New Media and Political Blogging in Russia: Effects for the Government and the Opposition

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A series of mass-scale protest movements known for such metaphors as "color revolutions", "twitter revolution", and "Arab spring", in the last decade made many governments face opposition from loosely organized social networks possessing a huge resistance potential. Ideas of multitude and trans-nationalization, originated as theoretical constructs, appear to start taking more practical shape. Political mobilization aroused by these movements is to a large extent grounded in a widely spread networked technologies of mass communication, which include the new media.

Of course, the importance of new media instruments (including blogging, twitting, and a variety of the so called social networks) varies from country to country. The less stable the structures of domination are, the more space for news forms of social communication unfolds. North Africa and some post-Soviet countries, including Russia, are good example of this trend.

Blogging is a rather new and quite peculiar discursive genre which only rarely was an object of academic analysis[1]. In this paper we are going to apply discourse analysis methods for analyzing some aspects of political blogging in today's Russia. This discursive genre has its own frames and styles of informal dialogue, and is based on speakers' strategies that produce "particular representations of reality"[2]. As in other types of discourses, in blogosphere there are certain rules of formation that regulate "what can be said, how it can be said, who can speak and in which name, and what kind of strategies can be realized"[3]. Yet these rules are more flexible and less structured than in more traditional political discourses. Blog content "can't be arrested by … any totalizing gesture". But the result is not a chaotic space, but "a playful

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determination of social meanings and identities within a relational system which is provisionally anchored in nodal points"[4].

Blogosphere is a communicative milieu which facilitates the function of discourse to produce new role identities and subjectivities. It is because of the new media, for example, that Alexei Navalniy has risen to a role of political figure, successfully converting his new media experience to political capital. Of course, political subjectivity can be attainable beyond the new media (Sergei Udaltsov, a new radical figure in Russia's leftist movement, is an example), but the new media adds a lot to more traditional forms of political activism.

In this paper we shall argue that communication in the new media in general and blogging in particular have different "power effects" – they may be part of a counter-hegemonic strategy of opposition forces, or may be used by state officials for stabilizing the hegemonic relations of power. We shall demonstrate how dissimilar are the effects of the proliferation of blogs in the ruling elite and in opposition movements. Our general premise therefore is that the proliferation of new media triggers different effects in different institutional milieu. The new technologies of immediate and interactive communication seem to give more effective results for the resistance to power than for its consolidation. For state servants the new media is more a part of their image-making strategies than indispensable political tool.

The paper is conceptually grounded in two premises. Firstly, we shall argue that in the state apparatus, the new forms of e-communication, including blogging, function as *de-politicizing* tools meant to decrease the degree of – and space for – political articulations. In practice they turn into awkward and sometimes clumsy accessories to the dominating traditional (and increasingly ineffective) ways and means of communication. In result, blogging reflects the regime's loss of its ability to sustain the Kremlin-centered symbolic order, to generate socially appealing meanings and to control the discursive space which became more and more fragmented and thus competitive.

Secondly, in the protesting segments of society the new media is the key shaper of the nascent *politicization* and emerging political subjectivities. The effectiveness of new e-media is largely explained by its well focused and targeted character, which is a sharp contrast to the more traditional media like press, TV or radio. The new forms of online communication are most likely to stay fluid and fuzzy, being communicative playgrounds for loosely tied conglomerates of movements, groups and charismatic personalities that challenge the existing power structures and offer alternatives to the existing mechanisms of hegemony. Theoretically speaking, the resistance movements in Russia may be conceptualized as part of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri called "the multitude", or "the movement of movements" which are not necessarily to evolve into party-like structures. They are most likely to avoid institutionalization and preserve their networked status to challenge the system from outside.

State Servants as Bloggers: Stabilizing the Hegemonic Discourse

In this section we shall focus on blogs of two categories of state officials – regional and municipal leaders, and foreign policy makers. Such an outlook will give us an opportunity to compare the ways blogging as a discursive genre operates in domestic context and in the field of Russia's external relations.

State officials use mew media basically as their PR accessories. They don't address a particular audience, and not always know what type of content will better serve the purpose of self-promotion. They may use blogs for congratulating their relatives with birthdays, or reminding about important events in their lives. Twitting is particularly used for producing information noise, and often resembles a game-like practice of endlessly checking in different places, quite popular among youngsters all over the world. Blogging and twitting among government officials is the means to promote and distinguish themselves in the administrative market; at the same time, they may receive a symbolic compensation for belonging to a highly ineffective state apparatus which practices obsolete and sometimes primitive methods of governance.

