

BLOGGING IN RUSSIA

The blog platform *LiveJournal* as a professional tool of Russian journalists

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The Russian media model combines elements of Western market economy with the considerable influence of the political elite. In regard to professional journalism, it is characterized by state control of media, restriction of journalistic autonomy, and censorship (including self-censorship). The Russian media system today is a hybrid composed of the main public sphere — that is, state-owned mainstream media — and a parallel public sphere or counter-sphere, consisting of mainstream media relatively disloyal to the Kremlin, and social media.

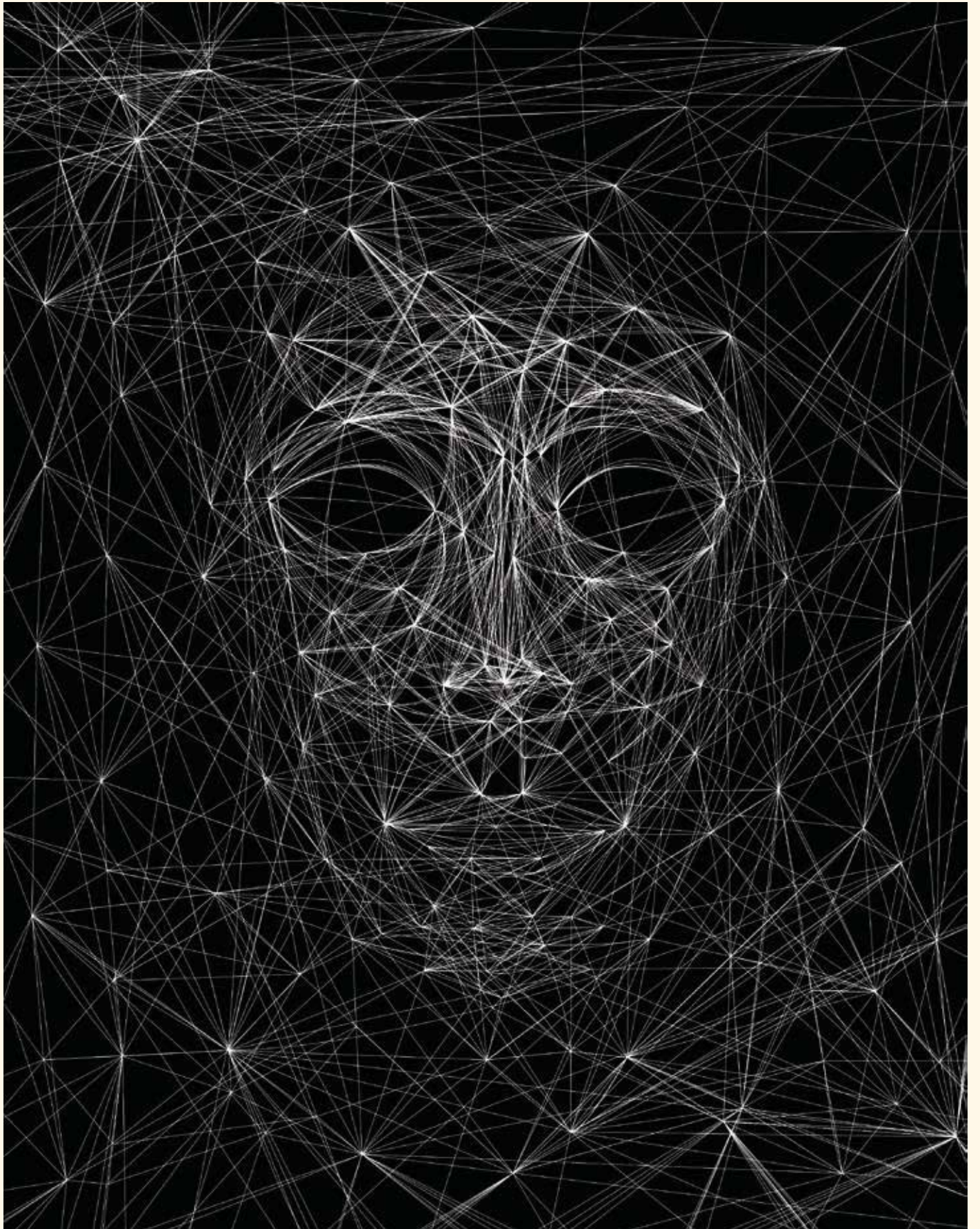
The technological developments that led to the introduction of social media changed traditional journalists' practices, challenged their professional roles, and created new conditions for journalists worldwide. Russian journalists actively use new social media services, and especially blogs. *LiveJournal*, one of the most popular and relatively non-controlled blog platforms, is considered a core medium of political and public discourse in Russia. As one of the basic components of the new media system, it has great potential as a useful tool for professional journalistic work.

The present study is based on an analysis of one hundred journalist's blogs maintained on the *LiveJournal* platform in during the 2012 presidential election in Russia. The findings show to what extent journalists' blogging (called "j-blogging") might assist them in their working routine and can be used as a compensatory medium or a tool for professional and personal self-expression in conditions of editorial restrictions.

