 600,000 Russians registered on the site to observe the elections.393

The frequent demonstrations of 2012 also sparked a number of creative approaches to public protest and assembly, designed to circumvent restrictions on mass demonstrations and other authoritarian measures. These solutions were empowered by Internet technology, which

fostered a decentralized, collective style of organization that made the enforcement of restrictions difficult. One example is the car-based protest, such as the ones held around Russia in January and February 2012, in which cars marked with white ribbons (the movement’s symbol) circulate in a particular area. These protests were organized via social networks and blogs, and have led to a large-scale turnout of thousands of vehicles.\textsuperscript{394} Another “flashmob” type protest organized, facilitated and publicized online is the Big White Circle action of February 26, 2012, in which protestors wearing white formed a nine mile human chain around Moscow’s city center, surrounding the Kremlin. This demonstration did not require a permit because it was, in actuality, a multitude of individual, one person protests. In a few cases, the demonstrations and protest activities were organized and coordinated via “pop up” websites created specifically for the event.\textsuperscript{395} Protest agenda and demonstration speakers were selected via online voting, using dedicated pages on LiveJournal, Facebook or SurveyMonkey.\textsuperscript{396} A less successful tactic was the establishment of a website, www.helpwall.info (no longer active) that tried to facilitate real time assistance and legal advice during the rallies, enabling users to post requests for help via text messages, Twitter and Facebook.\textsuperscript{397}

Another key arena for innovation is that of promotion and publicity. The white ribbon, a major symbol of the opposition movement, originated online, on the site BelayaLenta.com, which explains the symbol's meaning, and provides information and options for how it can be


\textsuperscript{397} For example: http://golosovalka.livejournal.com/95354.html or https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CSC899Z or https://www.facebook.com/questions/237935562943756/.
used, and where the ribbons can be obtained. The website enables users to produce, share and find posters to use in demonstrations. Posters and leaflets were also shared and created using the Facebook group Street Art (https://www.facebook.com/groups/strt.art/). Another innovation involved the use of QR codes on political posters, such those used by 20 year old journalism student Vera Kichanova in her successful bid for a seat in one of Moscow’s many minor district councils. Voters in Moscow’s local elections can also visit the site www.Gorod2012.ru, which promotes only non United Russia party candidates. 398

Citizen journalism also thrived in 2012, as evidenced by the plethora of YouTube videos and blog posts that documented the experiences of rally participants. Mobile phones were used to livestream protest coverage, enabling protesters to broadcast live from such unusual locations as police vans and police stations. Innovative photo-journalists used remote controlled aerial cameras to produced “birds-eye” views and 360 degree images, documenting the size and scope of the rallies, and challenging official “low ball” figures. 399 Cable, and, in particular, online channels, broadcast coverage of the demonstrations, as well as online debates and dialogue between various oppositional leaders. The leaders in this category are Networked Public TV (SOTV) (http://www.rusotv.org/), created as a public television channel by a number of liberal public figures just prior to the Duma elections in November 2011 and Dozhd TV (TVRain.ru), which launched in 2010.

The vibrant protest coverage provided by professional and citizen journalists, as well as the unprecedented magnitude of the demonstrations themselves, forced a transformation in the

398 http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/09/world/europe/russian-voters-surprise-many-first-time-candidates.html?_r=0
content of state controlled television as well. After ignoring the initial post-election protests on December 5-6, state television channels began to provide national coverage of the large protests that swept Moscow and other cities on December 10. In some cases, journalists and editors on the state channels allegedly refused to broadcast unless the demonstrations were covered. On the state-run Rossiya 1 television channel, Presidential election night coverage featured a variety of opinions and topics unheard of on national television in the past decade, including coverage of the discussions of fraud publicized in social media and the new phenomenon of online election monitoring. “It was a breaking point, something completely new,” asserted Anna Kachkaeva, a prominent Russian media expert and dean of the Communications Department of Moscow’s Higher School of Economics. Dozhd TV’s 25-year-old chief producer, Renat Davletgildeyev, argues that “the federal channels cannot continue working according to the artificial mode that they have done in the last years.” He describes staff “rebellions” in which correspondents and editors refused to report on events in a dictated fashion. “This is happening because journalists have a conscience too,” he explains, “and they are fed up with the social contract.”

**Conclusion**

Although the demonstrators have been most often described as political opposition, some observers, like AEI’s Aron, argue that a more fitting characterization would be that of a civil

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rights movement. In an August, 2012 analysis of the movement for AEI, Aeron describes the protesters as “reject[ing] the system not because of some specific political or economic grievance, but because they find it indecent, undignified, offensive, and unworthy of them as individuals and as citizens.” “Just like past civil rights movements,” argues Aron, “Russia’s is led by a middle class that is seeking to effect vast political and social change through a personal and deeply moral effort. The moral imperative of dignity in liberty and equality informs the protesters’ discourse. ‘Honor,’ ‘decency,’ ‘dignity,’ ‘conscience’ are the mainstay of the protesters’ vocabulary…That democracy ‘begins from below,’ that without a strong civil society ‘nothing will be achieved,’ that such a society is to be built ‘from the ground up,’ and that the process must start immediately, are perhaps the most powerful leitmotifs in interviews with protesters, leaders, and rank-and-file alike.” This movement, Aron argues, sets no time limits to the achievement of its goals. He quotes protesters as saying they are ready for “a long, hard struggle,” a political “marathon” to enact change that may “take years, not weeks or months.”

According to the Maria Lipman of the Carnegie Endowment, these protest rallies have “demonstrated that a new generation of Russians no longer believe that activism is pointless….The modernized segment of society has entered the formerly no-go area of political activism.” This generation is part of Russia’s emerging modern urban middle class, which, according to the Levada Center, an independent polling agency, constitutes around 15-17 percent

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of the population. Lipman argues that this new middle class “rejects the social contract of the
2000s, which rested on the authorities granting their subjects personal freedom—in the areas of
self-expression and money making—in exchange for their noninterference in the political
realm.” She argues that, “after years of indifference and cynicism with regard to politics, these
Russians no longer accept a role of passive onlookers. Nor will they put up with ‘being treated as
cattle,’ in a now common phrase used to describe the government's arrogance and disrespect for
the public.”

