THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE MOBILIZATION OF GRASSROOTS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIAN CASE

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Abstract

There are a great number of opinions – varying from too optimistic to very skeptical – about the role of the Internet in the stimulating of citizen participation and the promotion of participatory democracy. In this research, an attempt is made to explain the role of the Internet in the mobilization of grassroots social movements, one of the most important forms of citizen participation. Based on the theoretical concepts of social movements, the impact of the Internet on the formation of community ties and its role as an independent and alternative source of information have been analyzed. The same analytical approach is applied in the case of the Russian Internet. Although both analyses show that the Internet itself does not really increase citizen participation and does not stimulate development of grassroots movements, it still has a great mobilization power, which can be used for building of community of well-informed citizens that can serve as a basis for different forms of participatory democracy.

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Introduction

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of new technologies on the development of modern society. The breathtaking evolution of the Internet from the communication tool of American institutes into the global network has stimulated talk about the emergence of new cyber realities and new forms of global communities. Many analysts have connected the development of new networking technologies with the processes of globalization and the export of democratic values such as freedom of expression, freedom of access to information, the right to communicate, and plurality of opinions, mainly from the USA and Western Europe to new democratic states. The Internet has indeed become a powerful channel which provides access to the informational sources of the whole world and allows to everybody transmit her thoughts and opinions in various ways: from one to one, from one to many, and from many to one. Thanks to the Internet, the theoretical concepts of information society – the governance of which is based on the conscious decision of well-informed citizens – have gained an opportunity to be realized into practice.

One of the dimensions where the role of the Internet has been seriously analyzed is the formation of cyber communities. Many researchers have tried to connect the on-line activity of Internet users with the opportunity to increase people's engagement in off-line public life. Some analysts (Sandor Vegh, Dorothy Kidd, Tim Jordan) proclaim that Internet technologies enhance political participation, deliberation, and community ties, whereas other analysts (Cass Sunstein, Barry Wellman, Bruce Bimber) take a more skeptical position, arguing that the Internet by itself can not strengthen community or lead to wider civic participation. On the one hand, with the continuing growth in the number of Internet users and further development of Internet tools, the number of believers in positive role of the Internet in the development of democratic institutes is also increasing. But on the other hand, scholars from the latter group

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recently have come more or less to consensus in their skeptical approach to the democratizing role of the Internet. They consider the Internet as a new medium which may bring some distortions and new features to the existing political landscapes rather than develop necessary conditions for the establishment of participatory democracy.

In my work I research these two approaches through the analysis of the role of the Internet in mobilizing of social movements. Conducting this analysis I try to answer the question whether or not the Internet stimulates the mobilization of grassroots movements and leads to the advanced forms of citizen participation in political and public life. Based on the concepts describing the formation of communities in the Internet and concepts analyzing the role of the Internet as a new alternative medium I try to test two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Online networks present strong communities;

Hypothesis 2: The Internet, characterized by free access to information and unrestricted and uncontrollable freedom of self-expression, stimulates public discussion, or develops the public sphere, which in turn enforce civic participation and active protection of citizen interests and rights.

Uniting these two hypotheses my research question can be also redefined as whether the expanding penetration of the Internet and the continuing development of Internet tools lead to success and development of social movements, which use the Internet as a tool for advocating of community interests – as a mean of participatory democracy.

In order to answer this question I have divided my work into two main parts, one of which is based on a theoretical approach and the other on empirical. In the first part I analyze literature about the mobilizing – mediating, informative, communicative – role of the Internet. Although this analysis allows us to reveal the main approaches to the Internet supported by works of such acknowledged authors as Castells, Sunstein, McGaughey, and others, it has time limitation, as any work made five or ten years ago does not reflect fully modern picture

and can not predict correctly the further development of new technologies and their impact on society.

The Internet also has different meaning for political systems in different states that is why in the second part I analyze the Russian Internet and its impact on the advocacy campaigns in Russia. Many observers either inside or outside of the country have tied their hopes for the democratization of Russian society with the development of new information and communication technologies, including the Internet. This belief is characteristic not only of Russia but of most developing and/or authoritarian societies, in which the Internet has promised to stimulate pluralism of opinions and wider civic participation. This case-analysis method also has its limits, as in other developing or authoritarian countries role of the Internet can be bigger or lower under the influence of different factors. Although both analytical methods have their constraints, they allow us to create picture in which both optimistic and skeptical approaches can be combined. It is important because although it has been proven that the Internet does not lead directly to developed forms of participatory democracy, its evolving nature gives an opportunity for citizens to create and develop strong online ties and shape online environment according to their own and their community needs.

This research attempts to find a balance between popular optimistic understanding of the mobilizing role of the Internet in social movements and more skeptical approach. It does not mean that one of these approaches is overestimated and the other one is underestimated, but rather that they create a distorted understanding of the role of the Internet which has a certain impact on the mobilization of social movements and the development of civic participation. The findings of this work confirm the importance of determining the golden mean between too optimistic belief in the democratizing force of the Internet and too skeptical approach to the Internet as a usual media, controlled by powerful interest groups. Although the Internet has not led to the Golden Age of information society and new era of participatory

democracy people still can transform traditional channels of information flows and communication in such a way that it will also influence political structures of modern states and make them more open and accountable to their citizens.

Chapter 1: The mobilizing role of the Internet

Introduction. Social science about social movements: Resource Mobilization theory.

There is a multitude of definitions of social movements, as social science has developed a number of theories of social movements (SMs). One of the most adopted definitions, introduced by Sidney Tarrow, presents SMs in a broad sense as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (1994, 4). By the word „challenge" Tarrow means the opportunity of ordinary people deprived political decision-making power to influence policy of governing actors. Some scholars (Della Porta, 2006; Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994) consider social movements as an opportunity and a form of participatory democracy, when wider groups of society are engaged in the determining and forming of state policy at different levels: global, country, and local. Through participation in social movements people not only can provide their political or economic interests, but also protect their civil and human rights and promote different social and cultural values. That is why we can refer to social movements a variety of public actions and because of this scholars struggle to find a good definition which could comprise all these varieties.

Although in contemporary studies of social movements, as Canel argues (1997), there are two most dominating theories: New Social Movement theory (NSM) and Resourse Mobilization (RM) theory, for the purposes of my analysis, I have chosen the second one. Despite of the significance of the NSM theory it has a number of weaknesses, which make it especially inappropriate for the analysis of the mobilizing power of the Internet. First, NSM theory focusing on the meaning of SMs in reference to historical, structural, ideological and political processes, does not analyze important elements of social movements such as

development of strategies, the decision-making process and mobilization of resources. Second, NSM theorists „have little to say about organizational dynamics, leadership, recruitment process, goal displacement, and so on" (Canel, 1997). Because this theory is too general and concentrated on cultural dimension of social movements (1997) it is impossible to determine the role of the Internet in mobilization of these movements using this theory. The RM theory in contrast is more effective for the analysis of the micro-contexts and allows to track the whole way of the generation of a particular movement, taking into account multiple factors, which determine this process.

Supporters of resource mobilization theory such as Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, Mayer Zald (1996), and Charles Tilly (1978) underline the importance of resources in mobilization of social movements. They consider networks existing among citizens and commitment to interests and values of such networks as one of the main resources which creates predispositions to action. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani also recognize the role of networks in facilitating recruitment and sustaining participation in collective action: „...people will be more likely to contact organizations and come across opportunities for participation if they are connected to people already involved"; „individuals do not make decisions in isolation but in the context of what other people do, hence the importance of network connections" (2006, 119). Among other mobilization resources, researchers distinguish media, access to which gives the opportunity to distribute information about aims and actions of social movements and in this way shape public opinion and attract new supporters. Resource mobilization theory is especially helpful in defining the role of the Internet in mobilization of social movements, as the Internet is considered both as a facilitator for the creation and sustenance of networks of users and as a medium conveying information in multiple ways.