The Russian media model is defined by Vartanova¹ as a statist commercial model characterized by "a strong relationship between media, journalists and the state, legitimized by a shared belief — consciously or unconsciously — in the regulatory/decisive role of the state (or state agencies)", a political and business elite integrated in media policy, a contradictory role of civil society in the general community and in the journalistic community, the integration of leading journalists and media managers in the state, and, hence, their inclusion in the process of social management.

As Kiriya and Degtereva² postulate, the Russian media are composed of two main groups: those owned or rigidly supervised by the state — these include widely broadcast, mostly national TV channels — and those belonging to individuals, parties, or foreign corporations, and relatively disloyal to the Kremlin, but also regulated by the state, albeit indirectly. The two groups of media have distinct audiences: in the former case, a broad audience that is not actively involved in civic life and passively absorbs propaganda, and, in the latter case, a narrow, socially active audience stratum interested in discussing political life and drawing their own conclusions based on the available information. The state allows the minority to keep their own media, enclosing them in an "information ghetto".

The introduction of the Internet caused significant changes in the media sphere. Since the mid-2000s, in the wake of Web 2.0 and the development of social media in particular, the media's



next seismic shift started a new wave in media development. This new era is characterized by broader involvement of people in horizontal communication, increased media-audience interaction, political mobilization, and the organizational function of the Internet. The Russian Internet, or RuNet, has up to now remained relatively free of government interference,³ and has sometimes been a more reliable source of information than the traditional media.

With the growth of the digital public domain and the emergence of new media systems which influence the established media-political relationships, the patterns of communication have changed. Chadwick⁴ defines the new platforms as “hybrid media systems” which “built upon interactions among old and new media and their associated technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizations”. According to Chadwick, the relevant players in the hybrid media system are “articulated by complex and evolving power relations based upon adaptation and interdependence”.

A new model of the modern Russian media system suggested by Kiriya⁵ considers the coexistence of old and new media in terms of main and parallel public spheres. The parallel (or “alternative”) sphere is composed of institutionalized and non-institutionalized media:

Main public sphere:

- Widespread (national) TV channels, radio, and some political print media

Parallel public sphere:

- Institutionalized
 - “Oppositional” TV channels (e.g. *REN-TV*), media outlets controlled by elite groups close to the state (e.g. *Ekho Moskvy* radio), and online-media
- Non-institutionalized
 - Blogs and social networking sites

THE IDEA OF the division of the audience has been developed in the context of the public counter-sphere concept by Bodrunova and Litvinenko.⁶ They emphasize a twofold understanding of hybridization: it is based on technological media convergence, and at the same time it has a political aspect. According to their analysis, the hybridization of the Russian media system, which can be observed in both offline and online media, is characterized by the formation of a major cleavage in the public sphere, and of a nationwide, full-scale public counter-sphere based on an alternative agenda and new means of communication.

Bodrunova and Litvinenko draw a conclusion about the encapsulation of several (usually two) main audience groups “with-in their agendas and deliberation milieus with almost no bridges between those two”. In these two Russian public spheres, the barriers against information from the opposing sphere are quite high. Thus the most acute issues which form the agenda in the

counter-sphere often are not included in the mainstream news, or are slanted to the advantage of the current establishment. Conversely, topics relevant to the mainstream media are considered emasculated and “spin-doctored” in the counter-sphere media.

According to this analysis, the divide is grounded in different

patterns of media consumption: the divide, the authors argue, is between national TV channels, mid-market and tabloid newspapers on the one hand, and a new, “politically active social milieu cutting across traditional demographic stratification” on the other. Bodrunova⁷ identifies the following “media junctions” as constituting the counter-sphere in Russia:

Media

- Established “oppositional” media of all types and all platforms (the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, the newspaper *Novaia gazeta*, and the discussion portal *Grani.ru*);
- Alternative-agenda media in urban areas established in the 12000s (the online TV channel *Dozhd*, the city magazine *Bolshoi gorod*, and the online project *Snob.ru*);

- Business newspapers, which have tended to have a left-liberal stance rather than a conservative one (*Kommersant*, *Vedomosti*);
- Blogs, whose authors have become mediated public figures (the lawyer Alexey Navalny’s *LiveJournal* blog, for instance);
- Projects in social networking sites (*Facebook*; the Russian-language networking site *Vkontakte*);
- Creators of online media texts of a mostly critical, analytical, or even artistic nature (including journalists in online-only media, famous writers, and experts)
- Constellations of interconnected portals that included think tanks, universities, thematic sites, blogs, and news portals

THIS NEW MEDIA environment creates alternative public spaces and news agendas. Social media and especially blogs play an extremely important role in setting political agendas and forming collective opinions in the modern Russian hybrid media system, providing an alternative to government information channels and elite-controlled media. However, both political camps – pro-Kremlin and oppositional – coexist within the boundaries of social media.