Aron provides a series of quotes from interviews with protesters and reports by the New
York Times and the Washington Post, which indicate that people demonstrated for “human
dignity, the right to choose their own fate and to live in a lawful state.” These include statements
from rallies around Russia on February 4, 2012 such as “the law must be the same for all,” or “I
am here because in my country, my government ignores my interests and humiliates me,” by
participants in Novosibirsk, 1,750 miles outside Moscow and “we don’t want revolutions, we
simply want to be able to live and work honestly but this [system] does not give us such a right,”
from a demonstrator in the Siberian city of Omsk. Their slogans reflect the same sensibility and
outrage: “Don’t lie to us!” “Don’t steal from us!” “Listen to us!” “We are not cattle!” “We are
not a faceless crowd!” “We are the people!” and finally, via the New York Times, “We exist!”

“Nothing will change if we do nothing,” explains one activist, and “this is a fight for us to have a

Kramer, Andrew E., and David M. Herszenhorn. “Russian Middle Class Turns on Putin, a Benefactor.” The New
Barry. “Tens of Thousands Protest in Moscow, Russia, in Defiance of Putin.” NYT, December 10, 2011
normal civil society in Russia.” “Changes are possible in Russia only from below,” states another.\textsuperscript{410} Their general goal, explains Lipman, is “to bring integrity back to Russian civic and political life.” \textsuperscript{411} As the columnist Andrei Kolesnikov put it, “It is difficult to oppose an educated class, which demands from the regime not just political reform but, first and foremost, virtue and honesty.”\textsuperscript{412} Lipman concludes that the events of 2012 constitute a “civic awakening” caused by “tectonic shifts” occurring “at the very foundation of [Russian] society.” A new political generation is rising, “she argues. “Mass participation in election monitoring and spontaneous postelection street rallies have suggested that mass aversion to politics, especially among the youth, is becoming a thing of the past. New social networks based on trust and mutual assistance have begun to take root. Civic initiatives have sprung up, built on solidarity and organized around various, mainly nonpolitical projects.”\textsuperscript{413}

By December, 2012, one year after the first protesters took to the streets calling for “Fair Elections,” and a few months after the formation of the Coordinating Council, some of the opposition movement members began to form political parties, such as the “December 5\textsuperscript{th} Party” and the “People’s Alliance.” Others have won seats on Moscow municipal councils, a formerly

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{412} Lipman, Petrov. “What the Russian Protests Can -- And Can’t -- Do.” \textit{Foreign Affairs}, February 9, 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{413} Aron. \textit{Russia’s Protesters: The People, Ideals and Prospects}. AEI, August 9, 2012.
\end{itemize}
ignored institution. “Many who had never thought seriously about their political orientation,” reports the Moscow Times, have “started to recognize themselves as political subjects.”

In Russia, the ability to take targeted action and create successful change is a new social feature, enabled, I argue, by the interpersonal aspect of social media. What’s more, it is not just simply the ability, but the symbolic power of a belief in the necessity and possibility of grassroots change, that contains the seeds of civil society. While overtly triggered by a series of explicit government “affronts,” 2012’s momentous wave of political engagement was incubated in the relationships, energy, experience and civic confidence fostered by the non-ideological movements and grassroots campaigns of the preceding years. These movements leveraged Russia’s established, interconnected and flexible social networks to address the same fundamental concerns with corruption, abuse of privilege and lack of accountability that ultimately fueled the protests of 2011-2012. Taken together, they illustrate the Internet’s role as a medium of interpersonal communication and coordination, above and beyond its “liberating” power as an information medium. Civic participation in Russia, I argue, has its roots in the social networks of the RuNet.

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CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines the history, network structure and nature of Russian social media, with the goal of contributing to our understanding of the complex relationship between online communication technologies and society.

This exploration weaves together a number of key, interrelated concepts. One involves the discourse surrounding the universal affordances of the Internet and online social media, and the manner and degree to which they are understood to alter the relationship between individuals, information and action on a global scale. In particular, these theories investigate how the Internet and online social media have disrupted established systems of information production, consumption and exchange, as well as the influence of online social media on offline political engagement. In this dissertation, I examine the specific characteristics of online social media that, I argue, compel scholars to expand considerations of the relationship between information and action to include interaction and coordination.

It is universally acknowledged that the Internet has transformed the relationship between individuals and all types of information, but especially news and other public affairs related content. The user generated content and interactive features of online communications are generally understood to have fractured the traditional mass media dichotomy of broadcasters vs receivers, producers vs. audience, empowering the “audience” to participate in content creation and dissemination. The conversation is no longer one directional, top down, from mainstream media to the masses. Internet technologies empower individuals as members of a many to many
network of “self-communication,” enabling conversations on a variety of online media, including blogs as well as social networking sites, blurring the traditional boundary between the producer and consumer of information, reducing the power of information gatekeepers, and building networks of communication and coordination that span the globe. I argue that a consideration of the affordances of the Internet and online social media should involve both the information and communication aspects of ICTs, highlighting the influence of Internet technologies not only on systems of information production, consumption and exchange, but on networks of interpersonal communication as well. This perspective recognizes the importance of interpersonal conversation and coordination, above and beyond the production and consumption of information, as advocated by theorists such as Shirky, Castells and Benkler.  

Benkler in particular, argues that theories the “public sphere,” must be refigured, expanded from a focus on discourse and an informed citizenry, to include the interpersonal communication, coordination and engagement enabled by online communication networks. In this dissertation, I advocate for an even broader understanding of the public sphere, one that takes into consideration, not just discourse and coordination, but, something which is novel and essential in authoritarian environments - a sense of civic society, civic responsibility and civic empowerment. This is especially significant for Russia, because, as Shirky points out, the political and the personal are not mutually exclusive, and online discourse often interweaves both simultaneously.

In addition, I argue for the significance of social, cultural and political context to any investigation of Internet implications and effects, especially in regards to the relationship

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between the affordances of Internet technologies, universally understood, and their influence on society, and in particular, on public affairs discourse, political engagement and offline action. I contend that the ramifications of technological change are determined not merely by what the technologies enable, but how, and by whom, they are used. By examining specific local contexts, scholars can develop a more nuanced assessment of the implications of Internet technologies and online social media.

International and cross cultural comparisons go beyond assumptions of common affordances to consider the socially, culturally and historically situated relationship between online media and the public, and the complex set of factors that shape various national and language-based social media ecologies. In the process, they help elucidate the delineations between the assumed universal characteristics of a technology – in this case, social media - and the specific context in which they are used. This approach transcends deterministic and cyber-utopian rhetoric by highlighting context, in addition to the affordances of the tools themselves. It underscores the importance of expanding theories of new media beyond US centric models, or models that universalize US-centric assumptions about the form and function of social media.