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From the perspective of Resource Mobilization theory, one of the functions realized by social movements is to generate collective identities, knowledge and information (Salter, 2003, 126). RM theorists consider this function in the framework of the *mobilizing structures (resources)* – "those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action" (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996, 3). In my work I consider the Internet as a part of the mobilizing structures which may help to form community identity and disseminate information and knowledge thereby contributing to the formation and development of social movements. Although the Internet can also be used as a tool for organization of actions and direct advocacy of interests, I analyze only the potential of the Internet to engage people in public life and spring social movements. I evaluate the mobilizing effect of the Internet on citizen participation through the analysis of the principles, which shape online communities and determine flows of information.

Following the logic of two approaches – optimistic and skeptical – towards the mobilizing role of the Internet I have divided the rest of this chapter into two sections. First section, "Optimistic view on the mobilizing role of the Internet", is more descriptive as it mainly based on the examples of efficient Internet campaigns which strengthen belief of users and analysts in significant positive effect of the Internet as a tool stimulating collective action. In the second section, "Critical view on the mobilizing role of the Internet", I refer to critical analysis of the mobilizing effect of the Internet by authors such as Sunstein, Castells, Wellman, Bimber, and Andrew Chadwick. These authors although recognize the impact of the Internet on political life, do not support the opinion that new technologies will inevitably lead to an increase of citizen engagement and the evolution of the existing political regimes in participatory democracies, in which citizens have more opportunity to influence the functioning of political systems. The aim of such analysis is to put into a balance these two

different approaches and define factors which determine the development of the Internet as a mobilization tool.

It is worth mentioning that most of the authors do not consider the role of the Internet directly in the formation of social movements, but expose their concerns with regard to different impacts which the Internet have on social life of people. Thus my analytical approach allows to unit these different analytical works and elaborate comprehensive concept, which helps to define the mobilizing role of the Internet, its positive and negative places, more clearly. Better understanding of this role is a basis, without which it is impossible to involve people in public action and keep them constantly involved through online space and tools.

1. The optimistic view on the mobilizing role of the Internet

The Internet as an interactive multiuser's information source not only helps to distribute information of different kind but also serves as a global collection of knowledge. The Internet has a significant impact on the popularization of knowledge and breaks the monopoly of scholar's circles on knowledge (Abeles and Snyder, 2006) and the monopoly of mass media on public opinion. The influence of the Internet on the formation of public discourse about certain issues is so strong that sometimes hypotheses which have not been proven, or which are even inconsistent with science, are taken for granted, only because they have been consumed by mass-audience. Belief in the effective mobilizing role of the Internet which is supported by many activists using online tools in their campaigns and also by some media scholars is quite powerful. Usually this belief is based on the examples of successful application of on-line tools to mobilize people for active civic participation.

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To determine the sources of popular belief in extremely effective and important role of the Internet in mobilizing of social movements and raising citizen participation I refer to the John Emerson's web page (Emerson, 2005). This web page provides examples of effective public campaigns which were based and achieved an important impact due to the application of Internet technologies. Emerson divides such campaigns according to several criteria. For purposes of my analysis I have chosen criteria related to the role of the Internet as a mobilizer of communities and as a communicating tool: solidarity and tactical communication; and role of the Internet as a media distributing information and forming public opinion.

1.1. The Internet creating community and serving as a communicating tool

1.1.1. Solidarity

Emerson refers to online solidarity actions of Internet users who demonstrate their support for activists, resisting certain governmental initiatives (2005). Nowadays, Internet activists have elaborated different tools and users have a great number of options to demonstrate their solidarity with activists struggling against government abuses, violation of human rights and freedoms by governments and corporations, or trying to raise awareness or attract support in solving of public issues. Solidarity with activists is quite often demonstrated through the signing of petitions. Organizers of social movements can distribute petitions via their web-sites or e-mail lists or through special web sites like www.care2.com, which distribute information and petitions for different movements. Internet solidarity can also take an active form as in the case of earthquake in Haiti, when Internet users from all over the world transferred money via online deposits and helped attract financial and other support for Haitians suffered from the earthquake (The Huffington Post). Even if supporters do not take

active part in campaigns or social movements, the passive support of actions taken by activists allows them to assess public opinion on certain issues and guarantees support to activists which is especially important in opposing to government.

1.1.2. Tactical communication

According to Emerson, tactical communication refers to the mobilization of people through the usage of the Internet or other electronic communications both before and during collective actions (2005). One of the most famous examples is the anti-globalist movement, which organizes mass-protests at the cities where summits of countries of G7 and WTO take place. Activists of this movement use spreadsheets, email lists and social networking services to disseminate information about organized protest actions and coordinate such actions by other communication means, like pagers and cell phones (Kidd, 2003; Vegh, 2003; Elin, 2003). Because of the specific features of the Internet which determine it as "a horizontal, non-controlled, relatively cheap, channel of communication, from one-to-one as well as from one-to-many" (Castells, 2001, 157), tactical communication via the Internet is quick, covering wide scale, flexible, and sometimes more effective than via traditional media, access to which can be restricted by state or certain interest groups (corporations).

1.1.3. Information distribution and independent medium

Emerson describing this criterion emphasizes efficiency of the Internet as an information channel for the distribution of information about movement goals, mission, actions, reports, and so on through website, email, listservs, bulletin boards, chat rooms, etc (2005). Beyond the information distributed by activists for their particular purposes, it is

worth mentioning that in many cases the Internet serves as a national source of alternative information, which is not available through other media, like TV or printed media. Such situations are especially characteristic of non-democratic states, where the Internet becomes the only channel providing information about the internal situation in a state or assisting in the forming of appropriate understanding of foreign affairs. Jordan's research of cyber power supports this point and emphasizes the importance of a free Internet for developed democracies as well, where Internet forums and blogs provide valuable critical view on the actions of governments (1999, 163-164). According to Vegh this informative role of the Internet stimulates public discussion and can be considered as a fundamental in the organization and development of social movements (2003). The point that informed people take a more active part in the life of a society is also supported by sociologists such as Putnam and Shah (Putnam, 1995; Shah, 2001).

It is not surprising that many Internet researchers and users taking in consideration these criteria and examples are quite optimistic in their conclusions about the mobilizing power of the Internet: some of them suppose that networking via the Internet makes movement more flexible and diverse (Castells, 2006, 142), whereas others even believe that "the Internet is the tool of the non-establishment and that will change the political power structure" (Elin, 2003, 100). This leads to the growing of two popular beliefs. First, the Internet stimulates the formation of online communities which can be easily mobilized for off-line actions. Second, the online information space, saturated by diverse sources of information and opinions, stimulates public discussion of important political and public issues, which contributes to the development of robust public sphere. The aim of the next section is to analyze the nature of such online communities, the impact of the Internet as a

medium on them, and the possibility of the formation of self-organized grassroots movements based on the community of Internet users.

2. The critical view on the mobilizing role of the Internet

To determine which factors impact on the formation of the community of citizens which can be mobilized for the protection or promotion of their interests we need refer to some classical works on the formation of social ties. In this regard most authors appeal to the Putnam's term of social capital – "the features of social organization such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1995, 67) – and Habermas's definition of public sphere – which "encouraged rational forms of political deliberation away from the tentacles of state control and allowed public opinion to develop" (Habermas, 1991, 27). Based on these two concepts, most researchers determine the existence of networks of people sharing common values and ideas, the networks which exist out of established system of political institutions, as a basis for mobilizing of social movements. It is worth mentioning that these networks "include the range of everyday life micro-mobilization structural social locations that are not aimed primarily at movement mobilization, but where mobilization may be generated" (McCarthy, 1996, 141). Online communities are popularly considered as such "social locations".

