Framing and Civil Activism: New Media and the Rise of Protest Movement in Russia

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Abstract

The following study addresses the problem of collective action frames construction by looking at the case of the recent Russian protest movement, which was triggered by the outcomes of the parliamentary elections of December, 2011. In order to get a better understanding of how the opposition managed to mobilize the public for a wave of demonstrations, which spread all over the country, analysis of the frames utilized by the participants of the movement was conducted. The data for the study was taken from the Internet blogs of the movement participants. The discourse analysis of the blogs reveals the dominating master frames of the movement and provides relevant insights into its dynamics. Despite the ideological differences between the participants, they have managed to reach a consensus with regard to the most important elements of the master frame and create a congruent interpretation of the country's major problems, ways of their solution, and reasons for the urgency of immediate collective action. Employment of antisystem framing has proved to be a successful strategy for them. However, the major shortcoming of the master frame was its inability to sustain collective action over a long period of time, as the protest activity faded away after the presidential elections of March, 2012.

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Introduction

The events that followed the Russian parliamentary elections of 2011 revealed an important transformation that the Russian civil society has undergone over the past several years. Although the actual political implications of coordinated protest wave which covered the whole country cannot yet be properly assessed, the symbolical value of the protests in Moscow, which gathered up to 100,000 participants, remains undisputed. Indeed, these were the most numerous anti-government protests in the history of Putin's Russia. For the first time masses of people came out on the streets to express their discontent with the results of the elections and the political course that the country has been following during the recent years. Thus, this wave of protests was immediately interpreted by many pundits both in and outside the country as a sign of maturation of the Russian civil society and the renascence of the democratic ideals, which were lost in the muddle of the nineties and the following years of Putin's verticalization of political power.

From the very beginning of his first presidential mandate Vladimir Putin has clearly identified the restructuring of the Russian political system, which he was going to undertake. First, he managed to undermine the role of the oligarchs, who had a significant impact on political decision making under the previous Yeltsin's administration. Then, through the domination of the party of his supporters, United Russia, in the Parliament and monopolization of administrative resource he muscled out the competitive opposition, which was largely replaced by the so-called "managed" or "virtual" opposition (March 2009, 506). This process was accompanied by the policies of centralization of political power and the establishment of indirect control over media through ownership schemes which involved interest groups close to Kremlin. Thus, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, various opposition groups within the country found themselves in a difficult situation

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without being able to exercise any effective influence on the policy making and having no mainstream media at their disposal to communicate their messages to the general public.

Given this suppressed state of the groups in opposition, the public reaction to the outcome of the parliamentary elections which were held in December 2011, was unexpected. That is not to say that there was no evidence prior to the protests that a significant part of population did not believe in the fairness of the upcoming elections. However, the scope of public mobilization around this issue by far exceeded the expectation. Protesters all over the country differed a lot in their political preferences and party affiliations; however it did not prevent them from coordinating their actions and consolidating their activist efforts. The range of demands and aspirations spread from the concerns about free and fair elections to the demands of liberalization of political system and even appeals addressed to Putin to abandon his political career. The opposition leaders managed to keep the public mobilized in the course of a couple of months up to the date of the presidential elections of March 4, 2012. However, after the results of these elections were announced and Putin's victory in the first round with 63.60% of the votes was proclaimed, the enthusiasm of the general public has significantly lessened and the scope of protests that took place after the presidential elections was much smaller.

This study focuses on the collective action frames employed by the opposition in order to mobilize the population for demonstrations. By looking at the online information exchange among the participants of the movement, the dominating frames are recreated from the discourse. Framing processes are considered nowadays to be among the key factors of successful development of a social movement. It is important to look at the framing of political opportunities employed by the Internet users in Russia in order to understand the temporal success of the recent protest movement. Analysis of the frames also provides a better understanding of the movement dynamics. It allows revealing the origins of the

movement and the motives of its participants. The framing perspective may also cast analytical light on the question of why the movement did not succeed. The strength of the frames employed by the social movement can be part of the causal explanation for its decline and, thus, may provide some relevant insights into the problem of public mobilization.

Chapter 1: Framing Perspective in Social Movement Research and the Role of the Internet in Facilitating Collective Action

A number of authors have recently observed an increased influence of the framing perspective in the field of social movement analysis (Johnston 1995, Benford and Snow 2000, Snow and Benford 2005, Zald 2008). Benford and Snow report an "almost meteoric increase" of both conceptual and empirical scholarship on framing. They substantiate their argument by providing the figures which clearly show the growing popularity of the concept in the recent social movement literature, which manifests itself in the growing amount of articles, chapters, and papers, referring to the concept, as well as citations of the core conceptual articles, and, finally, emerging variety of critiques of the framing perspective. The observed transformation of scholarly focus leads them to the conclusion that "framing processes have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements" (Benford and Snow 2000, 612). By conducting a thorough analysis of this scholarship they conclude that the literature constitutes a coherent and evolving perspective, which facilitates understanding of the relationship between framing processes and the organization of social movements. They also claim that this new developing perspective casts analytic light on certain aspects of social movements that have been overlooked by previous studies.

The framing perspective has evolved from the recognition of the importance of meaning construction processes in the sphere of collective action. Sidney Tarrow in his work "Power in Movement" summarizes this development by stating that "movements do not simply seek instrumental goods" but rather also "make and manipulate meanings" (Tarrow 2011, 244). Benford and Snow point out in much similar vein that social movements should not be viewed as mere carriers of present ideas and meanings. On the contrary, the participants of a social movement are agents who are actively engaged in the processes of

construction and maintenance of meanings (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Thus, an important contribution of the framing perspective is to assign an active role to the participants of the social movements in developing and elaborating the ideational sphere of collective action. The movement is understood as "a field of actors" (Gamson and Meyer 2008, 283), and this conceptualization provides an interesting analytical framework for the social movement research and widens the perspective on the operation of the social movements in three important ways. First, it opens up opportunities for the analysis of the actual processes of meaning production from the constructivist perspective. Second, it captures the ideational sphere of collective action in a more meaningful way by understanding it as a fluid and constantly developing process of meaning elaboration, instead of treating it as a fixed and rigid set of ideas which somewhat naturally grow out of certain social structures, key historical events, and existing ideologies. Finally, it casts analytical light on the problems of the contention both within the movements themselves and with the other actors and organizations in the political arena. This is achieved by understanding the framing phenomenon as the one, which, according to Benford and Snow (2000), involves the generation of differing interpretive frames that may challenge each other as well as the already existing ones.

This idea finds its support in the work of Gamson and Meyer (2008). In their article "Framing Political Opportunity" they argue that the concept of political opportunity, which has been one of the central concepts for the social movement scholarship, is currently in trouble and endangered by the prospect of "becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment – political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts" (Gamson and Meyer 2008, 275). The authors suggest that this crisis of the concept can be surmounted by elaborating the stable (embedded) and volatile (contentious) elements of political opportunity. In this vein of

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theorizing, it is necessary to account for the activity of the participants of social movements in creating political opportunities. For Gamson and Meyer this process of construction is intrinsically connected to the framing processes. Thus, their study shows that the development of the framing perspective may not only contribute to opening new analytical horizons but to clarifying and giving more substance to the theoretical frameworks that already exist in the social movement literature.

A further, more in-depth discussion of the pros and cons of the framing perspective necessitates a conceptualization of the framing itself. The term "frame", as used most of the times in the study of social movements, is primarily taken from the work of Goffman. Benford and Snow in their article provide the following summary of Goffman's definition: "For Goffman, frames denoted 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). The scholars, however, prefer to emphasize the importance of meaning construction element by employing the verb "framing," which signifies "the process of deliberate and focused persuasive communication essential for the mobilization of consensus prior to collective action" (Steinberg 1998, 845-6). Steinberg also refers to framing as a "cognitive process necessary for orienting and sustaining collective action" (Steinberg 1998, 846). Hank Johnston in his article "A Methodology for Frame Analysis: From Discourse to Cognitive Schemata" observes a shift of the focus in the recent studies from cognition toward "collective and organizational processes appropriate for mobilization" (Johnston 1995, 217). He also contributes to conceptualization of frames by defining them as "hierarchical cognitive structures that pattern the definition of a situation for individual social action" (Johnston 1995, 237).

Although the theoretical conceptualizations of frames and framing provided above show a degree of variance among the scholars in the field with regards to the emphasis on

certain elements of the concepts, it seems, that there is a number of common points of view on the framing perspective, which are shared by most of the scholars.

First of all, the most basic understanding of framing as an "active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614) remains largely uncontested. Indeed all the adherents of the framing perspective would concentrate on the role of the agents (participants of the movement) in the process of construction of meaning. This common view has developed largely in opposition to the shortcomings of the previous social movement research, which tended to overestimate the political structures, phenomena, and ideologies in the "world out there" downplaying the cognitive processes in the minds of political activists and their attempts to reinterpret and transform the social reality in a way, which would facilitate collective action.