We have also witnessed a certain tendency towards interpenetration: bloggers actively cite and comment on the mainstream media agenda, while professional journalists refer to blogs and other social media as sources of information. Yagodin⁸ points to a “blogization” of Russian journalism – the politicizing of the media and social space. However, these trends do not significantly alter the paradigm described above.

After its introduction in Russia in 1999, *LiveJournal* quickly became a hit and acquired the informal status of an “area for Russian intellectuals”, in Podshibiakin’s words,⁹ finally becom-

“THE RUSSIAN INTERNET, OR RUNET, HAS UP TO NOW REMAINED RELATIVELY FREE OF GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE.”

ing a national cultural phenomenon. However, lively and rapidly developing social networking sites such as the Russian language *Vkontakte* and *Odnoklassniki* and the global *Facebook* have brought significant changes the past decade. First, they provoked an “exodus from *LiveJournal*”: the blog platform began to lose users. Second, as Baldin and Borodin¹⁰ argue, the blogosphere (or network of mutually linking blogs) has merged with social networking sites; the blog-roll function is often primary.

NEVERTHELESS, *LiveJournal* remains one of the most important media platforms in Russia. Berkman Center research¹¹ has found that the Russian blogosphere serves as a central discussion core that contains the majority of political and public affairs discourse, and is composed mainly (although not exclusively) of blogs on the *LiveJournal* platform. The Russian-language blogosphere contains some 65 million blogs: about nine million of these are stand-alone blogs; others are hosted on about one hundred different blog platforms. The *LiveJournal* blog platform is one of the leaders, with more than 2.8 million accounts and 90,000 entries daily.¹²

The changed role and functions of journalists

The rapid development of the Internet in recent decades has affected journalism as a profession worldwide. Increasing interactivity and opportunities for individualization of media content have changed audiences’ demands and behavior and challenged the usual routine of journalists’ work and professional practices, and have even undermined the traditional roles and functions of journalists in society. These roles and functions are rooted in professional journalistic culture, which usually is defined as a complex mix of journalistic values, practices, norms, and media products.

The role and functions of journalists in society, along with journalists’ distance from power and a market orientation, constitute institutional roles – one of the principal domains of professional journalistic culture. Professional journalistic culture tends to unify the profession worldwide: journalists often share the same professional values, follow the same professional standards, and use similar practices. At the same time, however, it varies with cultural differences from one country to another, as Hanitzsch argues.¹³ He and his colleagues extend this point in further research¹⁴ by identifying three main clusters of journalistic culture: “Western journalism culture”; “peripheral Western” (similar to the first); and a group of developing countries and transitional democracies, which tend to be rather non-democratic. In this analysis, Russia is placed the third group. The professional role of journalists in Russia, as elsewhere, is determined to a large extent by tradition, culture, and the state of the media.

First of all, Russian journalism inherits a long history of service to the state. Trakhtenberg¹⁵ stresses that the Russian media as an

institution were initially established by the authorities as a tool for informing, manipulating, and managing the public. Russian journalism is closely linked with literature: the most famous writers were at the same time well-known journalists; and major journalists thought of themselves primarily as enlighteners and contributed to Russian culture, as Zhirkov¹⁶ writes.

“THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE BLOGOSPHERE CONTAINS SOME 65 MILLION BLOGS.”

According to Pasti,¹⁷ in the Soviet period journalists functioned as propagandists and agitators; but as Roudakova points out,¹⁸ they were also “missionaries” and educators, part of the intelligentsia, a social class of people engaged in an intellectual endeavor aimed at disseminating culture, which in Eastern Europe “always connoted impeccable moral integrity and a perceived duty to put one’s education and social and cultural capital to use for the betterment of society”. Post-Soviet

journalists had fallen a long way from “almost the fourth estate” in 1991 to 1995, to use Zassoursky’s words,¹⁹ to almost PR workers serving the interests of influential groups and persons in politics and business, as Pasti observes.²⁰

Thus the journalistic profession in modern Russia is influenced by inherited traditions and at the same time by the specific nature of the contemporary media-political model. Russian journalism differs in its tendencies towards personification and literature-centric individualism, and in its ability to influence public opinion. Hanitzsch et al.²¹ find that journalists in contemporary Russia have “the most favorable attitude towards providing analysis”, but also perceive themselves more as cooperators and supporters of government and official policy and as having an advocacy function.

A TYPICAL RUSSIAN JOURNALIST is described by Pasti²² as “a happy journalist” combining two jobs – one in a media company, for stability, and one as a freelancer, for the sake of his or her creative ambitions. Some prefer to call themselves “media workers”. Pasti points out that journalism has become popular as a “social elevator”, to the detriment of the professional ethos. Vartanova and Azhgikhina,²³ however, optimistically note that Russian journalism, because it is literature-centric and more personified, has traditionally been a mission rather than a profession, and that this missionary function is being revived.

Singer²⁴ and Lewis²⁵ point out that journalists in Western democracies have traditionally been a kind of chosen gatekeeper with a clear mission to act as a “fourth estate”, but also as leading observers and reporters of society. Their job has always been “to gather, filter, edit and publish the news”, as Hermida²⁶ puts it. Today this function is challenged: everyone with a computer has the same capabilities as a journalist. Now retaining control demands some cooperation with the audience, which wants not only to consume media content, but also to produce and contribute to it.