The analysis of the works of RM theorists provided by Conel (1997) shows that only social networks which are strengthened by group coherence and strong horizontal ties can mobilize social movement. Such elements as group identity and solidarity allow leaders of social movements attract members of social networks to the urgent political or public issues, which require collective action to be solved. "In other words, they [social networks] facilitate mobilization by providing precarious organizational bases from which more complex forms

of organization can develop" (Conel, 1997). To understand whether or not online communities present a basis for the mobilization of people's offline participation we should analyze network ties and such elements as values and ideas which shape modern online communities.

2.1. Online communities and possibility to mobilize online communities

According to Wellman's research (2002) and Castells's analysis (2006), people usually use the Internet and other new communication technologies to keep their connections with people whom they know in the offline world. These new technologies are considered as "an important, complementary component of voluntary local interaction" (Wellman, 2002, 308) which supplements public and political activities. However, both analysts agree that it does not change people's level of involvement. Many observers also emphasize the growing commercialization of the Internet and its transformation into the global entertaining sphere which does not stimulate closer ties between users, but rather stimulates greater affiliation of consumer's preferences with particular products and services. These two facts confirm the important role of the Internet as a communication tool and sphere for socialization, mainly for entertainment purposes, but they do not provide an evidence of the development of strong community ties within online networks, which can be used for the mobilization of a social movement.

A number of researchers also point to such features of Internet communities as anonymity, lack of commitment, and fluid relationships prevailing among their members. All these contribute to the formation of *weak* (Castells, 2006) or *thin* (Bimber, 1998) ties among Internet users which encourage "superficial, anonymous or misleading interaction" (Bimber, 1998, 151), but not active political or social cooperation and participation. Such ties are less

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strong then ties existing in the traditional social institutions like family, locality, religion or even political organizations like political party or lobby groups (Chadwick, 2006, 26). In this regard Castells suggests identify online societies as networks of individuals, who communicate with each other on the basis of their interests, values and affinities, but who still put individual interests prior to the community's interests (2006, 130 – 132). The thin ties of such networks make the "public interest dependent upon the convergence of personal interests" (Bimber, 148), that is why the possibility of mobilization of such networks is lower than in traditional community as, for example, political party or labor union. Online communities reminds by their features mass parties described by Putnam in his "Bowling alone", in which number of participants is great, but level of commitment to party's values and mission, and readiness to take active role in the functioning of a party are low.

Another feature of online networks, the high level of polarization, also impedes the mobilization of a broad civic community. According to Sunstein (2007), societies and communities which form in the online environment are established not only on principles of common shared interests, but often on common approaches and system of values of their members. This leads to the situation when "groups of like-minded people, engaged in discussion with one another, will end up thinking the same thing they thought before – but in more extreme form"(2007, 60). This means that the Internet, instead of forming independent strong public sphere, rather stimulates further polarization and fragmentation of society on groups supporting different political forces of the offline world. Such groups will more probably act according to the will of politicians or popular activists than create independent self-organized social movements, defending interests of majority of civic community.

It can be seen that the Internet does not create strong thick communities of citizens which can be easily mobilized for political action or social movement. Instead it facilitates the formation of thin networks of individuals, who join and support different online groups for

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their personal goals. This makes the possibility for mobilizing of such groups and stimulating the participation of their members very low, as members are more concerned about their own benefits and losses from such participation than mutual gain or loss of the whole community. As people pursue quite different aims, it is difficult to come to a consensus about which actions should be taken. On the other hand the Internet is a fertile soil for the promotion and development of already existing political forces, like political parties and different public organizations. These organizations can easily attract new supporters and translate their ideas and values via the Internet and this stimulates the fragmentation and polarization of online society, what is characteristic of real world social structure. Thus the Internet should be considered not as the public sphere stimulating a deliberative participation of citizens in public life, as it happens in the framework of social movements, but rather as a medium which increases strength of the existing political forces and not of the community of citizens as itself.

2.2. Independence of the Internet as a mass medium

The role of the Internet as a medium, independent and accessible for everybody, which creates diversity of opinions and stimulates public discussions – a supportive environment for social movements – is also doubtful. Although some scholars argue that weak ties "increase the size of the information pool from which an individual can draw when deciding how to act" (Chadwick, 2006, 105), in reality the Internet, because of its unrestricted access, also suffers of diversity of quality of information, where many sources are not really reliable. Having information of low quality or even rumors, false reports and propaganda, citizens can hardly make right decision about what kind of action to take. In many cases, people

cautiously approach news from the Internet. Distrust to this form of mass media also blocks citizen participation as they are not confident in their ability to make right decision.

Sunstein also critically assesses the information circulated in the World Wide Web. He argues that the Internet creates polarized groups of users which tend to read like-minded points of view that in result leads to the dissemination of biased, or even extremely biased, information among the users of closed groups (2007, 145). It means that people operate only by limited information as their sources provide only short range of information directly related to the interests of a user's group and often with some dominating ideological flavor. As a result, informational networks created online do not stimulate robust public discussion because people operate along discrepant information and have polarized opinions on issues and events happening in a society. In such a fragmented society it is perhaps difficult to come to consensus and elaborate the common acceptance of public action.

These features of the information environment of the Internet do not contradict the fact that the Internet can be used as the mobilizer of a society through the dissemination of certain information. Although the online world of multiple groups can not organize itself for direct action of users-citizens, it can be activated by the traditional political actors, as political parties, lobby groups, mass media corporations, NGOs, and new actors – online community leaders. The examples which I have provided in section 1 of this chapter confirm that different actors can achieve quite significant results in the attraction and mobilization of masses applying different online tools and new means of communication. An important difference of the online distribution of information from the distribution of information by the offline technologies (press, TV, radio and telephone) that, thanks to the low cost and great scale, the majority of experienced Internet users can realize the role of informational sources, whereas traditional media is more restricted in its access and only owners of media can form public opinion through the translated information. Although access to sources, which shape

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public opinion and can mobilize people, is expending with the growing penetration of the Internet, it is still political and public actors who shape public opinion and enforce public action, and not Internet society by itself.

In short the Internet is not a free information space which broadens outlook of citizens and makes them more informed and prepared to take active part in public life. The Internet provides new and more accessible options for the distribution of information and mobilization of society through the distributed information (message), but it (the Internet) is still medium, which can be used successfully not by everybody, but by limited group of people and organizations. These people and organizations, thanks to their knowledge and experience, shape online networks and control to a certain extent information flows, in this way possessing the ability to raise social movement or public action.

Conclusion

As analyzed research works show, the Internet is rather a transformed pattern of the offline world which is governed by different political forces and groups of interest, than public sphere that facilitates direct action and direct participation of citizens. The belief that the Internet increases the number of information sources and stimulates public debate is also questionable. The Internet, like any other medium, is just a tool which is successfully used for aims of certain groups of society, whereas other users prefer simply consume Internet products: news sites, informational sites and blogs, different Internet campaigns etc. It makes the Internet similar to other mass media used by groups of influence, political and public actors, in order to shape public opinion and achieve their particular interests.

The Internet is still evolving because the development of new technologies, growing penetration of communicating means, and the changing policy of states' and non-states'

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institutions have a great impact on its shape and content. That is why we can hope that the situation with the improvement of citizen participation by means of online tools will change in future and the Internet will really become a direct channel communicating the demand of citizens with the decisions of politicians.

The Internet and global online community is not a homogeneous community and because it is highly dependent on the external offline socio-political factors, it has a different meaning and influence in public and political spheres in different societies. To better understand the process of shaping of online society and factors which determine this process in the next chapter I analyze the perception of the mobilizing power of the Internet in Russia, where many observers placed high expectations on the spread of new technologies and the penetration of the Internet. Some analysts and activists both inside and outside the country hoped that this could stimulate citizen participation and public activity.