The fluidity of frames is also largely recognized by the scholars. Although some of them would point out the necessity to "freeze" the phenomenon in time for analytical purposes (Johnston and Oliver 2005, 214), the idea that the frames essentially cannot be viewed as rigid and steadfast constructions is shared by the researchers. This understanding rests on the idea that framing represents a contentious phenomenon, which is the result of agents' engagement in the politics of signification. When the agents choose to interpret a certain condition or an event as an unjust phenomenon, which has to be changed through the means of collective action, they inevitably put themselves in a situation when contending groups would challenge their interpretation. The source of contention may also come from the actual changes in the political reality. As it was argued by Gamson and Meyer (2008), the structures of political opportunities have both stable and volatile elements. Thus, the political environment represents a constantly evolving and changing sphere. In this situation the frames have to be constantly reshaped and adjusted in accordance to the changes in the

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volatile elements of political opportunities to counter serious discrepancies between the interpretations of political reality as presented in the frames, and the real world.

An important point of contention between different scholars is the focus of some literature on the individual psychological aspects of collective action frames. Benford and Snow (2000) point out that the analyses of this type tend to overlook the interactive, constructionist character of framing processes. This critique is largely directed against the works of Johnston and the major problem seems to be his emphasis on the idea that the "'true location' of a frame is in the mind of the social movement participant" (Johnston 1995, 218). It seems, however, that the disagreement between the scholars is not conceptual but methodological. In fact, by shifting the location of the frame from the social sphere of interaction to the mind of the individual participant, Johnston does not try to downplay the role of the discourse but makes an attempt to reconstruct it. His theoretical assumption that the higher level "nodes" of interpretation of collective action would be shared by the movement participants seems plausible. It does not contradict the idea that the nodes are the results of negotiation processes (Johnston in his work "Verification and Proof in Frame and Discourse Analysis" (2002) discusses in greater detail the different levels of discourse in the social movements). The analysis of the participant's interpretation of events and experiences may help to reconstruct the larger discourse and reveal the contending tendencies within the movement. Thus, it seems that there is no substantial evidence for the claim that Johnston challenges the common conceptualization of the framing. The need for relocation of the frames in his research comes from the methodological necessities. So, it can be said that the assumption that public discourse constitutes an integral element of framing process is a common characteristic of the scholarship.

By introducing the element of public discourse in the analysis of framing, the scholars integrate media space in their analytical framework as well. Although the degree of focus on

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the media's impact on movement framing and mobilization varies from one study to another, on the theoretical level there is a consensus with regards to the importance of media coverage for the social movement activity. Bert Klandermans in his work "The Social Psychology of Protest" argues that media attention creates a climate which can be favorable or destructive for the development of a social movement. He makes an attempt to systematize the discussion on social construction of collective action frames by distinguishing three different processes: public discourse, persuasive communication, and consciousness raising during the episodes of collective action (Klandermans 1997, 45). According to him, the media coverage falls into the category of public discourse, which also contains interpersonal communication. Mayer Zald (2008) also underlines the importance of the available stock of media possibilities, which a specific movement has at its disposal. According to him, production routines and organizational dynamics of mass media have a significant impact on the output. Mass media not only transmit information, they transform it as well.

In order to conclude the discussion on the conceptualization of framing, it is important to address the criticism, which, interestingly enough, was pronounced by the scholars whose research often employs the framing perspective. Pamela Oliver and Hank Johnston (2005) raise the problem of the unclear relationship between framing and ideology. They argue that oftentimes the term "frame" is used uncritically by the scholars as a synonym for "ideology" (Oliver and Johnston 2005, 186). In their point of view a greater effort on the side of the adherents of the framing perspective should be put into conceptual separation of the two terms. In response to that Snow and Benford (2005) elaborate their perspective on the link between ideology and frames and the distinctions they make between the two concepts.

Their first argument is that ideology should be viewed as a "cultural resource for framing activity" (Snow and Benford 2005, 209). According to them, the ideology functions as a "bag of tools" for the construction of frames. In other words, the articulation of frames

involves employment of the elements of existing beliefs and values. Thus, the frames are to a degree rooted in the available ideologies, as well as cultural repertoire. However, they are "neither determined by nor isomorphic with them" (Snow and Benford 2005, 209). The authors proceed with their argumentation by stating that framing may function as remedial ideological work. Thus, it may be used as an instrument of fine tuning the ideologies and beliefs to correspond better to the actual events, behaviors, and outcomes of activities in the real world. Ideologies, which represent more stable structures embedded in the political repertoire of certain communities, are thus better adjusted to suit particular political goals. The third aspect of the relationship between ideology and framing that Snow and Benford address is that "framing mutes the vulnerability of ideology to reification" (Snow and Benford 2005, 210). They observe a tendency in the social movement literature to reify existing ideologies. According to them, conceptualizing framing as a social accomplishment provides an antidote to that tendency. Finally, they point out that unlike ideology, framing can be empirically observed because it represents an active process of meaning construction. It cannot be reduced to merely "mentalistic or cognitive entities" (Snow and Benford 2005, 210), but should be treated as an element of social interaction within the movements.

To summarize their argument, the following distinction can be made between ideology and framing. While an ideology represents a more or less stable set of ideas and values, which provide the basis for political dramaturgy of a movement, framing is a process of interpreting particular social conditions and phenomena in the light of these ideas and values. In this sense, as Snow and Benford argue, framing is not determined by ideology because ideology does not and cannot provide ready-made templates for interpretation of various social phenomena. The processes of meaning construction constitute a number of interpretative choices that the participants of a movement have to make by themselves. Furthermore, the outcomes of this process are dependent upon the negotiation of consensus among the

participants with regards to a particular frame. The ideology of the movement is constantly present in the background as a collection of acceptable analytical approaches, vocabulary, or even narratives. Framing, thus, constitutes the creative work of the movement participants in constructing shared interpretations and meanings which to a greater or lesser degree may involve employment of the ideological tools.

There are two elements of the conceptual framework of the framing perspective, which are of special importance for this particular study: focus on the media environment and conceptual distinction between ideology and framing.

Both Klandermans (1997) and Zald (2008) underline the particular role that media plays in the processes of creation of collective action frames. However, when talking about media they are most of the time discussing the traditional types of mainstream media and do not consider the impact of the new types of media, such as the Internet and blogging in particular. There is a shared understanding among the scholars of media that the Internet "is not simply a technology," as Castells put it in his book "The Internet Galaxy", but "a communication medium" (Castells 2001, 139). There is a number of different terms which are used by communication scholars for the phenomenon of the Internet-based media, most popular of which are "new media" and "alternative media". The latter term signifies the ability of the Internet to provide "a space for the expression of views excluded from the mainstream media" (Fenton 2008, 38). This is the most basic understanding of the term; however, it provides important insights into the relationship between social movement organization and the online media processes.

A number of authors in their works have addressed the question of the impact that new media environment has on the emergence, development, mobilization, and organization of social movements (Bimber et al. 2005, Castell 2001, Fenton 2008, Garret 2006). All of them point out several characteristic features of the online mobilization processes. Natalie Fenton

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in her analysis of New Social Movements (the concept in her understanding primarily stands for various contemporary global justice movements) underlines the fluidity and informality of the forms of collective action that are practiced by the participants of these movements. She also points out the processes of self-generation of information and identities in the online environment as key qualities of New Social Movements Mobilization.

This view is largely shared by the authors writing on the topic. All of them underline the importance of information generation, construction of collective identities and networks, and decline in the role of hierarchical structures of organization. Garret (2006) and Laer (2007) also add to that the reduction of participation costs due to the progress in the development of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs).

These changes in the character of the mobilization environment called for reconceptualization of the collective action perspective. Bimber et al. (2005) have tried to understand the nature of the contemporary media environment and shift the paradigm of collective action in order to capture the observed social phenomenon in a more meaningful way. They identify two major tenets of the classic model of collective action: the dichotomy of participation and non-participation, and the role of formal organization (Bimber et al. 2005, 366). The first tenet largely refers to the costs of participation and the problem of free-riding, while the second emphasizes the importance of formal organizational structures in "locating and contacting potential participants in collective action, motivating them, and coordinating their actions" (Bimber et al. 2005, 365). Recognizing analytical importance of this perspective, they point out that it is bound to a specific historical period and political and social environment. The conditions for application of this particular model might be present in certain environments even nowadays, but the authors argue that these conditions cannot be understood as universally present and, therefore, there is a need for reconceptualization of collective action in the light of these changed conditions. According to them, the most

important change in the conditions occurred with the advancement of ITCs, and contemporary collective action should be reframed as a "set of communication processes involving crossing of the boundaries between private and public life" (Bimber et al. 2005, 367). Garret (2006) provides an argument in support of this statement when saying that ICTs had transformed the networks of influence and the flow of information in them, thus affecting the framing processes, which are dependent on this flow. Consequently, nowadays basis of collective action is constituted in the processes of collective production of information and negotiation of the meaning which are easily transferred from the private to the public sphere and vice versa. This transition to the public sphere takes place when the private interests and actions are shared through communication.