In her analysis of blogging journalists (“j-bloggers”), Singer²⁷ found that most journalists do not invite audience participation to any greater extent that they did in an offline media culture,

maintaining the traditional work process and following a course of “normalizing” behavior: that is, they adapt the traditional norms and practices of journalism to fit the new platform. A similar tendency is observed by Lasorsa et al.²⁸ in the first big data analysis of journalists’ use of *Twitter*. Hermida²⁹ finds that journalists in the social media era try to retain their gatekeeping role, but put more resources into the filtering part of the process. They are becoming managers of conversations, highlighting what they see as good information instead of trying to edit out what they see as bad.

DUE TO THE RECENT CHANGES, the core function of the contemporary Russian journalist has shifted towards providing orientation “because orientation is what the audience needs in the face of the enormous information flow that is becoming more and more complex”, to quote Litvinenko³⁰. Referring to Conboy,³¹ Litvinenko argues that “the increasing presence of journalists in social media leads to [a] personalization of journalism”, and that the growing tendency of journalists to market themselves as brands was once “a trademark of pre-professional journalists” in the early days of the press.

Thus social media pose challenges to journalism, but also create new opportunities for it, and indeed have become an irreplaceable tool for journalistic work worldwide. Many studies document the effectiveness of the new platforms for finding, gathering and distributing news, for fact-checking,³² crowdsourcing, communicating with audiences,³³ for professional discussions with colleagues, and so on. A comparative study of 1500 journalistic surveys in Poland, Russia, and Sweden³⁴ in 2012 has shown that Russian, Polish, and Swedish journalists use *Facebook*, *Twitter*, other communities (*Odnoklassniki* and *Vkontakte*), and especially blogs primarily for obtaining ideas, for research and investigation, and for keeping in contact with their audience.

However, Russian journalists use those platforms and especially blogs for professional needs more frequently than their Polish and Swedish counterparts. According to Johansson,³⁵ Russian journalists are also much more active than their western colleagues in using social media for publishing other content besides their regular work, for discussing socio-political issues, and for commercial goals such as earning money by advertising or PR and strengthening the trademark of the media company.

ONE HYPOTHESIS MIGHT be that Russian journalists’ use of social media, and particularly *LiveJournal*, is influenced not only by the specific character of the journalistic profession but also by the journalist’s role in society, cultural traditions, the state of the media and the political situation. Moreover, another assumption is that Russian journalists are under two kinds of pressure – that is, political and commercial pressure, as observed by Nygren and Degtereva,³⁶ and the pressure of high censorship (or self-censorship) and reduced press freedom,³⁷ which restricts their exercise of their profession; and in this situation Russian journalists can use blogs maintained on the *LiveJournal* platform as a compensatory means of professional self-expression.

Analysis of the content in journalists’ blogs on the LiveJournal Platform

The present study is based on a cluster analysis of content in one hundred journalists’ blogs maintained on the *LiveJournal* platform. Usually, Russian media face especially strong state control during election campaigns. A two-week period before the Russian presidential election of March 2012 (from March 1 to March 14, 2012) was therefore chosen for examination.

Two difficulties arose in the selection of journalists’ blogs. The first was connected with professional identity. The boundaries of the journalistic profession are blurred today, and it is difficult to define who can be considered a journalist. Only those bloggers who met the following two criteria were selected for the sample:

1. Regular collaboration with or employment by at least one institutionalized media outlet;
2. A journalistic background or education.

The second obstacle was the anonymity of users in *LiveJournal*. This problem was also solved, however. It is generally known that bloggers can choose different levels of anonymity. People can hide their real names or use them openly. J-bloggers were found on *LiveJournal* in three different ways, depending on their level of anonymity:

1. Open identity: The user’s nickname corresponds to a real name
 - Real names of well-known journalists found in Google, Yandex, and Wikipedia under the key words “journalists’ blogs”.

Examples:

Vladimir Varfolomeev, nickname “varfolomeev”, <http://varfolomeev.livejournal.com/>;

Alexandr Podrabinek, nickname “podrabinek”, <http://podrabinek.livejournal.com/>.