Chapter 2: The Internet and online advocacy campaigns in Russia

Introduction

The Russian Internet, which has significantly grown in the last 8 years (Chart 1) and continues to grow and evolve, has been of the particular interest of Western research institutes. The project Russian-cyberspace.org, developed by a group of scholars from Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, the UK, and the United States (in 2008 renamed as Digital Icons), several research initiatives jointly developed by Berkman Center and the community of Global Voice bloggers, and 2008 research project of the Reuters Institute of Oxford University, all of them are aimed on the analysis of the evolutional processes in the Russian Internet. Most of these studies approach the Russian Internet as a public space, special and, to a certain extent, autonomous from the offline and especially political world, which functions according to its internal rules and therefore has great creative potential and freedom (Schmidt and Teubener, 2007, 66). Using this approach researchers have provided view from inside of Russian online society that allows us to analyze the internal ties between members of online communities and the functioning of information flows. The empirical character of this approach is especially important for studies of the Internet and its impact on citizen activity, as it takes into account the perceptions and practices of users as well as other internal factors which determine power of the Russian Internet as a mobilizer of grassroots social movements.

Chart 1. Russian Internet audience 2002-2008. (Fond Obshestvennogo Mnenija, 2009)
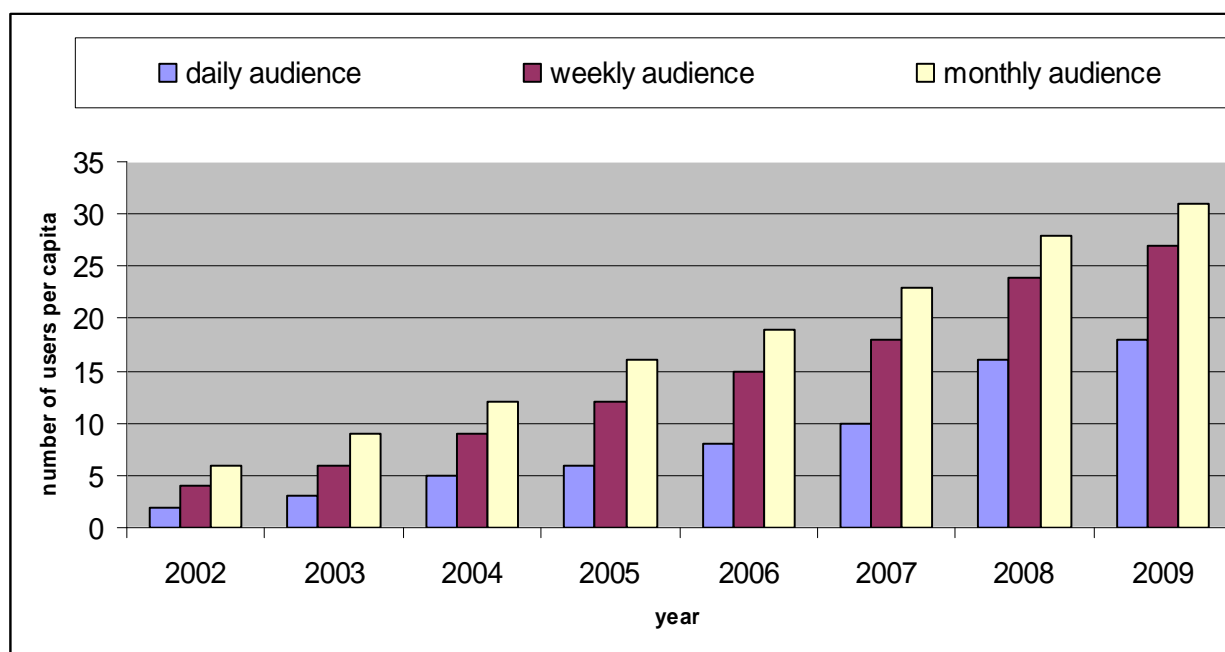
Following the logic of the previous chapter I also, first, introduce examples of recent and most prominent online campaigns in Russia and then research communication and information characteristics of Russian online communities through an analysis of the literature produced in the framework of the mentioned projects. This method again helps me to keep in balance between optimistic and skeptical approaches to the mobilizing role of the Internet and demonstrates that Russian society, like most other societies, has already adapted to virtual space and can successfully apply its tools for the stimulation of public activity in real world. The selected literature presented in the third section of this chapter reveals the internal structures of Russian Internet society. Thus the chosen Russian case and the related literature allow us to analyze democratizing power of the Internet in the conditions of real life situation, as the collected knowledge demonstrates the effect of the Internet on the development of social movements and citizen participation in particular country and in particular period of time.

1. The Internet in Russia – background information

It would be over ambitious to argue that the analyzed case of the Russian Internet can be extrapolated and applied to the cases of other countries. Although Internet societies enjoy a certain level of autonomy and freedom of expression and access to information, in different states this level is different and depends on a number of factors. Beyond of different levels of computerization, computer literacy, penetration and development of the Internet and online tools in different societies, the policies of such political actors as governments, political parties, private companies, and others have a great impact on the evolution of the Internet and online society. For instance, Internet regulation by the government in Russia is less strict than in China, but it is still not comparable with Western Democratic states in which government is rather the intermediary between the public and the corporations who indeed control online space. All these factors and the political structure of a state, providing certain amount of opportunities to influence on government policy through social movements as a form of public participation, vary from country to country.

The growing level of Internet penetration and its active usage have allowed Russia to leave behind such countries as France and South Korea in terms of online population (Appendix, table 1). However, in terms of the ratio of Internet users to general population of country, Russia is far behind of these states and closer to such countries as Brazil and Turkey. The level of Internet penetration, which depends on infrastructure, cost of the Internet services, the level of urbanization and so on, is not similar in different parts of Russia. There is a great difference in the level of Internet accessibility between central cities like Moscow and St-Petersburg, which demonstrate level comparable with European cities (59%), and the rest of the country (Chart 2; Table 2, Appendix). However, particularly, regions have demonstrated a significant growth in the number of Internet users, whereas the already high level of Internet penetration in Moscow and St-Petersburg has shown slower growth rates

(Baharev, 2010). Thanks to the growing income of the population and spread of new communication technologies the online community has increased significantly. This allows us count the Internet in Russia as a really important public medium, connecting users with their peers both inside the country and in the outside world and providing sources of information additional to the traditional media.

Another important feature of the Russian Internet which influences to certain extent its internal structure is the role of the state. Although the government does not use filtering and blocking software and other strict measures of the Internet regulation, as, for example, Chinese government does, still some forms of state interference exist. Ronald Deibert and Rafal Rohozinski in their analysis of the regulation existing in the sphere of Ru.net, which besides Russia includes the remaining 10 countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Georgia, define the Russian Internet as a selectively regulated (Table 1; Table 3, Appendix) (Deibert and Rohozinski, 2010). Among the most serious forms of the state intervention are attempts to regulate content in the framework of the legislative acts and the power of the intelligence services to monitor the online content and legally order to Internet Services Providers (ISP) to block web sites, threatening to the security and order of Russia. Because the authorities have a great freedom in the interpretation of such legal terms as defamation, slander, and "veracity", often anti-governmental web sites or web sites publishing information criticizing local authorities are blocked and their creators are prosecuted. This inevitably puts certain constraints on the online activity of users and especially critics of the political regime and potential organizers of social movements. Nevertheless this control is not total, and political activists themselves argue that all these barriers can be overcome by professional users (Asmolov, 2009).

Chart 2. Comparison of Internet penetration by regions (Yandex, 2010).