This approach speaks to the broader goal of my dissertation - to contribute to the internationalization of our understanding of the evolving role of online social media not only in theory, but in practice. This dissertation addresses the tensions between universal affordances and context sensitivity by providing three interconnected matrixes for international or cross-cultural comparison of social media networks – history, network structure and media ecology. These involve reviewing the specific national evolution of the Internet and social media, investigating how individuals use online channels to serve various communication needs, and
exploring how these media interact with other forms of communication in the larger media ecology. I hope that my analysis of the specific evolution of Russian social media networks, their structure and nature, and their place within the broader media ecology, offers a template with which scholars can better compare, and hence understand, the offline ramifications of online social media.

This dissertation asserts that the form and function of online social media networks - their structure, nature, uses and implications - are not universal, but are a consequence of a country’s individual social, cultural and political history. Contemporary individuals, I argue, leverage online media for private and public discourse in a way that is specific to each nation. In the case of Russia, the country’s distinct social media ecology is the product of three interrelated factors - a Soviet era legacy of grassroots communications via unofficial networks (computer and interpersonal); the specific timing of Russia’s Internet development, evolving simultaneously with social media; and the formative influence of Russia’s dominant social media platform, the social network and blogging hybrid LiveJournal. The result is particularly active, social and interpersonal online ecology, whose main characteristics have consistently been that of an informal medium, based on trusted interpersonal networks, producing content that interweaves the public and the private, the personal and the political. In this way, Russian social media ecology is distinct from the American model, which distinguishes between “front stage,” public facing blogs, featuring political discourse often segmented along party lines, and “back stage” interpersonal social networks.

Rooted in the private computer networks of Soviet Russia, and evolving hand-in-hand with social media, the history of the Russian Internet is primarily the history of a social medium,
founded on trusted, interpersonal connections. Unlike American society, in which the Internet took hold years before social media emerged, for most Russians, the Web has always been 2.0 – social, interpersonal and user driven. A social history of Russian social media recognizes it as an interpersonal space as well as public sphere, highlighting the communication and coordination aspect of social media, as much as the informational one. This insight explains the immediate success, “like a fish to water,” of LiveJournal’s social network based blogging platform in Russia, as well as the particularly interconnected structure and nature of Russian online discourse networks, as revealed by my case study.

This case study analyzed the content and linking patterns of the most interconnected “blogs” in Russia between May 2009 and Sept 2010. My research into the patterns of linking and clusters of attention in Russian social media networks is rooted in network theory, based on the understanding that the clusters formed by hyperlinks within an online social media network provide an indication of attention and interest within the network. By examining the shape and nature of these patterns, I was able to identify certain key features and aspects of Russia’s online discourse networks, including descriptions of key bloggers, clusters and conversations, and the relationships between them. In the process, I found that an approach to social network analysis developed based on the form and function of American social media did not accurately capture the Russian reality, and needed to be modified in order meaningfully reflect Russia’s hybrid social media ecology, and its unique combination of long form public “blog posts” within the closed, or platform sensitive, network structure characteristic of social networking sites. This finding highlights the distinctions between American and Russian social media networks, and the
danger of generalizing or universalizing the form and function of social media from one national context to another.

My analysis of the quantitative, qualitative and visual data generated by the patterns of hyperlinks between the blogs in the RuNet Discussion Core, as well as semantic analysis of the blogs themselves, identified 35 Clusters, segmented into four key zones – Politics and Public Affairs, Culture, Regional and Instrumental. The two key structural findings of my case study - the fact that Russian social media networks are structured according to the closed style of social networking platforms, and the fact that the RuNet Discussion Core is localized around LiveJournal, indicate the extent to which Russia’s social media ecology has been shaped and influenced by this pioneering blogging platform, which combines features of social networks and blogs, and has, historically, contained the core of Russia’s online public affairs and cultural discourse. My research revealed a centralized public discourse network created by Russia’s social media users, rooted in LiveJournal, and characterized by a high level of interconnected discussion. The bloggers in this RuNet Discussion Core engage in particularly active cross cluster dialogue, interweaving conversations on politics and public affairs with social and cultural issues, and exhibiting no distinct political agenda. Political topics are subsumed within a broader conversation about society, and hence politically oriented clusters appeared less “structurally distinct” than those in the US, covering a broad spectrum of attitudes and agendas, and making a distinct “political blogosphere” difficult to identify.

The interpersonal aspect of Russian social media networks is essential to understanding their nature, and helps explain the key findings of my research. The story begins with the simultaneous evolution of the Internet and social media in Russia, underscored by the dominance
of the pioneering LiveJournal model and the resultant hybrid structure of Russian social media networks. This hybrid network structure, exhibiting the characteristics of public blogging within closed social networks, undergirds the outstanding compositional features of the RuNet Discussion Core - the apparent blurring between public and private content, the mixture of political and cultural topics, the tendency of Russian bloggers to eschew political affiliation, the high level of interaction and lack of “structural distinction” between Attentive Clusters, and the subsequent difficulty of isolating purely “political” clusters, especially clusters that parallel existing offline political structures.

My analysis of the RuNet Discussion Core presents a case study of Russia’s online discourse networks between 2009-2010. These networks, however, are not a microcosm, “mirror image,” or “map” of Russian society. They are created and pursued by an as yet elite, but growing, segment of the population - active and engaged social media users for whom the relatively uncensored Internet serves as an independent source of information, as well as an avenue for interpersonal connection and communication. The information diet of the majority of the Russian populace, in contrast, remains narrow and monolithic – dominated, at the expense of all other media, by universally available government controlled television. Unlike the majority of Americans, who access multiple media channels and platforms to get news, only 30% of Russians turn to a medium in addition to TV. The result is a particularly sharp distinction, in Russia, between an “Internet minority,” who access and trust an diverse and independent array of news and information, and “television majority” exposed to a restricted diet of government regulated and approved news content.
For Russia, this distinction undergirds any conversation about the relationship between information and action. For some observers, the connection between information diet and politics is direct, leading them to equate the “Internet minority” with an “Internet Party” and the “televison majority” with a “TV party.” I argue that relationship between independent information and political engagement is not unidirectional, from information to engagement, and that analysis of the influence of Internet technology on democratic discourse and political action in Russia, as elsewhere, should be expanded to highlight communication and coordination, in addition to information. In Russia, the “Internet party” is distinct from the “TV party” not merely because of their information diet, but rather, because of their established history of active online discourse, addressing issues of personal, social and public concern, and leveraging strong social media networks for both communication and coordination.