Regional Officials

For governors, blogging is a tool for public communication and an instrument for both getting some feedback from the public and attempts to influence it. However, blogs of this type are out of synch with political situation and try to create their own parallel reality. The blog of Valeriy Shantsev[5], the governor of Nizhny Novgorod oblast, is a typical example of this depoliticized narrative. Not a single post in his blog touches upon genuinely political issues that shape the course of events in Russia, including the mass-scale street protests after the December 4, 2011 parliamentary election. It is non-political (sometimes bio-political) topics that are recurrent in the blog: the governor repeatedly shows his expertise in technology, medicine and healthcare, unveils his gastronomic and musical preferences, covers celebrations and festivities, converses about his family vacation, tells personal stories, and repeatedly demonstrates his vitality and workability. All these themes are important parts of a de-politicization strategy pursued by the governor who does his best to avoid issues that polarize and divide, and emphasizes those that presumably may unify the regional community (such as debates on new parking spaces, construction of new highways, allocating places in the city for free public speech, etc.). Political conflictuality in his blog is reduced to commenting on technical disagreements with the Ministry of Defense on financial issues

Within this post-political strategy, the role change game is a substantial element. In his blog the governor Shantsev plays the multiple non-political roles of a TV journalist (as a participant in a journalism contest), a sport fan (commenting on the games of local football and ice hockey teams), a professor examining students (as a member of attestation commission at one of the Universities in Nizhny Novgorod), a school teacher (whilst visiting a secondary school), and even a DJ at a musical parade.

Similar role games are part of the blogging narrative of Nikita Belykh, the governor of the Kirov oblast. His blog[6] is full of pictured posts in which he features as a swimmer, a blood donor, and a city guide. Yet Belykh's blog seems to contain stronger political articulations than Shantsev's. First, Belykh makes a much stronger accent on regional identity issues, focusing on cultural specificity and peculiar history of Kirov. His blog is a terrain where he publicly demonstrates his tensions with some of federal institutions, like NTV Channel or Ministry for Regional Development. Second, Belykh as a blogger is exposed to sharp political comments, mostly disgraceful to him and accusatory of his de-facto support for the Putin regime, channeled through his blog.

It has to be reminded that Belykh is one of only two regional chief executives who are not members of the ruling "United Russia" party. He used to lead the Union of Rightwing Forces, a liberal pro-market party which stayed in opposition to the Putin regime, yet later accepted the proposal to take over the governor's post in Kirov. In his blog Belykh more explicitly, in comparison with Shantsev, reacts to the street protests erupted in Moscow in fall 2011. He recognizes the legitimacy of opposition's demands, but simultaneously calls to avoid radicalism and extra-legal solutions. Being a part of the regime, he claims that the federal center is gradually changing under the pressure of the rising social demands for more democracy and transparency, and protestors should not disregard this evolution. Belykh expresses his solidarity with the demands for fair election, and explains his political choice of joining the Committee for Civil Initiative led by the former Finance Minister Igor' Kudrin and keeping working contacts with the former presidential candidate Mikhail Prokhorov. In the meantime, Belykh in his posts accu-ses the liberal opposition of intolerance to opinions that differ from their own, which, in his view, matches political

intolerance of the ruling party. He notes that mob can be dangerous, referring to the demands to "cut off the throat" to power as a proof of inacceptable political radicalism of some oppositional groupings.

Foreign Policy Makers

Among Russian foreign policy makers there are two figures who blog regularly. Konstantin Kosachev, former chair of the State Duma Committee on International Relations and currently the head of "Rossotrudnichestvo" (an agency subordinated to Foreign Ministry), explicitly focuses on issues of soft power as Russia's key foreign policy instrument[7]. He conveys through his blog ideas that appear to be consonant with the dominating European discourses. Kosachev not only accepts the legitimacy of soft power tools in world politics, but tries to instrumentalize this concept. Unlike many of his colleagues in Russian political establishment, he does not question the objectivity of multiple international ratings where Russia looks poor, and takes them as a challenge and an incentive for changes inside Russia. His blog, which intentionally features as informal means of communication, always contains references to Putin's speeches, which can be interpreted as a means of linking the President's discourse to a more open and flexible understanding of public and cultural diplomacy, much more consonant with the Western discourses than, for example, Putin's "Munich speech" which became a strong metaphor for the incompatibility of Kremlin's world outlook with the Western normative order.