	Population of region, +18, mln. people	Internet penetration, % of the region population
■ Population of region, +18, mln. people		
■ Internet penetration, % of the region population		
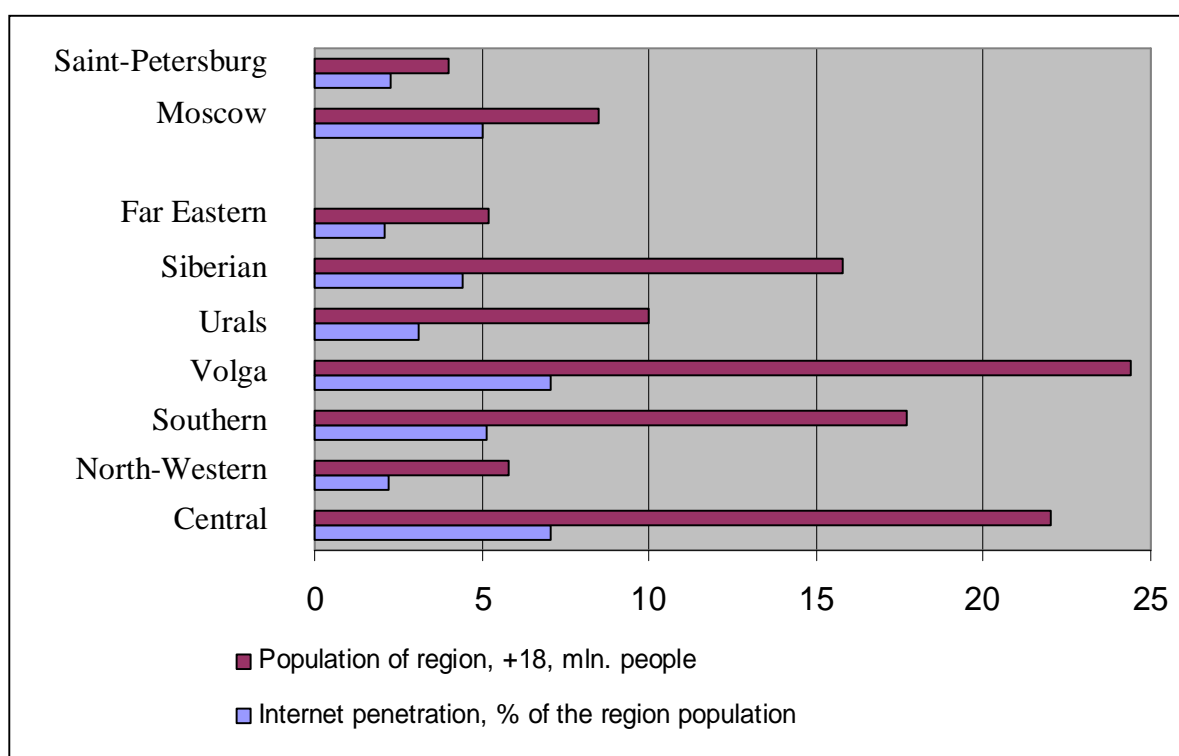
Table 1. Summary results ONI testing for Internet filtering, 2007-2008 (Deibert and

Rohozinski, 2010, 23)

	No Evidence	Suspected	Selective	Substantial	Pervaisive
Armenia			×		
Azerbaijan			×		
Belarus			×		
Georgia			×		
Kahakhstan			×		
Kyrgyzstan			×		
Moldova	×				
Tajikistan			×		
Turkmenistan					×
Russia			×		
Ukraine	×				
Uzbekistan				×	

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The presented statistic data and brief description of the state interference show that Russia is quite a unique case. Although I have not presented all other factors which can influence and determine shape and content of the online space in Russia, it is obvious that under the impact of these factors characteristics of the usage of the Internet and of the online communities in Russia differ from these characteristics in other countries. However, the aim of my research and this particular chapter is not to generalize findings on all other cases, but rather to demonstrate how the mobilizing power of the Internet works in real life and how it evolves depending on the external conditions. That is why the case of the Russian Internet can be considered as a real life model, in which the mobilizing power of the Internet to raise grassroots social movements is determined by a number of factors.

2. Internet campaigns in Russia.

The increasing Russian Internet population has also made possible development of the Internet as a supporting environment for social movements and public campaigns. In this section I present examples of Russian online campaigns based on the criteria introduced above in the section 1.1 of the first chapter.

2.1. Solidarity

Separated protests against the abuses of the militia (police in Russia), which started in spring 2009, in October – November of that year evolved in the public campaign covering the entire country (Za kapital'nyi remont milicii). Organizations and communities presented online played an important role in this campaign which was barely presented at TV and printed media. One of the most prominent events related to this campaign was a video made

by major of the militia, Alexei Dymovskiy. In this video he addressed to the president Dmitry Medvedev and the prime-minister Vladimir Putin evidence of the corrupt practices and the abuses of power in his police department and asked them to solve the problem of corruption in the Russian militia. The video was first uploaded on Alexei's website (Dimovkiy Alexei), then appeared on Youtube and later was quickly distributed through the online network. At the beginning the video caused a great public reaction, bulk of the online community showed sympathy and support to the brave major. But then Russian authorities blamed Dymovskiy for making libeling statements and also accused him the "fraud committed by a person using his official position" (Prava Cheloveka v Rossii, 2009). Although some human rights activists supported the major and some public protests against the arrest of Dymovskiy took place, public opinion was already affected and divided into supporters and people doubting whether the major was moved by some political forces. This case demonstrates importance of the Internet because the whole campaign for the reform of the militia and the story of the major Dimovskiy were actively discussed in Russian blogs and thanks to this get a wide public resonance.

2.2. Tactical communication

The Internet can stimulate the development not only of occasional movements and public actions, but also of the originaly planned actions addressing particular public issues. The ecologist campaign „SAVE UTRISH" is aimed at preserving unique forest of the Krasnodar region and preventing the construction of roads and administrative buildings on its territory (Spasem Utrish). One of the distinctive features of this campaign is the creative and successful use of online technologies by its activists, who managed to organize several simultaneous protest actions in different cities in Russia and abroad and attract the attention of

vast groups of society to this ecological problem. Activists have also attracted the support of international environmental organziations, such as Greenpeace and WWF, and organized constant communication with all supporters of the campaign through the website and pages of the campaign on Vkontakte (the most popular Russian social networking service) and LiveJournal (the most popular blog service in Russia). The organizers of the campaign have succeded to a certain extent in the achievment of their goal and the construction of the road has been postponed (Krasnodarskij kraj, 2010). As in Alexei Dimovskiy's case, the Russian authorities have also played an important role in the „Save Utrish" campaign. Instead of attracting the public to this issue and involving people in its discussion, the local government tried to hush up this deal, persuading or threatening activists to stop their campaign (Spasem Utrish).

2.3. Information distribution and Independent Media

Both previous examples demonstrate the effective use of online tools for the dissemination of information by Russian activists that allows them to attract new supporters and organize public action. Another merit of the Russian Internet is the diversity of opinions and sources presented on it. There is a wide spectrum of professional pro-government, neutral and oppositional online mass media (printed, audio and video) which cover political and public events within Russia and abroad. The public life of Russian society is also widely discussed on different forums and now very popular blogs. Russians with knowledge of English and other foreign languages have also access to great collections of worldwide information resources and can form independent and impartial opinions on current events. Although we can not say that the Russian Internet is absolutely free, as the government, having direct power under the providers of Internet services, still controls online content and

from time to time bans some oppositional websites, users have a great opportunity to receive diverse information on different public issues and express their opinion on these issues online.

Despite the fact that the government preserves a certain level of control and restriction on the Internet, this does not eliminate opportunities for public action and social movements organized through the application of Internet tools. The mentioned campaigns show that the Russian Internet has a great potential for the mobilization of citizen participation. In turn such campaigns create belief in the power of the Internet to change society and the political regime. In the next section I analyze the present literature of different researchers of the Russian Internet and reveal its particular characteristics which stimulate or suppress the formation of publicly active online communities and the development of plural public discourse that in their turn lead to increased citizen participation and advanced forms of participatory democracy.

3. The critical view on the Russian Internet

I have selected a wide range of analytical works on the Russian Internet in order to present a complete picture of Russian online society, activities of its members and factors which determine these activities and flow of information within the virtual space. Thanks to the contribution of Russian and international researchers changes in the Russian Internet are easily traceable and I have an opportunity to analyze and present the Internet as a dynamic phenomenon, the mobilizing power of which can be changed over the time by actors.