2. Semi-open identity

- Indirect indicators and feature search

- a. Sometimes journalists refer to their blogs in the “About the author” section on media web sites
- b. Journalists refer to their colleagues’ blogs. Search example: User’s date of birth in *LiveJournal* compared with a journalist’s personal information on a media web site or a CV openly published in the Internet

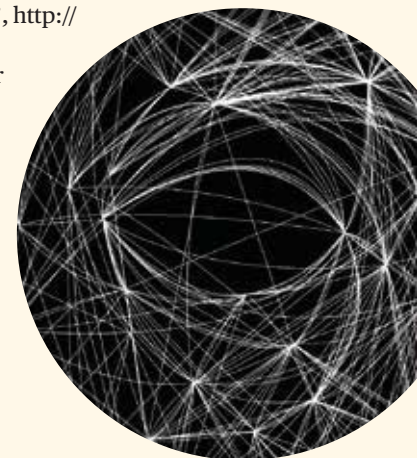
Examples:

Vadim Ponomarev, journalistic pen name

Guru Ken, nickname “guruken”, <http://guruken.livejournal.com/>;

Bozhena Rynska mentioned her *LiveJournal* blog and the nickname “becky-sharpe” when she was a guest on a TV program, <http://becky-sharpe.livejournal.com/>;

Sergey Dick’s nickname “onreal” in his blog on the radio station Echo Moskvy’s site, <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/>



onreal/, matches his *LiveJournal* nickname, <http://onreal.livejournal.com/>.

3. Secret identity

- Information obtained through personal contacts; journalistic background confirmed in private correspondence with j-blogger

Examples:

A female journalist working for a regional media company, nickname “indeborga”, <http://indeborga.livejournal.com/>.

ULTIMATELY, ONE HUNDRED j-bloggers on the *LiveJournal* platform were selected who met the criteria above. The cluster analysis of their blogs’ content is based on the results of a Berkman Center study³⁸ which found that the Russian blogosphere is significantly clustered, that is, it generally consists of discrete thematic discussion zones, namely the political/social and cultural clusters. For the present study two more clusters were added: professional matters and other issues. Thus the following topic clusters were established for the analysis:

1. Political/social discourse (discourse on Russian and foreign politics and current events, elections, international links, Russian and foreign media, business, economics, and finance, social and environmental activism, democratic opposition);
2. Cultural matters (movies, pop culture, hobbies, art, music, theater, literature and culture, “women’s issues”, psychology, philosophy, fashion);
3. Professional matters (professional ethics, censorship, self-censorship, media, journalists’ community, professional advice, contacts, employment);
4. Other (private matters, everyday routines, “noise” – emotional expressions and “messages about nothing”)

AS MENTIONED ABOVE, the blogosphere interweaves with other media, such as social media platforms.³⁹ This means that j-bloggers not only cross-post (that is, their *LiveJournal* posts may also be posted to *Twitter*, *Facebook*, or *Vkontakte*) but they also use numerous links. The following scheme for the analysis of links was elaborated with reference to Kiriya’s paradigm of two public spheres⁴⁰ and Bodrunova’s⁴¹ approach to the constitution of the counter-sphere in Russia:

1. Links to institutionalized media
 - a. Links to the author’s own published stories
2. Links to social media platforms
 - a. Links to social networking sites and blogs
 - b. Links to other platforms (e.g. UGC platforms such as *YouTube*, *Flickr*, etc.)
3. Links to non-media platforms (agencies, organizations, companies)
4. Links to the author’s website or stand-alone blog

In addition, the same one hundred j-bloggers were surveyed over the *LiveJournal* message system in April 2012 to clarify the characteristics of blogging in *LiveJournal* and to determine their specific use of blogging for professional needs. The survey message included these two questions:

1. Why do you still maintain your blog on *LiveJournal* although many people have abandoned this platform and moved to *Facebook* and *Twitter*?
2. How do you use *LiveJournal* for professional purposes?

This survey was sent only once; the waiting time was restricted to 2 months.

Social media plays an active role

In the two-week period during the presidential election campaign, ten of the 100 selected j-blogs were found to be inactive. The content of the active part of the sample (90 blogs) comprised 1754 entries on 1784 original topics (some entries contained two or more topics). The results of this cluster analysis are presented in Figure 1.

Socio-political issues were the largest group with 48.7 percent of the topics. The election was the topic discussed most in this group, and made up 55.7 percent of the socio-political cluster. Election frauds and protest rallies were the most frequent topics; however, the j-blogging on these topics was predominantly neutral and unbiased. Yet the political views of the journalists were visible and differed depending on the media they worked for, and played a crucial role in their blogging.

Cultural issues were the second largest cluster, with 39.7 percent of the topics. Professional matters accounted for only 2.1 percent, and other matters 9.4 percent.

In all, 923 links were placed in the selected j-blogs in the period examined. The majority of these links – 59.5 percent – referred to institutionalized media (see Figure 2). It is remarkable that, in the vast majority of cases, the j-bloggers referred to institutionalized media of the counter-sphere – that is, “oppositional” media of all types and all platforms (e.g. *Ekho Moskvy* radio, the *Novaia Gazeta* daily newspaper and the *Grani.ru* discussion portal), to alternative-agenda media (the city magazine *Bolshoi gorod*, the *Snob.ru* project) and especially to liberal business newspapers (*Kommersant*”, *Vedomosti*). Of the links to institutionalized media in this group, 28.6 percent referred to the blogger’s own published stories.

Links to social media were the second largest group with 42.1 percent of all links. Social networking sites and blog platforms (mainly *LiveJournal*) accounted for 69 percent of this group; another 31 percent were links to other

“THE CONTENT DELIVERED THROUGH LIVEJOURNAL CAN TAKE TWO DIFFERENT FORMS: ORIGINAL AND NON-ORIGINAL.”