Networks play an especially important role in this transition because it is the space where the communication primarily takes place. Fenton (2008), basing her argument in the works of Negt and Kluge, argues that the creation of network and collective identities is fostered by alternative media practices because they "offer forms of solidarity and reciprocity grounded in a collective experience of marginalization" (Fenton 2008, 38). The importance of identity construction for the development of collective action is an idea which finds its support in recent social movement literature as well. For example, Tarrow (2011) views this process as an important mechanism of fostering collective action. He states: "movements define, crystallize, and construct collective identities" (Tarrow 2011, 245). According to Tarrow, this shift of analytical focus to the cultural elements of social movements represents a "cultural turn" in the development of scholarship. In this vein of analysis, online networks provide an interesting case study for the processes of negotiation of meaning and construction of collective identities.

Chapter 2: The Russian Media System

The literature on the relationship between the ICTs and social movements demonstrates that there is a need for shifting the focus to the analysis of the informal communication and networks of influence for the purposes of understanding the New Social Movements. This study follows the trend outlined above and attempts to cast an analytical light on the exchange of information and the discussions that were taking place during the period of mobilization of the recent protest movement in Russia. The scholarship suggests that this communication plays an important role in the construction of collective action frames. Thus, the ultimate goal of the study is to reconstruct the processes of consensus negotiation and creation of meaning. However, the analytical focus on the online communication in Russia is not exclusively theoretically driven. The works of a number of scholars suggest that the Internet plays a very special role in the Russian media environment and has a very particular function in the structure of the public sphere. The following part of the paper is dedicated to unraveling this particular relationship. There are two major questions which one has to address in order to understand this relationship properly: a) what place does the Internet occupy in the Russian information space? b) what is the relationship between the political authorities, mainstream media, and the alternative media? Answers to these questions will provide valuable insights into the structures of the Russian society and into the larger political dynamics, which preceded the formation of particular collective action frames.

Locating the Internet-based media in the Russian information space requires taking a closer look at the Russian media system and its relationship with the political authorities of the country. The state of the Russian media during the Putin's era and the role of the Internet in the Russian society have recently been the topics of particular interest to various scholars of political science and media. Some of these scholars try to establish a connection between the freedom of distribution of information and the prospects of Russian democratization, thus

suggesting that the processes and dynamics of mass media development have played a significant role in the establishment and shaping of the current Putin's regime (White and McAllister 2006; Smaele 2006; Becker 2004; Gaman-Golutvina 2009). Although the views and interpretations of the Russian media differ, there seems to be a basic consensus that the media model practiced in Russia nowadays cannot be classified as democratic. Becker puts it into a "neo-authoritarian" category (Becker 2004), and it seems that most of the scholars would agree with this kind of interpretation of the Russian media development.

The development of the Russian media in the first decade of the twentieth century reveals an interesting analytical paradox. As Lipman argues, despite the rise and development of the media business as a market, a significant institutional decline can be observed (Lipman 2009, 159). While the quality of the media production and the revenues of this business have significantly increased, the professional journalistic standards have dropped to the point when media cannot effectively fulfill its social functions. Lipman attributes this phenomenon to a large-scale redistribution of the media assets that occurred in the beginning of the century. She argues that this redistribution was led by two main factors: "concentration of political-and-public affairs media in the hands of the state" and "consolidation and enlargement of commercially solid and profitable media property" (Lipman 2009, 160). Lipman's argument finds support in the work of Oates and McCormack (2010), who observe a "growth in media companies" and "their establishment as successful businesses" on one hand, but a "distinct decline in media pluralism and diversity of opinion in Russia" on the other (Oates and McCormack 2010, 118). The abovementioned trend seems to be the dominating characteristic of the Russian media development.

The different explanations of the institutional decline of media in Russia differ among each other in some aspects but the common ground for all of them is the idea that the state has played a crucial role in this development. An interesting path dependency argument is

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provided by Gaman-Golutvina (2009), who juxtaposes the concepts of freedom and development in the context of Russian historical process. According to her, Russia had to employ mobilizational development type throughout its history in order to modernize itself. The choice of this type over the innovative one was dictated by the lack of necessary "financial, intellectual, temporal, foreign-policy, and other resources" for development (Gaman-Golutvina 2009, 47). She argues that this factor had a profound impact on the political culture of the country. Gaman-Golutvina underlines that an essential feature of this model was the "limitation of individual freedoms for the purposes of implementing development goals" (Gaman-Golutvina 2009, 50). Thus, there is no surprise that the Russian media lacks the professional standards of the Western media model, which has evolved primarily in the context of innovational development framework. This analytical point is especially relevant when taking into account Smaele's understanding of the media transformation of Putin's era. According to Smaele, the paradox of this transformation is that the process of democratization in Russia "became a justification to curtail press freedom and keep media instrumentalized" (Smaele 2006, 46). This argument is indeed reminiscent of the analytical model proposed by Gaman-Golutvina.

However, the actual process is more complicated than it would seem at the first glance and has deeper historical roots than most of the analyses suggest. While the majority of the scholars would primarily discuss the role that Putin played in the process of consolidation of the Russian media, Smaele looks at the media processes that have been occurring throughout the entire period of post-communist Russia. Interestingly enough, he observes that Putin's justifications for the restriction of media freedom are not essentially novel in the history of new Russia. The major paradox of Yeltsin's presidency in this respect was his commitment to the ideals of free media on one hand and his readiness to take away this freedom on several occasions on the other. According to Smaele, Yeltsin has perceived himself as "the patron of

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democracy and press freedom" and "never questioned his presumed right to grant such freedom" (Smaele 2006, 46). Thus, in this sense Putin's reasoning for tightening the control over media based on "the unique socio-political setting of Russia and its process of democratization" is only a continuation of the rhetoric of his predecessor (Smaele 2006, 47). However, the decline of media freedom in Russia cannot be viewed as the result of government policies exclusively. Smaele suggests that on a number of occasions the journalists themselves have readily abandoned the standards of democratic media.

The presidential elections of 1996 provide a vivid example of this trend. During the electoral campaign the two major contenders were Yeltsin and Zhuganov (the leader of the Communist Party). In this situation the journalists agreed to mobilize against the Zhuganov, thus giving up on the principles of impartiality and objective coverage. Smaele states that the normative considerations were the major factor which influenced journalists' decision. The media bosses were concerned with the possible limitations on the freedom of media, which could have been imposed if Zhuganov won the elections. Thus, the journalists embraced the mobilization rhetoric in order to defend their freedom and the prospects of democracy in Russia.

The redistribution of media property under Putin's government represents another phenomenon, which is more complicated than it seems at first glance. During the confrontation between the government and Media-Most over the ownership of the NTV channel, which was the most influential private one in the country, the owner of Media-Most Gusinsky has argued that the freedom of press was at stake in this conflict. However, Smaele observes that Gusinsky could hardly be the champion of media freedom, showing little genuine concern about it in the previous years (Smaele 2006, 49). It was rather his own business interests he was fighting for and the rhetoric of democratization being at stake was nothing but a populist claim, which was supposed to mobilize the public against the attacks on

his private property. It seems that this analysis provides a better understanding of the developments in the Russian media. It also shows that the common interpretations of Putin's media policies are not entirely true. It is not to say that Putin's policies had no impact on the consolidation of media and its institutional decline, rather it shows that in the post-communist Russia there were no powerful players on the socio-political arena who had the genuine concern for the media freedom as a guarantor of democratic development.

This picture of the Russian media sphere would remain incomplete without a discussion of the allowed levels of pluralism and the control mechanisms utilized by Putin's government. First, it is necessary to point out that the major medium of choice of ordinary Russians is television. White and McAllister in their study of the effects of media coverage on the election results in Russia provide the statistics which reveal this consumption pattern (White and McAllister 2006, 211-2). The print media and the radio stations are far behind. Taking this into account, it is no surprise that the government allows much more pluralism for press and radio broadcasts, while curtailing free political discourse on the television. Thus, the pluralism of the Russian media remains limited. Becker (2004) in his work observes the phenomenon of strategic use of the power of television as well. However, he argues that most of the analysts make a mistake of equating the current Russian media system with the post-communist one. In spite of the presence of state control, a degree of pluralism is allowed by the authorities. Lipman (2009) argues that in some cases the media outlets manage to sustain editorial autonomy in spite of the change of ownership, as was the case with a TV channel REN TV, newspapers Kommersant and Nezavisimaya Gazeta, and a radio station Ekho Moskvy. In all of these cases the media outlets were bought by the Kremlin group of oligarchs and businessmen. Nevertheless, there was no radical shift in the editorial line.