3.1. Russian online communities

In order not to break logical chain in this section devoted to Russian online communities I use the same analytical characteristics as in section 2.1. of chapter 1. First, the analysis of recent surveys (RunetJob.ru, 2008) shows that most Russians use the Internet and related to it services for their personal needs: searching for necessary information, downloading interested music and movies. Communication Internet services – like chat-rooms, forums, blogs and social networks – are also much in demand, but even these services people mainly use for the "construction of their personalities" (Gorny, 2004, 20). As Anatolij Vorobej, one of the most active and oldest Russian bloggers, emphasizes: "The overwhelming majority of journals in LiveJournal are very personal and devoted mainly to the events in the writers' private lives, descriptions of their everyday activities and communication with people known in real life…" (Gorny, 2006, 75). The recent tendency of shifting "locus of online social activity in Russia" from blogs to social networking sites (Alexanyan, 2009, 11) also proves that for most of Russian users, the Internet is a complementary communication tool, which helps to keep connections with offline friends and acquaintances. Thus the personal interests of users determine the shape and content of created online networks, but not the desire to support and develop common ties for interests of a community itself.

The predominant individual interests determine the kind of ties existing between members of Russian online communities. Gorny, analysing communities of Russian bloggers, stresses that the continuing growth of these communities has made them less united and solid then before (2006, 83). Because of the mass-population of LiveJournal, its old members do not feel previous intimacy of their members-ties and therefore become less committed to their original community (2006, 85-87). This trend in the Russian blogosphere is quite unique. Many analists (Gorny 2004, Alexanyan and Alto 2009, Kuznetsov 2004, Leibov 2003) maintain that for a long time the Internet in Russia had been explored and developed by a

relatively small group of people, a sort of online intelligentsia, who used it to support their cultural ties. Later when the Internet became more accessible for broad masses in Russia, this creative and well-educated community started to explore LiveJournal, which has become so popular largley thanks to their diligence. Now when the Internet is accessible for majority of Russians and the population of the Russian part of LiveJournal achieved more than 1.5 mln. users (LiveJournal, 2010), the significance of these very creative people and their community has decreased, as their voices sink in the cacophony of the extensive Runet community. Not only for this group of users but for any, it is difficult to preserve intimacy of their ties and purity of their original union, as each new member adds a new vision and approach. As a result, the Russian Internet and, also to a certain extent, LiveJournal.ru now present a huge network of weakly tied members, who mainly persuit their own interests and do not really ready to act collectively.

Another feature of online networks – the polarization of groups according to certain common values and interests – which I analyzed in the previous chapter, is also characteristic of the Russian Internet. That groups of people who managed to create online communities distinguishable and independent from the mass of users usually evolve in relatively closed communities supporting extreme opinion on certain issues. Amongst them are Russian nationalist communities or communities positioning themselves as an opposition to mainstream cultural trends (in cinema or music or art) or existing political system. Fossato and Lloyd, analyzing online presence and campaigns of Russian nationalist groups and in another case of Russian oppositional party „Drugaya Rossia", conclude that in both cases the organizers did not manage to attract strong support of population as they were divided from inside and therefore did not have a voice strongly united and appealing to wide social groups (2008). The polarization is a common feature of most Russian forums, chat-rooms and blogs, which have been formed a relatively long time ago and which are, in fact, closed to

newcomers, not absolutely sharing opinion of their members and demonstrating commitment to ideals of these communities. This polarization and fragmentation of Russian online society undermines the opportunity for the development of robust public discourse and elaboration of decisions for common action.

As we can see, Russian online society is atomized and polarized at the same time. The existing online environment is not robust public sphere, which supports public discussion based on plurality of opinions and which stimulates collective action of its members, but is rather a reflection of the existing socio-political reality of modern Russia (Fossato and Lloyd, 2008; Gorny, 2009; Sidorenko, 2010). That is why in the Russian Internet, as well as in Russian society, different political actors struggle for the right to shape public opinion and attract wider groups of supporters. This decreases the chances for the development of social movements, protecting and promoting common public good, either in online space or in offline Russian society.

3.2. The Russian Internet as an alternative source of information and space for public discourse?

The merit of the Russian Internet as the information medium, which has been cherished by human rights activists within and outside Russia, in fact, also should be understood more critically. The data presented during the Russian Internet Week 2009 (Arslanov, 2009) shows that Moscow Internet users mainly receive their news by mailing from such mail services as Yandex and Mail.ru. These two sources take up seventh and eighth positions respectively among all mass media providing news services (on the first place TV channel "The First Channel"). Taking into account that the level of the Internet penetration in the regions is even lower than in Moscow and preferences of regional users are not very different from Moscow citizens', it becomes obvious that the majority of users get their news

from mail services, which deliberately publish mainly provocative and entertainment news (Lapina-Kratasyuk, 2009b). Such news does not create the authentic picture of political reality and therefore is not really helpful in the stimulation of robust public discussion, as they create biased and extreme opinions from the beginning.

There are also professional media, which are quite well presented in Russian online space by Lenta.ru, Gazeta.ru, and Kommersant.ru (The last one is an online version of the popular daily newspaper Kommersant, other popular offline mass media are also highly presented in the online sphere and have their regular audience). These media, positioned as neutral, try to provide unbiased professional coverage of different political and public events both inside Russia and outside its boarders. Nevertheless these media belong to pro-governmental groups of oligarchs and therefore may interpret certain issues in the ways necessary for their owners, or even do not provide information on certain issues at all. For example, Lapina-Kratasyuk emphasizes one-sided interpretation of the Russian-Georgian conflict by the Russian media, including online media, in August 2008 (Lapina-Kratasyuk, 2009a). Social unrest is usually covered by these media selectively, and often users receive such information from blogs or their friends through social networks. For instance, popular in Russia social networking service "Vkontakte" is on the 15 place in the rating of popularity of mass media (Arslanov, 2009), and it is actively explored by activists and organizers of social movements. With regard to blogs and discussion groups on LiveJournal, they often provide diverse information which is quite professionally collected and presented, including information on issues which are silenced in the traditional media. Nevertheless blogs are among the less popular information sources and usually used by the most advanced and well-educated Internet users, most of whom live in Moscow (Lapina-Kratasyuk, 2009b).

It is clear although the unrestricted access to the global net allows Russian users to receive information from multiple and diverse sources, in result, this does not lead to the

formation of plurality of public opinion and robust public discussion of the most important public issues. The majority of users consume news, from the informational sources of low quality and only a minor part of online society tries to approach diverse sources, analyze issues and form their own independent opinion. According to the famous Russian sociologist Boris Dubin: "Russia's society… is essentially 'guided by simple, quite archaic frameworks…'" (Fossato and Lloyd, 2008, 52), and therefore have a poor impression of real political situation in the country and the world. It is worth mentioning that the government and large media corporations use this situation for their benefit, trying to manipulate by public opinion. In Dimovskiy's case, when officials blamed the major in the spreading of libeling statements and collaboration with foreign organizations, most people suddenly lost interest to this story. This again confirms that the state uses dominating public distrust of social institutions, including mass media, and even if the government can not persuade the population, it can at least discourage the supporters of its opponents. This atmosphere, in which distrust dominates in public sphere and online mass media are controlled by political actors, diminish the possibility for the development of social movements or public actions, which in any case is oppositional to the authorities at some level and to a certain extent.

Conclusion

The analysis carried out in this chapter has confirmed two main arguments of the theoretical part of this work. First, the online community is rather network of individuals connected with each other by thin ties and therefore it is not a community which can be easily mobilized for social movements. Most Russian users spend their time in the Internet for leisure or business purposes and only the minority is really involved in some discussions and online activities on blogs, like LiveJournal, or other social media. Second, the Internet as a

source of alternative information, with regard to the information provided by traditional media, which are in Russia mainly controlled by the state, is not fully exploited by users. Although the number of users is growing steadily in Russia, only small part of the online population reads news and reads them from diverse sources. This leads to the narrow opinion of the citizens on political and public issues, which is often manipulated by different political actors. This poor political awareness and interest of Russian Internet users, as well as Russian citizens in common, leaves little chance for the effective organization and development of public actions and other forms of citizen participation, based on online communities.