In Russia, the vibrant interpersonal relationships and discussions online, coupled with a lack of civic and political options, have produced a number of Internet enabled grassroots civic campaigns, volunteer and relief efforts and other non-ideological, “bottom up” movements, targeting specific issues that have a concrete effect on everyday life. In particular, uses of the Internet for offline social action before the dramatic events surrounding the 2011-2012 election cycle provide compelling examples of Russians mobilizing the interpersonal aspect of social media networks to address issues of corruption, abuse of power and privilege, and a lack of official accountability. Initiated and organized within Russia’s blogosphere and social networks, the character of these 2009-2010 grassroots movements resonates with the key politically oriented findings of my analysis of Russian social media networks, and the RuNet Discussion Core - the mixture of social and political perspectives in all the clusters, the active
engagement in cross-cluster discourse, and the fact that none of the clusters could be easily mapped onto any existing Russian political party. These findings underscore my interpretation of Russian social media as an interpersonal sphere, in which political discourse is varied, diffuse and heavily intertwined with social and cultural issues. They reflect the range of political perspectives and lack of overt politics behind recent grassroots movements, as well as “the underdevelopment of political parties and a well structured and competitive political arena” in Russia, as noted by Koltsova in her analysis of my research.418

The election period of 2011-2012 was a turning point for socio-political action in Russia. The relationships, energy, experience and civic confidence fostered by the non-ideological movements and grassroots campaigns of the preceding years came to a fore, triggered by a series of government moves that were interpreted as blatant political affronts. The result was a year of massive street protests, and an unprecedented wave of political engagement, driven by established and flexible interpersonal networks and supported by the creative application of Internet technologies. 2012 is full of examples affirming the Internet’s role, in Russia, as an interpersonal, communication medium, above and beyond its “liberating” power as an information medium. These include the resilience of online networks in face of DDOS attacks, the crowd-sourcing of volunteer and aid efforts, the online production and distribution of grassroots symbols and publicity materials, the flood of documentation and self communication related to protests and election violations on social media and YouTube, Internet enabled innovations in election monitoring and other accountability efforts and the creative “virtual”

organization of protests and demonstrations that work around official restrictions. Civic participation in Russia, I argue, has its roots in the social networks of the RuNet.

The history of Russian social media is inextricably intertwined with that of the Russian Internet. It is the story of a social medium, build on strong interpersonal networks. This is reflected in Russian metaphors for the Internet, which build on Soviet era references such as samizdat (grassroots underground publications) or a virtual extension of Soviet era kitchen table debates, attesting to the Internet’s role as an alternative channel outside the control of the state, a mixed public and private medium for interpersonal discussion and the sharing of information within a community of trust. A socio-culturally situated understanding of the Russian social media as a channel of interpersonal communication, as well as, and perhaps more than, one of public information, explains not only the key findings of my research study, but also offers insight into offline implications of Russian social media. Russia’s social media discourse networks are particularly interconnected and less polarized in large part because of their uniquely hybrid structure, itself a product of Russia’s specific culture, politics and history. And while the nature and structure of the pioneering platform, LiveJournal, has profoundly shaped Russia’s social media networks, it is the resilient interpersonal networks themselves, and not the vehicle by which they are transmitted, that are at the core of social, cultural and public affairs discourse in Russia. Ultimately, the defining characteristic of Russian social media networks is not political – they have consistently represented a space that integrates the private and the public, combining informal interpersonal dialogue with a concern for social, cultural and public affairs, and addressing politics as part of a larger conversation on society in general.
In Russia, the ability to take targeted action and create successful change is a new social feature, enabled, at a fundamental level, by the interpersonal aspect of social media. What’s more, it is not just simply the ability, but the symbolic power of a belief in the necessity and possibility of grassroots change, that contains the seeds of civil society. As evidenced by recent events, the offline influence of the unique structure and nature of Russian social media lies primarily in their potential to nurture civic consciousness, empowering individuals to leverage these interpersonal networks to facilitate and organize specific offline action, and potentially change their world.


Kelly, John, and Vladimir Barash. *Salience Vs Commitment: Dynamics of Political*


Latynina, Yulia. “The Birth of Civil Society | Opinion.” The Moscow Times, March 14,


Marlow, C. “Investment and Attention in the Weblog Community.” In *Proceedings of the AAAI Spring Symposium Computation Approaches to Analysing Weblogs*. Palo Alto,


APPENDIX A
SURVEY – BLOGS

INSTRUCTIONS: We are interested in blogs that contain Russian text. We define a blog as a site containing content that is posted in chronological order, with regular updates. Please read the blog first, then go back a second time for coding. If the blog has a lot of posts, concentrate your reading and coding on the 7-10 most recent posts.

1. Is this URL a blog? (If the URL you have been given is not active, or does not have any Russian text, or if it is a LiveJournal Community, click 'NO/DON'T KNOW').
   - Yes
   - No

2. In what country is this blogger located?
   *Dropdown choices:*
   - Russia
   - Belorus
   - Ukraine
   - Latvia
   - Khazakhstan
   - Armenia
   - Israel
   - United States
   - Don’t Know, Other

3. In what city or town is the blogger located?
   *Dropdown choices:*
   - Moscow
   - St. Petersburg
   - Kiev
   - Minsk
   - Other
   - Don’t Know

4. If you selected "Other" for country AND/OR city above, please fill in below as appropriate.
   *Blank Textbox*

5. Does the blogger reveal their name or write anonymously?
   - Uses name
   - Anonymous (including pseudonyms)
   - Don't know

6. Is the blogger male or female?
o Male
o Female
o Don't Know/Mixed Group Blog

7. Can you estimate the blogger's age? (Select the most appropriate category)

o Under 24 (student age)
o 25-50 (young professionals and mid-career)
o 50-65 (late career)
o Over 65 (older adult/pensioner)
o Don't know

8. Please provide a series of one or two-word “Tags” for the types of topics this blog covers. You may provide up to TEN tags, the more the better. You must separate all tags with a comma.