However, there is nothing paradoxical in this. As it was mentioned earlier, the television remains the major medium for the most part of the Russian population since the

times of the Soviet Union. Thus, the actual influence of the print press and radio broadcasts on the political life of the country is limited. Kommersant, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, and Ekho Moskvy are simply not perceived by the state authorities as serious contenders to Channel 1 or the Rossiya channel, both of which can reach almost 100% of Russian households and are controlled by the government (Lipman 2009, 161). The impact of the REN TV is also marginal. According to the statistics provided in the study by Mickiewicz (2006), REN TV has the lowest percentage of coverage among the major TV outlets and reaches only 30% of households in Russia. Lipman's analysis shows that "the government tolerates a considerable degree of freedom in some minor outlets – as long as it is ensured that these media be politically irrelevant and make no difference in policy-making" (Lipman 2009, 163).

Becker (2004) speaks of this allowed pluralism as of the most important distinction between the Soviet and post-communist media models in Russia. He classifies the post-communist Russian media system as a "neo-authoritarian" one and argues that the government control over the media messages is exercised through a number of different channels:

> Subsidies, targeted tax advantages, government advertising and other forms of assistance are used to promote support. To silence critics, the state does not resort to pre-publication censorship so much as economic pressure through selectively applied legal and quasi-legal actions against owners, as well as broadly worded laws which prescribe criminal and civil penalties for journalists concerning such issues as libel, state interests, national security and the image of the head of state. (Becker 2004, 149)

Becker also argues that weak judiciary system makes it impossible for the journalists to defend their rights in court. Another important element of indirect government control of the media system is violence against journalists. Oates and McCormack state that "29 journalists were killed in a decade in post-Soviet Russia" (Oates and Mccormack 2010, 124). Through these channels of control the state creates an atmosphere of threat and insecurity for the

opposition journalists and, through that, self censorship, which has a major impact on the deterioration of the journalistic standards.

The understanding of the impact that the Russian media has on the political life of the country would be, however, incomplete if we do not address the question of how the media messages are received and interpreted by the general public. The study of White and McAllister (2007) suggests that the structure of the Russian media system had a profound impact on the outcomes of the parliamentary elections of 2003. They argue that although the elections were 'free' and there was a choice of candidates and parties, they could hardly be interpreted as 'fair' because the regime did not confront its opponents "on a level playing field" (White and McAllister 2007, 224). The advantageous position of the regime is secured by the media coverage. The authors observe a media bias in favor of the pro-Putin party United Russia which could be seen both from the quantity and content of the media messages about different parties running for the elections.

Although, as it can be seen from White and McAllister's study, the media coverage of the candidates had influenced the outcomes of the elections of 2003, it would be inaccurate to say that the Russian public is easily manipulated by the media messages. In her study Mickiewicz (2007) reveals a high level of media literacy of the Russian population. Her findings show that the public tends to be highly skeptical and critical of the media content usually expecting it to be ordered or commissioned by some business and political interest groups or by the government itself. Russian viewers are largely not satisfied by low quality journalist reports and demand "contextual information" in order to be able to evaluate the story by themselves (Mickiewicz 2007, 206). They also have the capacity to move outside the frame intended by the broadcaster and approach the news story from a different point of view. This is an important conclusion because it provides a better understanding of the actual dynamics of media consumption in the post-Soviet Russia. Although the control and

manipulation of the media sphere eventually yields positive results for the government, the general public has a much more sophisticated understanding of the political situation and of the media space in Russia then the first impression of the Russian public sphere might suggest.

Chapter 3: The Internet in Russian Information Space

One of the most important questions which is not addressed by the scholarship on Russian media system is how and through which channels does the Russian public satisfy its need for more objective and contextualized information. Greene in his article on the failure of political communication in Russia (2009) provides an interesting direction for search for the answer to this question. Discussing the Soviet media system, Greene concentrates on the role of samizdat as an independent medium of communication primarily employed by the dissidents. The word 'samizdat' is an abbreviation which stands for 'self-publishing'. It has started as "a means of publishing literature (primarily poetry) that people wanted to read but that was not published by the state" (Greene 2009, 58). However, the content of samizdat has changed significantly over the years as it became more politicized. It is necessary to note that samizdat was a movement without any organizational center. Greene defines it as a "social phenomenon, a very specific, highly participatory mode of multilateral communication, in which the act of participation is more important than what is actually being communicated" (Greene 2009, 58).

The phenomenon of samizdat is an important example which illustrates how the public can take the production of information in its own hands when the government controlled media fail to satisfy citizens' need for objective and impartial information. Greene quotes Liudmila Alekseeva (the chairman of the Moscow Helsinki Group), who summarizes the major factors, which contributed to the development of samizdat:

> samizdat was created by a combination of factors. On the one hand, society's recognition that much is hidden from it and that it is lied to. Second, the maintenance of censorship, which shows society that it is being lied to, that the truth is being hidden from it, and that it does not have the ability to use a printing press to say what it wants to say. And third, the availability of typewriters. (Greene 2009, 58)

Although, as it was stated by Becker (2004) there are substantial differences between the Soviet and post-Soviet media systems in Russia, it seems that some of the factors enlisted above are relevant for the nowadays state of affairs as well.

First, as the study of Mickiewicz (2007) shows there is a high degree of skepticism among the Russian viewers about the objectivity and quality of information provided by the major media outlets in Russia. Second, despite the fact that censorship is far from being the major form of controlling media in nowadays Russia, the tolerance that the state shows towards violence against journalists reveals that investigation of some sensitive topics (e.g. Chechnya, corruption, etc.) is not welcomed by the authorities. So, although a certain degree of pluralism is allowed, there are obviously topics, which the government would not like to be discussed by the public. Smaele (2006) provides an example for that when discussing the manner in which the Kremlin handled the disaster with the sunken submarine Kursk. According to him, "media coverage of the disaster was restricted, with only one journalist from the state-controlled television channel RTR granted full access to the disaster scene" (Smaele 2006, 53). It shows that there are aspects of political and social life which are indeed hidden from the eyes of the public and it is unlikely that this manipulation of information has remained unnoticed by the society. Third, although the printing press and some other institutionalized channels of communication can be used by the citizens to express their discontent with the government policy, the reach of these outlets is limited. The general atmosphere of threat and insecurity limits the opportunity for coverage of the whole array of opinions on a given issue as well. As Becker (2004) argues, self-censorship is an important factor which influences media coverage even in the outlets which are not controlled by the state through the ownership schemes. Finally, nowadays there is the Internet, which is much more efficient as a channel of communication in comparison to typewriters. The availability of this technology is limited but it is plausible to suggest that the "creative class," the category

used by Zubarevich in her study of the regional development in Russia (2011), has the access

to it. The creative class is the core of the dissent in nowadays Russia. The Russian authorities

and major media outlets have primarily utilized this term in order to describe the

demographics of the recent protest movement. The combination of these factors leads us to

the question: can the Internet substitute samizdat in the current socio-political context in

Russia?

Although a number of studies (Alexander 2003; Oates and McCormack 2010) suggest

a negative answer for this question, some more detailed analyses of the Runet (the Russian

language segment of the Internet) show that this view of the Russian cyber-space is

exaggeratedly dismal in comparison to the actual reality. Alexander in his study concentrates

on the technological factors as the major constraints for the democratization prospects of the

Internet in Russia. However, as it was mentioned earlier, the technology is readily available

for the most active and creative part of the population. A stronger argument, presented by

Alexander, is that the authorities use the Internet in a number of creative ways which allow it

to both silence the dissent discourse and engage in pro-government propaganda (Alexander

2003, 23). The work of Borogan and Soldatov (2012), on the other hand, suggests that the

Kremlin's tactics of the Internet control has largely failed to achieve its aims. First, the

readership of the government sponsored blogs is much smaller in comparison to that of the

opposition leaders. Second, the attempts to deteriorate the quality of the online political

discourse and discourage people to go online have failed. The Kremlin's spin doctors tried to

utilize the pro-government youth organizations for that purpose. Through these organizations

young people were recruited to post provocative obscene messages on the major discussion

platforms. Cyber-bullies were supposed to take over the discussions and, thus, depress the

political discourse. However, Borogan and Soldatov argue that the nature of the Runet is such

that neither government nor opposition can control it. Thus, these methods, which would be

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otherwise effective in a government-controlled cyber-space, do not yield positive results in the Runet.