At the same time the Russian Internet is a unique case as the external factors existing in the offline socio-political environment realize significant impact on the evolution of the Internet as a space for communication and as a mass medium. The atomized and apolitical character of the Russian society and the great involvement and impact of the state institutions in all areas of public life transform the Internet adding to it characteristics of the modern Russian socio-political system. This finding does not contradict to the findings of the theoretical part, but rather confirms that the online public sphere does not exist independently from the outside offline world. It evolves with the evolution of a society and political forces dominating in a society. It means that the opportunity for the development of citizen participation and increasing power of social movements depends mainly on factors existing in real world and the Internet is only complementary medium, which can be used for the mobilization of society. This mobilizing medium is a more effective in the hands of some experienced and powerful actors and less – in weakly tied communities of users-citizens. Although these findings support skeptical view on the power of the Internet to mobilize citizen participation in the next final chapter I analyze measures and actions which can stimulate the evolution of the Internet in this direction. As Russian case has shown the Internet is an evolving public space that is why it can be transformed in something close to

the public sphere described by Habermas; the sphere which exists to a certain extent independently from the political sphere and which enhance public discourse and active citizen participation.

Chapter 3: Developing the mobilizing power of the Internet – reshaping public sphere

The analyses provided in both previous chapters confirm the existence of obstacles common for online space of any country, which impede the development of the Internet as a robust public sphere and mobilizer of active citizen participation in political and public life. These obstacles are weak ties within communities of users and absence in many cases of robust public discussion and interest to political and public issues by users. The analysis has also confirmed that the Internet can be transformed by different external factors and groups of interest, using online tools and the online sphere for the achievement of their political purposes, commercial benefit or individual interests. Based on these two facts – existing barriers and the evolving nature of the Internet – in this final chapter I propose more pro-active approach to the role of the Internet as a facilitator of grassroots social movements. Keeping the balance between optimistic and skeptic approaches analyzed in this work, I develop the framework for the policies which can improve the role of the Internet as a public sphere and stimulate citizen participation at different levels. For this purpose I determine the main actors and directions for these developing policies.

Actors

Based on the analysis conducted in the previous chapters, in this section I explain the roles of main actors and the overarching framework of actions which they should take in order to facilitate the development of the Internet as a mobilizer of citizen participation.

State

Russian case has shown that a state can have a significant impact on the development of the Internet both as a public space and as the information medium. In order to stimulate citizen participation, governments should protect freedom of expression and the right to communicate, and provide access to public information for all citizens and representatives of other states having interest and/or necessity for such information. Governments should take some measures (legislative acts, regulating bodies, support of traditions of investigative journalism in mass media) to prevent the dissemination of false information in the Internet which may cause damage to society or groups of society, but should not try to regulate informational flows selectively in the manual mode. These measures should be based on International law and should not infringe the mentioned human rights and freedoms. Further step in the increasing power of the Internet as the mobilizer of a society is the development of e-governance systems and tools in the communication and cooperation between government and society. These systems and tools not only provide direct access to state information for public organizations and citizens, but also create opportunities for citizens to be more involved in the decision-making process and directly impact on decisions of politicians.

The private sector

Private sector also should take a more responsible role in the development of the Internet. It is maybe naïve to expect that corporations highly visible in the online sphere and using Internet tools for promoting of their goods and ideas, and as a result shaping public opinion, will act in the opposite to their profit-driven logic; but a more socially responsible and green approach to the Internet can improve their reputation and create more robust

environment for the online trade of goods and exchange of information. Private companies should be more careful in the using of online medium, not contaminating environment with the mass of disturbing banners and false, unproven, or propagandistic information that diminish trust in the Internet as an independent medium. The private sector should also develop collaborations with civil society through online instruments: reveal information about its activities especially that ones affecting public interest, support the development of impartial public online mass media and collaborate with citizens and public organizations on different issues.

Civil Society

For civil society organizations the Internet has become an indispensable. Nowadays, most social campaigns, public actions and even some political organizations, like political parties, keep contact with their members, provide them with the necessary information and coordinate activities via online. In online space, as well as in offline, civil society organizations and movements should play role of the watchdog – preventing and condemning government or private sector abuses, supporting access of citizens to diverse and reliable sources of information and stimulating citizen involvement in activities aimed at protection of human rights and freedoms. As in case of traditional mass media civil society institutions should struggle for the freedom of expression and the protection of journalists and bloggers from government prosecution and oppositional media from shutting down. Civil society should not only protect, but also facilitate the development of the Internet as a free mass medium, providing reliable information and plurality of opinions.

Online community leaders

The Internet, due to its multidimensional communication characteristics, increases the opportunities for an individual to take part in the social and political processes at the level of local community, state or even global society. As the analysis has shown not every Internet user becomes an important player in creating online networks. However, the most experienced and active, like in blogging, commenting on different mass media articles and posting different news and opinions on current political and public events, have the power to shape public opinion and impact on the development of social ties. These online community leaders are the new actors whom the Internet introduces in addition to the traditional political actors mentioned here. Having solid public trust and respect, these leaders become a new link between all existing socio-political institutions and public sphere, which presents the fundamental level of citizen participation and involvement in public affairs.

Community building

In the rest of this chapter I suggest strategies which stimulate the development of strong ties within online communities and increase quality of the information environment in online networks. These strategies are a roadmap of actions in which all mentioned actors should be actively involved in order to improve the mobilizing power of the Internet as a public sphere. Although these strategies can be applied for development of online communities at different levels (local, state, global), the main actors still should clearly define their exact aims, tasks and audience, because at different level there are different common ideas and values which unite users in communities. Most elements of the suggested strategies have been already used in the developmentalist practices. Practical strategies for community

building and the results of the application of such strategies are presented at numerous websites of the developmentalist organizations and agencies. The fact, that similar strategies have been already applied by different governments at the level of local communities and yielded positive results, suggests that these strategies can also be applied for the development of different online communities.

Stimulate public interest to public issues and creative discussion of these issues

Provide news and stimulate discussion. Depending on level (local – global) and principles on which community is based (allocation at the same place, professional ties, common interests and hobby, etc.) online community leaders and other involved actors should set an agenda, providing news and information on the most important for these communities events and issues and stimulate public discussions of these issues.

Establish feeling of a community and its importance. Online users should clearly understand the importance of the discussed issues and importance of the discussion itself for the benefit of a community. Online community leaders and other actors should help in shaping a feeling of individual responsibility for the future of a community among members of online community. Personal gratitude, tagging, for example, the most active members or the best advisers, and different awards can establish a sense of public importance of member's participation and strengthen belief in the ability to impact on socio-political affairs in real life.

Create friendly environment and avoid polarization. Online community leaders should also create and constantly support a friendly environment and give an opportunity to everybody express his/her opinion. This task also requires to avoid the development of extremely polar opinions and strong divisions within community, because such

divisions also usually lead to spreading of rumors and false information about opposing groups and their representatives, and therefore undermine trust to a community and information circulated inside it.

Stimulate the development of strong ties within communities

<u>Organize face to face meetings and activities</u>. It is impossible to create any strong online community without the face to face communication and collaboration of members of these communities. In order to maintain people's belief in importance of a community and their optimism about a power of their online community to influence public affairs in real life, it is necessary to organize offline meetings and different activities. At the local level, these can be different joint activities, from common parties and festivals to cleanup of streets and planting of trees. Common protest actions against decisions of authorities or activities of private companies threatening to interests of a community can be organized at any level. All these public meetings help to strengthen solidarity among members of communities and allow them to develop a community, whereas only communication usually leads to the degradation of community and the falling activity of its members.