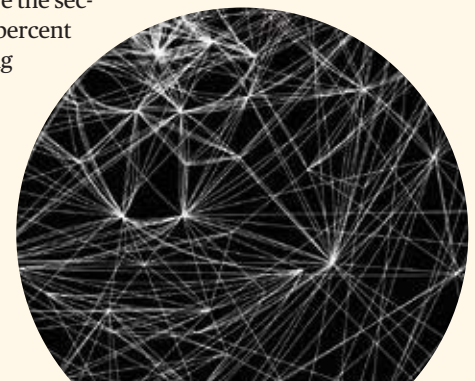


Figure 1. Topic Clusters

- Socio-political
- Cultural
- Other (private, noise, unidentified)
- Professional

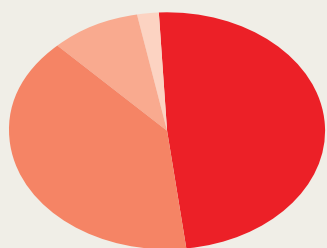
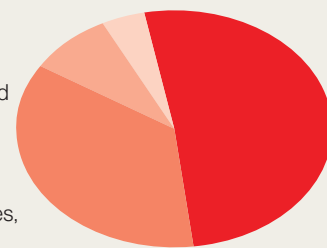


Figure 2. Links

- Institutionalized media (e. g. links to the blogger's published stories)
- Social media (e. g. blogs and social networking sites)
- Non-media websites (agencies, organizations)
- J-blogger's stand-alone blogs or websites



UGC services, predominately *YouTube* and *Flickr*. When mentioning state TV programs and news, j-bloggers preferred to link to the content on *YouTube* and not to a state media website. The smallest group, 5.2 percent of the links, referred directly to journalists' stand-alone blogs maintained on other platforms (such as *WordPress* for example) or to the journalists' own websites: In such cases, *LiveJournal* is used as a technical tool for publicizing content on other services.

Almost all of the links referred to the Russian-language media; only one link referred to a Ukrainian-language source and one to an English-language source.

J-bloggers use LiveJournal mostly for professional purposes

Of the 100 j-bloggers surveyed, 37 responded, or about one third of the sample. The majority of the responding j-bloggers use or used *LiveJournal* for professional purposes (19 said they currently did so, six had done so in the past). Two persons used *LiveJournal* only for private purposes and six persons ignored this question. Four j-bloggers used *LiveJournal* only as a tool for conveying content from their stand-alone blogs or websites.

The survey found several important peculiarities about the use of *LiveJournal*. Some j-bloggers considered *LiveJournal* a medium of personal self-expression rather than a tool for professional work. "I don't use *LiveJournal* for work. It's just a means to share my personal thoughts and ideas", the recognized j-blogger boris-ivanov wrote (a male freelance cinema critic). Another j-blogger, maxim-efimov (a male freelancer, provincial) noted:

Using *LiveJournal* is mostly a habit. It gives me a chance to express myself, to share my thoughts with large audience. It is an opportunity to be a part of society, to have a space to express my opinions and beliefs. In *LiveJour-*

nal there is no censorship. But I have accounts both on *Twitter* and on *Facebook*. *LiveJournal* is a mean of publishing and conveying information, and making it open and available to everyone. In my opinion, *LiveJournal* doesn't have much practical effect. There is a moral satisfaction in the fact that someone reads my posts.

Several journalists indicated that their use of *LiveJournal* had changed, and called themselves as "passive bloggers" – users who now prefer to read rather than to write and use *LiveJournal* mostly for occasional communication with close friends and "important followers" (j-blogger *klechik*, male, editor-in-chief of a provincial newspaper).

The first question regarding loyalty to *LiveJournal* revealed several reasons why journalists continue blogging even they do not use the platform for professional purposes. First of all, they associate *LiveJournal* with a "communicative power": "*LiveJournal* allows me to reach out to a much larger audience, and one that is important to me. I have about 5000 subscribers [i.e., "followers" or "friends"] who I can't simply drop and leave", writes the j-blogger *varfolomeev* (well-known journalist Vladimir Varfolomeev, radio Ekho Moskvy). The same reason appears to be important to the j-blogger *podrabinek* (the well-known journalist Alexandr Podrabinek, *Radio France Internationale* [RFI], *Novaia gazeta*), who also mentioned *LiveJournal*'s flexible layout preferences:

LiveJournal in this sense is more well-founded than *Facebook*, and *Twitter* is just transient. It is more for communication than for information. Is it possible to compare a hot discussion by phone with a well-thought-out journal polemic? New rapid communications can't replace depth of analysis and gravity of argument, but they permit an expanding audience. It's good, but for high-quality polemics, it is not enough.