Strukov's study shows that the government does not have the necessary infrastructure and communication technologies which would enable it to exercise control over the Russian cyber-space (Strukov 2009, 220). Moreover, these technologies, according to him are unlikely to appear in Russia in the near future. These conclusions are important for our understanding of the nature of the Russian cyber-space. They show that the Runet represents a space in the public sphere of Russian social life where people can actually express their opinions and can be heard by many. Moreover, the blogging readership statistics provided by Borogan and Soldatov show that many people choose to go online and look for the information with the intent to find viewpoints and analyses which contradict to the ones of the mainstream media. Peterson in his book on the informational revolution in Russia (2005) reaches a similar conclusion. Thus, the Internet in the Russian context can be seen as a phenomenon which is similar to samizdat during the times of the communist rule. Essentially it allows people to produce and share news and viewpoints which are interesting for themselves but are not available in the mainstream media.

This interpretation of the role that the Internet plays in the Russian information space goes in line with the theoretical framework proposed by Bimber et al. (2005), which emphasizes the processes of information exchange and of crossing the boundaries between the private and public as the key factors of the New Social Movements development. Fenton (2008) also points out the aspect of self-generation of information as an important element of the identity creation and mobilization of the public. In the Russian case the Internet functions as the medium providing uncontrolled information space for the development of free and unmediated discourse. Discursive nature of the framing processes is evident from the works of Benford and Snow (2000) and Klandermans (1997). According to them, framing should be

understood as a dynamic process of negotiation of meanings and interpretations, thus, it necessitates a certain information space in which it can develop. According to Greene, in the context of the Soviet Union this space was created by samizdat, a system in which the collective production of information was dependent upon the individual effort. The same argument can be applied to the cyber-space in the context of post-Communist Russia. Thus, the analysis of the online opposition discourse in Russia can provide relevant insights into the dynamics of the framing processes and give a better understanding of how the meanings and interpretations are negotiated by the participants of the movement.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The following analysis is based on Johnston's methodological assumption that the "'true' location of a frame is in the mind of the social movement participant" (Johnston 1995, 218). The methodology proposed in Johnston's work aims at reconstructing the framing discourse through interviewing movement participants. By conducting the analysis of what the actors say about their experiences and their understandings of different aspects of the movement, scholars can get a more accurate picture of the movement mobilization processes and motives of participation. As opposed to the analysis of the program statements and similar types of documents, this methodology is more efficient in capturing the discursive elements of the framing process. Thus, it implies utilization of discourse analysis as the major methodological instrument. Systematization of the frames employed by the movement participants provides an opportunity to deduce the dominating frame of the movement. Although Johnston's research is concentrated on the analysis of the interviews, his methodological perspective can as well be transferred to the analysis of the blogging posts, which essentially represent bits of public political discourse. Thus, the frames extracted from the Internet users' posts can provide an understanding of the general master frame dominating the movement.

It is also necessary to establish what kind of information should be extracted from the data in order to reach the conclusions about the movements' collective action framing. As Johnston suggests, the frames are "hierarchical cognitive structures that pattern the definition of a situation for individual social action" (Johnston 1995, 237). When engaging in the process of framing, the participants of the movement are engaging in the politics of signification, i.e. construction of interpretations and meanings which form perceptions of a particular political phenomenon. Thus, it is important to pay attention to the vocabulary of the participants, the metaphors that they are using to signify particular aspects of the

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phenomenon, and the parallels that they are drawing in order to invoke certain associations in the minds of the public. The role of the factual information presented by the participants should not be underestimated as well. Entman (1993) argues that the selection of information is an essential part of the framing process because it has a significant impact on the construction of meaning. The goal of this research is to identify the abovementioned elements of framing in the posts of the Internet users and systematize them in a meaningful way in order to obtain an understanding of the dominating frames of the recent protest movement in Russia.

The variety of the Internet-based media in the Runet poses a methodological problem of selecting the most representative and relevant ones. Russians are actively using a number of social networks for keeping in touch with their offline acquaintances as well as creating new online networks of communication. The Russian online services providers have successfully employed the experience of the foreign social networks, especially Facebook, and created Russian language analogues, such as VKontakte and Odnoklassniki, which are quite popular among active Internet users in Russia. According to the main page of VKontakte, the service is used by tens of millions of users. The importance of social networks during the process of mobilization of population is evident from the multiplicity of groups created to support the opposition or disseminate information about the organization of the protests. Some of the observers have also noticed an increasing importance of Facebook and Tiwtter. Miriam Edler in her article for the online version of The Guardian newspaper states that "Russians have flooded Facebook and Twitter as they organize unprecedented protests against Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party" (Edler 2011). Although the empirical evidence suggests that social networks and Twitter play an important role in the mobilization of the population, this analysis focuses on the Russian blogosphere.

According to the scholarship on the topic, the Russian blogosphere occupies a special place in the information space of the country. Gorny and Walker argue that it "serves as a substitute for the public sphere, much as literature did in the 19th century and the independent media did in 1990s" (Gorny and Walker 2010, 2). The studies of the blogosphere in Russia suggest that the users tend to cluster around blogging platforms rather than around ideology (Etling and Alexanyan 2010). Among the variety of blogging platforms that exist in the Russian cyber space LiveJournal stands out as the most popular and influential one. It was founded in 1999 and has never achieved the financial success of MySpace and other analogous Web 2.0 sites in the English language segment of the Internet. However, after introducing Russian language services it became popular among the Russian Internet users. In his article on the success of LiveJournal in the Russian language segment of the web Koulikov states that LiveJournal is by far the most popular blog hosting service in Russia with almost 350 000 of registered users, out of which 230 000 are active ones (Koulikov 2007, 4). He also notices that in the beginning the platform was mostly elite dominated but later it managed to attract broader masses, thus, changing the demographics of the blogging community. Comparing the demographics of the US and Russian LiveJournal communities he underlines that the average age of the bloggers is higher in the Russian language segment and that the majority of the community consists of users who are over 30. Another important feature which contributed to the success of LiveJournal is its independence of Russian jurisdiction. Koulikov argues that thus it allows the users "a degree of freedom or least lack of fear, in expressing opinions" (Koulikov 2007, 6). These conclusions find support in the work of Lonkila (2008) who states that LiveJournal is "the most important weblog platform and social network site in Russia in terms of its socio-political content" (Lonkila 2008, 1127). The political focus of the blogs in LiveJournal is the major reason for concentrating the analysis on this particular social media outlet.

LiveJournal provides an opportunity of creating thematic blogging communities in which the users can engage into posting their journal entries on the wall of the community and discuss them with the other members by developing threads of comments to the posts. The website also has a catalogue of the communities where the users can look for the topics of their interest. One of the rubrics in the catalogue is titled 'Political Protest.' For the purposes of this analysis the community with the biggest number of members (ru_opposition) was chosen from this rubric. According to the description, ru_opposition is an 'opposition journal' for those "who are not satisfied with the current political situation [in the country] and who would like to change it." Party affiliation and ideological views of the bloggers are not important according to the administration of the community. Thus, ru_opposition provides a representative sample of bloggers coming from different political backgrounds who are united by their opposition to the current regime.

Random sampling was employed in order to gather the data for the analysis. A total sample of 162 posts was collected. The sampling was conducted by choosing a random post for each day in the period between September 24, 2011, and March 4, 2012. This timeframe was chosen in order to capture both the period of pre-election movement development and the period between the parliamentary and presidential elections when the massive demonstrations took place. September 24, 2011 was the day when Medvedev has announced that he is not going to run for president and suggested Putin for the post as his successor. The reason for choosing this particular date as the starting point of the analytical timeframe is that this public announcement has finally revealed the political plans of the ruling elite. Before this day, the interpretations and prognoses of the political future of the country were based on speculations whether Medvedev would keep the post or Putin would take it over. Medvedev's announcement has revealed the future political configuration envisioned by the current authorities and opened up the opportunities for the opposition to develop frames and

strategies of their movement based on a more accurate set of political expectations. The mass protests have occurred in the period between the parliamentary elections (December 4, 2011) and the presidential elections (March 4, 2012). Inclusion of this period in the analytical timeframe gives an opportunity to follow how the frames were developed during the process of active public mobilization. The final date of the analytical frame is set on the day of the presidential elections because the protest activity has slumped after Putin's victory with 63.60% of the casted votes was announced. Although a number of protests have been organized afterwards, the numbers of people that the organizers managed to attract were significantly lower in comparison to the inter-elections period. Thus, March 4, 2012 marks the moment of the attenuation of the protest movement in Russia.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Frames

Before proceeding with the actual analysis it is necessary to discuss how the frames are systematized for the analytical purposes of this study. The scholars of framing have a general consensus with regards to the tasks that frames are performing in facilitating collective action. Benford and Snow identify three core elements of framing: diagnosis, prognosis, and motivation. In a very much similar vein Entman (1993) argues that frames should identify problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Before proceeding with the analysis of the particular frames employed by the Russian Internet users we have to take a closer look at these functions identified by the scholarship on framing.