Blank Textbox

9. Notes or observations: Please type a short description (2-4 sentences) of this blog or blogger.

Blank Textbox
APPENDIX B
CODER INSTRUCTIONS FOR CODING BLOGS

The goal of this coding project is to describe the blogs provided.

We want you to become familiar with the tool, to let us know if you have any questions or concerns, to see if we need to make any changes to the interface or instructions.

Please read the instructions below CAREFULLY. Don’t hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL:

• Go to this link: http://nan.berkmancenter.org/
• Your username is your first initial and last name (i.e. kalexanyan)
• Your password is: xxxx
• Once you log in, you should be redirected straight to the “Dashboard”
• Click on "Display" next to the XXXXX project

Note – To see how many websites you’ve coded, you can go back to the Dashboard by clicking on the link on the left, and check the number under the "Completed" column next to the survey.

When you have completed all of the questions for this URL, click the “complete” button at the bottom of the page. This is the only way that your answers will be saved. You will then be moved automatically to a clean questionnaire with a new URL to code.

THE SURVEY

We are interested in blogs (see definition below) that are written primarily in Russian.

We define a blog as “a site containing content that is posted in chronological order, with regular updates.”

Please read the blog first, then go back a second time for coding. If the blog has a lot of posts, concentrate your reading and coding on the seven to ten most recent posts.

1. Is this URL a blog?
   • Yes
   • No / Don’t Know

We define a blog as “A site containing content that is posted in chronological order, with regular updates.” This does NOT include news sites but DOES include the blogs of organizations and groups.

If the URL you have been given is not a Russian blog, or is a LiveJournal Community, or if you are unsure, mark ‘No/Don’t Know’ for Question 1 and then the ‘complete’ button at the bottom and move on to the next URL.

2. In what country is this blogger located?
   Do some digging to find out where the blogger is based. For LiveJournal blogs and most other blogging platforms used in Russia the easiest place find this information may be in the ‘User Profile’ link at the top of the page. If it is not listed there, you should also read the posts to see if they provide any clues to where the blogger is located. Use the drop down menu to find the country where the blogger is located. If the country is not included in the drop down menu, or if you cannot tell where the blogger is located, select ‘Other/Don’t Know’ - the last choice in the list of countries.

3. In what city or town is this blogger located?
Similar to question two, see if you can determine what the city the blogger is located in from either the 'User Profile, blog posts or other information on the blog. Select the city from the four choices in the drop down menu. If the city is not in the list, choose 'Other', which is second to last in the list. If you cannot tell what city or town they are writing from choose 'Don't Know', the last option in the list.

4. If you selected “Other” for the city, above, please fill in the city now
Please fill in the city here if you know it, but it was not on the list above. You can skip this if it is not applicable.

5. Does this blogger reveal their name or write anonymously?
Based on information on the blog, including the ‘User Profile’ section, please indicate if the blogger reveals their name, or if they write anonymously, including pseudonyms. Please only use the information on the blog to determine anonymity – do NOT bring in any outside knowledge you may have. For example, drugoi, would qualify as anonymous/pseudonymous – even though his real name may be common knowledge, he doesn’t sign his posts with his real name, and it is not on the blog header or in his profile.

6. Is this blogger male or female?
Based on information in the blog, including their posts, the language they use (female vs. male endings), their 'User Profile' and the topics they discuss, indicate if the blogger is male or female. If you cannot tell the gender of the blogger, choose 'Don't Know.'

7. Can you estimate the bloggers age?
Based on information in the blog including the ‘User Profile,’ pictures, and perhaps their topics of interest, indicate your best estimate of the bloggers age. Please select one of the four options provided. If you cannot tell the bloggers age, indicate 'Don't Know.'

8. Tags:
Please list a series of 5 – 10 tags that describe the blogger and the topics they discuss. Tags are one or two word descriptions of the blogs content. Tags provide a list answering simple questions about the “who & what” of the blog – who is creating the content? What is the blog about? What does it have in common with other sites? What makes it different? Tags are usually nouns, and do not reflect personal opinions or social analysis – there is room for that later. You can list primary languages used and countries covered, if applicable. Please be as specific as possible. Please separate each tag by a comma in the text box provided.

Some sample tags include – but are not limited to - ANY of the words/terms below – separately or together, in any order.

- Arts
- Business
- Conservative
- Crime
- Directory
- Domestic
- Drugs
- E commerce
- social activism
- Education
- Entertainment
- family life
- Fashion
- Pets
- health related

- Literature
- Commerce
- Liberal
- Corruption
- Musem
- International
- Education
- Aggregator
- Jobs
- Academic
- Hobbies
- Love
- Beauty
- Celebrities
- Medical

- Poetry
- marketing
- moderate
- Politics
- Portal
- regional
- environment
- Web 2.0
- Wages
- scholarly
- Cars
- relationships
- Diet
- Fans
- Hospital

- Film
- Advertising
- Government
- search engine
- Local
- charity
- commercial
- Taxes
- Web traffic
- Wages
- Food
- gossip
- doctor

- Movies
- television
- religious
- nationalism
- Dating
- Micro blog
- Child welfare
- Discrimination
- Sexism
- women's rights
- Movies
- Religious
- Tv
9. Notes, observations & description

This is one of the most important, and potentially demanding questions on the survey. In this area, we are looking for more than a simple summary or overview of the blog.

The best descriptions are informative, detailed, and provide both a sense of the blog/blogger and of the bigger socio-cultural context. They often cite specific examples of the content, relating it to salient issues in society. Ideally, the descriptions should teach researchers as much about the society as about the blog. Please use professional language -- the best descriptions will be quoted directly in our studies. The tone should be academic and neutral, providing insights about the blogger and the topics they discuss without making value judgments about either.

Descriptions that are NOT helpful are brief, general, and provide poor context and few insights into the society.

For example, a description that says "personal blog, focus on sports and pets" is far less helpful than something that gives deeper context, such as "this blogger focuses on sports like horseback riding and lacrosse, as well as on 'show pets' like fancy little dogs...these are all things that tend to be aspirational class symbols of the nouveaux-riche and indicate that the blogger is likely a young urban professional."

In other words, the description should capture the obvious things we need to know (news, sports, pets), but also try to teach us something about the politics and culture (WHICH news, sports, pets; from what point of view; of interest to what audience; in line with, or in opposition to, what ideology or system of values; what does this mean in the Russian context that an American wouldn't know?). The obvious elements – news, sports, pets – should already be included in the “tags”.