More specifically, in his blog Kosachev speaks in favour of banning capital punishment, admits that soft power is the weakest link in Russian foreign policy, recognizes that in security negotiations with the West Russia frequently is in minority, and claims that Moscow should not treat Russian-speaking communities in the Baltic States as the Kremlin's "fifth column". On regional agenda he supports Transniestria's reintegration in Moldova, and expects rebuilding full-fledged relations with Georgia. Despite evident political repercussions of these ideas, Kosachev nevertheless himself portrays his approach as overwhelmingly de-politicized and ascribes to politics negative connotations[8].

His colleague Dmitry Rogozin, former Russia's envoy to NATO, and current vice-prime minister in charge of military-industrial complex and presidential representative on Transniestria, takes in his blog a different, much less West-friendly stand. He sends philippics to "Romanian unionists", and exhibits a picture of himself planting a poplar tree near his former NATO office (poplar stands for "Topol", the name of Russian missile). Rogozin openly expresses his political standpoints, reporting about his congratulations to Marine Le Pen after she finished third at French presidential election held in 2012.

For Rogozin, twitting is a means of publicizing views which couldn't fit well with his more official lexicon. Thus, he calls "crude Russophobes" and "followers of Bandera" those in Ukraine who don't see any reasons to distinguish the status of the Russian language from that of Hungarian or Romanian[9]. In his twitter posts he explicitly argues that "Russia is not Europe"[10], and calls the "Pussy Riots" group "poor cows which have many important daddies behind"[11]. He deems that the old Soviet joke "who wears Adidas today can betray his motherland tomorrow" is not that obsolete[12], and then calls his opponents "marsh liberals"[13]. Some of his remarks – like, for example, calling people living in Transniestria (which is not recognized by Russia) "ours" – explain political reasons of Russian foreign policy hidden behind diplomatic or legal lexicon.

For foreign policy makers blogs, therefore, are instruments allowing for more publicity and freedom of assessments within a highly hierarchical and closed system of Russian diplomacy. In comparisons to governors, foreign policy bloggers are more politically accentuated, which is basically due to the fact that the area of international relations gives more opportunities for taking certain positions and accentuating diversity than domestic policy. In the meantime, both types of blogs which we have discussed in this section help stabilize the dominating discourse as devoid of open political articulations, which is in sharp contrast to the way blogging is used by opposition.

Blogging as a communicative tool of the Russian 'non-systemic opposition'

In order to evaluate how the new media is able to re-politicize the social milieu, in this section we shall analyze political strategies which are formulated in opposition blogs. This will lead us to a better understanding of how the opposition functions in a dynamic milieu of confrontation with the Kremlin.

Among the so-called 'non-systemic opposition' (non-party, non-NGO), some of the most popular and influential activist bloggers – the most prominent one being Alexey Navalny[14] – effectively use the 'tool' of the blog as an instrument for civic mobilization. The activist bloggers essentially apply four methods, with which they try to influence and mobilize their readers. These methods are: playing the role of a vanguard for civic action, anti-regime propaganda, creating a positive group feeling and motivating activity and participation.

Method one: Vanguards for civic action

Instead of leading 'abstract' discussions on ideological questions, the activist bloggers focus on citizens' real everyday problems like corruption, bad streets, pollution or violations of law, working on ways to deal with them and, importantly, offering people solutions to these problems.[15] The bloggers thus take on the role of a 'vanguard' in the field of Russian civic activism, which in a politically apathetic country like Russia bears great significance: through personal example the activist bloggers show that the everyday common grievances are not a given and unchangeable curse, but that there are ways and means of effectively dealing with them. They demonstrate that it is possible for *any* citizen with neither power nor status to fight for their rights and make a difference through personal commitment – making their own example a 'role model' for others and encouraging them to become active themselves. Accordingly, the activist bloggers never fail to share their actions, next steps and – importantly – success stories with their readers.