Diagnostic framing, according to Benford and Snow, is an activity aimed at negotiating "shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation" (Benford and Snow 2000, 615). Thus, it plays a major role in reaching the consensus about the interpretation of a situation itself and of its causes. Entman's (1993) systematization of the functions of frames suggests that pronouncement of moral judgments should be included in the category of diagnostic framing as well. Diagnostic framing is essential for mobilization of the population because it creates a stock of common images and interpretations, which are employed in deliberating the course of collective action, and defines the target conditions and agents. A commonly observed element of diagnostic framing is identification of the victims and amplification of their victimization. It is also oftentimes referred to as "injustice frames," and represents a "mode of interpretation generated and adopted by those who come to define the actions of an authority as unjust" (Benford and Snow 2000, 615). Although the empirical evidence suggests strong presence of injustice framing across a variety of types of social movements, Benford and Snow argue that it does not mean that all of the frames are "injustice frames." According to them in some cases there is no need for injustice component for mobilizing collective action, however, they admit that most of the movements advocating for

political or economic change do utilize this element. Analysis of diagnostic framing can provide some interesting insights into the initial causes of public mobilization, thus giving an opportunity to get a better understanding of the nature of a particular political movement. It is important to note here, however, that the consensus on the interpretation of a condition and its causes does not automatically lead to an agreement on the suggested course of action and that is why prognostic framing is conceptualized as an independent element of framing process.

Prognostic framing addresses the question of what is to be done. Entmant (1993) argues that its major function is to suggest remedies. Although this element is not defined entirely by the outcomes of diagnostic framing, it is to a large degree constrained by the interpretation of a given condition. This conclusion is only logical since a given frame should represent a consistent set of meanings. Consistency of a frame has a major impact on its potential strength. If the course of action proposed by a prognostic frame does not effectively address the problems identified by the diagnostic frame the public most likely will not mobilize since the possible outcomes of the action would not resolve their problems. Prognostic framing often becomes a question of contention among different factions of a larger movement (Benford and Snow 2000). Thus, oftentimes prognostic framing involves creation of counterframes which do not only elaborate the strategies of collective action but also show why a particular strategy is preferable over another. However, the literature does not suggest that lack of consensus on prognostic framing should necessarily lead to the failure of a particular movement.

Finally, the third task of framing consists of providing the rationale for engaging in collective action. Motivational framing suggests the "vocabulary of motive" (Benford and Snow 2000), thus, explaining to the public why a particular action should be undertaken in spite of the personal costs paid by the participants. In order to understand the function of motivational framing better it might be necessary to look at collective identity processes.

Tarrow (2011) underlines the importance of collective identity for mobilization of the public. While the diagnostic framing aids to identity building through victimization of the public, the goal of motivational framing is to consolidate the efforts of the 'victims' by providing a salient cause for their collective action.

All of the tasks described above represent essential elements of collective action frames. Successful public mobilization is impossible when one of those elements lacks since taken altogether they define the nature and character of a social movement. However, that does not mean that one particular message disseminated by the activists should contain all of them at the same time. Entman (1993) argues that various combinations of frames types are possible in a message. Thus, in order to get a full picture of a collective action frame variety of information items provided by activists should be analyzed. The purpose of the following analysis is to systematize the frames employed by the Russian Internet users for public mobilization and identify the tasks that a particular frame performs in the light of the theoretical perspective discussed above.

5.1 Diagnostic Framing

The most general interpretation of the current socio-political situation in Russia that is present in the posts of the Internet users is stagnation. Although in most of the posts that frame the problem in this manner the word 'stagnation' itself is absent, the meaning of this interpretation can be deduced from the historical parallel that the users make. On a number of occasions they compare nowadays Russia to the Soviet Union of Brezhnev's era:

> This is really the end of the country. It is like Brezhnev's times – the leader is surrounded by people, who have marasmus and understand nothing, and all of them have lost any touch with reality. (neoliberal2)

Another vivid example of this historical parallel can be found in the title of the post by makhk: "Late Brezhnev Era?" This period is commonly referred to in the Soviet history as the period of 'zastoi' (stagnation). Zastoi was characterized both by lack of economic development and public frustration about the political life of the country. There seem to be two major reasons for evocation of this frame in the minds of the opposition public. First, many users express their discontent with the fact that the economic strategy of the government did not effectively solve the problem of country's dependency on natural resources (especially on oil and gas exports). They tend to think that Medvedev's program of pouring finances into the innovations sector has largely failed and that the Russian economy is still based on the oil exports. The following post provides an example of this frame:

> Nowadays Russia is like a drug addict. If we have a dose (when the oil prices are high) we are living happily. If we don't (oil prices are going down), we have a crisis … I don't even want to talk about innovations. They were limited only to introduction of energy-conserving light bulbs. (inter51)

Second, the exchange of governmental offices negotiated between Medvedev and Putin, with the latter becoming the president for the next 6 years, gave a sense that Putin's governance will only end with his death. A similar dynamics could have been observed when Brezhnev was keeping his post of the General Secretary till his very last days, in spite of the fact that his incompetence caused by his deteriorating health condition was becoming more and more obvious with every passing day. This frame is reinforced with a number of posts drawing the parallel between the current Russian political elites and the nomenclature of the Soviet times: "In fact, everything would have been much better if we did not have this nomenclaturno-bureaucratic-security fraternity" (rinat_bichurin). Nomenclature in the Soviet Union was a class of bureaucrats who were enjoying special privileges in comparison to ordinary Soviet citizens by abusing the resources of the communist regime. This framing is employed in order to evoke the negative memories of the communist past as well as demonstrate the absurdity of the current political situation in Russia.

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Diagnostic framing, however, in this case is not limited to drawing parallels with the Soviet Union. The analysis of the posts shows that users identify a number of concrete social problems that are present in nowadays Russia. Among them are government subsidies to Caucasian republics, silencing of the dissent voices, tyranny of the police, weak judicial system, unfair elections, lack of strong opposition, and passivity of the general public. The focus of the public attention on these problems shifts throughout the period before the parliamentary elections and between the parliamentary and presidential elections. For example, the slogan "Stop feeding the Caucasus" can be observed much more often in the pre-election period than afterwards due to the fact that salience of this particular issue is diminished by the problem of fair elections, which comes to the forefront of public concerns.

The problems diagnosed by the Internet users can be divided into two major categories: the problems of the regime and the problems of the opposition and public. The conditions of the first category are generated by the corrupted nature of the regime itself, while the other category attributes a greater importance to the activities of the opposition parties and citizens of the country.

The framing of the problems from the first rubric is usually similar among different users. Although the particular socio-economic issues discussed by the users vary significantly they are usually attributed to a more general problem of corruption of the regime. The most prominent frame employed to describe the ruling party United Russia is the "party of swindlers and thieves." Arguably, this is the frame which had the most resonance in the Russian public. Different users with obviously varying political views (from nationalists to liberals) frequently employ this frame in their argumentation. Another piece of evidence for the strength of this frame is that it was referenced in the campaign slogan of Spravedlivaya Rossiya (Just Russia party) "Against swindlers and thieves."

Corruption is the leitmotif of the diagnostic framing among the Internet users. It should be noticed that corruption is seen as a phenomenon which spreads across the entire sphere of political life in Russia. The following two excerpts from the posts provide an understanding of the users' view of the corruption in Russia: "Corruption … became the norm of our life" (anitavolga) and "… corruption has turned into the most dangerous threat" (tpp_inform). According to the online public, the regime is corrupt in its entirety and there are hardly any party members or bureaucrats who are not exploiting the resources of the country in their own interests. Weak judiciary, tyranny of the police, unfair elections, etc. are the elements of a large corrupted system which parasitizes on the citizens and employs all the possible instruments in order to sustain itself:

> As soon as the Parliamentary election campaign has started the party of oligarchs and high level bureaucrats United Russia began to violate electoral legislation. It is impossible to believe in the numbers of newspapers that have been published recently by the order of United Russia, in which the Communist Party is slandered. (vsminyashev)
> Swindlers and thieves have organized a DDoS attack on the websites in Saint Petersburg, which published information about the falsifications [of the elections] made by United Russia. (b_insider)

Different bits of information about the cases when bureaucrats exceed their authorities and get involved into various criminal schemes, provided by the users, aid to the creation of this picture. Publicizing the cases of corruption is an essential part of the framing in this case. Entman (1993) argues that a frame consists not only of a set of interpretations and meanings but also of the information that is provided alongside with them in order to amplify the problems identified in the frame. Thus, by creating negative coverage of the political developments in Russia the Internet users try to create an alternative discourse which goes against the positions of the official media and create a sense of deterioration of the political life in the country.