Important: When you have completed all of the questions for this URL, click the “COMPLETE” button at the bottom of the page. This is the only way that your answers will be saved. You will then be moved automatically to a clean questionnaire with a new URL to code.

Thank you!

The Berkman Team
APPENDIX C
SURVEY – OUTLINKS

1. Is this site (primarily) in Russian?
   - Yes
   - No

2. If no, what is the site's primary language?
   Blank Textbox

3. What type of site is this? Please select ONE.
   - Blog/journal (Individual or group blog/online journal - i.e., http://radulova.livejournal.com/, http://golubchikav.livejournal.com/)
   - News/Info/Media – Broadcast (Web sites of television or radio station - i.e. www.echo.msk.ru)
   - News/Info/Media – Print (Web site of a newspaper or magazine - i.e. www.vedomosti.ru)
   - News/Info/Media – Web native (Media that only exists online – i.e. lenta.ru, gazeta.ru, and any online entertainment media)
   - Don’t know
   - Other

4. If other, please describe below.
   Blank Textbox

5. Please provide a series of one or two-word “Tags” for the types of topics this blog covers. You may provide up to TEN tags, the more the better. You must separate all tags with a comma.
   Blank Textbox

6. What country is this site primarily concerned with?

7. Notes or observations: Please type a short description (2-4 sentences) of this blog or blogger.
   Blank Textbox
APPENDIX D
CODER INSTRUCTIONS - OUTLINKS

The goal of this coding project is to identify and label the URLs provided.

We will be continuing this process for many languages in the future, and are constantly seeking to improve. Please do let us know if you have any questions or concerns, or any suggestions for improvement to the survey, interface or instructions.

Please read the instructions below CAREFULLY. Don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions.

HOW TO USE THE TOOL:
• Go to this link: http://nan.berkmancenter.org/
• Your username is your first initial and last name (i.e. kalexanyan)
• Your password is: xxx
• Once you log in, you should be redirected straight to the "Dashboard"
• Click on "Display" next to the correct project

Note – To see how many websites you’ve coded, you can go back to the Dashboard by clicking on the link on the left, and check the number under the “Completed” column next to the survey.

When you have completed all of the questions for this URL, click the “complete” button at the bottom of the page. This is the only way that your answers will be saved. You will then be moved automatically to a clean questionnaire with a new URL to code.

THE SURVEY
Take a few minutes to read the website you will be coding. If the website is a blog, please code based on the first page, or first 5-7 posts.

1. Is this site mainly/primarily in Russian?
   o Yes
   o No/ Don’t Know
   This question is asking what is the site’s primary language. If the site opens in Russian (even if it is an international site) mark “yes”. If the site is written in more than one language, mark “no” and go on to question 2.

2. If no, what is the site’s primary language?
   Fill in the primary or main language that the site uses here if it is not in Russian. If there is more than one primary language, you can list them here.

3. Types:
   Please review the website types listed here. This is NOT meant to be a list of all the website types possible, just a list of the ones we are most interested in. Does the website you are coding fall, relatively easily, into one of the six categories provided? If yes, please mark which one. If no, please mark “other” and move on to Question 4 where you can describe what kind of site it is. If you are unable to explain or discern what type of site this is, please mark ‘don’t know’.
   o Blog
   This includes personal blogs and online journals (i.e. on Live Journal, Live Internet etc), as well as the blogs of corporations, companies and other organizations or groups. This also includes communities on blogging platforms such as Live Journal. For example:
http://radulova.livejournal.com/, http://golubchikav.livejournal.com/
http://clubs.ya.ru/company/#y5_id47
   o  News/Info/Media – Broadcast
Websites of Television & Radio stations - i.e. www.echo.msk.ru
   o  News/Info/Media – Print
Websites of Newspapers, Magazines - i.e. www.vedomosti.ru
   o  News/Info/Media – Webnative
Media that only exists online – i.e. lenta.ru & gazeta.ru and any online entertainment media
   o  Ngo/Organization
Website of a non profit or non governmental organization, including religious organizations,
http://www.vasilyev-museum.ru
   o  Government, politician, political party or campaign website
Includes any government websites – national, regional or local, as well as the website of a
politician, political party or political campaign. Anything overtly political.
   o  Don’t know
   o  Other
If Other, please describe below:

If the website does not fall into one of the six categories above, please provide a brief summary
/description of the site here. You will provide additional information about the site in your Tags
(Question 5) and in the additional notes and observations (Question 7). Examples of short
descriptions are:
   Page on social networking service; micro blog; personal homepage; file / music/
video sharing or downloading site; commercial or company website, humor site, site
with online tests, games etc

5. Tags:
We would like to see a series of 5 – 10 Tags. Tags are one or two word descriptions of the
website content. Tags provide a list answering simple questions about the “who & what” of the
website – who is creating the content? What is the site about? What does it have in common
with other sites? What makes it different? Tags are usually nouns, and do not reflect personal
opinions or social analysis – there is room for that later. You can list primary languages used
and countries covered, if applicable. Please be as specific as possible.

Some sample tags include – but are not limited to - ANY of the words/terms below –
separately or together, in any order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Literature</th>
<th>Poetry</th>
<th>film</th>
<th>theater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>advertising</td>
<td>commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directory</td>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Portal</td>
<td>search engine</td>
<td>Web traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Gadgets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>environment</td>
<td>Charity</td>
<td>Piracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E commerce</td>
<td>Aggregator</td>
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<td>Jobs</td>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>prices</td>
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6. What country is this site primarily concerned with?
*Please write “international” if the website deals with more than one country - like YouTube or Wikipedia. If the website deals with particular countries, list them here, and also, in the Tags above.*

7. Notes, observations & description
*This is one of the most important, and potentially demanding questions on the survey. In this area, we are looking for more than a simple summary or overview of the website.*

   The best descriptions are informative, detailed, and provide both a sense of the website and of the bigger socio-cultural context. They often cite specific examples of the content, relating it to salient issues in society. Ideally, the descriptions should teach researchers as much about the society as about the website. Please use professional language -- the best descriptions will be quoted directly in our studies.

   Descriptions that are NOT helpful are brief, general, and provide poor context and few insights into the society. These kinds of descriptions belong to Question 4, above.