<u>Keep membership and involve new members</u>. Online communities, like their offline analogues, are not static but rather continually evolving entities, existence of which depends on the maintaining of existing membership and involvement of new members. For the maintaining of membership, regular contacts, fair proportional division of responsibilities among members of online communities and joint activities are vital. In order to attract new members, old members can use their networking ties, whereas community leaders can approach other communities and attempt to engage their

members as well. Understanding desires, opinions and level of satisfaction of members of online community is also a very important element of the community building process. In this regard, different specialized online surveys should be regularly conducted in order to reveal opinion of members and dominating common mood in a community. This allows members to correct some internal community policies thereby achieving greater homogeneousness and solidarity within a community.

Find and encourage leaders. Online community leaders play an especially important role in the community building. First, they should create an example to follow, supporting their good reputation and trust of other members of a community. Second, they should organize internal functioning of a community, dividing tasks and responsibilities among its members in a proportional and fair manner. Third, they should create a friendly and creative environment, encouraging and supporting people that they can feel importance even of their small contribution for the purposes of a community. Finally, leaders should be able to formulate higher purpose and maintain belief in values of a community and the necessity to protect its interests.

Increase quality of information environment

Promote usage of reliable and unbiased sources. Online community leaders and all other actors should take care about the provision of members of communities with accountable and diverse information, which is necessary to form an opinion on public issues, mainly related to the functioning of a community. This information, disseminated by different online tools, should be up-to-date and presented in a professional and unbiased manner. Online community leaders and active members

should play the role of critics, promoting popularity of reliable and unbiased sources of information among other members of communities and criticizing yellow sources.

The success of similar strategies applied by different developmentalist agencies and organizations in various countries confirms that communities of citizens can be shaped and level of citizen participation inside these communities can be increased. Online communities can become a complementary part or stimulating basis of real life communities, a public sphere, in which all members engaged in the decision making process, based on robust public discussion. The measures presented in this chapter are just a roadmap for the future actions and policies aimed on the development of online communities. In every particular case a more profound analysis of the system of actions should be developed, policies implemented further– evaluated and continuously corrected. Community building is a life long process, which has unique character in each particular case that is why further research and development of practices, sometimes unique, is necessary.

Conclusion

Based on the provided analysis both hypotheses suggested in the beginning of this research can be rejected. First, online communities do not present strong communities, which can be easily mobilized for grassroots movements. Second, freedom of information and expression of opinion existing in the Internet does not stimulate robust public discussion or development of public sphere, which in their turn can enforce citizen participation and involvement in political and public affairs. Thus the expansion of the Internet and further development of online and other communication tools do not lead to the flourishing of social movements and other forms of participatory democracy. The Internet is a medium, a tool, which can be effectively used by certain interests groups or actors, but interests of these groups and actors are not necessary coincide with public interest. In this sense, the Internet does not really change regimes or political landscapes now existing in countries all over the world. It provides additional communication and information channel and lever to the already dominating political forces, rather than increases power of citizens.

These findings appear to be more in favor of the skeptical approach to the role of the Internet as the mobilizer of citizen participation, but we should not forget that the Internet is an evolving sphere and not absolutely controllable medium. It means that people can shape both stronger ties within online communities and better information environment which are supportive for the development of participatory forms of democracy. This requires deeper analysis of the external factors existing in each particular community, whether at local, national or international level, and development of strategies, which stimulate stronger ties between members of online communities and better use of information, provided through online networks. For this purposes, the micro-level approach suggested by the Mobilization Resource theory can be very useful in the analysis of the factors determining the shape of

particular community and information content prevailing within it, whereas strategies developed by developmentalist organizations can serve as a guideline for actions. We can assess the role of the Internet differently and argue endlessly about its usefulness and success or in contrast its harmfulness and failure, but as in the research of any dynamic phenomenon we can not claim anything with absolute probability. This research is an attempt to find balance between the two oppositional approaches to the mobilizing role of the Internet, the balance, which provides the opportunity to critically evaluate conditions and elaborate the program of actions or policies.

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Appendix

Table 1. Top 20 countries with highest number of Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2009)

No	Country or Region	% Population (Penetration)	Users Latest Data	Growth (2000-2009)	% of World Users
1	China	26.90%	360,000,000	1500.00%	20.80%
2	United States	74.10%	227,719,000	138.80%	13.10%
3	Japan	75,5 %	95,979,000	103.90%	5.50%
4	India	7.00%	81,000,000	1520.00%	4.70%
5	Brazil	**34.00%**	67,510,400	1250.20%	3.90%
6	Germany	65.90%	54,229,325	126.00%	3.10%
7	United Kingdom	76.40%	46,683,900	203.10%	2.70%
8	**Russia**	**32.30%**	**45,250,000**	**1359.70%**	**2.60%**
9	France	69.30%	**43,100,134**	407.10%	2.50%
10	Korea South	77.30%	**37,475,800**	96.80%	2.20%
11	Iran	48.50%	32,200,000	12780.00%	1.90%
12	Italy	51.70%	30,026,400	127.50%	1.70%
13	Indonesia	12.50%	30,000,000	1400.00%	1.70%
14	Spain	71.80%	29,093,984	440.00%	1.70%
15	Mexico	24.80%	27,600,000	917.50%	1.60%
16	Turkey	**34.50%**	26,500,000	1225.00%	1.50%
17	Canada	74.90%	25,086,000	97.50%	1.40%
18	Philippines	24.50%	24,000,000	1100.00%	1.40%
19	Vietnam	24.80%	21,963,117	10881.60%	1.30%
20	Poland	52.00%	20,020,362	615.00%	1.20%
	TOP 20 Countries	30.30%	1,325,437,422	359.90%	76.40%
	Rest of the World	17.10%	408,556,319	461.50%	23.60%
	Total World - Users	25.60%	1,733,993,741	380.30%	100.00%

Table 2. Comparison of the development of the Internet by regions. (Razvitie Interneta v Regionah Rossii, 2010)

	Internet Penetration	Domains for 1000 users	Availability of the Internet, the average price for 1 Mb/s rubles per month	Blogs for 1000 users	News from one mass medium
Federal regions					
Central	32%	43	489	3.8	7.7
North-Western	38%	23	584	4.1	11.3
Southern	29%	22	896	3.2	14.3
Volga	29%	20	320	5.7	9.9
Urals	31%	33	321	5.7	15.8
Sibirian	28%	25	546	6.1	10.1
Far Eastern	38%	17	1465	5.9	13.3
Average by districts	32%	26	660	4.9	11.8
Moscow	59%	193	106	23	20
Saint-Petersburg	57%	85	132	16.4	15.1

Table 3. Spectrum of cyberspace content controls in the CIS (Deibert and Rohozinski, 2010, 23)

	First Generation			Second Generation			Third Generation			
	Internet Filtering	Policing Cybercafes	Legal Environment for Information Control[1]	Informal Removal Requests	Technical Shutdowns	Computer Network Attack	Warrantless Surveillance	National Cyberzones	State-Sponsored Information Campaigns	Direct Action
Armenia			×	×	×	×				
Azerbaijan			×	×		×				×
Belarus	×		×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Georgia			×							
Kahakhstan	×		×	×				×	×	×
Kyrgyzstan			×	×		×				
Moldova			×				×	×		
Tajikistan			×	×				×		
Turkmenistan	×	×	×				×	×		
Russia			×	×		×	×		×	×
Ukraine			×							
Uzbekistan	×	×	×				×			×

1. Legal and Normative Environment for Information Control includes the following:
a. Compelling Internet sites to register with authorities and using noncompliance as grounds for filtering "illegal" content.
b. Strict criteria pertaining to what is "acceptable" within the national media space, leading to the de-registration of sites that do not comply.
c. Expanded use of defamation, slander, and "veracity" laws to deter bloggers and independent media from posting material critical of the government or specific government officials.
d. Evoking national security concerns, especially at times of civic unrest, as the justification for blocking specific Internet content and services.
e. Legal regime for Internet surveillance.