As it was mentioned earlier, the weakness of the civil society is another major problem of the Russian politics identified by the online public. The population of the country is

oftentimes compared to a flock of sheep, which is easily manipulated by the authorities and has neither the capability nor the courage to raise voice against exploitation. A representative frame can be found in the post of the user mustafibrahim:

> It's not a pity that the authorities in this country treat their subjects with bestiality. It's a pity that these subjects are indeed a flock of cattle if they let themselves be treated in this way. (mustafibrahim)

However, this framing is mostly characteristic for the pre-election period, since the mass protests that took place after the parliamentary elections have proven superficiality of this understanding. This frame is interesting from the victimization perspective. Passivity of the general public, although being part of the problem, is not viewed as its cause. People who vote for United Russia, according to most of the posts, are lacking political sophistication. However, the more progressive part of the population does not view itself as the victim of the tyranny of the majority. It rather blames the authorities ('the wolves') for manipulating the information space and, thus, denying access to the truth about the country for the majority of the population. Thus, the whole population of the country is seen as victims of the regime.

The origin of the problems, as identified by the Internet users, is Putin himself. There are several important points that are to be made in this regard. First, a shift in the understanding of Medvedev's role in the regime can be observed throughout the pre-election period. While in September the regime is usually identified with the duumvirate of Medvedev and Putin, by the beginning of December almost no allusions to the then President can be observed in the posts of the users. The early pre-election period is in this sense marked by the references to both of the rulers. One of the users proposes to legalize gay marriages so that Medvedev and Putin would be able to marry. According to him, it would solve 90% of the controversies in the Russian politics. The word 'tandemocrats' was used by another user to mock superficiality of the democratic façade created by the two politicians in order to provide an illusion of democratic governance. However, as the elections approach, Putin becomes the

major target of criticism. This development seems logical since the exchange of government posts between the President and the Prime Minister had negative effects on the political ratings of Medvedev. The majority of the population has simply ceased to view him as an important political figure that is actually capable of exerting any influence over the Russian politics.

Thus, Putin has 'privatized' the regime in the eyes of the online public. It is necessary to note here that the Internet users tend to identify Putin with the regime to a high degree. A number of posts describing cases of corruption or tyranny of the police end with the question "Do you still want to vote for Putin after finding out this information?" He is viewed as the mastermind behind the creation of the regime and is blamed for "losing touch with reality." Thus, the ultimate responsibility for the corruption in United Russia and bureaucrats of various levels is attributed to him. An indication of that can be found in one of the slogans posted by the users, which says: "Putin's gang should be prosecuted." Putin and the elites, whom he assisted in raising to power, are sometimes framed as enemies of the nation and russophobes by the nationalists: "… the national question and russophobic policies of the authorities are the major problems for Russia and the Russians …" (eriklobakh).
The users are also highly critical of Putin's intention to go for the third presidential mandate, as this political move is viewed by many as unconstitutional: "This is lawlessness and an attempt to usurp the political power in the country …" (fidelkastro). Putin, of course is not seen as the only problem of the Russian political system. The other elements of it, such as United Russia and the bureaucratic apparatus, are also part of the cause and effect relationship in the eyes of the online public. However, he is the face of the regime and, thus, the major criticism of the Internet users is targeted against him.

This diagnosis of the causes of Russia's problems provides basis for some conclusions about the way in which the opposition understands the relationship between the authorities

and the public. The Internet users draw a distinct line between "us" (the common citizens) and "them" (the political elites). On one hand, they do assume the responsibility for the future of the country and believe that the civil society should take matter in its own hands. On the other, by framing the regime as illegitimate occupation they refuse to bear any responsibility for its creation. The Internet users see themselves as not privy to the verticalization of power initiated by Putin. This observation provides support to the findings of Evans (2010) who argues that the state authorities in Russia are perceived as an alien force whose rule is imposed on the population.

5.2 Prognostic Framing

The Internet users in Russia have not reached a consensus on the question of the remedies that are to be suggested in order to improve political situation in the country. The common point for most of them is that the change should be brought through constitutional processes and fair elections; however, there are other opinions as well. A certain part of the public believes that the only possible solution is to leave the country: "All of those who understand it [the political crisis in the country] have already left" (mustafaibrahim). This understanding is based on the perception that there is no future in Russia since the scale of corruption has reached the level when it cannot be effectively fought against. In other words, the nature of the political life in the country is such that neither new opposition leaders coming to power, nor new specialists overtaking bureaucratic posts would be able to improve it. Another option, which is primarily proposed by the nationalists, is the national revolution, probably combined with the coup initiated by the elites:

> My friends, we are entering the epoch of coup d'états (real 18th century!) – that's what the ruling elites might be thinking … Of course any patriot would prefer a national liberation uprising (like the one of 1612). I am sure that this will happen in a couple of years maximum. However, the elites are inspired by

the romanticism of the 18th century. Well, let's see. I think we can combine the both. (eriklobakh)

One of the users proposes to start rebuilding the political system of the country from scratch by creating a party committed to the idea of developing Russian democracy. Interestingly enough, a similar rhetoric of the uniqueness of the Russian democratic development was used by the Kremlin spin doctors in elaborating the concept of 'sovereign democracy,' extensively used by Putin when answering to the Western criticism of the Russian political system.

The majority of the Internet users, however, are committed to the idea of constitutional change and transformation of the current regime without resorting to extreme measures, such as revolution or violence. Sometimes, this commitment is driven by the fear of foreign intervention. A part of the public believes that a revolution would weaken Russian statehood and open up the opportunities for the outside and inside forces which would be interested in the disintegration of the country. The post by the user rusteam provides a representative example of this interpretation:

> Do we want to lose 500 billion dollars? … If the Americans will sponsor the revolution in Russia with 10 billion dollars and after the nationalists' rise to power will arrest Russia's foreign assets, the revenue from this scheme may exceed 500 billion dollars … That is why we need a constitutional process without revolutions and coups. (rusteam)

The proponents of this path of political transformation concentrate on the election procedures as being the key to the recovery of the Russian political system.

In the period before the parliamentary elections three major strategies were proposed by the activists. The first option was to ignore the elections and not to show up at the election centers. This option was framed as the only way to manifest concerns about legitimacy of the elections and fairness of the campaign. According to its proponents, casting a vote would be equal to legitimizing the whole election procedure, which was unfair from the very beginning since not all of the parties were registered for obscure reasons and the ones, which were did not receive the media coverage equal to the one of United Russia. The following excerpt

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provides a good example of this type of reasoning: "Even if you only sign the document that you received the bulletin, you already take part in the crime committed by the authorities" (31svoboda). The second strategy was to destroy the bulletins in order to demonstrate that the citizens do not accept the elections which were fixed by Kremlin's spin doctors. Finally, the strategy of casting votes for any party except for United Russia was proposed as well. The expectations of the activists were that if the overwhelming majority vote for the opposition parties, there would be no practical opportunity for the ruling elites to rig the elections. It seems that none of the proposed prognostic frames have managed to emerge as the dominant one before the parliamentary elections, however, in the course of the protests a common ground for mobilizing the population has been found.

The dominant frame of the protests ties up different ideological factions of the opposition. A number of announcements of demonstrations posted by the Internet users have stated that the supporters of different political parties should unite to make their voice be heard and increase the visibility of the protest movement:

> Political views do not matter in this situation. The only things that matter are honesty, conscientiousness, and readiness to participate in the political struggle. (alex_semenow)

A number of common demands have been elaborated and the evidence suggests that these demands were shared by the majority of the opposition public with no regards to their political views. The Internet users saw the solution for the crisis of legitimacy in organizing fair and free reelections. However, as the protest wave was spreading through the country the initial enthusiasm about the protests has turned into disappointment. A number of posts indicate that the cause of the united opposition movement was turned into 'glamorous' revolution when representatives of current political and business elites have joined the demonstrators. Another source of disappointment, as evident from the blog entries, was lack of strong opposition leader, who would be able to consolidate the diverse movement under

common cause. The analysis of the Internet discussions shows that different factions within the opposition did not manage in the end of the day to come up with a common understanding of what has to be done, which would go beyond the demands for reelections.

5.3 Motivational Framing

The analysis of the posts shows that there are three major frames employed by the Internet users in order to construct the motives for collective action. The first framing strategy is the one of representing the active involvement into the movement as a matter of moral choice. The second one interprets Putin's comeback to the presidential office as a sign that he will never give up his political power voluntarily. Finally, the third one appeals to the elections as the most proper moment for an attempt to change the political system of the country.