The convenience of the *LiveJournal* format is named as the second advantage of *LiveJournal* in comparison with other social media. According to the j-blogger *irek-murtazin* (male, journalist, *Novaia gazeta*), the format provides broader opportunities "for debates, for the development of opinions, for serious discussion" than other platforms. For the j-blogger *amalkevich* (male, TV journalist, provincial TV channel), *LiveJournal* today "is a unique way to speak in a circumlocutory manner, and with illustrations". The j-blogger *scottishkot* (male, journalist, *Ogonëk* magazine) expanded on this point:

[A] Russian is always a nuisance. Media people are no different. They need wide [...] open spaces to publish their immortal masterpieces. They also need unlimited blogging space for multiple entries, threaded comments instead of the linear mode, news feeds and updates from friends organized chronologically. We are not fond of changes. If it works, leave it alone! They say you never forget your first love. I could say the same about *LiveJournal*.

Third, the journalists surveyed explained their unwillingness to abandon *LiveJournal* accounts by citing personal traits such as conservatism, passivity, and “nostalgia” (j-blogger *sobakaenot*, male, journalist, provincial newspaper), and saying it would be “a pity to leave” (j-blogger *lchilikova*, female, journalist, RIAN news agency, provincial).

GENERALLY, RUSSIAN JOURNALISTS use blogging professionally in the same way as many journalists worldwide. One of the most important functions of *LiveJournal* is communication. The majority of Russian j-bloggers surveyed recognized that *LiveJournal* is effective for maintaining dialog with an audience and maintaining contact with colleagues and sources.

For example, the j-blogger *kapkoff* (male, TV editor with a state TV channel) got the opportunity “to participate in some interesting journalistic projects, to cooperate with publishing houses”, and “to give interviews to TV channels or for documentary films (about old actors, for example)” after his blogging in *LiveJournal*. Having worked as an editor, the j-blogger *glebtcherkasov* (male, journalist, *Gazeta.ru*, *Kommersant*) looked for new authors in the blogosphere. The j-blogger *christina-sanko* (female, TV journalist with a provincial TV channel) wrote:

I use *LiveJournal* to look for new topics and characters for my live coverage and TV shows and to discuss them with people. *LiveJournal* users have their own views on things. It's interesting to me to hear what they have to say before I make a final decision.

Another important function of *LiveJournal* for j-bloggers is connected with information: finding, processing, delivering, and verifying facts. The j-blogger *skyzmey* (male, journalist, *Kommersant* newspaper, provincial) explained this practice:

[T]he majority of the officials of the regional government and Ulianovsk city have blogs on *LiveJournal* (it's just a fad, a silly fad [...]). That makes it convenient to watch their posts through the *LiveJournal* service. Sometimes there may be some interesting facts or statements which can be used in writing copy. Occasionally, if important issue is being discussed and I am qualified, I may participate. A number of experts and politicians use *LiveJournal* as well [...]

To the j-blogger *dinadina* (female, journalist, online media), *LiveJournal* is both a personal diary and a professional log. As she travels a great deal and meets many people, she keeps track of her experiences and records notes in her blog: “Even 2 or 3 years later I may need a reference, and then *LiveJournal* comes in so handy! I also use it as a place to keep important links”.

The content delivered through *LiveJournal* can take two different forms: original and non-original. In the first case, *LiveJournal* merely works as a “technical” tool for linking to the blogger’s own stories or reposts. Some j-bloggers use *LiveJournal* simply as a tool for conveying content from other platforms, such as stand-alone blogs and websites. The j-blogger *barros* (male, freelancer) explained his motivation:

[A]fter my *LiveJournal* account had been invaded by “brigada_hella” [a community of spammers and trolls], [...] I created a new stand-alone blog and linked it to other popular blogging platforms (including *LiveJournal*) and social media sites too. Now it has become one of many channels I use to promote my publishing [...]. To my mind, *LiveJournal* is not a space for my personal diary, but rather an aggregator of incoming information and networks. Obviously, there are plenty of news aggregators, but the Russian blogosphere is stuck with *LiveJournal* for many reasons, including nostalgia. [...] It is and has been the main arena for public forums in the Russian blogosphere. And that's the reason why it's been attacked by DDoS hackers [...]

Cross-posting allows journalists to remain in touch with former *LiveJournal* users who have switched to other social networking sites and who can still leave comments using OpenID. The j-blogger *darkwren* (male, journalist with a niche magazine) gave a detailed picture of how cross-posting could work, but points out the shortcomings of stand-alone blogs:

My *LiveJournal*, on the other hand, is linked to my other social media accounts. Now when I write a new *LiveJournal* post, it can automatically cross-post its content to Facebook, Twitter or VKontakte. People see the headline and simply follow the link. About 50 percent of my *LiveJournal* readerships are people without *LiveJournal* accounts who come from different social media sites. It's convenient for everyone.

In the second case, *LiveJournal* takes on the function of an alternative media platform for publishing content outside the journalists’ regular work. In this function, it develops journalists’ “personal brands” to such an extent that some even earn money by blogging. The most popular bloggers, those who have more than 1000 followers, can earn money by placing advertisements or writing commissioned copy about products or services for example.