There were examples of ad-hoc networked communities that were spontaneously formed with a specific purpose before the

mass protests that started in fall 2011. One of the best examples is the micro-groups of civic activists which in summer 2010 voluntarily invested their resources and time for extinguishing mass-scale forest fires that destroyed dozens of villages in central Russia[16]. It was a non-ideological and non-political type of civic engagement, sometimes even anonymous and non-public, based on solidarity and compassion. Yet in the meantime there was a political component in their actions as well, since they unfolded as a reaction to the inertness of public authorities. In result, the activists managed to form a non-state structure of technical assistance to the victims of fires, exactly the same way as observers succeeded in forming – at least partially – an independent system of controlling the vote count in fall 2011.

Apart from encouraging others to become active, playing the role of a vanguard is also a precondition for the success of the following three methods, as it gives the bloggers greater credibility and trust in the eyes of their readers – an essentially significant factor in the Russian blogosphere where single activist bloggers enjoy the reputation of 'moral authorities', placed at the strategically important center of larger networks and functioning as a relevant 'collecting and distributing point' for all kinds of information.

Method two: Anti-regime propaganda

Activist bloggers make propagandistic use of the blogs by transmitting one-sided anti-regime messages to their readers, thus establishing a very clear-cut 'concept of the enemy'. Basically there are three main strategies of anti-regime propaganda applied by the activist bloggers to influence peoples' perception of the regime: a specific choice of words; the depiction of the regime as illegitimate, a failure, losing support and lawbreakers; and satire.

Choice of words

When referring to the regime, the activist bloggers almost exclusively use negative, drastic, deprecatory, mocking or insulting expressions, such as "crooks", "thieves", "morons", "Botox", "promise man" (the latter two referring to Putin), "stupid", "primitive" or "impudent". The constant use of such expressions has the aim of making the reader develop a hostile attitude towards the regime and make her/him associate it with these expressions only. The effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated by Navalny's meme „Party of Crooks and Thieves" for the 'party of power' United Russia (UR), which for most people has become an exclusive synonym for UR.

Depiction of the regime as …

a) … illegitimate

This strategy mainly contains the posting of personal accounts and videos on falsifications and 'carousel voting' concerning the December 2011 and March 2012 elections as well as the ridiculing of regime supporters. The role of videos thereby is to give an 'in flagranti delicto' demonstration of the cunningness and dishonesty of the regime which is shown to recur to illegal measures (falsifications, fraud, blackmail) in order to ensure it staying in power, thus making it a (lawfully) illegitimate and consequently unauthorized leader of the country. The effectiveness of such videos as a 'propaganda tool' is very high, as the blog readers widely accept them as credible eyewitness information shot by other ('ordinary') citizens. Accordingly they are a valuable means for influencing people, because eyewitness information enjoys much greater trust among people than for example information provided by the mainstream media.

The ridiculing of regime supporters serves the purpose of both elevating one's 'in-group' morally above the enemy 'out-group', and of showing that a regime which is based on 'fake' (i.e. paid or coerced), intellectually inferior or 'doubtful' supporters is just as 'dubious' as these and cannot be seriously regarded as true and rightful leaders of the country (i.e. it is morally illegitimate). The main means for ridiculing the regime supporters applied by the bloggers are satire (mostly aimed at questioning the genuineness and integrity of the 'supporters'); the posting of 'unflattering' photographs and/or videos, often showing Tajiks, Caucasians, Africans as well as drunk or dubious looking people rallying for the regime; and the pointing to the supporters' numerous intellectual 'shortcomings',

such as not knowing what 'Pyrrhic victory' means[17] or who Andrey Sakharov was.[18]

b)… losing support

This strategy contains videos as well as photographs and personal accounts, all of which are to demonstrate that the regime is running out of support and can no longer unfold any other 'bonding forces' than by just paying and coercing people. This demonstration of a ‚tsar's twilight' is important for political mobilization, as it suggests that, for one, the number of potential 'fellow fighters' is increasing, and for two, that – with the majority no longer on the regime's side – the time is right to act against it.[19]

c)… a failure

This strategy aims primarily at exposing the regime's "propagandistic myths"[20] and ‚destroying' UR's and Putin's self-ascribed reputation as guarantors of economic growth, wellbeing and stability. Working mainly with statistics as well facts and figures[21], the bloggers juxtapose statements and promises made by UR since the beginning of Putin's presidency with their own findings of the situation in Russia today, presenting their readers with their conclusion that Putin and his regime have obviously failed to live up to their own promises and have thus forfeit the right to stay in power any longer. Alternatively the bloggers simply post the statements and promises without additional comment, letting their readers draw the conclusions themselves (with practically the same result as in the former case).

d)… law breakers and 'smear campaigners'

The aim of this strategy is to criminalize and discredit the regime in the eyes of the audience by showing that - when dealing with the regime - people are actually dealing with officials that are either breaking (instead of protecting) the law (as in the case of the hacking of Navalny's mail allegedly ordered by UR[22]), covering up for criminals out of self-interest (as in the case of Sergey Magnitsky[23]) or using dirty methods to compromise opponents[24] (especially Navalny) and spread their own propaganda.