   For example, a description that says "news site, focus on sports and pets" would be suitable for Question 4, while in this area we are looking something that gives deeper context, such as "focus on sports like horseback riding and lacrosse, as well as on 'show pets' like fancy little dogs...these are all things that tend to be aspirational class symbols of the nouveaux-riche and indicate that the site is mainly of interest to young urban professionals"

   In other words, the description should capture the obvious things we need to know (news, sports, pets), but also try to teach us something about the culture (WHICH news, sports, pets; from what point of view; of interest to what audience; in line with, or in opposition to, what ideology or system of values; what does this mean in the Russian context that an American wouldn't know?). The obvious elements – news, sports, pets – should already be included in the “tags”.

   Important: When you have completed all of the questions for this URL, click the “complete” button at the bottom of the page. This is the only way that your answers will be saved. You will then be moved automatically to a clean questionnaire with a new URL to code.

*Thank you! The Berkman Team*
### APPENDIX E

**BLOG DEMOGRAPHICS**

**PUBLIC DISCOURSE ZONE – 7 Clusters**

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<th>Pub Disc - Russia Focus</th>
<th>Ethno-Natnlst</th>
<th>Bus, Econ &amp; Finance</th>
<th>Activism</th>
<th>Demo Oppo</th>
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**CULTURE ZONE – 8 Clusters**

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<th>Intl. - Music</th>
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**BLOGGERS**

**COUNTRY**

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**BLOGGERS**

**CITY**

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**GENDER**

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<td>71.4%</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>16.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other/Don’t Know</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>US</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
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</table>

#### BLOGGERS CITY

<table>
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<th>City</th>
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<th>St. Petersburg</th>
<th>Kiev</th>
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<td>33.3%</td>
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<td>8.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>45.5%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
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<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Petersburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minsk</td>
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#### USES NAME

<table>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>54.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

#### GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know/ Mixed Group Blog</td>
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</table>


## INSTRUMENTAL ZONE – 4 Clusters

<table>
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<th>CLUSTER LABEL</th>
<th>Inst. A</th>
<th>SEO/SPAM</th>
<th>Link Exchange</th>
<th>Inst. - Pro Gov</th>
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<td>CLUSTER #</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Blogs: 112 378 386 39
Coded Blogs - approx 10%: 11 36 35 3
Average Age *: 30 28 29 24

### BLOGGERS COUNTRY

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Belarus</th>
<th>US</th>
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<th>Armenia</th>
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<td>5.6%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
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<td>77.1%</td>
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### BLOGGERS CITY

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<td>2.8%</td>
<td>72.7%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>17.1%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
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### USES NAME

<table>
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<td>75.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>82.9%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
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### GENDER

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
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<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63.9%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know/ Mixed</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Blog</td>
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### APPENDIX F

**TOP 30 OUTLINKS ACROSS RUNET CORE**

*Top 30 online sources – of all types - for RuNet Core Bloggers*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>URL</th>
<th>CTRY</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4874</td>
<td>youtube.com</td>
<td>Intl</td>
<td>Other - Video Sharing Portal</td>
<td>World’s most popular video-sharing portals. Has content in many languages, including Russian. There's also a localized Russian-language section: ru.youtube.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4861</td>
<td>ru.wikipedia.org</td>
<td>Russia, Intl</td>
<td>Other - Russian Wikipedia</td>
<td>This is the homepage of the Russian-language version of Wikipedia, which currently has around ½ million articles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3127</td>
<td>lenta.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Media - Web Native</td>
<td>One of Russia's most popular news sites, founded by Anton Nossik in 1999. Sections: breaking news, commentary, online press conferences, business, economics, law, crime, mass media, culture, music, games, internet, sports, medicine, life, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2748</td>
<td>rian.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Media – Print</td>
<td>RIA Novosti, a state-owned news agency. Breaking news, politics, economy, world, culture, sports, etc. In Russian as well as other languages. Embeds content from other sources (e.g., InoSmi.ru). Links to authors' LJ blogs &amp; TV shows etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2520</td>
<td>gazeta.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Media - Web Native</td>
<td>Leading webnative news and analytical site in Russia. Breaking news, commentary, online press conferences. Short items and in-depth pieces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2459</td>
<td>aeterna.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - user-generated tests, surveys, games</td>
<td>Tests, surveys, games - over 100,000 users who have posted 35,353 tests. Current tests on the homepage include &quot;How cynical are you?&quot; - as well as something about love, elves, ghosts, dreams and Harry Potter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2298</td>
<td>en.wikipedia.org</td>
<td>Intl</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Wikipedia- English Wikipedia, user generated online encyclopedia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2289</td>
<td>kommersant.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Media – Print</td>
<td>One of the leading Russian newspapers; Kommersant publishing house also has a number of magazines, as well as a daily in Ukraine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2150</td>
<td>vkontakte.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Social Network</td>
<td>Russia's leading social network. A Facebook clone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>newsru.com</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Media - Web Native</td>
<td>Popular liberal news Web site that belongs to Gusinsky (affiliated with RTVi TV channel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1634</td>
<td>echo.msk.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Media - Broadcast</td>
<td>Echo Moskvy is a popular liberal Moscow radio station. Owned by Gazprom, it is considered one of the few remaining independent media outlets in Russia; high-quality reporting, high standards, wide range of opinions represented in talk programs, lots of interactive features both on the air and online, content from other sites (e.g., Inopressa.ru), a lively blogging platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1628</td>
<td>liveinternet.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Blogging Platform</td>
<td>Popular blogging platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1526</td>
<td>radikal.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Image hosting/File sharing site</td>
<td>Popular photo-sharing/image hosting site - doesn't require registration to post and then share photos, free of charge, photos stay there for as long as you need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Domain</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1484</td>
<td>vedomosti.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Respected business and economics newspaper. Coverage isn't limited to business-related topics: stories include weather, culture, education, politics and public opinion surveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1421</td>
<td>fotki.yandex.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Photo sharing/hosting</td>
<td>A photo sharing/hosting site owned by Yandex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1390</td>
<td>drugoi.livejournal.com</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Individual Blog</td>
<td>&quot;Drugoi&quot; (meaning &quot;other&quot;) is one of Russia's most popular bloggers. &quot;Drugoi&quot; is a pseudonym for Rustem Agadamov, a professional photo journalist. The majority of Drugoi's posts are photographs - his own, or others, with a few lines of commentary, documenting and discussing various Russian and international social, political, cultural and sporting events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>kp.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Komsomolskaya Pravda, a popular tabloid style daily newspaper, which has, according to the BBC &quot;built its reputation on a gentle nostalgia for the Soviet period, firm backing for Kremlin policy and a keen interest in celebrity news and scandal from home and abroad.&quot; <a href="http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4315129.stm">http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4315129.stm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>1331</td>
<td>twitter.com</td>
<td>Intl</td>
<td>Other - Micro blogging</td>
<td>Twitter - leading micro blogging platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1306</td>
<td>novayagazeta.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Russian newspaper owned jointly by Mikhail Gorbachev and &quot;oligarch&quot; Aleksandr Lebedev; known for its critical stance on the current regime and its policies; Anna Politkovskaya wrote for Novaya Gazeta.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1277</td>
<td>vz.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Vzglad (Look) - An online business and finance news portal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1260</td>
<td>flickr.com</td>
<td>Intl</td>
<td>Other - photo sharing/hosting</td>
<td>Popular photo hosting/sharing services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1189</td>
<td>vimeo.com</td>
<td>Intl</td>
<td>Other - video sharing/hosting</td>
<td>A video sharing/hosting site. Unlike YouTube, requires most content be produced by users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>gzt.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Gzt.ru (not to be confused with Gazeta.ru, which is a news site) Online news portal, formerly the website of Gazeta, a print daily which was closed in 2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1092</td>
<td>top.rbc.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Ros Business Consulting, online news agency and news Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>1080</td>
<td>interfax.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Independent News Agency with a network of correspondents and offices in many European and Asian cities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>1065</td>
<td>izvestia.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Website of Izvestia, major Russian paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1054</td>
<td>rg.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Website of Rossiyskaya Gazeta, government newspaper.</td>
</tr>
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<td>lib.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Free Online Library</td>
<td>A free online library, launched in 1994.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>1015</td>
<td>ozon.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Other - Online Book retailer</td>
<td>An online bookstore, which, like Amazon, sells pretty much everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>1002</td>
<td>vesti.ru</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>News/Info/Print</td>
<td>Homepage for &quot;Vesti&quot; (News) – a daily news show which airs on one of the state-owned channels, &quot;Russia.&quot; Domestic and international politics, culture, sports, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These websites and services represent various aspects of the Russian internet landscape, from news and information to entertainment and commerce.
## APPENDIX G