Some well-known and recognizable journalists attract significant audiences to their *LiveJournal* blogs. The j-blogger *amalkevich* used blogging to strengthen his employer’s media company trademark:

“LIVEJOURNAL AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIA PLATFORM PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FULL PROFESSIONAL SELF-EXPRESSION.”

[E]arlier, the blog allowed me to conduct an alternative PR campaign for the TV channel (especially when it didn't have its own site), or to write sketches for my journalistic or scientific and teaching activity – on films or books about policy or public relations, for example.

In some cases, such content has nothing to do with commercial goals and becomes a major focus of public attention. For example, the j-blogger *indeborga* (female, provincial media company) used *LiveJournal* “as a good channel to deliver the message” to government officials: because her blog was monitored by the regional administration and a number of press services, the message unusually reached its addressee. The j-blogger *skyzmey* uses *LiveJournal* in the same way:

I started blogging only because there are subjects which aren't covered in *Kommersant*, where I work, but I feel the necessity of public discussion or simple publicity. [...] When I wanted resonance, to publicize some facts, to raise a problem, or to notify the authorities, I simply wrote posts in *LiveJournal*. In 90 percent of cases, the posts made *Ulpressa's* first page and were widely discussed. [...] It is clear that regional and local officials follow the flow of information and discussions about it. The Kremlin also keeps an eye on it. But, for the same reason, I don't post on *LiveJournal* constantly; I write only when it's necessary.

The j-blogger *starshinazapasa* (male, freelancer) supposes that *LiveJournal* is “already an independent mass medium built into information space” where any “worthy news” can become public: “[I]f I want to write, for example, for *Ekho Moskvy*, *Newsru.com* and *Lenta.ru* – I don't need to write to the *Ekho* or to *Lenta*. I can simply post news in the blog, and then if it is really newsworthy, it will appear in all the news agencies”.

This way of using *LiveJournal* can also be considered to some extent as a compensatory medium for overcoming editorial policy, e.g. censorship or self-censorship. In some cases, editorial restrictions are connected with a medium's format and professional specialization; *LiveJournal* as an alternative media platform provides an opportunity for full professional self-expression.

Conclusions

Journalists' blogging at *LiveJournal*, like other users' blogging, is a unique mixture of private and public, as Gorny observes,⁴² but it is also a mixture of professional and personal matters. The unusual quantity of blogging activity of Russian journalists can be explained by the popularity of the *LiveJournal* platform, which was the first of its kind to become a socio-cultural phenomenon and a public forum in Russia. Second, Russian journalism is traditionally literature-centric and opinionated (that is, advocative), while the blog format is close to classic journalistic genres such as the column, essay, report, and news item. Hence blogging appears to be a suitable tool for Russian journalists.

Communication in *LiveJournal* has a multiplatform character:

the blog platform is interwoven with other social media and some online media (e.g. through OpenID). At the same time, that communication is relatively limited. First, the blog posts are in Russian and about Russia and Russians. Second, the journalists' blogging is mostly bounded within the counter-sphere⁴³ or “parallel public sphere”⁴⁴ because it is frequently merged with social media and linked with “liberal” and “alternative agenda” media. J-blogging can reach the mainstream media mainly when the blogger works for a state media company and shares its political views.

J-BLOGGING IS QUITE politicized, at least during political campaigns. There are also some definite indications that j-bloggers use individual blogs to overcome editorial policy, openly expressing their personal or professional points of view, and use their blogs as a tribune by publishing professionally written texts. In most cases, however, it is difficult to draw a line between the professional and private purposes of j-blogging – in other words, it is difficult to say to what extent *LiveJournal* works as a compensatory medium for journalists' work. When j-bloggers criticize authorities, or reveal officials' crimes in election campaigns for example, are they expressing themselves as journalists or as citizens?

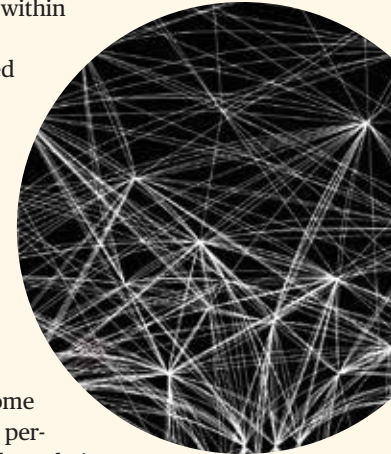
Following Pasti's 2012 statement⁴⁵ that a typical modern Russian journalist, employed in a state or state-controlled media company, usually tries to satisfy his or her creative ambitions outside of regular work, *LiveJournal* can be regarded as a platform for the realization of such needs. If so, we may say that *LiveJournal* is potentially a compensatory medium for Russian journalists; however, such “compensation” would function as a safety valve, letting off pressure.

Consequently, we may logically suppose that the incorporation of j-blogging in the new hybrid media system provides some opportunities for change, but at the same time stabilizes the status quo. The new legislation regarding the official registration of the most popular blogs as mass media in Russia does not add any reason for optimism, but seems to be rather a possible threat to this kind of blogging activity. ❌

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