Satire

In the activist blogs, satire can be found in various forms, such as (photoshopped) photographs, videos or in text (normal, couplets, poems). It is either provided for by the bloggers themselves or created with the involvement of blog readers and then spread by the bloggers to a greater audience. The satire on the activist blogs to the greatest extent focuses on the ridiculing of Putin and his supporters, primarily making fun of Putin's officially propagated image as masculine and strong man/leader, ironically commenting on his so-called 'achievements' and, as already mentioned further above, doubting the genuineness and voluntariness of the regime's supporters.

Summing up, the method of anti-regime propaganda serves to transmit a very negative image of the regime, focusing primarily on the aspects illegitimacy, incapability, lack of appeal and ridicule. It is to evoke both a deprecatory feeling towards it and at the same time activate a strong desire within in the readers to change this situation, the latter being an important aspect in trying to mobilize people.

Method three: Creating a (positive) group feeling

Creating a group feeling in the still rather atomized and isolated Russian society is an important factor in mobilizing people. People who would normally not form a

group are much more willing to become active if they can emotionally attach to a group that gives them a sense of meaning and belonging, a common cause, that provides a feeling of unity and creates identification with the group's idea(l)s, values and goals[25] that people are willing to defend and stick up for. Other important aspects are the belief that the group is both strong (in terms of numbers and effectiveness) and morally right (i.e. truth[26] is on our side).

In the activist blogs, the generation of a group feeling is established mainly by using emotional, positive language when referring to the 'in-group', the repeated use of group-building words 'we' / 'us' / 'our' (sometimes mixed with pathos), photographs to give the group feeling a 'visual face' (for example of the 'Big White Ring' action of February 26th 2012[27]) and the illustration that "we are many". Whereas the 'linguistic' creation of a group feeling is a phenomenon predominantly of the time since around the time of the December 2011 Duma elections, the establishment of a 'common cause' (fighting the regime, UR and Putin)[28] started earlier and found its ideal slogan in Navalny's meme "United Russia – Party of Crooks and Thieves" in February 2011.

Method three thus aims at establishing a positive 'counter-image' to the one created of the regime (method two), one that is both emotionally appealing, motivating, binding and attractive enough to make people join in and become more active.

Method four: Motivate activity/participation

The last method the bloggers use to mobilize people is to motivate their readers to act and participate both on- and offline. To that end, they do not merely post verbal statements in their blogs asking the users to 'get up and do something'; rather they apply specific strategies in order to support and encourage civic activity – a necessary aspect in a society in which people are not yet too familiar with how to articulate dissatisfaction, stand up for their rights or act against various grievances. The main strategies in this context are to provide 1) various possibilities for activity, and 2) material, strategies/ideas and training.

Providing various possibilities for activity

Providing more than just one possibility for civic activity enables the activist bloggers to reach a wider range of people, because it increases the likeliness that people willing to become active can find some social roles according to their own preferences and capabilities without having to join a party or an NGO. Moreover, it helps to broaden the basis of civic activism and introduces people to its various ways and means, which they can then pass on to others

('multiplying effect'). Among the various possibilities offered by the bloggers are money donations for opposition rallies or projects like Navalny's anti-corruption campaign Rospil; volunteering as election observers; distributing anti-regime material (handouts, stickers, posters etc.) on (pro- or anti-regime) rallies, in neighborhoods, in houses, on the street, at work, on websites or social media or on any other occasion; taking part in blog-based video and poster competitions; joining opposition rallies or actions.

Providing material, strategies/ideas, training

Providing 'incentives', 'starter kits', strategies and training helps facilitate and stimulate activism for people who are ready for social engagement, but may lack experience or imagination how to do so. Additionally, getting people to use material created by themselves gives the activist bloggers an opportunity to get their own views and messages across to a much larger audience, possibly including those people that are 'offline' as well.