### COMPARISON OF TOP NEWS SOURCES

**Top News Sources for RuNet Core Bloggers vs Internet Users in General**

| SITE          | NAME/Description                                                                                   | RuNet Core RANK | Internet RANK
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------
| Lenta.ru      | Popular online news agency and news portal/ Web site                                               | 1               | 2              |
| gazeta.ru     | Popular online news and analytical Web site                                                        | 2               | 7              |
| rian.ru       | RIA Novosti, a major governmental news agency                                                     | 3               | 1              |
| Kommersant.ru | Well known, relatively liberal newspaper with a focus on business and politics. Belongs to Alisher Usmanov who has strong ties to Kremlin | 4               | 14             |
| Newsru.com    | Popular liberal news Web site. Owned by Gusinsky (affiliated with RTVi TV channel)               | 5               | 14             |
| Echo.msk.ru   | Popular liberal Moscow radio station (owned by Gazprom)                                            | 6               | 20             |
| vedomosti.ru  | Respected business and economics newspaper                                                        | 7               | 9              |
| gzt.ru        | Website of newspaper ‘Gazeta.’ Paper was closed in 2010, and publishes online only               | 8               | 14             |
| kp.ru         | Komsomolskaya Pravda. Web site of a popular tabloid-style newspaper,                               | 9               | 3              |
| novayagazeta.ru | Web site of a popular liberal newspaper, known for its investigative journalism. Belongs to Alexander Lebedev and Mikhail Gorbachev. | 10              | N/A            |
| Vesti.ru      | Web site of a government-funded TV news channel                                                    | 11              | 11             |
| top.rbc.ru    | Ros Business Consulting, online news agency and news Web site                                      | 12              | 4              |
| vz.ru         | Vzglayd, news portal that has some ties to the government                                          | 13              | 18             |
| interfax.ru   | Independent news agency                                                                            | 14              | 16             |
| rg.ru         | Rossiyskaya Gazeta, government newspaper                                                          | 15              | 12             |
| News.mail.ru  | News.mail.ru – news aggregator as a part of online services by the major Russian e-mail provider mail.ru | 16              | N/A            |
| svobodanews.ru | Web site of US-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty                                              | 17              | N/A            |
| izvestia.ru   | Ivestia, a major Russian newspaper                                                                | 18              | 19             |
| mk.ru         | Moskovskiy Komsomoletz, Web site of popular tabloid-style Moscow newspaper                       | 19              | 21             |
| slon.ru       | Relatively new popular business portal that also includes many blogs and new media elements.      | 20              | N/A            |
| rosbalt.ru    | Online news agency, with a focus of Russian Northwest.                                             | 21              | 24             |
| polit.ru      | Political news portal and news aggregator                                                         | 22              | N/A            |
| bbc.co.uk     | British Broadcasting Company Web site                                                              | 23              | N/A            |
| chaskor.ru    | Chastniy Korrespondent. Web native media site created by new media expert Ivan Zasoursky. Contains a great deal of intellectual, analytical content on a wide range of topics. | 24              | N/A            |
| News.livejournal.com | A selection of best blog posts provided by SUP, which manages the major Russian blog platform LiveJournal. | 25              | N/A            |
| Grani.ru      | Liberal oppositional news Web site that was affiliated with Boris Berezvoski.                     | 26              | N/A            |
| fontanka.ru   | City news portal with a focus on Saint Petersburg                                                 | 27              | N/A            |
| regnum.ru     | Online news agency with a focus on regional news                                                   | 28              | 5              |
| Snob.ru       | A high end, intellectual and hip, print and online magazine, also a social network                | 29              | N/A            |
| Infox.ru      | Online news portal                                                                                | 30              | 25             |

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1 Ranking based on a compilation of 7 different sources, collected between the Summer/Fall of 2010: Webscan.com, Yandex.smi and Yaca.yandex.ru, Rambler.ru, Mail.ru, Webomer.ru, LiveInternet.ru and Adplanner