Active participation in the opposition to the current regime and voting against United Russia and Putin are seen by some users as the duties of an honest citizen. Thus, they oftentimes appeal to the morality of the public. User fakeltur in a verse "Conscience" writes about the corruption of the regime and exploitation of the common people in Russia. The verse is concluded with the words: "And are not you ashamed of voting for this scum?" This is a typical example of the moral framing of the issue. The post by alex_semenow discussed in the previous section also contains this frame: "The only things that matter are honesty, conscientiousness, and readiness to participate in the political struggle" (alex_semenow). This type of framing of the issue suggests that there are no moral justifications for supporting the current regime or choosing not to get involved into active struggle against it. This frame is constantly reoccurring in different posts and announcements of the meetings, and seems to be quite popular among the Internet users.

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Another motivational frame is the one of Putin's never-ending rule. Through making the historical parallel with the late Soviet period the online public tries to emphasize the idea that Putin will stay in power until his death unless challenged by the opposition. Thus, the political elite leave no other choice for the public except to take the matter in its own hands. In this respect it is interesting to look at the slogan "I don't want to die under Putin." It provides a strong vocabulary of motive to participate in the demonstrations. Without doing anything and challenging the regime one will have to die under Putin, since he will never leave. Thus, the one and only choice is to take action about the situation.

Probably, the most important motivational frame employed by the Internet users is the interpretation of elections as the best moment for challenging the power. Although, the frame is never stated explicitly in this way, it can be deduced from the multiplicity of posts about the elections. They appear as early as September 27, just three days after Medvedev's announcement that he is not going to run for president. Through emphasizing the importance of the coming elections the Internet users create the sense of urgency. For them this is the most important political event of the year. They also claim to know beforehand that the elections are going to be rigged:

> The elections are already fixed and the "accurate" results are already concerted. One does not have to be a prominent political strategist in order to understand that. (aktsynov)

There is logic to this interpretation of the elections. They represent one of the few events which "tie" the nation together through the immediate common experience. The concrete cases of corruption and abuse of authority, although being common for entire Russia, are only local stories most of the times. The elections, on the other hand, are a nation-wide event. Catching the authorities red-handed on this day has a special symbolical power. Gamson and Meyer (2008) refer to this type of events as 'open moments.' Open moments are volatile elements of political opportunity, which are used by the movement participants in their

framing in order to create the sense of urgency of collective action. The Internet users frame the elections as an open moment, the time when the political system is more vulnerable and challenging it is going to be more effective.

The three motivational frames are present in the different posts in various combinations. They constitute the major part of the vocabulary of motive for the movement participants. Their relative effectiveness could be seen in the amount of people taking part in the demonstrations all over the country and, especially, in Moscow, where around 100,000 people have gathered in order to express their discontent with the ruling elite of the country.

5.4 Discussion

The analysis of the messages disseminated by the opposition public through LiveJournal has allowed to reveal several dominating frames that have made a major contribution to the mobilization of the public and the development of the movement. The dominating diagnostic frame is the one of 'stagnation.' This frame is constructed by making the historical parallel with the Soviet Union and providing the information on the economic, political, and social problems of the country. In this sense, the problem of corruption is obviously the one, which occupies the central place in the framing of the current regime. The references to United Russia as the 'party of swindlers and thieves,' which can be found in numerous posts of the users, are aimed at delegitimizing the authority of the parliament dominated by this party. Users also tend to interpret corruption as a phenomenon common to all spheres of the sociopolitical life in Russia. Thus, the whole regime, according to them, is corrupt and its only goal is to parasitize on the Russian population.

The major cause of the corrupt nature of the regime is Putin himself. The political role of Medvedev is declining in the eyes of the opposition public. As the elections approach,

there are less and less references to him or to his tandem with Putin. Many users think that Putin has privatized the regime. This identification of the cause of political problems is not surprising. As it can be seen from the analysis, the users identify the regime as the major problem of the country. Putin is the face of the regime and one of its major architects. Thus, it is only logical that he is identified as the cause of all the problems created by his regime.

The prognostic framing differs among various factions of the opposition movement during pre-election period. However, the common element of all the strategies suggested is the focus on the elections as an opportunity to manifest discontent with the political authorities. The period between the parliamentary and presidential elections, however, is marked by a consolidation of prognostic frames. The majority of users prefer to opt for constitutional process of transformation of the political system as opposed to revolution or collaboration with the current regime. The most common remedy suggested by the Internet users for overcoming the political crisis is reelections. Although this prognostic framing seems to be efficient for a period of time, its major problem is that it does not offer further strategy of the country's developments. In other words, this frame implies that free and fair reelections would solve the problems of the Russian society. In this sense the frame is weak because it does not provide a sense of future development and seems unattractive for the risk-averse part of the population.

The motivational framing is largely based on three key elements: moral principles, idea that Putin will never leave the Russian politics voluntarily, and the sense of urgency created by emphasizing the importance of elections. Although, this master frame has achieved its goals in mobilizing the public for a short period of time, it has shown that it is inefficient for sustaining a long-term collective action. It seems that the major reason for that is the emphasis on the elections as the most favorable moment for challenging the political authorities. As the elections have passed and the demonstrations did not bring the major

change in the political system, the general public got disappointed with the effectiveness of the movement. Thus, the major challenge for the opposition public now is to find another open moment which would give an opportunity to mobilize the public again for the common cause of the movement.

Conclusion

From the framing theory perspective the results of the study are of special relevance in two major aspects. First, they provide an empirical case which allows clarifying the relationship between ideologies and frames. Second, they give some insights into the link between the concepts of political opportunity and framing.

One of the major polemics within the scholarship on framing addresses the question of the relationship between ideologies and frames. While some of the authors (Oliver and Johnston, 2005) point out the degree of confusion between the two concepts, the others (Snow and Benford, 2005) insist that the current conceptualization of framing is sufficient for providing a meaningful distinction between them. This study provides empirical support for Snow and Benford's argument, as it clearly shows that the processes of social movement mobilization sometimes require congruency of the frames rather than uniformity of the participants' ideologies. The analysis of the Russian blogosphere suggests diversity of ideological viewpoints among the participants of the movement. However, a well-developed master frame allows mobilization of the ideologically fractured public for the purposes of the collective action. Common understanding of the grievances and their causes provides the basis for this mobilization. Although the remedies suggested by the participants are slightly different, they share a common presumption that the elections represent the open moment, a volatile element of the political opportunity structure, which can be used for challenging the regime. Consolidation of the prognostic framing after the parliamentary elections is based on this common understanding. The same demands are voiced by the various movement activists coming from the parties representing both the left and the right spectra of the political continuum. The idea that the free and fair elections would provide an opportunity to establish a more transparent and responsive political regime is shared by the majority of the participants across the ideological boundaries. This master frame allowed consolidating the

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efforts of the public and shows that framing plays one of the key roles in the process of the movement mobilization. The study allows concluding that in this particular case framing turned out to be of higher importance than political ideology.

The present analysis of the frames is also relevant for the sub-field of the scholarship which concentrates on the relationship between the structures of political opportunity and framing. In his study, Diani (1995) provides a systematization of the most successful framing strategies, according to different configurations of the political opportunity structure. For the Russian case, which is characterized both by high opportunities created by the crisis of dominant cleavages and low opportunities for autonomous action within the polity, Diani's typology suggests the antisystem framing strategy as the most successful one. The results of the study confirm the Diani's findings, since the success of the mobilization process can be partially attributed to the employment of this type of framing. By antisystem frame Diani means "any representation of political reality that defines political actors along the lines other than established cleavages and denies legitimacy to the routinized functioning of the political process" (Diani 1995, 1057). Both of the elements can be observed in the frames employed by the Russian Internet users as they delegitimize the regime through framing it as a corrupt and parasitic one and refer to the major political actors as "swindlers and thieves." This contextualization of the results of the analysis provides an explanation for the successful mobilization of the population. The movement participants chose a winning strategy for framing the political opportunity and by doing so managed to mobilize their supporters and win sympathy of the bystanders. The only problem of the particular frame employed was that it heavily relied on a highly volatile element of the political opportunity structure by emphasizing the crucial importance of the upcoming elections. Although the antisystem framing proved to be successful for a short period of time, it failed to provide the basis for

sustaining the collective action over a longer period of time as the moment of political opportunity has quickly passed and the desirable outcomes were not achieved.

The conceptualization of the findings provided above may have a certain value for the understanding of the rise and failure of the protest movement in Russia. Although the explanatory power of the provided framework is limited, it seems plausible to suggest that the success of the movement can be explained, at least to a certain degree, through the framing processes within the social movement.

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