Examples for material provided by the bloggers are stickers to put on cars, mirrors, doors, walls etc., posters to hang in

elevators or wherever possible or 'agit'-videos to spread on social media sites or blogs. Strategies/ideas include calling on people to spread 'agit'-videos and other material among family, friends and others, encouraging anti-Putin agitation on so-called 'Putings' (pro-Putin rallies), the developing of strategies of spreading anti-regime information offline with the help of volunteers[29] or providing a strategy for fighting 'idiocies' in the public space (what to do, where to turn).[30] Training so far focuses on providing video lectures for those willing to become election observers or flyers with 'guidelines' to specific topics.[31]

To sum up, Russian activist bloggers make excellent use of the instrument of blogging and the wide possibilities it offers for influencing and mobilizing people: the posting of videos, photos, statistics/graphics and/or larger texts (either separately or in combination) allows for an effective presentation of 'propaganda material', the establishment of a cross-country and cross-group 'community feeling' and the wide and fast distribution and provision of ideas and material among readers. The effective use of the blog is complemented by a style that is characterized by emotional and personal language and putting the focus on issues that touch upon people's everyday

Political articulations of the opposition:	Depoliticized articulations of the state:
Diversity	Unity
Justice	Order
Reforms	Stability
Horizontal networking	Hierarchical vertical of power
Democracy as minority protection	Democracy as majority rule
Performativity	Technical administration
Openness to global experiences	Inward-looking (either nation- or region-oriented)

Table 1

concerns instead of merely leading ideological discussions.

Conclusion

This analysis might be part of a wider discussion on Russian politics, which has to be understood not as a bordered domain monopolized by a certain group, but as a deeply socio-cultural process of debating alternatives in a situation of uncertainty. The question is how strong is the resistance potential of Russian social networking, including blogosphere? We deem that this potential is rather substantial, especially against the background of the Kremlin's loss of ability to generate socially acceptable meanings, to convey messages to target audiences, to dominate the symbolic and ideational landscapes, and ultimately – to maintain its discursive hegemony.

Post-political discourse of the state is teleological, linear and celebratory, and this is what debilitates and marginalizes it. The state is on the defensive not only because of its shrinking financial and economic resources, but mainly because of intellectual and esthetic deficit in its discourse. The Putin regime seems to be insensitive to the importance of new discourses originated mainly in the new media and gradually spreading all across the whole Russian political spectrum. All this leads to re-politicization of alternative discourses, conveyed to a significant extend through blogosphere and social networks.

In table 1 we display the key differences between the two types of discourses analyzed above:

The very use of new social media by opposition can be viewed as "a form of political action"[32], "aimed to liberate subjugated knowledges from the repressive grip of the dominant ideology and challenged the traditional understanding of politics in terms of the activities of elected politicians and their administrative advisers"[33]. The wide use of new media resources by opposition in Russia proves that "the autonomy of the political is an illusion upheld by power itself"[34], and aims to discursively contest the monopoly of the ruling elite. Due to the proliferation of new mass media it is not the Kremlin any longer that formulates Russia's political agenda.

One can agree with Antonio Negri that there is a huge difference between democracy as a form of government and as a "non state-controlled association of the multitude"[35], as "civil life", or as the emergence of new political claims. Democracy may certainly exist "in the form of an infinite process, without any rules or guarantees"[36]. In this sense democracy is not a form of government, but a form of "being-together"[37], and presupposes protest groups' rejection of formal institutionalization, as well as their positioning outside the domain of representative politics as being hierarchical, repressive and ultimately dysfunctional. The evolution of the Putin regime after his inauguration in May 2012 – in particular, the adoption of the controversial law which requests Russian NGOs accepting financing from outside the country to register as "foreign agents" – leave no chances for opposition groups to integrate into the (post-) political order created by the Kremlin. Under these conditions the new media are to remain, metaphorically speaking, an archipelago of spaces where "different individuals and groups (primarily those excluded from the representative spaces of public politics) could deliver their messages to society in the most unmediated way"[38]. The power of new social networking lies in their "direct manifestation of social activism" and in opening up new social spaces "to facilitate spontaneous utterances and participation"[39] – a function that is in increasing demand in today's Russia.

Notes:

[1] Kazys Varnelis. *Networked Publics*. Cambridge and London: the MIT Press, 2008, p.94; Etling B., Alexanyan K., Kelly J., Faris R., Palfrey J., Gasser U. *Public Discourse in the Russian Blogosphere: Mapping RuNet Politics and Mobilization*, Berkman Center Research Publication, 2010.

[2] Jakob Torfing. "Discourse Theory: Achievements, Arguments, and Challenges", in David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (eds.). *Discourse Theory in European Politics. Identity, Policy and Governance*. Palgrave & Macmillan, 2005. p.6.

[3] Ibid. p.7.

[4] Ibid. p.13.

[5] http://shantsevvp.livejournal.com

[6] http://belyh.livejournal.com

[7] Konstantin Kosachev. Mozhno li izmerit' miagkuyu silu? June 4, 2012, http://blog.rs.gov.ru/node/19

[8] Konstantin Kosachev. Nachnite s liudei, a ne s politiki, March 20, 2012, http://blog.rs.gov.ru/node/6

[9] July , 2012, https://twitter.com/Rogozin/

[10] July 4, 2012, https://twitter.com/Rogozin/

[11] July 2, 2012, https://twitter.com/Rogozin/

[12] June 22, 2012, https://twitter.com/Rogozin/

[13] June 15, 2012, https://twitter.com/Rogozin/

[14] <navalny> by his LiveJournal name; other influential bloggers are Ilya Varlamov (<zyalt>), Rustem Adagamov (<drugoi>), Marina Litvinovich (<abstract2001>), Anonymus (<teh_nomad>), Anton Nossik (<dolboeb>) and Vladislav Naganov (<naganoff>).

[15] Examples are Alexei Navalny with his shareholder activism and anti-corruption campaign or Ilya Varlamov with his blog campaign 'A country without Idiocy' (http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/, accessed April 28th 2012).

[16] Igor' Averkiev, Vsevolod Bederson, Elena Pershakova. Liudi na pozharakh. Perm': Permskaya grazhdanskaya palata, October – December 2010.

[17] http://dolboeb.livejournal.com/2301746.html, accessed April 25th 2012.

[18] "Sakharov - that is the man who made sugar", http://drugoi.livejournal.com/3537597.html, accessed April 26th 2012.

[19] An important role in this context was played by a video <navalny> titles "The end of an epoch". It shows how Putin, stepping out to hold a speech after a fight in the 'Olimpiiski Sports Complex', is greeted with boos and catcalls by the auditorium. As an unprecedented event it received wide attention as soon as it got posted on <navalny> and was seen as a clear sign by the bloggers that the support for the regime is waning (therefore Navalny's title for it). (see http://navalny.livejournal.com/648199.html,   also http://drugoi.-livejournal.com/3654423.html and http://teh-nomad.livejournal.com/1038549.html, all accessed April 26th 2012)

[20]   http://naganoff.livejournal.com/45924.html, accessed April 25th 2012.

[21] often retrieved from official sources like the Russian Federal State Statistics Service (GKS), CISSTAT (Statistical Committee of the CIS states), the Russian Central Bank, RIA Novosti or newspapers like Kommersant, Vedomosti or Moskovskie Novosti.

[22] http://dolboeb.livejournal.com/2275327.html, accessed April 30th 2012.

[23]   http://naganoff.livejournal.com/37313.html, http://navalny.livejournal.com/647309.html, accessed April 30th 2012.

24 http://navalny.livejournal.com/635635.html, accessed April 29th 2012.

25 especially important if the state itself fails to provide a unifying idea.

26 truth is also symbolized in the white ribbons (or other white items) the protesters wear.

27 http://zyalt.livejournal.com/527002.html, accessed April 30th 2012

28 As pointed to by <navalny>, who favored the voting for any other party but UR as a uniting strategy – "*all against United Russia*" (http://navalny.livejournal.com/617297.html, italics and fat print in original; accessed April 24th 2012).

29 cf. Navalny's idea of building a "mega-hyper-agitmachine of Truth", http://navalny.livejournal.com/-692163.html (accessed April 29th 2012).

30 refers to Varlamov's campaign "A Country without Idiocy".

31 e.g. „ Parking Guidelines for Drivers ", http://zyalt.livejournal.com/450246.html (accessed March 22nd 2012) .

32 Audie Klots and Cecelia Lynch. *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations*. Armonk, New York and London, England: M.E.Sharpe, 2007. p.51.

33 Jacob Torfing. Op.cit. p.5.

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